Twitter Thread by Sqn Ldr Sivamohan Vinod Kumar (Retd)■■



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The flying was heavy as all the ballot boxes were being transported by helicopters .We were operating a single Mi8 detachment at Imphal . Night parking was at the Manipur University Helipad. We started our day at 0700h and had been flying for 7hours. 1/n

It was 5 pm. Exhausted after a heavy days flying I was ready to retire to our rooms. As I was shutting down the helicopter , I saw a BSF Jeep pull alongside the Helipad with a commandant rank officer jump out. The urgency in his moves told me something was not right . 2/n

As the helicopter was being shutdown by the flight engineer , I asked the co pilot to take controls and walked out towards the BSF officer .The helicopter blades were still turning. The officer told me that a BSF party has been ambushed near likhai and they have 7 injured 3/n

We checked the fuel onbaord and immediately within 5 minutes got airborne towards likhai. We were told that the casualties have been brought to a football ground near the road going South of Churachandpur. I was airborne meanwhile I heard a flurry of radio calls of two other 4/n

Helicopters airborne for the area .They were near shillong and would take 40 minutes more than me. I told them that I am on the way and they turned back . From knowledge of the terrain I knew that a BSF unit wa stationed in the area with a Helipad. I headed for that helipad 5/n

We landed there asking for the exact location of the casualitues . A senior officer of the unit jumped into the helicopter and I brought him to the cockpit to direct us as we flew low over the trees .because of the thick forest in the region the road was hardly visible .6/n

As we crossed a bend on the ridge we came up over the jeep that was ambushed , was still burning in the middle of the road .About 2 kms further south we saw an open area which was the size of a large basketball court .With goal posts at both ends. The hill was sloping up7/n

I saw the men laid out on one corner of the ground with locals standing around. I assessed that the area might be able to land the Mi8 just vertically. We had the co -pilot , me and engineer and gunner sticking our head out to see that the rotor

blades don't hit the trees 8/n

As they seem to close in. We managed to land the machine on that ground , back of my mind was the fact that the insurgents could be hiding in the hills overlooking the small ground and now my helicopter was a sitting duck ,if they decided to shoot .All 7 casualties were 9/n

Quickly loaded . After supervising the loading, I jumped in and within about 6 mins we were airborne back to the Manipur University Helipad , where we were told the ambulances would be waiting .I noticed that 4 of the men were not moving when they were loaded and all of them 10/n

Serious injuries. I was praying for those men at the back . As I was 30 minutes from landing the gunner came on radio and announced that the doctor said 5 of them are dead .only two alive . I could not have flown faster than I was already doing. As we descended for Imphal 11/n

The gunner came on intercom and told me , in a quiet voice one more has died .We landed at Imphal Helipad and all the bodies were taken away . The last was the still alive badly injured jawan who gave a sad look to me. The look pierced my heart as I stood there still 12/n

Later that night around 12 pm ,the local BSF unit called me and informed that the last jawan survived and was out of danger. Through all that pain that was a reason for me and my co pilot Rags to smile .13/n

Many years later , i was on a train journey from Jammu to Delhi . Typical as many times before, I arrived at the station to find that my waiting list was not confirmed. No berth . So I decided to board the general compartment ready to spend the night sitting .As d train was 14/n

Full of mostly army and BSF men returning from duty . Someone tapped me on the shoulder and said " Saab mera berth khaali hai " aap use karlo " I thanked the jawan and told him I am fine and refused as he looked tired and I was genuinely feeling fine not to sleep 15/n

He insisted that I use his berth with a smile . He asked me if he remembered me. After thinking long an hard , I said unfortunately No. He said with a beaming smile ." Saab aapka chehra zindagi mein kabhi nahin bhool sakta." that's when I really noticed his face .16/n

I hugged him ....Not sure , if he cried but I definitely had tears in my eyes . The joy of being a helicopter pilot . God was kind to both of us... Not sure where he is now.....