BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER

ON

CAPTAIN STEVE PHILLIS’ DESERT STORM HEROICS AND THE MEDAL OF HONOR

**PURPOSE**

Advocate for the upgrade of A-10 pilot Captain Steve Phillis’ Silver Star to the Medal of Honor for his Desert Storm heroics trying to save his downed wingman from Republican Guard troops in the face of withering surface to air missile (SAM) and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) fire which resulted in his death.

**BACKGROUND**

- On February 15th, 1991 Captain Steve Phillis was leading his wingman Lieutenant Rob Sweet on their thirtieth combat mission of Desert Storm flying the A-10 Warthog against the Medina Division of the Republican Guards, a combat hardened unit entrenched 100 miles north of the Saudi/Kuwaiti border.

- After destroying several targets and preparing for another attack, Lt Sweet was engaged by and defeated an SA-13 SAM at end game in part due to Steve’s “Break” call.

- Steve immediately rolled in to strafe the location of the SAM launch, coming off target with good hits and clearing Lt Sweet to attack. As Sweet rolled in, his aircraft was struck by an unseen SA-13 SAM, and he ejected from his mortally wounded A-10 thirty seconds later.

- Lt Sweet now had a five-minute parachute ride to the desert below, and was descending into the middle of the unit that he and Steve had just finished bombing and strafing. He saw muzzle flashes from the ground below, and heard bullets whizzing by this head.

**THE MISSION WAS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS**

- The tasking to fly two A-10s one hundred miles North of the border against an elite Iraqi unit was fraught with danger.

- The Medina Division was well equipped, battle tested, dug in, and 85 percent combat effective.

- The Division was compressed into a formation six miles long by three miles wide, consisting of 10,000 soldiers armed with over 150 mobile AAA systems and 24 SA-13 Batteries.

- Captain Steve Phillis and Lt Rob Sweet were the only aircraft attacking the Medina at the time of their shoot down.

- The recent lowering of the combat floor to 4,000 feet exposed the flight to significantly more threats.

- Environmental conditions made their dark green aircraft easy to see against the late afternoon sky.

- The Medina Division fought hard as evidenced in part by their tenacity during the Battle of Medina Ridge, which took place just twelve days later.

**MEDAL OF HONOR STANDARDS**

- Our nation’s highest award for valor in action against an enemy force requires that a recipient "distinguish himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty” while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force.

- This standard requires acts of personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades, and must have involved risk of life.

**HEROICS**

- After confirming Lt Sweet’s successful ejection, Steve alerted AWACS and immediately began search and rescue (SAR) efforts despite being low on fuel and weapons. His actions that followed were singularly taken to save his wingman, and were clearly above and beyond the call of duty. They included:

- Following Lt Sweet’s ejection, Steve orbited directly overhead to monitor Rob’s parachute descent, exposing himself to intense enemy fire. The safer option would have been to monitor Rob from a distance and away from the danger.

- By staying overhead Steve made himself a target for every Iraqi SAM and AAA operator in the Medina Division, drawing fire away from his wingman under parachute. Yet he remained, completely disregarding the threat to his aircraft and personal safety.

- He went to extraordinary lengths to get another flight of A-10s on scene to support his SAR efforts. The safer option would have been to return to base.

- A full three minutes after Lt Sweet ejected, Steve dispensed high visibility pyrotechnic flares highlighting his location to the enemy below in an effort to get the inbound A-10 flight directly overhead to protect Lt Sweet. The safer option would have been to continue using radio calls versus flares.

- When Steve’s A-10 was hit by a SAM moments later, he remained focused on others by urging the inbound A-10 flight to depart because of the danger. Any other pilot would have been completely consumed with flying their severely battle damaged aircraft back to base.

- Despite the chaos and stress of watching his wingman get shot down, and that of his own aircraft getting hit by a SAM, Steve maintained heroic calmness knowing that his aircraft was going down as evidenced by his final radio call, “Enfield 3-7 is bag as well.”

- Steve departed Rob’s ejection site to allow inbound SAR forces to find and recover Rob, again without regard to his own safety or potential recovery.

- His aircraft disintegrating and trailing black smoke, Steve’s battlefield heroics resulted in his death moments later at the hands of the Republican Guard’s Tawakalna Division entrenched just south of the Medina.

**PROPOSAL**

Upgrade Captain Steve Phillis’ Silver Star to the Medal of Honor using an integrated and coordinated AFA/USAFA/USAF/DOD/Congressional/White House approach.