

Alwin sisters want Wisconsin hero to be remembered

By Ginna Young

In a small churchyard, in rural Marathon County, lies the grave of a Wisconsin hero, but one that many haven't even heard of. In the Town of Hamburg, is buried Capt. Scott R. Alwin, who served in the "Top Tigers" 68th Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam, from 1967-71.

"Those of us who were his brothers and sisters at home, I didn't think of him as a hero," said his sister Pamela "Pam" Alwin Fullerton. "He was just Scott, doing Scott kinds of things."

Scott was one of the 16 children in his family born in Wisconsin, and raised by a Lutheran minister and his wife. When Scott was four or five years old, his father moved the family from Milwaukee, to pastor a small country church in Buffalo County.

Even early on, Scott was a great history buff, which he picked up from his father, with Hannibal as Scott's favorite general. Although Scott's father wanted him to become a minister, the life wasn't for Scott, who graduated from Fort Atkinson High School, where he received an appointment to the Air Force Academy.

Scott was concerned over what he saw as communism in Vietnam, and because he wanted to fly, he enlisted in the Army. During his training, there were four controls in the helicopter cockpit, one for each limb that you had to use all at once, each one doing something different.

I think nobody but an idiot would try to do it – but I love it, wrote Scott in a letter home. Scott proved to be good at what he did, so good, that he developed a counter rotational maneuver. At that time, if a rotor tail quit, the helicopter simply fell out of the sky and crashed.

Scott discovered that since the rotors turned one way, if he

turned the helicopter the opposite way, he created enough lift to be able to set the chopper down. He took his findings to the unit safety officer, who helped him further develop the maneuver, which is now taught to helicopter pilots worldwide.

One of the people Scott served with, called him a silver dollar driver, which meant that he had such an affinity, that he could get the helicopter to do anything he wanted it to do, without ever moving the stick the width of a silver dollar.

"And Scott was apparently one of the best there ever was," said Pam.

When Scott arrived in Vietnam, he made it clear he didn't want to be in the gun ships, because he felt that those crafts only wanted to "count kills," so he stuck to flying slicks for the first year.

Scott flew so well, he had the highest bounty of any American pilot placed on him by Hanoi Hannah, a Vietnamese radio personality. Scott crashed three times during his tours, but wasn't worried for himself, as he was in his element, openly scoffing at the price on his head by Hanoi Hannah.

She's never gonna get that, cause nothin's ever gonna happen to me, wrote Scott in a letter home.

"He didn't talk about those kinds of things, he just did what he had to do," said his sister Penelope "Penny" Alwin.

During his tours in Vietnam, Scott was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses; nine Bronze Stars; a Silver Star; and 136 Air Medals. An Air Medal in Vietnam, represented 25 hours of combat flight time.

"That means hours when you were being shot at," said Pam. "And Scott survived five tours doing that. As far as we know, he is the most highly decorated military flyer of that war."

His battalion records say Scott actually had 206 Air Medals, but the military can't confirm or deny, as they don't have the personnel to look into the records of deceased veterans. It was after Scott returned home from the war, when he was killed at 31 years of age by a drunk driver, that his family learned the kind of person he truly was, when men started showing up from all over the country for his funeral and beyond.

Those he served with, told stories that were unbelievable to Scott's family. They learned that he was nominated twice for the Congressional Medal of Honor, both times, for volunteer missions, but generals high up nixed the nominations.

One such mission, called for volunteers to fly to a Catholic orphanage that was about to be overrun by the enemy. Scott's friend, who volunteered to fly with him, remembers Scott landing with only three or four feet of clearance in the fenced stone courtyard, something practically unheard of.

Another time, Scott's chopper took a hit and landed in a rice paddy, but that didn't stop him from dragging the wounded man with him a quarter of a mile to tree cover.

"That's what Scott did," said Pam.

