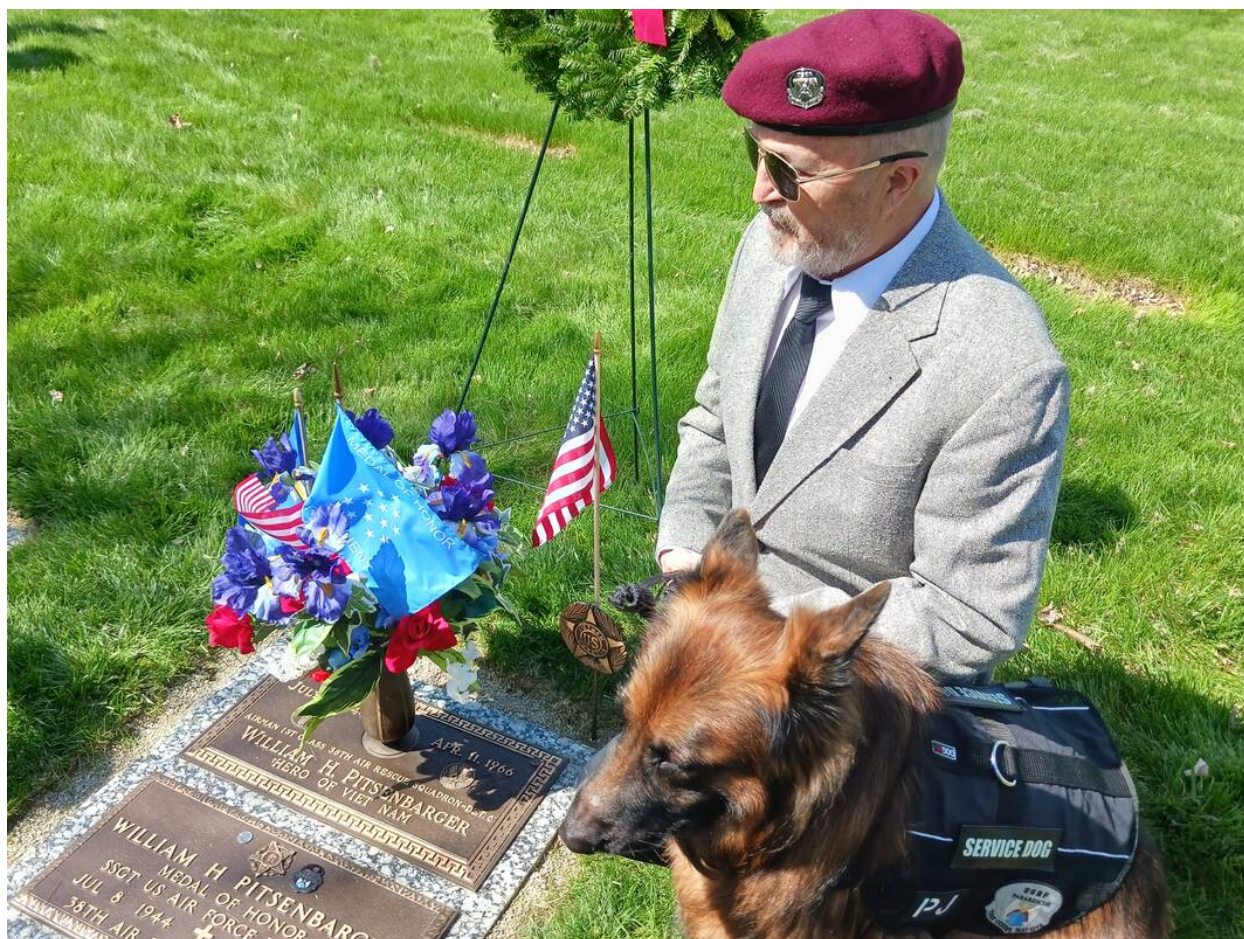


[Pitsenbarger's heroism recognized in Covington ceremony](#)

