

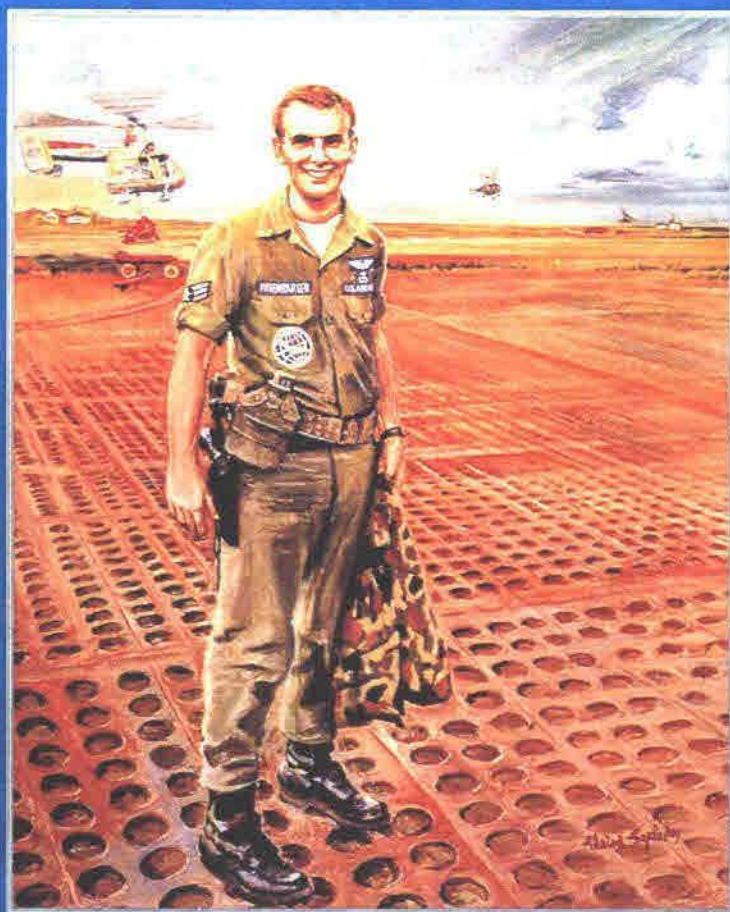


The Airmen Heritage Series

The Airmen Memorial Museum

WILLIAM H. PITSENBARGER

AIR FORCE ENLISTED HERO



"SO THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE"

WILLIAM H. PITSENBARGER



A2C William H. Pitsenbarger in Vietnam
standing outside an HH-43 helicopter, circa 1965.
Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

THIRD ENLISTED AIR FORCE CROSS RECIPIENT

by
William I. Chivalette
and
W. Parker Hayes, Jr.

Airmen Memorial Museum

Among the volumes of enlisted Air Force history are chronicles devoted to those airmen who gave their lives to save others. When we memorialize these heroes, and recount their deeds, it is often difficult to comprehend the magnitude of their actions. William H. Pitsenbarger was one such hero. To fully grasp his sacrifice, it is important to trace his story from small town beginnings to the steamy jungles of South Vietnam.

The only child of Frank and Irene Pitsenbarger, William was born on July 8, 1944 in rural Piqua, Ohio. He was raised to honor traditional American values: a sense of community, honesty, self-confidence and integrity. Young Pitsenbarger first tested these values in the athletic contests of his carefree youth. Like many young men, he knew there were greater challenges in life than high school. He dreamed of, "doing some-

thing with himself... of making his mark," recounts his father.

When Pitsenbarger was 17 he decided to quit school, leave Piqua and join the Green Berets. "He wanted to go where the action was," his father later related. But the wisdom and persuasive powers of his parents prevailed and he waited until high school graduation, in 1962, to join the Air Force.

After basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, the Air Force assigned Bill to the Security Police career field. He was not satisfied with their decision and volunteered to join Air Force Pararescue. Due to the Pararescue training schedule, Bill did not go home for traditional post-basic training leave.

Pararescue volunteers are highly trained in four specific skills. They are scuba qualified by the Navy, trained in all phases of parachute work by the Army, and qualified as medical technicians, as well as, survival specialists by the Air Force.

The Air Force first sent Airman Pitsenbarger to the survival school at Stead AFB, Nevada. This was the first leg of the most rigorous training program the Air Force offered. The four week course was divided into two halves. The first half covered classroom theory. The second half put theory into practice. Focussing on escape and evasion, the course taught students what to do in the event their aircraft was downed in enemy territory. Most importantly, they were given tools to help them survive if captured as prisoners of war.

