

Compiled and Edited by Gene Wilson and Dennis Currie



CPT/MAJ DONALD E. "GENE" WILSON (AS OF 12/21/66)
CATKILLER 5 (JUN-OCT 1966) / 3 (OCT 1966-JUN 1967)



SP5 DENNIS D. CURRIE, CREW CHIEF/INSPECTOR/OBSERVER
JUNE 1966 – JANUARY 1968

FORWARD:

When I arrived at the 220th at Phu Bai in early June 1966, "Woody" Woodhurst was clearing the unit to go "home," back to Fort Rucker. Woody was a great storyteller, and one of his stories was about the Battle of A Shau. I have never forgotten his 'excitedness!' Then Lieutenant J.D. Richards, Woody's Marine Aerial Observer (AO) and sidekick, would relate in a separate story: "Woody could not talk when he was excited, he simply yelled. The more he yelled, the higher pitched his voice became, and as he grew louder, he talked faster. Over time I became better and better at deciphering him as time went on."

When I became the volunteer Catkiller Historian in the summer of 2010, I started saving every bit of information about the Battle of A Shau that I came across. Since my "retirement" as the volunteer historian, this is just a bit of 'unfinished business' that I felt needed to be summed up and told. When I asked for assistance in pulling the whole story together, Dennis Currie, our Assistant Editor, responded to the challenge. This could not have been completed without him—and you see the result of a "co-'pull it together'-editor" partnership! We hope that you enjoy reading about this historic event in the legacy of our beloved 220th Aviation Company as much as we have enjoyed revisiting all of the many players that we have come to "know" in the *Battle of A Shau - March 1966*.

In a sense, this dedication of that singular event in March recognizes the supreme efforts of all involved, from clerks, cooks, crew chiefs and mechanics that made our mission and its success possible. Steve Badger, in his story, recalled his thoughts after hearing the stories of our Marine Brothers on the ground during a recent visit to Vietnam: "So after hearing their stories, it made

me realize that it may have been my pilot or aircraft that I saw off, that flew the mission that helped these men survive their battles. My work was more important than I gave myself credit for.”

PRELUDE:

Many heroic actions were to occur in this battle despite extreme adversity in a “lost” cause. The 220th was obviously involved in this battle from its beginning to its bitter end. The following is what I can put together in regard to 220th activities during this epic battle - and as well, several activities of the Special Forces, Air Force and United States Marine Corps. On March 10th there were over 200 sorties flown in support of A Shau – 103 USMC, 67 AF, 17 Navy and 12 VNAF. Low overcast impeded effectiveness and forced strike aircraft to altitudes where their vulnerability was greatly increased. From a reliable source I make the statement that if a Forward Air Controller (FAC) was required to assist any of these sorties of aircraft, the 220th provided that service on March 10th. Since the ceiling was 800’ or lower, the AF FAC’s “honored” their regulations – but the 220th was there under the overcast.

Although routine recon flights were maintained and reported over the A Shau Valley, it would be after TET ’68 before substantial forces were once again committed to the Valley. However, the 220th did support the South Vietnamese Special Forces (Project Delta) and the US Long Range Patrols in 1966-67. The A Shau Valley was a place to be reckoned with for the remainder of the 220th’s time in I Corps

The “General Situation” taken from the After Action Report conducted by the 5th Special Forces outlines the chronology of the battle from beginning to its conclusion. Within this chronology lie the individual stories of what can only be described as true American Heroes. Their eyewitness accounts relate the intensity of the battle from their perspectives and give us an appreciation of their courage and sacrifice. As in many reports from different sources, the Special Forces themselves, the Air Force, USMC, and individuals who were there, there appear to be several dichotomies and inconsistencies in the exact manner or precise time that some events may have actually happened. However, in the “fog of war,” time is often fleeting and such things happen.

GENERAL SITUATION:

The A Shau **Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG)** Camp had the primary mission of border surveillance and interdiction of infiltration routes into its assigned area of operation. The Camp was located west of Hue and approximately five kilometers east of the Laotian border at coordinates YC 494834. Because of its location near three major infiltration routes leading from Laos east into the A Shau-Aloui Valley the Camp was continuously harassed by small Viet Cong elements with small arms fire prior to the large-scale attack, which began on 9 March 1966. The only local population that existed prior to the attack was an unknown number of secretive and hostile Katu Tribesmen who were either Viet Cong or Viet Cong sympathizers. The occupants of Camp A Shau never made friendly contact with the Katu. The weather on 9, 10, 11 and 12 March included heavy cloud cover and ground fog during the early morning hours, with ceilings less than 2000 feet. The attack took full advantage of bad weather conditions to hinder tactical air support, reinforcement, and resupply attempts. Elephant grass reaching 8 to 12 feet high covers most of the Valley floor around the Camp, therefore, observation from the ground is very difficult and detecting movement of even large units is practically impossible unless they are detected while moving on trails in the Valley. On the east side of the airstrip and south side of the Camp were old mine fields that were overgrown with dense, high grass, which could not be cut because of the danger to friendly forces.

The friendly situation prior to the attack was as follows; Patrols on 18-19 February and 24-25 February captured enemy documents that indicated Camp A Shau was under enemy reconnaissance pending an enemy attack.

On 5 March a reconnaissance patrol of 30 CIDG and 2 US Army Special Forces (USASF) were dispatched two kilometers south of Camp A Shau, with no contact made. On 6 March a company size patrol was dispatched for a two-day mission to move southwest of Camp A Shau and be prepared to attack and destroy a suspected enemy position in the area. Enemy positions were actually detected by an over-flight aircraft on 5 March 1966. In the meantime, however, two NVA defectors turned themselves in at Camp A Shau and indicated that four battalions of NVA planned to attack Camp A Shau on 11 or 12 March and that heavy infiltration into the Valley was continuing. Based on this information the patrol was recalled to Camp A Shau to improve the defensive posture of the Camp. The patrol returned with negative enemy contact. On 6 March, a reconnaissance patrol was dispatched approximately two kilometers northwest of Camp A Shau with the mission to reconnoiter a suspected enemy mortar position. This patrol was unable to locate the position and returned to Camp A Shau with negative contact. Since Headquarters I Corps had requested repeated requests to reinforce the Camp, Detachment C-1 requested and received reinforcement from the 5th SFG Mike Force in Nha Trang. On 7 March at 1640 hours one Mike Force Company consisting of 141 Mike Force, 7 USASF and 7 interpreters arrived to improve the reconnaissance and defense capability of the Camp. Patrols were initiated approximately one

to two kilometers north, south and northwest of the Camp with the mission of confirming the locations of reported NVA troop positions. These patrols returned with negative contacts and negative information of any enemy activity. In conjunction with these patrols, night ambush patrols were dispatched in all directions around the Camp area and resulted in no enemy contact. During the period 4 through 8 March, daily over flight aircraft were requested and received. These over flights detected numerous weapons positions, freshly dug personnel positions, and anti-aircraft emplacements. This confirmed information received from the 2 NVA defectors that a definite buildup of a large unit was in progress. Tactical airstrikes were requested and received on these positions; however, assessments of these strikes were virtually impossible because of dense foliage and heavy ground fog. On 7 March a leaflet drop was conducted in conjunction with loudspeaker broadcast encouraging more enemy personnel to defect with the theme that all defectors would be well treated and moved to a secure location. On the evening of 8 March the Camps strength was as follows; 220 CIDG, 141 Mike Force, 9 Interpreters, 41 Civilians, 6 LLDB, 17 USASF.

On 8 March, the night before the attack, the Camp commander placed the Camp on general alert, since he considered an attack immanent. All personnel remained in their defensive positions. At approximately 1930 hours a squad of enemy was observed on the north end of the Camp and was fired on with mortars. At about 2300 hours, the camp personnel heard digging noises to the south. At about 0130 hours a claymore mine was fired in the direction toward which wire-cutting sounds were heard. Then at approximately 0350 hours on 9 March the camp began receiving heavy 81mm mortar fire, which continued until 0630 hours. A probe of about 2 NVA companies was initiated on the south wall at approximately 0430 hours. They met with heavy fire and fell back at no loss in additional friendly casualties. The initial barrage of mortar fire was extremely accurate and caused heavy damage to the USASF Team house, supply room water storage and contributed to the temporary loss of communication with all outside installations. Communications were reestablished through LLBD channels at approximately 0800 hours and through US channels at approximately 0920 hours. Casualties resulting from the three hour mortar barrage were as follows; 2 USASF WIA, 25 CIDG WIA, 7 Mike Force KIA, 14 Mike Force WIA, 1 Civilian KIA, 3 Civilians WIA, and 3 CIDG WIA. Sniper and mortar fire continued throughout the day.

At 1100 hours on 9 March an airstrike was received north and south of the Camp. Because of heavy ground fog the FAC could not observe the target, so bombs were initially dropped from above the clouds and were adjusted from within the camp by sound. All airstrikes were discontinued at approximately 1506 hours due to low ceilings. At approximately 1015 hours the Camp requested emergency resupply of ammunition and medical evacuation of all wounded. At 1100 hours two L-19 aircraft landed to evacuate seriously wounded personnel. However, these aircraft began receiving intense ground fire and were able to evacuate only one USASF (MSGT Robert I. Gibson). At approximately 1300 hours an AC-47 aircraft arrived over the Camp area. This aircraft was flying northwest to southeast and received intense anti-aircraft fire while flying down the valley. The aircraft attempted to circle east of the Camp and again received heavy anti-aircraft fire from the high ground to the east. At this time the ground fire was very accurate and the aircraft crashed approximately five kilometers north of the Camp. Three of the crewmen were rescued by helicopter and three were KIA. At 1415 hours a load of ammunition and medical supplies were dropped by a CV-2 airplane, just outside the Camp area, and was retrieved by a party from the Camp. At 1030 hours another load of ammunition was air dropped by C-123, a part falling outside the Camp area. Approximately 50% of this resupply was not recovered because of heavy ground fire on the recovery team. At 1700 hours another resupply drop from a CV-2 aircraft landed both in and out of the Camp. Also about this time an H-34 helicopter landed inside the compound to evacuate casualties. It was heavily damaged by sniper fire on approach into Camp and was unable to lift off. One more medical helicopter, an Air Force CH-3 which had been called in, evacuated 26 casualties prior to darkness. As darkness fell, personnel were deployed to defensive positions in anticipation of a ground assault during the night, and work continued to repair damaged defensive positions caused by mortar attacks. Those portions of the airdrops that had fallen outside of Camp were retrieved. At approximately 2000 hours a flare ship arrived over the Camp and provided continuous but limited illumination throughout the night.

At 0400 hours 10 March the Camp again began receiving intense and extremely accurate mortar and 57mm recoilless rifle fire, which battered almost all of the remaining buildings to rubble. This heavy fire continued throughout the entire day in varying intensity until the Camp was eventually evacuated at 1730 hours. The 57mm fire rapidly destroyed approximately fifty percent of all crew served weapons. At 0500 hours a massive ground assault was initiated on the east wall from across the runway, and on the south wall, the most vulnerable side due to the tall grass. At approximately the same time, defense of the southeast corner of the Camp collapsed as CIDG Company 141, ceased all effective resistance. The remainder of the east wall occupied by Mike Force and two Americans initiated fire against the enemy within the Camp who had taken part of the east and south walls and temporarily halted their advance. Bitter hand-to-hand fighting continued for almost three hours until those friendly forces on the east wall were isolated from the rest of the Camp, drawing heavy machine gun fire and small arms fire from the front and rear. When the south wall was taken at about 0800 hours, the retreating personnel withdrew to the vicinity of the communications bunker and the north wall. At about 0830 hours, survivors from the east wall joined them. The examples of outstanding courage, self-sacrifice, resourcefulness and leadership of the defenders were so widespread as to be commonplace.

At 0600 hours the Camp had requested airstrikes and targets were hit in the immediate vicinity north and south of the Camp. Those strikes were effective, but an assessment could not be made due to the heavy ground fire within the camp. At 0830 hours only the north wall and the communications bunker were still held. About this time the enemy initiated an assault to secure the communications bunker, but was unsuccessful because of the heavy volume of fire delivered by the defenders. The one remaining 81mm mortar and 60mm mortar continued to fire, but were destroyed prior to 1200 hours.

At 0900 hours airstrikes continued and inflicted heavy casualties on the NVA entrenched in the south wall, however, no exact figures of enemy casualties could be made. The remaining USASF and Mike Force personnel, led by Captain David Blair, made several assaults to reoccupy the south wall, but those attempts were unsuccessful.

At 1100 hours the "A" Detachment Commander requested the entire Camp, except for the communications bunker and north wall, be bombed and strafed. Between 1000 and 1200 hours the airstrikes continued, inflicting heavy casualties, and discouraged any further assaults on the communications bunker and the north wall by the North Vietnamese forces.

At 1215 hours a CV-2 aircraft dropped another resupply of water and ammunition. However, all fell into the enemy controlled portion of the Camp. At the same time an A-1E aircraft crash-landed on the airstrip, shot down by the heavy anti-aircraft fire from the many AA positions in the valley. The pilot was immediately picked up by another A-1E, which landed on the strip.

Between 1215 and 1400 a heavy exchange of small arms fire continued and the communications bunker sustained several near hits from a heavy caliber weapon. It should be noted that the enemy 81mm mortar fire had continued uninterrupted throughout the attack.

At 1415 hours the enemy was observed massing on the east side of the airstrip; presumably for another assault on the east wall (this is the wall where the front gate is located). Airstrikes were immediately called on this target, which produced heavy casualties sustained by the enemy and caused them to disperse. The assault failed to materialize; however, the VC continued to pour intense fire into the Camp. At 1500 hours, III MAF Headquarters decided to commit Marine helicopters to support evacuation of the garrison. The Camp was therefore immediately instructed to destroy their weapons and SOI's and prepare to evacuate by helicopter at 1700 hours.

At 1700 hours all communications equipment and SOI's had been destroyed and personnel occupying the bunker withdrew under fire to the north wall, and took defensive positions with the remaining force. Friendly forces on the north wall covered this withdrawal by fire.

At 1720 hours personnel were ordered to evacuate the Camp by moving north to a helicopter landing zone (HLZ) located approximately 300 meters outside the wire. All able-bodied Americans and the remainder of the Mike Force stayed behind to fight a rear guard action, but the enemy laid heavy fire down on the helicopter pickup area and inflicted many casualties. The rescue element consisted of 15 H-34 helicopters in flights of four, supported by four UH-1B gunships and tactical air, which had remained over the Camp area. Some of these helicopters were unable to come in due to low the ceiling. At the helicopter pickup point the Vietnamese personnel panicked and mobbed the aircraft. Abandoning the wounded and throwing down their weapons, the Vietnamese personnel fled from the Camp trampling a USASF soldier who was providing fire support. At the aircraft they fought to get aboard and at one point threw a wounded USASF soldier off the aircraft. One helicopter piloted by Lt. Colonel Robert House, the 163rd HMM Squadron Commander, was so overloaded that it could not initially take off. All efforts to throw the panic-stricken and hysterical Vietnamese personnel of the undercarriage were fruitless. By this time the tail rotor was damaged and the helicopter had to be abandoned. Due to the uncontrolled actions of the indigenous people and the mounting intensity of heavy ground fire, the rescue helicopters were only able to lift out 69 personnel that first day, including four wounded Americans. Two H-34 helicopters were destroyed during this operation. By 1745 hours all friendly personnel had left the camp that could do so and CO, Detachment C-1, declared the Camp closed.

