

# A Story of Selfless Service: Erickson Pilot Jeff Bulmer

July 4, 2018

After 48 years in aviation, helicopter pilot Jeff Bulmer says, "It's time to hang up my flight helmet while my landings equal my take-offs." He does this "not with a heavy heart, but with a gleam in my eye." He is well-aware that he has been very lucky to have had outstanding flight experiences and to have enjoyed the privilege of working with some of the finest helicopter pilots in the world, while serving the United States.

## Military Career



U.S. Army Helicopter Pilot-Second Tour Vietnam, 1971. As a young Warrant Officer flying out of "I" Corps area, Camp Evans.

His first tour was in Vietnam with the U.S.M.C., 1965-66 as a rifleman "grunt" G Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, 3rd Division where he and his fellow soldiers conducted many search and destroy missions, participated in Operation Harvest Moon and provided base security around the Danang Air Base. After completing his Marine enlistment in 1968, he found that he missed the camaraderie and sense of mission that he found in combat. He started warrant officer and flight training at Ft. Wolters, Texas in January 1970. After completing flight school, receiving his wings and warrant officer bars, he was put on a brief assignment at Ft. Bragg, N.C. with the 182nd Aviation. Co. After a few months of Garrison flying, he requested a return to Vietnam for a second tour, this time as a helicopter pilot.

In February 1971, he was assigned to C Company ("Phoenix 37") then B Company of the 158th Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne Division based at Camp Evans, I Corps, flying UH-1H Hueys ("Slicks"). During his first operational



We used the Night Hawk at night, with a search light, in attempt to draw fire so we could engage the enemy.

weeks he supported Operation Lam Son 719 — which was the invasion of Laos to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail and cut the main supply route for the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) into South Vietnam with the U.S. providing air and artillery support for the Army of Vietnam (ARVN). The operation lasted approximately 45 days and proved disastrous for the U.S. and their allies. Bulmer describes the NVA as "a worthy adversary."



CLASS 70-31 B-4 1ST WOC COMPANY  
U.S. ARMY PRIMARY HELICOPTER CENTER --FT. WOLTERS, TEXAS

<b>FIRST ROW:</b> CUTLER, TIBALDO W. GIBSON, CHARLES G. BULMER, JEFFREY S. GOUT, GERRARD R. HARTZ, CHARLES J. HODGES, HARRY J.	<b>SECOND ROW:</b> JOHN, ROBERT S. CW2 IVET, TOMMY E. KOLLANDER, BRUCE P. JOHN, JOHNNY L. THOMPSON, DOUGLAS A. WILLIAMS, DAVID KRODIE, HOWARD L.	<b>THIRD ROW:</b> BOSCHKE, WILLIAM R. LEE, RICHARD A. JOHNSON, MICHAEL SWEETNAM, THOMAS G. KITCHEM, PHELIP L.	<b>FOURTH ROW:</b> SPAFFORD, WILLIAM M., JR. KENNETH, ROBERT E. STANLEY, THOMAS L. KENNEY, TERRY J. JOHNSON, RUSH D. MELLENDE, JAMES P.	<b>FIFTH ROW:</b> TENNYLTON, ROONEY G. POWERS, JAMES E., JR. ISLAND, NEALE F. TAYLOR, GLENN A. POWELL, LAWRENCE A.	<b>SIXTH ROW:</b> HOENEMAN, ROBERT D. LIESCH, THOMAS O. THORNTON, TERRY L. HARRIS, KEITH G. BIRCHMAN, JAMES B.
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U.S. Army Flight School, Ft. Wolters, Texas, 1970

Bulmer remembers that the U.S. Army Aviation units did not fare well either. The NVA ground troops gave very accurate anti-aircraft, small arms fire and mortar rounds into the landing zones. It wasn't uncommon to use downed aircraft for navigation reference points or for a pilot to fly two or even three different aircraft in one day because the previously piloted aircraft had been rendered not airworthy due to battle damage.

The combined U.S./ARVN helicopter losses totaled 168 destroyed and 618 damaged. To provide a scale for the mission, during Lam Son 719, there were approximately 160,000 sorties flown, with 19 U.S. Army aviators killed, 59 wounded and 11 missing.



