

A Pilot's Daughter gets a Belated Christmas present back in 1969

By David Hause, Huey CE

I was a proud member of Thunder Aviation with HHC, 3rd BDE, 101st ABN DIV and I want to share this story about one of our brave pilots and the brave man who rescued him the day after Christmas in 1969.

Operation Randolph Glen, 7 December 1969 – 31 March 1970, was designed to keep pressure on the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) units in Thừa Thiên Province and prevent them from mounting any attacks on the populated coastal regions. The 101st Airborne Division in cooperation with the ARVN 1st Infantry Division conducted operations to locate and engage PAVN and Vietcong (VC) units and interdict supply lines into the populated lowlands of Thừa Thiên Province. On 11 December the 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment and the ARVN 54th Regiment air assaulted from Camp Evans into multiple landing zones near Firebase O'Reilly to conduct reconnaissance operations.

On 26 December one of the 2nd/506th reconnaissance units encountered a heavily-booby-trapped area. W.O. Lawrence T. "Terry" Lanier of HHC 3rd BDE, 101st ABN, was the pilot of an OH-6 Command & Control Helicopter. His passenger was the unit's Battalion Commander LTC Howard G. Crowell. LTC Crowell directed W.O. Lanier to land near the recon unit so that he could discuss the situation with the platoon leader. After the meeting as the chopper was taking off, a booby trap exploded 15 yards away from the chopper. The pilot was slightly injured but maintained control of his ship. The booby trap damaged the engine and in a short time caused it to explode. A small piece of the exploding engine lodged in the back of W.O. Lanier's neck. Somehow W.O. Lanier managed to crash land his Loach into the jungle trees and both he and his passenger survived.

Flying in the area and hearing the distress call on the radio was the Commanding General of the 101st Airborne Division, Maj. Gen. John M. Wright. Gen. Wright, a pilot himself, orchestrated the rescue of these men. Gen. Wright was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his action on this day. Here is the citation which describes the rescue.

"While returning to Camp Eagle from Camp Evans, Republic of Vietnam Major General Wright observed the downed helicopter of the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion (Airmobile), 506th Infantry which had crashed in an enemy-infested area after sustaining extensive damage from an enemy mine. Another helicopter in the area had tried unsuccessfully to land and pick up the crew. Major General Wright piloted his helicopter over the downed aircraft and dropped an emergency radio to the crew below. Because of the high trees in the immediate vicinity of the crash site, landing was impossible. Major General Wright directed the two men on the ground to another location. He then skillfully lowered his aircraft to within five feet of the ground. The main rotor blades were striking the trees, but he continued to hover over the men until they were pulled into the aircraft. The men were then quickly flown to the 326th Medical Battalion (Airmobile) for treatment. Major General Wright's decisive and courageous actions in an unsecured area resulted in the rescuing of the downed crewmen approximately two minutes after the crash. Major General Wright's outstanding flying ability and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."

I feel it is important to note here part of Gen. Wright's history which may helped to develop his character as I'm sure he didn't want the same thing to happen to his two soldiers on the ground that happened to him during WWII. Taken in part from the VHPA web site "Captured on Corregidor by the Japanese, he was a prisoner of war for three years and four months, enduring the worst kind of depraved, inhuman, and demoralizing conditions."

Thanks to Gen. Wright's actions that day, Terry Lanier became a career serviceman of the U.S. Army. A loving husband and father, he also was a very active member of the North Carolina VHPA Chapter. He received both an Air Medal with "V" device and a Purple Heart for the action on 26 December 1969. Sad to say W.O. Lawrence T. "Terry" Lanier died after tour on Nov. 3, 2018.

Here is a picture of W.O. Lanier standing near what was left of his Loach. The picture was taken at Camp Evans. The wreckage was retrieved and returned to Camp Evans. I received this picture from his daughter on her Facebook page.



Terri

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My daddy standing in front of what was left of his helicopter after he was shot down in Vietnam. I am so thankful that God hand picked him and blessed me with him for 52 years. He was not perfect, but he was perfect for me. HAPPY VETERANS DAY Daddy!



An aerial picture of Lanier's crash site.