

ARTHUR GENE ECKLUND
is honored on Panel 27W, Row 6 of
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Full Name: ARTHUR GENE ECKLUND
Wall Name: ARTHUR G ECKLUND
Date of Birth: 5/5/1943
Date of Casualty: 4/3/1969
Home of Record: PHOENIX
County of Record: MARICOPA COUNTY
State: AZ
Branch of Service: ARMY
Rank: MAJ
Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM
Casualty Province: NIHN THUAN
Status: MIA



A Note from The Virtual Wall

On 03 April 1969 two men - an Army pilot and an Air Force observer - departed Phan Rang Air Base at 0700 in O-1G tail number 51-12078 on a visual reconnaissance mission. They checked in by radio at 0730 giving their location (about 8 miles north of Phan Rang) and information concerning a convoy they were going to check out. No further communication was received. Extensive search efforts began at 0950 and continued for three days without success. The two men were classed as Missing in Action and were continued in that status until Presumptive Findings of Death were approved on the dates indicated in parentheses below:

- **MAJ Arthur G. Ecklund, pilot, 183rd Avn Co (07/19/1979)**
- MAJ Perry H. Jefferson, observer, 120th Tac Ftr Sqdn (09/28/1973)

Oddly, the Army carries Major Ecklund as a non-hostile loss, while the Air Force carries Major Jefferson as a hostile loss.

That much is certain. What is uncertain is what happened next. The POW Network and Task Force Omega sites have considerable information on the loss, some of it indicating that one or both men were captured and later died in captivity.

On 14 July 1999 remains believed to be those of Major Ecklund were repatriated and the identity verified through DNA testing. Major Ecklund's remains were buried with military honors in the Oak Lawn Memorial Gardens, Galesburg, Illinois, on 03 Apr 2004.

Once again, though, an oddity: The DoD PM-SEA Office database indicates that Major Jefferson's remains also were repatriated on 14 July 1999 - but gives no date of positive identification.

PEORIA JOURNAL STAR
18 January 2004
by Maya Tarter

GALESBURG, Illinois -

Major Arthur Gene Ecklund always loved the military.

"Had he made it, the military would have been his career," his father, Ralph Ecklund, said Sunday. Unfortunately, Arthur "Artie" Ecklund, as he was known to his friends and family, did not make it.

While serving in Vietnam as an Army air control pilot, the 24-year-old Ecklund was shot down by the Viet Cong on 3 April 1969. The Galesburg native described as "ambitious "and " self-sufficient" was one thousands of American soldiers who fought in Vietnam and who left behind friends, family and many questions. For more than 30 years, Edith and Ralph Ecklund have wondered what happened to their only son, with few answers in response.

After learning that Ecklund's plane was shot down, his parents heard many stories but nothing materialized. "There were many reports. He was supposedly sighted on a trail (in Vietnam) after he was shot down," said Ralph Ecklund.

Ralph Ecklund describes the experience as "more difficult than you will ever know."

The Ecklunds find solace in remembering who their son was.

"He never gave us any problems. He was the finest young man you ever saw." Ecklund said. Before Arthur Gene Ecklund was drafted into the Army in 1966, he studied engineering at Phoenix Junior College and worked at Motorola while attending Arizona State University.

"Everything he did, he did well", said his father.

"He supported himself. We never had to give him any money."

President Carter declared Arthur Ecklund PFOD (Presumptive Finding of Death) in 1979, but no evidence of his death was found until 1985, when a Vietnamese officer in the Philippines turned over a jaw bone to U.S. authorities, according to Ralph Ecklund.

"They (the Army) tried to tell us that it was Artie because it was a jaw bone without dental fillings, but that wasn't good enough. A lot of soldiers didn't have fillings," said Ecklund. It wasn't until science advanced that the Ecklunds were able to verify their son's remains. In August, Edith Ecklund sent a blood sample to the identification laboratory in Hawaii for DNA testing and discovered that it matched the DNA found on the jaw bone's teeth.

Although the finding isn't completely satisfying for the Ecklunds, a small piece of Artie has given them some piece of mind.

"To some extent, we'll always have questions. But we've worried and stewed for some time, and if this is all they're going to find, then at least we'll have some closure," said Ralph Ecklund.

The family is planning a military funeral in April, 35 years after their son's disappearance.

ARRANGEMENTS:

Visitation: 2 April 2004 - 6:30 - 8 pm

Funeral: 3 April 2004 - 10:30 am at Hurd - Hendricks Funeral Home (309) 289-4121
120 S. Public Square (downtown), Knoxville, Illinois.

Interment at Oak Lawn Memorial Gardens, 5 miles north of Galesburg on Route 150

FUNERAL MARKS THE END OF A ' LONG ROAD ' FOR SOLDIER'S FAMILY
by CARRIE KEPPLER
PEORIA JOURNAL STAR
4 April 2004

KNOXVILLE, Tennessee -

Tears of closure that those who knew and loved him longed to cry finally fell Saturday. Nearly 200 people, many of them war veterans, filled the pews inside Hurd Hendricks Funeral Home to pay their respects to a Vietnam War soldier who was once missing in action but now found - Major Arthur Gene " Artie " Ecklund.

