

McLEOD, DAVID VANCE JR.

Name: David Vance McLeod, Jr.
Rank/Branch: E7/US Air Force
Date of Birth: 24 September 1945
Home City of Record: Jacksonville FL
Date of Loss: 14 June 1973
Country of Loss: Cambodia / Loss Coordinates: 130259N 1040559E (VV024427)
Status (in 1973): None / Category: 3
Acraft/Vehicle/Ground: HH-53C
REFNO: 1988

Other Personnel In Incident: pilot, Gilbert Allan Rovito, Capt, USAF (body recovered); co-pilot, Francis E. Meador, USAF (body recovered); two pararescuemen, rescued.

Source: Compiled by Homecoming II Project 01 September 1990 from one or more of the following: raw data from U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, interviews.

Updated by the P.O.W. NETWORK 1998 with material provided by Woody Freeman.

SYNOPSIS:

MSGT David V. McLeod was a crew member onboard an HH-53C helicopter shot down in northwestern Cambodia on June 14, 1973. The aircraft went down over Tonle Sap, a large lake forming the southern border of Siemreab Province. Just north of the lake are the ruins of famed Angkor Wat.

The fate of the rest of the crew is unknown, but as none are missing, it is assumed that they were either rescued or their bodies recovered. Another possibility, although remote, is that the crew consisted of indigenous personnel. In this case, U.S. records would not record their loss. [see update below]

Few American planes were shot down in Cambodia during this time frame. An F-4 piloted by Douglas Martin and with backseater Samuel James had been shot down April 18. An F-4 piloted by Samuel Cornelius with back-seater John Smallwood was shot down June 16. These were the only Americans missing during the spring and summer of 1973 in Cambodia.

In July 1973, a South Vietnamese agent reported talking to a refugee who had seen three Americans dressed in flight uniforms in captivity near Kompong Barey Hamlet in Prey Veng Province in southern Cambodia. (Note that all events described are occurring AFTER the war with Vietnam "ended" and 591 American POWs were released from Vietnam.) The agent was able to make contact with a Communist cadre who said the three were airmen who had been downed in July 1973. The cadre went on to say that they were being taken to Loc Ninh (South Vietnam) to be held for exchange at a later date. No exchange ever occurred. It is assumed, since these three aircraft are the only ones missing in Cambodia that this report pertains to three of the five Americans involved. Nothing has been heard of the five since.

The United States did not bargain or negotiate with Cambodia for any prisoners held there. U.S. bombing of Cambodia continued until August 1973. Any who were lucky enough to return had earlier been moved from the border areas of Cambodia into Vietnam and released from Vietnam. Evidence points to many Americans being moved to Vietnam from Laos and Cambodia and held beyond the end of the war.

Because of the genocide perpetrated upon Cambodia by Pol Pot in the mid-70's, the chances of survival are decreased significantly for anyone still held prisoner of war in Cambodia. However, we owe our best efforts to those men lost in Cambodia, and in all of Southeast Asia to seek their release if alive, and determine their fates if deceased.

August 24, 1998

You have my permission to use the letter as written. I was glad to be able to set the record straight. Dave was a dear friend of mine and I still have a sense that a part of me is missing. He also was my supervisor and during my 21 years in the service I could not have had a better one. If you have access to Dave's family you may forward my address to them. I don't know if they know the real story of what a fine comrade Dave was to me and the other Jolly Green's he worked with. When I went to the Wall in DC, it took a long time for me to walk the wall; I lost so many friends (seven). Thanks for what you are doing.

Currently, I'm a member of the TLC Brotherhood (Thailand, Laos & Cambodia). We are prior Officers & enlisted that was stationed in the war zone (SEA) during the mid 60's to mid 70's). Our members did various jobs to support the operations in SEA at the time. We now gather around the fire on the net and tell old war stories and experiences. We support each other as well as an orphanage in Udorn, Thailand. Several of our members knew and flew with Dave. Through the brotherhood web site I saw the POWnet site and I just had to set the record straight when I read the bio on David.

Thanks again for your message.

Woody R. Freeman, TSgt, USAF, Ret.
Jolly Green Flight Engineer
37th ARRS. DaNang, RVN 1972
40th ARRS. NKP, Thailand 1972-1975
Proud Member TLC Brotherhood
Proud Life Member VFW Post #10249, Udorn, Thailand- We Make A Difference
Visit the TLC web Site at: www.seacoast.com/~jsweet/brotherh/index.html

I am writing to comment on your BIO concerning MSgt. David V. McLeod, Jr. USAF. He was the Flight Engineer on a HH-53C Jolly Green Giant helicopter attached to the 40th Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Squadron (ARRS) that went down (crashed) in Tonle Sap, a large lake on the southern border of Siemreab Province in Northwestern Cambodia. THE HELICOPTER WAS NOT SHOT DOWN. As an update to your file on MSgt McLeod, the aircraft and crew were returning from strip SAR (Search & Rescue alert) in Thailand to their home base (Nakhon Phanom, RTAFB, Thailand). Normal routine for the returning crews was to fly out over the lake in Cambodia and meet a USAF C-130 Refuel aircraft and make several (dry) contacts on the refueling hoses then to actually refuel from the C-130 and fly back to NKP, Thailand. On 14 June 1973, the Jolly Green was in the refueling formation with the C-130 and had just disconnected from the refueling hose when the helicopter rapidly pitched nose up then nose down, doing this several times. The helicopter descended into the lake upside down. The two pararescuemen sitting on the ramp were thrown out of the back of the helicopter when it pitched nose up (normal procedure for air refueling was all crewmembers have on backpack parachutes, all windows, doors and hatches closed except for the aft cargo ramp (optional). The pilot, Gilbert Allan Rovito, Capt, USAF (body recovered) and co-pilot, Francis E. Meador, USAF (body recovered) was also killed in the crash.

An effort was made to recover the helicopter and MSgt McLeod's body. A sling was attached to the underbody of the helicopter, e.g. the cargo hook and the landing gear. When the helicopter was lifted it was found that the impact of the helicopter going in inverted had sheared the airframe, at the airframe to inside deck (cargo) area. The helicopter broke apart at this shear and the top of the helicopter was unrecoverable. MSgt. McLeod's body was never found. The inside of the wreckage and surrounding area was searched extensively (given the time and situation).

The two Pararescuemen that were thrown out relayed this to me on 16 June 1973. The reason is because I was a flight Engineer in the 40th ARRS during that period and the crew of that helicopter was my HARD crew (we had crews assigned as hard crew members such as pilot, co-pilot, Flight Engineer, and two pararescue men). Those five people made up a hard crew and when the crew was assigned to fly; all five would be scheduled to fly together. The reason it wasn't me that was killed is due to my brother being killed in Florida and I was on emergency leave. MSgt. McLeod was my supervisor and was flying in my place until I returned to NKP, Thailand. I returned the day after the accident happened. The crash was relayed to me when I returned.

Edited for formatting purposes only

Obtained from: <http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/m/m403.htm>