



**LtCol David L. Althoff, USMC (Ret.)**  
"Dave"

Date of Designation: 16 June 1954                      N/A # T4543

Dates of Active Duty: November 1952 - November 1972

Total Flight Hours: 5,943

Carrier/Ship Landings: Fixed wing: 12    Helo: 2,457

Approximate Flight Hours:

Jet: 150    Prop: 1,580    VF/VA: 605    VT: 208

Helo: 3,400

Combat Tours:

Vietnam:    ProvMag 39, 1963-1964 Danang, RVN

Vietnam:    HMM-262, 1967-1968 Quang Tri (RVN),  
CH-46, combat support missions during the  
seige of Khe San, South Vietnam.

Combat missions: 1,084 missions

Combat Awards:

3 Silver Star Medals

4 Distinguished Flying Crosses

Bronze Star with combat "V"

Meritorious Service Medal

Distinguished Service Medal

55 Air Medals (5 single mission & 50 Strike/Flight awards)

Combat Action Ribbon

### **Summary of Significant Career Events**

- (1) During his tour in Vietnam from May 1967 to June 1968, he flew 1,080 combat missions. Dave and his CH-46 crew during the seige of Khe San, South Vietnam, were shot out of the sky four times. They continued to resupply forward area troops with ammunition, food and water. They were credited with saving hundreds of Marines who were critically wounded in battle, surrounded by the enemy and in need of immediate evacuation from the battlefield.
- (2) Dave Althoff developed airmanship/helicopter combat flying tactics and techniques used throughout USMC aviation.



(3) In 1968, Dave Althoff was selected by the USMC as Marine Corps Aviator of the year and awarded the Alfred A Cunningham Trophy.

(4) Althoff and crews from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 - nicknamed "Tiger Airlines", flew frequent supply runs to Marine mountain outpost that served as the eyes and ears of embattled Khe San. The flying was done at low altitude where "there was a lot of metal flying around." His aircraft was hit four times so that he had to land immediately. Other times he could just barely make it back to base and counted 100 or 120 bullet holes in the chopper.

(5) Earned the first of three Silver Stars on Feb 1, 1968, as flight leader of a section of two CH-46s assigned to extract an eight-man reconnaissance team surrounded and pinned down by 100 North Vietnamese soldiers near Dong Ha. When you go into a hot zone, they are firing at you from 360 degrees. You start to take hits. You know you are taking hits. The crew chief is telling you "OK, we're leaking here. The gas line's hit there." If they're shooting into the cockpit, the gas lines are under the gauges so they're leaking all over your feet. Forced to rely solely on his instruments due to fog, rain and the darkness, he skillfully maneuvered his aircraft through adverse weather conditions over hazardous terrain to arrive over the beleaguered Marines. Due to the seriousness of the situation, he elected to attempt the extraction without artillery or air support and immediately commenced his approach. Despite intense enemy automatic weapons fire as he began his descent, he continued his approach and landed near the Marines. As the team moved to board his aircraft, Major Althoff directed the delivery of accurate suppressive fire from all of his helicopter's weapons, enabling the Marines to safely embark. Although the aircraft had received damage from hostile fire, he was able to lift out of the hazardous zone, only to receive an increasingly heavy volume of North Vietnamese fire that seriously damaged several internal systems of the helicopter. Despite the severe battle damage, he skillfully maneuvered the aircraft to Dong Ha and safely landed.

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### Summary of Significant Career Events continued

(6) Excerpts from his second Silver Star citation read as follows: as the Executive Officer of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron TWO HUNDRED SIXTY-TWO, Marine Aircraft Group Thirty-Six, FIRST Marine Aircraft Wing, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 18 May 1968, Major Althoff launched as Section Leader of a flight of two CH-46 helicopters assigned an emergency extraction mission in support of an eight-man reconnaissance team which had sustained numerous casualties while heavily engaged with a numerically superior North Vietnamese Army force eight miles northeast of the Khe Sanh Combat Base. Arriving over the designated area, he was informed by the Tactical Air Controller (Airborne) that the team was under intense mortar, small arms and automatic weapons fire and was unable to move from its position to the edge of a narrow ridge covered with dense foliage. Although there was no suitable landing zone, Major Althoff immediately elected to attempt an extraction and unhesitatingly commenced his approach into the fire-swept area. Despite the mortar rounds impacting near him, he skillfully maneuvered his helicopter to within ten meters of the Marines, placing his aircraft's rear landing gear on the edge of the ridge while positioning the front of his helicopter over a steep precipice. Ignoring the intense hostile fire, he fearlessly maintained his position until all of the team members had been embarked and then skillfully lifted out of the hazardous zone, rapidly delivering the injured men to a medical facility. His exceptional aeronautical ability and sincere concern for the welfare of his comrades inspired all who served with him and were instrumental in saving the lives of several Marines.

(7) Excerpts from his third Silver Star citation read as follows: while serving as the Executive Officer of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron TWO HUNDRED SIXTY-TWO (HMM-262), Marine Aircraft Group Thirty-Six, FIRST Marine Aircraft Wing, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 13 May 1968, Major Althoff launched as Flight Leader of a section of two CH-46 helicopters assigned to extract a four-man reconnaissance team in heavy contact with the enemy while attempting to recover a Marine killed in a previous engagement. When three of the team members were wounded, it was decided to insert a twelve-man reaction force to aid in recovering the casualties. Despite heavy mortar and automatic weapons fire in the landing zone, Major Althoff maneuvered his aircraft to within one hundred meters of the beleaguered team, enabling the reinforcements to reach the wounded more quickly. As a result of the intense mortar and automatic weapons fire and exploding hand grenades, the reaction force sustained two casualties and immediately separated, moving to three separate landing zones. Upon landing in the first pickup zone, his aircraft received battle damage from exploding mortar rounds. Unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his own safety, he proceeded to the second landing zone where he was again subjected to heavy enemy mortar fire. Upon arrival at the third zone, he observed that a landing could not be effected due to the steepness of the slope. Displaying outstanding aeronautical ability and undaunted by

the hostile rounds which repeatedly struck his aircraft, Major Althoff hovered with the rotor blades barely two feet from the side of the hill until the last Marine was embarked. His courageous actions and resolute determination in the face of great personal danger were an inspiration to all who observed him and undoubtedly saved the lives of the beleaguered Marines.