

Hovering Loach

by [Bruce E Carlson](#)

My friend John wrote - Might not make sense to you, but I know of one loach driver (it WAS you, wasn't it Trooper Brucie) who has the DFC to show for it, along with myself (hey, even a snake driver gets adventurous sometimes) and a slicky.

August 28th, 1969. We were working the upper An Lao, and somebody thought it would be a good idea to drop one of those 15,000lb LZ cutters out the back of a C130. Only problem was, it left a lot of nasty tree stumps and the slicks couldn't land, so they repelled in a bunch of engineers to clear the LZ. So far, so good. Finally around the end of the day, they had it cleared enough for a slick to land, so they started extracting, as it was getting close to sunset. You could probably guess what happened next. Last ship is on approach when all hell breaks loose. To make matters worse, it's my first day as Fire Team Lead. Guy on the radio is panicked and is screaming "TAKING FIRE". I'm trying to reassure him with a clam voice and ask him to pop smoke and tell me where the NVA are. He pops smoke and screams back "THEYRE EVERYWHERE!!"

I'm already low on fuel and ammo, but roll in hot and nothing happens. No rockets or turret. Don't think I took much fire though, as the bad guys were probably keeping their heads down. Pulled out of the gun run and checked all circuit breakers and switches. Let's try this shit one more time as the shit is hitting the fan for the guys on the ground. This time I take some fire, but still not too bad (I did have a wing man covering me). Third pass. HOLY SHIT!! Looks like the 4th of July.

Meanwhile C&C has called the back-up gun team and the blues.

Now comes Trooper Brucie with his wing man. Don't remember which one of them it was, but one of em hovered in the LZ doing pedal turns and throw in out everything they could muster till the rest of the CAV could get there to save the day.

Long story short - we got em out about an hour after dark. That's another story in itself. How about it Bruce. Do you want to tell the rest of the story? How about that prick slicky (no offense to you good slick drivers) who was orbiting with the rest of the slicks who wouldn't turn on his position light. Remember how everyone wanted to kick his ass. Who was that no-balled SOB anyway?

Side note: These were the first DFC's given out since I arrived in country in Mar of 69. Don't think we (C TRP) even had an A&D officer. We got the DFC's from the engineers we saved that day.

TINS Hovering Loach part II

A couple of words of explanation for my reader.

First, ole friend John has a steel trap memory and probably remembers the color skivvies that the guys on the ground were wearing. My feeling is that he could give more factual information about the bigger picture than I can. However, ole John needs a wee touch of work as a story

teller. Truth is that it was a heck of a day that turned into a first class Rat Copulation.

Second, though Sky Trooper John is height and size challenged, he was a heck of a big man that day. As he was many other days when he saved ole Trooper Brucies little tooshie. One little secret that I have never told you guys is that we had to send back to the states for a restaurant's child's booster seat. In an act of self preservation, the Scouts did this so he could see over the instrument panel and his sandbag. We also had to use three rolls of 100 mph tape to tape enough blocks on the pedals so his little feet could reach them. However, that day, the empty space under his booster seat made a perfect place for him to tuck his gonads so that they didn't block his view.

John starts the story well enough. Though, I might add a correction or two. As most of you slick drivers know the concept of an Instant LZ is fraught with hazards. First of all, a REALLY BIG BOMB makes a lot of noise and attracts the attention of the local residents. Secondly, it was a Pioneer team that was sent in to remove the helicopter killers. That is those lovely hardwoods that break off at about the twenty-five foot level and can do truly nasty things to a slick trying to hover down!

The problem with sending a Pioneer team into a neighborhood that has been rudely awakened by a loud explosive device is that the neighbors get curious. Well, the pioneers are armed with chainsaws, axes, and maybe a log splitter or two to make firewood for the Generals barbeque. What they are not equipped for was a running gun battle with NVA regulars. While they have their M-16s and a few magazines of ammo, that's about it. I thought putting them on the ground with less than a full company of hard core grunts to protect them was a less than brilliant idea. But, what did I know. I was only a stupid Wobble One.

As John said, the last slick was coming in to pick up the five or six remaining Pioneers and the dusk turned bright with muzzle flashes. Ole White Two-One talking on the Fox Mike rolls in hot. However, something is not right. (He probably had ole Sober Charley in his front seat and Sober managed to turn off the Master Arm Switch.) His wing man follows and covers him. The Pioneers are in dire straights. Five or six M-16's and a few clips of ammo are not going to save them. I also know that the Snakes have already expended a bunch of bullets and other assorted things that go bang.

Oh that I could say that being the cool calm and totally in control Scout guy I knew exactly what to do. Such was not the case. My actions were not carefully reasoned out. However, I knew one thing and it was the only thing which mattered. The guys on the ground were dead unless someone changed the odds. I keyed up the intercom. Scotty, Al, how about we go down that hole and lay down some M-60? Their response was automatic. Sounds good to us, Boss. Let's Rock and Roll!

