



MAJ Bruce P. Crandall (right) was named winner of the Avco-AWA Helicopter Heroism Award (above) at the 29th annual meeting and news conference Aviation/Space Writers Association this spring in Las Vegas, Nev.



## Army Aviator

## Receives First

# Avco-AWA Helicopter Heroism Award

MAJOR BRUCE P. Crandall, a veteran of Vietnam combat, has become the first recipient of the Avco-AWA Helicopter Heroism Award. This award will be presented annually to a pilot, crewmember, or other individual for outstanding heroism involving use of a helicopter the previous year.

Major Crandall received the award at the annual meeting of the Aviation/Space Writers Association. The award is sponsored jointly by Avco Corporation and the association, known as AWA.

The Army helicopter pilot was cited for his rescue of 12 wounded soldiers, making two flights under intense enemy fire and in total darkness with only a flashlight on

the ground to guide him into a small landing zone surrounded on three sides by tall trees. Major Crandall is the holder of the Distinguished Flying Cross with cluster, the Bronze Star and the Air Medal with 17 clusters. He has been recommended for the Silver Star for the same action that led to his winning the Avco-AWA Helicopter Heroism Award.

Major Crandall's heroic action occurred on 31 January 1966, during the battle of Bong Son. At the time, he was commanding officer of Company A, 229th Aviation Battalion (Assault Helicopter), 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

Here is Major Crandall's story as told by LTC Robert S. Kellar,

commander of the 229th Aviation Battalion:

Shortly before dark Major Crandall led a flight of UH-1D helicopters carrying reinforcements to the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, which was heavily engaged with encircling enemy forces north of Bong Son.

In the ensuing engagement the ground unit sustained numerous casualties which required medical evacuation. At approximately 1830 hours the ground commander notified Major Crandall of this requirement. He was advised that the casualties would have to be carried a considerable distance to the nearest open area they could locate for helicopter pickup and that he would be further notified

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when this had been done. By this time complete darkness had fallen on the area, preventing any attempt to locate a suitable site from the air. There was no moon.

Approximately 1930 hours Major Crandall was notified that the casualties were ready for pickup. The pickup site was described as a small clearing with tall trees and bushes on three sides and with enemy fire still dominating the area. Crandall elected to attempt the mission with only his aircraft rather than risk additional aircraft under such hazardous conditions.

Taking off with all his helicopter lights out to prevent his being observed by the enemy, Major Crandall flew to the general area. He was completely unfamiliar with the exact area and had to rely on radio instructions from the ground commander. A ground flare was set off in an attempt to

guide Crandall to the pickup site, but he was unable to locate it due to the intense mortar and small arms fire.

At this point I [LTC Kellar, who was orbiting the area] contacted Major Crandall by radio and told him not to pursue the mission further unless he thought he had a chance of accomplishing it. I made it clear that the decision was strictly his and that it was a purely voluntary mission.

Major Crandall continued to search the area at low level, ignoring the intense fire, until he located a flashlight signaling him into the pickup site where he skillfully maneuvered his helicopter to a landing. Six seriously wounded soldiers were loaded aboard his aircraft. Crandall took off through the enemy fire and flew to a secure area where the casualties were transferred to a waiting helicopter. He returned

to the site under the same hazardous conditions and picked up the remaining six seriously wounded men.

Major Crandall's heroic actions were of great inspiration to all those who observed it or monitored the radio transmissions during the period of the evacuation. It was of particular reassurance to the men fighting on the ground to know that if they were wounded they were assured of medical evacuation.

In my opinion the odds against the successful accomplishment of this mission were so overwhelming that no criticism would have been directed against Major Crandall if he had elected to abort the attempt. Major Crandall's superb ability as a helicopter pilot, coupled with his undaunted heroism, culminated in an outstanding humanitarian act. 