

C-E-R-T-I-F-I-C-A-T-E

At about 1730 hours on 17 May 1971, CPT Michael Petty, [REDACTED], had a light fire team of AH-1G's on stand-by at the Quang Tri Airstrip. I flew as co-pilot on the wing ship of that fire team. Shortly thereafter, we were given frequencies and call signs for a tactical emergency mission and told to rendezvous for an inflight briefing with another light fire team led by CPT Allen D. Butler, [REDACTED]. In route to the target area, CPT Butler issued a fairly complete briefing about the situation. His briefing included the following salient facts:

(1) That a CCN 8-man reconnaissance team was pinned down with several dead and wounded.

(2) That three UH-1H's had already tried to land at the team's location for an extraction of wounded and that they had been shot up badly.

(3) That the controlling agency was presently employing tactical airstrikes on the enemy locations.

On arriving at the scene, the two fire team element which we now comprised was instructed to orbit west of the PZ until the replacement Zorros (UH-1Hs) arrived. We did so until a flight of three UH-1Hs reported being on station. Immediately, Zorro lead was quickly briefed by the controller and asked if he would make an attempt to pick up the wounded personnel. Zorro lead replied in the affirmative and almost immediately established a long descent toward the PZ. On about a mile final the controller asked the aircraft commander if Zorro lead's crew chief and door gunner would get out of the helicopter and assist in loading the wounded personnel. To this, Zorro lead also replied, yes.

From about a quarter mile and closing, I saw Zorro lead begin his deceleration as he approached the PZ. Then suddenly he began a sharp right hand turn away from the PZ. The aircraft turned and banked hard right and struck the side of a very steep slope, main rotor first. The aircraft impacted right side first, inverted and slid down the slope about fifty meters. The aircraft wreckage terminated in a ravine which had high vegetation that completely hid the wreckage.

By the time the wreckage had slid from view, we were very near it, so the aircraft commander initiated a very low orbit over the exact spot where the aircraft had disappeared from view. Throughout the several low orbits we made, I saw neither sign of movement nor any signal whatsoever.

At that point we were getting fairly low on fuel so we were instructed to extend our orbiting on the enemy locations and return to base.