



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE "ULTIMATE IN BRAVERY" - COMBAT RESCUE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

HQ. MILITARY AIRLIFT COMMAND, Scott Air Force Base, Ill. -- "When the history of the Vietnam war is finally written," commented Harold Brown, former Secretary of the Air Force (Oct 1, 1965 through Feb 15, 1969), "I feel that the story of Air Rescue may well become one of the most outstanding human dramas in the entire history of the Air Force. . . the extent of the operation, the dangers involved, and the dedication shown on an every day basis -- month after month -- makes these rescue operations something unique in our military history."

Today, the Vietnam war is over. The last American fighting man has left Vietnamese soil and former American prisoners of war held captive under tortuous and cruel conditions have been freed and are with loved ones.

And the humanitarian story of the heroic efforts by the thousands of men who risked their lives daily to rescue downed aircrewmembers in the jungles of Southeast Asia is beginning to surface. "Perhaps the ultimate in bravery," said the present Secretary of the Air Force, Robert C. Seamans, Jr., in February.

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of this year, "was the day-to-day performance of those who manned the rescue helicopters and accounted for over 2,600 combat saves."

Time and again, rescuemen extracted Americans from seemingly impossible situations -- some crews making several saves in a single day, literally fighting their way into and out of the rescue area. Despite the tremendous hazards, Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS) crews saved 2,624 lives under hostile conditions and another 1,231 lives in Southeast Asia under non-combat conditions from December 1, 1964, until the end of the war, March 29, 1973.

Air Force Captain Dale Stovall, a 29-year-old red-head from Toppenish, Washington, and a 1967 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy near Colorado Springs, Colorado, is not unlike those men lauded by Secretary Brown -- eager, competent, and determined to be the best rescue helicopter pilot in the Air Force. Like most ARRS crewmen who have served in Southeast Asia, Dale Stovall has been highly decorated, recently receiving the Air Force Cross (the nation's second highest military decoration for valor), his second Silver Star and the Air Medal for three separate combat rescue missions, all under intense enemy opposition and with great risk to life. ARRS crews have earned more than 33,000 individual awards and decorations for their combat rescue efforts, including one Medal of Honor, 40 Air Force Crosses and more than 600 Silver Stars.

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While most ARRS crewmen will long be remembered for their heroic efforts, Dale Stovall will have a special place in history. He has accrued 12 combat saves of downed aircrewmen, one of the highest number of individual saves by one pilot. He flew on 18 combat Rescue missions, including five in North Vietnam, and flew two of the deepest penetrations into North Vietnam, north of Hanoi, ever attempted by an Air Force rescue crew.

One effort in particular, the one for which he was awarded the Air Force Cross, highlights the bravery and the determination of the rescue crews to keep the number of prisoners of war taken by the enemy at less than 575 rather than three or four times that number.

As an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter pilot, Stovall and his crew were flying in a holding pattern near an F-4 strike on an enemy-held position, ready to spring into action should one of the Phantom jets be forced down by the enemy.

During one pass, a Phantom jet picked up a radio signal from the ground. "There is an Oyster (F-4) -- ZERO ONE BRAVO -- on the ground that says he was shot down the tenth of May," relayed the Phantom pilot to the two Jolly Green helicopter crews. It was the first of June.

Stovall looked at his copilot and then reflected for an instant. It seemed like he remembered that call sign -- Oyster ZERO ONE BRAVO. He was in a dog fight with a MIG 19 about three weeks ago and was forced to eject after sustaining damage.

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Could this be the same man?

It might be a trap, thought Stovall. Frequently, the enemy picked up a survivor and used his radio to lure in rescue crews and when they were most vulnerable open fire. But it was a chance Stovall and his crew had to take.

"This was my second time over the North," recalled Stovall. "And I was a little shakey, believe you me. I guess we were about 110 miles inside of North Vietnam and 30 miles north of Hanoi.

"We were with two Sandys, A-1 Fighters flying protective escort for us. One stayed with us and the other continued to look for the survivor -- Air Force Captain Roger Locher.

"We were in the area for about 15 minutes when a surface to air missile (SAM) was launched and an F-4 near us exploded. 'Get ready,' I said, 'We've got customers.' But somehow, the crippled F-4 managed to stagger out of there and back to base where he bailed out.

"The other Jolly and myself switched leads and right away one Sandy screamed at us, 'THERE'S A MIG, A MIG!! GET DOWN, JOLLY, GET DOWN!!!

