



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

9 April 1998

MEMORANDUM FOR PITSENBARGER MEDAL OF HONOR COMMITTEE

FROM: HQ USAF/XOOS
1480 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1480

SUBJECT: Initial Meeting of Pitsenbarger Medal of Honor (MOH) Committee

1. PURPOSE: To consolidate efforts and determine the best approach to upgrade the Air Force Cross awarded to A1C William H. Pitsenbarger to the Medal of Honor for his actions on 11 Apr 1966 in Viet Nam.

2. Attendees:

CMSgt Brown, ANG/SEA
CMSgt Williams, ANG/Enlisted Aircrew Manager
CMSgt Baggstrom, ANG/Awards Chief
Mr. Staton, Executive Director Air Force Sgt Assoc.(AFSA)
Mr. Lokovic, Director Military & Govt Relations, AFSA
SMSgt Miller, AF Pararescue Career Field Manager
MSgt Harris, ANG/Awards Superintendent

3. DISCUSSION: CMSgt Williams opened the conference with a table talk presentation covering the background, and past AF MOH winners. SMSgt Miller covered recent initiatives by the Piqua, Ohio Chamber of Commerce (Pitsenbarger's Hometown) and his own past foray's. Mr Staton and Mr Lokovic expressed interest and support from the AFSA perspective. CMSgt Baggstrom suggested forming a committee to keep all focused on the issue. All agreed and SMSgt Miller was agreed upon to chair the committee. Action items were agreed upon as below:

- a. AFSA will verify and gather all archived information
Suspense: 28 Apr 98
- b. SMSgt Harris NGB will attempt to find past samples of MOH upgrades submissions
Suspense: 28 Apr 98
- c. CMSgt Brown will talk to CMSAF Benken about mentioning the Pitsenbarger project at the next SEA conf.
- d. SMSgt Miller and AFSA were to look for information on new laws lessening restrictions on upgrades or awarding the MOH
Suspense: 28 Apr 98
- f. SMSgt Miller will do minutes and start an E-mail link among all participants

4. SUMMARY: Overall the meeting was productive in uniting forces. Consensus was to continue to gather information and reconvene at the end of April (TBD through E-mail) to discuss the best course of action.

//SIGNED//

PAUL D. MILLER, SMSgt, USAF
Chairperson Pitsenbarger MOH Committee



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1303 Dolphin Street
Orange Park, FL 32073

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Former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

CMSgt. William E. Stevens
Historian, USAF Headquarters

CMSgt. Sandra Williams
Vice Commandant, College for Enlisted PME

Dear Sir,

Hello again from the Airmen Memorial Museum. Since we last spoke in June the William H. Pitsenbarger Medal of Honor reconsideration project has gained considerable momentum. At that time you were assembling some information including; a transcript of interviews with Navarro and O'Beirne, slides of Pitsenbarger you took from the air during the action in question, and correspondence between the Bien Hoa AB Office of Information and the ARS historian. This information is critical to the success of our project and to the completion of our Pitsenbarger Archival Collection. We would be more than willing to pay to have all of the items copied, shipped etc.

Through a number of resources the Museum has located rare video footage, audio interviews and contacted over two dozen Air Force and Army veterans who have pledged to advance our efforts. Air Force individuals who are on board include Dale Potter, Harry O'Beirne, Roy Boudreaux, Hal Salem, Thomas Story, Allison Brooks and many others. I also have secured the support of Charlie Company veterans, Martin Kroah and John Libs. The next step toward achieving our goal is organizing this new information into a coherent narrative that will accompany the Medal of Honor reconsideration package.

The strength of the narrative and entire reconsideration package will be built upon the statements of eyewitnesses, as well as, individuals who can comment on the climate and context of the events of April 1966. It is evident, as the project's support group prepares to move forward toward its next set of goals, that the time has come to begin gathering concrete testimony. Within in the next month we would like to record these critical statements about Pitsenbarger and his actions.

Most significantly, this is an attempt to determine who will provide Pitsenbarger's cause with statements of support and recollections of the events. Nothing received by the Airmen Memorial Museum will be considered a final draft and everyone involved will have the opportunity to revise their statements before they are included in the final version of the Medal of Honor reconsideration package. I would like to have the package assembled by the end of the year and submit the application sometime in the Spring.

