

POW / MIA PROFILES

The purpose of the State POW/MIA Committee is to “provide increased awareness of POW / MIAs, to organize the Department and Posts’ POW / MIA activities and to provide education to the public”. To realize this duty a profile of a WI resident who is or has been classified as POW / MIA will be presented each month for your reflection. It is with great respect that we present this month’s Profile.

At the Midwinter Meeting back in January, a number of topics came up at our POW/MIA committee meeting. Department Commander David Kurtz visited us to contribute to the discussion. During his remarks, he mentioned the name of Lance Sijan, a POW from Milwaukee, and the first graduate of the Air Force Academy to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. This was a very interesting fact and some research revealed a most remarkable story.

Lance Sijan was born in Milwaukee in 1942. He graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1965 and after attending pilot training, was assigned to the 366th Wing at Da Nang Air Base, Vietnam. On his 52nd mission, on the night of November 9, 1967 the F4C Phantom piloted by a Lt. Col Armstrong and Capt Sijan, was engulfed in a ball of flame during a bombing run over North Vietnam. Sijan ejected and landed in the jungle below. A search and rescue mission by a Jolly Green Giant helicopter was nearly successful but had to abort due to enemy fire. The search continued the next day but with no further radio contact with Sijan (he was unconscious in the jungle), the search was called off and he was listed as MIA.

As the search ended, Capt Sijan’s ordeal was just beginning. The rest of the story cannot be justified with the space available so we will allow the text of his MOH citation stand as evidence to the true fighting spirit of Lance Sijan and of the American fighting man:

“While on a flight over North Vietnam, Captain Sijan ejected from his disabled aircraft and successfully evaded capture for more than six weeks. During this time, he was seriously injured and suffered from shock and extreme weight loss due to lack of food. After being captured by North Vietnamese soldiers, Captain Sijan was taken to a holding point for subsequent transfer to a prisoner of war camp. In his emaciated and crippled condition, he overpowered one of his guards and crawled into the jungle, only to be recaptured after several hours. He was then

transferred to another prison camp where he was kept in solitary confinement and interrogated at length. During interrogation, he was severely tortured; however, he did not divulge any information to his captors. Captain Sijan lapsed into delirium and was placed in the care of another prisoner. During his intermittent periods of consciousness until his death, he never complained of his physical condition and, on several occasions, spoke of future escape attempts. Captain Sijan's extraordinary heroism and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty at the cost of his life are in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Armed Forces.”

Please visit these sources on the internet for more complete narratives on this amazing story: <http://www.medalofhonor.com/LanceSijan.htm>,
<http://www.af.mil/news/airman/0196/sijan.htm>,
<http://www.af.mil/history/person.asp?dec=&pid=123006524>,

The Committee welcomes any information that any Legionnaire may have on one of our WI Veterans who are or have been POW/MIA from any conflict. Please contact Tom Ingram, Chairman, State POW/MIA Committee at tingram5@wi.rr.com or Robert Miller, Vice Chairman at bmillerplake@charter.net, 262-279-6429 if you have any information to help our endeavor. Thank you !