

RECOMMENDATION FOR DECORATION

DATE

16 April 1966

TO: (Organization and address)

CINCPACFLT (DPSP)

APO US Forces 96553

FROM: (Organization and address)

3d ARRG

APO US Forces 96307

RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMEND INDIVIDUAL INDICATED BE AWARDED

1. NAME OF DECORATION (Indicate number of clusters, if appropriate)

Medal of Honor (Posthumous)

KIA

(Air Force Cross
was awarded in
lieu of Medal of
Honor)

2. RECOMMENDATION IS BASED ON:

☒ HEROISM☐ MERITORIOUS SERVICE

(Based on completed period of service)

☐ OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

3. INCLUSIVE DATE(S) OF ACT, ACHIEVEMENT OR SERVICE

FROM: ON:

11 April 1966

TO

PERSONAL DATA ON INDIVIDUAL BEING RECOMMENDED

4. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL

Pitsenberger, William H.

5. AFSC

AF15680741

6. GRADE

ALC

7. PRESENT ORGANIZATION AND STATION

Detachment 6, 38th ARRS
APO US Forces 96227

8. PRESENT DUTY ASSIGNMENT

Rescue and Survival Specialist

9. PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS

626 Gordon Street
Piquette, Ohio

10. ORGANIZATION OF NEXT DUTY ASSIGNMENT (If applicable)

N/A

11. ORGANIZATION, DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND GRADE AT TIME OF ACT OR SERVICE

Detachment 6, 38th Aerospace Rescue &
Recovery Squadron
ALC, Rescue and Survival Specialist

12. DATE OF PROMOTION TO GRADE IN WHICH SERVING

1 October 1965

13. INDIVIDUAL'S SERVICE IN AIR FORCE SINCE ACT OR SERVICE HAS BEEN HONORABLE

☒ YES ☐ NO

14. DATE OF REASSIGNMENT, RETIREMENT OR SEPARATION, AS APPLICABLE:

RETIREMENT OR SEPARATION IS ☐ VOLUNTARY ☐ INVOLUNTARY, AND THE FOLLOWING SERVICE DATES APPLY

CDSD

PLSD

TAFCSO

TFCSO

TAFMSO

TFMSO

15. PREVIOUS UNITED STATES DECORATIONS, COMPLETE AUTHORITY THEREFOR, AND INCLUSIVE DATES OF SERVICE RECOGNIZED (Do not include service medals, battle credits, unit citations or foreign decorations)

Air Medal, Basic, SO G-276, 14 Aug 65 - 25 Aug 65

Air Medal, 1st-5th OLC, SO G-83, 28 Aug 65 - 19 Dec 65

16. ARE OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AWARDS TO THIS INDIVIDUAL PENDING (If yes, state awards)

AM 6-9th OLC
Airman's Medal☒ YES ☐ NO

17. ARE OTHER INDIVIDUALS BEING RECOMMENDED FOR THE SAME ACT OR SERVICE

☐ YES ☒ NO18. IF ANSWER TO ITEM 17 IS YES, ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OTHER INDIVIDUALS FORWARDED AS A PART OF THIS RECOMMENDATION ☐ YES ☐ NO

19. IF ANSWER TO ITEM 18 IS NO, EXPLAIN REASON FOR DELAY, INCLUDING DATE RECOMMENDATION(S) WILL BE FORWARDED, AND IDENTIFY THE INDIVIDUAL(S) BY GRADE, NAME, SERVICE NUMBER, PRESENT ORGANIZATION AND STATION.

N/A

19. HAS PREVIOUS AWARD BEEN MADE TO THIS INDIVIDUAL FOR THIS ACT OR SERVICE

☐ YES ☒ NO

20. HAVE ALL AVAILABLE RECORDS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION THAT WOULD HAVE A BEARING ON THIS RECOMMENDATION BEEN CONSIDERED AND NO CONDITION EXISTS WHICH WOULD MAKE APPROVAL OF THIS AWARD INAPPROPRIATE

☒ YES ☐ NO

21. IF AWARD IS POSTHUMOUS, OR INDIVIDUAL RECOMMENDED IS MISSING IN ACTION OR A PRISONER OF WAR, LIST NAME, ADDRESS AND RELATIONSHIP OF NEXT OF KIN.

Mr & Mrs William F. Pitsenberger (Father & Mother) 626 Gordon St., Piquette, Ohio

22. DATE WHICH PRESENTATION OF AWARD IS DESIRED, IF APPROVED

ASAP

23. IF APPROVED, FORWARD FOR PRESENTATION TO (Organization and address)

N/A

(Continued from AF Form 642)

they came under heavy attack by a large enemy unit. The US Army Force's position was over-run and it was during this final onslaught that Airman Pitsenbarger was fatally wounded. One survivor of the battle later recounted Airman Pitsenbarger's heroic deeds; the surrounded group of Americans was running critically short of ammunition. At this point the conspicuous nature of Airman Pitsenbarger's bravery and self sacrifice is again clearly evident; he ignored opportunities to seek protective shelter. Fully aware of the risk he was taking, Airman Pitsenbarger time and again voluntarily exposed himself to intense automatic weapons fire while scrambling around to fallen comrades, gathering up rifles and ammunition which he passed among the defenders. He courageously resisted to the very end. His bravery and determination were exemplary of the highest professional standards and traditions to be found in the United States Air Force. By his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, Airman Pitsenbarger has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



