



Michael J. Novosel, Sr.
Chief Warrant Officer, U.S. Army
Medal of Honor Recipient
Vietnam War

Chief Warrant Officer (CW4) Michael J. Novosel, Sr. (3 September 1922 - 2 April 2006) was a retired U.S. Army soldier who was a recipient of the U.S. military's highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor. Novosel's service to his country spanned three wars - World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Michael J. Novosel was born on 3 September 1922 in the Pittsburgh-area town of Etna, PA. He was the son of Croatian immigrants, and grew up during the Great Depression fluently speaking both his parents' tongue, and English. At the age of 19, Novosel joined what was then the Army Air Corps. That was just ten months prior to Pearl Harbor, and by 1945, he was a Captain flying B-29 Superfortress bombers in the war against Japan. He left the service for a brief time due to reductions in force after the war and settled in Fort Walton Beach, FL, to raise his family.

Novosel joined the U.S. Air Force Reserves and went back on active duty to again serve his country during the Korean War. He left the service again in 1953 and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserve in 1955. In 1963, Novosel was working as a commercial airline pilot when a deep sense of patriotism called him to return to active military duty. By then, he was 41 and the Air Force did not have space for any more officers in the upper ranks. It was then that Novosel made the decision to give up his rank of lieutenant colonel in the Air Force to join the Army and fly helicopters as a chief warrant officer with the elite Special Forces Aviation Section.

He served his first tour in Vietnam flying medevac helicopters (Dust-off) with the 283rd Medical Detachment. His second tour in Vietnam was with the 82nd Medical Detachment. During that war, Novosel flew 2,543 missions and extracted 5,589 wounded personnel, among them his own son, Michael J. Novosel, Jr. (*the following week Michael J. Novosel, Jr. returned the favor by extracting his father after being shot down*).

On the morning of 2 October 1969, Novosel set out to evacuate a group of South Vietnamese soldiers who were surrounded by the enemy near the Cambodian border. The soldiers' radio communication was lost and their ammunition expended. Without air cover or fire support, Novosel flew at low altitudes while under continuous enemy fire. He skimmed the ground with his helicopter, while his medic and crew chief yanked the wounded men on board. He completed 15 hazardous extractions, was wounded in a barrage of enemy fire and momentarily lost control of his helicopter that day, but when it was over, he had

rescued 29 men. Novosel completed his tour in March 1970. In 1971, then Pres. Richard Nixon placed the nation's highest award for valor in combat, the U.S. Medal of Honor, around Novosel's neck.

Medal of Honor

Rank and organization: Chief Warrant Officer, U.S. Army, 82d Medical Detachment, 45th Medical Company, 68th Medical Group.

Place and date: Kien Tuong Province, Republic of Vietnam, 2 October 1969.

Entered service at: Kenner, LA. Born: 3 September 1922, Etna, PA.

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. CWO Novosel, 82d Medical Detachment, distinguished himself while serving as commander of a medical evacuation helicopter. He unhesitatingly maneuvered his helicopter into a heavily fortified and defended enemy training area where a group of wounded Vietnamese soldiers were pinned down by a large enemy force. Flying without gunship or other cover and exposed to intense machinegun fire, CWO Novosel was able to locate and rescue a wounded soldier. Since all communications with the beleaguered troops had been lost, he repeatedly circled the battle area, flying at low level under continuous heavy fire, to attract the attention of the scattered friendly troops. This display of courage visibly raised their morale, as they recognized this as a signal to assemble for evacuation. On 6 occasions he and his crew were forced out of the battle area by the intense enemy fire, only to circle and return from another direction to land and extract additional troops. Near the end of the mission, a wounded soldier was spotted close to an enemy bunker. Fully realizing that he would attract a hail of enemy fire, CWO Novosel nevertheless attempted the extraction by hovering the helicopter backward. As the man was pulled on aboard, enemy automatic weapons opened fire at close range, damaged the aircraft and wounded CWO Novosel. He momentarily lost control of the aircraft, but quickly recovered and departed under the withering enemy fire. In all, 15 extremely hazardous extractions were performed in order to remove wounded personnel. As a direct result of his selfless conduct, the lives of 29 soldiers were saved. The extraordinary heroism displayed by CWO Novosel was an inspiration to his comrades in arms and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Novosel was inducted into the Army Aviation Hall of Fame in 1975. When he retired as the senior warrant officer with the Warrant Officer Candidate Program in 1985, he had been a military aviator for 42 years and was the last World War II military aviator in the U.S. to remain on active flying duty. Novosel accumulated 12,400 military flying hours, including 2,038 in combat during his career. Upon his retirement, he received a rare honor for a living hero when the main street at Fort Rucker, AL was renamed "*Novosel Street*." He also received his final award, the Distinguished Service Medal during his retirement ceremony.

While residing in Enterprise, AL, Novosel remained active in the military community during his retirement. He frequently was invited as the honored guest for military lectures and ceremonies spanning the entire country to share his unique insights, even until the final weeks before he died. He co-piloted the liftoff of the *In the Shadow of the Blade* mission in 2002. His book, *Dustoff - The Memoir of an Army Aviator*, was published in 1999.

Diagnosed with a recurrent cancer in November 2005, he had undergone a series of highly successful treatments at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. The cancer tumor had been greatly reduced in December 2005 and January 2006. In February 2006, Novosel concluded chemotherapy and other treatments and waited to regain strength in preparation for surgery on 7 March. His prognosis appeared excellent. Despite new and innovative procedures to reduce trauma, he never fully recovered from the shock of the surgery.