

20 November 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR
Col Blake George
Chief, Air Force Special Warfare
A34S, Room 5E794
Pentagon, Washington DC 20301

FROM: USAF Pararescue Association
William W. Watson, President

1. Request your office locate copies of Pararescueman SSgt Robert L. Berry's service records and medical records. We believe his service number was AF19530740; born 3 December 1938; died 23 July 1966. He is the recipient of the Silver Star and several other decorations for combat rescues in Laos and North Vietnam in 1966. We need copies of these records to use as evidence that his name should be added on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVMW) Wall in Washington, DC.
2. SSgt Berry (PJ Class 66-1) was a Pararescue hero who died in 1966 as a result of catching malaria in Laos during the Vietnam War. His name is NOT on the VVMW. It should have been added but was somehow omitted. One of the 2025 DOD criteria for adding names to the VVMW states, *"From a diagnosed illness, while in a defined combat zone, provided that death occurred within 120 days from departing the defined combat zone and that the death occurred within 120 days of the diagnosis."* Sergeant Berry meets that criteria. There are many names on the VVMW that died of malaria.
3. Why was his name not submitted? We don't know; but can speculate. In 1966 the U.S. government agreed that Laos was neutral in the Vietnam War, a status recognized by the 1962 Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos. The US, while violating this neutrality in various ways, still sought to maintain a degree of deniability.

Detachment 5, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron based at Udorn RTAFB was tasked with rescuing pilots shot down in North Vietnam and Laos. At the start of the Vietnam War, USAF Air Rescue had no air refuelling helicopters. In order to conduct rescue ops in North Vietnam, they had to preposition their CH-3 helicopters at forward operating locations. These locations were called Lima Sites (LS); and they were close to the North Vietnamese Border. There the aircrew refueled from prepositioned bladders or barrels, walked to a tent and pulled strip alert. They listened to a portable HF radio which alerted them when they needed to scramble for a rescue. All these operations classified SECRET.

4. On 30 June 1966, SSgt Robert Berry was deployed to LS 98 where he and his crew were on Strip Alert. While on the ground monitoring air strikes when they heard that an F-105 Callsign Savannah 2 was bailing out. The two rescue helicopters at LS-98 scrambled from that location (see attached 30Jun66 SAR mission report). Following a successful rescue of the downed aircrewman, he was flown back to our home base at Udorn RTAFB.

Soon after returning to Udorn, Robert Berry began to feel ill and reported to the flight surgeon for evaluation. (Need Sgt Berry's medical records to establish exact dates and medical diagnosis). The best date we have for his diagnosis is from the TSgt Aaron Farrior diary dated July 18th which stated that Berry had black water fever which is a very virulent form of malaria. TSgt Farrior was the NCOIC of the PJs at Udorn. Apparently, Sergeant Berry's first diagnosis was hepatitis and changed around July 18th diary entry stated the new diagnosis was Black Water Fever.

MON, JULY 18	JULY 24
19 OFF. Found out today that Berry has Malaria instead of Hepatitis. He won't be back they say. We're really short on P.J's. 19 Tried to find Tina + Erin something for their birthday but no luck. 19 Berry has Black Water fever and they shipped him to Clark. Heard he was really sick.	19 Handler Sgt. Monty called me up from Udorn this morning and told me we got a thesis in that Berry died yesterday. It's funny how a guy risks his life and gets shot at only to die from a disease. He'll be greatly missed by all that knew him. He was one of the better ones.
¹ TSgt Aaron Farrior diary	² TSgt Aaron Farrior diary

Comments on diary entries:

That they shipped him to Clark. The "they" probably referred to the Udorn Base Clinic Flight Surgeon. Shipped out to Clark most likely meant that Berry was MEDEVAC'ed from Udorn to the Clark Air Base Hospital in the Philippines. At that time, the Clark Air Base Hospital was the largest hospital in Asia and they had the most expertise in treating malaria cases. The July 18th diary entry is pasted in below. More likely than not, Berry was already at the Clark AB Hospital and that is where the definitive diagnosis was made. The owner of the diary passed away several years ago so getting further information from TSgt Farrior is not possible.

¹ TSgt Aaron Farrior diary, July 18, 1966 and July 24, 1966 (original copy at USAF PJ/CRO School Museum)

² TSgt Aaron Farrior diary, July 18, 1966 and July 24, 1966 (original copy at USAF PJ/CRO School Museum)

5. According to the 1967 Area Handbook for Laos, Malaria is endemic to all parts of Southeast Asia but was particularly virulent in Northern Laos. In 1966 it was the most important single cause of sickness, physical inefficiency and premature death. In Laos, about 50 percent of the country's inhabitants were estimated to suffer from the disease³.



Sergeant Berry was a crewmember on Det. 5's CH-3s and spent many days on the ground at Lima Site 98.

6. The following data was extracted from the USAF Pararescue Association Digital Historical Archive. The majority of the archives data came from the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) and the remainder from our members.

Below are dates showing his being forward deployed to Lima Sites in Pararescue. This list is incomplete. We only have a few SAR mission reports collected from AFHRA. His rescue unit deployed almost daily to Laotian forward operating locations. Sergeant Berry certainly deployed many more times than we have primary source documents.

22Apr66 Laos Silver Star HQ P order #286 26Sep66 SAR mission report 22 Apr 1966 by 1st Lt. Forest Kimsey HH-3 pilot in command (see attached mission report)

10May66	Laos	HH-3 with PJ George Hunt
30Jun66	Laos LS98	Forward deployed to LS98
30Jun66	Laos SAR	See attached mission report Pilot Capt Rush CoPilot Capt Hendrickson and FE SSgt Youngblood PJs Berry & Stevson on high bird

³ Department of Army Pamphlet Number 550-58 Area Handbook for Laos, June 1967, U.S. Government Printing Office, page 90

		Returned survivor to Udorn. Berry returned to quarters. Reported to Udorn flight surgeon
30Jun66	Farrior diary	Berry SAR data
18Jul66	Farrior diary	Berry Diagnosis

23 Jul66 Philippines Robert Berry died from Blackwater Fever. Blackwater fever is a severe, potentially life-threatening complication of malaria characterized by the rapid destruction of red blood cells (hemolysis), leading to the release of hemoglobin into the bloodstream and urine. This causes dark or blackish urine (hence the name) and can result in acute kidney failure.

7. We need Berry's medical records to verify his dates of treatment and his official diagnosis. Hence the purpose of this letter to you requesting your assistance in obtaining these records from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. His personnel records are also requested in order that we may search them for any other relevant information and contact information for possible family survivors.
8. My point of contact for this project is our historian Robert LaPointe, SMSgt Retired. Please contact him if you need additional information and if you are able to obtain the records requested. His contact information is:
 Robert LaPointe
 111 Citadel Ln
 Crestview, Fl
 email: historian@pjhistory.org CP850-829-0632

WILLIAM W. WATSON
 President USAF Pararescue Association