ARTHUR W. BEALL, Colonel, USAF
Commander

24. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (Description of the act, achievement or service, including specific dates, places and facts. If additional space is needed, use plain 8-10 1/2 bond paper, the last sheet of which must be signed by the recommending individual)

NARRATIVE TO ACCOMPANY RECOMMENDATION FOR AWARD OF THE
MEDAL OF HONOR
(POSTHUMOUS)

Airman First Class William H. Pitsenbarger distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing force, near Cam Ly, Republic of Vietnam on 11 April 1966. On that date Airman Pitsenbarger was a rescue specialist crew member aboard a Detachment 6, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron helicopter engaged in the evacuation of numerous American casualties from this dense jungle area 35 miles east of Saigon. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Airman Pitsenbarger voluntarily rode a rescue hoist more than a hundred feet down through the trees to the ground to instruct ground personnel in stokes litter loading and to organize and coordinate rescue efforts at the scene. During the period of time that followed, Airman Pitsenbarger cared for and prepared the casualties for evacuation, rigged the stokes litter for hoisting, and insured that the recovery operation continued in a smooth, orderly fashion. Through his personal efforts the evacuation of the critically wounded casualties was greatly expedited. Following the recovery of the ninth casualty the rescue aircraft hovering overhead was damaged and disabled by several rounds of automatic weapons fire. The helicopter was forced to abandon recovery efforts to make an emergency landing at a nearby air strip. This left Airman Pitsenbarger stranded in a hostile jungle area which was literally swarming with enemy forces, a risk he knew he was taking when he volunteered to be lowered into the area. It should be clearly understood that normal procedure did not require that Airman Pitsenbarger stay on the ground at the pick-up site. Paramedic personnel are lowered into such a situation to instruct the ground party in the proper loading of the stokes litter and/or forest penetrator and are then generally expected to be, themselves, hoisted back into the helicopter at the earliest opportunity, staying on the ground no longer than is absolutely necessary. However, Airman Pitsenbarger voluntarily gave up repeated opportunities to be hoisted to the relative safety of the helicopter, in order to evacuate additional Army casualties and to administer medical treatment to the wounded. Shortly after rescue efforts were interrupted, the pick-up scene came under sniper and mortar fire. US Army personnel at the scene decided to evacuate the area, and began preparing the remaining injured for the trip out. During this period of time Airman Pitsenbarger, while under fire, cut down saplings for litter poles and administered to the wounded. After the group had proceeded a short distance from the pick-up site they came under heavy attack by a large enemy unit. (Continued)

25. TYPED NAME, GRADE AND TITLE OF INDIVIDUAL

26. SIGNATURE

INITIATING RECOMMENDATION

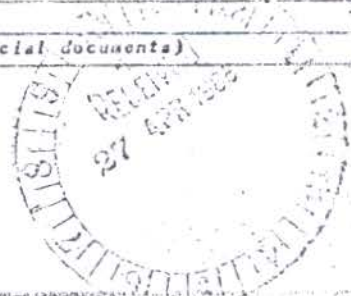
ARMUR W. BEALL, Colonel, USAF
Commander

27. ATTACHMENTS

NUMBER

DESCRIPTION (Citation and supporting statements or other official documents)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Unclassified Citation - 1 Copy |
| 2 | Taped Interview of Surviving Witness - 1 Tape |



PPD Action PCB
Check around 246

STAFF AGENCY	ACTION	INFO
ARCGO		
ARODC		
ARFDC	✓	
ARBDC		
ARMDC		
ARDAF		
ARYUC		
ARCOI		✓
ARIIG		

ORRS---049 CCN/185
 PFTE JAW RUEDVXF0544 1051525-EEEE--RUEBSBA.
 DE RUMSJS 31D 1020935
 ZNY EEEEE
 PQWPOQZ
 FM 3 CSG BIEN HOA AB RVN
 TO RUEAHQ/CSAF
 RUWTFJA/USAFMPC RANDOLPH AFB TEX
 INFO RUMSBJ/7AF TAN SON NHUT RVN
 RUEBSBA/1350 AB GP ORLANDO AFB FLA
 RUMSBJ/38TH AEROSPACE RESCUE AND RECOVERY SQUADRON TSN
 RUHLKM/HQS PACIFIC AEROSPACE RESCUE AND RECOVERY CENTER HAWAII
 RUEBSBA/HQS SEROSPACE RESCUE AND RECOVERY SERVICE ORLANDO AFB FLA
 RUCDAA/HQS MAC SCOTT AFB ILL
 RUHLKM/PACAF
 RUWHAN/AFAPC DENVER COLO
 RUMSMA/COMUSMACV SAIGON RVN
 RUHLHQ/CINCPAC
 BT

UNCLAS E F T O 3 CSG (DP) 07902 APR 66. CAUSALTY MESSAGE,
 INITIAL DEATH REPORT, BATTLE.
 A. PITSENBARGER REPEAT PITSENBARGER, WILLIAM H.
 B. AIRMAN FIRST CLASS. C. AF15680744 REPEAT AF15680744.
 D. DETACHMENT 6, 38 AIR RESCUE SQUADRON, BIEN HOA AIR BASE, REPUBLIC
 OF VIETNAM.
 ; 31 MILES SOUTHEAST OF BIEN HOA, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM.
 F. 11 APRIL 1966, APPROXIMATELY 1700 HOURS SAIGON LOCAL. EXACT TIME
 CANNOT BE ESTABLISHED DUE TO CIRCUMSTANCES.
 G. GUNSHOT WOUND (UNCONFIRMED).

