

Two Navy SEALs to Receive Awards after 35 Years

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SAN DIEGO (NNS) -- Two Navy SEALs will receive awards for actions they took during a highly classified operation to rescue U.S. POWs near Thanh Hoa, North Vietnam nearly 35 years ago.

Lt. Melvin S. Dry will be posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal with valor and Lt. Phillip L. "Moki" Martin will be awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with valor.

The awards will be presented in two separate ceremonies. The Dry family will accept the Bronze Star Medal on behalf of Lt. Dry at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., on Feb. 25.

Lt. Martin will be awarded his medal at Naval Special Warfare Command Headquarters in Coronado Calif., on March 18.

In 1972, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized U.S. Pacific Command to execute Operation Thunderhead in which SEALs were employed to assist in the rescue of POWs planning to escape, steal a boat and flee via the Red River to the Gulf of Tonkin. Although mission training and planning and rehearsal was conducted, the mission was aborted before execution. The operation was the first combat-use of a mini wet-submersible SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV).

The details of the once secret operation and the accounting of the SEALs' actions were reported in a magazine article in October of 2005.

When retired Capt. John D. Chamberlain, the then commander of the amphibious-transport submarine USS Grayback (LPSS-574) in which the SEALs were launched from during the operation, read the article and realized that neither Dry nor Martin were ever recognized.

Chamberlain collected naval messages, official documents, personal statements from witnesses and submitted awards for the two SEALs in November 2005.

The Navy authorized the medals on Oct. 26, 2007.