

# Air Medals Awarded to Vietnam Naval Aviators

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SAN DIEGO (NNS) -- A ceremony held aboard the USS Midway Museum Aug. 27 recognized the heroism and bravery of two naval aviators during Operation Lion's Den, a critical nighttime surface operation late in the Vietnam War.

The Air Medal was presented to Rear Adm. William W. Pickavance, Jr. and Rear Adm. Patrick D. Moneymaker for heroic achievement while participating in aerial flight 42 years ago. Both recipients earned the award while serving as pilots of A-7B Corsair II ground attack aircraft, assigned to Attack Squadrons 93 and 56, respectively, embarked with the aircraft carrier USS Midway (CVA 41) Aug. 27, 1972, while conducting an armed reconnaissance mission.

Retired Adm. S.R. Foley, then commanding officer of Midway, commented on the heroism of the two aviators during this timely event. "I must admit that I would not have missed this opportunity for all the money in the world," said Foley. "I am absolutely delighted to be part of this because they are a success story and justice is being done today."

Recognized by Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, Pickavance and Moneymaker were cited for providing close air support to a surface action group involved in Operation Lion's Den, the nighttime shore bombardment mission against the enemy port of Haiphong, North Vietnam. Receiving an urgent call for assistance from the cruiser USS Newport News (CA 148), which was under attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats, they immediately diverted to the scene and deployed flares to pinpoint the fast-moving vessels among the small islands dotting the outer harbor, illuminating the targets for the ship's gunfire. Despite intense hostile fire, they repeatedly pressed home low altitude bombing attacks to sink or cripple the torpedo boats, their actions contributing to the success of the mission.

During the ceremony, Pickavance and Moneymaker spoke of their actions during the operation and recognized all the men that served alongside them in combat.

"I would have never imagined when I first joined the team at Midway that 42 years later I would be here," said Moneymaker.

Pickavance and Moneymaker were presented with the Air Medal by Vice Adm. David H. Buss, Commander, Naval Air Forces, during a ceremony aboard the USS Midway Museum in San Diego.

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