PAGE 2 RUMSJS 31D UNCLAS E F T O
 H. AIRMAN PITSENBARGER WAS A PARAMEDIC ON A RESCUE MISSION TO EVAC-
 UATE WOUNDED U S ARMY PERSONNEL FROM AN AREA APPROXIMATELY 31 MILES
 SOUTHEAST OF BIEN HOA AIR BASE, RVN. AIRMAN PITSENBARGER WAS LOW-
 ERED FROM A HELICOPTER TO THE GROUND ON A HOIST TO LOAD INJURED
 PERSONS ONTO THE "STOKES" LITTER. AT APPROXIMATELY 1650 HOURS LOCAL
 THE RESCUE HELICOPTER WAS HIT BY AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRE AND FLEW AWAY
 FROM THE SCENE, LEAVING AIR PITSENBARGER ON THE GROUND WITH THE
 ARMY UNIT. SHORTLY AFTER THE HELICOPTER DEPARTED, THE AREA WHERE
 AIRMAN PITSENBARGER WAS LOCATED WAS MORTARED. SHORTLY THEREAFTER,
 SNIPERS HAD SURROUNDED THE UNIT AND PORTIONS OF THE UNIT WERE CUT OF
 FROM EACH OTHER. EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED TO AIRMAN PITSENBARGER AND THE
 PORTION OF THE UNIT WHICH WAS CUT OFF IS UNKNOWN, BUT WHEN THE REST
 OF THE UNIT RETURNED TO THE SPOT WHERE AIRMAN PITSENBARGER AND THE
 WOUNDED WERE LAST SEEN, THEY CALLED FOR ANOTHER RESCUE HELICOPTER TO
 THE AREA TO EVACUATE MORE WOUNDED. AT THIS TIME, ANOTHER PARAMEDIC
 WAS LOWERED INTO THE AREA. HE SEARCHED AND FOUND AIRMAN PITSENBAR-
 GER, WHO HAD BEEN HIT AND WAS DECEASED.
 I. DETER. REMAINS PRESENTLY BEING FLOWN FROM 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION
 GRAVES REGISTRATION TO TAN SON NHUT.
 J. 1. SINGLE

PAGE 3 RUMSJS 31D UNCLAS E F T O

2. WILLIAM PITSENBARGER, FATHER, IRENE E PITSENBARGER, MOTHER,
BOTH RESIDE AT 626 GORDON STREET, PIQUA, OHIO, TO BE NOTIFIED BY
HQ, USAF.

3. NONE

4. NOT APPLICABLE

5. WILLIAM F PITSENBARGER, FATHER, 626 GORDON ST, PIQUA, OHIO;

K. TO BE FURNISHED Y USAF

L. 298-38-0273

M. IRENE EMMA PITSENBARGER, MOTHER, 626 GORDON STREET, PIQUA, OHIO.

N. IRENE EMMA PITSENBARGER, MOTHER, 626 GORDON STREET, PIQUA, OHIO,
ONE HUNDRED PERCENT.

O. 11 AUGUST 1965

P. NO

Q. ACTIVE DUTY, PRESENT FOR DUTY

R. 2-4

S. \$216.00

NONE

\$65.00 SPHD, 15.00 FSP, 6.00 CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

T. YES, CREW MEMBER

U. REGULAR AIR FORCE

PAGE 4 RUMSJS 31D UNCLAS E F T O

V. CATHOLIC, LAST RITES NOT ADMINISTERED

W. CAUCASIAN

X. NOT APPLICABLE

Y. NOT APPLICABLE

Z. UNKNOWN

AA. 1. AIR MEDAL. ORLANDO AFB FURNISH ADDITIONAL AWARDS. ← PPD

2. NO DEROGATORY INFORMATION.

3. NONE

4. 626 GORDON STREET, PIQUA, OHIO.

5. DECEASED WAS PERFORMING OFFICIALLY ASSIGNED OPERATIONAL
DUTIES AT TIME OF DEATH. DUTIES WERE DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTORY TO DEATH.

BB. UNKNOWN, CERTIFICATE NOT AVAILABLE

\$2.00 VERIFIED DEDUCTION FROM PAY RECORDS.

BT

000
SORM.....068

OTTE JAW RUEDVXB0911 1032343-EEEE--RUEBSBA.

DE RUMSJS 41D 1030900

ZNY EEEEE

O P 130840Z ZFF4

FM 3 CSG BIEN HOA AB RVN

TO RUWIFJA/USAFMPC RANDOLPH AFB TEX

RUMSBJ/7TH AIR FORCES TAN SON NHUT RVN

RUEBSBA/1360 AB GP ORLANDO AFB FLA

INFO RUHLKM/PACAF

RUMSMA/COMUSMACV SAIGON RVN

RUMSBJ/38TH ARRS TAN SON NHUT AB RVN

RUHLKM/HQS PARRC HICKAM AFB HAWAII

RUEBSBA/HQS ARRS ORLANDO AFB FLA

RUCDAA/MAC

BT

UNCLAS E F T O 3 CSG (DP) 70906 APR 66. CASUALTY MESSAGE.

