

7 January 2013

Honorable John Dingle
Representative in Congress
19855 West Outer Drive, Ste 103-E
Dearborn, Michigan 48124-2028

Representative Dingle,

I am writing to gain your assistance in an effort to upgrade a military award for Charles S. Kettles, Major, Artillery at the time. He was originally awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on 15 May 1967. The upgrade would be for the award of the Congressional Medal of Honor. I can speak to his actions for the beginning and latter part of the mission, those parts being enough alone in my mind for the award.

On the day in question our unit, which supported the 1st Bde, 101st Airborne Division, was called on in the afternoon to insert combat troops into a hot LZ to reinforce a unit under heavy attack from automatic weapons, rocket propelled grenades and mortars. The official military report indicates the enemy force was battalion size and well dug in. We initially went into the LZ as a group of six helicopters. On the way in, even after heavy helicopter fire suppression, artillery, and Air Force fighter aircraft activity, we observed tracer rounds coming from at least eight different locations firing at all helicopters and many mortar rounds were striking the ground frequently in the area where we were to land. We continued on, dropped our combat troops and were immediately filled with wounded soldiers needing immediate evacuation for medical care. Fortunately, in my case, as best we could tell, our helicopter was not hit badly on this trip in...we checked gauges and they looked good.... but heard Major Kettles helicopter had been hit many times to include some plexiglass damage. Additionally, the underside of both rotor blades was badly damaged by the mortars. Even so, he stayed on the ground receiving wounded and still managed to depart even though his helicopter was badly damaged. After delivering wounded to the medical clinic, before I could join him with my helicopter, he immediately returned to the LZ ferrying more combat troops.

As I was on my second trip to the LZ to discharge more reinforcing troops, I observed Major Kettle's helicopter, after his second mission into the LZ, approaching me with his load of wounded soldiers. As he approached I advised him I saw fuel streaming out the side of the helicopter. He advised me that he had again taken heavy fire throughout the entire aircraft and that his door gunner was severely wounded. He then advised me to team up with another helicopter carrying ammunition and go to the LZ, drop the combat troops and pick up as many wounded as we could (there were very many). Later reports indicated that his helicopter had more than 40 bullet holes in it and was deemed unfit for flight. I continued on to the LZ with another helicopter in trail to deliver more troops and ammunition and recover more wounded. Immediately upon our touch down, as the soldiers departed for the small tree line, three out of five were being hit. We waited for them to place wounded on the helicopter but the fire was so severe... many bullets and many mortar rounds were lacing the LZ and us... the soldiers would not leave cover to bring the wounded to us. We decided to hover closer but in doing so stayed exposed too long and were laced by automatic weapon fire and mortars eventually sustaining a direct hit by a mortar round or a rocket propelled grenade, bursting into flames. Fortunately I was the only one in my helicopter to be wounded. I only tell you this to indicate just how severe the enemy fire was. Further support for the severity of the situation is that the official S3 log indicates that our platoon-plus sized unit on the ground had 3 KIA and 34 WIA. If you landed there again you were in dire danger of being killed or wounded at this point. They must have also reinforced their troops. Since our helicopter was destroyed and burning we were forced to stay in the LZ and fight with the Infantry. We reported to Major Kettles how severe the fire was suggesting they abandon other trips into the LZ. At this point a lesser person would not return having surmised that to again go into the LZ would result in his death or at least severe injury. He actually could have reached such a conclusion after his first trip in. Also, at this point, our unit had suffered heavy losses

of helicopters so he had to acquire others from another unit in order to organize a mission to fly in and get all of us out.

During this time the AF attacked the enemy with napalm and "daisy cutters" to little effect. However, without regard to his own safety he acquired another helicopter and again decided to come back to the LZ. As the six helicopters approached the LZ, the enemy opened up with everything they had...small arms, automatic weapons, mortars, and rocket propelled grenades. As I and my crew observed all this we felt that to try to run to the helicopters to be rescued would probably lead to death or severe injury but the alternative was to be captured by the enemy and probably killed. At that time, the enemy was being rewarded well for killing or capturing helicopter crews. As I had a leg wound, I had to be half carried. As we headed out, the ground erupted in front of us and we could see that it was happening all over the LZ. Then the mortar rounds started falling all around us and the helicopters. As that was going on, Major Kettles insured the helicopters waited on the ground until all of us somehow miraculously made it to the helicopters, some wounded but all alive. One could not blame Maj Kettles and the other flight crews if they departed in order to plan another way to get us out. But they stayed. Upon departure, I was advised by the pilot of the helicopter I was on that since we had less damage than the others we had to return alone to pick up some soldiers left behind. As we were on approach to the LZ the pilot, observing the activity, then informed us that Maj. Kettles had maneuvered and circled around and, without normal gunship support, again landed in the LZ under heavy fire and rescued the "forgotten" soldiers. He miraculously made it in but not without more damage. As luck would have it, all six helicopters made it out, many of them badly damaged. Some never flew again.

Overall, after it was over, the official S3 log indicated that on that mission there was one helicopter destroyed (mine) and 12 damaged and unflyable. Two of those damaged were flown by Major Kettles. It was again reported that his second helicopter had more than forty bullet holes in it and the plexiglass windshield blown out, plus a badly damaged tail boom. All of this activity occurred over a two to two and a half hour period.

I am convinced that I, among others, would not be here today if Maj Kettles, disregarding his own safety, had not unselfishly entered a deadly landing zone three times, without reservation, to come to the aid of badly wounded soldiers and, finally, had not organized a way to extract all of us from the danger. The best any of us could have hoped for...since we were greatly outnumbered with only one ground route out....would have been to become a POW with a strong possibility of eventual torture and death.

I sincerely believe this information offers new, substantive, and material information not made clear in the initial recommendation. For instance, the original write-up did not indicate that Maj Kettles' second trip into the hot LZ was not as a member of a six flight formation, allowing the enemy to then concentrate more fire on his helicopter. It also did not indicate that we had made him aware of the increasing firepower of the enemy and that he should abandon further flight into the LZ even though he did return. It did not indicate the severity of the action by providing the information on how many friendly personnel were killed or wounded and how many helicopters were damaged and deemed unflyable. I have included a copy of the S3, 1st Bde, 101st Airborne S3 log to substantiate these losses.

I hope you will take this information and any other you may have received and proceed, however you must, to lead the effort to upgrade the original award of Distinguished Service Cross to the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Long
LTC, US Army, Retired