

From: <http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/z/z352.htm> [retrieved 2016, January 29]

ZIMMER, JERRY ALLEN

Name: Jerry Allen Zimmer
Branch/Rank: United States Marine Corps/O3
Unit: VMFA 542 MAG 11
Date of Birth: 05 May 1944
Home City of Record: MAINE NY
Date of Loss: 29 August 1969
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 154212 North 1081112 East
Status (in 1973): Killed In Action/Body Not Recovered
Category: 3
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: F4B
Missions:
Other Personnel in Incident:
Refno:

Source: Compiled by P.O.W. NETWORK from one or more of the following: raw data from U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, interviews and CACCF = Combined Action Combat Casualty File. Updated 2010 with information from Elaine Zimmer Davis.

REMARKS:

CACCF/CRASH/PILOT/QIUANG NAM/3 YRS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

No further information available at this time.

MIA UPDATE

CAPT JERRY ZIMMER, USMC 1ST LT AL GRAF, USMC SEPTEMBER, 2010

Many thanks to POW Network and others who have continued to keep our Vietnam POWs and MIAs in the forefront and to feature bios of people like my husband, Capt Jerry Zimmer, and 1st Lt Al Graf, both of whom are MIAs. Here is the latest news on the status of their case, #1486. I have tried to be brief and accurate, but this is a complex story with a lot of twists and turns along the way. Thank you for your interest!

Background: 1969

My first husband, Capt Jerry A Zimmer, USMC, and 1st Lt Al Graf, USMC, were killed in Vietnam on August 29, 1969, when their F4 was shot down over the Que Son Mountains, approximately 20 miles south of Da Nang Air Base where they were attached to VMFA 542, an F4B squadron. My husband was the pilot, and Al was his Radar Intercept Officer (RIO). Due to the wartime situation and heavy armament on their aircraft, no remains were recovered, and I was told by Marine Corps officials—including Jerry's Commanding Officer—not to expect any changes in that assessment in the future. The aircraft was armed with napalm, 500 lb Snake-eye bombs and full fuel, so I didn't contest their findings. Jerry and Al were clearing a landing zone for a Recon insert, a seemingly routine mission, when the plane was hit during its first bombing run, by 50 Cals hidden in the mountainside. Soon after, the 1st Force Recon team (Sailfish), led by 2nd Lt. Wayne Rollings, USMC, (now Maj

Gen Rollings, ret) hiked to the area and verified that there were no survivors.

I would learn much later that Jerry and Al were two of only 130 Marines listed as KIA/BNR, among the 14,840 Marines killed in the Vietnam War. When I read those statistics, my heart broke all over again, but I knew it was the cruelty of war. Little did I know that other revelations would eventually surface—four decades after Jerry's and Al's deaths!

JPAC Excavates

What a difference 41 years can make. After countless months of research, visits to Vietnam and email traffic with hundreds of Marines, friends and officials, our family managed to convince the Joint Prisoners of War, Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC)—the group that searches for our MIAs in former battlefields throughout the world—of inaccuracies recorded under its predecessor, the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA), who was investigating all known sites in the early nineties, included Jerry's and Al's. Shortly after, JTF-FA placed Jerry's and Al's case in the "No Further Pursuit" category, where it remained for nearly two decades, until 1st Sgt Bob Burke, USMC, ret—a guide for Battlefield Tours, took Al's widow and others to what everyone believed was Al's crash site. Once in country, however, observing differences in the terrain, Bob began to question the coordinates, recorded on the U.S. military's Vietnam 1:50,000 Hiep Duc map. Upon returning to the states, Bob called my husband, Capt Ron Davis, USMC, ret—a former Huey gunship pilot who I married after Jerry's death, setting in motion an enormous effort that would lead us to believe that remains might be available, after all.

Ron, a former Special Agent with the FBI, set up an email distribution list with hundreds of fellow Marines, friends and experts around the country to learn everything he could about the event that ended Jerry's and Al's lives 40 years earlier. He talked on the phone to other pilots who were in the air with our guys and those on the ground. Ron spent nights and weekends researching, trying to determine the exact location of the site. The names of people who helped would fill an entire page, but we couldn't have done it without them—nor could we have done it without JPAC!

The reason that Jerry's and Al's site received the lowest chance of ever being excavated was that investigators in the early nineties were misdirected by witnesses to a location, just short of the crash's impact zone. However, as we continued to learn more about the challenges that faced the JTF-FA in those early years, it was easy to understand how that oversight happened. At the time, they were investigating/reviewing hundreds of cases—over a thousand—and doing their best to cover a lot of territory in a hostile environment. During those early days, shortly after the normalization of relations between the U.S. and Vietnam, MIA investigators were not received with open arms by many of the Vietnamese people. Hostilities were apparent, and no doubt made investigative efforts even more difficult. Things have changes immensely in the last two decades but it was slow going in the first two.

After Ron had compiled all the information that he'd gathered, including high resolution images of parts that Lt Col Gene Mares, USMC, ret, and I had found on a trip to Vietnam, he created a detailed PowerPoint presentation, petitioning JPAC to reactivate Jerry's and Al's case. In turn, JPAC followed up with a site investigation, concurring with our findings. They placed Jerry's and Al's case on the excavation waiting list until August 2010. The good thing about our guys' crash site was its location, which is accessible by foot—a critical factor, because JPAC recovery teams in Vietnam currently cannot be transported to sites by Vietnamese helicopters.

Although we were disappointed that no human remains were found, the JPAC recovery team, dispensed from Hawaii, worked its heart out. JPAC left the site open, pending recovery of remains, so that a team can return in the future to conduct another excavation. Note: Prior to the excavation, we understood that the site likely would require more than one excavation, so while we were saddened that no remains turned up, we weren't

caught off guard. Jet crashes are among the toughest to excavate, because the debris fields are huge and finding the remains of two people typically requires more than one excavation. In fact, we were told that the average is two excavations per site. And although the scope of the debris field is a problem, it is not the only concern. A big issue is that time is running out in Vietnam—faster than in other wartime locations where our MIAs still exist. Unfortunately, remains are disappearing rapidly in Vietnam, due to acidic soil and erosion that plagues most of the country—except the sandy locations, close to beach areas, which are not representative of most remaining MIA cases.

Elaine Zimmer Davis is the widow of Capt Zimmer and a long-time writer/editor, who has stayed connected with people interested in the recent events surrounding Jerry's and Al's case with her blog:

www.bringingjerryhome.com.