

On Christmas Day 1968, the crew of HH-3E Jolly Green 17 assigned to Detachment 1, 40th ARRS scrambled out of NKP Thailand for a “first light” SAR of Major Charles R. Brownlee, an F-105 pilot, call sign Panda 01.

Maj. Brownlee had successfully ejected from his battle damaged “Thud” late in the afternoon December 24th in Laos. Major Brownlee had radioed his wingman on his survival radio and reported that his parachute was hung up in the trees and he was injured. His wingman located the parachute and told the survivor that rescue had been notified, but that because sunset was imminent, he might have to spend the night in the jungle. ¹A-1E “Sandies” and an OV-10 “Nail” FAC quickly arrived on scene but only had a short period before sunset. They were unable to get radio contact with the downed pilot and sunset forced them to depart the scene until the next morning.

Jolly Green 17 was part of the “first light” SAR task force consisting of King 3 (airborne mission commander and Jolly tanker, Jolly 09 the high bird for JG 17, five A-1E Sandies for CAS, and several other high performance jet aircraft for support as required.

On board the Jolly was pilot Lt Col William Cameron, co-pilot Capt. Robert Heron, FE TSgt Jerome Casey and PJ Airman First Class Charles Douglas King².

The Jolly crew came into a hover over the parachute of the downed pilot. It was hung up high in the jungle tree tops approximately 125 feet above the ground. The area was a double jungle canopy, with a dense jungle undergrowth which allowed only brief glimpses of the surface. Both the FE and PJ could see what appeared to be the unconscious pilot still hanging from his harness. Airman King volunteered to ride the rescue hoists forest penetrator down to accomplish an inert survivor recovery. While descending on the hoist, the rotor wash dislodged the parachute and the F-105 fell to the jungle floor. The PJ was soon on the ground, go off the hoist, and requested slack in the hoist cable so that he could move to the still inert pilot. He release the pilots parachute capewells and was in the process of moving the pilot directly under the jungle opening he had just been lowered in. Suddenly, enemy weapons fire broke out and simultaneously, A1C King radioed “I’m hit! I’m hit! Pull up, pull up!

JG 17 was taking multiple hits from ground fire but because of the jungle foliage, the crew could not see where the fire was coming from. The armor plating in the floor under the copilot definitely saved him from injury or death. The pilot initiated a climb out from the hover. While climbing out the penetrator, without anyone on it, snagged it a tree and the cable snapped while ripping the hoist mount from the helicopter. JG 17 managed to egress the area and because of battle damage was forced to return to base.

¹ Vietnam Air Losses, Chris Hobson, Midland Publishing 2001, p170

² Mission Narrative Report (2-3-082-8359, 24-25 December 1968), Det 1, 40th ARRS MAC

Airman King was left on the ground and his condition was unknown. SAR forces remained overhead for another five hours but could not get radio contact with their missing PJ. Darkness forced the remaining SAR forces to return to base where they planned a first light SAR effort for the PJ and F-105 pilot. During the days debriefing, the Jolly pilot stated that Airman King's radioed warning to pull up and leave the area, undoubtedly kept Jolly Green 17 from being shot down.

During the night, a beeper emanated from the area Airman King was last known to be. When SAR forces arrived on scene, the beeper stopped and no voice contact could be obtained from either the downed pilot or Airman King³. Both missing airmen were listed as missing in action. On 5 May 1978, Charles King's MIA status was changed to killed in action. In 1986, a Loatian refugee who arrived in the USA reported that Airman King had been captured and taken away in a truck. He had no additional information⁴.

In March 1993, a USAF research team in Hanoi discovered Airman King's military ID card at the Central Armed Forces Museum. It was in an envelope that was annotated "King, Charles Douglas, followed by his military ID number, and the statement "shot down by the troops of Truong Son on 25-12-68. The pilot's body was smashed with an A1C aircraft. (The "A1C" aircraft is mis-identified as an aircraft type, probably because the North Vietnamese were not familiar with USAF enlisted ranks and may have confused A1C with an A-1 type aircraft.)⁵

To keep email file size small the mission report is not attached.

If you would like to read the mission report, go to

http://www.pjsinnam.com/VN_History/Memorial_Pages/25Dec68King.pdf

If you would like to see the memorial page for Doug King go to

<http://www.scally.com/mia/king.html>

³ Ibid, mission narrative 2-3-082-8359

⁴ Ibid, Hobson

⁵ Joint Task Force Full Accounting, William Forsyth, 22 January 1973 email to Robert LaPointe re: PJ last known status as MIA