

STATEMENT

On 17 January 1969, I was flying Aircraft Commander on a UH-1H "slick" on a highly classified mission west of Dak To, Republic of Vietnam. We were working with "King Bee" CH-34's belonging to the VNAF. About mid-afternoon we were scrambled to insert a platoon-size element into an LZ. One of the King Bee aircraft was down for maintenance and "Silver Lead" and myself divided the load and were to be insert ships. The three King Bee aircraft were initial insert aircraft and they received fire all the way in on final to the single ship LZ. "King Bee Lead" pinpointed the gun position and told us about it in an effort to help us avoid receiving fire. Silver Lead was on short final to the LZ via a different approach path as directed by King Bee Lead who was also vectoring the gunships onto the target. As Silver Lead came out of the LZ and was picking up airspeed, he announced that he had taken a hit and was on fire. I was on short final and the guns told me to abort as they were going to chase Silver Lead. I aborted the approach and set out to follow Silver Lead thinking that I was the closest aircraft to him. I looked up and saw King Bee Lead virtually falling out of the sky from his high orbit in an effort to catch the burning ship. He got to Silver Lead and vectored the guns to the proposed LZ. He decided then that they couldn't get into the clearing and advised the guns and the crippled ship of this. King Bee Lead then told them of another LZ a little further up over the ridge which he had spotted on his way down from altitude. Silver Lead made it to the LZ and King Bee Lead touched down in the LZ the same time as the burning helicopter and waited there about 5 to 10 minutes while the downed aircraft was evacuated and the equipment removed. The CH-34 then departed with all personnel safely onboard.

Had it not been for King Bee Lead's quick decision, and cool organization of all aircraft (his own King Bee flight, the gunships and Silver Lead's slick), it is certain that many lives would have been lost.

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