

Marine Captains Devin Smiley and David Szwed had to support a mission northeast of the town of Karmah, in the Al Anbar province. Their task was to conduct route reconnaissance. The time was 2010, and to get a better look at the roads, they decided to descend. As they began to descend, the pilot at the controls realized the collective would not go down without excessive force—it easily could be increased. A quick cockpit inspection revealed neither pilot was blocking the collective. To avoid exacerbating the situation, the crew decided to leave the collective at 60-to-65-percent torque and return to base.

The flight back to Al Taqqadum (TQ) was about 15 minutes and required a climb to 2,000 feet to deconflict their section from another flight working along the route. During the transit, the other helo was tasked with coordinating with base for a recovery effort and follow-on support for the mission. In the emergency aircraft, the rearseat pilot maintained the controls and avoided any collective increases, while the frontseat pilot handled communications. The section arrived at TQ, on final, at about 1,500 feet and 100 knots. They reached home field about 30 minutes after sunset but still barely pinkie time.

To bleed off the airspeed and establish a rate of descent on the back side of the power curve, the crew performed a right 360-degree turn. This yielded a 100-to-200-feet-per-minute (FPM) rate of descent. Any greater rate of descent required airspeeds less than 40 knots. As they approached midfield, the crew determined their rate of descent was insufficient and performed another 360-degree turn; this time, they turned left. When they rolled out from the turn, the aircraft was at about 200 feet AGL, at 40 to 50 knots, and with a 100-to-200 fpm rate of descent. This descent was maintained until the aircrew touched down at midfield. They slid onto the runway at 40 knots and stopped after a 100-yard slide. They had more than 4,000 feet of runway remaining.

The aircraft and aircrew were unscathed. After an inspection and some maintenance, the aircraft was returned to the schedule. The maintainers determined the collective had been stuck by the dust cover on the collective, which had rubbed against the metal airframe. After a short ride to the squadron in the fire truck, the aircrew manned another aircraft to complete the evening's flight schedule.



HMLA-369

From left, Capt. David Szwed and Capt. Devin Smiley.

BRAVO Zulu



VT-2

Assigned as the runway duty officer (RDO) during evening flight ops, 2ndLt. Jeffrey Pullinger, USMC, prevented squadron aircraft from landing with animals on the runway. On three occasions, with an aircraft inside the 180, 2ndLt. Pullinger waved off landing traffic because of deer darting across the approach end of the runway. As naval aviation searches for deterrents for the bird-and-animal-strike-hazard (BASH) threat, nothing is more effective than a vigilant scan.