

June 6, 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I received a call on June 2, 2017 from Hazel Blankenship asking me if I remembered the events that took place on October 6, 1969 when my helicopter was shot down in Laos. When I said it was almost 50 years ago but I still remembered, she stated some people in Santa Barbara, CA were working to upgrade Major Conran's Air Force Cross to the Medal of Honor. She then asked me if I could jot down any thoughts which might assist them in their effort.

I was a gunner on the first helicopter shot down and I still feel I owe my life to him because, before he joined us on the ground, I didn't think we would survive the day. The enemy was numerous and we were in the process of being overrun. Conran, even though he failed to rescue us after his helicopter transmission was destroyed, brought in extra indigenous troops allowing us, with the help of fighter aircraft, to withstand the onslaught until four aircraft dropped debilitating gas around us allowing rescue helicopters to land and pick us up.

Major Conran, even though he was not the ranking officer, took charge once he was on the ground. He stripped the two helicopters of all useable equipment, set up our defense and acted as our forward air controller. Using his compass he called in the fighter aircraft to silence the enemy whenever he detected movement. Unfortunately the enemy still kept getting closer and he was calling for weapons release right over us before they dropped the gas.

I still remember one heroic act by Conran that still impresses me. We were forced to use the side door on the rescue helicopter since the indigenous soldiers packed the rear of the helicopter. Col Silva, who was overweight and wounded, could not get in the helicopter. Major Conran, even though he had a serious leg wound, immediately got down on his hands and knees allowing Colonel Silva to use his back as a stepping stone to gain entrance.

There was an H-1 helicopter flying with us for crew rescue if needed. I never knew, until I talked with Mrs. Blankenship, why it wasn't used. That pilot thought a rescue attempt was too dangerous and would never be successful. I now really thank Conran for his heroic action in trying to rescue us and I totally support upgrading his Air Force Cross to the Medal of Honor.

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