The "kind-hearted ", "hard-working" soldier was saluted with full military funeral honors 35 years after his war service ended.

"It's been a long road," his father, Ralph " Bud " Ecklund, 83, said after the services.

Artie Ecklund, a Galesburg native, was drafted into the Army in 1966. He later trained as a Huey gun ship helicopter pilot and was sent to Vietnam in 1968. On 3 April 1969, Artie was shot down by the Viet Cong. He was 25 years old.

The 10 years that followed were filled with confusion and unanswered questions for his family. He was declared PFOD - Presumptive Finding of Death - by then President Carter on 19 July 1979.

But that wasn't enough for the Ecklund family. For the next 25 years, the soldier's father and mother, Edith Ecklund, became deeply involved in the POW-MIA group in Arizona, where they lived from 1953 to 1983. Edith also served on the board of the National League of Family, based in Washington, D.C. Through both organizations, the couple traveled the country in support of the continuing search for missing Vietnam vets, all the while hoping and praying for answers.

"We've been everywhere in the states but Alaska," Bud Ecklund said.

They credit good friends and family for the strength to continue the search for so long. The day of answers finally came. On 7 August 2003, Artie's remains were identified by a DNA test at the Identification Laboratory in Hawaii.

"At least we got a part of him back here with us," Edith said.

After much debate over whether to accept his partial remains as closure, Edith and Bud decided to put him to rest.

"We had done it long enough and done our best," Bud said.

The two said they chose to hold the services Saturday because it was the 35th anniversary of his disappearance.

"We'll always have him in our minds," Bud said.

"And we'll still fly our flags every day," Edith added.

Saturday's service was focused on how Artie fulfilled his duty and honor to his country.

"He paid the ultimate price for freedom so we can be free," said Eric Shuller, who spoke in his role as senior policy adviser for Illinois Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn.

"He was a soldier, a hero and a true American."

The Rev. Michel D. Clark, who led the service, said, "Many looked to Artie for his leadership. He was among a generation of youth who risked and lost their lives in the jungles of Vietnam. We gather to remember his life that was lost."

After the service, six Army pallbearers carefully loaded Ecklund's casket to start the procession to Oak Lawn Memorial Gardens in Galesburg. There, military flags waved in the gusting wind while seven rifles were fired in a three-volley salute. And trumpets playing "Taps" echoed through the cemetery as surviving soldiers stood at attention.

Ecklund received the Air Medal and the Purple Heart for his service to his country.

ECKLUND, ARTHUR GENE "ARTIE"

Name: Arthur Gene "Artie" Ecklund
Rank/Branch: Major/US Army
Unit: 183rd Aviation Company,
223rd Aviation Battalion,
17th Aviation Group,
1st Aviation Brigade
Phan Rang Airbase, South
Vietnam
Date of Birth: 05 May 1943 (Galesburg, IL)
Home of Record: Phoenix, AZ
Date of Loss: 03 April 1969
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 115111N 1085848E (BP750005)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Status in 1973: Missing in Action
Category: 4
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: O1G "Bird Dog"
Other Personnel in
Incident: Perry H. Jefferson (missing)



REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The Cessna O1 was one of the most versatile and exceedingly useful fixed-wing aircraft in Southeast Asia. From 1962 on, the US Army and Marine Corps, as well as the South Vietnamese Army and Marine Corps, were among the early operators of the two-seat Bird Dog. Because it was built to take a great deal of punishment, and was suited to a wide variety of tasks, it was used virtually throughout the entire war.

On 3 April 1969, US Army 1Lt. Arthur Ecklund, pilot; and Air Force intelligence officer then Capt. Perry Jefferson, observer; comprised the crew of an O1G (serial #51-12078), call sign "Seahorse 78," on a visual reconnaissance mission. This was no ordinary aircrew. Artie Ecklund was an experienced pilot in both helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft and Perry Jefferson was a highly skilled intelligence officer who was wrapping up his tour of duty in Vietnam. This flight was to be his final local air reconnaissance mission before rotating back to the United States.

They departed Phan Rang Airbase at 0655 hours in their Bird Dog and the last radio contact with the crew was at 0738 hours. At that time, 1Lt. Ecklund reported they were flying over the populated and forested mountains approximately 30 miles southwest of Cam Ranh Bay Airbase, 8 miles north of Phan Rang Airbase, and 19 miles west of the coastline, Ninh Thuan Province, South Vietnam. Further, he reported information

pertaining to an enemy convoy they spotted along with their intent to investigate it more thoroughly. No undue concern was felt when the crew of Seahorse 78 failed to make their scheduled radio check at 0808 hours. However, a few minutes later the command center attempted to make contact without success.

