



FORT NOVOSEL

As the new name for **Fort Rucker, Alabama**

Early in 1970, Army aviator Michael Novosel, Jr., was shot down while on a routine helicopter flight over Vietnam. Although not seriously wounded, he nevertheless found himself stranded with the enemy nearby – a precarious predicament for any soldier. It must have been a relief for him to hear that extraction was not only 10 minutes away, but that the evacuation pilot was none other than **Michael Novosel, Sr.** – his own father and one of the greatest Army aviators of the age.

In many ways, Michael Novosel, Sr.'s rise mirrored that of Army Aviation itself. Novosel joined the Army Air Corps at the age of 19 in 1941, 10 months before the attack at Pearl Harbor. By the end of World War II, he had risen to the rank of captain at the age of 23, flying B-29 Superfortress bombers the size of modern 737 passenger planes. After leaving the Army in the immediate post-war period but remaining in the reserves, Novosel again served his country in combat in Korea, now as part of the newly created Air Force.

By the time the United States expanded its role in the Vietnam War during the mid-1960s, Novosel was a 42-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserve, comfortably flying passenger aircraft as a private citizen. He decided to volunteer for active duty. Learning that the Air Force had too many senior officers, Novosel resigned his commission and instead joined the Army as a warrant officer and helicopter pilot.

Assigned to Vietnam as a “Dustoff” pilot, he flew helicopters evacuating combat zone casualties; a dangerous mission in which approximately one third of all medevac pilots became casualties themselves. In Novosel's two tours in Vietnam, he flew 2,543 extraction missions, rescuing over 5,500 seriously wounded soldiers.

Perhaps no moment made Novosel's skills as a pilot and strength as a leader more evident than his actions on 2 October 1969. Beginning the day at 0500 by being alerted to the urgent need for evacuation by a group of wounded and surrounded South Vietnamese soldiers, Novosel brought the first helicopter of his unit into the

air. The timing and nature of the call meant he had no gunships or aircraft to support him, while the presence of the enemy exposed his aircraft to extensive machine gun fire. Indeed, enemy fire throughout the day would disable his speed gauges, damage his rotors, and destroy his radios, windshields, and parts of his landing apparatus. Other problems also exacerbated the situation: since the troops on the ground did not speak English and were unable to communicate by radio, Novosel had to fly low and circle as



he searched for them by eye, further exposing himself to fire. And since the terrain they were pinned down on presented no appropriate landing zone, Novosel had to skim and hover right above the ground, carefully maneuvering the helicopter while his crew pulled wounded men on board.

On six different occasions, enemy attacks became so great that Novosel was forced to withdraw, momentarily leaving the area and then returning from another direction to confuse and elude their assaults. Wounded himself during a final extraction that required rescuing a wounded soldier directly facing an enemy bunker, Novosel nevertheless maintained control of the aircraft and returned his crew

and casualty safely to base. Eighteen hours had passed since he started the day. Novosel was 47 years old. His aircraft was damaged and his body was battered, but he had saved 29 men.

Receiving the Medal of Honor for his actions, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Novosel continued serving in Army aviation until 1984, and then continued to support Army aviation and aviators through two decades of retirement. And his son also repaid his father's favor: one week after Michael Novosel, Sr., extracted him from a disabled aircraft, Michael Novosel, Jr., did the same for his dad. Their combined service honors generational service, a common trend in the modern military. And Michael Novosel, Sr.'s career of valor, hard-earned technical skill, and commitment to his comrades serve as an example and inspiration for all soldiers.