In the classroom students gained knowledge concerning evaluation of terrain, eluding enemy forces, movement at night, concealment, the use of the parachute for clothing and the edibility of plants and animals. Further classes

provided psychological preparation for the possibility of imprisonment in a P.O.W. camp. Students learned a code of conduct designed to help them resist interrogation and cope with extreme solitude.

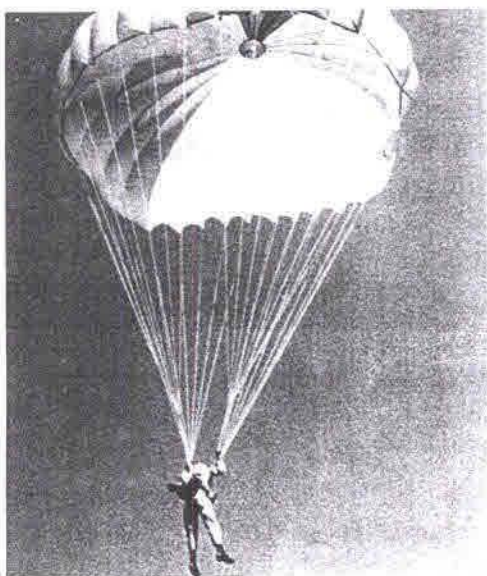
The second half of the grueling course required each student be confined in a recreated P.O.W. camp. Pitsenbarger and his classmates spent the next week in 4' x 4' cells and 2' x 2' x 10' deep pits filled with water. Students in the cages were subjected to daily interrogation and periodically doused with water during the cold desert night. The pits tested stamina as occupants were left to tread water for several hours with a lid on the pit opening. They were also placed into cramped boxes and stacked on one another for long periods of time. To make matters worse, an informer was placed in the camp to keep them off guard and create distrust in the unit. Although only a limited recreation of the actual P.O.W. experience, Pitsenbarger's ordeal prepared him for some of



William H. Pitsenbarger in full scuba gear preparing to exit an aircraft, April 24, 1963.
Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

the dangers he potentially faced in Vietnam.

The fourth and final week was perhaps the most arduous component of the training. The eight day test involved a 60 mile journey through the Sierra Mountains at elevations of 10,000 feet and higher, chased by "enemy forces". If captured once, the students failed the course. If captured twice, they were removed from the pararescue field. At the outset nine students were given one live rabbit to split for food, a sleeping bag and

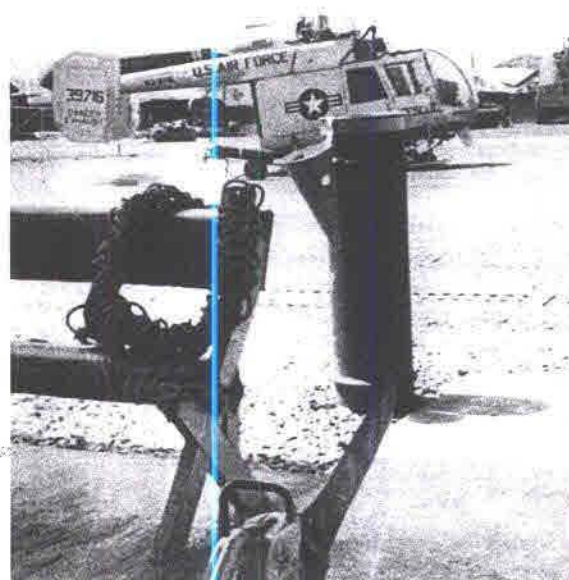


William H. Pitsenbarger parachuting at Hamilton Air Force Base, California, February 11, 1965.
Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

a sketchy map that traversed rivers, mountain passes, and thousand foot climbs. Broken into groups of three, they set out on their own. Despite weight loss and severely diminished constitution, Pitsenbarger cleared the final hurdle and passed the difficult course.

After graduation, Pitsenbarger attended the three week U.S. Army Infantry "Jump" School, at Fort Benning, Georgia. Due to the after-effects of survival training at Stead AFB and the

Georgia summer heat Bill did not pass the physical fitness test required by the school. But he was persistent and spent an extra week building his health until he was strong enough to meet the minimum chin-up requirement wearing a full jump pack. Training at "Jump" school concentrates on building physical conditioning. Every day began with an early morning five mile run while watchful instructors provided ample motivation for each trainee. There were also numerous exhausting sessions requiring hours of sit-



HH-43 #39716 on the ramp at Bien Hoa AB, Vietnam with special "tree removal" gear.
Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

ups and push-ups. The essential skill everyone had to master was, of course, jumping out of airplanes. Using wooden planes, Pitsenbarger and his classmates began with drills explaining proper jump and landing techniques. On the third and final week Pitsenbarger made five live jumps, one in full combat gear. He graduated from the Airborne Course on June 14, 1963.

