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TOP USAF PARARESCUEMAN
AFTER 51 COMBAT SAVES
COMPLETES VIETNAM TOUR

DA NANG AIR BASE, RVN (7AF)—At age 21 Air Force Sergeant Steve M. Northern, Riverside California, has completed his Vietnam tour.

Barely of voting age, Sergeant Northern has recorded more "combat saves" than any other person in aviation history — 51. The all-time record was established by Northern during two consecutive Southeast Asia tours as a (PJ) Pararescueman with the 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group of the Military Airlift Command (MAC).

Northern, who was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, where his father (deceased) was a championship race car driver, came to Southeast Asia in July 1966. He was first assigned to Bien Hoa Air Base, where he served as a PJ aboard HH-43 "Pedro" rescue helicopters.

He was wounded in action less than two months after his arrival, on September 10, 1966, and was awarded the Purple Heart.

Enemy bullets couldn't stop the then 19 year old youth, and he went on to become one of the most highly decorated pararescue men in the nation's history.

Northern received the first of two Silver Stars for "gallantry in action" for an heroic rescue action on July 15, 1967. His second Silver Star as a PJ came for an action on August 23, 1967, when he "volunteered to be lowered from his HH-3 helicopter to aid an immobilized survivor located in a position completely surrounded by hostile troops and gun locations."

The citation continues: "Airman Northern carried the survivor to the hoist and shielded him with his own body as they were brought into the helicopter..."

Both Silver Stars came for actions with the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, home of the HH-3 "Jolly Green Giants." Like Northern, the 37th ARRSq is one of the most decorated units in history. He joined the unit in June 1967. Earlier, Northern served with Detachment 6, 38th ARRSq, at Bien Hoa.

While at Da Nang Northern has flown more than 240 missions with the long-range aeri ally-refuelable "Jolly Green Giant." He flew an average of 45 combat missions a month, many deep into enemy territory as far north as the Haiphong area of North Vietnam.

During his off-duty days Northern volunteered to fly rescue missions with Detachment 7, 38th ARRSq, also based at Da Nang. He is one of the few pararescuemen who flew missions interchangeably on both the HH-3 "Jolly Green" and the HH-43 "Pedros."

At other times Northern participated in Medical Civic Action Patrol flights, offering medical aid to local Vietnamese villagers in the I Corps area.

During a rocket attack on Da Nang, Sergeant Northern and the 1968 "Airman of the Year," Sergeant Duane Hackney, aided 25 persons trapped under a C-130 Hercules which had been set afire by exploding 750 pound bombs ignited by enemy rockets. Hackney, first living Airman to be awarded the "Air Force Cross" will return to the 37th ARRSq early next year.

Northern, who entered the Air Force at Oklahoma City (Midwest City), in early 1965, plans to attend El Camino Junior College, Torrence California, starting in February.

Northern attended Riverside, California High School but earned his high school diploma while in the Air Force.

His brother, Army Specialist 4th Class Randy Northern, 20, is a helicopter "Gunship" crew chief, currently serving in West Germany. His sister, Glennanna, 21, lives in Kansas City, Missouri.

His father, a championship "sprint car" driver, was paralyzed following a race car crash at Jungle Park, Indiana, in April, 1949, shortly before he was due to take part in the Indianapolis Speed Classic on Memorial Day 1949. He died on July 22, 1967, seven days before Northern was due to complete his initial 12 month SEA tour.

Northern completed his final two "combat saves" (all combat saves involve an action in which the survivor would have met certain death or enemy capture had he not been rescued; most are under enemy fire) off Tiger Island, North Vietnam, on October 20, 1968.

Ironically, Northern's last save was of a fellow PJ, Airman First Class Robert Cassidy, 21, of Pittsburg, Pa. Cassidy and three other "Jolly Green Giant" crew members were rescued in a dramatic action when their aircraft was destroyed by enemy fire while attempting to rescue two Marine Corps F-4 crewmen from the Gulf of Tonkin.

Asked how he felt about leaving the Air Force and Southeast Asia, the soft-spoken, dark-haired, six-foot one-inch, 175-pound PJ Said:
 "I'll miss it!"