

# Downed Pilots Endure 30 Minutes of Intensity Before Rescue



Chief Warrant Officers 2 Mark Burrows (left) and Steven Cianfrini of the 17th Cavalry Regiment's Troop C, 3rd Squadron, were rescued by an AH-64 Apache helicopter after their helicopter, a OH-58D Kiowa, was shot down July 2, 2007. Photo by Story by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills

BAGHDAD (Army News Service, July 5, 2007) - What started as a routine reconnaissance mission for two pilots suddenly became 30 minutes of intense action July 2 as they found themselves shot down, surrounded by enemy fighters, then finally rescued.

Chief Warrant Officers 2 Mark Burrows and Steven Cianfrini of the 17th Cavalry Regiment's Troop C, 3rd Squadron, had just finished spotting a suspected roadside IED for an infantry unit south of Baghdad when Chief Cianfrini saw tracer rounds arching up toward their OH-58 Kiowa. He quickly shouted to Chief Burrows to turn away.

"I saw the tracer rounds come up through the rotors and at that point we tried to get out of range, check our instruments, make sure our systems were good and that nobody was hit," said Chief Cianfrini.

Thirty seconds after the firing stopped and the two decided to return to base, a heavy machine gun opened up on the aircraft. With no time to use the helicopter's weapons systems to fire back, the pilots dodged and weaved to escape the bullets.

When large caliber munitions struck the aircraft, the instrument panel lit up with warning lights and alarms rang in the pilots' ears. Then the panel exploded.

"One second it was there; the next it was a mess of wires," said Chief Cianfrini.

Being hit by a combination of large and small caliber weapons for an extended period of time proved too much for the Kiowa.

"From the time the second engagement started to when we hit the ground we were taking fire the whole time," said Chief Burrows.

Chief Burrows decided to attempt a controlled landing in a field as he weaved back and forth in the shaking aircraft, trying to avoid the intense fire. As he slowed, the aircraft began to try to spin on its axis, a sign that the tail rotor had been rendered useless.

The aircraft came down hard, bouncing over a canal before landing on its left side near a road.

With only bruises and scratches, the pilots scrambled out of the aircraft and met at the nose. While assessing the situation and discovering that Chief Cianfrini's M4 rifle had ejected during the crash, enemy bullets again hit the side of the aircraft.

Chief Burrows and Chief Cianfrini decided then to escape across the canal, away from the enemy fighters. The canal's thick growth of reeds afforded camouflage for the pilots and seemed like the best escape route.

"When we got into it we realized the water was up to our necks and we were in knee-deep mud," said Chief Burrows. "We physically couldn't move from the center of the canal."

Being stuck in the canal was a good thing for the pilots, who would have run right into the arms of insurgents had they been able to move down the canal.

Soon insurgents gathered on both banks of the canal, shooting blindly into the reeds with their assault rifles.

All they could do, said Chief Burrows, was wait for what seemed to be the inevitable. Bullets clipped the reeds around them, hitting the water they were standing in, but not them.

"They just didn't see us," said Chief Burrows. "I had one of the attackers in my sights but I knew if I'd shot him they would have known where we were."

Insurgents eventually pulled up in a truck and began firing into the reeds with a heavy machine gun. Again, the rounds came close but none hit the pilots as they hunkered down in the water.

Chief Burrows said the insurgents began moving down the canal, firing into the water, but soon they loaded up into vehicles and left.

"When they started leaving, walking away, I felt amazement that we were still there," said Chief Burrows.

After Chief Burrows radioed a distress signal, Army helicopters and Air Force jets began arriving. The Kiowa that had been flying with them had also been hit and had retreated to a safe distance, where its pilots called in reinforcements over the radio.

A pair of AH-64 Apaches from the 1st Cavalry Division from Fort Hood, Texas, had responded to the "Fallen Angel" call and was circling nearby. One of the Apaches, piloted by Chief Warrant Officers Allan Davison and Micah Johnson, landed nearby. Johnson, the front-seat pilot, jumped out to check Chief Burrows and Chief Cianfrini for injuries.

To avoid insurgents who might return, the rescuers extracted the pilots via spur ride, an unconventional means of extraction in which the pilots clip themselves onto the outside of the aircraft using their built-in safety harness and d-rings.

"It wasn't the most comfortable flight but I was elated to be out of there," said Chief Burrows.

Both pilots said nearly 30 minutes passed from the moment their aircraft hit the ground to when their rescuers started the flight back to base.

"It happened so fast I don't think we really thought about much except just trying to stay alive," said Chief Cianfrini.

"I knew we would be rescued but I can't believe that through all this we made it through without serious injury," added Chief Burrows. "That's the kind of unbelievable part."

The 17th Cavalry Regiment's Troop C, 3rd Squadron, part of the 10th Mountain Division from Fort Drum, N.Y., is attached to 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade from Fort Stewart, Ga.