

Terry Brooks

Terry Brooks was a Leading Seaman (Underwater Control) who changed his rating to become a Leading Seaman (Aircrew) flying in Wessex Helicopters and Gannet aircraft as a sonar operator.

In August of 1967, Terry along with 49 others—pilots; observers; maintenance personnel a cook; steward; writer and sick-bay attendant were all informed that they were to join what was termed an Experimental Military Unit (EMU), a full integration between the RAN Helicopter Flight (Vietnam) and the 135th United States Army, Assault Helicopter Company in the Republic of South Vietnam.

Terry was always cheerful and had a quick witty sense of humour so much that one early morning awaiting the arrival of the CO and Senior Pilot the level of noise was growing, so Terry boldly walked up to the front of the room calling for “Quiet”, when he had achieved this he then said “Thanks for that; I’ve got a hell of a headache” and went back to his seat, we all knew we had what all units like this need, a “joker”. Terry was assigned as a door gunner on gun-ship’s upon his arrival in Vietnam, he flew 880 actual hours of combat flying in eleven months; losing several very close friends in that time. This is Terry’s story told in a photograph and two poems.



Sometimes, we would meet in some secret rendezvous just to get away from it all. The Do Drop Inn was just such a place, and here you can see where Tom and I are catching up on current events. I am reading the latest Phantom comic, and Tom is catching up on Donald Duck and his nephews. The thing is, see, there were times when you'd be contentedly sitting, reading, and nipping things off to a point, when suddenly a voice came from behind, "Hang in there.." or "Won't be a minute", or, "Close shop, it's time to ring the changes..", and it was then that the rear access door opened and the bin, above which you were sitting (and I spell that correctly), was removed and replaced. It seemed, sometimes these secret meetings didn't 'pan out'...well, something like that....

THE EMU (EXPERIMENTAL MILITARY UNIT) AIRCREW

Politics aside, that exciting ride
Of life and grim expectations,
Showed me how (and even now
I know) I had limitations.

Twelve long months, and more than once
I'd sat in the hands of Fate;
Why was I there? Why should I care?
Just rely on your mate.

Aussies and Yanks, of various ranks,
We were a mixtured crew;
From one of each we learned to teach
Each other of what we knew.

Fear and pride, both taken in stride,
Humbled me... that's for sure;
I felt aloof and bullet-proof...
While death hovered right next door.

At times I'd fly, at times I'd cry...
Frustration reigned supreme;
Friend or foe?... 'twas hard to know...
For both wore black or green.

Back at base, sometimes I'd face
Questions from a mate;
"How'd it go?" and words would flow

While drinking beer 'til late.

He also flew, that's how he knew
The right words so to speak;
And words so said erased the dread
Of future flights so bleak.

[2]

It made me proud I was allowed
To call this bloke a mate;
I knew him well and I could tell,
To me, *he* could relate.

A gentle man from a southern land,
I got to know him well;
A willing bloke who loved a joke...
Who'd fly with you through hell.

At times we flew in a four-man crew
O'er lands of trees and rice;
'CHARLIE' would hide and our luck
would ride
With 'Death'... and the throw of his dice.

When holes appeared, (then tape adhered),
Like a badge... our 'ship' was honoured;
We hadn't heard strikes to our bird...
"Lucky again!?"... we pondered.

When we put down in a mud-surround

'Twas a place not meant to be;
Miles from home and all alone...
It scared the hell out of me!

When we set down in a dry-surround
Our choppers numbered ten;
When mortars rained our engines strained
To get airborne again.

While six flew on, the rest prolonged
Their stay upon the ground;
In injured state they could but wait...
With wounded men all round.

(3)

“What rotten luck”, for a pilot struck
In the head while flying high;
These words you’d think...and *dare’d* not
sink
To thinking *your* time was nigh.

Five ‘ships’ set out and went about
Their duties for the day;
Four ‘ships’ returned... that’s when we
learned
That one was not okay.

’Twas a mission ‘hot’... ‘CHARLIE’ had
shot
A crew and a ‘ship’ that day;
In an old bomb crater, I learned much
later....
That upside-down they lay.

The daily plan for ‘ship’ and man
Was making a safe return;

But then again, “of mice and men”
The “best laid” takes a turn.

Should someone say, “a quiet day,”
And, “missions should be short;”
’Twould often play the other way...
And peacefulness abort.

Some daily flights stretched into nights...
The “quiet day” was wrong;
And in a bind our crews would find
Their strengths and carry on.

I’ll not repent the whole year spent
At war in a foreign land;
I’m *proud* I flew as an EMU crew...
And I’m *proud* of the EMU man.

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