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT, BATTLE.

A. PITSENBARGER, REPEAT, PITSENBARGER, WILLIAM H.

B. AIRMAN FIRST CLASS C. AF15680744 REPEAT AF15680744.

G. GUNSHOT WOUND CONFIRMED.

I. READY.

BT

To PCB

Col Williams
was advised
14/0045Z

[Handwritten signature]
[Handwritten signature]

STAFF	ACU
ARCCO	
ARODG	
ANPDG	✓
ANBDG	
ARMDC	
ANDAS	
ARXDG	
ARCOI	
ARIIG	
ARAMS	

RRNN
ARS.....002
PFIL JAW RUEDVXJ0573 1050852-EEEE--RUEBSBA.
DA RUMSJS 19D 1030515
ZNY EEEEE
P 150445Z

FM 3CMBT SPT GP BIEN HOA AB RVN
TO RUEDHQA/CSAF
RUWTFJA/USAFMPC RANDOLPH AFB TEX
RUMSBJ/7AF TAN SON NHUT AFLD RVN
INFO RUEBSBA/1360 AB GP ORLANDO AFB FLA
RUMSBJ/38ARRG TAN SON NHUT AB RVN
RUHLKM/HQ PARRO HICKAM AFB HAWAII
RUEBSBA/HQ ARRS ORLANDO AFB FLA
RUCDAA/HQ MAC SCOTT AFB ILL
RUHLKM/RACAF

BT
UNCLAS E F T O 3CSGP (DP) 72933 APR 66. PACAF: FOR DPSP, 7AF: FOR DPSP.

- A. PITSENBARGER REPEAT PITSENBARGER, WILLIAM H.
B. AF15680744 REPEAT AF15680744. C. AIRMAN FIRST CLASS.
D. 12 APRIL 1966.
E. NONE
F. NONE.
G. VIETNAM SERVICE MEDAL, PURPLE HEART, AIR MEDAL (6-9 OLC),
AIRMAN'S MEDAL, MEDAL OF HONOR.
AIRMAN'S MEDAL AND MEDAL OF HONOR WILL BE PROCESS BY 3ARRG. 15N.

BT

To PCB

STAFF	ACT	INFO
ARCCO		
ANODC	☒	
ANPDC	☒	
ANBDC		
ARMDC		
ARDAS		
ARXDC		
ARCOI		☒
ARIIG		
ARAMS		

Following is verbatim transcript of tape recording forwarded to this Hq by Hq 7AF in connection with recommendation for award of Medal of Honor to ALC William H Pitsenbarger.

ALC William H Pitsenbarger, the son of Mr and Mrs William F Pitsenbarger of 626 Gordon St, Piqua, Ohio, has given his life upholding the principles of his organization's motto "That Others May Live." A pararescue specialist with Detachment 6, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Sq at Bien Hoa Air Base, "Pit", as he was known to his friends and co-workers, was no stranger to death as a number of downed pilots and wounded ground troops owe their lives to his selfless devotion to duty.

Army Sgt Fred C Navarro of Hutchins, Kansas, is a squad leader with C Company, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, First Infantry Division. Sgt Navarro is recovering now from a wound he sustained the night that Amn Pitsenbarger was killed. Sgt Navarro can you tell us what happened the night that Pit was killed?

Ans - Well, sir, when it first started there was sniper fire and we were hit by artillery and the rescue chopper came in to take some of the men out and they had taken five or six of them out when there was heavy enemy fire and the chopper was forced to leave the area. Then about 10 minutes later the firing was pretty heavy and Pits, knowing that this area where he was was getting hit the hardest he took his pistol and gave it to one of the wounded men that couldn't hold a rifle. He took his rifle and then he went from place to place while the fire was going on, trying to get ammunition from the wounded and

Pitsenbarger--2

people that had been killed to get them ammo. Ten or fifteen minutes later he was back in the same area where he had left before. Then he was in the area about 10 to 15 more minutes when he was hit.

Q - You say he was left there. Could you tell us why he was left in the area?

Ans - Well, after they had took two or three men out, he came in on the hoist from the rescue chopper to help evacuate the wounded. He was unable to rescue about six guys when the Air Force chopper was under heavy fire and it was forced to take off. And then after the chopper left the basket that the wounded were being put in was caught in a tree and Pits wanted to climb the tree to get the basket so the same chopper could come back later because he told us if we waited until another chopper came then it would be too late. So he went ahead and done it.

Q - How long was he on the ground before he was hit?

Ans - He was on the ground for about one hour and 20 minutes and he was running from one place to another picking up ammo from the wounded, from the dead that couldn't fire, then after he distributed all this ammo out to the people then he went back to get some more and he came back with a handful of ammunition. Then he lay down there beside the section that was getting hit the hardest and he started firing, then he was hit.

Q - Were you able to talk to him at any time?

Ans - I talked to him when he was - when the chopper was fired at and it took off. They told us we were going to leave the area and set up in another place, and I talked to Pits when he was cutting

Pitsenbarger--3

trees to make litters and to carry the wounded out.

Q - While he was picking up this ammunition and bringing it back was he also taking care of the wounded?