At approximately 1800 hours all personnel not evacuated began evasion and escape (E&E) action. This included seven USASF personnel, one of whom was a seriously wounded Mike Force soldier, fifty CIDG and the crew of two downed Marine helicopters. The wounded USASF soldier died in the vicinity of the HLZ. From this time on, the evasion element moved northwest and took up positions on the high ground approximately two kilometers away from the Camp. At 0200 they moved again in a northerly direction. During this movement several men were lost because of extreme exhaustion and the difficulty moving in the dark. On 11 March, one USASF, the Marine helicopter crew, and an unknown number of Mike Force and CIDG personnel were rescued by helicopter at different times during the day. The remaining elements continued north in the hope of being seen by the friendly aircraft. Their objective, in the event rescue aircraft failed to materialize, was the City of Hue. The remaining Americans and some scattered groups were seen by rescue aircraft and returned to Hue on 12 March. Further air reconnaissance on 13, 14, and 15 March failed to locate any more friendly personnel and was discontinued on 16 March. The total personnel still MIA are depicted in the personnel recapitulation:

Source: Extract from Enclosure 15 to Section II to Operational Report on Lessons Learned of Period Ending 30 April 1966, Headquarters, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces [www.testgoons.com]



A SHAU valley looking South

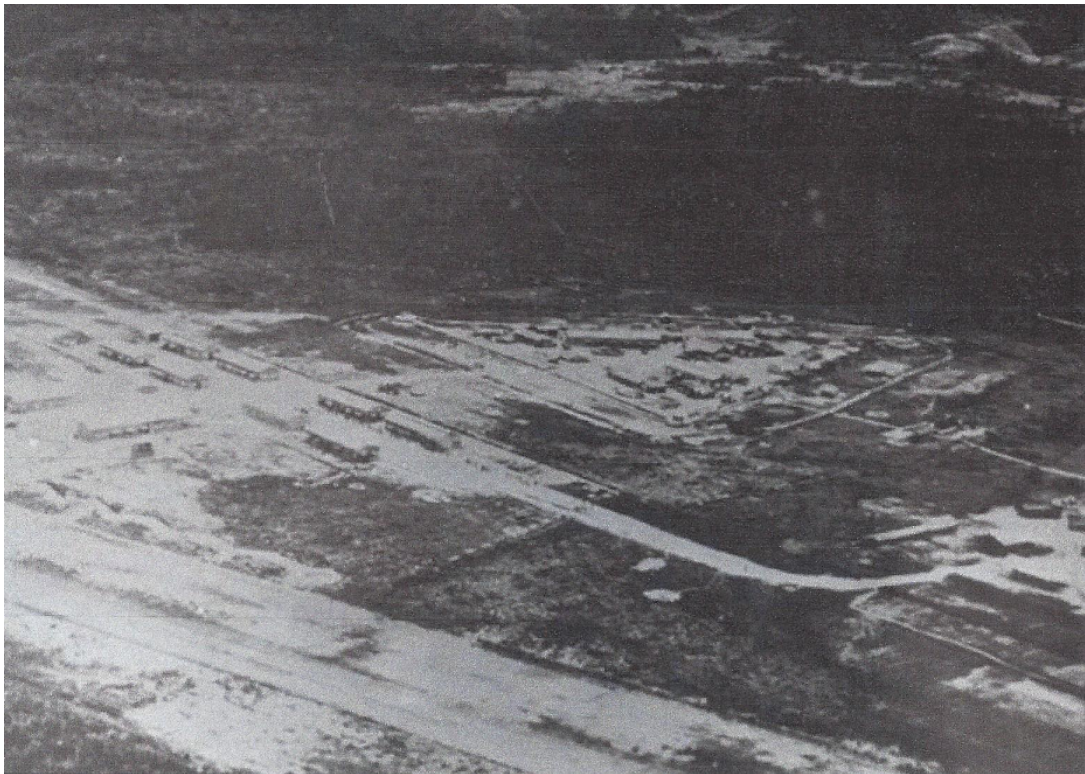
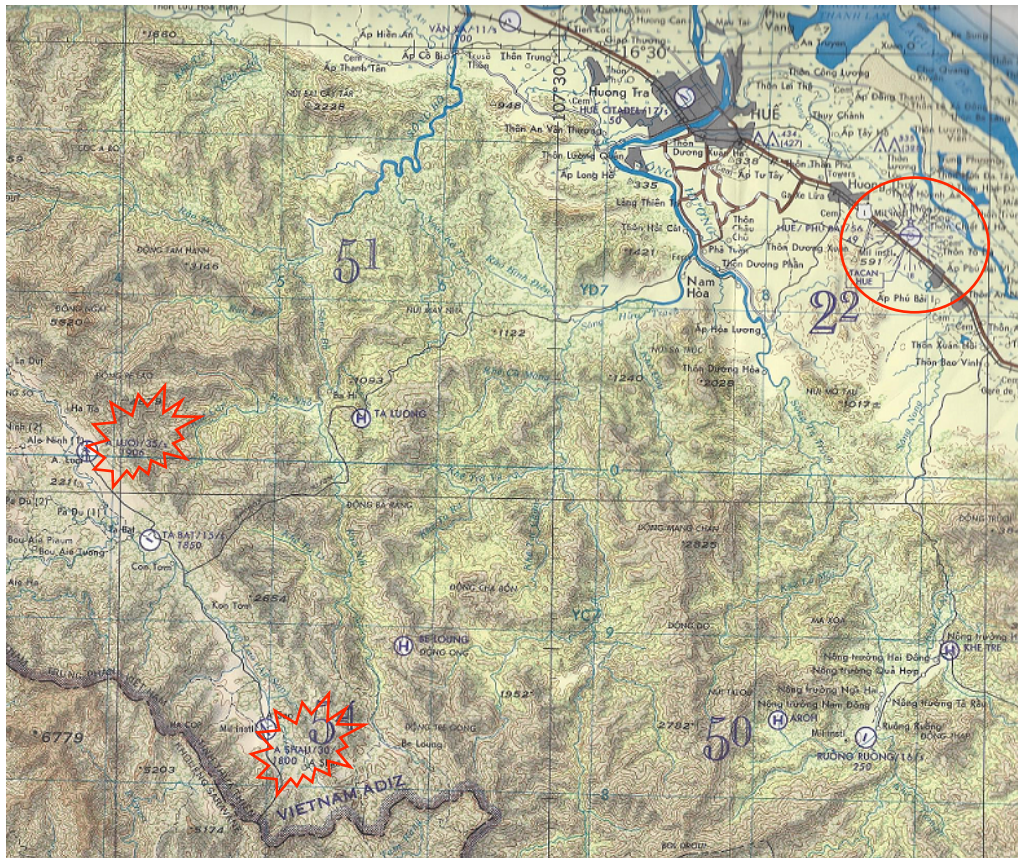
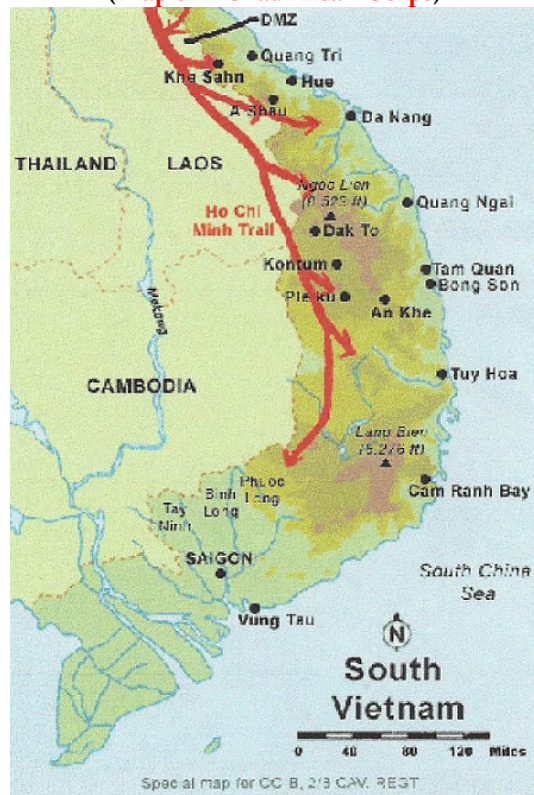


Photo Of Camp A Shau Before The Battle



(Map of A Shau Area I Corps)



Map depicting Ho Chi Minh Trail system in Vietnam

Battle and Fall of A Shau, March 1966 - 6

The A Shau Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Camp was established in 1964 in order to observe and impede traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail on the other side of the border in Laos. The camp routinely received harassment from the Viet Cong, but patrols out of Camp A Shau during February 1966 captured documents that indicated a build-up of enemy forces to the north in the Valley and that an attack might be imminent. By the end of the month it was fairly evident that the NVA had decided that it was time to put the camp—then situated astride a major confluence of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that led into Hue and Da Nang—out of business as a “thorn in the side” that hindered NVA operations traversing the A Shau Valley.

The Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program was developed by the U.S. Government in the Vietnam War to develop South Vietnamese irregular military units from minority populations. The belief was that the Viet Cong would be able to recruit large numbers of minority troops and that a South Vietnamese effort to create similar paramilitary units had to be bolstered. So in 1961 the CIA devised the program to counter the expanding influence of the Viet Cong in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. Beginning in the village of Buon Enao, small A teams from the Army Special Forces, Green Berets, moved into villages and began setting up Area Development Centers. Focusing on local defense and civic action, the Special Forces teams did the majority of the training. Villagers were trained and armed for village defense for two weeks, while localized Strike forces would receive better training and weapons and served as a quick reaction force to react to Viet Cong attacks. The vast majority of the CIDG camps were initially manned by the inhabitants of ethnic minority regions in the country, especially the Montagnard, who disliked both the North and South Vietnamese and therefore quickly took to the American advisers.

By 1963, the military felt that the program was a great success, but also that the CIDG units and Special Forces units were not being employed properly and ordered Operation Switchback, which transferred control of the CIDG Program from the CIA to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. The CIDG Program was rapidly expanded, as the entire 5th Special Forces Group, U.S. Army Special Forces, moved into Vietnam, and the CIDG units stopped focusing on village defense and instead took part in more conventional operations, most notably border surveillance.

SOURCE: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_Irregular_Defense_Group_program

The Mobile Strike Force Command, or Mike Force, was a key component of the United States Army Special Forces in Vietnam. They served with indigenous soldiers selected and trained through the largely minority CIDG and were led by American SF and Australian Army Training Team Personnel, AATTV. MIKE Force was composed of the persecuted Degar, Bahnar, Hmong, Nung, Jarai, Kmer Krom and Montagnards making their homes in Vietnam’s Central Highlands.

MIKE Force’s mission was to act as a country-wide reaction force for securing, reinforcing, and recapturing CIDG A camps, as well as to conduct special reconnaissance patrols. In addition, they also designated drop zones, landing zones, and called in air strikes on high value targets. They also were a critical factor in the search and rescue of downed American pilots because they were mobile and often in close proximity to the DMZ.

SOURCE: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MIKE_Force

MISSION TASK FOR 220TH AVIATION COMPANY:

On 4 March 1966, the Special Forces Commander at Camp A Shau requested an aerial reconnaissance mission, which was completed by CPT Charles “Woody” Woodhurst and 1LT Jim Harris of the 2nd Platoon of the 220th Aviation Company at Hue-Citadel. Their mission generating suspicions were confirmed. On 5 March two NVA defectors walked into the camp and subsequent interrogation revealed that the attack was planned for 11 and 12 March. The defectors further indicated that four battalions of the NVA 325th Division were in preparation to attack the camp. Additional recons flown on 5 and 6 March detected a large build-up of troops evidenced by numerous weapons positions, freshly dug personnel positions and anti-aircraft emplacements. On 7 March, a request for reinforcement resulted in the dispatch of a 5th Special Forces Group MIKE Force Company from Nha Trang to Da Nang, which was then flown to Camp A Shau and in place that evening. The defense of the camp was now about 210 CIDG, 141 MIKE Force, and 17 US Special Forces Green Berets, plus 9 interpreters and other personnel—a total of about 400 friendlies—with an estimated NVA force of 2000 outside its perimeter. CPT John D. (Dave) Blair was the SF Camp Commander (10 US). CPT Tennis (Sam) Carter was the MIKE Force Commander (7 US). There was also a Vietnamese “Commander” of the CIDG personnel at Camp A Shau.

On 8 March the camp was placed on general alert. During that night there was limited activity; however, poor weather conditions favored the attack and encouraged the NVA to move up their timetable. On the morning of 9 March, at approximately 0350 hours, the camp began receiving heavy 81mm mortar fire. A probe of an estimated two NVA companies was repulsed about 0430 hours, but the barrage of mortar fire continued until about 0630 hours. An assessment at about 0800 hours revealed that the mortar fire had been extremely accurate causing heavy damage to the team house, supply room, the water storage—with several personnel WIA—among them, SSG Billie Hall, the MIKE Force medic. Initially, he tended to those wounded but was soon

severely wounded, too, losing one leg with the other badly mangled. When he could not crawl to others to render treatment, he had them brought to him and instructed others, often through an interpreter, how to treat wounds—while at the same time refusing aid for himself.

SSG Billy Hall died of his wounds about 0900 hours. He was nominated for the Medal of Honor, but was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross Posthumously.



BILLIE ALLEN HALL

Date of Birth: 9/21/1939

Home of Record: SAND SPRINGS, OKLAHOMA

Branch of Service: ARMY

Rank: SSGT

Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM

**By Direction
of the
President of the United States
The**

**Distinguished Service Cross
Is Awarded
To**

**Billie A. Hall
(Posthumously)**

Rank and Organization: Staff Sergeant, Special Forces Detachment A-102

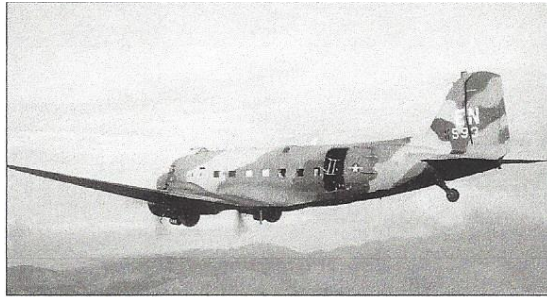
Date and Place: 9 March 1966, Republic of Vietnam

Reason:

On 9 March 1966, Special Forces Detachment A-102 at Camp Ashau was subjected to a mortar barrage and small arms fire. After a day of continuous enemy bombardment, Camp A Shau was attacked by two North Vietnamese Regiments. With the advantage of surprise, superior firepower and bad weather the enemy hurled wave after wave of troops at the weakening defenses on Camp A Shau. The vicious battle forced the evacuation of the camp, and resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. Sergeant Hall, a medic, had accompanied a company of one hundred and forty-three men to reinforce Camp A Shau. When the attack started, Sergeant Hall grabbed his weapon and aid kit and ran from his quarters. Seeing many wounded in the center of the camp he ran through the enemy fire to assist in dragging the wounded to safety and treating them. Throughout the bombardment, he ran from position to position treating the wounded. Seeing two wounded Americans lying on a road in the center of the camp in the midst of numerous mortar explosions, Sergeant Hall ran to their aid. With enemy mortar rounds bursting all around him, he reached the two men and dragged them into a ditch and gave them medical aid. A direct hit on this trench killed one of the wounded Americans, an interpreter and wounded two other Americans nearby. Although Sergeant Hall had both his legs blown off when this round exploded, he refused medical attention. Being the only qualified medic at that location, he realized his responsibility to the wounded. Only after these men were treated and moved did he allow himself to be carried to the dispensary. On reaching the dispensary, though in extreme pain and weak from great loss of blood, Sergeant Hall permitted only slight treatment of his severe wounds to stem the flow of blood so he might live longer to direct operations at the aid station. Through an interpreter, he directed indigenous medics in caring for the wounded. He continued this gallant task until his body could withstand no more the demands being placed upon it, and he lapsed into a coma and died. Sergeant Hall's conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the cost of his own life, was a continuous inspiration to the entire garrison of Camp A Shau. His sacrifice was the spark needed to ignite the flame of desire in each man to repulse the relentless enemy as long as means were available. Sergeant Hall's unimpeachable valor in close combat was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

(Abstract: **Copy of DSC Citation:** <http://arlingtoncemetery.net/bahall.htm>)

At 1015 hours Special Forces Higher Headquarters requested evacuation of the wounded.



AC-47D of the 14th Special Operations Wing



At 1120 hours, 9 March, an AC-47 was sent to the outpost. The crew was scrambled from bed, having flown the previous night. When the aircraft piloted by Captain Willard M. Collins arrived over the camp, ground forces told him the camp was in imminent danger of being overrun. The ceiling was still around 400 feet but Captain Collins and his co-pilot, 1st Lt. Delbert R. Peterson, made two attempts to penetrate the ceiling under visual flight conditions. A third attempt was made at treetop level and the plane was successful in reaching the fort. Under intense enemy ground fire from automatic weapons, including .50-calibers, the plane completed one pass at enemy troops surrounding the fort and, on its second pass, had the right engine torn from its mounts by ground fire. The other engine was silenced seconds later. The plane crash-landed on a mountain slope, sliding to rest at the base. One crewmember, SSgt. Foster, broke both legs in the crash. The crew prepared a perimeter defense around the wreckage of the plane and its wounded crewmember, and in fifteen minutes the enemy attacked. This was repulsed, but a second enemy attack killed both Captain Collins and SSgt. Foster. A third attack began as a USAF H-43 rescue helicopter dropped down to pick up the remaining crew. During this attack, Lt. Peterson charged the enemy's .50-caliber machine gun with his M-16 and a .38-caliber pistol to permit the rescue to take place. He was successful. The chopper picked up the three survivors and took off under heavy enemy fire, leaving Peterson and the two dead men behind.

