

November 26, 2012

Honorable Congressman John Dingell
Representative in Congress
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Dearborn, Michigan 48124-2028

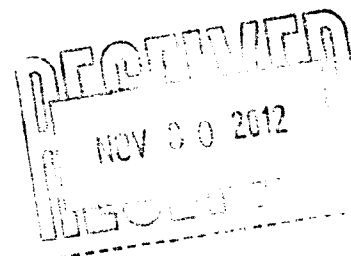
Dear Sir:

I am writing on behalf of LTC (Ret.) Charles S. Kettles in support of the initiative to submit additional information for a possible upgrade from the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) to the Medal of Honor for action in the Republic of Vietnam. Major Kettles was awarded the DSC for his actions on May 15, 1967.

I participated in the May 15 operation as a 176th Aviation company gun platoon fire team leader. The DSC award citation does not accurately depict the horrific combat that took place this day. My wing man labeled this combat area "Chump Valley." Looking back, a more accurate description would be "Death Valley." I am going to describe the day as I saw it in an effort to insure Major Kettles' actions are put into perspective and he receives the upgrade that is truly deserved.

The search and destroy ground operation involved a troop insertion of a 101st airborne unit. The enemies were elements of a North Vietnamese Army Regiment, not Viet Cong and they had multiple 12.75MM machine guns (51 Caliber), automatic weapons, recoilless rifles and mortars. They waited until we had the first lift dropped in the landing zone and then opened up with an intensity of fire I had not seen in any previous operation. Soldiers were being hit and killed before they could leave the arriving lift helicopters (slicks). We were receiving deadly fire from multiple directions. Jets were dropping napalm and bombs on the machine guns dug in on the ridges overlooking the landing zone and they had little effect. We were attacking machine gun positions and they were still firing with everything around them burning, the enemy had an extensive tunnel and bunker complex that let them pull back from their firing positions during our attacks.

On one of the lifts Maj Kettles led into "Chump Valley," I saw a series of flashes and watched one of the slicks explode in the landing zone, the enemy had hit it with a recoilless rifle round. All the slicks and gunships were receiving multiple hits. This is the environment Maj Kettles continued to enter to provide reinforcing soldiers, ammunition and to evacuate wounded. Maj Kettles demonstrated a complete disregard for his own safety and inspired other pilots to follow his lead as he fully realized the potential for the enemy to overrun and destroy the 101st unit in contact.



This battle clearly required heroism above and beyond the call of duty as each entry into the landing zone resulted in American casualties. This was not a single act of bravery; it was an amazing act of heroism repeated multiple times over the course of the many hours of this battle. Pilots continued to fly aircraft that were marginally flyable, any of the aircraft commanders could have easily grounded their aircraft, yet Maj Kettles inspired them to stay with him as he kept returning to the battle area. His heroism resulted in the saving of many lives and prevented the defeat and loss of all soldiers in the landing zone.

Mr. Joe Galloway, a reporter embedded with the 1st Cavalry during the 1965 Ia Drang Valley battle referred to the Army aviator as one of "God's Lunatics." He characterized Army aviators as men who never failed the soldier on the ground, no matter how intense the enemy actions or dangerous the environment, the Army aviator kept coming to provide support and in many instances, changed the course of battle by turning certain defeat into victory. In battle when the hand of death is touching many around you, it takes a very special person to place themselves into the environment willingly, Maj Kettles was one of those exceptional men that repeatedly placed himself in harm's way and so inspired others that they placed their life in jeopardy and followed him out of respect and confidence in him.

I'm not sure how many soldiers died in this landing zone on May 15, 1967; I just know it was too many with a significant number of seriously wounded. At the end of this day, out of the 24 slicks and 8 gunships in our unit (176th Aviation Company) we had only 3 or 4 flyable slicks and one flyable gunship. In addition to those destroyed, several of the slicks were severely damaged and required replacement.

In two Vietnam tours, and 1200 hours of combat armed and attack helicopter pilot time, I supported many troop insertions and I have never seen a more heroic, professional aviator than Maj Kettles or a more deadly combat environment than "Chump Valley."

Please contact me at the address below if clarification or additional information is required.

Yours truly,


Matthew McGuire (Musket 1) (Col, USA Retired)