

BRAVO Zulu

HMLA-169

Event 1



Misfit 21 and 22, a section of HMLA-169 AH-1W Cobras, in support of Operation Phantom Fury/AI-Fajr, launched for their fourth sortie of the day at 1428. The section already had completed missions spanning many of the tasks of a Marine Light Attack Helicopter squadron: close air support, armed reconnaissance, time-sensitive target overwatch, point-of-origin searches for anti-Iraqi force indirect fire and small-arms assets, and screening missions north of the river and west of the city. During this time, the section was flying between 500 and 2,000 feet above the ground because of small-arms engagements on previous days in this vicinity.

The section flew to the peninsula, which defined the western edge of Fallujah, to continue supporting Third Light Armored Reconnaissance's (3rd LAR's) Comanche 6 because the convoy still required escort back to Camp Taqadum. Before contacting the ground unit, the section swept north at 1,000 to 1,200 feet, 120 knots, on the west side of Route Boston.

After clearing the area to the north, the flight began a right turn to the south. At 150 degrees of turn, the lead aircraft, Misfit 21, began to automatically dispense flares. Simultaneously, Misfit 22 took a direct hit by an SA-14 surface-to-air missile (SAM). Misfit 22, piloted by Capt. Jon Towle and Shawn Anderson, had more than eight hours of flight operations that day.

The SAM exploded above the rear seat pilot's canopy, just below the rotor blades. Then-1stLt. Anderson had been lean-

ing forward, scanning for enemy positions with the aircraft's night-targeting system. Neither pilot observed an automatic-flare dispense, any missile-warning-system indications, or the missile's origin. Capt. Anderson described the impact of the missile as being equivalent to two cars colliding. Capt. Towle sustained an open fracture to his right arm, a broken left hand, and numerous shrapnel wounds to his back and legs. Capt. Anderson had shrapnel wounds to his upper back. The primary aircraft damage was to the rear-seat pilot's left, right, and overhead canopies, the rear instrument panel, one main-rotor blade, and the upper transmission cowling.

As the aircraft rapidly lost altitude, and Capt. Towle made distress calls over the inter-flight radio frequency. Capt. Anderson immediately grabbed the flight controls to help stabilize the flight. Both pilots felt unusual vibrations and control feedback during the descent. The explosion had destroyed the aircraft's rear canopy, crippling the inter-cockpit communications system. The pilots communicated by shouting and continued to operate effectively as a crew.

Capt. Anderson took control of the aircraft, identified electrical power lines in the flight path, maneuvered the aircraft, and positioned to land. The pilots confirmed the clearance of obstacles and location of friendly positions. After clearing 3rd LAR's position, Capt. Towle jettisoned the ordnance at 50 feet.

Capt. Anderson landed the helicopter in an open field and quickly egressed, while Capt. Towle completed the shutdown procedures. Capt. Anderson helped Capt. Towle from the aircraft, and then provided security for the area until Marines from 3rd LAR arrived. Capt. Towle received first aid from a corpsman, and immediately was moved to a casualty-evacuation (CasEvac) zone. After gathering items from the helicopter, Capt. Anderson was picked up by a separate CasEvac aircraft.

Witness Info:

Our platoon was tasked to provide a screen line and blocking positions. We had daily enemy contact in the area, receiving numerous indirect fires, RPGs, IEDs, and machine-gun fire. While pushing south, several IEDs were identified adjacent to an area the enemy used for ambushes. While waiting to detonate the IEDs, a section of Bradleys were ambushed with machine-gun fire. The Bradleys returned fire, and the insurgents fled. Shortly after the engagement, two Cobras flew in and helped locate the enemy. RPGs were heard in the distance,

but the source could not be established. Immediately, our element was halted and told a Cobra had taken a direct RPG hit, and the pilot was badly wounded. The pilot found an open field, ditched his ordnance,



and landed. An air MedEvac was conducted to Camp TQ. My platoon then shifted to provide a security perimeter of the downed Cobra. An assessment team arrived late the same night, investigated the damage, and

departed. A few days later, a recovery team returned, prepared the Cobra for transport and the ordnance for destruction. Again, enemy contact in the area was daily, with more RPGs, indirect fire, IEDs, and machine-gun and small-arms fire. The crew of the Cobra appeared to handle themselves spectacularly.—SSgt. Henderson, 3rd LAR 



Left to right: Capt. Shawn Anderson, Capt. Chris Parson, Capt. Dale Behm.

Event 2



After establishing section integrity with their Dash 2, an HMLA-169 AH-1W Cobra, call sign Misfit 06, piloted by Capt. Dale Behm and Christopher Parson, provided support to Mercy 01. The Mercy 01 event was a CH-46, which launched at 1350 on an urgent, casualty-evacuation (CasEvac) mission in support of Operation Phantom Fury/Al-Fajr, during Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

The CasEvac aircrew picked up their patient at the Al Taqaddum Surgical Shock Trauma Platoon (SSTP), and the section flew to the 31st Combat Support Hospital (CSH), located in central Baghdad. After dropping off the patient, the flight was cleared to transit out of Baghdad's airspace on routing that passed just north of Fallujah, where offensive-combat operations were raging.

At 1450, the section was five miles north of the small city of Al Karmah and heading west. Suddenly, the Mercy 01 pilots heard and felt a loud thump beneath the cockpit, broke right,

and radioed Misfit 06 they were taking fire. Misfit 06 confirmed that Mercy 01 was taking small-arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) fire, and that they would be engaging the target. Mercy 01's aircrew then reported that two RPGs had airburst 100 feet to their rear. The Cobra turned to suppress the threat to allow the CH-46 to safely egress.

On their attack run, Misfit 06 was hit by anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) fire from a previously concealed position. The AAA extensively damaged their aircraft, crippling several flight-critical systems, and rendering inoperative both hydraulics systems. Despite the difficulty encountered in maintaining control of the helicopter, Capt. Behm and Parson maneuvered their sinking aircraft around several obstacles, and completed a textbook, high-speed slide to the grass near the enemy positions. The Cobra pilots completed an emergency shutdown, quickly gathered as much of their gear as possible, and ran to the back of the Mercy aircraft, which landed next to them for their extraction. Once the Misfit pilots were confirmed on board, Mercy 01 lifted out of the zone and returned to Al Taqaddum. 



Capt. Jon Towle receiving his Purple Heart medal.