Ans - Yes, he was, he was helping bandage and putting dressings on the wounded and making stretchers, and all that stuff. When it first started it was bad because they were firing from all directions and they had us surrounded, the fire was pretty heavy and Pits knew that the part that he was in was getting hit hard and that all the guys had run out of ammo. They couldn't get out because the fire was so bad, but somehow Pits made up his mind that he was going to get up and he got up. He ran all over the perimeter picking up ammunition then he came back and he distributed the ammo out to each guy that was still alive. When he came back to lay beside me, he must have had 20 magazines of ammunition. He lay there and he must have been able to see where the VC were because he was probably one out of 15 of the company that was firing semi-automatic. Everybody else that couldn't see anyone was firing automatic hoping that they would hit the VC.

Q - Could you tell us what time of night Amn Pitsenbarger got killed?

Ans - I think it was about 7:30.

Q - What happened immediately after this?

Ans - Well after that first time the fire stopped, about 15 minutes later and it was dark and then VC women and children came in and they started slitting throats and taking weapons.

Q - You say these were VC women and children, were you fighting these women and children?

Pitsenbarger--4

Ans - No. See those were hard-core VC and the hard-core VC come into a South Vietnamese village and they tell the South Vietnamese people that if they don't help them fight that they will destroy their village, kill all the women and children and if they don't help them fight that they'll take their wives and their kids away and take them off somewhere, so actually the South Vietnamese civilians don't have any choice but to go along with the VC. And usually in an attack with regular North Vietnamese you have the South or the local VC's making the first part of the attack and then the North Vietnamese come in.

Q - What were you doing during this time?

Ans - What time are you speaking about?

Q - Well while the women and children you say were slitting the throats of the GIs. What were you doing?

Ans - I was about 20 or 30 meters from them. At the time I didn't know this was going on. You must recall it was dark because the jungle had a triple canopy and you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. The interpreter told us later that the women and kids that had slit the throats and taken the weapons and carried the dead VC that we had killed off to make us think that we hadn't gotten anybody.

Q - Did you see any hard-core Viet Cong?

Ans - I seen a few drop out of the trees with 50 calibers.

Q - Did you stay there the rest of the night?

Ans - Yes, Sergeant, we did. After the fighting stopped we heard probably 100 Congs hollering at each other saying that they were going to destroy us. I was told by our Vietnamese interpreter, he told our Lt, to hurry and call in artillery all around us because they were going to

Pitsenbarger--5

assault us. And we called in the artillery and five or six rounds came in every 15 seconds from 8:30 that night until possibly seven that morning and they didn't get a chance to come in and get us..

Q - Did any of the artillery rounds land near your position?

Ans - They were landing pretty close, they had to drop them close to us because the VC were right on our back and the fighting was real heavy. The artillery probably landed 25 - 30 meters from us but actually if the fight would have started again, they would have had to drop it right on us.

Q - What was your location?

Ans - 45 miles east of Saigon about 12 miles west of Vung Tau.

The operation was Operation AVALANCHE.

Q - Sgt Navarro, were you wounded?

Ans - Yes sir, I was.

Q - How many men were originally in your squad.?

Ans - I had 10 in my squad.

Q - Could you tell us how many of those men made it?

Ans - Three, sir.

Q - Well how do you feel now?

Ans - I feel lucky just to be here.

AlC Henry J O'Bern, friend and co-worker of Amn Pitsenbarger's, had this to say, when asked if Pits knew what he was getting himself into when he volunteered to go down the hoist to rescue the wounded on the ground.

O'Bern - Yes, I do. Bill had gone down many a time before, he had gone down on his own. In fact only two weeks ago he went down there in very dense jungle. Later on he went in with the help of a Special Forces team. The Special Forces team themselves even said that if we're hit, which there were six of us down there at the time, they said we would definitely be killed in minutes. And Pits himself had gone in there three hours earlier on his own looking for a pilot and got the pilot and got him out in spite of the VC. He knew the score pretty well and he had been fired at quite a bit before. He knew the chance he was taking and it wasn't a case of going in there blindly.

Interviewer - In other words he volunteered to go in knowing what was on the ground.

Ans - Yeah, he did and he's been down picking out Army before, he's been under sniper fire before. He knew all about it.

Q - Well what type of guy was Pitsenbarger?

Ans - Well the usual thing everybody says is that he was a really fine fellow but in this case it's the honest truth. I think just about everybody in the squadron liked him. He was very pleasing, you can't even say anything really bad about him. He's probably had some small faults, just about everyone has, but all over everybody liked him. I'd say that he was almost the most popular guy in the squadron.

O'Bern interview--2

Thank you Amn O'Bern.

It can truly be said that AlC William H. Pitsenbarger gave his life in the tradition of the men of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service "that others may live."

This is SSgt Ron Sears from Bien Hoa Air Base.

Bien Hoa, Vietnam
Wednesday, April 13

Dear Van

Am circumventing policy tonight. Any stories or photos which leave my office are supposed to go through headquarters 7th AF, then to MACV for clearance. But for two reasons, I'm sending you the enclosed without going through channels. The first is that you're a buddy in the same business to whom I will always owe favors. The second is that, like most of us who even casually knew this pararescueman, I was very impressed by him and would like to see him get all the posthumous eulogies he deserves.