Bill's motivation deepened as his training became more intensive. After



William H. Pitsenbarger donning scuba gear with the help of an A3C, circa 1965. Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

"jump school" he attended the Rescue and Survival Technician's Medical Course at Gunter AFB, Alabama. The course provided him with the basic medical knowledge required to perform his pararescue duties. He graduated on July 17, 1963, and continued on to the U.S. Naval School of Underwater Swimmers, "scuba school", at the U.S. Naval Station at Key West, Florida.

The scuba school tested Pitsenbarger's resolve for four weeks. It did not take long for the course to get to the business at hand. In the very first week Pitsenbarger, with SCUBA gear and a compass, was taken a mile from shore, dropped off, and ordered to swim underwater to an exact location on the beach. After succeeding, he did it again at night. By the third week students began explosives training, including the use of primer cords and satchel charges. As training continued the drop off point for daily swims to the shore was farther away. When the swimmers reached a

prescribed depth of forty feet they were joined by meracing schools of Barracuda. In the final test before graduation, students had to successfully escape from a mock submarine. They were required to swim out of a diving bell with only a breath of air and ascend to the surface from a depth of 130 feet. Along the way instructors helped the students expel air by striking them in the stomach. When the student surfaced all of the pressure on the body was released causing intense pain and often bleeding from the nose and mouth. The challenging nature of the course led to a forty percent drop out rate. However, Pitsenbarger qualified as a U.S. Navy Scuba Diver on August 30, 1963.

After completing demanding training at these three specialized schools, Pitsenbarger's education still was not complete. A3C Pitsenbarger attended Air Rescue Service Transition "Tree Jump" Training, at Eglin AFB, Florida. Tree jump training was critical to the pararescue field as often there is no choice concerning the insertion point. During the course there are three "tree jumps" necessitating the pararescue trainee to wear a heavy, tough canvas suit specially constructed to protect the parachutist jumping into dense forests. They are taught how to lower themselves and their gear from heights of fifty feet, using nothing more than a length of rope. After completing the final leg of his training Bill Pitsenbarger finally went home on leave prior to reporting to Hamilton AFB, California.

Pitsenbarger tested his pararescue skills on a high profile mission, while stationed at Hamilton AFB. He and pararescuer Sergeant Donaldson were dispatched to find two hunters lost in the rugged Sierra Mountains without any food

or ammunition. They located the hunters and repelled down a cliff face to reach them because the terrain was inaccessible by helicopter. According to Bill's father, as the two pararescuers cut a path down the mountain, they came face to face with an equally determined bear. Pitsenbarger reacted instantly with confidence and courage, charging toward the bear and yelling as if enraged. Inwardly he hoped the bear would turn and flee. His strategy worked. The frightened bear performed an about face, and fled from the crazed airman. San Francisco television stations covered the rescue on the evening news. Pitsenbarger's recollections of the rescue paint the serious incident in a humorous light rather than a heroic one. This outlook typified his desire to be closer to combat, saving servicemen instead of hunters.

While at Hamilton AFB, Bill received orders to ship out to Okinawa. Unhappy with the assignment, he requested a change of orders to Vietnam. After approval of the request, he was sent to Tropical Survival School at Albrook, AFB, Panama Canal Zone. During this two week long course, Pitsenbarger learned how to survive the unique conditions of the jungle. One of the greatest challenges was simply to stay dry during torrential rains. Pitsenbarger learned how to construct a banana tree leaf shelter, which raised the occupant off of the wet ground and also provided protection from snakes searching for the warmth of a human body. The students also learned about food sources in the jungle including the preparation of monkey, snake and the multiple uses of bamboo.

Finally Bill attended the fire-fighters course for the HH-43 helicopter at Stead AFB, Nevada. After finalizing his combat training and preparing for the

harsh realities of war in Southeast Asia, Pitsenbarger returned home. Leaving Piqua, Ohio for the last time he did not look back. Astute judges of their own son's capacity for bravery and courage, his parents quietly agreed they would never see him alive again.

In Vietnam, Bill Pitsenbarger was finally in his element. He found wartime military life exciting, demanding and difficult all at once. Although he never complained, respite from combat missions was infrequent. On occasion his duties did provide him with unique experiences. One particular duty took place when he served on the helicopter which took singer Mary Martin from Tan Son Nhut Air Base to Bien Hoa.

According to members of his squadron, Bill enjoyed participating in flights to treat patients at a leper colony in Viet Cong controlled territory near Bien Hoa. Bill's commander Major Maurice G. Kessler, called Airman Pitsenbarger "One of a special breed. Alert and always ready to go on any mission. He was the cheerful type and was always there when needed. He was a definite morale booster to the rescue people."

