

**is honored on Panel 1W, Row 24 of  
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial**

**Full Name: RODNEY LYNN STROBRIDGE**  
**Wall Name: RODNEY L STROBRIDGE**  
**Date of Birth: 5/22/1941**  
**Date of Casualty: 5/11/1972**  
**Home of Record: TORRANCE**  
**County of Record: LOS ANGELES COUNTY**  
**State: CA**  
**Branch of Service: ARMY**  
**Rank: MAJ**  
**Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM**  
**Casualty Province: BINH LONG**  
**Status: MIA**



On 11 May 1972, then-Captains Rodney Lynn Strobridge, F Battery, 79th Aerial Rocket Artillery Regiment and Robert John Williams, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 229th Aviation Battalion, crewed an AH-1G helicopter (tail number 68-15009), one in a flight of three providing air support to South Vietnamese Army forces heavily engaged by hostile units in the siege of An Loc, Binh Long Province. Their helicopter was hit in the tail boom by an SA-7 hand-held surface to air missile, and the boom was immediately severed. The Cobra went into a flat spin and crashed but no one saw the actual crash. Heavy anti-aircraft fire precluded a search of the crash site area. Both airmen were declared missing in action.

The Secretary of the Army approved a Presumptive Finding of Death for Rodney Strobridge on 15 May 1978. His remains have not been recovered.

Strong evidence indicated the remains in the Tomb of the Unknowns were one of two American pilots killed in action in Vietnam - Air Force 1LT Michael Joseph Blassie or Rodney Strobridge. The tomb was opened in 1998 and the remains were positively identified as those of Michael Joseph Blassie. He was laid to rest at Jefferson Barracks National Ceremony near St. Louis.

***From thewall-usa.com***

Rodney and I flew for the 183rd Aviation Company (Seahorse) during 1968-69. He was one of my favorite pilots to be around even though he was at Dalat and I was at Nha Trang. He was a true American hero and remains in my thoughts.

William Jackson  
 Brother "Seahorse" Pilot  
 Aug 21, 2006

**From www.flyarmy.org**

**Rodney Lynn Strobridge**

Status: Body Not Recovered from an incident on 05/11/1972 while performing the duty of Pilot.

Declared dead on 05/15/1978.

Age at death: 31.0

Date of Birth: 05/22/1941

Home City: Torrance, CA

Service: FA branch of the reserve component of the U.S. Army.

Unit: F/79 ARA 1 CAV

Major organization: 1st Aviation Brigade

Service: FA branch of the U.S. Army.

The Wall location: 01W-024

Short Summary: Surface to air missile shot off tail boom near An Loc. See CPT Robert J. Williams. Declared dead 15 may 78.

Aircraft: AH-1G tail number 68-15009

Call sign: Blue Max

SSN: 568544862 Service number: O5425073

Country: South Vietnam

MOS: \*

Primary cause: SVN-BNR-SAM

Major attributing cause: aircraft connected not at sea

Compliment cause: small arms fire

Vehicle involved: helicopter

Position in vehicle: pilot

Vehicle ownership: government

"Official" listing: helicopter air casualty - pilot

The initial status of this person was: missing in action - bonified

Length of service: \*

Location: Binh Long Province III Corps.

Military grid coordinates of event: XT755872

Reason: aircraft lost or crashed

Casualty type: Hostile - died while missing

married male U.S. citizen

Race: Caucasian

Religion: Protestant - no denominational preference

The following information secondary, but may help in explaining this incident.

Category of casualty as defined by the Army: battle dead Category of personnel: active duty Army Military class: officer

This record was last updated on 02/21/1994

## Helicopter AH-1G 68-15009

Information on U.S. Army helicopter AH-1G tail number 68-15009

The Army purchased this helicopter 0169

Total flight hours at this point: 00001844

Date: 05/11/1972 MIA-POW file reference number: 1855

Incident number: 72051110.KIA

Unit: F/79 ARA 1 CAV

This helicopter was LOST TO INVENTORY

South Vietnam

UTM grid coordinates: XT755872

Original source(s) and document(s) from which the incident was created or updated:

Defense Intelligence Agency Reference Notes. Defense Intelligence Agency Helicopter Loss database. Also: 1855, Mike Sloniker

Summary: Shot down by an SA-7 missile at 1233 hours over An Loc.

