

STATEMENT

On 17 January 1969, I was flying as pilot on an unarmed helicopter of the 189th AHC. We were operating out of Dak To and working with the "King Bee" helicopters of VNAF. Late in the afternoon we were scrambled to insert a platoon into a classified area west of Dak To. CPT Nguyen Quy An was "King Bee Lead." He and his 2 helicopters were to insert the bulk of the platoon while CPT Limer and myself were to insert the remaining 6 men. CPT An and his crew, LT Vu Tung, pilot, and WO Nguyen Quang Hien, crewchief, lead the flight into the LZ. As they approached the lip of the bomb crater clearing they came under fire and notified the rest of the flight as to the direction of fire. We couldn't see the enemy fire but we were able to spot the positions by his crewchiefs return fire. After the "King Bees" made their departure we were on short final to the LZ. We made the insertion without incident and began to hover out. We were informed not to break over the dirt road adjacent to the LZ because of recent enemy vehicular traffic. As we broke left we were struck by what was later determined to be a 37mm round. It struck our fuel cell and we caught fire. It seemed like only a split-second later that I saw a "King Bee" helicopter off our right side. It was CPT An who had left his orbit high above and (as we later learned) spotting our burning "slick," had entered a high-speed dive to catch up with us. As we were frantically searching for a forced landing area CPT An radioed us that there was a clearing to our northwest and we should try to make it. Meanwhile he was vectoring the gunships toward us. As we approached the proposed LZ CPT An was right next to us. He saw (as did we) that the stumps and trees would not permit even a reasonably safe landing. He then maneuvered his ship so as to prevent our landing and at the same time told us that there might be a better area over the ridgeline in the valley. We were getting very low on fuel and the hydraulic lines had burst. As CPT An said, we did find a better LZ in the valley. As we were breaking left to land he was breaking right and shooting a parallel approach. It was great seeing him there, as we were now so low on fuel (200 lbs) that another abort was impossible. We landed and left our burning aircraft, taking the radios and crew served weapons with us. As we thrashed our way through the 15 foot tall elephant grass, CPT An's crewchief, WO Hien was making his way toward us. He helped us all aboard and only after we were all safe did CPT An and LT Tung take off. These gallant men saved our lives. If it were not for their prompt and heroic actions I feel sure that we could not have made it.

I highly recommend CPT An, LT Tung and WO Hien for American Valor awards.

Colonel Robert R. Stratiff,
U.S. Army (Retired)
235 Battery Place
Colonial Height, VA 23834
Tel: [REDACTED]


ROBERT R. STRATIFF
CPT, IN
Executive Officer
189th AHC