Richard G. Seifried, now retired from the U.S. Army, was a CW4 pilot returning to Fort Bragg in a UH-1 Huey from a mission to Asheville, then Charlotte on October 17, 1975, when he heard on the police band radio that an officer was down in the Laurinburg area. He was in thick clouds over Pinehurst when he heard the broadcast.

 Seifried said the Medical Evacuation Pilot’s Motto is: “Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime” and they always tried to live by that Motto to honor the memory of ones who had fallen.

With only 30 minutes of fuel remaining and no airport in Laurinburg, Seifried landed at Simmons Army Airfield on Ft. Bragg, refueled without shutting down or getting out of the aircraft, and took off in low visibility – below Visual Flight Rules. He used a North Carolina map to find Laurinburg by following roads. He found the pick-up site 45 minutes later in a field near a school with police cars and their flashing lights.

Trooper Harry Stegall had been shot and was in an ambulance waiting to be transported when Seifried arrived. Seifried said they were not going to let him die on their watch. Sgt J.R Blalock accompanied Stegall.

The weather continued to decay. A few minutes after takeoff, heavy rain forced Seifried to declare an emergency with Air Traffic Control, and requested priority clearance to Raleigh-Durham airport.

Only after takeoff did the medic from the Huey crew learn that the trooper had been shot seven times and said he needed to be taken to Chapel Hill as soon as possible. Seifried pushed the Huey air speed as fast as possible.

On arriving at RDU, the promised ambulance was not there, perhaps delayed by the severe weather. The medic said they were running low on oxygen and he did not think Trooper Stegall would live if he was not on an operating table in 30 minutes. The decision was made to try and make it to the UNC Hospital.

RDU’s Air Traffic Control warned Seifried about the weather and asked if he was sure he did not want to wait for the ambulance or try and make it to Duke instead. He thanked them for the warning and advice but was ready to get Stegall to UNC.

Again, Seifried had to use a North Carolina road map and travel using the interstate as his guide. The weather kept them at no more than 100 feet above ground level, below some of the taller buildings in the area and they flew past several construction cranes whose top sections were not visible to the Huey crew.

As the crew got into the Chapel Hill area, the weather went zero. They were forced to land in a parking lot next to a shopping center. A man, shocked that a helicopter had just landed next to his car, gave directions to UNC Hospital. The co-pilot and crew chief watched for obstacles in the flight path. A cross appeared out of the clouds and they flew around it. They thought a blinking red light was on top of a tall building, but it was a traffic light. When Seifried spotted the Bell Tower on the UNC campus he knew exactly where he was and setup for approach to the parking lot behind the Emergency Room.

Seifried helped unload Trooper Stegall and all the medical equipment, and he followed the trauma team into the Emergency Room entrance. Once inside, Seifried handed Dr. Herb Proctor, chief of the trauma department, the paperwork and information they were given in Laurinburg and he returned to the aircraft, taking off and returning to Simmons Army Airfield.

Seifried remembered, “This mission was a pivotal moment in my life, learning the true meaning of risk vs. reward, and what could be done if you set your mind to it and refuse to give up. This lesson served me well over the next 20 years as a UH-60 Blackhawk, instructor pilot flying many other rescue and special operation missions in peace time and in war.

“More than forty years later on February 13, 2016 we found each other and talked for the first time on the phone,” Seifreid said. “It was one of the most wonderful phone calls I have had in my life. Of the hundreds of missions that I have flown over the years, he was the only patient that I had ever talked with. I think talking to Harry that day was a validation that all of the bad that I have seen, all of the deployments, all of the deaths, all of the hardships that I put my family through during my 23 year Army career, maybe it was worth it. Thanks Harry!”