SOURCE: <http://www.catkillers.org/ADA487011.pdf>

(Abstract from page 2, Actual AF Project CHECO Report with photo of AC-47 and USAF HH-43)

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MIKE'S SUMMARY OF HIS AND DAVE ROGERS' EXPERIENCE OF 9 MARCH:



IRA W. (MIKE) MISENHEIMER III

On the morning of 9 March I was not scheduled to fly until the afternoon; however, at about 1045 hours I was told to go to the airfield at Hue Citadel and meet Captain David K. Rogers, the Platoon Commander. When I arrived at the airfield, CPT Rogers told me that a Spooky C-47 had been shot down at A Shau and that the Air Force could not get in because the weather was too bad. MACV and SF Headquarters elements wanted to see if we could get in and locate the Spooky and those Marine helicopters would be standing by for rescue operations. He also asked if I would be comfortable flying on instruments if necessary—I answered, “Yes.”

I followed CPT Rogers up north along a ridgeline then into a valley to a notch at the north end of the A Shau Valley where the Spooky supposedly was down. He told me to circle outside while he went through the notch first to see if we could get into the Valley and search. He called me and told me to come in – it was clear with about 500 feet of ceiling – but he told me to go south as he would go north because it was too dangerous to fly together. We looked around for about 30 minutes with no luck when we got a call that mortar rounds were falling into the camp and one of the Special Forces Senior NCOs had been badly wounded and needed to be medevac'd. CPT Rogers told me to go down and pick him up and take him to Phu Bai.

As I was flying toward the camp I received a radio call telling me that I would have to land to the North and take off to the South as the NVA was attacking strongly from the North. I came in low, as the ceiling was not getting any better. It was a good thing as I then saw a lot of NVA to the north and there was a lot of shooting. I told the camp where I saw the enemy and how many I estimated and they were able to put mortar fire on them. I landed to the north and could hear a lot of shooting over the sound of the engine. I pulled in to the parking area and got out to talk to the guys standing there – three Special Forces Sergeants and about 25-30 Vietnamese. We spoke about the injured man, a SFC who had 7 wounds and could not walk. They were going to bring him out in a dump truck.

About that time we came under heavy fire and the SF guys said that the NVA obviously were after the airplane. I did not see many NVA but there was heavy firing and I was on my belly at the side of the airstrip. I fired .45 rounds in their direction – the SF NCOs had M1 carbines and were being careful with their shots. The senior NCO said that they were low on ammo after 3 days of fighting. I said I have some in the plane – I'll go get it. He said it was too dangerous – too late – I was already running over.

To back up a bit: When I arrived at the 220th in February 1966, on a transfer from the 92nd Aviation Company (Caribou) in February 1966, I was issued a .45 caliber pistol. Rifles were not assigned to pilots. The M14 was issued to EM but officers had to scrounge for any other weapon. One hut over from mine was the Australian advisors hut. One of their men was killed the day I arrived. As new friends they gave me some of the deceased man's gear. An M-1 carbine with fully automatic setting was one of the items. Having heard stories of what happened to pilots shot down and being 20 years old, I decided I would make a fight if downed. To this end I made up about 20 magazines of .30-cal fully loaded and about 2000 rounds in boxes and 500 rounds of .45-cal in boxes. Along with 10 hand grenades, I carried all of this in 2 helmet bags to the flight line and took them with me on every flight. At the SF armory, getting ammo was easy.

When I brought the helmet bags from my airplane, it was like Christmas! I'll never forget the look on the SF NCO's face when I opened the bags. He called the other NCOs over and then asked, “Do you have grenades too?” – so off I went. The grenades were used right away and made the guys happy because it pushed the NVA back—they had been completely out. Shortly after, I shot the one person I ever shot on the ground when a lone NVA soldier came running at us. I fired all 7 rounds and hit him with the last one. “Sapper,” the SF guys said. They had been divvying up the ammo and didn't see him at first.

Then a guy came out from the camp and said the engine in the truck had been hit and they couldn't start it, they needed to push it out to the plane. So, all four of us ran into the camp and helped push it out, with rounds pinging off the truck bed. We got it to

the plane and the medic and I and two others carried the wounded SFC to the plane and I strapped him in as fast and best I could. He was in a lot of pain and the medic gave him a shot of morphine and gave me the tags to give the medics in Phu Bai.

I got into the plane, started it and taxied to take off to the south. Take off was okay, and I was thinking my way into going IFR when the airspeed started dropping and I thought, 'Oh, no—the engine was hit!' I had plenty of fuel, but as I started looking around, the flaps were full down. I thought, 'How did you do that, Dummy?' I pushed the flap switch and they wouldn't go up. I looked in the back seat and saw that the SFC must have tried to sit better and had his hand on the flap switch holding it down. I was able to get his hand off the switch and raise the flaps. However, I was now too far south in the valley and turned back north to get some room, since I knew that the hills or mountains further north were to my east. When I got back even with the camp, I climbed into the overcast to go on top. I picked up the ADF and headed for Phu Bai and called in that I was coming with wounded on board. The tower responded and said that the GCA was down and the ceiling was too low for an ADF approach (I did not have an approach plate anyway – but I carried some after that). I then made radio contact with 220th Operations and asked for any ideas; I was told to go to Da Nang. I headed that way looking for the sea, cleared the clouds at Hai Van Pass and called Da Nang with wounded.

They told me to land at Marble Mountain because Da Nang-Main runway was too far from the hospital. As I was told later, the 220th guys at the airfield and the medics from the hospital had torn down the fence and rushed an ambulance to the 220th ramp. I landed VFR (all traffic was put on hold until I landed) and pulled over to the ramp. The ambulance had pulled into position as the prop stopped and the crew chief and I got the SFC out. The medics then placed him on a stretcher and into the ambulance and off they went to the hospital. The SFC survived to be sent to Japan and I did not hear what happened after that. (Note: The SF After-Action Report identified him as MSGT Robert I. Gibson.)

I refueled the Birdog and flew back to Phu Bai to be debriefed. While I was there, my right hand had been itching since I had left A Shau, I had not looked too hard until I pulled the gloves off at Phu Bai and saw that I had metal fragments in my hand. The flight line medic pulled them out, put on antiseptic and asked if I wanted a Purple Heart. After having seen the blood soaked uniform of the SFC, I said, "No." I then flew back to Hue.

My DA Form 759 shows flight time recorded on 9 March as 4.4 hours flown, and with one landing—which has to be wrong, because I made four!

WILLARD MARION COLLINS

Captain

4TH AIR COMMANDO SQDN, 6250TH CBT SPT GROUP,
14TH AIR COMMANDO WING, 13TH AF

United States Air Force

Quincy, Illinois

January 21, 1929 to March 09, 1966



ABOVE: (Copy of Photos, Citations and actions of Collins and Peterson)

SOURCE: <http://www.virtualwall.org/dc/CollinsWM02a.htm>

Accounting of the citation presented for Captain Collins for his extraordinary heroism in connection with the military operations against an opposing armed force near A Shau, Republic of Vietnam: On 9 March 1966, Captain Collins, Aircraft Commander of an AC-47 gunship, call sign "Spooky 70," departed Da Nang airfield and was scrambled in defense of a Special Forces Camp which was under heavy attack by hostile forces. Captain Collins' crewmembers consisted of Lieutenant Delbert R. Peterson, co-pilot; Captain Jerry L. Meek, navigator; SSgt. John G. Brown, flight engineer; SSgt. James Turner, Jr., Aerial gunner; and SSgt. Robert E. Foster, the second aerial gunner of the crew. Arriving over the area, Captain Collins attempted to locate the camp, which was surrounded by mountainous terrain in a narrow valley obscured by heavy clouds. He made two attempts to penetrate into the valley but was forced to withdraw. On the third attempt, at 1300 hours, he entered the valley at tree top level, and managed to locate the camp. With complete disregard for his personal safety, and fully aware of his aircraft's vulnerability to ground fire, Captain Collins maneuvered into position. He made two firing passes against the hostile forces. It was on the second pass that both engines exploded from the impact of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) ground fire. Captain Collins feathered the #1 engine and notified the crew they "were going in." Demonstrating superb airmanship and skill, Captain Collins successfully crash-landed his battle torn aircraft. After landing, Captain Collins rallied his crew and attempted to establish defense positions away from the aircraft. Once the crew got out of the aircraft, surveyed the damage, they collected their survival equipment and weapons, they discovered that SSgt. Foster was injured in the crash and Lieutenant Peterson began first aid on him. Captain Collins at that point began working the survival radios while Captain Meek loaded all of the M16's and established the perimeter defense outside of the aircraft. About 10 minutes later, Captain Meek was shot and wounded by a Viet Cong guerilla that was closing in on the downed aircraft. At that moment an L19 Birdog Forward Air Controller (FAC) aircraft, piloted by Captain Dave Rogers, spotted the aircraft and crew through the dense jungle and called in A1 Skyraiders to provide air cover for the downed aircrew. Captain Meek told Lieutenant Peterson they needed a sentry at the rear of the airplane because it was a blind spot. Delbert Peterson then put on his survival vest and crawled around past the tail into the undergrowth with his M16. However, before the Skyraiders could make a pass, the right side of the C47 was raked with enemy machine gun fire killing SSgt. Foster outright and mortally wounding Captain Collins. Captain Meek at that point called out to Lieutenant Peterson and SSgt. Brown, and while SSgt. Brown acknowledged that he was all right there was no response from Lieutenant Peterson.

At about 1520 hours, search and rescue helicopters arrived on scene and made a circular pass over the crash site. While one descended to a ground hover approximately 25 feet away from the nose of the C47, the other remained overhead. Captain Meek ordered SSgt. Brown to make a run for the helicopter, taking with him SSgt. Turner who had just kicked out the remnants of the emergency of the emergency exit door on the right side of the aircraft to make their escape. All three made it to the rescue helicopter at the same time. As it lifted off the ground, the crew and passengers searched the area around the C47 for Lieutenant Peterson; however, none saw any trace of him.

About 20 minutes after the three crewmembers were rescued; a Special Forces ground team arrived at the crash site. They found the bodies of Captain Collins and SSgt. Foster where they had fallen near their aircraft. However, during their search, which included the area in and around where the co-pilot was last seen, they could find no sign of Lieutenant Peterson. Further, they found blood spots or blood trails leading away from the crash site. Because of the heavy enemy presence in the area, the Special Forces ground team was unable to bring the bodies of Captain Collins and SSgt. Foster out with them. Captain Collins and SSgt. Foster were immediately listed as Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered. Because there was a strong possibility that Lieutenant Peterson was captured, he was listed Missing In Action. The location of loss placed the gunship 10 kilometers north of the A Shau Valley and 2 miles south of the Special Forces Camp they were to provide air support for.

Although attacked by hostile forces in the area, Captain Collins continuously fought off his attackers enabling three of his crewmembers to be rescued. The valuable minutes which he gave his crew, and for which he paid the supreme sacrifice, was directly responsible for their rescue. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness in the face of hostile forces, Captain Collins reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



DELBERT RAY PETERSON

Major

**4TH AIR COMMANDO SQDN, 6250TH CBT SPT GROUP,
14TH AIR COMMANDO WING, 13TH AF
United States Air Force, Manson, Iowa
May 11, 1939 to February 09, 1978
(Incident Date March 09, 1966)**



Air Force Cross

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Title 10, Section 8742, United States Code, takes pride in presenting the Air Force Cross (Posthumously) to Captain [then First Lieutenant] Delbert Ray Peterson (AFSN: 0-3130436), United States Air Force (Reserve), for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force while serving as Co-Pilot of an AC-47 aircraft of the 4th Air Commando Squadron (Fire Support), 14th Air Commando Wing, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam, in action near A Shau, Republic of Vietnam, on 9 March 1966. On that date, Lieutenant Peterson and crew responded to a desperate plea for close air support from the embattled defenders of the Special Forces Camp at A Shau. Arriving over the battle scene, Lieutenant Peterson's aircraft penetrated a four hundred foot cloud ceiling to reach the beleaguered, mountain-shrouded fort. Shortly after making a firing pass at treetop level, the aircraft's right engine was torn from its mounts by savage .50 caliber anti-aircraft fire. Second later the left engine was lost and the pilot crash-landed the aircraft on a nearby mountain slope. Realizing that the Viet Cong would soon swarm to the crash site, Lieutenant Peterson displayed an utter disregard for his own safety as he refused to abandon a badly injured fellow crew member. The Viet Cong attacked immediately but were beaten back by the downed crew. During the second assault, one crew member was killed and another seriously wounded, but again the Viet Cong were repelled. As they pressed their third attack, Lieutenant Peterson, in a last ditch effort, gallantly and heroically charged the hostile forces. The intensity of hostile fire immediately diminished. Largely through his determined resistance, rescue aircraft were able to pick up the surviving crew members. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness in the face of the opposing force, Lieutenant Peterson reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

General Orders: Department of the Air Force, Special Order GB-189 (July 13, 1966)

Action Date: March 9, 1966

Service: Air Force

Rank: Captain

Company: 4th Air Commando Squadron (Fire Support)

Regiment: 14th Air Commando Wing

Division: Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam

Above: (Abstract copy of Citations and actions of Collins and Peterson)

With the AC-47 gone, at about 1300 a flight of two A1-Es out of Pleiku were diverted from other targets to A Shau – MAJ Bernard “Bernie” Fisher and his wingman, Bruce Wallace. There was no available Air Force FAC aircraft at the scene, as ‘regulations’ did not permit them to operate below 1000’ AGL. MAJ Fisher then, on his own, found his way through a hole and then led his wingman under the overcast. Later, he went back up topside and led another flight of A1-Es into the Valley. After they had expended, he then personally directed a CH3C (Jolly Green Giant) in to evacuate wounded.

During the assault on the base, the number of KIA and wounded were mounting as the air support teams attempted to make their way through the cloud cover. The following, first person account, by Sergeant John Bradford relates the conditions on the ground as they battled gallantly to defend their positions.

Late in the afternoon of 9 March 1966, I was a young, badly wounded, Special Forces Sergeant holed up in a bunker at the A Shau Special Forces Camp located in the A Shau Valley near the Laotian border. The Camp was under attack and on the verge of being overrun by an NVA regiment. With daylight fading, being unable to walk and after watching several failed attempts to evacuate me and other wounded personnel, I knew that when the Camp fell, if not evacuated, our odds of making out were not good.

I had arrived at the camp two days earlier, as part of a contingent from the 5th Special Forces Group, Mobile Strike Force sent to reinforce the resident A Team and their Vietnamese irregulars. Known as “Mike Force,” it was largely composed of ethnic Chinese Nung mercenaries trained and led by Special Forces Officers and NCO’s.

In the early morning hours of 9 March, the NVA flattened the camp with a prolonged mortar and rocket barrage and then launched several ground assaults. As a result, approximately 50 Nungs, 30 Vietnamese irregulars and two Special Forces personnel were killed. About 100 irregulars and Nungs and virtually all of the remaining 15 Special Forces personnel were wounded. Two of the latter—including myself and the resident Team Sergeant plus about thirty Nungs and Vietnamese irregulars—were judged by our medics to be in serious condition and in need of medical evacuation.

In conjunction with the main attack, the NVA overran several peripheral outposts and ringed the hills around the camp with 12.7 and 37mm AA Sites. Due to very low cloud cover, air support was extremely vulnerable to these weapons and small arms fire. Virtually every aircraft that entered the valley near the camp or overflew the camp was hit and a number, including an A1E Skyraider, a C47 “Spooky” gun ship and several helicopters were shot down.

Around mid-morning, an O-1 Birdog, piloted by an unknown aviator with some large cajones, landed and evacuated the Team Sergeant who was literally dragged to the airstrip by two Special Forces Soldiers and thrown head first into the aircraft. Late that afternoon, a Marine H34, which tried to evacuate the remainder of the seriously wounded, was hit and crashed in the Camp. Another H34, which came in shortly thereafter, departed as soon as the crew of the downed H34 jumped aboard and made no attempt to load anyone else. After being carried several times under fire to the Camp LZ, only to be brought back to the bunker because an attempted medevac had failed or was aborted, it seemed that I and others in critical condition needed a miracle to get out of the Camp alive.

