

Capt. Merlyn Hans Dethlefsen

Unit: 355th Tactical Fighter Wing

Aircraft/position: F-105/pilot

Place of action: Over North Vietnam

Date of action: March 10, 1967

Born: June 29, 1934, Greenville, Iowa

Entered service at: Royal, Iowa

Citation

Maj. Dethlefsen was 1 of a flight of F-105 aircraft engaged in a fire suppression mission designed to destroy a key anti-aircraft defensive complex containing surface-to-air missiles (SAM), an exceptionally heavy concentration of anti-aircraft artillery, and other automatic weapons. The defensive network was situated to dominate the approach and provide protection to an important North Vietnam industrial center that was scheduled to be attacked by fighter bombers immediately after the strike by Maj. Dethlefsen's flight. In the initial attack on the defensive complex the lead aircraft was crippled, and Maj. Dethlefsen's aircraft was extensively damaged by the intense enemy fire. Realizing that the success of the impending fighter bomber attack on the center now depended on his ability to effectively suppress the defensive fire, Maj. Dethlefsen ignored the enemy's overwhelming firepower and the damage to his aircraft and pressed his attack. Despite a continuing hail of anti-aircraft fire, deadly surface-to-air missiles, and counterattacks by MIG interceptors, Maj. Dethlefsen flew repeated close range strikes to silence the enemy defensive positions with bombs and cannon fire. His action in rendering ineffective the defensive SAM and anti-aircraft artillery sites enabled the ensuing fighter bombers to strike successfully the important industrial target without loss or damage to their aircraft, thereby appreciably reducing the enemy's ability to provide essential war material. Maj. Dethlefsen's consummate skill and selfless dedication to this significant mission were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.



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