Even though Scott is believed to be the most decorated aviator in any branch of the military, he remains largely unknown by even his fellow Wisconsinites. That is about to change, with the Honor in the Air project, a documentary to let people know about Scott and the respect his peers have for him.

The project came about fairly recently, when Pam was on a panel of Wisconsin authors, where one person asked why anyone would want to read a story about Wisconsin. That made Pam speak up.

"I said, 10 miles northwest of Wausau, in the middle of no-

where Marathon, next to a tiny little red brick church, is the grave of one of the greatest heroes of Wisconsin history, and nobody knows he's even buried there, much less that he existed or what he did," said Pam. "I said, *that's a story that should be told and should be written down.*"

One lady on the panel agreed and said Scott's legacy should be made into a documentary. That lady happened to be Susan Reetz, with Clear Focus Media, a well-known maker of documentaries.

However, Pam and Penny's task is far from done. The Honor in the Air documentary is in the works, but it takes funding to visit and film commentary from Scott's comrades across the country.

"We need money," said Penny. "It takes money to do the kinds of things we do. It's important to us."

While in Vietnam, Scott hoped to make the public understand what the soldiers were fighting for in the unpopular war.

For we can hear the bell toll for the freedom in Vietnam, we would have to know for certainty, that it tolls for us also, wrote Scott to a letter in a local newspaper.

There was no parade when Scott or any of the soldiers came home; they were spit on, called baby killers and some couldn't even claim they served in Vietnam, because they risked such hatred and distrust.

The sisters say the documentary is not just about their brother's heroics, but also to educate the public on patriotism, standing up for beliefs and to honor the many others who gave all they had in Vietnam, in service of their country.

"Doggone it, it's about time we had something out there that makes up for the treatment that they've had to be subjected to," said Pam.

Those making the documentary hope to release it in 2023, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of when the war ended with the withdrawal from Vietnam. For more information or to donate for expenses of the non-profit documentary, visit honorintheair.com.

"Every single person who hears his story," said Pam, "is one more person, who knows there's something in the water that creates heroes in this state."