By Kathleen Leese April 16, 2026 For Miami Valley Today



Pararescue veteran Jim Morris kneels by the grave of SSgt William Pitsenbarger, alongside his service dog, T-Bone, following a ceremony to honor Pitsenbarger at Miami Memorial Park in Covington on Saturday, April 11, 2026

COVINGTON — Under bright blue skies, Pararescue Veterans, known as PJ's, a U.S. Air Force official, family members and residents came together at Miami Memorial Park in Covington on Saturday, April 11, to honor the life of a 21 year-old young man who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam to save the lives of his fellow soldiers 60 years earlier on the same date.

Staff Sgt. William Pitsenbarger would become a Medal of Honor recipient after the son of Piqua residents William and Irene Pitsenbarger stayed in a firefight to help save the lives of soldiers around him. According to a program distributed to guests at one of the events earlier in the day, Pitsenbarger spent approximately 12 hours caring for those soldiers until it cost him his life, refusing to leave them behind.

The event, which was one of four honoring Pitsenbarger over the weekend, included remarks by Colonel Dustin Richards, Commander of the 88th Air Base Wing at Wright Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB), who spoke about Pitsenbarger's sacrifice. "I think about what sacrifice really means...as we gather at his final resting place. A true American hero, a son of Ohio. We throw the term sacrifice around a lot, we who are currently serving in the military, we talk a lot about sacrifice...we have folks who are going into harm's way. We see that in this last month and a half, as we've seen combat operations in Iran. We've sent folks into some of the most perilous situations that we've seen over the last 20 or 30 years and our pararescue members (like those) here...they were called into action in the last week and a half to bring home a downed officer from an F15."

Richards continued, "We go back...30 plus years, we look at Desert Storm... and the sacrifices made by those people and it was a nation that was fully supportive...(we) free Kuwait from an invasion force from Saddam Hussein and do what was required. 10 years later, the sacrifice was required to go to Afghanistan and then to Iraq. The nation was in full support. When I go back and look at the Vietnam era, at Wright-Patt, we get to greet members who come back from Honor Flight, who get to go to D.C. and see the memorials and they come off the plane and we welcome them, we give them the full respect and the full devotion that they deserve, that they did not have 60 years ago."

"The sacrifices that you all gave who would do those jobs, knowing that the nation was not behind you, knowing that people were not necessarily going to welcome you home, what you did for the people to your left and the people to your right was awe-inspiring. Then you go even further to the ultimate sacrifice, the last full measure of devotion, and that quote comes from Abraham Lincoln," Richards explained, speaking about Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. "He talked about the last full measure of devotion and he phrased it as devotion to a cause...Staff Sgt. Pitsenbarger was not giving the last full measure because of the war in Vietnam or because of what the nation was trying to do...he was doing it as he saw people in harm's way on the ground who needed his support and he went down to take care of that because he knew those men needed him."

Richards said, "for him (Pitsenbarger) to do that for people he didn't know, they were not basic trainees together, they were not working together, they were not constantly seeing each other...he went down because he saw people in need and then when he was on the ground, he waved off the helicopter and said, 'no, they need me here,' that others may live...(Those are) the watch words of the Pararescue community, that others may live and for him to make that sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice, is something that is powerful to reflect on, humbling to reflect on...and you wonder if you would be able to do the same thing in his shoes at that time."

“Staff Sgt. Pitsenbarger is not just recognized here locally where he is from, but it’s around the entire Air Force.” Richards named various U.S. Air Force bases where Pitsenbarger’s story is known, including “our dining facilities at WPAFB, all are named for William Pitsenbarger.” Richards said there is a display that “shows his contributions, what he did, what he did on that day and I think as long as we have people who are educating our airmen...his story will endure...it will live on.”