The miracle arrived in the form of a CH3, which landed in the Camp with a roar of turbines and in a cloud of dust and debris. I remember a solitary Airman firing an M-16 from the door as it touched down. Despite taking fire while Special Forces NCO’s lifted the wounded, including me, over a mob of panicked Vietnamese irregulars trying to board the aircraft, the pilot held steady and lifted off only after we were safely on board. Thirty minutes later, I arrived at a Navy/Marine Corps medical facility at Da Nang from which I was evacuated to Okinawa.

I subsequently found out that the Camp had, in fact, been overrun and the survivors forced to E&E for several days until they were picked up by Marine and Army aircraft. I also learned that several Special Forces soldiers attempted to carry a wounded comrade as they evacuated the Camp evading pursuing NVA, but he died during the process and his body was hidden and left behind. It was never recovered.

Since that time, I periodically attempted, without luck, to identify the guys who manned that CH3. About three years ago, a friend who is a former Air Force Special Operations helicopter pilot, said that he would try to obtain the information I was seeking. He recently informed me that he located Frank Kelley, the pilot, and only surviving member of the crew.

I contacted Kelley and he confirmed that on 9 March 1966, he; co-pilot, Captain John T. Bags; and crew Chief, Technical Sergeant, Lyle Keller, crewed the CH3 that evacuated the wounded from Camp A Shau. During the course of our lengthy conversation, I began to realize that I had been rescued by a very special man; areal American hero that served his country during three conflicts.

Briefly stated, Kelley joined the Massachusetts National Guard in 1940 as a private in a field artillery unit; was selected as an aviation cadet in 1943; completed flight school in 1944 and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps; and flew B25’s on bombing missions in Italy in 1945. He was discharged and returned to Massachusetts shortly after the end of the war. In

1953, during the Korean conflict, he was recalled to active duty with the Air Force and flew B25's and T29's that served as training platforms for student radar operators. While at Waco, Texas, Kelley saw a helicopter "take off backwards" and was so impressed that he requested qualification as a helicopter pilot. After completing the 90 day transition course at San Marcos, Texas in 1955, he remained on active duty, serving in Japan, Korea and CONUS, flying a number of aircraft, including the H19, H5, H21 and CH3 on various missions.

Among the exploits Kelley related to me were ditching an H21 in the Atlantic off Massachusetts and spending several hours in a life raft – Kelley still regrets the Boston press coverage of the incident credited him, a Bostonian, with saving the crew while ignoring C.B. Jeannes, a Texan and instructor pilot, who actually flew the aircraft and made most of the critical decisions; flying one of the first CH3B models the Air Force acquired from the Navy; and picking up the first ever Air Force CH3C following a ceremony at the Sikorsky Facility in Connecticut. He laughed as he described getting a warning light shortly after departing Sikorsky, but refused permission to his point of departure because the VIP's were still present.

Kelley arrived in Vietnam in 1965 as part of the 20th Helicopter Squadron; initially known as "Pony Express" and later "Green Hornets." Stationed in Nha Trang, his section, consisting of six CH3C's, rotated between various air bases in Vietnam and Thailand performing a variety of missions. He explained that on 9 March 1966, while in I Corps enroute to Khe Sanh, he was diverted to the A Shau Valley to pick up the crew of a C-47 "Spooky" gun ship that had been shot down near the Special Forces Camp. As he approached the valley, Kelley was contacted by Major Bernard Fischer, flying lead for four A-1E Skyraiders providing air support for the Camp (Fischer was awarded the Medal of Honor for landing, under fire, on the Camp air strip the following day and rescuing his wing man who had earlier crash landed there). Fischer suggested that because of the low ceiling and intense AA and ground fire, that Kelley follow him to the crash site. Kelley did so and, after running the gauntlet down the valley and determining that no survivors were present, headed to the Special Forces Camp. He recalled landing near the downed H34; the frantic, unwounded Vietnamese mobbing the aircraft as the wounded were loaded; how, on takeoff, he "wiggled" the aircraft to ensure the Vietnamese clinging to its undercarriage and struts were dislodged; and how a young GI in a tiger suit remained standing, refusing to sit or lie down after being carried aboard – unknown to him, I had been wounded, among other places both buttocks.

Kelley retired in 1968 and returned to Massachusetts. He and his wife, Eleanor, live in Plymouth. I suspect that most of his neighbors don't know of his exploits and some see him as an old warhorse put out to pasture. If they only knew – this guy was the real deal, a hero that the George Clooney's, Tom Hanks and other Hollywood types portray in movies. How do you thank a person for giving you forty-plus extra years of life? When I tried, he replied "If you ever need help again, you know who to call."

John W. Bradford

SOURCE: <http://usafhpa.org/20poniesnew/FrankKelly2.html>

There were only 29 daytime sorties flown in support of A Shau on 9 March—17 by USAF, 10 by USMC, 2 by VNAF (a flight of two A-1Hs).

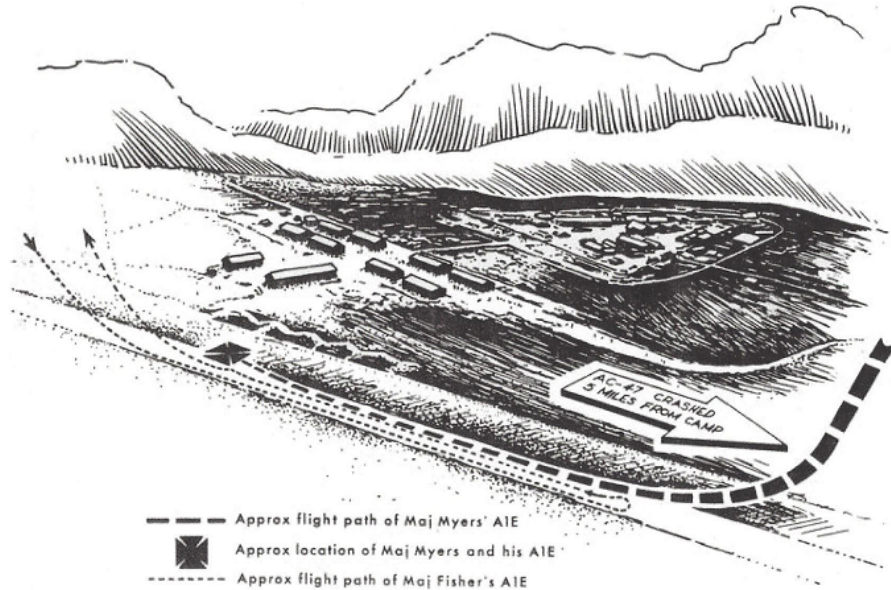
MAJ Fisher would be awarded a Silver Star for his efforts as the on-scene commander that day – his wingman, Wallace, would be awarded the DFC for destroying the downed AC-47, after three of the crew had been rescued and a search of the area found no survivors.

On 10 March fire support was continuous from USAF, Marine, Navy and ARVN aircraft, with 220th aircraft providing assistance in locating targets in support below the 500-800' overcast.

About 1100 hours MAJ Bernie Fisher and his wingman that day, CPT Francisco "Paco" Vasquez, were on a mission near Kontum when they got an emergency call to divert to A Shau.

Other A-1s soon over A Shau were MAJ Dafford "Jump" Myers and his wingman, CPT Hubert King, out of Qui Nhon. The Valley was still overcast at 500-800', and the air space was tight; however, we know several details of at least 3 flights of A-1Es that worked in the Valley this day.

King took hits in his cockpit canopy on a strafing pass and due to limited forward visibility had to divert to Da Nang. Then in early afternoon Myers was hit hard and had to crash land on the A Shau runway. When a call for a medevac was estimated to be 15-20 minutes away, Fisher made his decision to rescue Myers. Calling another flight of A1-Es down to cover him, Fisher made his daring rescue, which earned his recognition of the Medal of Honor.



SOURCE: Graphic between page 6-7: <http://www.catkillers.org/ADA487011.pdf>

MAJOR FISHER'S MEDAL OF HONOR MISSION TAPE TRANSCRIPT:

SOURCE: <http://skyraider.org/skyassn/fisher/fishermoh.htm>

FISHER: He's about 20 feet.

LUCAS: Understand he's 20 feet?

FISHER: Roger.

LUCAS: Which way you gonna land?

FISHER: I'm gonna make 180 degrees, come in to the southeast.

LUCAS: OK. Well, then, we'll come up behind you and strafe paralleled to your heading with you.

FISHER: OK, I'm rolling in now.

Unknown: Make it slow or you'll lose it.

LUCAS: I'm right behind you, Bernie. I took a hit in my pitot system, and I'm smoking a little.

HAGUE: OK, I'm right back at your six o'clock, Luke.

LUCAS: OK. Ahh, do you see any smoke?

HAGUE: Negative. It looks pretty good.

LUCAS: OK, my air speed's gone to hell, and my hydraulic pressure's fluctuating.

HAGUE: All right. You want me to stay with you?

LUCAS: OK, Bernie, you gonna land out of this one?

Unknown: Skosh

Unknown: (garbled) in trail ???

Fighter: Five-Two, Oxford 81, over.

FAC: Oxford 81, Birddog 52?

Fighter: Roger, we're headed your position for time on target of 1240. We're ten minutes late. We have eight 500 GPs retarded and 20 mike-mike.

FAC: All right, Sir, hold on high and dry. At the present time we have A-1H's working underneath. There's an aircraft down there at the present time and we're trying to get the pilot out.

Unknown: (garbled) all aircraft

Fighter: This is (Call sign) 07-1. We're still orbiting up here at 20,000.

FAC: Roger, hold high and dry for now, Sir.

Fighter: Roger.

Fighter: Ahh five one, this is Congo 56 with eight napes and eight bombs and 20 mike mike.

FAC: Roger, stand by. The weather underneath is not too good for napalm at the present time.

Fighter: Roger.

HAGUE: Bullshit!

Unknown: (Call sign) Bird Dog 52.

LUCAS: OK, Paco, you in trail with us now?

LUCAS: Hobo 51, Hobo 03.

Unknown: Zero three, uh, Shoeseller 03. ???

LUCAS: Roger, go ahead, Jim.

GUNTER: Roger, which kind of help do you need? We're about three miles up the valley.

LUCAS: OK, Jim, do you read me?

GUNTER: Roger.

LUCAS: OK, Babe, come on down the valley. As you come down the valley you run over that airstrip, pick up a heading of one five zero. And as you run down, you can run the napalm right down the east side of the runway.

GUNTER: Understand. 150 down the east side of the runway. OK, got that. Pete?

HOUK (Jim's Wingman): Roger Dodger, Jim.

LUCAS: You'll see quite a bit of smoke.

GUNTER: OK, I see an aircraft down there to the left. Who's that? You?

LUCAS: No, I'm coming down the east side of the runway now. Why don't you come down one time and look it over.

Fighter: OK, this is Hobo 21, we're up here Luke.

Birddog 52: Hobo 21, Birddog 52.

FAC: Roger 52, we're orbiting the airfield to the North at 6000 feet.

LUCAS: OK, let's hit everything Denny, except the Fort.

HAGUE: Roger, I gotcha....I'm winchester (out of ammo).

LUCAS: OK, so am I. Let's keep making passes though. Maybe they don't know it.

HAGUE: Roger.

LUCAS: OK, Jim, the area's smoking pretty badly, and you'll see an aircraft burning on the runway. Bernie's taking off to the north.

GUNTER: OK, understand to the north. OK, I can see him. Is he rolling now?

HAGUE: Roger - Roger.

LUCAS: OK, get the east side Denny.

HAGUE: Roger - Roger, Babe.

GUNTER: OK, where do you want those trenches strafed, Jon?

LUCAS: OK, you got us in sight? We're breaking off. I'm coming left.

GUNTER: OK, Where you want the strafe here? Right on the east end of the runway?

LUCAS: Yeah, put it all down the east side of the runway, in the grass area. Put a couple of bursts in there and then get hold of Barry.

GUNTER: OK. Get a hold of who?

LUCAS: Correction, it'll be Hound Dog 23 if he's still up.

GUNTER: OK, right here, we'll be going right in now.

LUCAS: OK, all the gun fire is over here on the East side in these trees.

GUNTER: OK, Luke, you got a chopper comin' in up here to the north. Uh, he may be able to get the pilot out.

LUCAS: We already got him out.

GUNTER: Roger.

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RESCUE NARRATIVE:



Major Fisher and Major Myers

“Major Bernard F. Fisher Distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict as an A-1E Pilot at A Shau, Republic of Vietnam on 10 March 1966. In the face of a strong and determined hostile force armed with automatic weapons, he landed his single engine A-1E on a hostile held 2500 foot airstrip, cratered by mortar fire and cluttered with battle debris capable of destroying his aircraft to rescue Major Dafford W. Myers. At the time the Camp was under attack by some 2000 North Vietnamese Army Regulars who had forced the 300 defenders of A Shau into one bunker within the Camp. Hostile troops with automatic weapons had overrun the airstrip and had positioned themselves between the airstrip and the Camp dug-in positions. Other troops in similar positions surrounded the Camp and were raking it with automatic weapons fire from the surrounding hills. The tops of the 1500 foot hills were obscured by an 800 foot ceiling limiting aircraft maneuverability and forcing pilots to operate within range of hostile gun positions, which were often able to fire down on the attacking aircraft. Major Myers aircraft, one of six A-1E's operating in the Valley at the time of the action, was hit at 400 feet above the ground by a number of heavy caliber shells of unknown size. Unable to bail out because of his low altitude, the situation was further complicated by cockpit smoke, which made it impossible to use his flight instruments, flames outside this aircraft cockpit further hindered and prevented flight orientation.

Major Fisher assessed the situation and, closing on Major Myers' aircraft, guided the burning A-1E onto the hostile controlled runway with verbal commands and encouragement to the pilot. At the time he was guiding in the burning aircraft, he was providing suppressive fire ahead of it and giving battle instructions to other members of the circling flight. After observing the wheels up flaming landing and explosion, Major Fisher observed Major Myers emerge from the inferno and roll into the weeds on the edge of the runway, his flight suit smoking.

Calling for air rescue helicopters he was informed that they were 15 to 20 minutes away. In the belief that Major Myers was seriously injured and in imminent danger of capture by a vicious and brutal hostile force, Major Fisher announced his intention to land on the hostile controlled airstrip to affect a rescue. Although advised by the Airborne Command Post of the extreme hazard and likely failure of such an attempt, he selected to continue. He noted that Major Myers' position was only 20 feet from a hostile gun position and advised the Command Post it was doubtful a helicopter would survive a rescue attempt in the face of extreme and intense hostile fire surrounding the Camp. He directed the remaining A-1 Pilots to provide him with fire support against the anti-aircraft positions. There were approximately 20 such positions in the area being reported by Forward Air Controllers in addition to other automatic and semi-automatic weapons possessed by the attacking soldiers.

Prior to the rescue attempt, Major Fisher expended his remaining ordinance on hostile positions within the Camp, where the defenders had requested a strike, and began his approach to the airstrip in an already battle damaged aircraft. The approach was complicated by ground fire from infantry forces and smoke from fires initiated by bombs and napalm. As a result of smoke covering his approach he broke out high and landed long. Realizing he would be unable to stop in the remaining distance, he

applied power as he passed Major Myers, who was attempting to wave him away from the strip and what appeared to be certain destruction.

Holding his aircraft, a few feet above the ground to avoid as much of the intense ground fire as possible, Major Fisher began an "S" turn which would bring him back to the airstrip from the opposite direction of his first attempt. The second landing attempt was successful, although violent braking, and rudder action was not always successful in avoiding debris on the battle-torn runway. Major Fisher utilized all of his flying skill to miss mortar craters, shell casings, and pieces of the A-1E, which now littered the runway as a result of the fuel tank explosion.

Unable to stop within the confines of the short airstrip, Major Fisher's aircraft went into the over run and then out into a high grass area used to store empty steel fuel barrels. He felt them striking and further damaging his aircraft. His position was now at the far end of the runway from Major Myers' last known location. Applying power he began weaving his way, under fire from virtually all sides, taxiing down the rubble-strewn runway towards Major Myers' position. Trying to avoid jagged edges of metal created by mortar bursts on the pierced steel-planking runway (which would have destroyed his tires) he taxied almost the full length of the runway. Although Major's Fisher and Myers both observed tracers and heard thousands of rounds of fire during this period, strafing runs by the A-1's impaired the accuracy of the gunners.

After braking to a stop near the last position he had seen Major Myers, Major Fisher unbuckled in preparation to leave the aircraft in the belief the officer he was attempting to rescue would be so severely burned and wounded he could not reach his aircraft. On his way out of the aircraft he met Major Myers and from his position in the cockpit, helped Major Myers enter. To land on its jagged, mortar -pocked surface among debris, with enemy troops all around and even firing from the hills above the clouds, took a tremendous amount of skill and courage. Myer's words to Fisher when he was pulled into the aircraft were: "You dumb S.O.B. now neither of us will get out of here". During this time Major Fisher could hear bullets striking his aircraft. Later ground crewmen counted 19 hits on the aircraft.