His last mission began at 1500 Monday, April 11. He and his crew were alerted to rescue lifted number of U.S. Army casualties from Operation Abilene which is still going on about 75 miles east of Saigon. The wounded troops of

fire fight and Captain Bachman recovered at Bien Hoa.

In the battle which followed, the VC overran the American position. They attempted to kill all wounded but two managed to survive until morning when other friendly forces finally reached their position. One of the two, an Army sergeant who saw Airman Pittsenbarger shot and killed in the battle, is now at the 93rd Field Hospital between here and Saigon.

Of a company of about 180 men; only 14 escaped that battle uninjured. Most were killed. All others were critically wounded. Our losses, in terms of the MACV casualty reports were "heavy".

A few added comments on Pittsenbarger. He was described by the man who perhaps knew him best and respected him most, Captain Dale Potter, rescue pilot, as a "young, eager kid who was always ready to go and always willing get into the thick of the action where he could be ^{the} ~~most~~ ^{help} ~~there~~."

Pitsenbarger had already completed 350 rescue missions.

Those left on the ground included Airman Pitsenbarger who had been lowered during the first pick-up to assist ~~with~~ getting the wounded into the stokes litter, strapping them in and hooking the basket to the cable.

With both power and rpm raging above the maximum and with his rudder controls locked, Captain Salem managed to get the chopper to Binh Ba and made a running landing. The engine couldn't be shut down by either the normal or emergency procedures. It was finally stopped by Airman Hammond who removed a few panels in the roof of the cabin and with a hammer beat the fuel controls closed.

There were nine holes in the side of the chopper and two of the four rotor blades had been hit.

The second chopper, meanwhile, attempted to get back into the pick up point but as soon as the enemy's automatic weapons stopped, the VC began ^{WALKING} ~~moving~~ mortars into the area. Friendly artillery from about three different points was called in and it fell with pinpoint accuracy all around the trapped Americans. ~~Not only~~ ^{the} the chopper couldn't lower into that

(MORE)

Force.

Between 1530 and 1700 the two craft had made a total of five flights in and out of the area. They carried 9 wounded soldiers in Stokes litter baskets to a field aid station about seven miles away near the village of Binh Ba.

On the sixth flight, the third for the crew in the first chopper, Salem ~~and his crew~~ reached a hover, started lowering the basket and watched as the men on the ground were reaching for it, when their chopper was suddenly hit by a volley of fire from a .30 cal machine gun. The chopper lurched, the power and rpm went screaming over the red lines and the pilot pulled up rapidly and at the same time, armed and fired the cable cutter separating himself from the basket and the survivors on the ground.

His last mission began at 1500 Monday, April 11. He and his crew were alerted to rescue fifteen number of U.S. Army casualties from Operation Abilene which is still going on about 75 miles east of Saigon. The wounded troops of "Damage Charlie Five" company out of the 2nd Brigade of the Big Red One, were down in thick jungle. The tree canopy extended about 130 feet up and the only way of getting the wounded out was with a hoist-equipped chopper. Two H-43's from our Detachment 6, 38th AARS, were scrambled. In the first one ^{were} ~~was~~ Captain Harold D. Salem, pilot; Major Maurice G. Kessler, copilot, A/1C Gerald C. Hammon, crew chief, and A/1C William H. Pitsenbarger, pararescue specialist.

They were trailed by a second H-43 flown by Captain Ronald L. Bachman, pilot; Captain Raymond L. Murden, copilot; S/Sgt. David E. Milsten, pararescue specialist and A/1C Thomas C. Story, crew chief.

Both choppers got to the rescue point within one half hour after being alerted. They found a spot in the thick jungle where they could lower and hover below the tops of the trees and just ^{ABOVE} ~~about~~ the secondary growth. The area was too tight for a loaded Huey to lift out of and much too small for a Chinook to get into. So the job fell on the Air

A few added comments on Pittsenbarger. He was described by the man who perhaps knew him best and respected him most, Captain Dale Potter, rescue pilot, as a "young, eager kid who was always ready to go and always willing get into the thick of the action where he could be ^{the} ~~most~~ ^{help} ~~valuable~~."

Pitsenbarger had already completed 350 rescue missions.

He's been recommended for the Airman's medal for one episode and should have been awarded at least a DFC for his heroic efforts to save a VNAF survivor of chopper shot down in D Zone last September. (HE WAS NEVER SUBMITTED FOR IT)

He planned to get out of the Air Force next Fall and had already applied to Arizona State where he hoped to study to become a medical technician or male nurse.

There's a move under way here to name the newly organized, LOCAL VFW Post in his honor. He was one of the most active and instrumental of the charter members of this, the first post to be ~~open~~ opened in a combat zone.

As Potter said, "You don't replace people like Pits".

fire fight and Captain Bachman recovered at Bien Hoa.

In the battle which followed, the VC overran the American position. They attempted to kill all wounded but two managed to survive until morning when other friendly forces finally reached their position. One of the two, an Army sergeant who saw Airman Pitsenbarger shot and killed in the battle, is now at the 93rd Field Hospital between here and Saigon.

I'm sending one of my staff there tomorrow to interview this sergeant and get his story on tape. I'll send you a dub of that taped interview.