"We broke off and dove the helicopters into a canyon right across a nearby village. We lost the MIG and in a few minutes I rejoined my wingman and we started talking with Locher again. But again, a MIG made a pass at us. Of course, that watered our eyes and we broke a second time. Since he was flying so fast -- about 400-500 knots -- he didn't have time to get set and fire at us.

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"We were lucky. .

"But by that time, with all the diversions, we were running low on fuel and headed for our flying gas station -- an HC-130 King (Hercules) aerial tanker and airborne command post. He had to come about 20 miles inside North Vietnam to let us hook up with him. We refueled and headed back to Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand, hoping to get an early start the next day.

"It was nearly dusk.

"And what a next day it was. They fragged a Linebacker (scheduled a massive air strike) in the area to pin down any enemy action. I guess there were more than 100 airplanes. We got back into the rescue area and Captain Ron Smith, flying a Sandy, flew right across the top of a dam we had spotted earlier the day before, drawing intense ground fire from what turned out to be more than 30 heavily defended gun positions on the top of the dam. If he had been shot down, there would have been no way we could have gotten to him before they did. But he was determined to get those gunnery positions knocked out so we could get to Locher without a hassle from them. With some help from several F-4s, Smith knocked out all but one or two of the gun positions.

"Smith then spotted Locher about halfway up the side of a 1,200-foot hill just above a village and about seven miles from an enemy airfield with 70 MIGs. (Before we started in for the pickup, Smith flew over the airfield at low altitude and very slow, to make sure the Linebacker airstrikes put enough holes in the runways to ground the MIGs. They had.

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"We tried to call in our MIGCAP (fighter aircraft flying protective cover from MIGS) but weren't able to raise any of them. We called the King Bird, 'Sorry, babes,' he said, 'They're all on the tanker.' So for the next 25 minutes we had absolutely no fighter protection. I had a little interplane discussion with the other Jolly and the Sandys. The consensus was that we've come this far, we might as well go all the way.

"Locher was on top of a nearby mountain. One of the Sandys told him to pop his flare and we could see the orange smoke drifting upwards. I still wasn't sure that it wasn't a trap to put it to us. I told my minigunner that if there was more than one person down there, to open up. As we got closer, we picked up his signal mirror. We passed over him once and, in what probably seemed like an eternity to Locher, turned around and came back for the pickup. We hovered over him, lowered the cable and he was in the chopper in a matter of seconds.

"It then became our prime concern to get the hell out of there. Just before we crossed the Red River as we popped over a small hill, right there in front of us was a 14-car train. We were only about 50 feet high, and it was too late to change course, so we charged right over the top of the train.

"It reminded me of those old World War II movies. Two of the flat cars had sandbag machine gun bunkers, and of course, they opened up. Major Jim Harding, in another Sandy made six passes at the train and knocked out the guns and destroyed the train. About that time, a MIG 17 came up to investigate what

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was going on. Harding was the first to see him and got in position and fired a complete rocket pod of white phosphorus smoke, all four 20 millimeter cannons, and his 7.62 minigun -- the whole works. It looked like the Fourth of July. The MIG had no time to mess with guys like that, so he was out of there in a flash.

"From there on in, it was a breeze. A Kingbird came up to meet us and we took on some fuel.

"Locher was in amazingly good shape. He walked around the helicopter for awhile and rode all the way back in the jump seat between myself and my copilot. He was one happy man!

"He'd been on the ground for 23 days, the longest time ever spent by an American pilot on the ground in North Vietnam.

"We were happy, too!"

Rescue crews like Stovall's didn't always get their man, but no matter what the odds, they made the effort. In North Vietnam, those odds were pretty slim -- less than 20 per cent for rescue. But in the South, it was upwards of 70 to 80 per cent. And if a pilot bailed out over the water, he had about a 98 per cent chance of being picked up.

What makes these guys volunteer for these pickups when the deck is so stacked against them?

"It's that first pickup," commented Stovall. "When you see that guy coming up the penetrator and you see that great big smile -- you just can't help think

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about how he feels and how you would feel if you were on that other end. It's
a satisfaction of accomplishment that you just can't get any other way."

Now that the war has ended, Dale Stovall and the hundreds of rescue
helicopter pilots like him will go to other units around the world and use the
skills and experience picked up in combat to continue the humanitarian efforts
to aid those in distress.

In 1972 alone, more than 1,300 lives were saved around the world in other
than combat areas -- the majority were civilians. To paraphrase another com-
ment by Secretary Brown, "These men do deserve immortality. Their solemn
pledge 'That Others May Live' will continue to be echoed not only on the pages
of the history books, but in their every day humanitarian accomplishments
throughout the world."