The A-1 pilots above reported that they were now out of ammunition. Their strafing runs would be "dry" in an effort to suppress as much hostile fire as possible and bluff the hostile gunners at the edge of the airstrip. Turning his aircraft around, Major Fisher saw he had less than two thirds of an already too short airstrip ahead of him. Calling on all of his skill, he applied power and worked his way through the wreckage and debris gaining enough speed to lift off at the over run. Flying just above the ground at insufficient airspeed to climb, he gradually built up speed, still under intense hostile fire, and began to climb into the 800 foot overcast above the Valley.

Throughout this action, Major Fisher and five other A-1E pilots were maneuvering their aircraft under intense hostile anti-aircraft fire in a "Box" approximately one mile square, ringed with mountains under complete hostile domination on all sides and enclosed by an 800 foot ceiling.

During the defense of the Camp by these airmen one of the six was shot down and one was forced to return to base because of extensive battle damage. Three of the remaining four aircraft, including Major Fisher's had suffered battle damage before the decision to attempt the rescue was made. The landing was made by Major Fisher in the knowledge of the fore (Line Missing from narrative) complete control of the Camp, and was in fact, in control of the airstrip, directing his own air cover, and possessing the knowledge that the airstrip was not adequate for A-1 operations under favorable conditions. He chose to land his battle damaged aircraft on a hostile controlled runway further complicated by battle debris and parts of an exploded aircraft. He performed this rescue in the face of some 2000 armed and nearly victorious hostile troops. His determination, his incredible display of courage in the face of resolute and heavily armed hostile forces, this complete disregard for his own life to effect the rescue of a fellow airman, and his resolve to continue despite advice by others of the severe hazards involved, reflect the highest ideals of American fighting forces above and beyond the call of duty.

I personally hold no reservation in nominating Major Bernard F. Fisher for the Medal of Honor.

[Signed:] Lieutenant General J.H. Moore, Commander"

SOURCE: <http://www.popasmoke.com/notam2/showthread.php?4634-Ashau-SF-Camp-Rescue>

MAJ Fisher was to later return above the overcast and brought in two C-123s for a much-needed Para-drop of medical supplies and ammunition. He and his wingman suppressed hostile gunfire by strafing. Later, even though almost at the limits of his fuel supply, he brought two B-57s through the hole in the overcast and they were able to lend their support to the battle.



Major Bernard Francis Fisher's Medal of Honor Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On that date, the Special Forces camp at A Shau was under attack by 2,000 North Vietnamese Army regulars. Hostile troops had positioned themselves between the airstrip and the camp. Other hostile troops had surrounded the camp and were continuously raking it with automatic weapons fire from the surrounding hills. The tops of the 1,500-foot hills were obscured by an 800 foot ceiling, limiting aircraft maneuverability and forcing pilots to operate within range of hostile gun positions, which often were able to fire down on the attacking aircraft. During the battle, Maj. Fisher observed a fellow airman crash land on the battle-torn airstrip. In the belief that the downed pilot was seriously injured and in imminent danger of capture, Maj. Fisher announced his intention to land on the airstrip to effect a rescue. Although aware of the extreme danger and likely failure of such an attempt, he elected to continue. Directing his own air cover, he landed his aircraft and taxied almost the full length of the runway, which was littered with battle debris and parts of an exploded aircraft. While effecting a successful rescue of the downed pilot, heavy ground fire was observed, with 19 bullets striking his aircraft. In the face of the withering ground fire, he applied power and gained enough speed to lift-off at the overrun of the airstrip. Maj. Fisher's profound concern for his fellow airman, and at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

SOURCE: <http://skyraider.org/skyassn/fisher/fishermoh.htm>

Two C-123s and one AC-47 provided flare support throughout the night.

Between 0400 and 0630 the next morning request for air strikes resulted in several sorties of USMC A-4s from Chu Lai. Most strikes had to be accomplished by "radar" bombing due to the low overcast; however, one was lost when he came under the overcast for one bomb run and then on a second pass with a strafing run with his 20mm cannon he failed to pull up in time and crashed into a mountain. 1LT Augusto M. Xavier was awarded the Silver Star posthumously.

AUGUSTO M. XAVIER

First Lieutenant

VMA 311, MAG 12, 1ST MAW

United States Marine Corps

26 May 1941 - 10 March 1966

Silver Star (Posthumous)



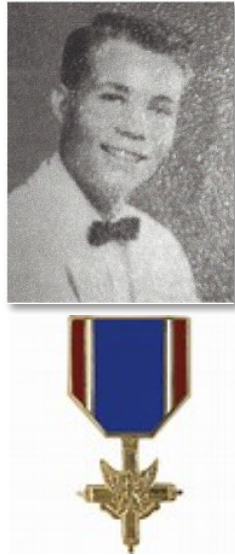
26 March 1997

1Lt Augusto Xavier, flying an A-4C SKYHAWK, was killed while flying close air support for the A Shau Special Forces Camp.

His body has never been recovered. He is remembered by the men he served with and the men he died supporting.

In those nearly hours under the intense renewed attack by the NVA forces who had breached the walls of the camp, another medic, SP-5 Philip Stahl, himself wounded, was KIA after attending other wounded and then was manning a white-hot machine gun as an Infantryman. Incoming mortar fire was exceptionally accurate and recoilless rifle fire was almost pin-point, destroying much of what ammunition, food, water and weapons that were remaining.

PHILLIP THOMAS STAHL
Specialist Five
DET A-102 (A SHAU), 5TH SF GROUP, USARV
Army of the United States
Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumous)



STAHL, PHILLIP THOMAS (MIA)

Specialist Fifth Class, U.S. Army

Detachment A-102, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces

Date of action: March 9 & 10, 1966

Citation:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918 (amended by act of July 25, 1963), takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Specialist Fifth Class Phillip Thomas Stahl (ASN: RA-12638984), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Detachment A-102, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces. During the period 9 and 10 March 1966, Special forces Detachment A-102 was attacked by two Viet Cong regiments at Camp A Shau, Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of 9 March 1966, Specialist Stahl, the team medic, took his position on the camp's south wall. The insurgents began the attack with mortar and small arms fire inflicting heavy casualties on the friendly forces. With complete disregard for his own personal safety, Specialist Stahl exposed himself to drag the wounded from the open to areas of safety in order that he might treat their wounds. He was constantly running from position to position giving medical aid to the wounded. While doing this, he received two painful wounds, one in his left forearm, partially paralyzing his hand, and the other in his right leg. Despite these wounds he again braved the intense fire to rescue several Americans lying wounded in the center of the camp. Through the remainder of the day he continued in giving medical aid to the wounded while paying little attention to his own painful wounds, and also helped in the evacuation of his comrades while refusing to be evacuated himself. On the morning of 10 March 1966, the Viet Cong launched another regimental sized infantry assault. Personally manning a machine gun, he killed numerous insurgents as they threw wave after wave against Specialist Stahl's position. His fine example of courage helped the defenders stall the Viet Cong main assault. Once more the insurgents mounted a full scale assault and Specialist Stahl returned to his position to continue firing the machine gun until the barrel glowed red hot. He resisted the onslaught by killing scores of attackers. As the insurgents moved within grenade range, Specialist Stahl was mortally wounded. Specialist Five Stahl's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty, at the cost of his life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

General Orders: HQ US Army, Pacific, General Orders No. 163 (July 18, 1966)

Home Town: Pompano Beach, Florida

SOURCE: <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=5282>

TOM'S SUMMARY OF HIS MISSION ON 10 MARCH:

Tom Murray, who was a Section Commander in the 3rd Platoon at Da Nang and was quite familiar with the A Shau SF Camp, volunteered for a mission out of Marble Mountain. When he arrived on the scene, he observed many downed aircraft which included Myers' A-1E, a CH-34, which had been shot earlier down during a rescue attempt, and several other helicopters.



PHOTO OF TOM MURRAY (FROM 2012 REUNION IN SEATTLE)

“Exactly what time I headed to the valley, I am not sure, but it was in the afternoon. Shortly before I took off, an SFC from the A Shau SF Team showed up wanting to ride with me. He was just returning from R&R and had just heard that his comrades were in deep trouble. I took him with me thinking he could be a great help when we got into the valley. As it turned out, he was of little help. He felt so guilty that he was not with his team fighting the NVA that he emotionally broke down every time that we made radio contact. He sat in the rear seat and wept. Arriving in the area, we found the ceiling to be only a few hundred feet and the clouds topped out at over 7,000 feet. I moved up and down the valley until I found a small hole in the overcast where I could see a glimpse of the valley floor. I dived into the hole and came out at about 200 feet AGL, but several miles up the valley from the camp. I flew nap of the earth down the valley floor toward the camp while receiving a SITREP from the camp.

It was disconcerting to note that several aircraft had already been shot down attempting to support the camp and were lying on the valley floor. There was a Sky Raider (MAJ Myers) and several VNAF helicopters in the wreckage. As I approached the camp, I started receiving heavy fire from above. The anti-aircraft positions were located on each side of the mountain and were firing at me from above. A new experience! I reported all I saw to the camp and informed them that it appeared that they were completely surrounded. Needless to say, they already knew that. They asked me to try to contact their higher headquarters and asked to be resupplied with ammo and medical supplies. They also wanted to be evacuated by air ASAP. I climbed above the clouds and was able to make radio contact with a higher headquarters. I was not sure who they were, but I always felt like I was talking to Saigon. (MACV) They indicated that a Caribou was enroute to resupply them and would contact me when they entered the area. They also said that they were putting together an air evacuation mission to rescue the camp. I passed the info to the SF guys on the ground and they thanked me and asked if I could hurry things up.

Shortly, the Caribou arrived, but the valley floor was still covered by clouds. I found another hole, up valley, and had the Caribou fly right on my tail as I led them down to and along the valley floor to

make the resupply. Although we were under constant heavy fire, they did a great job getting the supply bundles close to the camp. From the air, I was able to guide the SF detail to pick up the resupply bundles. I then went back on top to hurry up the evac aircraft. I was assured the aircraft would be there soon and passed this info to the camp which was in constant contact with the bad guys. Throughout this whole ordeal I was amazed at the cool that the guys on the ground were displaying. Never did they ever raise their voices, nor did they seem overly excited. As we waited for the rescue aircraft, the men on the ground continued to fight. They often shut down their radio contact for a few minutes as the NVA started to overrun different parts of the camp. Several times they told me the enemy was within 40-50 yards of their positions. As I circled above talking with higher headquarters, I finally got a message that the rescue aircraft were not coming today, as the weather was just too bad and that a new plan was to wait until darkness and then E&E to a pickup position to be provided. Pickup time was first light. I reluctantly passed this info to the camp. They took the bad news with no complaints or gripes and continued to impress me with their bravery. Finally, I received the coordinates of the pickup site. It was in code. I passed this info on to the camp. In a few minutes they came back to me and pointed out that the coordinates provided were not even on their maps. I then informed the higher headquarters that they had obviously made a mistake. They said, "Sorry", and in a few minutes gave me another set of coordinates, which I then passed on to the camp. In a couple of minutes they came back with the fact that those coordinates given were actually the CP of the NVA regiment that was attacking them. In a few minutes we had new coordinates that made sense.

By this time I had been on station for over 31/2 hours. My replacement (Jim Morris) was enroute but could not find me because of the heavy cloud cover. I did not want to leave the camp without any contact to the outside of the valley. I thinned out my fuel, made a few calculations and decided that I would not leave until I had only 45 minutes of fuel left. I continued constant contact with the camp until I was under the 45 minutes safety margin, which I had allowed myself. Although my replacement was not on station yet, I had radio contact with him. I checked out with the camp, wished them well and headed to Phu Bai. The flight was only about 15- 20 minutes – so I was OK – or so I thought. I had miscalculated. I had not realized that at almost 10,000 feet, above the clouds, that I had a head wind of almost 70 knots. I was guiding toward the Phu Bai ADF and finally realized that I was not making good time because of the wind. After about 30 minutes, I contacted radar in order to get a fix on me in case I ran out of gas. Above the clouds, I now had no idea how far I was from Phu Bai. I reached 45 minutes and the ADF was still in front of me. At just under one hour the ADF needle swung around. There was no time to shoot an approach and I did not have an approach plate anyway. I turned to my passenger, the SF SFC, and told him to hold on and open his mouth because we were going to dive straight down, through the clouds, as fast as our O-1 would go. We broke out at about 200-300 feet AGL and were just off the south end of the Phu Bai runway. Never was I so glad to see Phu Bai. We landed without incident and ran out of gas as we taxied back to the tie down area. It had been quite a day! “

Unknown to Tom - about 1500 HQ III MAF determined that an evacuation effort of Camp A Shau would be made by HMM-163, a Marine CH-34 unit, at Phu Bai.

RESCUE IN DEATH VALLEY WITH HMM-163:

By Richard Camp Originally published on HistoryNet.com. Published Online: March 16, 2012



The distinctive markings of HMM-163 was a welcome sight to wounded GIs in the A Shau Valley and elsewhere during the war. (Photo courtesy Thomas Pilsch)

"I estimate you're going to lose one out of every four choppers that you put in there...but nevertheless, I don't think we can abandon those people. We'd never live it down".

"Need reinforcements—without them, kiss us goodbye," came the call from the Special Forces Camp in the A Shau Valley on March 10, 1966. Plaintive pleas for ammo, water, medevac and evacuation filled the airwaves. The Camp, about 30 miles southwest of Hue and just two miles from the Laotian border, was in imminent danger of being overrun by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars. It was at this point that the decision was made to have Lieutenant Colonel House's HMM-163 go into the valley for one last attempt.

At 1700, headquarters gave Captain Blair the word to abandon the Camp. "Almost all friendly crew-served were destroyed. Very little ammunition remained. No food or water had been available for 36 hours, he reported. Sergeant Underwood and another Special Forces soldier were told to set up a helicopter landing zone about 300 meters north of the Camp so the wounded could be evacuated. As Underwood later recalled, "When the Vietnamese saw us and the Nungs head for the landing zone, they lost complete control and swarmed out of the Camp in a mob, led by the Vietnamese Camp Commander...I tried shooting the (Camp commander) but someone always kept getting in the way." Blair's plan was to use all able bodied Special Forces and irregulars to fight a rearguard action while the wounded men were placed on the aircraft. But the rout left him with only a few Americans and Nungs to hold the NVA.

Shortly after 1730 on March 10, Colonel House was in the air heading 16 UH-34's from his squadron into the valley, supported by six UH-1E's from VMO-2 and fixed wing aircraft. The squadron was organized into two flights of eight, with House leading one and Captain Wyman Blakeman, the operations officer, leading the other. The rapidly deteriorating weather caused Blakeman to detach flight of four and leave them east of the valley. He put his first four into trail position and snuck through a crotch in the mountains just below the clouds, only to find the weather in the valley to be "zero-zero," forcing his return to base.

In what would later be described as "a suicide mission," House continued to lead his flight toward the Camp, approaching the valley north of the Camp by following a mountain stream, crossing the tops of mountains in the soup, then diving down into the valley under overcast, which was about 200 feet above the terrain. They then turned toward the Camp, about 15 miles to the south. Through a blizzard of enemy fire, 1st Lieutenant Norm Urban followed House's lead, and as they neared the Camp, they could see the good guys streaming out through the north barricade gate, while the bad guys came in and over the south wall.

The helicopters swept in, flared and settled in the 15 foot high elephant grass. Some of the H-34's, including Houses, were immediately overloaded. "So many people wanted to get out," House said in an interview later, "they hung on the cables and almost pulled the helicopter into the zone. "There were 50 of 'em hanging on one of the birds, holding onto the sides, grabbing on the wheels. We tried to drag 'em off, beat them off, kick 'em off – but they just came back. It was mass panic. Finally, we had to shoot 'em off. We hated to do that, but no one would have gotten out if we didn't."

Urban's helicopter was likewise mobbed. With some 25 soldiers in the cabin and three or four standing on the struts, Urban yelled to the crew to get them off, shoot them if necessary. Finally, the chopper managed to lift off, with barbed wire trailing from the tail wheel.