Loss to Inventory

Crew Members:

P MAJ STROBRIDGE RODNEY LYNN BNR

P MAJ WILLIAMS ROBERT JOHN BNR

REFNO Synopsis:

CPTs Strobridge and Williams were the crew in an AH-1G helicopter, as in a flight of three providing air operations support to South Vietnamese Army forces heavily engaged by hostile units in the siege of An Loc town, Binh Long Province. Their helicopter was hit in the tail boom and the boom was immediately severed, possibly by a surface to air missile. Their helicopter went into a flat spin and crashed but no one saw the actual crash. Heavy anti-aircraft fire precluded a search of the crash site area. Both airmen were declared missing in action. In September 1974, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center reported a crash site associated with a 1972 aircraft downing. The remains of a pilot were reportedly buried nearby. In 1983 and 1984, JCRC received further reporting about aircraft wreckage associated with remains in the area of their crash. In July 1987, a source reported dog-tag information associated with Robert J. Williams and reported his remains were in Bo Trach District, Quang Binh Province. In May 1991, another source previously incarcerated at the Tong Le Chan reeducation camp provided dog tag information with the name Robert Williams and asserted his remains were in Song Be (new name for Binh Long) Province.

War Story:

Shot down by an SA-7 missile at 1233H over An Loc. Might have been a survivable tail boom loss, several thought they may have gotten out. Aircraft landed upright and did not burn. Aircraft was not there when ARVNs later secured the area. Williams was a high time, multi-tour Cobra pilot with over 2000 hours of rotary wing time. He was assigned to HHC 229th as the Battalion AH-1G Standardization Instructor Pilot (SIP). Previous assignment was with the 5th Aviation Detachment at Vung Tau, where he taught in-country AH-1G transitions.

This record was last updated on 05/25/1998

**From taskforceomegainc.org**

**STROBRIDGE, RODNEY LYNN**  
Name: Rodney Lynn Strobridge  
Rank/Branch: Major/US Army  
Unit: Battery F, 79th Artillery Battalion,  
3rd Brigade,  
1st Cavalry Division  
Date of Birth: 22 May 1941 (Denver, CO)  
Home of Record: Torrance, CA  
Date of Loss: 11 May 1972  
Country of Loss: South Vietnam  
Loss Coordinates: 113825N 1063639E (XT766872)  
Status in 1973: Missing in Action  
Category: 4  
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH1G "Cobra"  
Other Personnel In Incident: Robert J. Williams (missing)



**SYNOPSIS:** The first Bell AH1G Cobra helicopter gunships arrived in Vietnam on 1 September 1967. It was a major step forward in the development of the armed helicopter since it carried both guns and rockets. The Cobra had enough speed to meet the escort mission. It also had tandem seating, better armor, and a better weapons system than any previous helicopter of its day. By 1970-1, the Cobra's armament included the 2.75-inch rocket with a 17-pound warhead, the very effective 2.75 -inch flechette rocket, and the SX-35 20MM cannon that made it a truly powerful aircraft.

On May 11, 1972, Capt. Robert J. Williams, pilot; and then Capt. Rodney L. Strobridge, co-pilot comprised the crew of an AH1G Cobra gunship (tail #69-15009), in a flight of three that launched to support ARVN troops trapped in the besieged city of An Loc, Binh Long Province, South Vietnam. The provisional capitol located approximately 12 miles due south of Loc Ninh and 65 miles northwest of Saigon had been under siege off and on since early April by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces. Airborne support in the form of supply drops of food, medicine and armament, as well as close air support, were critical in keeping the city from being overrun.

Each of the three gunships was engaged in an aerial artillery attack against enemy tanks when Capt. Williams' and Capt. Strobridge's helicopter received heavy and accurate anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) fire that severed the tail boom causing it to go into a flat spin and crash. As the crippled Cobra descended toward the ground, Capt. Williams' transmitted, "Oh, my God!"