Statements should be less than one page in length, but certainly can be longer if the writer desires. If possible, a type-written statement would be the most useful format for the project. The statement should include, who you are, a simple description of what you know about the events and Pitsenbarger's role in them, how you knew Pitsenbarger (if you did) and felt about him and his actions. Finally, the statement should include your opinions about whether Pitsenbarger earned the Medal of Honor. Many have already addressed these difficult subjects with me by written correspondence or during phone conversations. Unfortunately, the requirements of the reconsideration process make these formal type of written statements a necessity.

For those who would rather not make a personal statement of support please inform us of this decision. If you only would consider signing a group letter to be submitted with the reconsideration package please inform us of this preference. If you have any further contacts or new information that should be included in the package, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thanks once again for your time and commitment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Parker Hayes Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

W. Parker Hayes Jr.
Curator and Director of Operations



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CMSgt. (Ret.) David E. Milsten, USAF
1303 Dolphin Street
Orange Park, FL 32073

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CMSgt. Sandra Williams
Vice Commandant, College for Enlisted PME

Dear Sir,

Hello from the Airmen Memorial Museum. I hope you enjoyed the holidays. I recently received word from my boss, CMSgt. (Ret.) James Staton, that the climate at the Pentagon is receptive toward a Medal of Honor proposal for Pits. We must act quickly.

I know the holidays were very busy and you probably have not had time to write your statement. We are entering the "now or never" stage in this undertaking. Not only might the Pentagon's window of opportunity close but Pitsenbarger's father, Frank, does not deserve to wait another year for recognition of his son's deeds.

I will need all statements of support by February 5, 1999, to include them in the Medal of Honor proposal submitted to our contacts in the Pentagon. I was also hoping you might be able to forward copies of the materials we spoke about previously relating to the event.

I only have one completed statement of support in the proposal binder and I'll need at least ten to make the package formidable. Needless to say, your statement is crucial to this project. If you don't have access to a computer or typewriter, write out your statement by hand. Our staff will type it and forward it back to you for

signature and approval. Please let me know if there is anything delaying the process I can be assistance with. Please call me on the Museum's 1-800 number ASAP.

Sincerely,

W. Parker Hayes Jr., Curator and Director of Operations

W. Parker Hayes Jr.
Airman Memorial Museum
5211 Auth Road
Suitland, Maryland 20746

25 January 1999

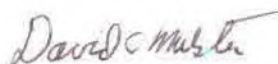
Dear Mr. Hayes,

Thank you for sending me your museum's publication about Bill and the copy of the 11 April 66 mission narrative report. They greatly assisted in refreshing my memory of those events 33 years ago.

I am having a difficult time expressing my thoughts on the issue of Bill's Medal of Honor. Maj Nadler, Det 6's Operations Officer, informed me shortly after Bill's death that the Army was submitting Bill for the Medal of Honor, but I hadn't heard anything more regarding this when I left Vietnam in June 66. I was present for Bill's posthumous Air Force Cross presentation, but no mention was made by anyone there of a Medal of Honor recommendation. Until hearing otherwise from you, I had assumed that the Army never submitted the request. I have observed many decoration requests for my fellow pararescuemen (and myself) either get downgraded or simply disappear. One one occasion, my teammate and I parachuted to a Norwegian tanker between Iceland and Norway during a winter storm (high winds and seas, limited visibility, and low ceiling), managed to get aboard the ship, saved two seamen and treated several others (boiler explosion), and had our Airmen's Medal recommendation downgraded to Air Force Commendation Medals, the same award the rest of the HC-130 crew received for being on the mission. I didn't feel too badly about the medal being downgraded since Iceland presented my teammate and me with the Icelandic Lifesaving Award, and the Air Force Association flew me to their annual convention to award me the AFA's Citation of Honor for being the PJ team leader on the mission, but my team mate wasn't very happy about the Air Force's action.

