

AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



Major James A. Hartwig Pilot, USAF Vietnam

James A. Hartwig was born in Hutchinson, Minnesota in 1936, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hartwig. While not a Marquette native, he chose to live in Marquette County during the last 30 years of his life.

His military career began when he enlisted in the United States Air Force and became an aviation mechanic and working his way up through the ranks. He was accepted for Officer Training School and ultimately certified as a pilot. He qualified for several types of aircraft including the B-25 Mitchell bomber. He transitioned into helicopters during the early days of the Vietnam conflict, qualifying as a pilot in the HH-3 "Jolly Green Giant". In this aircraft, he was able under extremely hazardous conditions to rescue pilots who had been downed by enemy fire. Serving with honor in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand during 1966 and 1967, he was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, six Air Medals, and a Meritorious Service Medal.

The first Distinguished Flying Cross citation read as follows: "Captain James A. Hartwig distinguished himself by heroism while participating in aerial flight as Rescue Crew Commander of an unarmed HH-3 rescue helicopter on 14 December 1966. On that date, Captain Hartwig

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was launched from a forward operating site to rescue an American pilot downed in the stoutly defended Hoa Binh area of North Vietnam. All routes to the survivor's position were guarded by concentrated anti-aircraft weapons, and interdiction by hostile aircraft was an ever-present danger. In spite of this extremely hostile environment and with complete disregard for his own safety, Captain Hartwig breached this lethal barrier and sped to the downed pilot's position. When the Jolly Green Giant finally reached the area, a rapid and successful pick-up was made. Upon departure, they were again menaced by the anti-aircraft weapons that had threatened them earlier and only by extraordinary aerial skill and unwavering calmness were they able to avoid deadly fire and return the rescued airman to safety. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Captain Hartwig reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

The second Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded to Captain Hartwig on 28 February 1967. In the course of a search and rescue (SAR) mission in progress, he diverted to Migia Pass in response to a mayday call from an F-105 pilot who had ejected from his stricken plane. Anti-aircraft fire was intense. The citation read: "Fully knowing the vulnerability of his aircraft to ground fire, but intent only upon saving the life of the downed pilot, Captain Hartwig descended to treetop level one ridge from the hostile defenses, darted across the ridge, and executed the recovery. The professional competence, aerial skill and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Hartwig reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

In addition, Captain Hartwig earned six Air Medals and a Meritorius Service Medal during this conflict.

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Following the war, Hartwig was assigned a variety of flying-related duty stations including flight instructor at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. In 1973, he arrived at K.I. Sawyer AFB and settled on base and later in Sands Township. He commanded the Air Rescue Squadron and worked on many notable SAR missions including the wreck of the Edmond Fitzgerald. Noted in his service record is his coordination with the Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) team who, working with the State Police and other local organizations, conducted SAR missions providing humanitarian airlift support and transporting critically ill patients and premature newborn babies from the Upper Peninsula to down-state hospitals when needed. Rapid delivery of organs destined for transplant was also a part of the MAST mission.

Hartwig retired from the Air Force in 1977. Once retired, he continued volunteer work with the State Police refining SAR strategies and methods. He was a founding member of the Sands Township Ambulance Service and an active member as a certified Emergency Medical Technician for many years. He served on the Sands Township Zoning Board and Township Solid Waste Authority until his death in 2003.

TJ Mudge, Feb 2004