Upon impact, the gunship was immediately engulfed in flames. However, an Air Force Forward Air Controller (FAC), who was coordinating all air activities during the battle, reported he witnessed the shutdown and that the "two downed pilots were on the ground running away from the aircraft just before it exploded." Shortly afterward a large segment of the enemy forces broke contact and withdrew across the nearby Cambodian border. US intelligence believed that if Robert Williams and Rodney Strobridge had been captured, they certainly would have been removed from the battle site in a timely manner.

The crash site/battle site was located roughly ¼ mile west of Highway QL 13, the primary road running between Loc Ninh and Saigon, less than a mile south of the city of An Loc and 11 miles east-southeast of the South Vietnamese/Cambodian border. In addition to the city being strategically located, rubber plantations, small villages and hamlets surround the provisional capital. Under the circumstances, no aerial or ground search was conducted at the time due to intense and continued enemy activity in the area. At the time of loss, Robert Williams and Rodney Strobridge were immediately listed Missing in Action.

It was well known by the spring of 1972 that the war was drawing to a close, and that the North Vietnamese were offering huge bonuses to AAA gunners who could shoot down American aircraft and capture the aircrews alive. At this stage in the war our enemy knew that the more men they could capture, the better their chances were at the

negotiating table to secure peace on their terms. Further, everyone knew American prisoners were worth much more alive than dead to both sides.

In an attachment to a 1 December 1992 letter prepared by the Office of Senator Bob Smith, Vice-Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, entitled "US POW/MIAs who May have survived in captivity," he presented a list of 324 POW/MIAs with data supporting the belief held by US intelligence analysts that there was ample evidence that these specific men survived their loss incidents and were probably captured. According to this document, "Robert J. Williams, USA," was a "POW reportedly seen in (a) Vietnamese magazine photograph, JSSA." Analysts were unable confirm to whether or not Rodney L. Strobridge was also shown in the propaganda photo.

If Robert Williams and Rodney Strobridge died in their loss incident, each man has a right to have his remains returned to his family, friends and country. However, if they survived, their fate, like that of other Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, could be quite different. Either way, there is little doubt that the Vietnamese could return them or their remains any time they have the desire to do so.

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 POWs remaining captive throughout Southeast Asia TODAY.

American military personnel were called upon to fly and fight 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.

***From [www.pownetwork.org](http://www.pownetwork.org)***

STROBRIDGE, RODNEY LYNN

Name: Rodney Lynn Strobridge  
Rank/Branch: O3/US Army  
Unit: Battery F, 79th Artillery Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division  
Date of Birth: 22 May 1941 (Denver CO)  
Home City of Record: Torrance CA  
Date of Loss: 11 May 1972  
Country of Loss: South Vietnam  
Loss Coordinates: 113825N 1063639E (XT766872)  
Status (in 1973): Missing in Action  
Category: 4  
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH1G  
Other Personnel in Incident: Robert J. Williams (missing)

## REMARKS:

Source: Compiled 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.

SYNOPSIS: On May 11, 1972, Capt. Robert J. Williams, pilot, and Capt. Rodney L. Strobridge, co-pilot, were flying an AH1G helicopter (tail #69-15009), as wingmen in a flight of three AH1G helicopters launched to support allied forces at An Loc, in Binh Long Province, South Vietnam.

While pulling off the target, the aircraft was hit by enemy ground fire. Something had hit near the tail boom, and it was severed from the fuselage. The aircraft went into a flat spin and crashed. It was believed that a SAM (surface to air missile) had hit the aircraft because of the immediate separation of the tail boom.

Capt. Williams' last radio transmission was, "Oh, my God!"

No further radio contact was made with Williams and Strobridge. No one saw the helicopter hit the ground. Both men were thought to have died in the crash of their aircraft.

A refugee later reported that while serving in the 21st Division Engineers at An Loc, he discovered the skeletal remains of an American. The U.S. Army believes this could have been Williams or Strobridge, but the remains have never been recovered.

According to witnesses, Williams and Strobridge are almost certainly dead. Tragically, their families have no grave holding their bodies to visit. Their remains are on enemy soil and not buried in their homeland. Even more tragically, evidence mounts that hundreds of Americans are still alive, held captive in Southeast Asia. What must they be thinking of us?