Airman First Class Pitsenbarger was no stranger to peril. He flew into hostile territories on over 250 combat missions to rescue individuals in dire straits. On March 7, 1966, he volunteered to be lowered from a hovering helicopter into a burning mine field to rescue a South Vietnamese soldier. The soldier tripped an old French mine while attempting to put out a grass fire and horribly mangled his foot. The man was still conscious and no one present could figure out how to extract him. Pitsenbarger arrived and volunteered to assist with the emergency saying, "Put me on a penetrator and lower me down... I'll get



William H. Pitsenbarger with spider monkey Clyde P. Jinx, Bien Hoa, Vietnam, February, 1966. C/O William F. Pitsenbarger.



William H. Pitsenbarger in pararescue scuba gear at Hamilton AFB, California, May 27, 1964.
Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

this guy." Pararescue personnel thought that the prop wash from the helicopter might set off the old, unstable mines, but Bill was undaunted. The rescue was successful and he earned the Airman's Medal for his actions. Additionally, the South Vietnamese honored Bill with the Vietnam Medal of Military Merit and the Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Bronze Palm.

One particularly harrowing mission involved both Bill Pitsenbarger and A1C Henry J. O'Beirne. A U.S. observation aircraft crashed deep inside Viet Cong territory with two people on board. Detachment 6 of the 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron dispatched two helicopters, one with Pitsenbarger and the other with O'Beirne, to the crash site. Bill went into the jungle searching for the missing officer by loudly calling the man's name. Considering their location, Bill made a target of himself by yelling. Disregarding his own safety, Pitsenbarger was determined to find the missing officer. Finally, the officer stepped out from behind a tree and approached Bill. He was dazed from the crash, but Bill managed to get him back to the relative safety of the chopper. Pitsenbarger and O'Beirne attempted to extract the body of the other man, a special forces officer, who did not survive the crash. The plane was entangled in heavy underbrush and it required they clear a significant area. The longer they stayed the greater the threat of discovery by the Viet Cong grew. They decided to pull out and return to Xoc Loc. Once there the special forces group insisted they return with the pararescuers to retrieve the body. Some provided cover while others assisted the pararescue personnel in clearing the undergrowth. Eventually, the body was recovered.

Bill Pitsenbarger's greatest challenge began to unfold on April 11, 1966, when at approximately 4:30 p.m., an urgent call for assistance was received by Det. 6 of the 38th ARRS. Three companies of the First U.S. Infantry Division, Second Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, were engaged in a searching sweep campaign code named Operation Abilene. The operation was a strategic move by their new commander, Major General William E. DePuy, that involved sending small units of American soldiers (the 2nd and 3rd brigades of the 1st Infantry division) through Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh provinces to search out and destroy Viet Cong units.

Charlie Company, of the First Infantry Division, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, normally consisted of four platoons of infantry, 291 men strong, however, 157 men were out of action which left only 134 soldiers for the operation. The company had pushed its way into an area 45 miles east of Saigon and 12 miles west of the resort area of



A2C William H. Pitsenbarger with M-16 rifle outside an HH-43, Bien Hoa, Vietnam, circa 1965.
Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

Vung Tau. They were searching for a powerful first-line Viet Cong battalion of 400 troops and a backup force of women and children, triple the size of depleted Charlie Company.

Alpha, Bravo and Charlie Companies began the operation together for mutual support. From an aerial view, an American forward air controller (FAC) noticed that Charlie Company began to move away from Alpha and Bravo due to the terrain. Throughout the day Charlie Company took sporadic fire from hit-and-run Viet Cong snipers. According to 1st Lt. John Wells Libs, leader of Charlie Company's 2nd Platoon, it appeared the Viet Cong were trying to draw them into a prepared killing zone. Based on the location of the sniper fire, Lt. Libs knew the Viet Cong had riflemen deployed at the front and rear of the company and were trying to surround and cut them off. To save themselves and break the Viet Cong ambush, Charlie Company formed a circle and covered the area outside the circle with interlocking (overlapping) fire.

The stakes got higher as Viet Cong small arms and mortar fire from surrounding cover abruptly turned the peaceful jungle into a roaring firestorm. The barrage came from all sides and the men of Charlie Company found themselves cut off from their supporting units. Casualties mounted as the situation turned from unstable to precarious.

