

May 21, 2018

Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

I submit this observation to support Col. Conran's upgrade from the Air Force Cross to the Congressional Medal of Honor, which he so richly deserves.

I was Major Conran's co-pilot for this mission on 6 October 1969 when he made the decision to risk our helicopter (Knife 62) to aid our comrades when he realized that there was no other immediate support available.

On this mission, we had five helicopters, four of which were each loaded with about twenty-five Hmong soldiers. The fifth was empty as an emergency resource in case any one of the others ran into an emergency situation. When the lead aircraft (Knife 61), under the command of Major Claret Taylor, made its approach into the airfield, North Vietnamese troops that were in the area, used machine gun fire to incapacitate one of the engines, which caused a loss of power. This resulted in the aircraft not having enough power to continue to operate and had to settle onto the airfield. Upon seeing this, Major Conran asked the Air America pilot, who was leading us, to attempt a rescue. The Air America pilot replied that he didn't have enough fuel and could not attempt the rescue. It was then that Major Conran made the decision to attempt the rescue knowing that if anything happened, we would have additional Hmong soldiers on board that could reinforce those already on the ground.

It is important to note that if he had not made this spontaneous decision, we would have probably lost those on the ground plus those on board the emergency resource.

On our approach, our right engine was also riddled with machine gun fire and we were also forced to land. Major Conran then told me to abandon the aircraft and soon followed me out. While on the ground the Hmong soldiers set up a defensive perimeter and appeared to hold the North Vietnamese to the brush line that surrounded the airfield. There were now eight Americans on the ground along with approximately 50 Hmong troops. The remaining aircraft in the air along with two support A1E Sandy's, informed Rescue of the situation and we soon had support aircraft bombing and strafing all around the perimeter. Major Conran then got on his emergency radio and directed the aircraft where to drop their bombs and strafe. I also observed him, under fire, climb into the aircraft that was initially disabled to recover M-60 machine guns and whatever resources he could get his hands on. We tried to get the M-60's operable, but they turned out to be too badly damaged.

At some point, an HH-3E tried to land about 100 yards from our position and was shortly driven off. I believe that it was during this period of time, when we were all dashing toward that aircraft, that Lt/Col Silva took a round through his back and Major Conran was wounded in his leg and, I believe, still carries the bullet in his leg to this day. Later, after Sawdust gas was deployed, an HH-53 was able to land and all Americans and surviving Hmong were safely rescued. Due to Major Conran's decision, to commit our aircraft, many lives were saved. There are photographs taken by an RF-4 right after, the incident that

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shows many NVA KIA around the field. These photos were sent to me soon after the event, which indicates that on that day we flew into an ambush.

Finally, what is most important is that everyone involved had their recommended decorations downgraded for political purposes because Laos was "The secret war" and remained classified for years after.

Sincerely,



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