

In October 1969, we lost two CH-3E's on the Bolivens Plateau in a helicopter trap set by a company size force of the North Vietnamese Army. This was on one of the 7th/13th AF/DOSA missions that we flew in support of the CIA efforts in the Laotian panhandle. I was in the SAR center in the command post throughout that day with the DCO. Eight CH-3 crewmembers with the 50 Laotian troops they were inserting were pinned down in a small depression in an open area. (The lead helicopter was on the ground and the second just about to touchdown when the NV opened fire.)

Their A-1 escorts provided support but the NV were well dug in. Several attempts were made throughout a very long day by HH-53 Jollys to pick them up. However, each time the Jolly's had to abort with battle damage (several damaged HH-53's landed at NKP). Finally at dusk, the wind dropped off and the A-1's delivered "Peanuts" (non-lethal debilitating gas) which allowed two HH-53's to make the pickup. Six of our crewmembers and 49 Laotians got on the first Jolly leaving two lonely 21st SOS crewmembers on the ground. However, # 2 Jolly was right behind and picked them up. One Laotian had been killed but everyone else got out. (Phil Conran, aircraft commander of one of the downed Knife CH-3s, returned to one of the aircraft under heavy fire to recover an M-60 machine gun and ammunition to assist in their defense. Phil was recommended for the Medal of Honor and received the Air Force Cross -the Nation's second highest award for valor -for his actions in recovering the machine gun and leading the downed group's defense throughout the day even after being wounded. Ted Silva, the squadron commander, flying as Phil's co-pilot, received a deep crease in his back from a round. As I recall, several Laotians were also wounded.)