

LT KEITH L. ELLIASON  
PILOT'S STATEMENT  
ANGEL 004 SH-3G/149735

On 19 March 1972, I was aircraft commander of an SH-3G helicopter flying in plane guard for CVA-63 while it was conducting night flight operations in the Tonkin Gulf. At approximately 1952H, approach control called on Button 16 instructing us to take up a heading of 180° and to switch to Button 7 for vectors. The co-pilot who was flying, turned to 180°. As I switched to Button 7, I heard something about an aircraft in a dive. Checking in on Button 7; we were told to go to the 193/15. As I took control of the aircraft, the co-pilot brought up the power and I climbed to 400 feet and increased the speed to 130 knots. The first crewman went aft to prepare for rescue and the co-pilot went through the pre-dip check list. Enroute we were instructed to switch to Button 8 for SAR.

Upon reaching the general area, I had the first crewman come forward to look out the upper personnel hatch (it had been removed prior to flight). It was very hazy and the co-pilot was backing me up on the gauges most of the time. There were some lights ahead of us, but on investigation, they turned out to be some fishing boats. The first crewman spotted a light at our 9 O'clock position, and I turned to it. While flying toward the light, a red and green flare shot up from about our 11 O'clock position. We then heard a beeper on guard and the co-pilot tried to get a DF steer. We then saw more flares and then a red light appeared on the surface. We turned toward the red flare and as we continued in, we spotted a strobe light.

The survivor had been about three miles away when we saw the first flare. The survivor continued to shoot .38 red-green flares as we approached.

As the reflective tape on his helmet came into view, I maneuvered the aircraft so I could make my approach into the wind. The co-pilot backed me up on the gauges and I flew a manual approach to an 80 foot hover. The manual approach was used as it was the most expeditious. We were uncertain of the survivors condition and concerned over the nearby boats.

The survivor appeared to be in good condition. His floatation gear was inflated and he was holding onto his raft. We proceeded ahead about 100 feet, dropped a maxtrix light and the first crewman talked us back over the survivor. We then lowered down to 40 feet and the co-pilot engaged the coupler for a doppler hover. It took a minute or so for the doppler to settle down and to make adjustments necessary for a stable hover. With no visible horizon and the hazy weather conditions,