Air Force Detachment 6 had two HH-43F and one HH-43B helicopters available. Two of the choppers were on alert status along with a pararescuer assigned to each chopper. The HH-43 was a Kaman helicopter with twin blades. It resembled an egg-beater with a hoist attached to it. Although primarily designed to put out fires, it was armor-plated with a crew of four airmen on board. Up



A2C Roy A. Boudreaux (left) & A1C William H. Pitsenbarger by an HH-43 at Bien Hoa, Vietnam, March 1966. C/O Roy A. Boudreaux.

front were the pilot and copilot, in the back was the mechanic and pararescuer. Its strength was in the vertical lifting power it possessed. Due to its small size the helicopter could only evacuate four patients sitting up very close together. However, if they had a litter patient, only two other passengers could be evacuated.

A normal four day duty rotation for the paramedics of Det. 6 consisted of 1st alert crew, 2nd alert crew, 3rd alert crew and an off day. Consequently, when the call came in to help Charlie Company the first two crews on call responded. Staff Sergeant (SSgt.) David E. Milsten was the primary paramedic on first alert status in the chopper named Pedro 97 and Pitsenbarger was on second alert status in the chopper named Pedro 73. Both rescue helicopters were dispatched immediately to help Charlie Company. Before they left however, Bill Pitsenbarger remarked to his friend and roommate Airman Second Class (A2C) Roy A. "Frenchy" Boudreaux, "I have a

bad feeling about this mission." Boudreaux said the ~~every~~ moment was the first time Bill ever expressed any misgivings about a mission.

The first alert helicopter, Pedro 97, went directly into the battle area, guided in by colored smoke from the ground party. They found an opening in the 150 foot trees, entered and flew down to trees at the 100 foot level and hovered. Below the 100 foot canopy dense brush grew to a height of 30 feet. The crew found a hole in the brush just large enough to lower a stokes litter, (a wire basket), through. The opening was so small the helicopter had to hover with the rotor blades within three to five feet of the trees on either side. Once in position, they lowered a bullet-shaped jungle penetrator, followed by the stokes litter down to the ground. Soldiers loaded the litter with a wounded man and Pedro 97 moved out. Pedro 73 moved in next with a stokes litter pick up. Then Pedro 97 returned making one more extraction as both helicopters proceeded to a field hospital at Binh Ba, about eight miles to the south. During initial operations the enemy did not fire at the helicopters. Pedro 97 refueled and Pedro 73 returned to make another pick up.

Pedro 73, was manned by Captain Harold D. Salem (pilot), Bill's commander Major Maurice G. Kessler (copilot), A1C Gerald C. Hammond (mechanic), and Bill Pitsenbarger (paramedic). The helicopter maneuvered over the hole in the trees, hovered and lowered the stokes litter to the ground. Charlie Company's situation was worsening and it became evident to Bill Pitsenbarger they needed help loading the litter. Pitsenbarger recommended that he personally should be lowered to the ground to help them. The pilot concurred and made the fateful decision to

lower him in. In these situations the para-rescuer can volunteer to take potentially hazardous actions but the burden of the decision is on the shoulders of the pilot. In most cases the pararescuers' opinion is highly regarded and acted upon.

Airman First Class Pitsenbarger signaled Airman First Class Gerald Hammond to release the steel cable that would lower him through the tree tops down to the smoking battlefield more than a hundred feet below.

Once Pitsenbarger released himself from the hoist he began to instruct ground personnel loading the litter. He 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. Pitsenbarger loaded up Pedro 73 which lifted out making room for Pedro 97 to drop in. He loaded it with one litter patient and two more on the forest penetrator and it left

for Binh Ba. With Bill's assistance the casualty evacuation process was effective despite intermittently heavy small arms and mortar fire at the pick-up point.

Each Huskie made three trips, rescuing nine wounded. When Bill's chopper returned they began lowering the stokes litter. When it reached approximately ten feet off the jungle floor, the Viet Cong opened up with automatic small arms fire on the hovering Husky, ripping seven holes in its engine. The

pilot cut the hoist, called "Ground Fire" and started to depart the area. Immediately after the chopper started its climb the rotor and engine RPMs could not be controlled. The throttle was jammed in the full open position. The pilot regained control of the helicopter and decided to try to make it to Binh Ba instead of landing in an unknown, hostile environment. As the Huskie struggled away under heavy fire, the stokes litter became entangled in the trees and had to be cut away from above. By flying the helicopter

nose tilted downward, Captain Salem managed to fly the unstable bird back to Binh Ba. A quick investigation of the aircraft revealed nine hits. The armor plating in the cabin successfully stopped two .30 caliber armor piercing rounds destined for the hoist operator. Pedro 97 returned to the pick up point where seven more known casualties and Airman Pitsenbarger remained. They

were told to orbit west of the pick up point because the ground forces were engaged in heavy enemy contact. Pedro 46 arrived also and was told to orbit. No more extractions could be made and the choppers were ordered to return to Bien Hoa. It was apparent any helicopter going in would be shot down.