U.S. Marine-Sniper Duty-1966 Vietnam. Taken in the Hill 55 area outside of Danang, Vietnam. Note we didn't wear "flak" jackets during 1965 and some of 1966.

For the balance of that second Vietnam tour, Bulmer flew regular combat assault missions, resupply ("ash and trash") missions. His most challenging missions were supporting Military Assistance Command Vietnam, Studies and Observations Group, and Command & Control North missions. These highly classified, multi-service U.S. Special Operations Units conducted covert unconventional warfare operations.

## Commercial Career

After ending his U.S. Army aviation career, Bulmer came back to the U.S. and went to work with Petroleum Helicopters Inc., flying the Gulf of Mexico and supplying



Last Flight Afghanistan-December 30, 2016. Tim Ekey and Yours Truly at Bagram, Afghanistan closing down the contract.

oil rigs in the late '70s through the early '80s. He moved to New Jersey where he flew shuttle service work for Damin Aviation until their demise. This led Bulmer and three partners to start a helicopter sight-seeing business called Liberty Helicopter Tours. They flew out of New York City's W30 St. Heliport. From there he moved on and started his own single pilot, single aircraft shuttle service, Broadcast Helicopter Inc. He flew daily commuters out of the New Jersey shore area to the various NYC heliports. The business went on for a few years until "his" aircraft was sold by the owner to a competitor. He had a two-year hiatus working for Flight Safety International after being type rated in the Falcon 50, as a ground instructor in the Falcon 50 program (AMD-50) at Moonachie, NJ. This led him to the Federal Aviation Administration at the Teterboro Flight Standards District office (2001-11), where he served 10 years as a Principal Operations Inspector before retiring, overseeing nine FAR 135 Air Carrier Certificates.



Flying with Zandy Greef, an accomplished Puma guy, in Afghanistan.

## Evergreen to Erickson



Duncan, one of the best and my friend. Bagram, AFB-2015

Not yet ready for retirement, Bulmer was hired by Evergreen Helicopter Inc., where he continued to fly with some of the best aviators he'd experienced in his career. He and his colleagues were given the challenge of rotational flying in Afghanistan for five years (yet another war zone for Bulmer), flying Department of Defense contract personnel and supplies to the many different Forward Operating Bases. Flight conditions could include high mountainous terrain, extreme weather conditions (dust and sand storms, hot temperatures, extremely cold temperatures,

and snow and ice storms), Spartan living conditions, and high-density altitudes. Limited flight visibility also prevailed most of the year, further adding to the complexities of Afghan flying. Additionally, there were daily and nightly incoming rocket attacks on the bases of operation they served. For example, the FOB Shank base, was known as "Rocket City" with an average of six incoming rockets daily falling on the base. Bulmer recalls that the rockets could be "disconcerting" while trying to get some rest or enjoy one of the "fine epicurean delights" during their daily meals! Upon returning to base, the discovery of the occasional bullet hole in their aircraft rounded out the seriousness of their mission.



Standing by to refuel at FOB Shank; Afghanistan. Stephan' Delpueyo, me, Ben Brown and Gene Montanaro.

After the conclusion of the Afghanistan contract, Bulmer and his fellow pilots were off to AFRICOM, (Africa Command) where they supported the DOD and U.S. Military in its well-known search for international terrorists. They were initially based out of a remote village in the Central African Republic which provided its own difficult geographic flight conditions—a flat, featureless, savanna region with venomous snakes (black and green mambas, cobras), wart hogs and very mean baboons. Bulmer recalls warmly that the integrity and character of the seasoned professionals comprising their remote operations made it a relatively seamless transition for him to move from Afghanistan to Africa. Even now, he longs to be part of the camaraderie of their remote outposts.

"For me, the opportunity to have served and contributed in a combat environment has been, and still is, the most personally fulfilling work I have been able to do."

In a few parting words, Jeff Bulmer, Pilot (retired) says: "It is now time to accept the fact that I no longer fly helicopters, however I have had more than my share of 'time in the barrel.' My career has been way cool! My regrets are few and are far outweighed by the tremendous upside that I have experienced and shared with my fellow 'Rotor Heads.' Keep your rotor in the Green."



Great to be alive! It doesn't get any better than this!

Erickson thanks you for your commitment to your country and your colleagues.