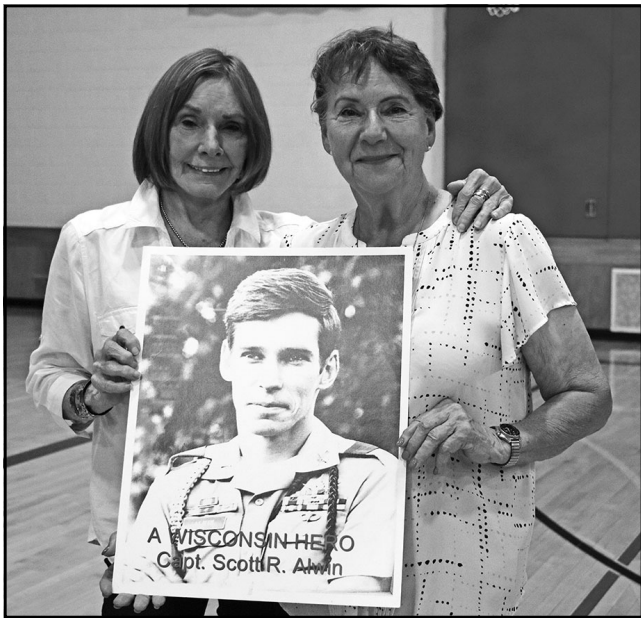


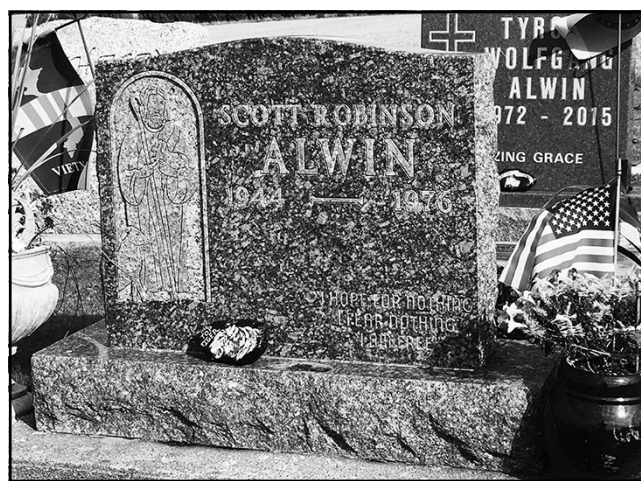
Photo by Ginna Young

Penny Alwin (left) and Pam Alwin Fullerton look to make the world aware of their own hero, brother Capt. Scott Alwin. The two shared Scott's story during a presentation in Cornell, Oct. 9. During his time in Vietnam, Scott flew many dangerous volunteer missions, coming home as possibly the most decorated military aviator in U.S. history.



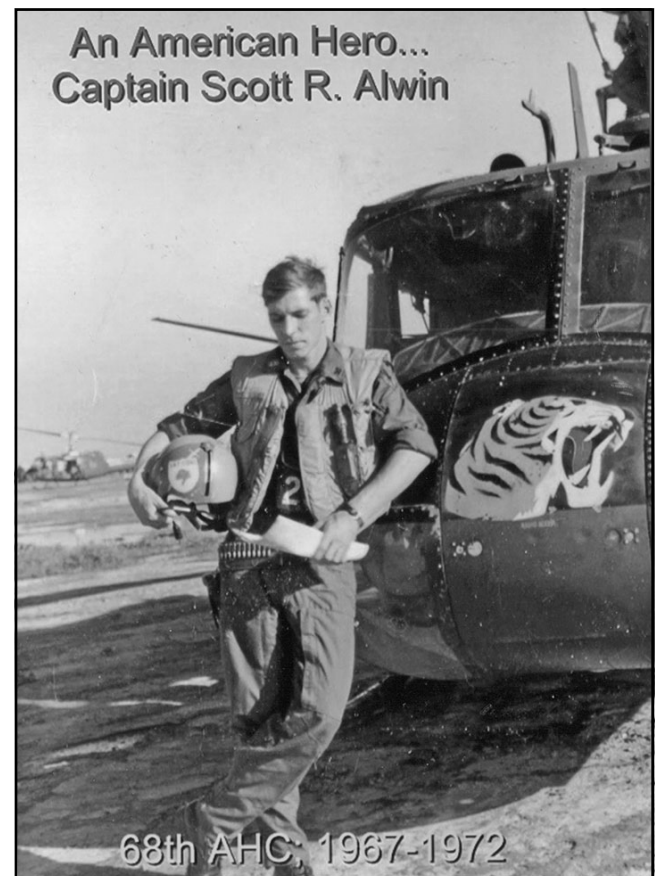
Submitted Photo

Capt. Scott Alwin was never happier than when flying and was surprised to find a photo of him taken from a helicopter alongside of him on a mission in Vietnam. Scott learned the photographer was none other than the brother of his childhood friend from Wisconsin. Scott's sisters marvel over not only that connection, but that Scott's favorite Bible verse was *Isaiah 6:8* (Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!") and that he ended up in the 68th company.



Submitted Photo

The final resting place of Capt. Scott Alwin lies in Hamburg, in Marathon County, in a small graveyard, with his time in Vietnam, honored by a "Top Tiger" stone. Scott married while in Vietnam, and had two children, before he was killed by a drunk driver when he was 31. Scott's inscription is a copy of the last thing he wrote in his journal. "I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free."



Submitted Photo

Known as the Top Tigers, Capt. Scott Alwin's 68th Assault Helicopter Company eventually withdrew from Vietnam, when the war ended, a decision that didn't set well with Alwin. (Inset) The nose cone of Scott's final chopper he flew ended up smuggled out of Vietnam by his comrades, and bounced around for 20 years, before it was given to Scott's parents in Wisconsin.