By 0950 hours, an extensive search and rescue (SAR) effort was initiated utilizing all available aircraft. These air operations continued for nine days over the area of loss. Because it was heavily occupied by Viet Cong (VC) forces, no ground search was possible. During this time, one faint emergency beeper signal was heard for several seconds, but because it was heard for such a short time, it could not be homed in on. Likewise, because of the low speed and excellent gliding capability of the Bird Dog, both the US Army and Air Force believed its crew had a very good chance of survival. At the time formal SAR efforts were terminated, both Artie Ecklund and Perry Jefferson were listed Missing in Action.

Within two weeks of loss, on 15 April 1969, agent intelligence reports stating that the VC shot down an aircraft with two Americans in it between Phan Rang and Cam Ranh City. The reports also provided information indicating both men had been wounded, but were alive and being held captive by the VC at a secret base near the area of loss.

A later report indicated that two men fitting the descriptions of Artie Ecklund and Perry Jefferson were seen on a trail where VC soldiers were guarding them. It went on to state that the Americans appeared to be in good health. This report was of great interest to both men's units since no other Americans were lost in that region during this time frame. Based this timely and detailed intelligence, the commander of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing requested the US Army and Republic of Korea combat troops stationed in this region to attempt to rescue the American POWs. Two separate rescue attempts were initiated by ground units, one on 17 April and the second on 18 April, but both were unsuccessful. In spite of the overwhelming weight of the evidence that both crewmen of Seahorse 78 were actually captured by VC forces, 1st Lt. Ecklund and Capt. Perry's status was never upgraded by their respective branch of service.

Since the end of the Vietnam War well over 21,000 reports of American prisoners, missing and otherwise unaccounted for have been received by our government. Many of these reports document LIVE American Prisoners of War remaining captive throughout Southeast Asia TODAY. Aircrews in Vietnam were called upon to fly in many dangerous circumstances, and they were prepared to be wounded, killed or captured. It probably never occurred to them that they could be abandoned by the country they so proudly served.



Jack Bentley (L) Art Ecklund (R)

Art and I were roommates in Flight School for six of our ten months in training. We met at Fort Wolters during rotary wing primary training and immediately hit it off. Soon we were inseparable, studying together, spending weekends chasing the ladies together and enjoying the challenges presented in flight school. We finished the class in 3rd and 4th place and decided on a lark to put the fixed wing qualification course as our first choice on our 'dream sheets.' I'll be darned but we were both selected for the school in Georgia. We spent the next eight weeks learning to fly the O-1 Bird Dog. During that time we toured all of the great golf courses of the southeastern United States. Ate in the finest restaurants and had the time of our lives. It was difficult to be with Art and not have a good time. He had a Datsun sports coupe B-2000, as I recall and we could pack two sets of golf clubs and an overnight bag in it, and off we would go on another adventure. After we finished the fixed wing course we headed back home, Art to Phoenix, Arizona and myself to Long Beach, California. During our 30 day leaves Art rented a Cessna 150 and flew over to Long Beach. We spent a few days together and I rented an airplane during his stay and the two of us did some formation flying. I didn't realize it at the time but it would be our last formation together. We both had the same departure date to Vietnam and assumed we would be on the same airplane together but it didn't happen that way. I would learn of Art's MIA status while reading the Army Times in April of 1969. I just want to let everyone who visits this page to know what a wonderful man Art Ecklund was. He was truly a piece of American Treasure with a love for life. His parents Bud and Edith are the salt of the earth - none better. I grieve for their loss. I would continue but the tears are staining the keyboard. I'll wait and tell him the rest when I get to where he is. I love you Art.

Jack Bentley
Flight School Roommates
Pinetop, AZ., 85935
Jan 7, 2009

Miss You, my old Friend

I sometimes visit these pages and remember friends of long ago. I read where some people carried Art's bracelet and felt some comments were in order. Art and I and many others were in OCS at Ft. Sill together. We were in class 27-67. Art was a little older than some of us, having gotten his education out of the way. He was a little wiser and quite a bit funnier. He was not a tall man, ruddy complexion, and amazing disposition. When I first met him, I felt he was probably a smart aleck but the more I came to know him, I decided he was just very bright and had a unique sense of humor. He kept things light while all of us were going through some rough times. He never let things get to him and his spirit was infectious. We toiled through the 23 weeks of OCS and on that bright, sunny day of July 18, 1967, we all went our separate ways. Art volunteered for flight training and I for jump school so our paths never crossed again. I read of his MIA status in the spring of 1969 and thought about him for many years after that. When he was declared KIA, as always, a part of me left for good. Art was a decent, good man that should be reading these pages not being referred to. We lost too many men like that in those times. I miss you Art.

Vance Williams
OCS Classmate
2569 Sanctuary Lane
Ft. Worth, TX 76132 USA
February 12, 2002



Arthur is buried at Oak Lawn Memorial Gardens, Galesburg, Illinois



Arlington National Cemetery Section 60 Site 8553