

**An enterprising crewmember saves the day with an innovative escape from certain death while trapped in a helicopter beneath a sited anti-aircraft battery on the HCMT, Laos.**

#### BACKGROUND

While I was a Forward Air Controller in Viet Nam, I had occasion to associate with many pilots and crew members with a wealth of combat experience. I was struck with one example of **RESOURCEFULNESS** on the part of a LOACH (Light Observation Attack/Command Helicopter) crew that managed to survive against all odds. As a Nail FAC we had inserted a Studies and Operations team (MACV/SOG) unit behind enemy lines in Laos. They had been discovered and surrounded by North Vietnamese Army regulars (NVA). In anticipation of a pending rescue flight, the NVA created a well-planned trap for would be rescuers. Their plan included siting 12.7 mm antiaircraft guns they had hidden on top of a n adjacent karst pinnacle, well above the luckless hostage team.

Flying point for a HATCHET Team reinforcement mission, the lead helicopter unknowingly approached the embattled ground team with a flight of supporting gunships and Slicks (Huey helicopters for without ordnance) In trail formation well behind him. Fortunately, anxious North Vietnamese gunners exposed themselves by firing too early, thus alerting the lead helicopter to the trap and allowing him to command an "abort!" to the remaining aircraft. Since the NVA guns were level with the LOACH, the pilot realized that any maneuver but one would place him in greater jeopardy. To evade disaster he made an abrupt descent. The NVA gunners had anticipated their prey would climb into their stream of fire, now caught by surprise the gunners found they could not depress their tripod mounted guns sufficiently to bring fire against the rapidly descending helicopter. Both gunners and crew realized that any attempt to escape from below the sheltering karst would be fatal to trapped helicopter by placing them in a direct line-of-fire..

The **RESOURCEFUL** pilot yelled, "We're not going down without a fight!" He ordered the crew to start opening cases of hand grenades, while his observer was told to string wire across each open door and straighten the safety pins of every grenade. The rings of the now semi-live grenades were then strung on the door wires by the pull-rings to allow the soon-to-be-live grenades to be stripped from the wire. Th crew was briefed on the plan, to go down fighting.

Going to MAXIMUM power, and full collective, the pilot caused the inertia of the helicopter to translate vertically, so rapidly the surprised NVA could not train their guns "on the vertically ascending "rocket" in the form of a helicopter. Concurrent with the climb the crew waited until the vertical momentum of the LOACH waned before stripping the now live grenades from the wires in a mini "ARC LIGHT" bomb run. The now diving helicopter gained speed rapidly as it rushed into the startled eyes of the enemy. The falling grenades completely destroyed the antiaircraft site. The now confounded enemy forces retired instantly, releasing the hostage troops to their rescuers. All had been saved by the resourcefulness of one man who wouldn't give up!

Anonymous