

Ex-Rescueman Wins Chopper Heroism Award

General Presents Third Silver Star, Fifth Distinguished Flying Cross Also



STEVE NORTHERN

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DA NANG — The "kid" who could do it all . . . has done it again!

Fellow pararescuemen and pilots alike at the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron here, the famed "Jolly Green Giants," call him "Sergeant Wonderful."

Ex-Sergeant Steve M. Northern, Hermosa Beach, Calif., doesn't like the nickname. But he earned it! And the respect that goes with it!

Steve Northern, who departed Vietnam last November after compiling more "combat saves" than any other person in aerial combat history, has been named the 1969 AVCO AWA Helicopter Heroism Award winner. During his 30 months of duty in Vietnam he participated in the aerial recovery of 51 persons and also aided in the saving of at least 25 other lives.

Northern was presented the award in Dayton, Ohio, at the annual Aviation Space Writers Assn. news conference and awards presentation ceremony last Wednesday.

Among those present was a Marine, Maj. Stephen W. Pless, winner of the 1968 award for his daring rescue of wounded soldiers in Vietnam the previous year. Major Pless, 28, the youngest major in the U.S. Marine Corps, later received the Medal of Honor for his act.

In addition to the high honor Northern, wearing his Air Force uniform and distinctive pararescueman's maroon beret for the first time since being honorably discharged late last year, was also presented his third Silver Star Medal and fifth Distinguished Flying Cross. Making the presentation was Maj. Allison Brooks, commander of the

Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service.

Northern's third Silver Star was awarded for the daring rescue of another Marine Corps major. The survivor, Maj. Curtis Lawson, now of Cherry Point, N.C., was rescued from the banks of the Dai Giang River in North Vietnam on July 26, 1968.

The successful pickup of Major Lawson came late on the afternoon of July 26. His A-6 had been downed the previous evening and he had spent the night and the entire day concealed in dense river bank vegetation.

As darkness approached the situation appeared grim. Four different rescue attempts had been beaten back from the savagely defended enemy area. The crew of Jolly Green 31, led by Majors Charlie Wicker, Baltimore, Md., and Robert E. Booth, San Antonio, Tex., volun-

teered to make one last attempt to recover Lawson. Northern and Sgt. John Enriquez, Duluth, Minn., a flight engineer, mounted the HH-3E rescue helicopters twin M-40 machine guns.

While Major Wicker executed a series of wild 180-degree turns to evade intense enemy ground fire, the pair blazed away at the river bank entrenchments. Northern's machine gun became so hot that it literally burned up. While Enriquez aided in spotting the survivor, Northern manned the other gun and continued to fire away furiously. As the pilots lowered the rescue helicopter the Marine major, although he had been trapped for more than 20 hours, swam out into the river to aid his rescuers.

Northern's fifth DFC was presented for a rescue action in the A Shau Valley on June 9, 1968.



The Crew

The mission for which ex-Sgt. Steve Northern won his third Silver Star was successfully completed July 26, 1968. Shown at end of mission are (left to right) Sgt. John Enriquez, Duluth, Minn.; Northern; Maj. Bob Booth, San Antonio, Tex.; Marine Maj. Curtis Lawson, Millington, Tenn.; and Maj. Charlie Wicker, Baltimore, Md.