Wounded in the legs, Underwood hobbled to Houses' aircraft, encountering 20 to 30 Vietnamese trying to get in his helicopter. As he later reported, "I was on the ground trying to calm them down, but they wouldn't listen and shoved me out of the way. Some of them were shot; the others backed away." The helicopter finally was able to lift off, but at about 10 feet the NVA shot the tail rotor off and it crashed. As the crew piled out of the stricken aircraft, Colonel House realized that rescue was now out of the picture and started planning to escape and evade, asking Underwood; "Have you got a compass?, I've got a map." House took charge of the friendlies left on the ground including seven Green Berets and 190 Vietnamese, and led them into the jungle.

Enemy fire, also shot down House' wingman, 1st Lieutenant William J. Gregory, who along with his co-pilot and crew chief made their way to another aircraft. In addition, to the two downed H-34's, three marine F-4B Phantom fighter bombers, two A-4 Skyhawks, two UH-1E Iroquois helicopters and three other UH-34s sustained damage. With the approaching darkness, the rescue mission was halted. Four Special Forces advisers and 65 Vietnamese and Nungs had been pulled out of A Shau.

As soon as weather permitted on the following morning, March 11, Major Blakeman led a search and rescue mission consisting of seven aircraft from HMM-163 and two from VMO-2. At about 1330, they spotted House and his men about three kilometers north-northwest of Camp A-Shau. Colonel House ignited a red smoke grenade to mark the small landing zone, even though red smoke marked an enemy position. House knew that Blakeman would understand that no enemy would have the guts to pop a red smoke on himself.

As the rescue ships prepared to land, the situation on the ground grew even more desperate and chaotic, with the CIDGs panicking and fighting among themselves. One of the South Vietnamese threw a grenade, killing 10 of his fellow soldiers. In another instance, according to Colonel Gray, "one of the U.S. Army advisers ordered a CIDG soldier to get out of the area which they were clearing for the rescue, and when he refused the adviser shot him on the spot, it was a desperate situation complicated by diluted command authority.

Finally, control was established, allowing the rescue to be completed. Thirty-four more survivors, including House, his crew and five Army advisers were evacuated. All the helicopters sustained damage- one H-34, piloted by Captain Wilbur C. McMinn Jr. struggled back with 126 bullet holes.

During the two day rescue operation, HMM-163 brought out 161 of the 186 survivors, including 10 of the 12 Special Forces advisers. All but three of its 24 helicopters had to be replaced as a result of the evacuation operation. It was estimated that 300 North Vietnamese had been killed by the defenders and another 500 killed by airstrikes.

However, the Special Forces Camp was no more, a major blow to the efforts to stop North Vietnamese infiltration. Lost with the base were 248 of its 434-man garrison, including five Green Berets. Reverberations from what transpired during the rescue rippled through the military command and into the public.

Correspondent John Lawrence interviewed Colonel House soon after the rescue. He described the mass panic during the evacuation and how the helicopter door gunners first fired their machine guns into the ground in an attempt to force the CIDG to back off. When that didn't work, House told the reporter he ordered his men to fire at the Vietnamese who wouldn't obey. Lawrence was taken aback, "Colonel House was giving us this big story," he wrote. "For Americans to shoot their South Vietnamese allies deliberately, for whatever reason, was extraordinary news. But I doubted he would say it on film. Officers' careers had been ruined by public admissions far less controversial than this. "He asked House if he would repeat what he had to say on camera. "Yeah," House replied after a long pause. "I've been passed over for promotion twice, so I'm on my way out anyway." The broadcast of the interview caused a sensation, leading to an investigation of House, by a board led by General Carl.

In a final act to the battle that, in many ways, is emblematic of the Vietnam War's contradictions, as a result of his actions in the A Shau, House was awarded a Navy Cross. But for making what his immediate superior, Colonel Thomas J. Connor, deemed "some rather emotionally charged statements to authority about the wisdom and futility of the mission," he also received a letter of reprimand -and was relieved of command.

However, Lt. Col. House was also made an honorary member of the Special Forces at a Camp ceremony and as a result, Barry Sadler's song, "The Ballad of the Green Berets", was often sung in his honor at the squadron Officers Club during Happy Hours.

SOURCE: <http://www.historynet.com/rescue-in-death-valley-with-hhm-163-the-evil-eyes.htm>

NAVY CROSS CITATION, LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES ALLEN HOUSE



The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Colonel Charles Allen House (MCSN: 0-26690), United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-THREE (HMM-163), Marine Aircraft Group SIXTEEN, First Marine Aircraft Wing, in action in the Republic of Vietnam on 9 and 10 March 1966. Colonel House's helicopter was disabled by intense enemy fire in the landing zone at A Shau, where the garrison had been under siege for several days. After ensuring that all personnel had abandoned the aircraft, Colonel House immediately rallied his crew members and joined a group of seventy exhausted survivors of the garrison. With inspiring leadership and dogged determination, he skillfully led the group into the jungle to escape capture. Chopping a trail through the dense underbrush, he moved into the hills which surrounded the outpost, cleverly maneuvering between hostile positions and successfully evading enemy search patrols. Although the group was subjected to harassing fire throughout the march, Colonel House managed to overcome the language barrier and instill in the Vietnamese a sense of confidence and encouragement which sustained them through the ordeal. With constant concern for the welfare of the survivors, many of whom were wounded, he halted the march several times to allow them to rest, stalwartly standing watch while others slept. When helicopters were sighted and signaled on the following afternoon, Colonel House's brilliant leadership motivated all who were able to help clear a position from which the rescue was subsequently effected. His valiant effort and determination throughout contributed in large measure to saving the members of his crew and many Special Forces and Vietnamese defenders from capture or death at the hands of the Viet Cong. By his intrepid fighting spirit, extraordinary ability as a leader, and unswerving dedication to duty, Colonel House upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

General Orders: Authority: Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals

Action Date: March 9 & 10, 1966

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Lieutenant Colonel

Company: Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163)

Regiment: Marine Aircraft Group 16 (MAG-16)

Division: 1st Marine Aircraft Wing

SOURCE: <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=4374>

MIKE'S SUMMARY OF HIS SECOND MISSION ON 11 MARCH:



IRA W. (MIKE) MISENHEIMER III

On the morning of 11 March we were awakened and told that the camp had completely fallen into NVA hands and that survivors who had escaped were evading and hoping for pickup. Some of the 220th had been there earlier, but the weather was very bad and they had no luck. Since I had been there on the 9th and was familiar with the situation, I was asked to go in to help and replace another Catkiller who was on station. I left alone to look for them as the ceilings were quite low and only one ship at a time could maneuver safely. I followed the same route as CPT Rogers and I had flown on the 9th, found the notch, and slipped into the valley and started looking. Ceilings were low, about 300-400 feet. I made contact on FM with a group of survivors and told them to call me when they heard my engine or saw my plane.

Then came the frustration, I looked for an hour, as it was hard to keep up with my location, so that I could call in the helicopters to the right place. The fog was closing in and the north end of the valley was now socked in; I was not going out the same way I came in. The survivors could hear me but could not see me, and I could not see them at all. So I tried a different way and “pop,” there were, two circles chopped out of the trees with survivors in them. The circles were about 50 yards apart. Then the hard part began. The Marine helicopters came in and I guided them down the valley by radio—to the right place—as the valley really began to sock in. I received a call from the 220th Ops to ask if I needed relief, and I replied that it was not possible to get in.

My circles were getting smaller and I was staying about three miles away to keep from giving away the location of the E&E survivors. When the first CH-34 arrived and pulled out some guys, there was bad panic among the Vietnamese. More CH-34s showed up and they were telling others how to get there. It was now also time for me to go.

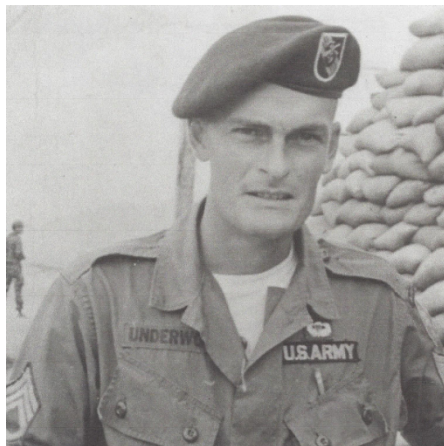
I was too far south to climb out, as I had before, so I tried to go back far enough so that I could make a steep IFR climb to get above the surrounding hills. I started climbing up into the soup with a high rate of climb. When I felt I was ready to level off, suddenly I noted the altimeter unwinding. Just like flight school IFR training, I was in a “graveyard spiral.” I let go of the controls, got out of the stall, then slowly raised the nose, got the airspeed down and started climbing again until I was VFR on top. This time the GCA was up and I shot an approach into Phu Bai, and then flew to Hue-Citadel. My DA Form 759 shows 4.0 flown that day with three landings.

CPT Rogers later told me about his locating the downed AC-47 and then guiding the helicopters to rescue the crew under heavy fire. Parties of NVA looking for the AC-47 and its crew had shot at us. He said that once the helicopters came in, the NVA went crazy. As I remember, he went out IFR as well, let down over the sea and came back under the overcast and refueled at Phu Bai.

[NOTE 1: At a Catkiller mini-reunion in Savannah in October 2013, I saw and talked with Mike Misenheimer for the first time since 1967 and he set me straight – especially about having to by-pass Phu Bai and going to Da Nang. During this time together he also told an interesting story about his being the youngest Warrant Officer pilot in all of Vietnam. The CO of the 220th had been required to render a daily report to HQ MACV regarding his “status” – until finally he reached a much more mature age – and another younger WO pilot arrived somewhere (anywhere) in Vietnam. He remembered that MAJ Schmale called him when the report was no longer required.

NOTE 2: I wish we had more information about what Dave Rogers was able to lend to the action by a single O-1 to the best of his capability over the crash site as noted above and in the 220th History files along with the supposed recommendation for DSC.]

VIC UNDERWOOD'S ACCOUNT OF ACTION DURING A-503'S BATTLE FOR CAMP A SHAU, MARCH 7 THRU 11, 1966:



SFC VIC UNDERWOOD

Mike Force (A-503) left Nha Trang on the morning of 7 March by C-130, arriving in Da Nang at noon. Carter and I were briefed by the C Team Intel and were told there was possible NVA battalion in the area of Camp A Shau. We left from Da Nang in six C-123's arriving at Camp A Shau at 1600 hours on 7 March. We moved in and started building defensive positions and mortar pits for the Nungs.

On the morning of 8 March, Carter sent a short patrol out to the west of the camp. The patrols were platoon-size with two Americans with each platoon. They returned without making contact. While they were out, Adkins gave Carter and me a complete Intel briefing on the Camp and the surrounding area. According to Intel reports the 325B North Vietnamese Division headquarters was located 15 kilometers to the north. That day the Nungs finished their positions. After dinner a poker game was started in the American Team house so Hall, Allen and I went to bed early in the dispensary.

At about 0350 the morning of the 9th, we heard the V.C. mortars fire from south of Camp. Bradford and Allen were first out of the dispensary. Taylor, Hoover, Hall and I started out after them but had to take cover from a heavy barrage of rocket and 82mm mortar fire. Most of the rounds were landing on and around the American Team house and commo bunker. When this barrage slackened off, I started to run towards the Nung positions.

When I got just past the commo bunker I found Gibson lying in the middle of the road which runs the length of the Camp. He had a bad wound in the back of his head; I thought sure he was dead but when I moved him, he groaned. I picked him up and started dragging him to a Nung trench when another round came in wounding Gibson again and knocking me down. After I got my wind back I picked Gibson up and got him into the trench.

When I arrived Bradford and Allen were in the trench, both wounded. Allen was hit in the head and chest, Bradford in the leg, butt and hand. After making Allen as comfortable as possible, I helped Bradford to the relative safety of the commo bunker where I left him with Hoover. I went to look for our medic, Billy Hall, to go to the trench to help Allen and Gibson, and then went to the commo bunker to check on Bradford. While I was there another heavy barrage came in. I went back to the trench and found Allen dead; Hall had one leg gone and the other mangled; and Halls interpreter was dead. I put a tourniquet on Halls legs and went to look for Adkins and found him in the 81mm mortar pit. We went back to the trench together to take care of Hall and Gibson. While Adkins worked on Hall I went to the dispensary to find a stretcher and a Nung to help me. We moved Gibson and Hall to the dispensary.

After turning them over to Carnahan and Stahl, Adkins and I went to check the Camp defenses. I told the Nung mortar crews to firing illumination until daylight. We then found the Nung C.O. and Taylor. After telling them what had happened to Allen and Bradford, I informed Taylor he was in charge of the Nung Company.

After leaving them, Adkins and I separated; he went to check the rest of the Camp and I went to look for Carter; I found him by the 81mm mortar pit. He told me he had been sleeping in the supply room adjacent to the U.S. Team house when the attack started and one of the first rounds had collapsed the supply room on top of him. He had just now dug himself out. I informed him of what had happened and he went to check on Hall while I went to find Taylor and tell him to have the Nungs improve their positions.

Hall died about 0900. Hoover and McCann were in the commo bunker trying to get medevac but the weather was bad; a low ceiling. Two finally tried to make it in; one was shot and crash landed inside the Camp, the other left. After several radio messages we got an L-19 on the airstrip to pick up Gibson who was the most critically wounded. We moved his and Allen's bodies down next to the airstrip. Carter and Adkins stuffed Gibson in the back behind the pilot. Later a CH-47 came in and picked up all the wounded.

When Carter and Adkins were loading Gibson, an unusually heavy volume of fire started coming from the southeast corner of the Camp. Taylor, Stahl and I ran to that area and found the Vietnamese Company in that position was firing on the airplane. While we were trying to stop the firing, a couple of Vietnamese were killed. When this happened, the firing stopped. After that, Taylor and I placed the Nung recon platoon in position to watch the Vietnamese in that corner of the Camp.

From then until later in the evening, things were fairly quiet. That evening an AC-47 came in to strafe around the Camp and was shot down about four kilometers north of Camp. That night we all stayed in our fighting positions.

Sometime after 0300 on the 10th the V.C. opened up with everything they had. They attacked the south wall in wave after wave. When one wave was shot down another would come. They finally breached the southeast portion of the wall. Because the Vietnamese Company responsible for that section was mostly V.C. and turned and tried to attack back into the Camp; the Nung recon platoon killed most all of them.

During the early morning Stahl, and McCann were killed and Taylor was seriously wounded. At about 0700 the V.C. occupied the south wall. At one time Carnahan, Carter and I using an M-79 and M-16's killed a tremendous number of V.C. as they didn't seem to know what to do when they got inside the Camp. They would stand up to look around, making good targets.

Later that day we were talking about a counter attack, which the Nungs C.O. did, retaking the eastern portion of the Camp. In order not to leave the Nungs flank open, we tried to get the Vietnamese to counter attack and retake part of the south wall. They didn't think much of the idea; in fact, it scared the hell out of them. Carnahan and I decided we would try and lead them. We armed ourselves with hand grenades and our M-16's. We started across the Camp towards the south wall throwing hand grenades at any V.C. we could see. We were about halfway across the Camp, even with the commo bunker when we took cover behind a Conex container. Carnahan covering one side and I the other, a V.C. threw a hand grenade, wounding us both. I jumped around Carnahan and saw the V.C. who threw the grenade running back towards the south wall. I hit him in the back with our last grenade and blew him all to pieces. We then pulled back to the north wall and Carnahan took care of our wounds which were all in our legs; he had a broken leg.

I went to look for Carter who had attempted another counter attack and was pinned down by one or more snipers on the south wall. I found a Vietnamese 60mm mortar with the crew all dead; so I started lobbing rounds into the south wall where the sniper fire was coming from. The firing stopped and Carter was able to withdraw to the north wall. The next hours were rather slow.

In the afternoon of the 10th the overcast lifted a little to let the jets and A-1E's come in. They started dropping bombs and napalm and firing rockets south and east of Camp. Blair brought the A-1E's in to bomb the south wall which was approximately 75 -100 yards from the north wall where we were and it shook the hell out of us. During one of the strikes a piece of shrapnel about 10 inches long landed between Carnahan and me. He hollered "Grenade!" I dove for cover; he grabbed it to throw it back outside the wall and burned the hell out of himself.

One of the A-1E's crash landed on the airstrip. Carnahan and Carter saw the pilot climb out and run to the berm east of the runway. I led four Nungs to try and get him inside the Camp, but when we got through the main gate, we were pinned down. All four Nungs were killed and I was in a shallow hole and couldn't move. Then another A-1E came in with his wheels down. I thought "Oh Shit! Not another one." He landed and taxied to the end of the airstrip, turned around, pulled up by the downed pilot who jumped into the cockpit head first and they took off with a lot of V.C. shooting at them. While the V.C. was concentrating on the airplane I got up and ran back to Camp. This act not only earned Major Bernie Fisher the first Air Force Medal of Honor, but also saved my ass.

