

Pilot Got Medal for Saving 16 Children at Songmy

By PETER KIHSS

A helicopter pilot has received the Distinguished Flying Cross for saving 16 children in disregard of his own safety at Songmy in South Vietnam on March 16, 1968—the day of an alleged massacre of South Vietnamese civilians by American troops there.

The award to Chief Warrant Officer Hugh C. Thompson Jr., 27 years old, of Decatur, Ga., became known yesterday. At Fort Rucker, Ala., the warrant officer said he could not answer questions, and the post's public affairs office said he had received written orders from a military judge to refrain from interviews.

At least three soldiers had previously reported hearing that intervention of a helicopter pilot or pilots had halted what some witnesses called a slaughter on March 16, 1968, which has led to Army court-

martial charges against an infantry lieutenant for alleged premeditated murder of 109 persons.

Stanley R. Resor, Secretary of the Army, in discussing the case with the Senate Armed Services Committee last Wednesday, said:

"During the day, reports received from an Army helicopter pilot who had supported the operation suggested there might have been unnecessary killing of noncombatants at Mylai." Mylai 4 was the raided hamlet in the Songmy village

complex. The Distinguished Flying Cross, ranked next to the Medal of Honor, was conferred on Mr. Thompson last Oct. 15, which was just about six months after the Army reopened an investigation of the massacre charges.

The citation indicated Mr. Thompson had made two landings in the area—a place that underwent artillery barrages and gunfire both from helicopters overhead and soldiers on the ground. Some G.I.'s have said that some of the gunfire came from the enemy.

Commending Mr. Thompson for heroism as a member of Aero Scouts Company, 123d Aviation Battalion, Americal Division, while performing a reconnaissance mission that day, the citation said:

"He spotted 15 young children trying to hide in a bunker

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and evacuated them to secure area.

"Moments later he located a wounded Vietnamese child and disregarding his own safety he again landed and evacuated the child to the Quangngai hospital."

Former Specialist Varnado Simpson, 22, of Jackson, Miss., has said 150 to 600 to 700 persons rounded up in the village were spared after orders to stop killing. Mr. Simpson said he heard from a radio operator that the orders resulted from a protest by an airborne helicopter pilot.

Richard Pendleton, of Richmond, Calif., a former rifleman, was quoted by The Washington Post yesterday as saying that "just before 7 A.M., some choppers flew over and could see what was going on," and that a few minutes later Capt. Ernest Medina, commanding the infantry company involved, received a radio telephone call and ordered shooting stopped.

Former Sgt. Charles A. West,

23, of Chicago, has said he heard that "some of the heli-Ga., Captain Medina, 43, a n-copter pilots operating over the village told higher head-quarters that there was unnec-essary killings going on."

Mr. Thompson, a much-decorated soldier, served in Viet-nam from some time in 1967 until August, 1968, when he was evacuated with a compres-sion fracture of the back. He now is an instructor pilot in the Army Aviation Center at Fort Rucker.

A native of Decatur, he was a student at Troy State Uni-versity in Alabama and served six yeears in the Navy before entering the Army June 30, 1966.

He holds the Bronze Star for meritorious service; the Air Medal with 16 oak leaf clus-ters, the Purple Heart with one oak leaf cluster, the Army and Navy good conduct medals, the national defense medal, and the Vietnam campaign ribbon with three stars.

An earlier dramatic episode in the history of the infantry company involved in the Song-my raid is related in the text

of the citation for a Silver Star, the Army's third-highest medal, awarded to Captain Medina, who also holds the Bronze Star.

According to the document, obtained from Fort Benning, tive of Springer, N. M., received the Silver Star on Aug. 22, 1968, for "gallantry in action against a hostile force" on Feb. 25, 1968, 20 days before the Songmy attack.

The citation said he had been serving as commander of Com-pany C, 1st Battalion, 20th In-fantry, that day "on a combat operation south of the village of Lacson in the district of Binhson."

'Ignoring the Danger'

"On that day," the citation said, "as his company was mov-ing towards blocking positions for a combat sweep, the lead elements walked into a Viet-cong minefield and detonated three heavy charges, critically wounding six men.

"Completely disregarding the danger to himself, Captain Me-dina immediately moved into the mined area to care for his wounded men. Directing the other platoons to set up a de-

fensive perimeter around the mined area, he worked with his medics in stopping the bleed-ing of the badly wounded men.

"Ignoring the danger of oth-er mines, Captain Medina moved from man to man ap-plying pressure bandages and tourniquets and giving encour-agement to the injured men.

"When he moved through the minefield to collect band-ages from other members of his company, he detonated a fourth boobytrap which knocked him to the ground.

"Although dazed, he con-tinued to treat his men. De-ciding to move the wounded to the extraction point from 500 meters away, he personally carried one of the wounded to the landing zone, guided mede-vac helicopters to the area and helped load the wounded men aboard.

Captain Medina's courage, professional actions and unself-ish concern for his men are in keeping with the traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon his self, the Americal Division and the Unit-ed States Army."