



Chief receives Air Force Cross 40 years after mission

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4/10/2008 - **WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y.**
(AFP) -- A retired chief master sergeant was awarded the Air Force Cross 40 years after the mission which earned him the Air Force's second-highest honor April 5 here.

Nearly 300 members of Chief Master Sgt. Dennis Richardson's former unit attended the ceremony for the flight engineer with the 106th Rescue Wing for 30 years as he was recognized for his actions during a rescue mission in Vietnam March 14, 1968.

Twenty-one enlisted Airmen have been awarded the Air Force Cross since its inception. Since the end of the Vietnam War, only three Air Force Crosses were awarded to enlisted Airmen including one for action in Somalia and two for action in Afghanistan.

"In an extraordinary display of courage and valor, Richardson, despite his wounds, leaned far outside the door of his helicopter and neutralized charging enemy combatants who appeared intent on boarding," the citation states.

"It was a long, scary day, and I don't think I did anything different than the rest of the crew," Chief Richardson said.

On that day, two HH-53 Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopters were called in to rescue two men of a downed F-4 Phantom. The helicopters repeatedly moved in to make a pick-up but were driven away by gunfire. Both aircraft sustained heavy damage, said retired Brig. Gen. Frank Cardile, a pilot on the mission.

Chief Richardson displayed exceptional courage when he stood unprotected in the door of his helicopter to drive off the enemy, said General Cardile, who presented the medal to the chief.

The team failed to make the pickup, General Cardile said. Ultimately, it took 10 Army helicopters full of Soldiers to rescue one Airman.

Chief Richardson and three other crew members on the mission were put in for awards. Three of them received Silver Star Medals. Although Chief Richardson's medal had been granted, it was lost in paperwork.



Retired Brig. Gen. Frank Cardile (left) awards retired Chief Master Sgt. Dennis Richardson after presenting him with the Air Force Cross April 5 at the Francis S. Gabreski Airport in New York. Chief Richardson was awarded the Air Force's second-highest honor for valor because of his actions during a March 1968 mission to rescue Airmen in Vietnam. During the mission, Richardson stood exposed in the door of an HH-53 Jolly Green Giant helicopter to fight off enemy forces attempting to board it. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. David J. Murphy)

A military history buff uncovered a paper trail that showed Chief Richardson had been granted the medal. In December, an Air Force review panel recently confirmed the award and restored the medal.

Chief Richardson, now a Xerox repairman, said he was glad he was able to receive the Air Force Cross in front of the Airmen he served with.

"This is my family," he said. It was good to get the recognition and share it with the people he cared about.

Lt. Gen. Donald J. Hoffman, the chief of Air Force acquisition, represented the secretary of the Air Force at the ceremony. Rep. Tim Bishop of Long Island and New York State Deputy Secretary for Homeland Security Michal Balboni also attended.

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