

11 June 1982

From: Colonel F. L. TOLLESON U. S. Marine Corps (Retired)
To: Commander

U. S. Army Military Personnel Center
Attn: DAPC-POS-A (Mrs. Clinton)
200 Stovall Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22332

Subj: Recognition of Heroism and Gallantry in Action; Cases
of U. S. Army Personnel during Operation LAMSON 719
during the War in Vietnam

1. Background:

a. In early January 1971 highly classified planning was conducted by selected key members of the XXIV Corps staff and the Vietnamese I Corps Staff. In late January a plan developed under the guise of "Plans for the 1971 Spring Summer Campaign." The objective of this plan (Code Name LAMSON 719) was to launch an attack along National Route 9 into Laos in order to cut the HO CHI MINH Trail and to destroy the 604 base area of the North Vietnamese Army.

b. This operation was to be conducted and controlled by the I Corps Command which would be augmented by the ARVN Airborne Division and by two Vietnamese Marine Brigades. Additionally U. S. Forces would be actively engaged in support of the operation. Especially, the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) and other U. S. helicopter assets.

c. During this time I was assigned as the Senior Advisor to Brigade 147, Vietnamese Marine Corps. Additionally, as the operation progressed I was assigned the duties of Senior Airborne Coordinator for the Vietnamese Marine Division.

d. Various after action reports and the records of the U. S. Army Center for Military History and records of the U. S. Marine Corps can be used to provide details of LAMSON 719.

2. Specifics:

a. In early March Brigade 147 was committed to the battle by conducting a helicopter assault onto Fire Support Base DELTA (Hill 550 located at GC 647302)

By 16-17 March FSB DELTA was surrounded with the Marines successfully defending the base against almost overwhelming NVA forces. But they were paying a high price. By 18 March the resupply problem had become critical as well as the need for the evacuation of wounded. The tactical situation was

worsening as the other ARVN forces were retreating in disarray from LAOS. An all out assault on FSB DELTA by the 29th and 803rd Regiments of the NVA 324B Division was imminent.

c. On 18 March I launched an all out effort to resupply Brigade 147 on DELTA.

d. FSB DELTA was ringed by at least three NVA 12.7mm AA guns (possibly four) and innumerable NVA light machine guns and small arms totally surrounded the hill. In many cases the NVA were so close to the RVN Marine's positions that artillery or gunship strikes could not be made. More importantly the landing zones on DELTA were zeroed in by NVA mortars. This required superior airmanship and coordination in a game of "cat and mouse" to confuse the NVA as to the exact point and timing of helo landings. Many of these problems could have been solved if the U. S. Army would have let us escort the helos with U. S. Navy attack aircraft that were available.

e. We were being supported by the 71st Aviation Company with UH-1H helicopters. Normally as each helo landed it not only dropped supplies but picked up wounded. Additionally a high helo was kept on station to pick up downed crews or other missions as assigned. My job as the Senior Airborne Coordinator was to coordinate the U. S. helo support with the needs of the supported Vietnamese ground commander. As a result, for all helo operations I was airborne above FSB Delta in a U. S. Army Command and Control helo from which I directed artillery missions, air strikes and the phasing of resupply landings.

f. On the 18th of March at least three landings were made. At the end of each sortie the high bird would be sent in to extract wounded.

g. On the first landing of the high bird (Rattler 20) that day heavy automatic weapons fire was directed at the helo but, it made it in. As the wounded were being loaded mortar rounds began to impact in the LZ. At one point it appeared that one round had hit the right front of the helo, but the helo was able to lift out with the wounded on board.

h. After picking up more supplies a second sortie was put into the base. Again the high bird was used to pick up more wounded. This time the helo (Rattler 28) flew a hard zig-zag pattern but still received heavy AA fire. The pilot faked a touchdown away from where the wounded were staged then made a hovering turn to land next to the wounded. Again before the loading was completed the mortar rounds began impacting. At times the dust and smoke made it appear that the helo had been hit. Luck and the Almighty were with us and a brave, skilled pilot lifted off the base with wounded.

i. Another sortie was put into Delta but the intense AA fire prevented the resupply helos from landing. My Vietnamese counterpart on FSB DELTA was pleading for more medevacs. We sent in a medevac helo but it too was turned away by the intense fire. Since Rattler 20 and Rattler 28 had been successful before I asked the Air Mission Commander, who was piloting my helo, to ask them if they would take another try at bringing out more wounded. It had to be on a volunteer basis.

