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PILOT EARNS DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS FOR LANDING PLANE AFTER BEING WOUNDED IN IRAQ ATTACK

By Sgt. Brandon Little

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq -- “The whole flight was eight minutes out, eight minutes back,” said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Terrance Lee,. “You don’t think about those things (while flying). It’s only while you’re lying in the bed in the hospital, that’s when ... lots of things go through your head.”

Lying in that hospital bed gave Lee plenty of time to think about his actions and the events of Jan. 4 -- the events that earned Lee the Distinguished Flying Cross he was presented Oct. 25.

As an infantryman in Vietnam, Lee said he has been shot at before, but the January incident marked the first time he had been shot at in 32 years of flying. Lee's fixed-wing C-23 “Sherpa” airplane crew is an Alaska Army National Guard unit from the Operational Support Airlift Command, which is in turn attached to Task Force XII here, led by U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.



SGT BRANDON LITTLE

Pilot Chief Warrant Officer 5 Terrance Lee was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq Oct. 25 for his actions landing his C-23 Sherpa after an enemy attack on the aircraft wounded Lee and his pilot-in-command. Lee is assigned to an Alaska National Guard unit attached to Task Force XII, led by U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.

“We work very hard on training our crews for emergencies,” said Lt. Col. Pat Weber, Lee’s commander. “We try to make training as realistic as possible, just in case an emergency like this happens.”

When the flight began, Lee’s job as right-seat pilot was to help fly the plane and assist the pilot-in-command, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brett Krass.

“We got about 24 miles from here when we came across a hard-top road by a water canal,” said Lee. “We saw a pickup truck, and Mr. Krass tried to avoid it.”

By the time the pilots saw the vehicle, it was too late. Their only choice was to make a hard right turn to maneuver away from it.

“Unfortunately, it exposed the left side of the aircraft and we took 14 rounds,” he said. The rounds ripped through the aircraft and wounded Lee, Krass and one of the two passengers on the plane.

“I felt a whack in my leg, and I knew something had hit me but I didn’t really feel any pain,” he said.

“I was more concerned about Brett (the other pilot), than I was about myself,” said Lee. “Luckily, we had a flight surgeon onboard and he took control of treating the wounded.”

Sgt. Alex Johnston, the flight engineer for the aircraft, helped Krass out of the cockpit so he could receive medical attention.

“This was only my third time flying (in Iraq),” said Lee. “Fortunately, Mr. Krass put direct to Balad in the (navigation) box before he got out of his seat.”

Since the plane had two injured pilots and a broken radio, Johnston remained in the cockpit to aid Lee in returning to LSA Anaconda and landing the plane.

“We made a low-altitude, high-speed pass right between the runways, and then we made a hard turn and landed,” he said. “That’s when we discovered we had a blown tire.”

Landing any aircraft with a blown tire can have a tragic outcome, but luck once again showed favor to the disabled aircraft and its crew.

Flight engineers are trained for just such emergencies, so Johnston was fully prepared to steer the aircraft, said Lee. After the plane landed safely, rescue crews and firefighters rushed toward the aircraft to evacuate the passengers.

“We are very proud of him and the rest of crew on that plane,” said Weber. “It took a real crew effort to land that plane, and they each had a crucial job to perform.”

In addition to his role as a pilot, Lee is also the battalion safety officer, and Weber said he is responsible for the more than 10,000 hours of safe flying the battalion has racked up.

“He displayed the same courage and character in the airplane that day as he does at work every day,” said Weber. “Mr. Lee is a real citizen-Soldier and a true professional.”



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