Of a company of about 180 men, only 14 escaped that battle uninjured. Most were killed. All others were critically wounded. Our losses, in terms of the MACV casualty reports were "heavy".

Those left on the ground included Airman Pitsenbarger who had been lowered during the first pick-up to assist ~~with~~ getting the wounded into the stokes litter, strapping them in and hooking the basket to the cable.

With both power and rpm raging above the maximum and with his rudder controls locked, Captain Salem managed to get the chopper to Binh Ba and made a running landing. The engine couldn't be shut down by either the normal or emergency procedures. It was finally stopped by Airman Hammond who removed a few panels in the roof of the cabin and with a hammer beat the fuel controls closed.

There were nine holes in the side of the chopper and two of the four rotor blades had been hit.

The second chopper, meanwhile, attempted to get back into the pick up point but as soon as the enemy's automatic weapons stopped, the VC began ^{WALKING} ~~being~~ mortars into the area. Friendly artillery from about three different points was called in and it fell with pinpoint accuracy all around the trapped Americans. ~~Notably~~ the chopper couldn't lower into that

(MORE)

Force.

Between 1530 and 1700 the two craft had made a total of five flights in and out of the area. They carried 9 wounded soldiers in Stokes litter baskets to a field aid station about seven miles away near the village of Binh Ba.

On the sixth flight, the third for the crew in the first chopper, Salem ~~and his crew~~ reached a hover, started lowering the basket and watched as the men on the ground were reaching for it, when their chopper was suddenly hit by a volley of fire from a .30 cal machine gun. The chopper lurched, the power and rpm went screaming over the red lines and the pilot pulled up rapidly and at the same time, armed and fired the cable cutter separating himself from the basket and the survivors on the ground.

"Damage Charlie Five" company out of the 2nd Brigade of the Big Red One, were down in thick jungle. The tree canopy extended about 130 feet up and the only way of getting the wounded out was with a hoist-equipped chopper. Two H-43's from our Detachment 6, 38th AARS, were scrambled. In the first one ^{were} ~~was~~ Captain Harold D. Salem, pilot; Major Maurice G. Kessler, copilot, A/1C Gerald C. Hammon, crew chief, and A/1C William H. Pitsenbarger, pararescue specialist.

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Young Airman Gives Life to Aid Wounded Soldiers

BIEN HOA AB, Vietnam—A1C William H. Pitsenbarger, a pararescue medic, died during the evening of April 11 so that wounded soldiers might live. He was 21 years old.

Pits, as he was known here, was killed by Viet Cong gunfire during a fierce jungle fight about 31 miles south-east of Bien Hoa.

He had voluntarily dropped from his rescue helicopter

to help load wounded soldiers aboard a sling which would lift them into the hovering chopper.

Pits was a first-termer, having entered service on the last day of 1962.

Though young, Pits had lived a life filled with adventure.

An eyewitness to his bravery at the time a VC bullet took Pitsenbarger's life is Army Sgt Fred C. Navarro, a squad leader who was one of the wounded Pits was trying

to save. Of Navarro's 10-man squad, only two survived.

From a hospital near this base, Navarro said his unit—"C" Co., 2d Bn., 16th Inf., 1st Inf. Div.—was involved in a heavy fight with the VC on April 11. Snipers and artillery fire were all about, and there were many wounded.

Pits, who was off duty that day, volunteered to go to

(See AIRMAN, Page 15)



Air Force Times

Airman Gives Life To Help Wounded

(Continued from Page 1)

their rescue. He was assigned to an HH-43.

The jungle where Pits died is dense. It has what soldiers call a three-canopy cover — three levels of tree heights. Some of the trees are 150 feet tall.

The Huskie pilot with whom Pits made his last flight is Capt. Harold D. Salem. To get into position to pick up the wounded, Salem had to hover in an area with 100-foot trees below him and 150-foot trees towering on all sides—some within five feet of his rotor blades.

Pits was aboard the Huskie when the crew made the first pickup and took the wounded to a field hospital at Binh Ba, a plantation about two miles from the battlefield.

Coming back to the jungle, Pits was lowered on his copter's winch line to the jungle floor to treat the wounded and get them into a litter so they could be lifted to the helicopter and out of what Navarro called "terrible fire."

No one ordered Pits to drop into the jungle. Going into a battle zone—even leaving a helicopter at the time of a rescue attempt — is voluntary for the pararescue medic. Pits knew what he was doing, what he would get into, but he went. He often said his first concern was for the wounded who needed him.

His drop from the helicopter placed him where the fighting was most fierce. As he treated some wounded men, he gave them ammunition taken from men who could no longer use it. Earlier he had given his own

pistol to a soldier so badly hurt he could not hold a rifle.

When he had done what he could for the wounded, Pits left the first group. Navarro didn't know what Pits did while he was away, but about 10 to 15 minutes later, the young paramedic returned to Navarro's side with 20 magazines of rifle ammunition.

He crouched among the wounded and used a rifle to pour out fire.

"Pits must have seen the VC, for he was the only one using semi-automatic fire. The rest of us were on full automatic, just spraying the bushes and trees, hoping our fire would hit," Navarro said. The soldier said he saw VC snipers fall from trees after they were hit.

Fifteen minutes after returning to the wounded men Pits lay dead in the jungle.

