

BERG, GEORGE PHILLIP

Name: George Phillip Berg
Rank/Branch: W1/US Army
Unit: Company A, 101st Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne Division
Date of Birth: 16 July 1946 (Seattle WA)
Home City of Record: Belford NJ
Date of Loss: 18 February 1971
Country of Loss: Laos
Loss Coordinates: 160431N 1071910E (YC481785)
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Category: 2
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH1H
Other Personnel in Incident: Walter E. Demsey; Gary L. Johnson; Gerald E. Woods (all missing from UH1H); Allen R. Lloyd; Ronald L. Watson (missing from Special Forces team)

REMARKS: KIA CRASH - REMS TAGD - NO RECV - J

SYNOPSIS: WO Gerald E. Woods, pilot; WO George P. Berg, aircraft commander; SP4 Gary L. Johnson, door gunner; SP4 Walter Demsey, crew chief; were assigned to Company A, 101st Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne Division. On February 18, 1971, their UH1H was dispatched as part of a flight of four on an emergency patrol extraction mission on the west side of the A Shau Valley in Thua Tin Province, South Vietnam. The patrol to be rescued included Sgt. Allen R. Lloyd, Capt. Ronald L. Watson and SFC Samuel Hernandez, part of Special Operations Augmentation, Command & Control North, 5th Special Forces Group.

The team was assigned to MACV-SOG (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Studies and Observation Group). MACV-SOG was a joint service high command unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces channeled personnel into MACV-SOG (although it was not a Special Forces group) through Special Operations Augmentation (SOA), which provided their "cover" while under secret orders to MACV-SOG. The teams performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction which were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prairie Fire" missions.

During the attempt to recover the patrol, Woods' helicopter came under heavy fire and had to leave the pick-up zone with Lloyd, Watson and Hernandez attached to the three-staple rig. While in flight, the rope broke, and Hernandez fell 30-40 feet, landing in double canopy jungle. He was rescued the following day. The helicopter continued a short distance, and was hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire, crashed and burned.

On February 19, a Special Forces recovery team was inserted at the crash site to search the area. Woods and Berg were found dead in their seats. Johnson's body was found in a tree. One leg of Demsey, the burned crew chief, was found in the cargo compartment. All remains were prepared for extraction, and the team left to establish a night defensive position. En route, the team found the remains of Lloyd and Watson, still on their rope slings, in the trees on the edge of a cliff. Because of the rugged terrain and approaching darkness, the rescue team leader decided to wait until morning to recover these two remains. However, the following morning, the search team came under intense fire, and the team leader requested an emergency extraction, and in doing so, left all remains behind.

All the crew and passengers on board the UH1H downed on the border of Laos and Vietnam west of the A Shau Valley that day were confirmed dead. It is unfortunate, but a reality of war that their remains were left behind out of necessity to protect the lives of the search team who found them. They are listed with honor among the missing because their remains cannot be buried with honor at home.

passengers lost on February 18 are among nearly 600 Americans listed as missing in Laos. Although the Pathet Lao stated publicly they held American Prisoners of War, they insisted that they would only be released from Laos. Because the U.S. did not recognize the communist government of Laos, no negotiations were ever conducted for Americans held in Laos. Not one American has been released from Laos.

As thousands of reports mount indicating that many American prisoners are still held in Southeast Asia, one wonders if we will ever be able to bring the Vietnam War to an honorable end - by bringing all our soldiers home.