At 1700 hours headquarters gave us the word to abandon Camp. We were to be picked up by Marine helicopters at approximately 1000 meters north of the Camp. Carter and Blair told me and Carnahan to go out first to organize and control a landing zone so we could get the wounded out on the helicopters first. When the Vietnamese saw us

and the Nungs head for the landing zone they lost complete control and swarmed out of the Camp in a mob, led by the Vietnamese Camp Commander. They ran past us, separating Carnahan from me and the Nungs. I was wounded in the legs and couldn't move very fast. I tried shooting the Vietnamese Camp Commander, but someone always kept getting in the way. When the helicopters (Marine CH34's) tried to land the Vietnamese swarmed on the first ones down. The others started circling back for a clear place to land. Some landed away from the Vietnamese but were then mobbed.

The first helicopter I got to was Lt. Colonel House's, the Squadron Commander. There were from 20 to 30 Vietnamese trying to get into his helicopter. His crew chief and gunner were trying to beat them off so they could lift off. I was on the ground trying to calm them down, but they wouldn't listen and shoved me out of the way. Some of them were shot; the others backed away. The helicopter lifted off about 10 feet and the V.C. shot the tail rotor off, so it crashed. Colonel House and his crew got off, Colonel House walked up to me and said, "I've got a map, have you got a compass?" He and his crew were separated from me by the confusion.

I had moved about 100 meters to the northwest looking for other Americans when Pointon hollered "Sgt. Underwood, get me out of here!" He was wounded through the chest and both upper arms. There were still gunships flying around. I had a panel sewn in my hat. I flashed the panel at a gun ship; he dropped his ammunition pods and landed. I helped Pointon on board and he pulled his pistol and pointed it at me and he shot a Vietnamese off my back. The helicopter took off and left me standing there.

All of the remaining Americans (some got out on the Marine extraction), Nungs and Vietnamese got together about a mile north of Camp to plan our E&E route. Adkins and Mari had carried Taylor out of Camp. We went west toward Laos into the mountains and stopped for about two hours to rest. When we started moving again Carter and Adkins and some Nungs, who had stayed at the rear of the column with Taylor, got separated from the main group. Taylor died while we were stopped. Carter and Adkins cached his body. Carter and Adkins and about four Nungs E&E'd together until they were picked up. Hoover and three or four Nungs got separated the first night but were able to rejoin the main body the next day about noon. We kept moving north and about 1700 we were spotted by a Marine helicopter. He was able to hoist Colonel House and his crew aboard and an old Vietnamese lady and Blair ordered me to go aboard too, We were flown to Phu Bai where Sgt. Perkins was waiting with 2nd Company. We flew back to Nha Trang that night. Hoover, Blair and Mari and their group were picked up the next morning. Carter and Adkins were picked up in the afternoon.

This is the action I was involved in and is by no means all of the action that took place in the battle for Camp A Shau.

SOURCE: <http://home.earthlink.net/~aircommando1/Bernie.htm>

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The Ashau Mission, by Norm Urban, Captain, USMC, HMM-163

THE A SHAU MISSION AND AFTERMATH, NORM URBAN, CAPTAIN USMC (RETIRED):

They say the memory is the second thing to go with age. I remember the mission well (and the aftermath). But at my age, I don't know how accurate my memory is.

We had been listening to radio calls from the A Shau Special Forces Camp, asking for help, for a few days prior to the March 11, 1966 "A Shau" mission. The A Shau Special Forces camp, located on the Laotian border and manned by a SF detachment, an ARVN unit, and a detachment of "Nungs," had been surrounded by the NVA and VC Forces. The North Vietnamese 325B Division HQ was reportedly set up in the valley. The enemy had set an aircraft trap by humping 37mm anti-aircraft weapons to the top of the surrounding hills and mountains. So far, the bad guys downed at least one UH-1E, an Air Force AC-47 and a Marine A-4. It seemed to us at Phu Bai, that the Army couldn't or wouldn't do anything further to bring the troops in, or get these guys out. Lieutenant Colonel C.A. "Chuck" House finally gathered the squadron together in our mess tent, and explained the situation. House then stated he was going to A Shau to take a look, and if any of us chose to follow him, that was OK by him. As far as I know, we Marines (HMM-163), call sign, "Superchief" had no frag orders to do anything to support the Camp. Fifteen minutes later, there were no operable H-34's left on the ramp at Phu Bai.

A Shau was socked in, with an overcast sitting on top of the mountains surrounding the valley. Lt. Col House had plotted all known AA gun sites on his chart, (the day before, on March 10, A-1 Skyraider pilot, Air force Major Bernie Fisher, landed on the shot up runway at A Shau to rescue his wingman that had bellied in his Spad, riddled with bullet holes created by these same AA guns. He took off in a hail of enemy fire. Fisher won the CMH for doing so.) We approached the valley north of the Camp by scud running up a mountain stream, crossing the tops with our rotors in the soup, then scud running down into the valley and under the overcast, which was about 200 feet above the terrain. We then turned left towards the camp about 15 miles south. Fortunately, the AA guns were in the clouds above us.

Suddenly circling around us was a flight of Air Force A-1 Skyraiders loaded with napalm, (forever changing this Marine pilot's opinion of Air Force pilot's skill and courage.) These guys had to punch through the solid overcast using just a TACAN fix, (radial & distance), hoping they'd break out below...awesome!

As we approached the Camp, the good guys were coming out the north barricade gate, while the bad guys came in, through and over the southwest wall. That's where the Skyraiders dropped their ordinance. We followed Lt. Col. House's lead and landed just outside the Camp in 15 foot high elephant grass. Some H-34's, mine included, were immediately overloaded with panicked Nungs and ARVN, while other ships had no one loading because they couldn't be seen down in the elephant grass. I remember seeing a Special Forces soldier putting Orientals aboard but not jumping on himself.

About then the lead H-34, (Lt. Col. House's), kind of exploded and smoke poured out. My bird, BU143977, had way too much weight on board to lift off, and it looked like mortars were "walking" into the landing zone. We had perhaps 20 soldiers in the cabin and three or four were hanging on the struts. I started yelling to the crew below to get them off, shoot if necessary. We weren't going anywhere the way we were. Finally we managed to lift off, trailing

barbed wire from the tail wheel, and rose into the soup above. Most other H-34's made it out individually, some full of bullet and shrapnel holes. VFR on top, as a flight of one, we headed back to Phu Bai. Mission time 2.4 hours, .9 IFR.

Lt. Col. House and his crew joined the A Shau refugees led by a Special Forces Captain. House took command and led the E&E column, choosing a route the Captain didn't agree with. Later that night, the Captains route was heavily mortared, while the path House took brought them out safely. The next day, or maybe the following, House and his crew were picked up by one of our birds.



MAJOR CHARLES "WOODY" WOODHURST (LEFT) AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL J.D. RICHARDS

However, the very next day, in his aftermath report, Norm Urban related that the squadron (HMM-163) was given a stand down, to repair and recuperate. The only birds flying were two medevac standby ships. Norm was the section leader of the medevac flight in BU 149318, and was to fly some photographers over the Valley so that they could take pictures. The weather had cleared, and flying at approximately 10,000 feet, the photographers took their photos. At the same time Captain Charles "Woody" Woodhurst, the pilot and Lieutenant J.D. Richards, the Marine AO, of the 220th Aviation Company, were flying reconnaissance in the A Shau Valley and had flown to the Camp to look for opportunities. This would be the point where the 220th Aviation Company and the Marine HMM-163 rescue of a downed Air Force Skyraider pilot would intersect. The following combined narrative tells of that heroic rescue.

Woody and I decided to take a trip to the Special Forces Camp to see what remained. Our mission was to perform reconnaissance in the area and identify trucks, tanks, elephants or anything that would indicate NVA supply or simply something to shoot at. West of Ashau we had spotted two, three man patrols of NVA Soldiers. Since Woody and I were always up for a fight, we got the first rounds off and killed everyone in both groups. We then flew parallel to the runway, the camp was totally wrecked, bombed out and abandoned, except for a few hundred NVA Soldiers that Woody and I found, and they were tightly packed under the camp runway. We observed them flying at between 100 to 150 feet altitude and about 100 yards south of the runway. There were hundreds of faces looking at us as we flew the entire length of the runway. "Hundreds!"

My first thought was they are all in range and I could get a lot of them, however, I then thought we were also in range and strongly outnumbered. I don't know why they didn't open up on us since the odds were definitely not in our favor. We were basically sitting ducks, so we gained a little altitude and I radioed the DASC and was informed that there were not any planes available. I further explained that I had several hundred NVA cornered in the open and received the same response that no planes were available to be scrambled to our target.



A Loui Special Forces Camp - Overrun In December 1965

SOURCE: <https://www.facebook.com/1CorpsMikeForceHistory/photos/pcb.305819802957698/305819156291096/?type=1&theater>

We then flew to A Loui, the next Special Forces Camp in the Ashau Valley, where we spotted several AAA emplacements, camouflaged mortar pits and dozens of NVA Soldiers who were lounging about in the open. Once again, we were low, slow, sitting duck targets and still they held their fire and so did we. Since we were outgunned, out manned and an easy target we flew on to Tabat, the last Special Forces camp abandoned in the valley. Again, we spotted AAA pits, mortar pits and crews of NVA Soldiers longing around, who also held their fire. At this point, I rationalized that they had heard about our reputation as a scout for B-52 strikes and were terrified of what we could bring on them if I dropped red smoke on their position. As we left the area, Woody and I developed a plan. The last group of NVA was in a small clearing next to heavily forested woods. We would fly close to them let them have it and then disappear over the line of trees. It worked beautifully; at least four to six NVA soldiers fell as we made our pass. Did I mention that "I love the AR-15; it stays steady on target on full auto."

On our way back to Phu Bai we heard a "Mayday, Mayday", and saw an Air Force Skyraider circling around a descending orange and white parachute. They were a flight of two and had been working on an AAA emplacement on a ridge on the South edge of the A Shau Valley. Now, the circling Skyraider was strafing the NVA to keep the NVA off of his wingman. I informed Woody that I would handle this and answered the Mayday. The Skyraider was attempting to raise SAR but "no joy". I explained to him that I had a helicopter squadron at Phu Bai and that I would attempt to get them. Woody at this time had to gain altitude to obtain line of sight to Phu Bai so that we could contact HMM-163.

They were monitoring their frequency and I informed the operator that I had a Mayday, a downed American pilot and provided him with the coordinates. I continued to explain that I had the pilot in sight and his wingman was keeping the NVA at bay with strafing runs. I emphasized that we needed them here ASAP, or else he'll be killed or captured. "Advise." In a stunning reply the operator stated, "We won't be able to take the mission." Once again, I reinforced the issue and the situation the downed pilot was in and proceeded to say things unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. At that point had I been an enlisted man I would not have been eligible for a good conduct medal nor would I have received a sportsmanship award for my outburst. However, there was silence, followed by a calm, collected and mature voice that I have remembered for the past 46 years. My call sign was Rosemont Golf, "Rosemont Golf, be advised that we are turning up now and will be there in fifteen minutes. "My God, the relief Woody and I felt!"

Prior to the Skyraider being shot down, HMM-163 had actually been flying at approximately 10,000ft., and was photographing the Skyraiders bomb the AAA positions. However, as they returned to Phu Bai, Major Wyman Blakeman, the Operations Officer for HMM-163 gave the returning pilot the turn up sign and informed the pilot that one of the Skyraider pilots had been downed by AAA fire. After refueling, the H-34's returned to A Shau and I notified the Air Force wingman that help was fifteen away. At the same time the wingman was directing the downed pilot to move up hill while he held off the NVA. Woody and I joined the attack as we circled the pilot, picking off NVA as they tried to get to the top of the ridge to cut off the downed pilots escape route.

My concern with the Skyraider is that it is a flying dump truck, however the pilot assured us he had three to four hours of fuel left, plenty of ammunition, and a couple of bombs. We decided bombs were not advisable in this situation. It was at this point I heard a very welcome sound, "Rosemont Golf, where are you?" and "We are in the area." I saw in the distance three H-34's and immediately answered, "Make a left 45, then straight, I have you in sight." The H-34's saw our aircraft and entered the area. I then turned the rescue mission over to the Skyraider and HMM-163. What I observed as an eternity, was described by the actual helicopter pilot in the following narrative; "We flew back out at altitude, and contacted the O-1 Birdog pilot, who directed us to the downed pilot, I instructed my wingman to stay as high as he could,

and try to keep us in sight. My co-pilot 1st Lt. Joe Weiss and I flew east, descended and approached the pickup point in defilade, keeping the hills between the AAA guns and us. I did a hover check and found we could not hover at that weight and altitude. I instructed the downed Air Force pilot on his survival radio, to try and move down hill, while we flew off and burned off some fuel. About 45 minutes of flying in full rich mixture, at high power setting plus throwing out the life raft, survival gear and toolbox, and anything else not fastened down finally did the job. We returned for the pickup, spotted his smoke flair, and came to a hover for an out-of-ground-effect, hoist pick-up. With Weiss on the throttle/collective, looking inside me, and with me on the cyclic and rudders, looking outside, with our wheels in the treetops, we made the pickup in the red paint on the 100ft. hoist cable. We got the pilot, Major Buzz Blaylock, USAF and scooted out of there with Blaylock hugging my feet from the cabin below. My wingman joined up, followed by the Skyraider wingman. I led the flight into a right echelon, left break over our camp at Phu Bai at 300 feet. The squadron, on stand down, alerted by Blakeman via the loudspeaker, welcomed us home.”

After watching the horse collar being lowered into the trees and then hearing, “he’s in it!” has to rank as one of the most impressive things I’ve seen in my lifetime. Since Woody and I were anxious to congratulate the rescued pilot, the rescuers, as well as the Skyraider pilot, we went directly to the Officers Club tent where the celebration was in full swing. As Woody and I approached the Air Force pilots, we explained who we were, and we were greeted with the most vitriolic, rude and crude comments you would imagine. Given that it was a tough day for Woody and me, after all we had kicked up a lot of action for the day, we decided to leave and let the celebration prevail. This rescue still represents a high point in my career and I would still like to meet them now to shake their hands. I continue to hope that they successfully survived the remainder of the war.”

SOURCE: (<http://www.popasmoke.com/pop-a-smoke-stories/339-a-shau-valley>)

SOURCE: (J.D. Richards Marine AO Diary – Catkiller History Index 1 – 1965-66)

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SFC BENNIE ADKINS RECEIVES DSC



SFC BENNIE G. ADKINS
U.S.A
Distinguished Service Cross
War: Vietnam War

REASON:

Sergeant First Class (E7) Bennie G. Adkins served with the Special Forces for more than 13 years with the 7th, 3rd, 6th, and 5th Special Forces Groups (Airborne). According to the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) biography on Mr. Adkins:

“While in Special Forces, he deployed to the Republic of Vietnam with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) for three non-consecutive tours. While serving with ODA-102 at A Shau in 1966, his camp was attacked by a large Viet Cong force. SFC Adkins rushed through intense hostile fire and manned a mortar position. Although he was wounded, he ran through exploding mortar rounds and dragged several of his comrades to safety. When the mortar barrage subsided, SFC Adkins carried his wounded comrades to the camp dispensary, while still receiving sporadic sniper fire. During the evacuation of a seriously wounded American, he maneuvered outside the camp walls to draw fire and successfully covered the rescue. During the early morning hours of 10 March 1966, a Viet Cong regiment launched its main attack. Within two hours, Adkins was the only man firing a mortar weapon and although wounded with most of his team killed or wounded, he fought off the waves of attacking Viet Cong. Adkins and the small group of remaining soldiers were ordered to evacuate the camp. Although they were running low on ammunition, they fought their way out of the camp and evaded the Viet Cong for two days until they were rescued. Adkins was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic actions.”

SOURCE: http://www.soc.mil/swcs/RegimentalHonors/_pdf/sf_adkins.pdf

220TH UNIT HISTORY

1 JANUARY 1966 TO 31 DECEMBER 1966:

EXTRACT (EARLY MARCH):

March began with a change of command, the first for the unit. On 1 March, Captain Schmale, the Executive Officer, took command of the company from Major Curry, who was leaving to become S-2 of the newly activated 1st Army Aviation Brigade Headquarters in Saigon. A luncheon followed in the unit mess for local area commanders who had been invited guests.

