

To KK - The True Fighter

M. P. Anil Kumar, Posted: Aug 27, 2005 at 0000 hrs IST



Fondly called KK, Wing Commander B.S. Krishna Kumar, a classmate, took over as the commanding officer of the helicopter flight based at Car Nicobar in November 2004. As the seismic tremors set off by the seaquake on the morning of December 26 began quivering his world, KK mustered his wife, daughter and son and fled into the open. Minutes later, the waves rose menacingly. The invading torrent had the unsuspecting crowd outside the officers' quarters taking shelter on the rooftops. Not KK. He employed the robust survival instincts he honed at our alma mater — Sainik School, Kazhakootam — and bolted en famille to higher ground. On their way, they hitched on to the vehicle of an officer and reached the highest spot on the island. Only five on the rooftops survived the cataclysm.

The station commander asked KK to reconnoiter the ruin. Just 30 minutes after the tsunami struck, KK, Flight Lieutenant Vijay Kumar and a crew of four sergeants were airborne in a Mi-8 helicopter, in pyjamas. Except KK, no crewman was aware of the whereabouts or safety of his loved ones.

The widespread devastation benumbed them. KK converted the recce into a rescue mission. Though they saved IAF personnel and their families marooned on housetops, they had to helplessly watch some getting washed away. Thereafter, he headed to the villages and rescued some islanders.

Short of fuel, KK landed the Mi-8 and hopped into another. He flew to a teasingly floating ramp teeming with stranded women and children. The crew

used a winch and a fire tender ladder to evacuate them. This protracted rescue was as heroic as it was perilous.

They could not undertake more missions as the fuel on board the choppers was used up and the fuel in the Car Nicobar dump was contaminated by seawater. In under six hours, KK and his crew rescued more than 300 lives.

Eight months on, KK is still coming to grips with the trauma of losing several officers and airmen he commanded and



their kin. And he is still grappling with the task of rebuilding life from scratch as the tsunami swallowed his entire belongings.

This Independence Day, KK was conferred the Kirti Chakra, the second highest peacetime gallantry award, for his exemplary devotion to his calling under adverse circumstances. KK, we, your mates, are ineffably proud of you.