j. As the request went over the radio Rattler 28 turned towards FSB DELTA. The helo requested that a smoke grenade be used north of the LZ to confuse the NVA. As the helo began its decent toward the smoke intense AA fire was directed at the helo. Our gunship support had long been out of ammo and the necessary flight paths prevented me from using artillery to suppress the enemy air defense. The pilot of my helo, the air mission commander, advise Rattler 28 to break off but they continued their approach. Again the skill and daring of the complex approach ended with the helo landing next to the pad where the wounded were staged.

k. Again the mortar rounds commenced to walk towards the helo. The C&C helo pilot told Rattler to get out of the zone and leave the wounded but Rattler answered that they would die if he couldn't get them out. The helo loaded the wounded and lifted out through a rain of intense AA fire and only through highly skilled airmanship eluded the fire to safely land in South Vietnam ,

l. In excess of thirty severely wounded RVN Marines were evacuated by Rattler 20 and Rattler 28 that day. These men would have all died had it not been for the gallantry of the pilot and crews of Rattler 20 and Rattler 28.

m. Five days later on 23 March the situation on DELTA was beyond hope. Near sundown the NVA commenced an all out assault supported by ten PT 76 flame throwing tanks. The RVN Marines destroyed two with LAAWS, one with an AT mine, and one with tactical air but six made it inside the DELTA perimeter. During the night Brigade 147 fought its way off of DELTA and commenced withdrawing towards FSB HOTEL only to encounter an ambush. The following morning Brigade 147 had linked up with Brigade 258 having survived the night ambush which was a pitched battle between tanks and infantry. The battle for DELTA cost the enemy over 2000 troops probably more. Brigade 147 lost about 600 of its original 1100 Marines killed or wounded. The South Vietnamese would "officially" give a lower casualty figure; I know how many we mustered.

WE MADE THE ONLY MEDEVAC THAT DAY BUT UP UNTIL I FOUND COL. TOLLESON, I THOUGHT WE WERE THE ONLY SHIP TO LAND AT DELTA THAT DAY. HE AND HIS C&C SHIP TRIED AN EXTRACTION AFTER OURS. THEY MADE IT TO THE LZ AND AS TWO ARVNS HELPED A THIRD RUN TOWARD THEIR SHIP, A MORTAR ROUND TOOK THE WOUNDED MAN'S HEAD OFF. THE TWO ARVNS EITHER SIDE FELL AWAY AND THE HEADLESS ARVN RAN A FEW MORE STEPS TOWARD THE A/C BEFORE COLLAPSING! A/C THEN TOOK OFF

n. Upon returning to the CP of the Vietnamese Division and the Marine Advisory Unit at Khe Sanh on 18 March during my debriefing I recommended that Rattler 20 and Rattler 28 be recommended for immediate award of the Silver Star for superior airmanship and gallantry in action. I asked if they needed any more detail statements from me and told no, that the 101st Division would be notified by the Marine Advisory Unit.

3. I have subsequently learned that Rattler 20 and Rattler 28 were WO 1 Jim E. FULLBROOK [REDACTED] and WO 1 Douglas M. F. WOMACK [REDACTED] and that neither of them have received recognition for their heroic efforts on 18 March 1971. Enough things went wrong during that war but it is totally inappropriate to not recognize their heroism that day.

4. I again recommend the award of the Silver Star for Gallantry in Action.

5. Should you require more information or an appearance before any review board I am available.


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IN CONVERSATION, MAT. TOLLESON CREDITED OUR EXTRactions WITH FREEING THE ARVN MARINES OF THEIR WOUNDED, ALLOWING THEM TO FIGHT THEIR WAY OFF DELTA.