Scotty and Al were old hands with lots of experience. We had also been flying as a team for a while so we usually didn't need to debate anything. However, this was not a call that I could make alone. We were under no illusions about what would happen when we went down into the hole and they had a right to be in on the decision!

Going up uniform, I told Major Joe Tobin and my wingman I was going down into the hole. He responded. Its your call, One-Four. During this conversation we had countless C&C ships stacked up to the stratosphere. As big Sixs are prone to do, all were yelling orders and generally getting in each others way. Ole Joe Tobin came on the Uniform, Fox Mike, and Victor.

Everyone shut up! I'm sending my Red Birds in. One of the Big Sixs got indignant and started babbling about being command. Joe responded, "This is Yellow Scarf Six and we'll talk about it later. Clear this frequency NOW!" Joe was a Major who, obviously, had no plans for becoming a LTC. Gawd, it was wonderful working for Joe.

And, a great miracle happened. It got quiet. All those Big 6's kept their thoughts to themselves. Flaring above the hole, I began to hover down, while Scotty and Al put down heavy M-60 fire. As I descended, I began doing pedal turns. Getting as low as I could, I pulled in a little pitch, started climbing, and allowed the bird to slowly spin about her axis by not adding pedal. That became my new Loach maneuver. Yo Yo up and down while spinning in circles. It was working. The NVA folk decided that we were a much better target than a handful of Pioneers who weren't going anywhere. At one point I saw a green trace pass just over my head and under the rotor system and another pass between my butt and the skids. Upon occasion, I still examine my old body looking for the four ball rounds that were supposed to be between the green tracers!

As I entered the hole, I radioed the pioneers and told them to dig deep because we were going to be raining hot brass down on them and have the Snakes bring it in very close. I will never forget their excitement when we began slugging it out on all three hundred and sixty degrees. When the NVA shifted their fire to the better target and bigger threat and with Scotty, standing on the skids, and Al, leaning out the door matching them punch for punch, they were cheering like Saturday night at the fights. Punching through their cheering, I confirmed that they were all directly below me and that I had a good eyeball on them.

Here is where a Cav Troop running full teams was at her very best. Using my little spinning bird as a reference point, John and his wing man began repeated gun runs firing maybe a pair of rockets and a short burst of mini on each pass. I called it in close very close really close. I trusted them. John would dive down trying to draw fire and return a little. His wing man would cover him doing the same thing, and my wing man would cover his break. What I saw was a tremendous demonstration of courage and skill. (Mind you, had he been only covering me, I would have chewed him and his wing man out for putting leaves in their rocket pods. I had a rule that my Snakes broke at no lower than five hundred feet or they heard from me.) While the Snakes clawed for altitude to make another run, my wing would make very slow, walking speed, passes firing at two-thousand. I swear that he put it between my skids, through my rotor, and under my tail! (Again, where he only covering me, I would have chewed his butt bloody for flying the wing slot so slowly.)

Here is where my memory gets a little fuzzy. Joe had scrambled the second team, John and his wing had started making dry runs or runs with just short burst of turret and I was getting ready to draw my forty-five and hand it back to Scotty cause we were getting short of bullets. I remember talking to four Charley birds that Joe had drafted from the people who were suppose to make the insertion into the LZ. When, our slick driver was on about quarter mile final, against all reason and odds, I pulled out without receiving a hit. As I pulled out, the Charley Birds salvoed everything they owned all about the compass. Though, I might have had them do it before I pulled out. (Thirty Years makes some things fuzzy.)

As our Blue bird made its approach my wing man and I maxed out, to the lift ships which were supposed to make the insertion. We were going to steal some of their M-60 ammo. I don't remember if they were 61st ships or 129th ships. Whatever the case, the crew chiefs and gunners were passing ammo before we touched down on the sandbar. Joe, being a great guy with the

details that made the difference between life and death had them ready for us. After all, there was no guarantee that we wouldn't be need if the slick got into trouble. John flew off to rearm. I think he had to go to L.Z. Uplift.

As we red lined it back to the fight, Joe gave us a call and told us to refuel at English and meet him at home base. Those were the sweetest words that I ever heard because I knew that six Pioneers would live another day and maybe go home to Jody. I was vital and alive because I was doing what I had been born to do. I was taking care of the troops. I don't know if we killed any of the NVA. I don't care. We didn't care. Six guys who ere dead were alive due to great leadership and the skill of Americas greatest Aviators.

Of all my adventures with the best Cav troop in the world, this was the greatest. A man has never been so proud to be associated with a group of warriors as I was that day. Twas also a heck of a night at the club what I remember of it. :-))

Yes, John. I know who that Chicken, lowlife, useless S.O.B. who wouldn't turn on his position lights was. We threw him out of the Scouts when he was training because he stupidly got himself into a tail rotor stall panicked, let go of the controls, and yelled. You got it, to me who was on his first flight in a Loach. But, that is another story.

I tell the story better in my novel. However, I don't want Papa yelling at me about band width. NO, I don't have pictures. However, I do have documentation as does John. TINS!