

Copter giant rewards true grit of pilot

By ADRIAN DAVID
news@nst.com.my

BRAVERY UNMATCHED: Brigadier-general given award for undertaking dangerous rescue flights



Brig-Gen Datuk Ibrahim Hashim (centre) being congratulated by Col Rosni Azaz (left) and other award recipients in front of the Sikorsky S-92 helicopter at the RMAF Sungai Besi base in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pic by Lim Poh Chin

KUALA LUMPUR: DESPITE near-zero visibility, a Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) major decided to undertake several rescue missions more than 23 years ago.

Brig-Gen Datuk Ibrahim Hashim, who was then assigned to the RMAF base in Butterworth, was summoned to lead a rescue mission after Lt Affandi Buang (now Brig-Gen Datuk Affandi) ejected from his A-4 Skyhawk jet fighter over the jungle in Kuala Lipis, Pahang, on March 14, 1988.

Ibrahim, co-pilot Lt Ridzuan Salleh and air quartermasters Sgt Ismail Yahya and Sgt Shokri Ali took off in a Nuri helicopter after receiving a call from the Kuantan air base.

Recalling the incident, Ibrahim said he had just completed a mercy mission to Penang Hospital at 6.15pm that day, ferrying a soldier injured by a booby trap in Gubir.

"Shortly after my crew and I returned to Butterworth, the 'bell' rang about 7pm.

"Our services were required as another Nuri from Kuantan could not undertake the rescue mission after Affandi ejected 30 minutes earlier. We did not hesitate and within five minutes, we were airborne again and arrived in Kuala Lipis an hour later."

Although the Nuri was not equipped for night flying and the trees were as high as 60m, Ibrahim used his experience and expertise to fly.

He communicated with Affandi via the latter's Sarbe (search and rescue radio beacon communicator set) to zero in on his location.

"Sgt Ismail was winched down to hoist Affandi into our helicopter and we returned to base safely," said Ibrahim, who has clocked 2,460 flying hours.

Yesterday, Ibrahim's rescue missions were recognised by the United States helicopter manufacturer, Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation. He was among the 70 Sikorsky S-61A4 Nuri air and ground crew who received the Sikorsky "Winged-S" rescue, maintenance, record flight hours (1,000 to 5,000) and combat awards by RMAF chief Gen Tan Sri Rodzali Daud at the Sungai Besi base.

Present were Rajawali Aerospace Sdn Bhd (Sikorsky's local authorised agent) executive chairman Brig-Gen Datuk Richard Casimir Robless and RMAF top brass.

Later, they were taken on a familiarisation flight on board a Sikorsky S-92 helicopter that is making its "Legacy of Heroes World Tour" and a bid for the Armed Forces fleet replacement and expansion programme.

Ibrahim was also involved in the rescue of 70 victims following the collapse of the Sultan Abdul Halim ferry terminal bridge in Butterworth on July 31, 1988. The incident killed 32 people and injured 1,674 people.

"I was, at that time, the No. 3 Squadron acting commander and had to use my discretion to fly numerous sorties for three hours from 8pm to ferry the victims to Penang Hospital.

"Penang government officials had sought my assistance after they failed to obtain one elsewhere," said Ibrahim, who had to once again fly in near-zero visibility conditions.

Eight others were also honoured for their role in rescuing two Malaysian International Shipping Corporation ships held by Somali pirates last year and this year.

They were part of the aircrew on board two Royal Malaysian Navy vessels.

Courtesy of NST, Wed 14 December 2011