

Chief Warrant Officer William Hayden "Pappy" Jones was nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Here is the story behind that nomination as told by Hayden Jones and Ernie Steincamp.

June 30, 1972--

Approximately two hours into a six hour mission as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) , 1st LT. Erwin (Ernie) Steincamp received an urgent radio call from the Airborne Command Post (ABCCC) to contact a Marine Captain, Advisor to a company of an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Special Forces.

He pushed the throttle all the way forward to the stops on his OV-10 Bronco and turned immediately to the coordinates given. Soon he had clear radio contact with the Marine Captain, who explained he and his ARVN troops were in a dire situation. They had spearheaded a push into territory known to contain at least 20,000 North Vietnamese Army Troops (NVA). The NVA executed a classic maneuver to pull the ARVN forward and then outflank and pincer off their retreat. The Marine excitedly explained their need for immediate Air Support, as his front-line troops were in hand-to-hand combat. To further complicate the situation, a thin cloud cover was developing over the area.

LT. Steincamp asked ABCCC for any Strike Aircraft nearby. ABCCC already had a flight of four F4's armed with MK-82 (500lb) bombs inbound to his position. The Marine Advisor explained he wanted the bombs dropped directly onto his frontline troops, as they were seriously outnumbered and about to collapse. Stunned by his request, LT. Steincamp asked the advisor to confirm. The advisor explained that they were heavily outnumbered and he was declaring a "TAC-E" or Tactical Emergency as they were about to be overrun and felt they had no other choice!

LT. Steincamp briefed the fighter-bombers and diligently tried to work them through the increasing cloud cover, but to no avail. The fast-movers couldn't maintain target contact. On the last pass, LT. Steincamp tried to lead the fighters through the clouds. The fighters lost sight of the FAC and called "Breaking off-bingo fuel." They needed to head for a tanker Aircraft to re-fuel.

Already through the clouds, LT. Steincamp had a clear view of the target and noted a skirmish line of about forty NVA troops advancing south toward the TIC (troops in contact). Yanking the OV-10 hard to the left put him in perfect position to attack. Though lightly armed, the mission load was two seven-round pods of white phosphorus (Willy-Pete), two seven-round pods of high explosive (HE) and four internally-mounted M-60 machine guns. Selecting both pods of Willy-Pete, LT. Steincamp fired all fourteen rockets just south of the NVA to half their advance and pin their position. Next he selected the HE's and walked them down the line of NVA. Now within range of the M-60's, he pulled the trigger on all four guns, walking the tracers down on what remained of the NVA until all four guns fell silent.

Nearly at ground level, LT. Steincamp pulled hard on the stick in a high-G recovery that put him in a near vertical climb, seeking the safety of the lowering clouds. The biggest

threat was the Russian-made SA-7 heat seeking missile, a highly lethal shoulder-launched missile supplied to the NVA late in the war.

Reaching the clouds, LT. Steincamp checked his engine instruments, all OK and reversed course to put himself back in the fight. Although out of ammo, he planned to make another pass to jettison his centerline fuel tank and empty rocket pods to at least unnerve the NVA.

He never got the chance. Breaking out of the clouds, he quickly oriented himself, set his armament switches and prepared for another pass. Just as he looked at the target area, a huge explosion outboard of his left engine violently shook the whole plane. Stabbing rudder and aileron to level the wings, he glanced back at the left wing just in time to see the entire wing tear away, sending the aircraft into a violent nose-down roll with high negative G forces.

The G forces were so high that LT. Steincamp's hands were torn from the controls and pinned to the canopy above his head. Despite his best efforts, he could not get either hand down to the ejection handle between his legs. For several seconds he fought to reach the handle, when for reasons unknown, the aerodynamics changed, and he was able to grab the D-Ring and pull. LT. Steincamp's next sensation was the relative quiet of hanging beneath a full parachute. His relief was short-lived, as the steady sound of small arms fire and the sonic crack of bullets passing close was felt. There was a steady ripple down the shroud lines as automatic weapons punched hundreds of holes in the canopy.

