

# Medal Of Honor Recommendation - Ron Radcliffe

an Affidavit by [John Spencer](#)

*Eye Witness Account by F Troop (AIR) Commander, MAJ John J. Spencer, Jr., of Actions by Captain Ronald A. Radcliffe on 20 February 1972*

## AFFIDAVIT

The undersigned assumed command of F Troop (AIR), 4th U.S. Cavalry on 28 January 1972 and was the Commander on the day [Captain Radcliffe](#) performed one of the most heroic series of actions I have ever witnessed. This assignment was my third Aviation tour in the Republic of Vietnam. On the previous two tours and during this tour I personally witnessed many heroic actions by both ground and aviation personnel. None of them compared to the actions performed by CPT Radcliffe on 20 February 1972.

On the 20th of February F. Troop had been conducting visual reconnaissance missions in and around Tay Ninh Province and in Cambodia. After the missions had been completed for the day, the aircraft and crews landed at Tay Ninh Airfield to refuel and rearm for the return to our home base of Long Binh, RVN.

I had stayed behind with my Assistant Operations Office to get briefed for the next day's missions. As soon as we were briefed we took off with me riding the right seat in a co-pilot role. As we got airborne we heard frantic transmissions on the Troop radio net. One of our Scout helicopters had been shot down and there was a survivor as confirmed by a second trailing Scout bird. But both the pilot and Crew Chief/Gunner had been killed. The survivor, CW2 **Rod Lacewell** had managed to crawl out of the burning helicopter and roll into a partially water filled bomb crater. This extinguished the smoldering clothing he was wearing.

As we got to altitude I requested a status of all other helicopters in the vicinity of the crash and determined that the cobras were still fully loaded with rockets. At this time Captain Radcliffe requested permission from the Command and Control Huey to go in for a reconnaissance to see what could

be done to get our survivor out and recover the two bodies. Permission was granted and he began what turned out to be the most heroic effort I had ever seen.

We arrived over the site approximately 15 minutes after the shoot down and assumed control of the situation. We told CPT Radcliffe to exercise extreme caution, which was to no avail as he had already determined that F Troop was going to rescue our downed airman whatever it took.

As we watched from on high it became evident that there were numerous .51 caliber machine guns in the area and it seemed as though the very air was lit up by green tracer fire. We maneuvered the Scout helicopter over the crash at an altitude of approximately 1,500 feet in such a way as to draw fire. Many times we had to go to a lower altitude to cause the .51 MGs to fire at us instead of Radcliffe. At one time I noticed there were at least three different .51s trying to shoot him down.

Radcliffe repeatedly exposed his helicopter to enemy antiaircraft (AA) fire in an effort to locate them and mark them for the cobras to destroy. Within the next 30 minutes we began to see a lessening in the numbers of AA positions but the fire was still intense.

Radcliffe, using his skill as an OH-6 pilot, continually baited the enemy positions in an effort to locate them and mark them for the cobras to take out. He used bamboo and other vegetation to mask his bird and would pop up long enough to draw fire and mark the position. In addition there had been rain showers in the area and some ground fog had formed allowing CPT Radcliffe to maneuver in areas of fog in order to mask his position. This, however, caused his aircraft to be extremely difficult to see from the [C & C](#) helicopter and from the Cobras. Whenever he marked a MG position he would turn the aircraft toward the Cobras, raise his nose and turn on his landing lights so that the position could be marked. He would then exit the vicinity of the marked position in order to allow the Cobras to fire into the area without hitting him. I saw him mark five different MG emplacements in this way prior to our attempting to get medevac helicopters in to pick up the survivor.

At this time, about 45 minutes into the rescue effort, two medevac helicopters tried to get into the area of the downed airman to pick him up but took such intense fire they had to withdraw with a crewmember on one seriously

wounded. All the while CPT Radcliffe continued to draw fire, with his crew returning fire from his bird in an effort to cover the downed crewman. At this time we saw enemy troops trying to get to CW 2 Lacewell so we determined that we needed to put down the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) into an area from where they could provide some covering fire for our survivor. This force was a group of Vietnamese Infantry from Cu Chi which we called "Browns". We requested that CPT Radcliffe throw smoke as close to the downed airman as possible in an effort to mark his position for the QRF. This was accomplished under intense hostile fire as was the insertion of the QRF. In fact the enemy also threw smoke but CPT Radcliffe informed the rescue team of the color he used. During this entire time the area around the downed airman was under intense ground fire with most of it directed at CPT Radcliffe's aircraft. He was deliberately acting as a decoy in order to allow the lift aircraft to get into the LZ without being shot down.

After the Browns were in position on the ground it was determined that several of the helicopters needed to be re-armed and re-fueled. CPT Radcliffe's helicopter was among those needing both. In addition he needed to check for damage to the bird as it was becoming extremely hard to control due to excessive vibrations.

Once on the ground, an inspection of CPT Radcliffe's aircraft revealed that it had some 30 holes in it and that the fiberglass portion of the tail rotor blades was gone. In addition, part of one tip on a main rotor blade was missing. This alone would have been cause to have the aircraft grounded. Never the less, after refueling, CPT Radcliffe ordered his crew to lighten the load and remove all excess equipment and to remain behind as he believed with additional crew on board the helicopter would not fly and he felt he might not make it back out this time.

Captain Radcliffe then took off and headed back to the crash site. As he arrived near the location he noticed that there was still one .51 MG position that was still placing fire toward CW2 Lacewell's position. He circled to the rear of the MG bunker and approached it at extreme low level and high speed. As he approached to within 25 meters he pulled up and flashed his landing lights at the Cobras so they could take the bunker out and then broke away from the position. The crew of the .51 MG bunker was killed and although still

under intense small arms fire CPT Radcliffe elected to land next to the crater where Lacewell was located and motioned for the wounded pilot to get up and come to the aircraft. After Lacewell was on board, Radcliffe cautiously picked up to a hover to see if he could control the helicopter. He was able to, so he called for the UH-1H C & C helicopter to come in and recover the remains of the two dead crewmen. As soon as this was accomplished he then called for the QRF helicopters to return and pick up the RVN Infantry on the ground. As soon as they were safely away from the position they had been in, CPT Radcliffe headed for the Medevac Pad at Long Binh where he landed and deposited CW2 Lacewell with Medical personnel.

CPT Radcliffe then flew his helicopter to the F Troop parking pads at the airfield at Long Binh. After I arrived I located Radcliffe and congratulated him on what I considered the most heroic action I had ever witnessed. I informed him that I was going to put him in for the Congressional Medal of Honor. The next day I informed my Awards and Decorations Officer to begin the necessary paperwork to submit recommending award of the CMH to CPT Radcliffe. Not long after these actions I received a classified message from GEN Abrams directing me to move F Troop North to First Regional Assistance Command. After we arrived the Troop became involved in such intense action that we struggled to keep up with the awards that were being submitted. We assumed that CPT Radcliffe's was in the system already so did not concern ourselves with it. It was not until a couple of years ago that I learned that CPT Radcliffe had never received anything for that action other than an Impact award of the Silver Star. Therefore I want to try and correct what has happened and try and see that this Heroic Officer receives a highly justified and long overdue award of the CMH.

This action happened over 34 years ago but the events that I have related are true to the best of my memory. I feel I have not done justice in this situation until CPT Radcliffe has been recognized for the most heroic action I ever witnessed.

I hereby certify that the above statement is true and factual to the best of my memory.

John J. Spencer, Jr.  
LTC Infantry (RET)