The battle raged on. Rescue helicopters from Pitsenbarger's unit, Det. 6 of the 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Sq., tried to descend. They were driven away by the heavy fire.

Darkness brought a halt to the firing and also brought, Navarro said, the VC women and children who infiltrated in the blackness to slit the throats of wounded soldiers and take away weapons and ammunition. The women and children carried dead VC away so the Americans would not know how many were killed.

Navarro's unit called in artillery during the night to drive back the VC forces. Five or six rounds came in every 15 seconds from 8:30 that night until 7 the next morning.

A helicopter crew brought Pits body out of the jungle that morning.

Col. Arthur Beall, AF rescue chief in Vietnam, said the young airman had displayed incredible bravery.

PITS CAME to Vietnam on August 8. He had completed Army paratrooper training at Fort Benning, Ga., had gone to the U.S. Navy underwater swimmers school, the rescue and survival technicians medical course

and the Air Force combat survival course at Stead AFB, Nev. He trained to jump into the jungle at Eglin AFB, Fla., went to the Tropical Survival School at Albrook AFB, C.Z., and attended the fire-fighters course for the HH-43 helicopter.

Life in the military was exciting for Pits. He went to Perth, Australia, as a pararescue medic on Gemini and Mercury space probe recoveries. Last fall, he was on the helicopter which took singer Mary Martin from Tan Son Nhut AB to Bien Hoa.

According to his squadron mates, he liked to go on flights carrying doctors to treat patients at a leper colony in VC-infested territory near Bien Hoa.

Pits made 300 flights in Vietnam.

He was nominated for the Airman's Medal recently after he dropped on a helicopter winch line into a minefield to rescue a Vietnamese soldier. The soldier had unknowingly entered the minefield while fighting a fire, and set off a mine which blew off part of his foot.

Pits was the type of man no one could dislike. "He probably had his faults, but no one working with him could say just what they were," said A1C Henry J. O'Bierne, a pararescue medic.

Sgt. Maurice G. Keesler, Pitsenbarger's commander, said Pits was "one of a breed—ready to go on any mission. He was always there when needed."

Capt. Dale L. Potter also knew him. He said, "You don't replace someone like Pits."

Hanoi Broad

CAN THO—Air Force men AB here, deep in the Mekong, congratulating themselves on their "r."

The base was heavily mortared recently, but almost all missed the target.

Total friendly casualties: 1 Vietnamese and three wounded try dogs. Two trucks were damaged, gasoline drums were punctured. The only aircraft hit was sported a small hole.

In the subsequent counterattacks, several Viet Cong

Vietnam Reports

Vietnam Communiqué

ALWAYS - ALWAYS
Pitsenbarger

MAC NEWS SERVICE

Editorial

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ASK NOT WHAT YOU CAN DO.....

For A1C William H. Pitsenbarger there was never a choice. He was of the breed of men who need not be asked, "What can you do for your country?" He knew. He always knew.

He knew when he volunteered for training as a pararescueman. He knew when he completed Army paratrooper school, Navy underwater swim school and Air Force rescue and survival training.

He knew when he voluntarily entered a minefield to save a Vietnamese soldier who had been wounded. He knew each time he went down a rescue helicopter cable in Vietnam to help lift a fellow man to safety.

And he knew when he had himself lowered to a Vietnamese jungle floor to give aid to trapped Army infantrymen. He left the relative safety of a helicopter to join men who were facing death themselves. To those men he represented hope.

He also represented compassion as he used his medical skills and equipment to bandage the wounded. He was courage as he flitted from body to body, gathering ammunition and weapons for the walking wounded to use in a fight for their own lives.

And when his lifeless body was found next morning, he had become a statistic, a memorial to man's long quest for peace and freedom. He was also a legend.

Only two men among the trapped group lived to contribute to the legend of A1C William H. Pitsenbarger. But there were others, men who knew him, men who worked with him, men who owed their lives to him.

These were the men who provided the information about his exploits which earned him the Air Force Cross. He was the first enlisted man to receive the nation's second highest medal ^{posthumously.} He also earned the Airman's Medal, four Air Medals and a Purple Heart, all of which were presented to his parents recently by General J. P. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff.

But medals shown to friends of the Pitsenbarger family in Piqua, Ohio, do not provide an answer to why an Ohio boy died in Vietnam.

Add 1 -- ASK NOT WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Between Piqua and Vietnam there is an incredible gap -- a gap of distance, of time, of culture and of values. Perhaps there is but one common link which bridges that gap, man's common devotion to the cause of freedom.

It is the cause that sent A1C William H. Pitsenbarger to Vietnam as a member of the U. S. Air Force's 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Bien Hoa AB. It is the cause for which he risked his own life to save the lives of others. And it was eventually the cause for which he died.

Army men he saved, Air Force personnel with whom he served, Vietnamese for whom he fought, his fellow citizens of this nation and the parents who loved him -- these are the people who must continue to bear the burden he carried so well. He displayed understanding, skill, dedication, courage and a sincere regard for other men.

There is no need for anyone to ask what William H. Pitsenbarger did for his country. The question we must ask, as citizens, and as military men, is: "What can we do for our country -- and for him?"

As military men we must give generously of our skills, keep bright the fire of individual dedication. We must extend ourselves to do more -- doing it better - for to do less is to lose faith with American First Class William H. Pitsenbarger who gave himself.