## **1998**

### **NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT WASHINGTON, April 24, 1998**

By Jim Miklaszewski

The Tomb of the Unknowns is the U.S. military's most sacred shrine, but there's a strong possibility that the Vietnam veteran buried there may not be unknown after all. After a lengthy investigation, Department of Defense officials appear ready to open the tomb to try to identify the remains.

PENTAGON SOURCES tell NBC News it's almost certain the Tomb of the Unknowns will be opened and the remains of the Vietnam Veteran exhumed for DNA testing.

In fact, strong evidence indicates the remains may be of one of two American pilots killed in action in Vietnam 26 years ago Air Force pilot Michael Joseph Blassie or Army Capt. Rodney Strobridge.

For 26 years Blassie's family was never told his remains may have been recovered. His sister, Pat Blassie, says their mother deserves to know. That is her son, says Blassie. She gave him up once. I don't believe she has to give him up again.

Althea Strobridge was only recently told it could be her son in the tomb. People lose their children but they've got a body, says Strobridge. I lose mine and I've got nothing. After 26 years, she says, she doesn't need to know.

Blassie and Strobridge were shot down and killed only two miles apart near An Loc on the same day in 1972. Six months later a partial set of remains and Blase's ID card were recovered. Should the military do DNA testing on the Tomb of the Unknowns?

"I know it was Michael Joseph Blase who we recovered," says Bill Parcel, who was an Army colonel at An Loc. But six years later, the Army morgue at the Central Identification lab in Hawaii found that the blood type and bones were a closer match to Strobridge.

David Kelly was a casualty analyst for the military lab. "It was strongly felt the remains were portions of Strobridge, not Blassie," he says.

But without a positive ID, military officials in Washington designated the remains unidentified. In 1984, in an elaborate ceremony, those same remains were buried in the Tomb of the Unknowns.

Today, there's a good chance that modern DNA technology could identify the remains. Dr. Mitchell Holland and other experts at the Armed Forces DNA Laboratory in Rockville, Md., are confident they can solve the mystery. "There's a strong likelihood that if we were asked, we would be able to get a result from these remains," Holland says.

But after all these years, Althea Strobridge says she doesn't need to know if it's her son in the tomb. "I just know that he's dead. Still dead," she says.

The Blassie's want the tomb reopened. "We believe it is him," says Pat Blassie. "If it comes back that it's not him, we will still know the truth."

The worst case is that DNA testing would still be inconclusive. Whatever the outcome, today's science makes it unlikely there will ever be another U.S. combat casualty classified as unknown.



## **Rodney Strobridge was filled with grit**

*By Jerry Schwartz, Associated Press writer*

It was long ago -- 40 years ago -- but Don Latham still remembers watching Rodney Strobridge pitch.

It wasn't that he was a great player; Torrance High School had better pitchers than this junk-balling right-hander.

What Latham remembers is Rod Strobridge's hands.

"He used to have a fungal infection on his hands," says Latham. "It would eat through his skin, make them tender, and they would bleed at the slightest touch. But he still pitched, and his hands would bleed."

Rod could easily be dismissed as just another fun-loving kid -- easygoing, always joking. But then there was this determined boy on the mound, blood oozing from his hand as he gripped the ball.

It was this boy who would be sent to Vietnam. It was this boy who would win the Silver and Bronze stars, the Distinguished Flying Cross. It was this boy whose helicopter would plummet from the sky at An Loc.

And it is this boy, Pentagon officials say, who may have been buried in the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery.

Those remains were exhumed this month; Althea Strobridge may soon find out if they are the bones of the son whose MIA bracelet she still wears, 20 years after he was declared dead.

"I say hello to him every day," she says.

He was her eldest, born in 1941, in Denver, five years before Connie and 10 years before Brian.

George Strobridge, a plumber, went into the Navy. When he came home from the war, the family moved around. Finally, in 1952, they settled in Torrance, near Los Angeles.

Rod liked to play ball. He got good grades. He was, his high school yearbook reports, "well known for his good nature and sense of humor."

Mostly, he hung out with his friends, Don Latham, Ricky Boucher and Jimmy Johnson. Latham remembers playing football on Saturday afternoons. He remembers how the friends would gather at Tom Nordstrom's house and play cards when they should have been in school.

