

Aviators' heroism remembered

by General Henry H. Shelton

Credit: Sine Pari, August 1999

Throughout my career I have served with, fought with, and always admired the Army aviators who went into battle alongside Special Operations Forces. In Vietnam, few served with more courage or more distinction than the pilots, crew chiefs and gunners who supported the Special Forces. Hovering overhead—often in the face of withering enemy fire—they provided critical fire support and a vital lifeline to their comrades fighting on the ground below.

There is not a day in my life that I do not pause for a moment to reflect on the bravery displayed by one of these aviators, **CPT Bob Moberg**. Moberg was the pilot of a helicopter that extracted my Special Forces Project Delta team from the jungle after we had spent seven days evading North Vietnamese forces. As Bob maneuvered the aircraft overhead, the crew chief lowered the jungle penetrator, however, even fully extended, it did not reach all the way down through the triple canopy jungle and was just out of reach for most of my team. We were finally able to lift the team members up to reach the penetrator and then I jumped up, barely snagging it.

As I was winched up through the jungle canopy, I could see where the rotor blades were striking the tree-tops. Bob had had to hover that low, risking himself, his

crew and his aircraft just to reach us. As I looked into the cockpit I could see Bob's fiercely determined face, a look of intense concentration and absolute focus, tinged by apprehension about enemy fire and whether the blades would survive the beating they had taken from striking the treetops.

I have never forgotten the feel of that vibrating Huey as the helicopter rolled out and gained altitude; nor have I ever forgotten the courage of that warrior and his crew as they accomplished a very dangerous and very risky mission.

Those aviators who flew with and fought alongside Special Forces in Vietnam will always have a special place in my heart and their valor is without question. However, during the war and through the 1970s there was no permanent Special Operations Aviation organization. The tragic experience at Desert One in Iran in 1980 was the event that finally, and with unmistakable clarity, demonstrated the need for the superb rotary-wing capability that the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment now provides. In a very real sense, Desert One was the catalyst that led to the creation of Special Operations Aviation.

If you compare the venerable Huey from Vietnam with the highly sophisticated aircraft in the Regiment today—aircraft that are air-refuelable and outfitted with the latest avionics and night-vision capabilities—it is easy to see how far we have come in developing Special

Operations Aviation. While the technology has changed dramatically, the courage, skill and determination of the men who flew with Special Forces in Vietnam flourish today in those who fly with the 160th.



On October 3, 1993, in a valiant attempt to rescue wounded comrades on the ground below, two very special special operations soldiers, **MSG Gary Gordon** and **SFC Randy Shughart**, jumped from a Black Hawk into a blazing fire. The Nation knows about the deeds of these two great NCOs, deeds for which they were awarded the Medal of Honor, but few know about the countless acts of valor performed by the members of the 160th in that battle.

After inserting these special operators in a hail of fire, the Black Hawk with the callsign "Super 62," piloted by **CWO Mike Goffena** and **CPT Jim Yacone** and crewed by **SSGs Paul Shannon** and **Mason Hall**, went into an overhead orbit to provide close air support. Despite being pounded by extremely heavy fire from automatic weapons and rocked by explosions from volleys of rocket-propelled grenades, the pilots of Super 62 kept the aircraft aloft and in position, allowing the crew to cover their fellow soldiers on the ground. To those who were watching that day, the aircraft seemed, at times, to defy the laws of physics, and it became so badly damaged that **CWO Goffena** had to make an emergency landing. 