

Dale Stovall

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Born	February 19, 1944 Toppenish, Washington
Service/branch	United States Air Force
Years of service	1963-1993
Rank	Brigadier General
Awards	Air Force Cross Silver Star (2) Distinguished Flying Cross (2) Jabara Award

Dale E. Stovall (born February 19, 1944^[1]) is a retired [Brigadier General](#) in the [United States Air Force](#) who figured prominently in several [search and rescue](#) operations during the [Vietnam War](#). A member of the [40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron](#) based in Thailand, on June 2, 1972, he recovered Maj. [Roger Locher](#) from deep inside [North Vietnam](#), the furthest any airman was ever rescued from inside enemy lines. For his efforts in rescuing Locher, Stovall was awarded the [Air Force Cross](#), which described how "he willingly returned to this high threat area, braving intense ground fire, to recover the downed airman from deep in North Vietnam."^[1] Stovall was also recognized with the 1973 [Jabara Award](#) for Airmanship, two [Silver Star](#) awards and two [Distinguished Flying Cross](#) awards for other combat rescues among the 12 successful

rescue missions he accomplished during his tour in [Southeast Asia](#).^[2] Stovall retired from the Air Force as a Brigadier General on June 1, 1993.

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Background

Stovall was born in [Toppenish, Washington](#) and graduated from the [U.S. Air Force Academy](#) at Colorado Springs, Colorado, in the class of 1967.^[1]

Rescue of Roger Locher

During the initial phase of [Operation Linebacker](#) in June 1972, an American [4F-4D](#) was shot down by a North Vietnamese [Shenyang J-6](#). Pilot Maj. Robert Lodge refused to [eject](#), but^{[3][4]} his [weapons officer Roger Locher](#) was able to get out of the aircraft. Locher landed, unseen by either friendly or enemy forces, only 64 kilometres (40 mi) from Hanoi, North Vietnam.^[5]

Maj. Locher [evaded capture](#) and covered over 19 kilometres (12 mi), gradually losing 30 pounds (14 kg) and his strength.^[6] On June 1, 1972, his 22nd day behind enemy lines, he was finally able to contact a flight of American jets overhead, calling, "Any U.S. aircraft, if you read Oyster 1 Bravo, come up on Guard".^[7] Lt. James Dunn and others, including [Steve Ritchie](#) in one of the F-4 aircraft overhead, heard his radio call and remembered Locher's call sign. When the aircraft answered, Locher calmly responded, "Guys I've been down here a long time, any chance of picking me up?"^[8] His transmissions left some Americans who did not hear his call in doubt about the authenticity of his message, and they believed that the [NVA](#) may have manipulated a [POW](#) into impersonating him, setting a trap for the would-be rescuers.^[5]

Rescue operation

Capt. Stovall, based at [Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Navy Base](#) in [Thailand](#) responded, piloting a [HH-53](#) from the [40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron](#) along with a rescue force consisting of several [A-1Es](#) and another [HH-53](#).^[5] As they neared Locher's position, the A-1 Skyraiders and HH-53C helicopters came under attack from two MiGs, surface-to-air missiles

and gunfire. The rescue force successfully dodged the missiles and eluded one MiG in a narrow canyon, but were eventually driven back by the enemy fire and failed to get through to Locher on that day.^[2]

On June 2, 1972, General [John Vogt](#), commander of the [7th Air Force](#) canceled the entire strike mission set for [Hanoi](#) on that day. He sent a task force of 119 aircraft^[2] including Stovall piloting his [HH-53](#) rescue helicopter, bombers, and an array of [F-4](#) escorts, [EB-66s](#), [A-1Es](#), [F105G Weasels](#), and [KC135](#) tankers to get Locher out.^[9] "We shut down the war to go get Roger Locher," Stovall later said.^[2]

Capt. Ronald E. Smith in an [A-1E](#) guided Capt. Stovall to Locher's position. Only when Locher rose out of the jungle canopy riding the [jungle penetrator](#) were all of the Americans sure it was him. Despite their proximity to [Yen Bai](#) airfield, no aircraft were lost during Locher's rescue.^[10]

Citations

Silver Star



Silver Star ribbon

Capt Stovall was recognized on several occasions for his bravery during the Vietnam War. He received the [Silver Star](#) for actions on March 2, 1972. The citation reads in part:^[1]

...Captain Stovall with superior airmanship and personal courage, repeatedly volunteered to fly as co-pilot of an HH-53C helicopter into an extremely hostile area in the rescue of a downed airman. While under intense ground fire, Captain Stovall correctly analyzed an in-flight emergency, maintained vital communications with the Search and Rescue forces, insured that all required checks were performed, and was an indispensable aid in assisting the pilot in avoiding hazardous areas...

Three months later, on June 27, 1972, he was instrumental in recovering another air man for which he was awarded the [Silver Star](#) with Bronze [Oak Leaf Cluster](#).^[1]

...Captain Stovall, as Aircraft Commander of an HH-53C Rescue Helicopter, voluntarily and at great risk to his own life piloted his aircraft into a hostile and heavily defended area of North Vietnam to effect the rescue of a downed American airman. Realizing the primary recovery aircraft had suffered crippling battle damage, he piloted his aircraft through intense hostile ground fire to complete the rescue of an injured survivor and crewman from encircled ground forces...

Air Force Cross



Air Force Cross

For his flights on two days deep inside North Vietnam on June 1 and 2, 1972, to rescue Maj. Lochar, Stovall received the [Air Force Cross](#) on November 22, 1972.^[1]

...for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as an Aircraft Commander of an HH-53C rescue helicopter of the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand, in action in Southeast Asia from 1 June 1972 to 2 June 1972. During this period, Captain Stovall, voluntarily and at great risk to his own life, repeatedly penetrated an extremely hostile and heavily defended area to effect the rescue of a downed American airman. Captain Stovall's first attempt to rescue the airman was thwarted by numerous hostile aircraft and missiles being directed at the rescue force. Determined to save this airman, he willingly returned to this high threat area, braving intense ground fire, to recover the downed airman from deep in North Vietnam...

Distinguished Flying Cross



Distinguished Flying Cross ribbon

On April 13, 1972, Stovall he assisted in rescuing a Marine pilot for which he received the [Distinguished Flying Cross](#). The citation reads in part:

...Captain Stovall voluntarily participated in the rescue of a downed Marine pilot from deep within hostile territory. Braving intense anti-aircraft artillery, he defiantly orbited his aircraft for over forty minutes in this extremely hostile area to assist in the successful recovery of the downed pilot.

Stovall was recognized again six months later on December 6, 1972 and received the Distinguished Flying Cross with Bronze [Oak Leaf Cluster](#).^[1]

...Captain Stovall's job knowledge, outstanding airmanship, and continuous professionalism, displayed under the constant threat of hostile fire and adverse weather conditions, immeasurably aided in recovery of a downed American airman...

Peace time awards



Defense Superior Service Medal ribbon



Legion of Merit ribbon

During peace time he was recognized with the [Defense Superior Service Medal](#), the [Legion of Merit](#), and the Legion of Merit with Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster.^[1]

References

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