

September 5, 2023

Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records
3351 Celmers Lane
Joint Base Andrews, MD 20762-6435

REF: Philip J. Conran USAF Col (Ret)
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On October 6, 1969 I was the case officer assigned for the support and direction of Red Battalion at Savannakhet, Laos.

This battalion of Lao troops consisted of three SGU (special guerrilla units) 100 man companies. I had visited the position at Muong Phine several days before this reinforcement was to take place and all was secure at that time. The mission was briefed at NKP (Nakhon Phanom) Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand, and again at the Whisky Three training camp where these troops were located. No hostile activity was expected at the LZ.

The reinforcements were picked up by Air Force H-3 helicopters. I led them and the two A1E close support aircraft to the landing site at Muong Phine in a fixed wing Continental twin engine Baron. I contacted the company commander on the ground prior to arrival and asked for his position, however he never gave me his position and didn't answer any further calls. I made a low pass over the LZ at about 100 feet above the ground and neither I or the Baron pilot detected any personnel on the ground. I continued to try to contact the company commander but to no avail. The lead helicopter attempted a landing and immediately took ground fire which disabled it. At that point, it became a rescue operation and I had no assigned helicopters or personnel available for emergency operations. I felt sick and feared for the American crew who would be captured and probably killed if immediate help was not found. At this point I could be of no help so I tried to stay out of the way of the A1E ground support aircraft who were laying rocket and machine gun fire on both sides of the helicopter and crew. At this point I observed a second H-3 helicopter attempt to rescue the airmen on the ground. I had been a staff officer in CIA special operations beginning in 1963 and a former Captain in USMCR

at the time of this operation. I knew I was watching an Airman and his crew making what was likely would become their ultimate sacrifice in their attempt to rescue their comrades. Phil Conran knew his chances of surviving were slim. It was an amazing act of courage. I have no doubt that Phil's actions in the air and on the ground were primary in saving American and Lao lives.

The operations report I wrote that day in the Savannakhet base office contained all of which I stated above. I retired in 2004 after 40 years in CIA special operations. I served in many trouble spots around the world and have seen several acts of the highest level of courage, but none came close to Conran's actions at Muong Phine. I strongly believe he should have been awarded the Medal of Honor and never understood why he just received the Air Force Cross.

I am ready to speak with any Air Force personnel who has a question or just wishes to talk.



Bruce Lehfeldt

blehf@icloud.com

850 240-1836