

MILITARY NOTES

Fallen gunner to be honored

MILITARY An Arlington serviceman who flew 330 combat missions in Vietnam before he was killed will be added to the Navy Enlisted Combat Aircrew Roll of Honor.

By FRANK PERKINS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM

A former Arlington serviceman killed in action in 1969 along the Vietnam-Cambodia border will be honored Nov. 9 when his name is added to the Navy Enlisted Combat Aircrew Roll of Honor in a ceremony aboard the USS Yorktown aircraft carrier museum ship moored in Charleston, S.C.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Schafernocker, an aviation ordnanceman, was killed on April 28, 1969, while serving as a helicopter door gunner with Navy Attack Helicopter (Light) Squadron 3, "The Seawolves." His mother, Dorothy Schafernocker, lives in Newark, northwest of Fort Worth.

"I am very proud and feel very honored that my son will be added to the roll of honor," she wrote in a letter. "I'm going to be there if I have to crawl to get there."

Her son was nominated by another Seawolf helicopter door gunner, William Rutledge of San Diego, Calif.

Michael Schafernocker flew 330 combat missions in Vietnam and was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart and a number of other air action honors, distinguished unit citations and strike awards.

"He was selected for induction in the NECA Roll of Honor for his bravery and extraordinary heroism during low-level, search-and-destroy and strike missions supporting the Navy SEALs, Brown Water Riverine Force patrol boats and Army, Marine and other friendly forces in contact with the enemy," Rutledge said.

He said Schafernocker was awarded the Silver Star shortly before his death during a rescue operation involving another downed helicopter.

"They came in over the wreckage and Schafernocker volunteered to jump out of the bird and collect the survivors, but the senior gunner told him to stay with the ship and he jumped out. As they flew orbits around the site, providing covering fire for the rescue, Schafernocker would run from one side of the helicopter to the other, firing at enemy troops. He was a real hero."

Schafernocker's Detachment 3 flew out of bases along the Vietnam-Cambodia border. On the day he was killed, he was manning an M-60 machine gun as his fire team attacked enemy troops and heavily loaded sampans. Troops on the Cambodian side of the Mekong River shot down two UH-1B helicopters carrying Schafernocker's crew and another fire team, killing five and wounding two others.

The helicopters crashed on the river bank in Cambodia. The two wounded men were recovered by another helicopter crew.

Ten months later, Cambodian officials returned Schafernocker's body for burial in the United States.

"Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy, President Kennedy's widow, arranged that deal through the State Department by contacting the then-Cambodian ruler," Rutledge said. "They were friends. I have all sorts of documents signed by her arranging the transfer."

Rutledge also praised Dorothy Schafernocker. "She's been a mother to Vietnam vets around Fort Worth," he said. "She is always there to help them out or work for whatever they need. She's quite a lady."

Schafernocker will be hosting her annual Fall Veterans Picnic on Saturday at her Newark home on the northeast shore of Eagle Mountain Lake. It is open to all veterans. For more information, contact her at (817) 489-2880.

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