

Silver Star

FROM: COMMANDING OFFICER, MLS/QL
SOA (CCS), 5TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE)
1ST SPECIAL FORCES
APO 96297

TO: WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

SUBJECT: EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

THE DATE 2 APRIL 1970, MAJOR MARSHALL G. HARRISON, U.S. AIR FORCE, DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF BY HEROISM WHILE PARTICIPATING IN AERIAL FLIGHTS AS EVIDENCED BY VOLUNTARY ACTIONS ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM. ON THAT DATE MAJOR HARRISON WAS OPERATING AS A FORWARD AIR CONTROLLER, FLYING AIRBORNE RELAY AND TOP COVER FOR A FIVE MAN SPECIAL FORCES RECONNAISSANCE TEAM ON A CLASSIFIED MISSION. SUDENLY, DURING THE ROUTINE EXECUTION OF HIS DUTIES, THE MAJOR RECEIVED AN URGENT MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM STATING THAT THEIR POSITION HAD BEEN COMPROMISED, AND THAT THEY WOULD HAVE TO BE WITHDRAWN. FIVE MINUTES LATER THE TEAM WAS IN HEAVY CONTACT WITH A LARGE ENEMY FORCE, AND IT BECAME IMPERATIVE THAT THEY BE EXTRACTED BY HELICOPTER IF THEY WERE TO SURVIVE. MAJOR HARRISON IMMEDIATELY SCRAMBLED HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS AND QUICKLY PINPOINTED THE BELEAGUERED TEAM'S LOCATION IN HEAVY TRIPLE-CANOPY JUNGLE. DUE TO THE PROXIMITY OF THE ENEMY FORCE AND THE HEAVY AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRE THEY WERE RECEIVING, THE TEAM WAS FORCED TO RELY ON THE MAJOR'S ABILITY TO DETERMINE THEIR EXACT POSITION THROUGH THE LIMITED USE OF SIGNALLING DEVICES AND THEIR VERBAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA, DEPENDING HEAVILY ON HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE SURROUNDING TERRAIN. HAVING CONFIRMED THEIR POSITION, MAJOR HARRISON SAW THAT AN EXTRACTION FROM THAT POINT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE THICK OVERHEAD COVER. HE IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO VECTOR THE TEAM AWAY FROM THE HOSTILE ELEMENT TO A MORE SUITABLE AREA 100 METERS DISTANT, WHERE A HELICOPTER PICKUP COULD BE EFFECTED. BY THE TIME THE TEAM HAD EVADED TO THE PICKUP ZONE, FOUR HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS HAD ARRIVED ON STATION. SURROUNDED BY THE ENEMY AND UNDER EXTREMELY HEAVY SMALL ARMS, AUTOMATIC WEAPONS, AND B-40 ROCKET PROPELLED GRENADE FIRE FROM THE SOUTH, THE TEAM DESPERATELY REQUESTED 360 DEGREE COVERAGE OF THEIR POSITION AT A DISTANCE OF 20 METERS. AWARE THAT THE SITUATION WAS CRITICAL, MAJOR HARRISON LOST NO TIME IN SKILLFULLY DIRECTING THE EXPENDITURE OF THE GUNSHIPS ORDNANCE AT THE EXTREMELY CLOSE DESIRED DISTANCE AROUND THE FRIENDLY POSITION. AFTER THE FIRST PASS BY THE GUNSHIPS, THE HOSTILE FORCES RESPONDED WITH INTENSE AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND B-40 GROUND TO AIR FIRE. RECOGNIZING THAT THE SITUATION WOULD REQUIRE EVEN MORE GUNSHIPS TO PROTECT THE EXTRACTION, THE MAJOR PROMPTLY

