

Mission of Mercy

By the time the Korean War finally ended in July 1953, more than four million people had died. In the first “hot” conflict of the Cold War, neither side had gained much ground, but the Korean Peninsula remained a flashpoint where violence could and sometimes did erupt without notice. As a result, the United States permanently stationed a large contingent of forces in the Republic of South Korea.

It’s unlikely that William A. Lashley, of Columbia, paid much attention to Korea while a student at Clemson. An electrical engineering major and ROTC scholarship recipient in Clemson University’s Class of 1970, Lashley seemed to enjoy the outdoors, participating in the RPA Club and the Outing Club in addition to Alpha Gamma. If he considered the Far East at all, it was probably to wonder how the escalating conflict in the Republic of Vietnam would impact him and his fellow ROTC cadets.



After earning his commission and graduating from Clemson, Lashley reported for active duty. He attended the Army’s basic course for field artillery officers and then flight school. By the time he was assigned to the 3rd Aviation Detachment of the 17th Aviation Group, in Korea, Lashley was no stranger to the Far East. He had already served at least one tour of duty in Vietnam.

On July 12, 1977, Captain Lashley, as copilot, along with Warrant Officer James Miles the pilot, and crew member Staff Sergeant Horace Robinson were alerted for a rescue mission. A Marine Corps UH-1 “Huey” helicopter had crashed 145 miles southeast of Seoul, the South Korean capital. Lashley and his crew were dispatched to rescue the nine crew and passengers of the Marine chopper.

Flying in rainy weather, Lashley’s aircraft also crashed killing all three aboard. Lashley was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism. He was survived by his wife Alice and sons Will and Chris. Lashley is buried in Greenlawn Memorial Park, Columbia, South Carolina.