As he never expected to make it to the ground alive, in a short prayer he asked Almighty God for a quick merciful death and for God to look after his son, now one year old. Opening his eyes he saw the ground, now close, and looking east about 50 NVA running toward him about 50-60 yards away. He hit the ground hard, popped off the chute releases and ran west, dodging trees and brush until exhausted. He crawled into a bush and sucked as much air as possible until he heard the NVA voices getting near. Again he ran west, hoping not to come face-to-face with several NVA, as his only weapon was the standard six-shooter revolver.

His luck held as he finally came to an abandoned rice paddy with a narrow treeline extending about two-thirds across. Thick vines and tall grass grew at the bottom of the tree-line, extending over the paddy ditches. Knowing the NVA would not want to search through the thorny vines, LT. Steincamp knew he had found his hiding place. Advancing several yards into the tree line, pulling vines together behind him, he finally fell to the ground, rolled into the paddy ditch, and waited to be captured, killed, or rescued.

LT. Steincamp now pulled as much grass and vines as possible to cover himself, and smeared mud from the paddy wall over his face, neck, and hair. During this time he heard nearly constant bursts of small arms fire from every direction. He figured the NVA were firing into likely hiding places trying to flush him out. Just as his heart rate began to settle, two NVA soldiers walked up to the edge of the rice paddy. Both carried AK-47's slung on their shoulders. They quickly scanned the paddy, unslung their weapons,

and squatted to have a cigarette, unaware that LT. Steincamp lay 15 yards away. Laughing and smoking, they lingered for about 10 minutes, then circled north and west around the paddy. Twice more during LT. Steincamp's five hours on the ground would NVA come dangerously close to his position.

It was nearly an hour before LT. Steincamp dared to make a call on his survival radio, even though he heard planes overhead several times. The sound of an O-2 FAC Aircraft encouraged his short whispered transmission of, "Mayday, Mayday, Nail 37, I'm alive." A Covey FAC out of Da Nang called back immediately, "Glad to hear it, standby for ID", the question and answer routine to verify that a survivor was legitimate and not an English speaking enemy trying to suck rescue forces into a trap. This was a frustrating procedure, for LT. Steincamp knew the NVA carried radio direction finders, so he had to keep transmissions under 5 seconds in length. Any longer and the NVA would triangulate his exact position. He had flown many missions over this area west of Quang Tri and knew that it was occupied by thousands of NVA. He alerted the Covey FAC that there was an SA-7 missile threat, knowing that information would greatly complicate the rescue effort. The WWII vintage A-1E's and the huge HH-53 Helicopters were at high risk in a missile environment.

The next few hours were torture, waiting for the rescue that seemed less likely with each passing minute. It was getting late in the day. There would be no rescue attempt at night. The Covey FAC kept talking, trying to keep LT. Steincamp's spirits up, both knowing the rescue window was closing. Finally, the bad news arrived, the rescue would be delayed until morning. Hearing Vietnamese voices from ALL directions, LT. Steincamp told the Covey FAC, "I won't be here in the morning."

Meanwhile at an Air CAV base on the island of Tan My off the Coast of Vietnam, two chopper pilots, settled onto bar stools at the base watering hole and ordered two well deserved beers after a full day of base-hopping inspections, meetings, and supply drops. As Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Hayden "Pappy" Jones and his boss, Captain Jim Elder, hoisted the refreshing liquid to their lips, an enlisted trooper barged through the door announcing, "Hey, we got an Air Force pilot down southwest of Quang Tri."

This was real estate that CWO Jones was very familiar with, as it lay in their primary area of operations (AO). He turned to CPT Elder and said, "wadda you think?" CPT Elder, relatively new to this AO shrugged and said, "Up to you!" CWO Jones did not hesitate. True warriors always ride toward the sound of battle and Pappy Jones was a true warrior. Taking one swig to knock the dust from his throat, he said, "let's go!" Knowing his crew were probably through servicing the Huey slick, he quickly gathered a volunteer crew of two door gunners, a crew chief and a Search and Rescue (SAR) coordinator and was quickly airborne.

