

This story dedicated to Pararescueman

David M. Davison

Killed in action 5 December 1969.

He gave his life

“That Other’s May Live.”

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE SILVER STAR
(POSTHUMOUS)
TO
DAVID M. DAVISON

Airman First Class David M. Davison distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force as an HH-53 Pararescue/Recovery Specialist in Southeast Asia on 5 December 1969. On that date, Airman Davison participated in the attempted air rescue of two downed airmen deep within hostile territory. As the helicopter descended into the pickup area, Airman Davison repeatedly exposed himself to intense ground fire, with complete disregard for his own safety, while firing suppressive bursts from his gun position on the rear ramp of the helicopter. Although under heavy fire, he continued this valiant effort at the sacrifice of his life. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Airman Davison has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

At this point the HH-53’s had been airborne for nearly three hours. Jolly 76 was low bird and Jolly 72 was the high bird. The low birds crew was pilot Capt. Holly Bell, copilot Capt. Martin Weeks, FE Sgt James Corcoran, photographer Sgt. Lawrence Brown and PJ’s Sgt. Douglas Crowder and A1C David Davison. In his after action report, Captain Bell describes what happened next. *“At 13:55, Sandy told us to approach from the west northwest at high speed and low altitude. We began to pick up ground fire from the top of the karst about a mile and a half from the survivors positions, and were under fire of varying intensity until we exited the area. A1C Davison was the first to spot and return fire from the #3 minigun position. Breaking out of the karst and over the open valley, the ground fire dropped off momentarily, then it increased tremendously. The Sandy’s were dropping CBU and firing 20mm cannon shells into the karst face and into the ground and as close as 100 feet of us. The FE mistook a string of CBU’s going off as really heavy ground fire and called for me to abort the attempt. He immediately realized his mistake and called for me to continue. I had started to roll right to exit the area, but reversed the roll and continued the approach. This placed me directly over Boxer 22 Alpha at high speed and headed directly into a karst face infested with gun positions. I saw one large caliber tracer*

round pass off to the right side. My main focus was directed to surveying the area below for the lowest possible area to hover near the survivor. JG 76 was nearly in a hover at this point when the entire crew called that ground fire was increasing. It really erupted. Through the noise of the engines, rotors and our own miniguns, it sounded like we were inside a pop corn machine. The Sandy's executed a "Daisy Chain" around us as we slowed to make the pickup. JG 76 got directly over Boxer 22 Alpha when heavy ground fire erupted from all sides. We received multiple hits in the fuselage and rotor system and the aircraft began to vibrate badly. I knew if we took more hits, my Jolly would be shot down. I applied power and began to exit the area. As I flew by the karst face on the west side of the valley, I could see numerous caves along the base of the karst which held gun positions that were firing on us.

During egress from the valley, Sgt. Corcoran called that AIC Davison had been badly hit. Dave Davison had bravely defended his aircraft by firing from his minigun position almost continuously until wounded. I told my other PJ to give him aid and we would RTB. Fellow PJ Doug Crowder ran to Dave to provide emergency medical care. Shortly afterward, Sgt Corcoran informed me that AIC Davison was dead. He had taken a small arms round through his head. Sergeants Crowder and Corcoran reluctantly moved back to their duty stations. The FE then inspected the aircraft for battle damage. He found numerous holes in the fuselage, right aux fuel tank, and a small hydraulic leak in the forward cabin area. The aircraft was vibrating moderately as we climbed out of the area at 80 knots. I tried different airspeeds to see how it would affect the vibration. At about 105 knots, the vibration disappeared. This speed was maintained back to NKP. About 30 miles from NKP, the utility hydraulic system failed. We reviewed bailout procedures and discussed what was affected by this system failure. A shallow approach to a running landing was made at NKP. The brakes failed, so I used the rotors to stop the aircraft. Post flight inspection revealed hits in all rotor blades, swash plate, utility hydraulic system and numerous holes in the fuselage."ⁱ

After getting out of the Nam Ngo Valley, Jolly 76's pilot immediately radioed the OSC. "Sandy 5, this is Jolly 76. My crew just advised me that the survivors are surrounded. We took small arms fire from every direction around the survivors. The bad guys have climbed up into the trees and were firing on us. You guys have to get that 23mm gun that is shooting at us from the cave. Over." "OK Jolly 76. I understand. I think I got the cave in sight. I thought I saw muzzle flashes out of there. We dropped nape and everything else on that mother and he is still hanging on. So, we'll have to get him."ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ JG 76 Mission Report, 13 December 1969, Capt Holly G Bell, Aircraft Commander.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., King Audio Recording