

Wednesday
11 January 1967

Mr. and Mrs. Paul A. Duggan
3951 Lyndora Street
Lynwood, California 90262

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Duggan,

I am writing to tell you about your fine son, William. I know that his untimely death is a great loss to you and there are no words that I can say that will lessen your burden.

As the Officer in Charge of this detachment and pilot of the helicopter, I want you to know what occurred on Friday, the sixth of January.

Our mission here is to provide rescue services to our pilots whenever they encounter any difficulties. We were alerted at 5:45 p.m. that one of our carrier pilots had bailed out of his damaged aircraft and landed three to four miles inside North Vietnam. We became airborne within minutes, the crew being myself, the copilot, the first crewman and William. I proceeded toward the mainland and at two miles out commenced to orbit while awaiting more fighter aircraft to give us protection. I talked to the wingman of the downed pilot, who was circling over him. The wingman gave me a rundown as to the location of the downed pilot and the danger areas. With darkness only minutes away and imminent capture of the pilot by the Vietnamese, a rescue attempt had to be made without anymore delay. With aircraft overhead for protective cover, the mission was started. The fighters began strafing to suppress enemy ground fire and I started my dash inland. My crew was armed, and had on protective vests, ready to return any ground fire that might be encountered.

We safely crossed the beach inspite the many rifles firing at us. Soon I had the downed aircraft in sight and was going to continue beyond, toward the pilot, when we flew into a terrific barrage of anti-aircraft fire. At this point William was wounded and the helicopter received many hits making its control difficult. I decided to abort the mission and turned away to avoid the ground fire. As I continued the turn to get back over water, we ran into a second barrage, more intense than the first, fired at us from a different gun position. The helicopter was again hit several times, as was I in the left arm. Then followed a few moments of grave doubt in my mind as to whether the helicopter would remain controllable much longer. However, the good Lord was with us and we did land aboard the ship safely.

During the return trip, the other crewman, Lewis Robertson, rendered first aid to William. This first aid was instrumental in keeping him alive until we could land aboard. Upon our return the entire ship's company was awaiting to help in anyway they could.