Getting rough coordinates from ABCCC, he contacted the Covey FAC for a more exact location, and mentally drew a plan to get to LT. Steincamp's location and an exit strategy designed to escape the worst of the NVA defenses. CWO "Pappy" Jones knew that the sooner he could get the Air Force pilot the better, as the NVA would have less time to

organize air defenses for the rescue mission they knew would come. CWO Jones was unaware that LT. Steincamp had been on the ground nearly five hours now, and the NVA were already well prepared.

The flight inbound was an unpleasant surprise, the area was saturated with NVA, and the Huey drew heavy small arms fire and the door gunners were kept busy returning fire and called out five SA-7 launches. CWO Jones had to slow the Huey so that he wouldn't over-run LT. Steincamp's position. His original idea of Steincamp's position was somewhat south of his actual position, so he flew deeper and deeper into "Indian Territory". He was determined to extract the Air Force pilot; turning back was not an option.

As some of the adrenalin wore off, LT. Steincamp realized that there was very few portions of his body that didn't radiate pain. Contemplating his situation, he realized that his chances of survival were slim and none!! Moments later, the Covey FAC called and told him to standby, there was a chopper inbound. Within seconds he heard the distinct sounds of a Huey chopper to the west of his position. His first thoughts were that "no one in their right mind would fly a Huey into this area," however at this point, "I'll take any ride I can get."

Whispering into his survival radio to turn hard right, LT. Steincamp heard an immediate change in the rotor blades of the Huey as they loaded up in a hard right turn. He also heard CWO Jones call on the emergency frequency for everyone to cease the chatter. Now LT. Steincamp heard the Huey heading from West to East just north of his position. Thrashing out of his hiding spot, he quickly made his way toward the center of the rice paddy and saw the Huey moving east, right on the tops of the trees. He called for another "hard right". CWO Jones pulled hard on the collective, stabbed the throttle and laid the Huey over in a near 90 degree bank, putting his heading in a perfect line to LT. Steincamp. Holding a white plastic signal panel in his left hand and his .38 revolver in his right hand, LT. Steincamp waved his arms frantically to get the crew's attention, forgetting he also had his radio in his left hand.

CWO Jones spotted the downed pilot less than 25 yards ahead and again put the Huey into a blade-bending right turn to position the Huey at the west end of the tree line. Just as CWO Jones was settling the Huey into a hover, the left door gunner opened up with his .50 cal on two NVA that popped out of their "spider holes" on the west bank of the paddy. They never got off a round. When the .50 cal erupted LT. Steincamp thought the NVA had sprung a trap and crouched in the middle of the paddy and quickly scanned the perimeter of the rice paddy expecting to see NVA rushing in from all directions. Seeing nothing, he looked back at the Huey that hovered two feet above the paddy so steady it appeared to have landed. CWO Jones moved the Huey sideways toward LT. Steincamp as far as possible while the right door gunner waved frantically to LT. Steincamp to hurry to the aircraft.

Moving quickly toward the Huey, LT. Steincamp became entangled in old rusty barbwire. The right door gunner jumped to the ground helped the pilot get untangled and

both rushed to the Huey and jumped aboard. CWO Jones demanded all the Huey could give and within seconds they were headed north at treetop level. Knowing that the NVA had fired an SA-7 at the Covey FAC from about 100 meters north of his position, LT. Steincamp leaned forward to the cockpit and yelled for a "right turn", just as an NVA .51 cal anti-aircraft gun riddled the Huey from nose to tail. CWO Jones yanked the Huey into a hard right turn and headed for the coast, not knowing how badly the Huey was damaged. Both door gunners kept a steady rate of suppressive fire and it was several seconds before LT. Steincamp noticed that the SAR coordinator, 1st SGT McConnell, who was sitting in the seat next to him had pitched forward unconscious. Steincamp yelled, "we have a man hit" and saw blood gushing from a wound above his left kidney.