“We heard today from Ms. (Kathleen) Ferguson about the (new) Pitsenbarger award that is (going to be) given (The Last Full Measure Award) to our Community College of the Air Force graduates, among our brightest...our best enlisted airmen who are going to continue to grow. The Last Full Measure Award is a new award that recognizes the best of the best. I think that award is going to do so much to embody the selflessness, the watchword of Staff Sgt. Pitsenbarger’s life,” Richards noted.

Richards asked those present to think about Pitsenbarger’s sacrifice. “As we leave...today, I want you all to remember that sacrifice of those who have served before, who we would not be anywhere near where we are today without their sacrifice, those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in times like Vietnam. Those who gave the sacrifice just recently from Ohio...who were killed when their plane crashed in an accident in Iran. They are part of that long blue line of airmen who have given the ultimate sacrifice.” Richards named the three airmen, including Capt. Seth Koval of Stoutsville, Ohio; Capt. Curtis Angst and Tech Sgt. Tyler Simmons, both of Columbus.

Richards encouraged those in attendance to make sure the younger generations continue to learn about military heroes like Pitsenbarger as well as others who have made the ultimate sacrifice. “Pass on what you’ve heard to our newest generation so they keep learning the stories.”

Following his talk, Richards assisted two members of the family in placing a wreath on Pitsenbarger’s grave.

A 21-gun salute by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4235 was followed by taps that were played by Mike Ullery.

[Wright Memorial Chapter to honor Pitsenbarger](#)

PIQUA — The Wright Memorial Chapter of the Air & Space Forces Association, in partnership with the city of Piqua, will host a public weekend of remembrance on April 10–11, 2026, honoring Staff Sergeant William H. Pitsenbarger, an Ohio native and U.S. Air Force Pararescueman whose extraordinary heroism during the Vietnam War saved more than 60 soldiers.

On April 11, 1966, then Airman First Class Pitsenbarger volunteered to descend into an active combat zone near Cam My, Vietnam, to rescue wounded soldiers under intense enemy fire. Refusing evacuation despite grave danger, he continued aiding and defending the surrounded unit until he was mortally wounded.

For his actions, he was posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross, later upgraded to the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military decoration for valor. He was also posthumously promoted to Staff Sergeant. His story continues to inspire generations of Airmen and service members.

Born and raised near Piqua, and buried in nearby Covington, SSgt Pitsenbarger remains one of the Miami Valley's most revered military heroes.

"The 60th anniversary of Staff Sergeant William H. Pitsenbarger's sacrifice is more than a remembrance of a single heroic act — it is a tribute to the enduring values of courage, selflessness, and devotion to others that define our Air and Space Forces and our nation," said.

Carl "Shof" Shofner, Vice President of Education for the Air & Space Forces Association's Wright Memorial Chapter. "By gathering in the community where he was born and laid to rest, we honor not only the lives he saved that day in Vietnam, but the generations of service members who continue to draw inspiration from his example."

Commemorative Events

Friday, April 10: Public Film Screening – 7 p.m.

A free public screening of *The Last Full Measure*, the feature film inspired by Pitsenbarger's story, will be held at the Cinemark Theater in Piqua, 1020 Garbry Rd, Piqua, Ohio. Or Piqua High School, 1 Indian Trail Suite 12A, Piqua, Ohio.

Special guests are expected to include several of the "Mud Soldiers" who served alongside Pitsenbarger, including some whose lives he saved.

Saturday, April 11: Public Memorial Ceremonies Morning Ceremony — Pitsenbarger Park, 1421 South St. at approximately 9:30 a.m.

The ceremony will include an American flag skydive, National Anthem performance, and keynote remarks and tributes from military, civic, and government leaders at the statue honoring SSgt Pitsenbarger. Graveside Ceremony — Miami Memorial Cemetery, 7875 N Crescent Rd, Covington, at approximately 11 a.m.

A solemn tribute will follow featuring a wreath-laying ceremony, 21-gun salute, Taps, and a missing-man flyover.