

U. S. S. GRIDLEY (DLG-21)
C. O. FLEET POST OFFICE
SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA

At Sea
11 January 1967

Mr. and Mrs. Paul A. Duggan
3951 Lyndora Street
Lynwood, California 90252

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Duggan,

There have been occasions in the past when I have had to write letters like this under similarly tragic circumstances. I know of no task more difficult or more futile than that of trying to find appropriate or even adequate words of condolence to send to you for the loss of your son.

As you know, William was attached to Helicopter Support Squadron One, Detachment Three, which has been embarked in USS GRIDLEY since January first incident to this ship's search and rescue assignment. Your son was fatally wounded by enemy ground fire on the first rescue mission flown from GRIDLEY since the helicopter detachment arrived on board. Lieutenant Commander Joseph Brecka, first pilot of the helicopter and William's officer in charge, has first hand details of the circumstances at the time your son was wounded and I know that he is writing to you also. LCDR Brecka piloted the aircraft on this rescue mission on the evening of January sixth. Present in the aircraft, in addition to your son and the pilot, were Ensign John F. Mc Minn, the copilot and AW2 Lewis B. Robertson, the other air crewmember.

The first indication that we in the ship had of the tragedy was when the pilot radioed that the helicopter had been hit by enemy groundfire while over the coastal combat area of the Gulf of Tonkin. He then advised us that he and one crew member were wounded and that the aircraft, a UH-2A helicopter, was returning to the ship. That the aircraft made it back to this ship at all was a remarkable feat of flying because it was badly damaged by bullet holes in the rotors, fuselage and electrical equipment. The pilot, with a shrapnel wound in the left arm, managed to land the helicopter on our deck where we had the staff physician, Lt Robert P. Lonergan, Medical Corps, USNR and two experienced senior hospitalman, HM1 Newton and HM2 Dickson standing by. The Sick Bay had already been placed in readiness. William was taken immediately to Sick Bay and a call for blood donors with his type blood was announced on the ship's announcing system. A line of at least seventy-five donors, all William's shipmates, was formed immediately. All the blood which possibly could be used was willingly volunteered.

I can report to you that Doctor Lonergan and his medical technicians worked rapidly and efficiently for eighty minutes to keep William alive while five units of whole blood were being administered. There were no distractions whatsoever and the wounded pilot was not treated until after William had passed away. The sole concern of all involved was to save this sailor's life if at all possible.