

IF EVER A BOOK were a movie waiting to happen, it would be Military Order of the Purple Heart member **William Albracht's** and **Marvin Wolf's** recently published book *Abandoned in Hell: The Fight for Vietnam's Firebase Kate* (NAL Caliber/Penguin Group).

In October 1969, Captain Albracht, who was then the youngest Green Beret captain in Vietnam, was assigned command of Firebase Kate, a hilltop outpost in the Central Highlands region of Vietnam. Serving under him were 27 American soldiers and 150 indigenous Montagnard Irregulars, the famed hill tribesmen so noted for coming so ably to our aid and that of the French before us in both of our wars against Communist insurgency, and to whom the captain dedicates the book.

"None of the 27 Americans who served on Firebase Kate," Albracht wrote, "would have survived the enemy's onslaught if these short, wiry, dark-skinned and unshakably loyal fighting men had not stood their ground, bled and died and fought as bravely and as well as any soldiers on the planet."

The morning after Firebase Kate was a dot on the map near Bu Prang in the Highlands, three North Vietnamese army regiments of 6,000 troops crossed the nearby Cambodian border and attacked the fire-

base with a barrage of artillery fire and encroaching troops that led to a five-day battle that left Albracht and his men with a dwindling supply of ammo, food and water. Meanwhile, the "mucky mucks" on the other end of the radio soon refused to resupply the outpost for fear of losing more troops. The attack took place during what President Richard Nixon termed the "Vietnamization" of the war, when the push was for American troops to begin to disengage and more of the burden of the war to be placed on the South Vietnamese. Vietnamization or not, Albracht refused to give up.

As noted Vietnam war correspondent Joe Galloway writes in the foreword of the book, "That Firebase Kate survived an all-out North Vietnamese attack for five days and nights is little short of a miracle, given that the enemy opened up with artillery from its Cambodian sanctuary and brought in 37mm anti-aircraft weapons and plenty of .51 caliber heavy machine guns to make helicopter support a true nightmare."

Yet, as Galloway also points out, it was in large part the helicopter crews who were able to bring in as much ammo and water as they could that kept those manning Firebase Kate

in position to fend off the NVA for as long as they did. He also credits bombardment from Air Force F-4 Phantoms, F-100 Super Sabres and C-47 Spooky gunships with keeping Albracht's troops alive.

In the end, we learn in Albracht's and Wolf's enthralling work that Albracht decided to carry out a most daring escape from the hostilities in order to save the lives of his men, many of whom had been severely wounded.

"I gave the order and we moved out—but after 40 or 50 meters, the line stopped. I worked my way to the front and found the point man twenty meters from the gap leading to Ambush Hill. Frozen with fear, he was unable to move forward. Spooky was still too far to fire and clear our path. The enemy was on our heels; I must act immediately.

"I understood that I was almost about to die. But it had to be done, and there was no one else. My carbine was slung beneath my right arm and held waist-high on full automatic, my finger resting on the trigger. I gripped the radio handset in my left hand... 'Follow me,' I said, and stepped into the night," Albracht, who received one of his three Silver Stars for the actions he took at



Firebase Kate, and Wolf stirringly wrote.

What makes this book so cinematically inclined throughout, and where it thrives the most, is not only in Albracht's remembrances, but also the recollections of what the men serving under him, as well as the helicopter pilots, recounted to him and Wolf some 45 years later of the fight to persevere on Firebase Kate and during the escape.

"I vividly remember seeing almost continuous air strikes on Kate," recalled then 23-year-old helicopter pilot Warrant Officer John Ahearn, call sign 'Stagecoach II.' I'm a couple of miles away at 4,000 feet and I see an [Air Force] F-100 come in to attack; as soon as it breaks off, I see all those ants swarming out of the jungle and running up the hill—North Vietnamese troops. Absolutely astounding,"

Equally astounding was the fact that a grueling six hours after departing Firebase Kate, traversing the jungle, ever-petrified that their position would be given away, Albracht and Wolf write that the captain and his forces met up with the Mobile Strike (Mike) Force that had been put on alert to receive and help extract them.

"I kept calling and I kept walking. Finally I reached the tree line, and there, a Mike Force striker [Sgt. First Class Lowell Stevens] stared back at me from a foxhole... 'Go back and get the rest of your men,' he whispered. And keep your voice down. There's all kinds of f*****g pith helmets and A-Ks around here. Get your guys, and then let's get the hell out of here."

Captains William Albracht and Marvin Wolf's *Abandoned in Hell: The Fight for Vietnam's Firebase Kate* is a must read for Purple Heart recipients from any war. Its 347 pages are full of captivating episode after episode that will have readers on edge throughout. Albracht thanks God and the Montagnards for sparing his life. You will thank him and Wolf for writing his fascinating story all down. And who knows? It may very well be a movie soon. *

Purple Heart Regulation

CAPS

Official Vendor's Supply List

Cap prices include the cap patch and the lettering "Military Order of the Purple Heart" and "U.S.A." On the left side, and Chapter number on the front right, if requested.

NATIONAL CAP

All white with purple piping & letters: **\$22.75 each**

DEPARTMENT CAP

Purple with white top, gold piping & white letters: **\$22.75 each**

CHAPTER CAP

All purple with white piping & letters: **\$22.75**

PURPLE HEART BERET \$14.25

(Lettering not available)

Life Member Annotation

Includes direct embroidery "Life Member" around flap curve on front right side: **\$5.00**

Associate Member Annotation: \$8.50

(in addition to cap price).

Additional letters:

\$0.50 each

Remove/replace letters:

\$1.50 per letter

Plastic zippered cap bag:

\$3.50 each

Summer baseball caps:

\$10.50 each*

Winter baseball caps:

\$11.25 each

Dress Tie: **\$12.00 each***

Purple tie – 100% polyester with white-bordered MOPH patch (specify standard tie or clip-on)

*ONE SIZE FITS ALL

Allow approximately four (4) weeks for delivery.

For shipping & handling, add \$7.50 per order

With your order, include the following when ordering:
(Please print clearly)

Your Name

Your Address

Your Chap. # Cap Size

Your Tel No(s)

VISA/MC No. & Expiration Date

Compute the Total Amt. of your Order and email, phone or mail check or Money Order to:

KEYSTONE UNIFORM CAP

2251 Fraley Street

Philadelphia, PA 19137

PHONE: (215) 821-3434

Fax: (215) 821-3438

caps@keystoneuniformcap.com

www.keystoneuniformcap.com/MOPH

PLEASE NOTE: ALL RUSH ORDERS WILL INCUR AN ADDITIONAL CHARGE/FEE