I will submit my statement of support, but need a few more days to make sure I have given it my best effort. Enclosed are the three slides taken during the 11 April mission along with some others from my pararescue collection with a brief narrative on each slide. Also enclosed are copies of the interview with Navarro and O'Beirn, the letter between the Bien Hoa Office of Information and Mr Vandegrift, the Air Rescue Service Historian, and some general thoughts I have about our rescue operations in Vietnam. This information is for your background knowledge and I hope I haven't overdone it. Please make any use you can of the slides. I have many more of Air Rescue/Pararescue if you ever need PJ photos.

Sincerely,


David E. Milsten, CMSgt (Ret)
1303 Dolphin Street
Orange Park, Florida 32073

Statement provided to the Airman Memorial Museum by CMSgt (Ret) David E. Milsten regarding Det 6, 38 ARRS rescue operation on 11 April 1966

I would like to provide some general information about myself and Det 6's rescue operations before discussing the 11 April mission. I arrived at Det 6 in October 65, about one year after Air Rescue Service began operations at Bien Hoa AB and two or three months after Bill arrived. At this time, I has been in the Air Force for eight years, five years as a survival instructor at Stead AFB, Nevada and three years as a pararescueman with tours at Guam and Patrick AFB, Florida before volunteering for duty in Vietnam. After Vietnam, I completed eight more assignments as a PJ and retired after my final assignment as Chief of Pararescue in 1986.

Det 6's primary mission was local base rescue (crash rescue/ firefighting) and the rescue of downed pilots/aircrew members. We flew frequent crash rescue sorties, sometimes as many as five or more a day. Off base rescue missions were far less frequent since Army helicopters would usually get to the downed pilots before our helicopters could arrive on scene. We designated one HH43 aircrew primary alert for crash rescue missions and another HH43 aircrew as secondary alert for off base missions, which we always flew with two helicopters.

Our HH-43F helicopters were equipped with armor plating and a 210 foot rescue hoist, and our helicopters were the only ones in our theater of operations available for hoist recoveries. The armor plating saved several of our crewmembers, but it did limit our operating capability.

We occasionally were requested by the Army through the Rescue Coordination Center in Siagon to fly missions to recover special forces teams and Army casualties who were in the jungle and couldn't be picked up by Army helicopters. Most of these missions involved the 173rd Airborne and First Infantry Divisions and were usually for one or two casualties. We would use the primary alert helicopter to make the pickup while the backup alert helicopter provided top cover. Air Force A1s or Army UH-1 gunships always escorted us on these casualty recovery missions to provide fire support. We were not called in unless the casualties were critically injured and our biggest problem with these missions was that we rarely received accurate information regarding the situation on the ground, especially on how secure the area was. We occasionally received ground fire while in a hover directly over the friendly personnel. Since we usually encountered thick jungle canopy, the enemy troops had to be in the trees almost over the friendly forces to be able to hit us. Another major problem was that we didn't have direct communication with the units on the ground, and information was usually relayed through the on scene forward air controller, who could talk to both the troops on the ground and to our helicopters.

The decision to send the pararescueman to the ground on these Army pickups was always a difficult one to make. We were aware that there were no guarantees on getting the PJ back to the helicopter once he was on the ground. The HH-43 cabin was small and it was difficult to maneuver a loaded stokes litter into the cabin, even with both the PJ and HM working together. With single pickups, we could send the PJ down on the forest penetrator seat to bring the casualty back up with him or place the casualty in the stokes litter and then follow him back up

to the helicopter. With multiple pickups, it was almost necessary for the PJ to remain aboard to assist the HM and treat the casualties.

The Det 6 crewmembers held many discussions on the best way to work these pickups. The pilots and HMs preferred to keep the PJs aboard to assist with the loading and to provide medical care enroute to the field hospitals. The PJs were always eager to go down the hoist to provide any assistance we could, but we were aware of the problems this caused for the HM in making the pickups without help in the cabin and of the risks we were taking. We also held discussions on accepting these Army casualty recovery missions. Some of our crewmembers (not the PJ's) felt that our mission was to support Air Force operations and we weren't trained or manned to support Army casualty recovery operations. The PJs, especially A1C Pitsenbarger, believed our mission was to help our fighting forces in any way we could.

