

Summary of Recommendation for the Presidential Unit Citation
14th Combat Aviation Battalion United States Army

MISSION:

The mission of the 14th Combat Aviation Battalion on this day was to perform the extraction of a Battalion of American troops from the Special Forces Camp and Airfield at Kham Duc, Republic of Vietnam.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS:

The 14th Combat Aviation Battalion, utilizing OH-47D medium lift helicopters, escorted by UH-1H armed helicopters, would land at the camp and ferry out men and supplies.

SITUATION:

During the weeks prior to 12 May 1968, a continuing enemy build-up was observed in the mountains surrounding the Special Forces Camp and airfield at Kham Duc. By 9 May, aircraft making resupply or medevac flights into the camp were being shot at continuously. By 11 May, the enemy had the camp surrounded with a multi-regimental force from the 2d NVA Division. The enemy defense posture was strong. They controlled the high ground surrounding the airfield and had emplaced numerous mortar and machinegun positions able to command every foot of the airfield and the aerial approaches into the camp.

Inside the camp, the American forces and their Vietnamese allies were under a severe strain from the steadily mounting ground and mortar attacks. During the night of May 11, the CIDG Forces killed an estimated 200 enemy making a frontal attack on the camp. By the early morning hours of 12 May, the situation had deteriorated to the point that the Commanding General, Americal Division, ordered the evacuation of the camp.

The 14th Combat Aviation Battalion was committed to extract as many US troops as possible. The USAF and USMC would attempt to evacuate the Vietnamese Forces and other American troops. As the first flight of OH-47 helicopters from the 178th AGAS made their approach, they were met by a devastating burst of machinegun fire. The lead ship burst into flames and crashed on the runway. The remaining aircraft returned for refueling, one returning to Chu Lai with severe battle damage. After the Air Force and Marine airstrikes had finished, the Chinooks returned. Three made it to the runway and lifted out the first American troops. Two others never made it down due to a constant rain of mortar rounds detonating on the runway.

Between 1130 and 1300, UH1H helicopters, escorted by UH1C gunships made 10 sorties into the camp, in response to an urgent plea from the ground commander for ammunition. Each ship landed, off-loaded its supply of ammunition under continuous fire, and ferried out more American troops. Throughout the day, CH-47 helicopters made repeated trips into the camp to extract troops. A fully loaded CH-47 was shot out of the sky but due to skillful handling it was crash-landed with no casualties other than 1 passenger killed by machinegun fire. A Marine AH, providing cover was shot down. A UH1H helicopter covered by two gunships, raced in and extracted the pilot from the jaws of an onrushing NVA platoon.

At 1645, when the last sortie terminated, the 11th Combat Aviation Battalion had extracted 700 American troops under the intense enemy fire which had downed 9 aircraft that day. In a message to the Commanding General, 1st Aviation Brigade, Major General Samuel Koster, CG, Americal Division said "...efforts of the 11th Combat Aviation Battalion...are most appreciated...without the assistance of this...organization, the success of the operation would have been infinitely more difficult if not impossible to achieve....".

Personnel of the Battalion have been awarded or recommended for 78 awards for that day. These are: 1 JBC, 15 SS, 21 DFC, 1 MSMV, 15 AMV, 20 ACMV, and 5 PH. Of these, General Koster personally presented 10 SS, 4 DFC, and 1 MSMV on 17 May to members of the Battalion.

The extraordinary courage displayed by the 11th Combat Aviation Battalion in this operation, proving that Army Aviation could perform an extraction of a Battalion sized force under fire, reflects the highest possible credit upon the officers and men, their units, and the United States Army.

The facts stated in this summary and Proposed Citation are a matter of record.