

Airman killed in Laos awarded Medal of Honor

Staff report

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Chief Master Sgt. Richard L. Etchberger, who was killed in action in 1968 in Laos, will posthumously be awarded the Medal of Honor on Sept. 21, the White House announced Friday.

Etchberger will be honored with the nation's highest award for valor for his actions on March 11, 1968.

According to the announcement, Etchberger displayed "immeasurable courage and uncommon valor" when he deliberately exposed himself to enemy fire in order to place three surviving wounded comrades into rescue slings so they could be airlifted to safety. When it was his turn to be rescued, Etchberger was fatally wounded by enemy ground fire.

Etchberger's sons, Cory and Richard Etchberger and Steve Wilson, will join President Obama at the White House to honor their father.

Etchberger served in the Air Force from 1951 to 1968.

Born in Hamburg, Pa., on March 5, 1933, Etchberger was inspired to join the military by his brother Bob, who joined the Navy in 1946, according to the White House announcement.

Upon enlisting, Etchberger qualified as a radar operator and later an auto track radar specialist, according to the CMSgt Richard L. Etchberger Memorial Committee's website.

During his career, Etchberger served assignments in Mississippi, Utah, Morocco, North Dakota, Philippines, Illinois and Vietnam.

On March 11, 1968, Etchberger and his crew were overrun by the enemy during a bombing mission, according to the memorial committee website. His entire crew was either dead or wounded, and Etchberger continued to fire on the enemy to keep them away from his position. He also was able to direct air strikes and call for air rescue. When the helicopters arrived, Etchberger placed himself in the line of fire to save his wounded comrades. He was wounded when it was his turn to be airlifted to safety; Etchberger died before reaching the hospital, according to the website. The mission left 12 Americans either dead or missing in action.

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