There were many factors that made the PJs such a valuable asset for these rescue operations. The RS for our crew position stood for rescue specialist, and almost all of our training, both during our qualification training and after being assigned to the operational teams, involved surface rescue operations. The PJs were trained to be able to handle themselves and the survivors in their care in almost any situation they might encounter. Their parachuting, mountain climbing, survival, and SCUBA training conditioned them to function while under extreme stress, and the stress of being under fire in combat wasn't much different from the stresses they had already been exposed to. Some of the earlier rescue units attempted to operate using regular AF medics instead of PJs and sometimes found they had just another survivor on the ground rather than someone able to function while under stress.

I was the pararescueman on the primary rescue aircraft on 11 April 1966. My crew had been scrambled to provide crash rescue support for a F-100 returning with battle damage and had just returned to the flight line when we were notified by the rescue center that the Army had several casualties 33 miles southeast of Bien Hoa. We reconfigured our helicopter (Pedro 97) for an off base pickup mission and took off with the back up helicopter (Pedro 73) a few minutes after notification. The Air Force FAC vectored us into the area and the Army unit on the ground marked their location with a smoke grenade. The unit on the ground was in a small hole surrounded by dense jungle, and I noticed some downed trees in the hole, which were either knocked down by artillery or by the ground troops. We went into a high hover slightly below the tops of the trees with the rotor tips almost touching the trees and lowered our stokes litter. The troops on the ground placed the first casualty in the litter without any problems and we retrieved him into our aircraft. My helicopter moved up and out of the hole to let Pedro 73 go in, and I transferred the casualty from the stokes litter to our folding litter, which freed our stokes for another pickup. We moved back in as soon as Pedro 73 made their pickup and made our second litter pickup. I had expected Pedro 73 to go back in for their second pickup, but they departed with us to transfer the casualties to an Army forward operating base about eight miles away. I am not sure if they had experienced difficulty with their pickup or were leaving with us since we hadn't refueled before leaving Bien Hoa and were low on fuel.

We landed at the Army forward base at Binh Ba, transferred the three casualties, and my helicopter moved to a rubber fuel bladder fuel dump to refuel. The HM, A1C Thomas C. Story,

and I refueled our helicopter while our pilots conferred with the Pedro 73 pilots (Maj Kessler on Pedro 73 was the Det 6 commander) before Pedro 73 went back to the pickup area. I had a brief time to talk to A1C Pitsenbarger before they departed, but he didn't say anything about going down to the ground.

My crew arrived back at the pickup point just as Pedro 73 had completed a litter pickup. They departed with their casualty and as we went into the hole, I was notified by my pilot that A1C Pitsenbarger was on the ground. We sent our stokes litter down and I watched from the rear of the helicopter as Bill loaded a casualty into the litter, which we recovered. Bill signaled that he wanted us to send our forest penetrator down instead of the litter, which we did and he placed two ambulatory casualties on the seat. We recovered them and departed for Binh Ba since we didn't have room for any more casualties. At this point, my crew had recovered five casualties and Pedro 73 had recovered two.

Pedro 73 was refueling when we landed at Bihn Ba. We unloaded our casualties and immediately took off and headed back to the pickup point. We weren't sure how many casualties were left, but I assumed that there were probably only two or three based on the information we had been given before departing Bien Hoa. While enroute to the pickup point, we were informed by the FAC that the ground unit was under heavy small arms and mortar fire. The firing stopped as we approached the area, so we went in and made two more litter pickups. I took the time to take three photos while Tom was operating the hoist on the first of these pickups, two of Bill and the troops on the ground and one of A1C Story working the hoist. As the litter approached our helicopter, I had to help Tom with the litter and work on the casualties, so couldn't take any more pictures. Before we left, I requested that Bill return to Pedro 73 when it went in on its next pickup.