NO U.S. AWARDS WERE RECEIVED BUT WE KNOW OUR NAMES WENT FORWARD BECAUSE OF AWARDS OF THE VIET-NAM GALLANTRY CROSS WITH SILVER STAR DEVICE SIGNED BY ARVN MARINE DIVISION COMMANDER

RECONSTRUCTED AWARDS RECOMMENDATIONS AS SUBMITTED BY CPT
DAN GRIGSBY. AWARDS RECOMMENDATIONS WERE MADE INDEPENDANT
OF CO. FOLESON'S RECOMMENDATION, BUT WERE APPARENTLY LOST
AT 14TH CAB IN CHU-LAI

FULBROOK, JIM E., [REDACTED], WO1, Aviation

71st Aviation Company, 14th Combat Aviation Battalion, 23d Infantry Division,
APO 96374

Award: Distinguished Service Cross

Date of Service: 18 March 1971

Theater: Kingdom of Laos

Authority: (To be inserted)

PROPOSED CITATION: For extraordinary heroism at great risk of life as evidenced by voluntary actions above and beyond the call of duty in the Kingdom of Laos. Warrant Officer Fulbrook distinguished himself on 18 March 1971 while serving as an Aircraft Commander with the 71st Assault Helicopter Company. On that date, the company was conducting an emergency resupply of retreating South Vietnamese ground elements in a valiant attempt to consolidate forces, encourage a counterattack, and prevent total annihilation of the Allied Force. Firebase Delta was completely surrounded by a large North Vietnamese Regular Army force and a decision had been made the day before to forgo further airmobile evacuation of the wounded as the mounting helicopter losses were too great. Warrant Officer Fulbrook was flying his helicopter as high ship (downed ship recovery) for the resupply operation when the flight returned to Lang Vei, Vietnam for refueling. Knowledgeable of the fate of the litter wounded remaining on Firebase Delta, Warrant Officer Fulbrook volunteered to attempt a rescue. As he began his first approach to Delta, intense volumes of small and heavy automatic weapons fire were directed toward his craft. Determined to reach the LZ, he expertly performed evasive maneuvers to avoid the enemy fire and successfully reached the escarpment on Firebase Delta. As the litter wounded were taken aboard, enemy mortar shells, targeted on the LZ, began exploding around Warrant Officer Fulbrook's helicopter. With complete disregard for his own safety, he courageously maintained his position until the wounded were secured and then made his departure through the mortar barrage. On his second approach to Firebase Delta, he requested that the LZ be moved 100 yards south to confuse the enemy gunners. He was met with an even increased intensity of automatic weapons fire as he performed evasive maneuvers on his approach. Upon reaching the new LZ, mortar rounds began exploding in adjustment that rapidly enveloped his helicopter. He narrowly escaped injury when a mortar round exploded to the left front of the helicopter as the craft lifted from the LZ. After dropping off the wounded, Warrant Officer Fulbrook volunteered to evacuate wounded South Vietnamese from LZ Hotel prior to refueling. Mortar fire adjustments had targeted LZ Hotel, inflicting injuries and effectively eliminating the ongoing extraction of troops. His approach into and departure from LZ Hotel with the wounded were executed so swiftly that the North Vietnamese gun crews did not even have time to engage his aircraft. At dusk, the situation at Firebase Delta has gravely worsened. Monitoring the ARVN Marine FM frequency, he overheard an interpreter state that the handful of garrison troops could not sustain the inevitable NVA attack and might have to leave the litter wounded behind. Without hesitation, he immediately volunteered to attempt another rescue. Despite being warned that there would be no helicopter gunship cover or tactical fighter support, he insisted on making an attempt. Because the two LZs previously used on Firebase Delta were now targeted by enemy mortars, he requested that a smoke grenade be used at a third and false location to confuse the enemy gunners. Considering the risk, and as a

precautionary measure, both pilots in the helicopter were on the controls with Warrant Officer Fulbrook directing the approach. As he began his rapid descent, the NVA heavy machine gunners realized there would be no air cover and began using tracers. Green 12.7mm tracers enveloped the rapidly descending helicopter from at least three sources at such an intensity that the Air Mission Commander instructed Warrant Officer Fulbrook to break off the approach. Ignoring this warning in light of his life saving mission, he courageously and expertly defied the enemy and successfully reached the LZ. Upon touchdown, mortar rounds began impacting around the aircraft. Ignoring the Air Mission Commander's warning to take off, he maintained his position until all wounded were safely on board. Departing through an intense mortar barrage and heavy automatic weapons fire, Warrant Officer Fulbrook successfully departed Firebase Delta. His extraordinary heroism in face of grave danger resulted in thirty-one South Vietnamese troops being evacuated, all of whom would have died had it not been for his efforts. Warrant Officer Fulbrook's personal heroism, professional competence, and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 23d Infantry Division, and the United States Army.

