

**DONALD LLOYD SWANSON****Class 42B-67**

is honored on Panel 14W, Row 87 of  
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

**Full Name: DONALD LLOYD SWANSON**  
**Wall Name: DONALD L SWANSON**  
**Date of Birth: 9/19/1943**  
**Date of Casualty: 1/31/1970**  
**Home of Record: MILLBRAE**  
**State: CA**  
**Branch of Service: ARMY**  
**Rank: CPT**  
**Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM**  
**Casualty Province: THUA THIEN**



CPT Swanson was killed in action serving as a Rotary Wing Aviator with Company C, 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 101st Aviation Group, 101st Airborne Division.

On the morning of 31 Jan 1970, a team of engineers and infantrymen were lowered in place to cut a new landing zone out of the jungles of Quang Tri Province. When the work was finished the team was to be picked up by helicopters of C Company, 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion.

One of the pick-up Hueys, UH-1H tail number 68-15563, was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade as it lifted off. Although the crew managed to keep it airborne for several hundred yards, when the Huey crashed six men were fatally injured:

**CPT Donald Lloyd Swanson, pilot, KIA**  
**WO Philippe L. Las Hermes, copilot, WIA - died 02/14/70**  
**SP4 Mahlon Ronnie Arnett, gunner, WIA - died 02/08/70**  
**SP4 Blaine W. Enos, 1st Bn, 506th Inf, KIA**  
**PFC Paul H. Cardenas, Jr, 1st Bn, 506th Inf, KIA**  
**PFC O'Neil J. Pellegrin, Jr, 1st Bn, 506th Inf, KIA**

## FINAL MISSION OF CAPT DONALD L. SWANSON

On January 31, 1970, a U.S. Army helicopter UH-1H (tail number 68-15563) from C Company, 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion, was shot down while participating in an assignment to create some improved landing zones the first and second ridgelines outside of Camp Evans. Three crewmen and one passenger were killed in the attack. The lost crewmen included aircraft commander WO1 Philippe L. Las Hermes, pilot CAPT Donald L. Swanson, and gunner SP4 Mahlon R. Arnett. The passenger was PFC Paul H. Cardenas Jr.

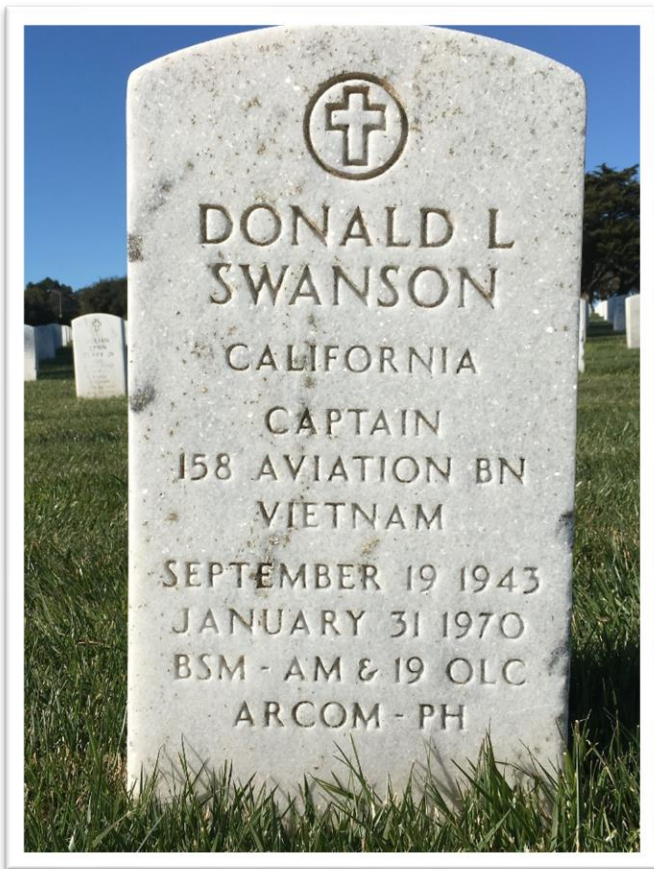
There are three accounts for this incident:

First account – (68-15563) was the flight lead of a Phoenix flight to pick up a team of combat engineers who had cut a landing zone in the jungle that morning. General John Wright, the CG of the 101st decided to have a landing zone per grid square. The mission would require that when you got to the assigned position, you hovered the aircraft in position while the engineers would repel out of the aircraft with their equipment and then cut the landing zone. An RPG had hit this aircraft in the LZ and pilots Swanson and Las Hermes lifted the aircraft out of the landing zone. It flew for a hundred yards, fluttered, and then fell toward the jungle covered mountain foothills. Warrant Officer Jack Glennon couldn't believe that anyone could survive the crash. Crew chief Mike Amos jumped from his seat in the tumbling Huey. Remarkably Amos survived the fall and was picked up by a medevac Huey the next day. La Hermes died on the hospital ship or in Japan on February 14, 1970. Specialist Mahlon R. Arnett was listed as Missing in Action. It was ironic that "Frenchy" Las Hermes received his draft notice from the French Army that fall. He boasted in the club, "What are they going to do to me if I don't show up, Send me to Viet Nam". Also, Philippe's father had served at Dien Bien Phu with the French Foreign Legion. **(Taken from phoenix158.org)**

Second account - We were hauling equipment (chain saws) in and out of the area on long ropes, maybe 200 feet or so. We spent the whole morning hovering around doing this. There was a very small contingency of tree-cutters on the ground. We broke for lunch and went back to Evans. I wanted to go to the PX, so I ask Philippe to fly for me. Philippe wanted to build time so that he could become a Concorde pilot and agreed to finish the afternoon with Don. An RPG hit under/near the aircraft, but apparently not a direct hit. They took off trying to fly out. I don't know if the aircraft was on fire when they took off, but at treetop level (I was told) the flames were pouring out of the aircraft and inside the open doors. Ultimately, they crashed killing Don, Las Hermes died on the hospital ship from complications of severe burns. Amos jumped out at treetop level and survived (he used this strategy twice). I am not sure what happened to Arnett since I have heard more than one version and don't know which version is correct. **(Narrative by Robert Scarbrough)**

Third account - I was on the lift, chalk four or five. We had rappelled pathfinders in the LZ earlier in the day and were coming back in the afternoon with troops to make the switch. Swanee was lead and took an RPG in the right side while at a hover. (You couldn't land because it was on the side of a hill and lots of stumps.) He pulled pitch and ended up settling into the trees a few hundred meters away. The next two chawks went to secure the crash site and I picked up the gunner, Arnett, who was blown out of the aircraft, and one of the troops from the LZ. I flew them directly to the hospital ship. Arnett died within 24 hrs. **(Narrative by Bob Sauer)**

**Posted on February 19, 2016 by W. Killian**



***Donald is buried in Golden Gate National Cemetery***