Pedro 73 arrived as we completed the second litter pickup. We moved out of the hole and Pedro 73 went in to make more pickups and hopefully get Bill back. I wasn't sure how many casualties were left, but they must have sustained more during the fire fight while Bill was on the ground. We heard Pedro 73 say they were receiving ground fire, flew to Binh Ba to drop off our casualties, and flew back to pick up the Pedro 73 crew if they went down. We escorted them as they struggled back to Binh Ba and immediately returned to the pickup point to get Bill back. We were not allowed to go back in since the ground unit was in a heavy fire fight with enemy troops. We were joined by Pedro 46, a HH-43B from a crash rescue unit in Saigon. We remained in the area until well after dark, and were finally directed to return to our units since further pickups were not possible. We were informed that A1C Pitsenbarger and the remaining casualties were moving to another pickup area and that they would be recovered by Army helicopters in the morning.

We returned to the Bien Hoa and continued to monitor the situation for the rest of the night. Pedro 97 returned in the morning with a new crew, and were joined by Pedro 91, a HH-43F from Det 10, another combat rescue unit. They were informed by Army personnel on the ground that A1C Pitsenbargaer has been killed around dark during the fire fight.

A1C Bill Pitsenbarger was one of the most capable PJs I have ever worked with and I am convinced that he was a real hero who willingly placed his own life at risk to save the lives of his fellow American fighting men. He had been down on the ground on many occasions before this and knew he was risking his life every time he went down. From the eyewitness reports of Company C survivors, Bill constantly exposed himself to enemy fire while treating the wounded and recovering weapons and ammunition for troops who had run out of ammunition. The Army must have been convinced about Bill's heroism, for it was highly unusual for an Army commander to recommend the Congressional Medal of Honor for an Air Force enlisted man. The Army would have had a much better understanding of Bill's heroic actions than the Air Force. I sincerely hope the Air Force corrects the error it made when Bill's Medal of Honor was downgraded to an Air Force Cross.

End of Statement

25 January 1999



Air Force Sergeants Association

International Headquarters, P.O. Box 50, Temple Hills MD 20757-0050 • Phone: (301) 899-3500

February 1, 1999

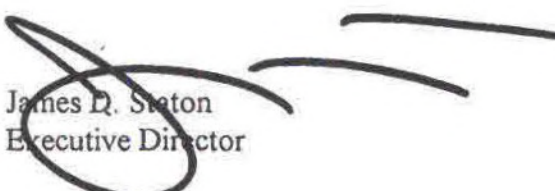
To Whom It May Concern,

In April 1998, a group approached the Air Force Sergeants Association requesting AFSA join them in an attempt to upgrade A1C William H. Pitsenbarger's posthumous Air Force Cross decoration to a Medal of Honor. SMSgt. Paul Miller, a Pararescue specialist assigned to the USAF Special Operations Division, Pentagon and a member of the group, stated that he and his spouse, MSgt. Sandra Miller, were performing limited research concerning Pitsenbarger for approximately two years and needed additional resources. Sergeant Miller had become interested in the possibility of an upgrade after reading an article in a 1972 *Airman* magazine issue and listening to a speech by John Levitow, a Medal of Honor recipient.

I quickly offered the services and resources of AFSA and its affiliate, the Airmen Memorial Museum. Contained within this package are the results of our efforts and Sergeant Miller's initiative.

I request that the accumulated documentation pertaining to A1C Pitsenbarger be reviewed and the necessary steps be taken to award the Medal of Honor to A1C William H. Pitsenbarger.

Sincerely,


James D. Steton
Executive Director



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1303 Dolphin Street
Orange Park, FL 32073

2/8/99

Dear Sir,

Hello. I got your fax on Saturday and placed it in the Medal of Honor package along with many of the photographs you loaned to us. I'll be watching the mail for your signed statement. It will replace the fax version in the package as soon as it arrives.

Mr. Staton, the AMM's Executive Director, took a copy of the package to the Pentagon this morning for a briefing on Pitsenbarger and the Medal of Honor recommendation. The ball is rolling...

Enclosed you will find all of your slides, etc. I kept the slide narration, assuming that you have a copy. Thanks for loaning everything and completing a statement, your assistance has proved invaluable in the past two weeks. I will keep you updated on the project's progress. Don't hesitate to call if there is anything I can do. Thanks again.

Sincerely,

W. Parker Hayes Jr.
Curator and Director of Operations