The left door gunner turned and saw the wound and grabbed the first aid kit on the forward bulkhead, pulled the paper off a whole wad of gauze and shoved it into the large wound and yelled for LT. Steincamp to "Hold that in". Blood continued to flow and another wad of gauze was shoved in and held by LT. Steincamp, while the left door gunner returned to putting down suppressive fire.

Everyone aboard the Huey knew they were in a time critical situation, whether the Huey would survive the extreme abuse long enough to get SGT McConnell to a much needed surgeon. CWO Jones called on the emergency radio that they had critically wounded crew member on board and needed medical help. A return call stated that they had a medical team on board and were standing by to receive casualties. CWO Jones thought he was talking to another chopper and called for a rendezvous point called twin steeples, as he approached the coastline.

The return call was a puzzle when the caller stated, "Negative, Negative, I'm feet wet and stay feet wet." CWO Jones replied, "What are you? A F---ing boat??" The caller replied, "Affirmative" and proceeded to give radial and DME settings. Jones replied that all he had was a mag compass that didn't work. Luckily another reserve helicopter told Jones that "the boat" was 20 klicks offshore and asked if he had enough gas to make it. Jones stated that he did and followed the other helicopter until he had a visual of "the boat".

"The boat" turned out to be the USS Okinawa, a marine troop ship that was off shore Da Nang Air Base and had streamed north when LT. Steincamp's position was known, to be in position, just in case it was needed. It had a complete set of operating rooms and full component of Naval surgeons. They deserve the full credit for saving the life of SGT McConnell.

When LT. Steincamp looked out the forward windscreen of the Huey, all he could see was water so close he figured they must be leaving a wake! He knew SGT McConnell would never make the long trip to Da Nang, so when the large ship filled the windscreen he was elated. After CWO Jones related to the ship's landing officer that he understood not a word of the naval landing instructions, he told them he would come around the end of the ship and land on the front. That seemed to satisfy everyone. The marine aviators had a good laugh with Jones later.

CWO Jones brought the Huey around the ship and touched down on the heaving deck like a butterfly with sore feet. The gunners and LT. Steincamp lifted SGT McConnell out of the right side to several corpsmen waiting with a gurney. They quickly hustled him to the triage and surgery to remove all the shrapnel and repair the damaged organs. The first piece of metal the surgeons removed from SGT McConnell's back was the door handle from the left side of the sliding door of the Huey. Another piece the size of a silver dollar stopped ¼ inch from his heart.

LT. Steincamp half stepped and half fell out the left side door, completely exhausted and sick from over five hours of adrenalin pump. He was covered in several areas from SGT McConnell's blood. After protesting to the corpsmen that he was OK, they wrestled him onto a gurney and began cutting off the bloodstained flightsuit on the way to triage. He felt he was lucky at the time—but had 2nd and 3rd degree burns, a severely sprained left ankle and right knee, a compression fracture of his lower back, and numerous scrapes and scratches.

Steincamp states that both he and SGT. McConnell owe their lives to Hayden (Pappy) Jones. Steincamp can't believe that there was anybody crazy enough to come that deep into the danger to get him. Steincamp ask Jones what he owed him—Jones replied—"Oh buy me a drink the next time you see me." Thirty years later when the men saw each other again for the first time, Steincamp presented Jones with a bottle of Crown Royal.

One of the things that both Steincamp and Jones remarked about was the coordination of the 4 services—The U.S. Air Force in support of the U. S. Marine Corp. The U.S. Army rescuing the U.S. Air Force and The U. S. Navy being ready to help and taking care of the personnel injured. Truly a joint force effort!

There are soldiers and there are warriors. Warriors are men that can't tolerate the idea of abandoning another soldier to the enemy. CWO Hayden "Pappy" Jones was a warrior and what heroes are made of!