NCO Stories

A selection of Valor

Sgt. Gary B. Beikirch

Citation to award the Medal of Honor

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces, Sgt. Gary B. Beikirch was awarded the Medal of Honor.

A medic with Detachment B-24, Company B, Beikirch distinguished himself during the defense of Camp Dak Seang on April 1, 1970, in Kontum Province, Republic of Vietnam. The allied defenders suffered a number of casualties as a result of an intense, devastating attack launched by the enemy from well-concealed positions surrounding the camp.

Beikirch with complete disregard for his own safety, moved unhesitatingly through the withering enemy fire to his fallen comrades, applied first aid to their wounds and assisted them to a medical aid station. When informed that a seriously injured American officer was lying in an exposed position, Beikirch ran immediately through the hail of fire. Even with serious wounds from fragments of an exploding enemy mortar shell, Beikirch carried the officer to a medical aid station.

Continuing to ignore his injuries, Beikirch left the safety of the medical bunker to search for and evacuate other men who had been injured. In the process, he was again wounded as he dragged a seriously injured Vietnamese soldier to the medical bunker while simultaneously applying mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to sustain his life.

Beikirch again refused treatment and continued his search for other casualties with the help of two Montagnard men, who carried him until he collapsed. Only then did he permit himself to be treated.

Beikirch's complete devotion to the welfare of his comrades – even at the risk of his own life – are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Medal of Honor recipient recounts deadly attack in Vietnam

By Stephanie Sanchez

The screams still echo, the explosions still roar and the gunfire still thunders.

It has been 40 years, but the violent attack on Camp Dak Seang in Kontum Province, Vietnam remains alive in Sgt. Gary B. Beikirch's mind.

Beikirch remembers how artillery and rockets began pouring onto the campsite early April 1, 1970 – almost 11 years since the beginning of the Vietnam War. Among the chaos, bodies lay silently on the ground, he stated in an account of the attack on The Spirit of America Web site.

Many people died that day, but some survived with Beikirch's help. For his bravery, Beikirch was awarded the Medal of Honor – the nation's highest medal for valor – three years later.

During the war, Beikirch was a medic with Detachment B-24, Company B, 5th Special Forces Group. His team was set up in a village of about 2,300 people, mostly women and children, from the Montagnard tribe.

"Our peaceful Montagnard jungle camp was surrounded by three North Vietnamese regiments," he said of the day the camp was invaded. "The 'human wave' assault of ground troops began. Our jungle home had become a scene of horror, terror and death."

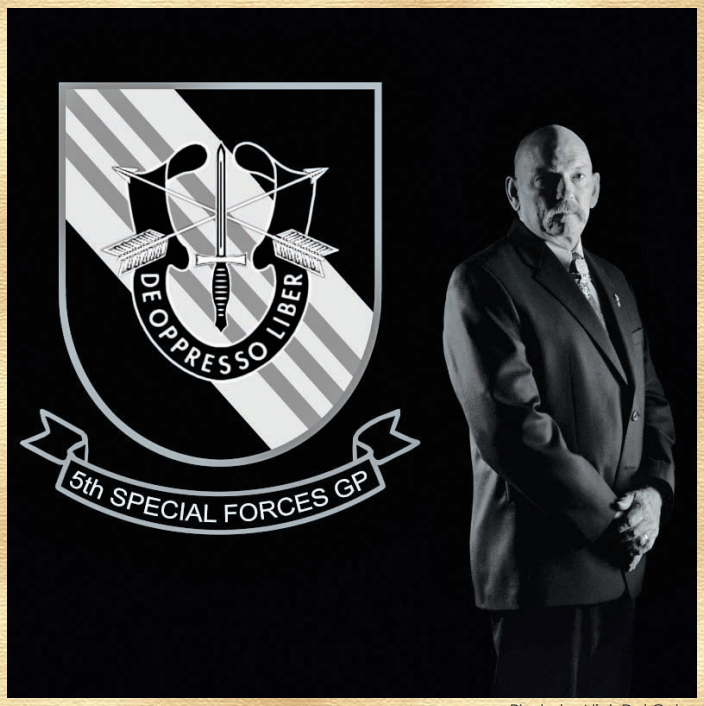

Photo by Nick Del Calzo

Sgt. Gary B. Beikirch was featured in *Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty*. Beikirch earned the Medal of Honor, which is the nation's highest medal of valor, for his actions in the Vietnam War. The above photo illustration was taken from The Spirit of America Web site

Among those dead, Beikirch said was a wounded man from the tribe. He ran across an open space and tried treating the man when an explosive hit.

"As I threw my body over the wounded man to shield him from the explosive, I felt like I had been kicked in the back by a horse. Shrapnel from the blasts had slammed into my back and abdomen," he recounted. "The concussion from the blast had thrown me about 25 feet into a wall of sandbags by our mortar pit. I tried to get up but could not move my legs."

Two men from the tribe ran to Beikirch's rescue and tried to carry him to safety. But Beikirch refused. With the help of the tribesmen, Beikirch treated more "wounded people, dragged bodies, distributed ammunition, directed fire and fought for their lives."

In his effort to assist more people, Beikirch was wounded two more times. He continued to lose blood, became weak and lost consciousness, according to his recount on The Spirit of America Web site.

Although his narrative does not mention it, several accounts state that Beikirch also ran through heavy fire to help a fellow Soldier who had been wounded during the attack.

Beikirch said he could remember little about being airlifted to the hospital.

"From [then] on, my personal memories are a swirling stream of sporadic events," he said. "Watching the medevac helicopters being shot down as they tried to get me out; strong arms reaching down and pulling me into the 'warm belly' of a chopper; the face of the young medic shocked at seeing that I was still alive, but telling me I was going to be OK; being thrown onto a litter and rushed into an operating room; IVs in my arms and neck, catheters in every opening of my body, lights, shouting and then darkness."

The following days, Beikirch went in and out of consciousness. He slowly recovered from the injuries to his stomach and back and was discharged from the Army.

In 1973, he joined the seminary. That year, he received a phone call from Washington, D.C., informing him he would be given the Medal of Honor, which was presented by President Richard Nixon.

"God does have a plan and a purpose for our lives, and although there is no mystery to finding Him, at times it is a mystery to walk with Him. It wasn't easy for me at first," Beikirch said. "Even now there are times when I fail to trust His love completely. But then I remember my two [Montagnard] friends who loved me, protected me and carried me when I couldn't walk. If I could trust them with my life, why shouldn't I be able to trust Jesus?"

To read Beikirch's entire account, visit *http://www.thespiritofamerica.info/beikirch.html.*