After graduation, he earned some money pouring concrete at missile bases in Nebraska with an uncle, Clarence Lacy. He went to community college but never graduated. He worked for an aerospace electronics company, and traveled to install its equipment.

Paul Guiso roomed with Strobridge from 1961-65. "Gosh, we partied. We were young guys and it was Southern California. It was a great time."

There was an eight-month marriage. Neither of his parents, who by this time were divorced, recall his wife's name.

He received a draft deferment, Guiso says, because of his skin condition. It was a ticket out of the military, but he used lotion and was drafted into the Army.

"He knew his father served, and I served, and he wanted to serve," says Lacy.

Lacy recommended that he apply for Officer Candidate School, but Rodney said he

didn't want it. "I told him, when you get out there and you're crawling under barbed wire down there with the snakes, you'll change your mind."

Strobridge graduated from OCS at Fort Sill in Lawton, Okla., on Dec. 17, 1966.

In his first tour of Vietnam, Mrs. Strobridge says, he worked in reconnaissance. He returned home, remarried.

On his second tour of Vietnam, Strobridge was trained to pilot the AH-1 Cobra attack helicopter. He was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division, Battery F, 79th Artillery -- otherwise known as the Blue Max.

Their mission was to lend aerial support to ground troops. They would swoop down at speeds of up to 140 mph, guns blazing.

The pilots of the Blue Max were legendary for their heroism. Everyone seemed to have a nickname. Rick Rickenbacker was known as "Fast Eddie" when he became an aircraft commander within weeks of his arrival.

Strobridge didn't have a nickname, Rickenbacker says. He was too new. He was a "bullet catcher," sitting in the Cobra's front seat while the aircraft commander sat in the rear. He did not live long enough to be checked out on the Cobra and moved to the rear seat.

On April 13, the North Vietnamese attacked An Loc, a provincial capital 80 miles north of Saigon. The town's South Vietnamese troops and American advisors were besieged.

The Blue Max went in. Over seven weeks, nine of the 32 would die.

Strobridge won the Distinguished Flying Cross on April 27; the citation says bad weather forced him to operate "within range of enemy small arms," and that he persisted under fire.

Two weeks later, on May 11, Strobridge was flying with Capt. Robert John Williams, a seasoned pilot who had been a helicopter trainer.

Larry McKay, the commanding officer, says Strobridge and Williams destroyed two of the big T-54 tanks on An Loc's southwest perimeter.

But then, the radio crackled: "MISSILE, MISSILE, MISSILE!"

A heat-seeking missile shot toward the Cobra's exhaust pipe. There was an explosion. The helicopter went one way, its tail boom another.

None of the Americans saw them hit the ground.

Rodney Strobridge was 5 feet 9 and 30 years old, and had type O blood, all characteristics of the man in the tomb, according to the old tests. But other evidence found with the bones points to 1st Lt. Michael Blassie, who died the same day as Strobridge, and whose family led the effort to open the crypt.

George and Althea Strobridge are going along with the inquiry, but they are unenthusiastic. "I don't need that," says Althea.

"It's a long time getting over it," says George, "and I'm not over it yet."

**June 18, 1999**

**Vietnam War Crypt At Tomb Of Unknowns To Stay Empty**

WASHINGTON - The crypt that once held the symbolic unknown dead from the Vietnam War will remain empty for now, the Pentagon said today.

Scientific techniques for identifying remains have advanced to the point that it's not appropriate to bury the remains of any other soldier not yet identified, defense officials said.

The Vietnam War crypt at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery has remained empty since May 1998, when the body of a pilot was exhumed and identified as Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Blassie.

The U.S. continues to receive remains from the Vietnam War, as crash sites are excavated and the Vietnamese government hands over recovered bodies. Those remains are taken to a special laboratory in Hawaii for identification.

"I think that as long as there are living relatives of some of our missing men, there will always be a hope that remains that are now at the lab will be identifiable at some point," said Rudy de Leon, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

**Redesignation of the crypt**

The crypt that once held the remains of the Vietnam Unknown has been replaced. The original inscription of "Vietnam" and the dates of the conflict has been changed to "Honoring and Keeping Faith with America's Missing Servicemen." as a reminder of the commitment of the Armed Forces to fullest possible accounting of missing service members.