

PAVE HAWK SAR Techs Save Lives After Helicopter Downing

Members of an elite New York Air National Guard SAR unit saved the lives of two American soldiers trapped in a helicopter that was shot down in Iraq.

Sixteen soldiers died in the downing of the CH-47 Chinook on Nov. 2. With debris strewn on a field outside Falluja, rescuers from the 106th Rescue Wing swooped in aboard two HH-60G PAVE HAWK helicopters, used a "Jaws of Life" type of apparatus to pry open a piece of the downed aircraft, and pulled out two injured soldiers, the unit's commander, Col. Mike Canders, told the Long Island newspaper Newsday

The injured soldiers were ferried to a field hospital. The Long Island-based rescuers also retrieved the bodies of three soldiers killed in the attack, Newsday reported.

On Nov. 4, New York Gov. George Pataki officially congratulated the unit.

"While we were deeply saddened by the loss of the 16 brave U.S. soldiers killed in this despicable act of terrorism, the courageous efforts of New York's own 106th Air Rescue Operation helped spare two American families the pain of losing a loved one," Pataki said in a letter to Canders.

"It wasn't easy to get them," he told the newspaper from the unit's Long Island base.

Canders said he was not surprised the unit carried out the mission successfully, since "that's what we train for. That's what we do."