On 4 March, two aviators from the 2nd Flight Platoon, Captain Charles L. Woodhurst, 05306123, Infantry, and 1st Lieutenant James A. Harris, 05223565, Infantry, flew, at the request of the U.S. Special Forces, a reconnaissance of the A Shau Valley. The mission debrief indicated a tremendous buildup of Viet Cong forces in the area immediately adjacent to the A Shau Special Forces Camp. Daily recon flights were made in the area on 5 and 6 March. Early on the morning of 8 March the Viet Cong launched the first of a series of attacks that finally resulted in the abandonment of the Camp by what was left of the beleaguered garrison and its reinforcements.

At the conclusion of the A Shau action the following message was received from Lieutenant General Jean Engler, Deputy Commanding General USARV:

1. The following is an extract from a message received from General Westmoreland:

“The air support provided at the recent Battle of A Shau Special Forces Camp was equal to any in aviation history. The repeated heroic deeds of the transport, fighter and helicopter crews and FAC's, accomplished under extremely adverse conditions, reflects the utmost credit on the crews themselves and their respective Services. Please extend to these courageous airmen my hearty congratulations.”

2. Congratulations to the 220th Aviation Company whose actions typified exemplary conduct in combat and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Army”.

The first wounded American was evacuated in an O-1 piloted by Warrant Officer Ira W. Meisenheimer III, W3152715, on 9 March, while the camp and airstrip were under attack. He was subsequently awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) for his heroic action.

Captain David K. Rogers, OF106218, 2nd Flight Platoon Commander, was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross for his valiant efforts in locating, directing the rescue, and protecting the crew of a downed USAF AC-47, also on 9 March.

A total of eight Distinguished Flying Crosses, Two Air Medals with “V” Device and one Distinguished Service Cross were recommended for individual acts of heroism during the A Shau action.

The 220th flew a total of 91 sorties during the A Shau battle and has been recommended for the Valorous Unit Citation for its participation.

The Camp Commander of the A Shau Camp, in a letter to the 220th company commander following the battle, commented as follows:

“The L-19 pilots from the 220th Aviation Company, 14th Aviation Battalion, heroically and courageously rendered the besieged garrison at Camp A Shau lifesaving services by relaying radio messages, directing air strikes, scouting and reporting enemy activities, and later by searching for evading survivors. These valiant aviators constantly and fearlessly exposed themselves and their aircraft to grave and imminent dangers from adverse weather and deadly enemy anti-aircraft fire in accomplishing their missions.

Their courage, valor and devotion to duty, far beyond what was expected of them and at great risk to themselves and their aircraft, were major contributing factors in the prolonged defense by the Camps garrison and subsequent air rescue of evading survivors of the battle.” [Signed:] John D. Blair, Captain, Infantry

SOURCE: CPT Blair's letter to the Company Commander after the battle from the Unit History Index - 1966.

At the same time the battle for A Shau was raging the company was also undergoing its first annual General Inspection by the USARV Inspector General. All facets of the unit's operation came through with flying colors.

CHANGE OF COMMAND & RECOGNITION:

The period 1 March 1966 to 12 March was a turning point in the lives of the 220th Aviation Company leadership. History often places challenges on men of character, who rise above the fray and distinguish themselves for who they are. The events leading up to and including the siege at A Shau would do just that, and their legacy will forever be kept alive through the recognition bestowed upon them at this pivotal time.

220TH AVIATION COMPANY BATTLE OF ASHAU AWARDS & RECOMMENDATIONS:



Distinguished Service
Cross



Silver Star



Distinguished Flying
Cross



Legion of Merit

CHRONOLOGY:

1 March 1966:

- Major Jerry R. Curry, Recommended for the Legion of Merit - For Meritorious Service
- Captain William O. Schmale, Takes Command of the 220th Aviation Co. from Major Curry
- Captain William H. Everett, Assumes Duty as Unit S-4
- Captain Charles H. Evans, Takes Command of 1st Platoon from Captain Everett
- Captain J. Orman Weight, Moves Up As Executive Officer, 220th Aviation Company

9 March 1966: (Day 1)

- Warrant Officer Ira W. Meisenheimer, Recommended for DFC for Evacuating Sgt. Gibson from Besieged A Shau Special Forces Camp
- Captain David K. Rogers, Recommended for DSC for Extreme Heroism at A Shau (**No Record Found**)
- First Annual General Inspection

10 March 1966: (Day 2 – Camp falls – E & E begins)

- Captain Thomas H. Murray II, Recommended for Distinguished Flying Cross for Gallantry at A Shau

11 March 1966: (Day 3 – E & E and Search and Rescue Operations)

All Recommended for Distinguished Flying Cross for Gallantry at A Shau

- Captain David K. Rogers
- Captain Charles L. Woodhurst (Upgraded to Silver Star Awarded for Gallantry)
- Lieutenant Donald L. Johnson
- Lieutenant James M. Morris
- Warrant Officer Ira W. Meisenheimer

12 March 1966: (Day 4 – Search and Rescue Operations)

- Captain Robert H. Teer Jr., Recommended for Distinguished Flying Cross for Gallantry At A Shau

OTHER ARMY (220TH) AWARDS (RECOMMENDED OR AWARDED – AS KNOWN)

[MARCH 9-12, 1966]
FROM THE 220TH UNIT HISTORY FILES IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

220th was Recommended for the Valorous Unit Award (No record found)

Two Air Medals w/ V were also recommended according to 220th History Report.
No names were identified.

NOTE: The above noted 220th aviators were members of the 2nd and 3rd Platoons who were quite familiar with the A Shau Valley with their missions out of Hue and Da Nang. The 2nd Platoon was responsible for the Thua Thien Province while the 3rd Platoon mission included the responsibility for support of all Special Forces Camps throughout I Corps – both of which included the SF Camp A Shau.

In all of the references that I have found, the only mention of FACs being present at all was unspecified. I found one very limited communication with a “Birdog 52” and a possible AF FAC above the overcast over Camp A Shau who may have been involved in some “radar” controlled bombing. I would have to assume that the 220th aviators who were in the area as the only FACs under the overcast and were quite engaged in providing area surveillance and reporting enemy activity and location, running airstrikes, and doing whatever they could to assist the forces at Camp A Shau.

From John Bradford’s description of an unknown aviator, in the form of a young Mike Meisenheimer, with large cajones, evacuating their seriously wounded Team Sergeant, to the Camp Commander, Captain John Blair’s description of the 220th’s supply of life saving services through adverse weather and deadly enemy fire, a clear picture is framed of our service and contribution to the Camp’s defense and evacuation. The narratives that came out of the 91 successful sorties flown by the 220th Aviation Company exemplify the courage and dedication of the entire unit in support of its mission. From clerk typist to commanders, our motto of “We Observe”, along with so much more, demonstrated and carried with it our unit commitment to excellence in service to each other, our unit and our country.

PHOTO OF A SHAU AFTER THE BATTLE



PRESIDENT OBAMA TO AWARD THE MEDAL OF HONOR:

Washington, DC – On September 15, 2014, President Barack Obama will award the Medal of Honor to Army Command Sergeant Major Bennie G. Adkins, for conspicuous gallantry.

Command Sergeant Major Adkins will receive the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as an intelligence Sergeant assigned to A-102, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces. Then Sergeant First Class Adkins distinguished himself during combat operations at Camp A Shau, Republic of Vietnam, on 9 March through 12 March 1966.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND:

Command Sergeant Major Adkins joined the Army in 1956, at the age of 22. He served in the 2nd infantry Division until leaving to join Special Forces in 1961. He deployed to Vietnam three times between February 1963 and December 1971; the actions for which he will receive the Medal of Honor took place during his second tour.

After Vietnam, Command Sergeant Major Adkins served approximately two years as First Sergeant for the Army Garrison Communications Command in Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He then joined Class #3 of the Army Sergeants Major Academy in El Paso, Texas. After graduation, he served with Special Forces at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and then led training at Fort Sherman's Jungle School in the Panama Canal Zone. He retired from the Army in 1978.

Command Sergeant Major Adkins and his wife of 59 years, Mary Adkins, currently reside in Opelika, Alabama. They will both attend the Medal of Honor ceremony at the White House.

SOURCE: <http://m.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/26/president-obama-award-medal-honor>

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COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR BENNIE ADKINS (RETIRED)
CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR:



OFFICIAL CITATION:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of Congress the Medal of Honor to:

Sergeant First Class Bennie G. Adkins, United States Army

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:

“Sergeant First Class Bennie G. Adkins distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as an Intelligence Sergeant with Detachment A-102, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces, during combat operations against an armed enemy at Camp A Shau, Republic of Vietnam from March 9 to 12, 1966. When the camp was attacked by a large North Vietnamese and Viet Cong force in the early morning hours, Sergeant First Class Adkins rushed through intense enemy fire and manned a mortar position continually adjusting fire for the camp, despite incurring wounds as the mortar pit received several direct hits from enemy mortars. Upon learning that several soldiers were wounded near the center of camp, he temporarily turned the mortar over to another soldier, ran through exploding mortar rounds and dragged several comrades to safety. As the hostile fire subsided, Sergeant First Class Adkins exposed himself to sporadic sniper fire while carrying his wounded comrades to the camp dispensary. When Sergeant First Class Adkins and his group of defenders came under heavy small arms fire from members of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group that had defected to fight with the North Vietnamese, he maneuvered outside the camp to evacuate a seriously wounded American and draw fire all the while successfully covering the rescue. When a resupply air drop landed outside of the camp perimeter, Sergeant First Class Adkins, again, moved outside of the camp walls to retrieve the much needed supplies. During the early morning hours of March 10, 1966 enemy forces launched their main attack and within two hours, Sergeant First Class Adkins was the only man firing a mortar weapon. When all mortar rounds were expended, Sergeant First Class Adkins began placing effective recoilless rifle fire upon enemy positions. Despite receiving additional wounds from enemy rounds exploding on his position, Sergeant First Class Adkins fought off intense waves of attacking Viet Cong. Sergeant First Class Adkins eliminated numerous insurgents with small arms fire after withdrawing to a communications bunker with several soldiers. Running extremely low on ammunition, he returned to the mortar pit, gathered vital ammunition and ran through intense fire back to the bunker. After being ordered to evacuate the camp, Sergeant First Class Adkins and a small group of soldiers destroyed all signal equipment and classified documents, dug their way out of the rear of the bunker and fought their way out of the camp. While carrying a wounded soldier to the extraction point he learned that the last helicopter had already departed. Sergeant First Class Adkins led the group while evading the enemy until they were rescued by helicopter on March 12, 1966. During the thirty eight hour battle and forty eight hours of escape and evasion, fighting with mortars, machine guns, recoilless rifles, small arms, and hand grenades, it was estimated that Sergeant First Class Adkins killed between one hundred thirty five and one hundred seventy five of the enemy while sustaining eighteen different wounds to his body. Sergeant First Class Adkins' extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Detachment A-102, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces and the United States Army.”

EPILOGUE:

With the fall of the SF Camp A Shau the flow of traffic from Laos into the NVA Base Area 611 and routes south were essentially unimpeded. The entire area of the A Shau Valley became a haven for the buildup of NVA forces for the TET '68 attacks into Hue City, Da Nang and the movement southward throughout South Vietnam. Activity increased markedly along the DMZ with the 3rd Marine Division while the A Shau Valley maintained a 'quietness before the storm' relative silence. Then in January, TET '68 was unleashed. In the months and years to come, the USMC would have its trials in the DMZ area and at Khe Sanh, the 1st Cavalry Division would fight the battles around Hamburger Hill and later the 101st Airborne Division would establish and abandon Firebase RIPCORD. The war took on a new complexion.



Meanwhile, Gene went to Germany – to the HQ 16th CAB culminating with six months in command of the 67th Aviation Company. Then it was back to Vietnam in 1969 with the 1st Cav's 2/20th ARA in III Corps, commanding C/2/20 during the Cambodian Incursion in May 1970. That was followed by a ground duty tour in the USA in a 155mm (SP) battalion. After CGSC in 1972, he was a wargamer with the USA Strategy and Tactics Analysis Group and Concepts Analysis Agency in the Washington DC area, which included being the Artillery aviator on the Heavy Lift Helicopter Study (in which the project was cashiered) and the CAA aviator on the Advanced Attack Helicopter Study (which is today's Apache Longbow). During this assignment he also completed his MED in Student Development in night school at American University. It was time for a change.

However, after only a short time as PMS in ROTC at the University of Wisconsin at LaCrosse, he was selected for command of the 10th CAB at Fort Lewis, WA. In 1979 he was then offered the opportunity as the Inspector General of the 9th Infantry Division & Fort Lewis. With a promotion he found himself off to Korea as Commander, Special Troops, with Combined Field

Army (ROK/US) north of the Han River in Uijongbu at Camp Red Cloud. Accepting a short term extension, he became the C4 – while also negotiating for a position with hopeful return to Fort Lewis. In November 1981 he reported to Fourth ROTC Region as Chief of Training Division; however, soon thereafter was assigned as Commander, IV Intermountain Brigade, and then Director, JROTC Division, Fourth ROTC Region. His final assignment, completing 30 years of active duty in 1988, was as the Senior Army Advisor to the Idaho National Guard.

Upon retirement from the Army, in 1989 he started as an Instructor with Central Texas College at Fort Lewis and then became the Program Manager of the MOS School Command. In 1990 he became the PM of the Basic Skills Education Program. After a career in the Army, he enjoyed being back among the troops and units. In 1991 the Army Career and Alumni Program contracted a Job Assistance Center and initially he served as a Counselor and then as the Contractor Installation Manager – retiring in November 1997.

As a new retiree he could not remain idle and soon had plenty to keep him occupied. Among several other things, as a long time lover of music, he became a member of the Normanna Male Chorus of Tacoma – a Scandinavian group locally since 1888 – eventually serving as its President, a Trustee and a long term Board member. When the 14th Cavalry Regiment was reflagged with new STRYKER Brigades at Fort Lewis in 2000, a group of former veterans established the 14th Cavalry Association – as part of the initial organization, he served as Secretary-West, then Treasurer, then as Co-Operator of the Online Gift Shop for several years.

About 2008 when things slowed to a more manageable pace, he came across the Catkiller website. His first tour in Vietnam with the 220th was very memorable. After meeting our web master Don Ricks on line, and then agreeing to help him to 'build' a History Index, little did he know the actual work that would be produced. The past few years as the volunteer Catkiller historian rekindled so many friendships and memories—a priceless experience!

And during the same time, Dennis was to complete his Army enlistment and return home to Flint, Michigan, to pursue an education and trade through General Motors. It was the war that matured him, and provided him with a clear vision and purpose that ultimately lead him to New York State to complete that education. Eastman Kodak would be where he spent the next thirty years covering a variety of roles from engineering to finally managing 35mm Film Components and Packaging Maintenance until his retirement.

While he had a very successful career building factories and manufacturing processes, literally around the world, it was his service in Vietnam that meant the most to him. However, it came at a price; and that price was silence. It was during his entry back into the classroom in 1969, it became clear that the war was even more unpopular on the campuses, than what he read in the papers. He was the old guy at twenty two, sitting next to eighteen year olds, with no idea how their freedom was earned. He learned to keep his service and veteran status to himself, even after beginning work at Kodak. The engineers he worked with had their student deferments and even became fortunate to see the draft end, ensuring their careers would be uninterrupted.

Both of them pursued their respective careers, were married and supported by their true loves, Dennis with Karen and Gene with Ellie. Gene, the older of the two, was in Vietnam as his second son turned one year old in June, just after his arrival in Phu Bai. Dennis was about ten years younger (and still is), but shared much in common after Vietnam as the years went by. There continued to be a missing piece in both of their lives as they sought out our brothers-in-arms over the decades. Their search would take them across the country as they sought out individuals with which to reconnect. However, it was to be an Internet search that yielded pay-dirt when a website begun by Scott Cummings crossed their paths.



GENE & ELLIE WILSON



DENNIS & KAREN CURRIE

In an excerpt from the book, “We Were Soldiers Once...And Young,” the authors are quoted as saying, “Only now do we understand why old soldiers have always gathered to murmur among themselves of days gone by.” Given that many of us are geographically separated, the Internet allows us the opportunity to connect and share our stories and ‘murmur’ amongst ourselves. As the site has grown, the opportunity to develop reunions around the country has created another opportunity for old soldiers to meet and remember. Their best friends and partners, their wives, have stood by with them as they have spent many hours looking back at the 220th history that has resulted in stories that have brought many memories back to life. It was often, on their ears alone, that many of our experiences could be shared, without fear of judgment or condemnation.

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