**STINGER 41 DECORATIONS BOARD REBUTTAL 8-11-2025**

(bold are excerpts from results memo, non-bold are our rebuttals)

**1. “When the Board considered the original submission for the Stinger 41 crew, it was precluded from obtaining the customary written advisory from the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) due to the proponent’s emphatic request for rapid adjudication in time for the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the events under review.”**

This assertion wrongly shifts responsibility onto the proponents, implying they caused the Board’s lack of preparation. This is not accurate.

The AC-119 Gunship Association and former SECAF Whitten Peters were the original proponents. In December 2021, the Association provided two potential presentation dates: 2 May 2022 and 2 October 2022. Senator Mark Kelly, then designated presenter, chose 2 May.

Later, AFSOC assumed the role of presenter and requested the rapid adjudication. It was AFSOC’s command staff—not the Gunship Association—who scripted the event, demanded status updates from AFPC, and pushed for a firm adjudication deadline. They even stated in writing that they would “keep the heat on” to ensure timely completion.1, 2

According to SAF/MRBP, the Decorations Board was given only nine days to prepare, while AFPC later admitted that normal preparation takes four to six months. Convening the Board under these conditions was fundamentally flawed and unjustified. The result was a rushed and incomplete process.3

The inadequate timeline caused:

* No time for AFHRA advisory input3
* No time for comparison with similar combat award precedents
* No time for full personnel files from NPRC3

A second presentation date—2 October 2022—was available the entire time. The rush was unnecessary and entirely avoidable.

**2. “The analysis focused on the three primary affidavits… the Board concluded these actions did not meet the criteria for the Silver Star Medal, DFC, or AM.”**

The Board’s conclusion—denying awards to seven of the nine crew members—is a profound miscarriage of justice.

The Stinger 41 crew flew a rare daylight mission into An Loc, the most heavily defended city in South Vietnam, in a night-designed aircraft painted black, making them highly vulnerable to enemy fire. Despite intense AAA, the crew made multiple attack passes to destroy a high-value target. They were eventually shot down—three KIA, seven survivors.9, 12, 13, 15

A U.S. Senator, a former Secretary of the Air Force, 24 General Officers (including four Chiefs of Staff), the wartime Wing and Squadron Commanders, and the AFSOC Commander all independently assessed that the crew’s actions clearly met the criteria for valor awards.4

The SAR mission commander also confirmed that the crew's heroic actions on the ground directly contributed to their rescue and survival.5

The Board’s dismissal of these actions reflects a failure to grasp the operational context, the extreme risk, and the overwhelming evidence of gallantry.

**3. “Former Secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable F. Whitten Peters, requested reconsideration… the package included an unofficial 7-page summary [unknown author] of An Loc operations.”**

This statement is inaccurate and misleading.

The An Loc summary was an official, integral part of SECAF Peters’ signed reconsideration package. It was submitted as Attachment 2. It is disingenuous to refer to it as an “unofficial” summary by an “unknown author.” The source was known, the content was heavily documented, and it was submitted through proper channels.6

**4. “...it is more likely than not the entire crew of Stinger 41 was duly considered for recognition in real time. Specifically, military personnel records indicate six members of the crew received AMs, where the award period included the events of May 2, 1972. Two crew members were each awarded the DFC, one for a mission on April 30, 1972, the other for a mission on May 1, 1972. Additionally, all ten Stinger 41 crewmembers were awarded Purple Hearts for injuries sustained on the May 2, 1972, mission. Finally, references to this mission were included in various performance reports.”**

This claim lacks evidence.

The AMs mentioned above were awarded for the completion of a specific number of missions, not for a specific mission. The DFCs mentioned were for missions other than May 2, 1972. Purple Hearts are awarded for injuries, not for valorous actions. On the contrary, an affidavit from the 18th SOS Awards and Decorations Officer confirmed that awards for May 2 were submitted through command channels and never returned. This suggests the recommendations were lost in the fog of war, and the deactivation of the 18th Special Operations Squadron.7

Furthermore, if the crew was truly “duly considered” in real time, the 2022 Board's new award approvals for two members would have been duplicative, which they were not.

**5. “...despite the lack of independent affidavits or evidence…”**

Again, this ignores documented testimony.

An affidavit from the 18th SOS Awards and Decorations/Operations Officer explicitly states that the original awards were drafted, signed by commanders, and sent forward to higher Headquarters. The burden of proof should not lie with 50-year-old memory or missing documents. The absence of a paper trail does not equate to denial of the facts—it reflects lost records during wartime.7

**6. “...the Board determined the evidence was not sufficient to conclude that the crew of Stinger 41 was not fairly considered… compared to purportedly similarly situated members.”**

This conclusion is demonstrably false.

