

NAVY CROSS



JOHN JACK WILLIAM HILGERS

Captain, U.S. Marine Corps
Headquarters & Service Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines
Thon Son Lam Area, Republic of Vietnam, 23 - 24 August 1966
Hometown: Virginia Beach, Va.

Citation:

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to John Jack William Hilgers (0-74432), Captain, U.S. Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism as Battalion Operations Officer of the Second Battalion, Fourth Marines, THIRD Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 23 and 24 August 1966. During Operation PRAIRIE, when a company from Captain Hilgers' battalion was attacked and surrounded by a numerically superior North Vietnamese force in the Thon Son Lam area, he immediately realized the seriousness of the situation and unhesitatingly volunteered to lead a reaction force to the company's aid. The battalion's disposition and the nature of its mission prevented dispatching one company as a unit, so a composite company was quickly formed and heli-lifted into the area just after dark. After analyzing the enemy's weaknesses, he fearlessly led his unit through 400 meters of enemy infested, dense, and unfamiliar jungle, dispatching one unit to halt the enemy's attack and neutralize deadly automatic weapons fire on the left flank. After joining the besieged unit, which was located in a bowl-shaped depression, Captain Hilgers selflessly exposed himself to heavy automatic weapons fire and grenades in order to move to the forward slope of the position to direct his forces better and insure that the beleaguered unit was obtaining the maximum support available. During the early morning hours of 24 August, the North Vietnamese launched three vicious assaults on the position, threatening to annihilate the trapped company. The combined force, under Captain Hilgers' inspiring and aggressive leadership, successfully repulsed each attack, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. Throughout the seemingly endless fourteen-hour battle, he repeatedly exposed himself to the devastating enemy fire to direct and control fire support and encourage his gallant fighting men. As a result of his heroic actions, the combined force successfully defeated the enemy attacks and relieved the pressure on the besieged company. By his outstanding leadership, fearless determination, great professional skill, and unfaltering dedication to duty in the face of extreme danger, Captain Hilgers reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.