This left Bill Pitsenbarger stranded in a hot combat area, swarming with Viet Cong forces. Normally pararescue personnel do not stay on the ground at a



A2C William H. Pitsenbarger on the ramp at Bien Hoa, Vietnam outside of an HH-43, circa 1965. Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

pick up site. They are lowered into situations strictly to instruct the ground party in the proper loading of the stokes litter and/or penetrator if they appear to be having problems. When this is completed they are hoisted back into the helicopter at the earliest opportunity.

After being refused permission to return and retrieve, Airman Pitsenbarger, his Air Force comrades were not aware that Charlie Company's fire fight had turned desperate. They were told by the Army that the action was over. Later that night, the Army reported they were moving out to a new position and a helicopter would drop Pitsenbarger off. Bill's pararescue unit was told they would not be needed, so they relaxed and joked about how Bill would return with a fantastic tale of winning the battle single-handedly.

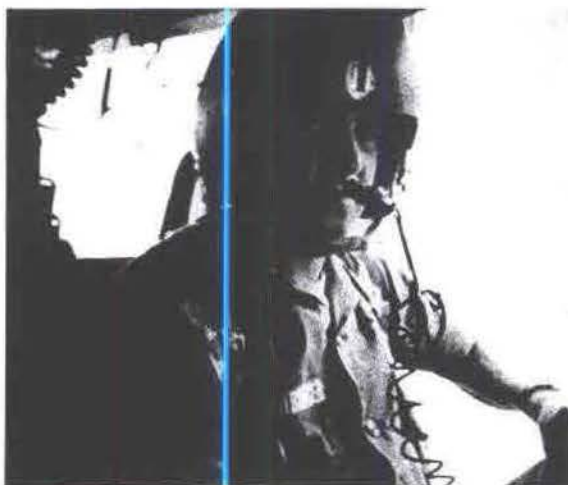
Shortly after rescue efforts were interrupted, the wounded pick-up area came under sniper and mortar fire. U.S. Army personnel at the scene decided to evacuate and began preparing the remaining injured for the trip out. Airman Pitsenbarger, while under fire, cut down saplings for litter poles and administered to the wounded.

The area Bill landed in was being hit hard by the VC. They were surrounded. Many of the Army soldiers were inexperienced and quickly used up their ammunition by firing their weapons on the full automatic setting. Bill realized without ammunition their chances of survival would be slim. By his own initiative Pitsenbarger decided to risk his life dodging bullets to bring the desperately needed ammunition back to the besieged soldiers. He covered the perimeter gathering rifles and ammunition from the killed and wounded, exposing himself constantly to fire. He ignored the bullets

flying around him and distributed ammunition to the men who were still able to fight. He even gave his own pistol to one of the wounded Army soldiers who was unable to hold a rifle.

When he finished the ammunition distribution he found a spot on the ground near squad leader, Sergeant Fred C. Navarro, and joined the fight. According to Sergeant Navarro, Bill must have been able to see the Viet Cong because he began returning semi-automatic fire. About fifteen minutes later, roughly 7:30, the firing stopped and Sergeant Navarro realized Bill Pitsenbarger had been killed.

After Bill was killed, it turned dark and Sergeant Navarro could see some of the Viet Cong drop out of the trees with fifty caliber machine guns. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese women and children were carrying off their injured and killing any wounded Americans they could find. The remaining Americans drew in tighter and called for close artillery strikes, hoping to survive the night. The barrage, five or six rounds a minute, continued from 8:30 at night until about 7:00 in the morning.



A1C William H. Pitsenbarger in an HH-43 at 1800 feet over Vietnam, Oct. 1, 1965. Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

The next morning, April 12, 1966, at 9:44 Both Detachment 6, Pedro 97, and Detachment 10, Pedro 91, responded to a call for help from the Army. Harry O'Beirne, Bill's close friend, flew in with Detachment 6's only operable chopper to replace him on the scene. When they arrived the Army was conducting an air strike one half mile south of the pick up point, so the choppers had to orbit to the west. After approximately 30 minutes the air strike was completed, but the Army still had to blast a landing zone for the choppers. O'Beirne finally reached the ground and was unaware that his friend was dead. His first concern was the evacuation and treatment of the wounded. He loaded three severely wounded troops immediately onto the chopper. Due to the height of the trees and limited amount of maneuvering room, Harry was left on the ground to give the Huskie enough power to lift off. With the chopper loaded and heading back, Harry headed into the jungle. An Army Captain stopped him and asked if he was a paramedic. He told him he was and the captain said, "I'm sorry but one of your buddies was killed last night. He's somewhere over there." That was the first time he heard of any harm coming to Bill. An Army soldier uncovered Bill's body for Harry. Harry found Bill had been shot four times. Based on the wounds, Harry reasoned Bill Pitsenbarger continued to aid the soldiers until he received one of the two wounds that killed him. Harry, angry and hurt, began cutting away Bill's gear. The soldier stopped him, assisted removing the gear and then helped carry Bill back to the clearing where they were evacuating the bodies to Saigon. O'Beirne continued administering to the wounded at the landing zone. Sergeant Navarro told Harry about Bill's heroics and later, a private came looking