In May 2022, a comparison package on the Manta 75 mission (a similar C-130 shootdown) was submitted to AFPC via Senator Kelly’s office. It was received and tracked. Yet the Board claims it was not considered in the original Board.8, 9, 14

Silver Stars were awarded to all 10 personnel involved—6 from the C-130, Manta 75 and 4 from the Army rescue helicopter—with full orders and citations. The Army awards were issued in 2017 under Title 10, Section 1130.9, 15

The Board incorrectly claimed only DFCs were awarded to the helicopter aircrew. This is factually wrong. They received no awards in 1972.

In addition, the Board misidentified another comparison mission—the AC-130 gunship was not Spare 612, but Spare 617. This mistake invalidated the AFHRA research.

Two crew members from Spare 617 received the Air Force Cross. The original wartime board for Stinger 41 similarly stated the pilot met AF Cross criteria. Yet in 2022, the co-pilot was denied any recognition—even though both pilots performed the same life-saving acts.

In addition, the wartime Decorations Board (1972) stated that the Stinger 41 pilot met the criteria for the AF Cross, while the 2022 Decorations Board did not recognize the copilot with any award (disapproved), even though both pilots performed the same valorous acts of gallantry. Without both pilots risking their lives to prevent the aircraft from crashing, all seven of their fellow crewmembers would not have had the opportunity to bailout and would have perished.10,11

The 2022 Board failed to apply consistent standards across similar incidents.

**7. “...the Board determined there was no basis to disturb the original decision.”**

This defense is indefensible.

The original Board was given nine days to prepare—a timeline AFPC itself admits is grossly insufficient. The adjudication lacked the required historical, personnel, and comparative analysis.2, 3

In fact, the review of that flawed decision was conducted by the same person who led the flawed original Board. Predictably, he defended the outcome. This is not an independent or objective review.

Additionally, Corbett’s Military Personnel Records (MPRs) were mishandled. AFPC had them in October 2021. When the Board met in 2022, it claimed they were unavailable. After being alerted, Corbett personally provided 100+ pages of MPRs, and requested and received a copy of his records from the NPRC. In 2023, AFPC finally admitted they had his records.3

This failure undermines the credibility and integrity of the entire adjudication process.

**Conclusion**

The 2022 Decorations Board process was deeply flawed, rushed, and inconsistent. It ignored evidence, mishandled comparisons, and misrepresented facts. The follow-up review was not independent and failed to correct these issues.

We strongly request:

1. The award of the recommended decorations for the Stinger 41 crewmembers16, or
2. Appoint a new, fully staffed and properly resourced Board, with an independent review of the full record, including the previously submitted materials and comparable precedent cases.

**Justice delayed for the crew of Stinger 41 is justice denied. These warriors deserve fair, accurate, and unbiased consideration—not flawed excuses and bureaucratic deflection.**

Respectfully, 1. Attachment

1. References

**Thomas C. Waskow, Lt Gen (Ret), USAF**
AC-119 Gunship Association Awards Committee

Sundog 40 Forward Air Controller (eye witness)

waskowvisions@gmail.com

(503)710-4689

[signed]

**Roy A. Davis, Col (Ret), USAF**
Chairman, AC-119 Gunship Association Awards Committee

royalandavis@gmail.com

(253)549-2044

[signed]

**REFERENCES**

1. **[EMAIL FROM AFSOC/A1 TO AFSOC/CC](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-1.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**
2. **[EMAIL FROM THE AFPC AWARDS POC](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-2.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**
3. [**EMAIL FROM A DECORATIONS BOARD MEMBER**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-3.pdf)
4. [**GENERAL OFFICERS ENDORSING THE STINGER 41 PACKAGE**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-4.pdf)
5. [**LAMAR SMITH (CSAR) AFFIDAVIT**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-5.pdf)
6. [**FORMER SECAF PETERS RECONSIDERATION PACKAGE (2023**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-6.pdf)**)**
7. [**CHARLES POLLOCK (AWARDS AND DECORATIONS OFFICER) AFFIDAVIT**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-7.pdf)
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14. [**STINGER 41 AND MANTA 75 MISSION COMPARISON**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-14.pdf)
15. [**VIETNAM MAGAZINE ARTICLE**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-15.pdf)
16. [**STINGER 41 AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS**](http://www.island-escape.com/ref-16.pdf)

 Attachment 1