* * * *

CURRENT PERSONAL DATA: Dr. Fulbrook is presently a CPT, MSC, assigned to the U.S. Army Aeromedical Research Laboratory; P.O. Box 577; Fort Rucker, Alabama 36362

WOMACK, DOUGLAS M.F., [REDACTED], WO1, Aviation

71st Aviation Company, 14th Combat Aviation Battalion, 23d Infantry Division,
APO 96374

Award: Distinguished Service Cross

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safety precaution, both pilots in the helicopter were on the controls. As the helicopter began its rapid descent, the NVA heavy machine gunners immediately recognized that there would be no air support and instantly started using tracers. As the helicopter rapidly descended through murderous fire erupting from at least three 12.7mm anti-aircraft positions, he monitored critical instruments and ignored warnings from the Air Mission Commander to break off the approach. Upon touchdown, mortar rounds immediately enveloped his helicopter. Despite the pleas from his Air Mission Commander to abort, Warrant Officer Womack remained in the LZ until all wounded soldiers were safely on board. Departing through an intense mortar barrage and heavy automatic weapons fire, he successfully departed Firebase Delta. His extraordinary heroism in face of grave danger resulted in thirty-one South Vietnamese troops being evacuated, all of whom would have died had it not been for his efforts. Warrant Officer Womack's personal heroism, professional competence, and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 23d Infantry Division, and the United States Army.

CURRENT PERSONAL DATA: Mr. Womack is presently a CW3, USAR, assigned to the 327th Aviation Company (Corps) (-), Building P-0090; Fort Meade, Maryland 20755

EXTRACT FROM 14th CAB AFTER ACTION REPORT

2. SECTION II - SECTION 2.1.1.1: Commanders Observations, Evaluation and Recommendations.

a. RECOMMENDATIONS:

(a) Observation - Influx of maintenance school trained personnel is far below the number of outgoing.

(b) Evaluation - The 71st Maintenance is second to none. This unit at the present time is far below its strength, with unskilled personnel filling existing vacancies, if our maintenance is to continue at such a high quality more school trained personnel are needed.

(c) Recommendation - That this unit receive allotted strength, to compensate for the diminishing personnel factors.

b. OPERATIONS:

(a) Observation - The following is a brief report on the hits sustained by the 71st in the Month of March in support of Lam Son 719.

(1) 3 March 1971; #67-17269 took numerous hits with all major components incapacitated by intense fire (30' 10kts) (Aircraft was not recovered)

(2) 3 March 1971; #09-15352 also took an insurmountable amount of hits, incapacitating all components of the aircraft. Aircraft was not recovered (30' 10kts)

(3) 3 March 1971; #68-16426 took 3 hits in fuel compartment (30' 10kts)

(4) 3 March 1971; #68-16383 took 6 hits, that struck his transmission, while attempting to land (30' 10kts)

(5) 5 March 1971; #65-95492 was shot down while orbiting the LZ all components damaged (50' 90kts).

(6) 5 March 1971; #66-15060 took one hit in the fuselage while low leveling (0' 90kts)

(7) 6 March 1971; #66-16491 took 2 hits in the tail boom. (500' 90kts)

(8) 7 March 1971; #65-9510 took 3 hits in the fuselage (1500' 90kts)

(9) 17 March 1971; #66-16491 took one hit that went through wire bundles and penetrated trans deck (0' 90kts)

ALL BELOW ASSIGNED TO EMERGENCY RESUPPLY MISSION - ALL BUT 742 DAMAGED AT DELTA

DELTA (11) 18 March 1971; #66-15128 received one hit, damaging the main rotor (3,000' 90kts)

DELTA (11) 18 March 1971; #65-19510 received 1 hit also damaging the main rotor (1500' 90kts)

HOTEL (12) 18 March 1971; #68-15742 took 30 hits (shrapnel) while sitting in the LZ (0' 90kts)

DELTA (13) 18 March 1971; #69-15770 received 4 hits in the main

DETA 18 MAR - CREW WOUNDED IN 763 BUT A/C NOT HIT