Henry J. O'beirne flying the pararescue position of an HH-43 Huskie over Vietnam, August 11, 1965. Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

for him and led him to Lt. Crowe. Lieutenant Crowe, 3rd platoon leader, was shot four times and grievously wounded. He survived by playing dead when the Vietnamese women came through the night before. He wanted to make sure that the Air Force heard about Bill's actions. According to Army reports Charlie Company suffered 106 wounded or killed soldiers out of their original 134 men. That made their casualty rate eighty percent, an extremely high number even if more Viet Cong were killed. Battalion commander Hathaway estimated in his after-action report that at least 150 of the crack D-300 Viet Cong troops had been killed in the battle.

On September 22, 1966, in a ceremony at the Pentagon, Air Force Chief of Staff John P. McConnell posthumously presented the Air Force Cross to Frank and Irene Pitsenbarger for their son's heroic actions. They also received his Airman's Medal, Purple Heart and four Air

Medals.

Frank Pitsenbarger's wife of fifty years, Irene, passed away from cancer and was buried next to her son in Piqua, Ohio on December 7, 1991. Frank Pitsenbarger could no longer bear the heartache of hometown memories and moved away from Piqua. He married his high school sweetheart Alice and they reside happily in Muncie, Indiana.

The name William H. Pitsenbarger is recognized throughout the Air Force, however, few people know Bill's complete story because enlisted heroes usually receive only a few lines in conventional histories. Pitsenbarger's friend and fellow pararescueman Henry J. O'Beirne believes what Bill did deserves the Medal of Honor. But more importantly, Harry states that Bill's accomplishments will stand on their own merit without embellishment, as so many accounts have done in the past.

What set Bill Pitsenbarger apart from his peers was the good natured way he faced danger throughout his more



Frank and Irene Pitsenbarger sit in front of a painting of their son, January 16, 1986. Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.



A1C William H. Pitsenbarger receiving his first Air Medal for 25 combat missions at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, Aug. 11, 1965. Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

than 250 combat missions in Vietnam. Whether dropping into a burning minefield to rescue a Vietnamese soldier, or unselfishly dodging bullets to gather weapons and ammunition for beleaguered defenders, he considered every dangerous mission a part of his routine duty.

Pitsenbarger epitomized the very ideals and principles that Americans admire. If he was less courageous or not as concerned for the wounded, Bill would probably be alive today. Instead he was proud to serve the Air Force and his country, and for his efforts, he gave his life.

Bill Pitsenbarger's story is an incredible testimony of courage and determination. Although he is gone and there is no way to thank him personally for what he's done for our country, as enlisted men and women we should not forget his sacrifice or the motto he believed in,

"So That Others May Live."



AWARDS & TRIBUTES TO WILLIAM H. PITSENBARGER

1. The Air Force Sergeants Association's "Pitsenbarger Award" for heroism.

2. The Pitsenbarger Chapter of the Non-Commissioned Officers Association.

3. Pitsenbarger Hall (dining facility) at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, 388th Tactical Fighter Wing.

4. Pitsenbarger dining facility (bld. #1214), Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

5. Pitsenbarger dormitory at Randolph AFB, Texas.

6. Survival Hangar, Aerospace Rescue and Recovery center (Military Airlift Command), Craig AFB, Alabama.

7. Plaque honoring Bill Pitsenbarger at Lackland AFB, Texas.

8. Pitsenbarger Street (formerly 2d Street) Scott AFB, Illinois.

9. Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron Pitsenbarger Memorial Trophy for the most outstanding Pararescue section of the year.

10. Special William H. Pitsenbarger Plaque, Chapter 751, Air Force Sergeants Association.

11. Pitsenbarger display, Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

12. 52d Tactical Fighter Wing Pitsenbarger Professional Military Education facility, Spangdahelm Air Base Germany.

13. Pitsenbarger Chapter 461 Miami County, Ohio Vietnam Veterans Association, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

14. Pitsenbarger Statue at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico.

15. "William H. Pitsenbarger Sports Complex" Piqua, Ohio.