REQUESTED ANOTHER FLIGHT BE SENT INTO THE AREA. THE GROUND TO AIR FIRE CONTINUED TO INCREASE IN INTENSITY, AND THE GUNSHIPS, THREE HAVING SUSTAINED NUMEROUS HITS, WERE FORCED TO EXPEND THEIR ORDNANCE MORE RAPIDLY THAN HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED, CAUSING THEM TO LEAVE STATION BEFORE THE SECOND FLIGHT ARRIVED. MAJOR HARRISON WAS ONCE AGAIN ALONE AND THE SOLE SUPPORT OF THE SPECIAL FORCES TEAM, WHICH BY THIS TIME HAD SUSTAINED 100 PER CENT CASUALTIES. WITH COMPLETE DISREGARD FOR HIS OWN SAFETY, THE MAJOR UNHESITATINGLY BEGAN TO EXPEND HIS 21 H.E. AND 7 W.P. ROCKETS ALONG WITH 2,000 ROUNDS OF 7.62 CAL AMMUNITION, CAREFULLY CONSERVING HIS RESOURCES AND MAKING REPEATED PASSES ON THE SOURCES OF THE HEAVIEST, MOST INTENSE FIRE. THE INTENSITY OF THE GROUND TO AIR FIRE CONTINUED TO INCREASE WITH EACH PASS AS THE MAJOR SUCCESSFULLY SOUGHT TO DRAW FIRE AWAY FROM THE FRIENDLY ELEMENT. ON THE FOURTH OR FIFTH PASS HIS OV-10 AIRCRAFT SUSTAINED A HIT FROM AN EXPLODING B-40 ROCKET PROPELLED GRENADE. DESPITE THE FACT THE MAJOR CONTINUED HIS VALIANT EFFORTS TO PROTECT THE TEAM. ON ONE PASS HE OBSERVED 35-55 OF THE ENEMY, ONLY 60 METERS AWAY, AND ADVANCING RAPIDLY TOWARD THE FRIENDLY UNIT. MAJOR HARRISON THEN ROLLED IN AND ENGAGED THE ADVANCING ELEMENT, DELIVERING HIS ORDNANCE WITH EXTREME ACCURACY DESPITE THE HEAVY GROUND TO AIR FIRE, THEREBY DESTROYING 10-20 OF THEIR NUMBER AND EFFECTIVELY THWARTING THE ATTACK. THE SITUATION WAS FURTHER COMPLICATED WHEN THE AIRBORNE COMMANDER OF THE PICKUP HELICOPTER ARRIVED ON STATION WITH MORE GUNSHIPS, BUT WAS UNABLE TO DIRECT THE RECOVERY OF THE RECONNAISSANCE TEAM DUE TO THE FAILURE OF HIS RADIOS. MAJOR HARRISON QUICKLY ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE NEWLY ARRIVED HELICOPTER FORCES, AND WHILE HE CONTINUED TO PROVIDE SUPPRESSIVE FIRE, DIRECTED THE EXTRACTION OF THE SPECIAL FORCES TEAM AND THE SIMULTANEOUS EXPENDITURE OF THE GUNSHIPS. ROPES WERE LOWERED FROM THE HELICOPTER HOVERING OVER THE FRIENDLIES, AND ALL FIVE WERE RECOVERED, DESPITE THE FACT ONE HAD BEEN KILLED AND THE REMAINING FOUR WERE SERIOUSLY WOUNDED. MAJOR HARRISON'S COMPLETE DISREGARD FOR HIS OWN SAFETY, AND HIS VALOROUS AND DECISIVE ACTION IN THE FACE OF EXTREME ADVERSITY, WERE UNDOUBTEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE SPECIAL FORCES TEAM, AND THE SAVING OF FOUR LIVES. MAJOR HARRISON'S OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE, COURAGE, AND DEVOTION TO DUTY WERE IN KEEPING WITH THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF THE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER IN COMBAT AND IS WORTHY OF EMULATION IN THE MOST CHERISHED TRADITIONS OF THE UNITED STATES OFFICERS CORPS.

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