

## **Air Medal with V**

By CW-2 [Bernardo S. Paez](#)

It seems that April of 1967 was a dangerous period in my life. Not only did we get shot down on April 1st, but the following happened on the 26th.

We had been assigned to a Battalion Commander, (Lt. Col. Thomas Rosell, 1st Battn. 22nd Inf. Regt.), for the day. He had 3 companies combing the jungle about 5 miles north of the Ia Drang Valley. (Where the movie "We Were Soldiers" took place in 1965). We were flying in a D Model Huey that was noted for being a "Dog" with little power.

We flew mostly Command and Control, in which the Commander directs his troops from the air. Kind of boring type of flying, flying around in circles. Toward the end of the day, I had dropped off the Colonel at his fire base, had gone to refuel at a Special Forces camp near the Cambodian border named Duc Co, and had gone back to the fire base to wait for the Colonel to release us.

We sat around for about a hour, when the Colonel came running to our Helicopter and asked us if we could go in to evacuate 2 critically wounded men of his Battn. It seems that one of his Companies had gotten into a fire fight and had gotten surrounded. He had sent his other 2 Companies to relieve the first one and they had also gotten surrounded. He said there were no Medical Evacuation Helicopters available. He also said that they had blasted a small landing zone with C4 explosives.

I said O.K. and he briefed me on the situation. He gave me the units' position and radio call sign and told me there was artillery firing to the North and Fighter Bombers firing close air support to the East and West.

We cranked up and I contacted 2 of our Gunships (The Gamblers). I had flown with them for 6 months and knew the Gunship team leader. He was standing by at Duc Co and he readily agreed to cover us while we went in to pick up the wounded. I gave him the FM radio frequency and call sign of the ground commander. We communicated with each other on a UHF frequency. I told him that I would meet his team South of the Landing Zone and that we would be approaching from the South to North over a small hill.

I contacted the ground commander and told him our plans and to call off the Fighter Bombers for a while.

When we got set up, I asked the ground commander to pop a smoke grenade to mark the landing zone. I identified the color, (I still remember it was yellow), and we went in with the Gunships on each side firing to the East and West of the Landing Zone. Usually the Gunships flew an elongated circular pattern to cover us and each other, but due to the ground unit being surrounded, they came in on each side.

It was a really tight LZ where we had to come to a hover above the trees and come straight down about 60 feet.

I remember setting down while they loaded the wounded. The LZ was full of dust, smoke, and sound, with an occasional tracer passing above. They were still firing and the artillery was still going on to the North.

They brought up the 2 wounded, 1 was wounded in the head and was able to walk, but the other was on a stretcher and a soldier was giving him mouth to mouth resuscitation. He had been shot in the buttock and the round had come out in front and taken out his groin area. He was white from lose of blood.

With the 3 extra bodies and a full load of fuel we were overloaded.

I called the Gunships and told them we were coming out and to give us cover. I had to climb straight up due to the tight LZ. When the rotor blades were about 4 to 6 feet from the top of the trees, the engine RPM started bleeding off and I boosted it up as far as I could, but we could not gain any more altitude. Our options were to go back down and burn off fuel, find some way to lighten the load, or to cut through the trees.

I remembered we had come over a hill and that if we could get to the other side, that we could go downhill and get up enough airspeed to fly. I decided to cut through the branches sideways toward the South. The branches went flying just like being cut by a giant lawnmower and the Helicopter's fuselage was scraping the ends of the cut branches. We made it safely and were able to fly out.

By the time we took the wounded to the hospital, it was dark. (We later found out that the one shot in the buttock, died). We still had to fly about another 20 minutes to our airfield at the 4th Inf. Div. base camp. By this time a thunderstorm had come in and we had to fly back in the dark, in driving rain, thunder, and lightning. We were practically flying on instruments, luckily the lightning illuminated the ground occasionally. We got back to Enari Airfield in one piece.

I had the next day off and was asleep when the Maintenance Officer woke me up about 8:30 AM. He asked me if we had hit anything with the main rotor blades the day before. I told him the story and he told me that the rotor blades had deep gashes in them and that we were lucky they hadn't fallen apart.

Lt. Col. Rosell wrote up a great recommendation and I wound up getting my 23rd Air Medal with a "V" Device for being extremely lucky.

HEADQUARTERS  
4TH INFANTRY  
DIVISION  
APO San Francisco  
96262

GENERAL  
NUMBER 4539  
21 December 1967

ORDERS

AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL FOR HEROISM

1. TC 320. The following AWARD is announced:

PAEZ, BERNARDO S W3152621 CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER W-2 United States  
Army Co A, 4th Avn Bn, 4th Inf Div, APO 96262

Awarded: Air Medal with "V" Device (Twenty-Second Oak Leaf Cluster)

Date action: 26 April 1967

Theater: Republic of Vietnam

Reason: For heroism while participating in aerial flight in the Republic of Vietnam. Chief Warrant Officer Paez distinguished himself by heroic action on 26 April 1967 while serving as Aircraft Commander of a UH-1D helicopter which was flying a command and control mission for the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry.

At approximately 1900 hours, he received a request to evacuate seriously wounded Infantrymen from a small landing zone. Despite the helicopter's near capacity load. Chief Warrant Officer Paez, volunteered his aircraft for the hazardous medical evacuation mission. The darkened landing zone was no larger than the diameter of the main rotor and was surrounded by sixty to seventy-foot trees, which necessitated a vertical descent. Disregarding his own safety, Chief Warrant Officer Paez lowered his helicopter into the dark and smoky landing zone with only inches separating the rotor blades and the tree branches.

After the two critically wounded men were loaded aboard his helicopter, he again manipulated it through the trees and flew them to the nearest medical facility. His professional conduct and flying skill were directly responsible for the successful completion of a critical and dangerous mission. Chief Warrant Officer Paez's exceptional performance and exemplary devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.

Authority: By direction of the President under the provisions of Executive Order 9158, 11 May 1942, as amended by Executive Order 9242-A, 11 September 1942.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

OFFICIAL:



H. HYLAN

CHARLES A. JACKSON  
Colonel, GS  
Chief of Staff  
B. HYLAN  
CPT, AGC  
Asst AG

GO 4539