16. Pitsenbarger Memorial Plaque, Piqua, Ohio.

17. Pitsenbarger Rifles, Air Force Junior ROTC Berkeley Company, Martinsburg, West Virginia.

18. Flag Pole and plaque, Miami Memorial Cemetery, Piqua, Ohio.

19. Recreation room, Post 4874 Veterans of Foreign Wars, Piqua, Ohio.

20. Pitsenbarger flag, Garbry Gym, Piqua, Ohio.



Airman First Class William H. Pitsenbarger, Bien Hoa, Vietnam, circa 1965-1966. Courtesy of William F. Pitsenbarger.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Airmen Memorial Museum Oral History Interview, Piqua Ohio, William F. Pitsenbarger, 20-21 June 1997, William I. Chivalette.

Airmen Memorial Museum Oral History Transcript, Ben Hoi, Vietnam. Interview with friends of William H. Pitsenbarger, 1966, SSgt. Ron Sears, AF Office of Information.

Airmen Memorial Museum Oral History Interview, William I. Chivalette with Henry J. O'Beirne, "William H. Pitsenbarger," 15 December 1997.

Airmen Memorial Museum Oral History Interview, William I. Chivalette with Roy A. Boudreaux, 15 August 1997.

Narrative accompanying the recommendation for award of The Medal of Honor for A1C. William Hart Pitsenbarger, Airmen Memorial Museum (AMM) Archives.

Draft narrative to accompany recommendation for The Silver Star to William H. Pitsenbarger, no date, AMM Archives.

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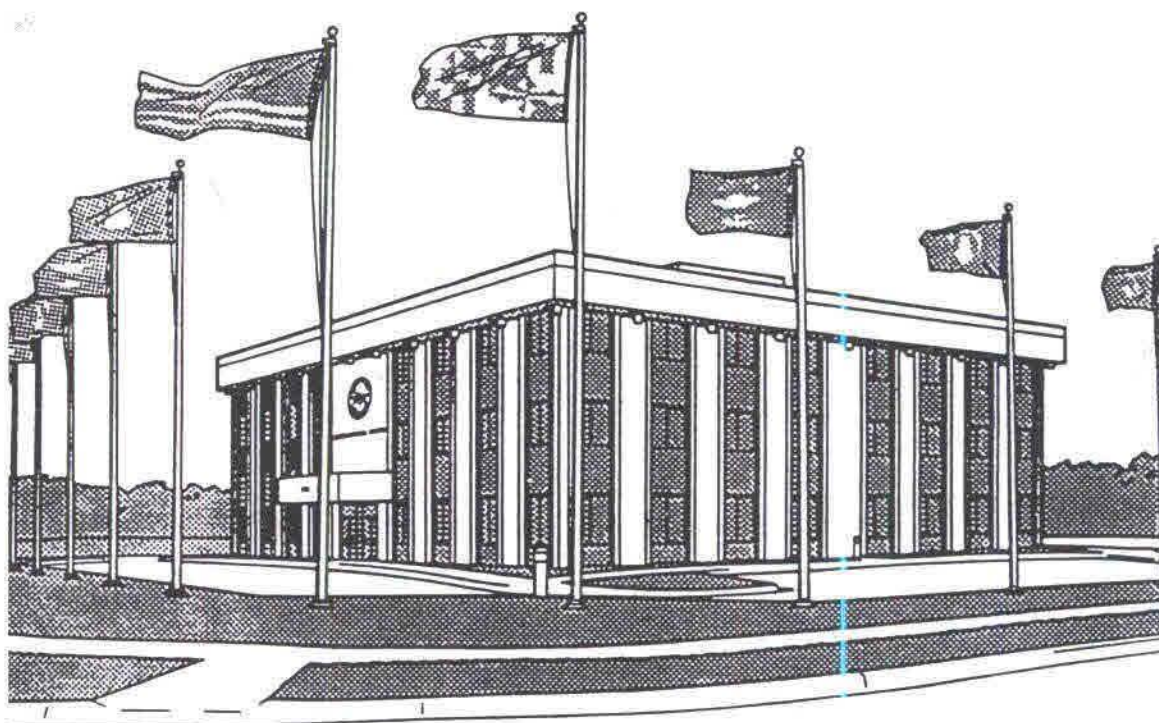


AIRMEN MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Founded in 1986, the Airmen Memorial Museum stand as a tribute to enlisted airmen who have served in the U.S. Air Force, the Army Air Corps and the U.S. Army Air Forces.

Located in the Airmen Memorial Building just eight miles from Washington, D.C., this museum is a maturing showcase of accomplishments. It is also designed to function as a research and reference center that documents and preserves the contributions of the men and women who served honorably but, until now, without a memorial or museum they could call their own.

The museum is open 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. weekdays and during specially scheduled events. For more information about the museum and its research project, contact the Airmen Memorial Museum, toll-free at 1-800-638-0594 or 301-899-8386.



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