



Surprised at Being Alive: An Accidental Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam and Beyond

Robert Curtis

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Sometimes you do everything right, but it just isn't your day. A part fails and your helicopter comes apart in flight, or, another aircraft runs into you and the pieces of both fall to the ground below, or the enemy gunner pulls the trigger at just the right moment and his rounds find your aircraft in exactly the right spot to take it out of the sky. Whichever way it happens, it wasn't your day.

Which is why, after 24 years and over 5,000 flight hours with four armed services, Major Robert Curtis was so surprised at being alive when he passed his retirement physical. Starting with enlisting in the Army to fly helicopters during Vietnam, and continuing on through service with the National Guard, Marine Corps and Royal Navy, he flew eight different helicopters—from the wooden-bladed flying he OH-13E, through the Chinook, SeaKnight and SeaKing, in war and peace around the world. During that time over 50 of his friends died in crashes, both in combat and in accidents, but somehow his skill, and not an inconsiderable amount of luck and superstition, saw him through.

His flying career began with a misbegotten strategy for beating the draft by enlisting. With the Vietnam War raging full blast in 1968 the draft was inevitable, so he wanted to at least get some small measure of control of his future. Although he had no thought of flying when he walked into the recruiting office, he walked out signed up to be a helicopter pilot. What he did not know was that 43% of all the aircraft sent to Vietnam were destroyed in combat or accidents. Soon he was in the thick of the war, flying Chinooks with the 101st Airborne. After Vietnam he left the Army, but kept flying in the National Guard while going to college. He was accepted at two law schools, but flying is addictive, so he instead enlisted in the USMC to fly some more. Over the next 17 years he would fly around the world off US and British ships from Egypt to Norway and all points in between. His engaging story will be a delight to all aviation enthusiasts.

REVIEWS

one of those books that you read that gives you the feeling of Deja Vu, and makes the hairs on the back of your neck rise
Neall Ellis

Robert Curtis gives us a compelling account of his exemplary service in wartime and beyond. The combat missions he flew out of Phu Bai/Camp Eagle in Vietnam did so much for so many, and remain alive and meaningful for all of us today.

Gary Matthews, American Ambassador (ret) Former Deputy and Province Senior Adviser, Thua Thien/Hue

“The author’s time in Vietnam was action packed, flying over the DMZ, the Laotian border and Khe Sanh. During his time there, he heard NVA radar and radio signals, dodged enemy ordnance, and survived an enemy round through the helo windshield. . . . The danger of flying the aerodynamically complex helicopters in all kinds of rapid changing weather conditions and varied topographies required courage and skill. Curtis

few training, transportation, supply and combat missions in climate regions from the Southeast Asian tropics to the storms, highlands and ice of the Arctic. . . . In 1992, Major Curtis retired from the military, "...surprised to still be alive." Naval History Magazine

"Curtis' eye for detail puts him in the top rank of my list of Vietnam War autobiographers. The precision of his style creates both the picture and the mood of acts as simple as crawling out of bed and shuffling to the flight line in the middle of the night. Curtis repeatedly refreshed my Vietnam War memories. His highly personalized description of helicopter action during Lam Son 719 is the most straightforward account of that operation I have read. What's more, Curtis injects historical references without breaking the narrative thread."

VVA Veteran

"Curtis uses a particular wit and sharp descriptive skills to narrate his extraordinary career. He brings the reader right into the moment, whether in the cockpit of a Chinook in Vietnam, a CH- 46E on a pitching deck at night, or a Sea King navigating the fiords of Norway. Curtis was surprised at being alive when he passed his retirement physical. you will be surprised as well, with this great reading experience."

VHPA Aviator

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From reader reviews:

Terry Hayes:

Book is to be different for each and every grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. As we know that book is very important usually. The book Surprised at Being Alive: An Accidental Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam and Beyond seemed to be making you to know about other know-how and of course you can take more information. It doesn't matter what advantages for you. The publication Surprised at Being Alive: An Accidental Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam and Beyond is not only giving you a lot more new information but also to get your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your own spend time to read your guide. Try to make relationship with all the book Surprised at Being Alive: An Accidental Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam and Beyond. You never feel lose out for everything should you read some books.

James Sellers:

Reading a book tends to be new life style within this era globalization. With studying you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. Along with book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire their particular reader with their story or maybe their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the publications. But also they write about the ability about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your children, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors in this world always try to improve their talent in writing, they also doing some study before they write to their book. One of them is this Surprised at Being Alive: An Accidental Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam and Beyond.

Daniel Moore:

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation or maybe go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent they free time just watching TV, as well as playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity here is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun in your case. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent 24 hours a day to reading a publication. The book Surprised at Being Alive: An Accidental Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam and Beyond it is rather good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore very easily to read this book from a smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book features high quality.

Vanessa Gibson:

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