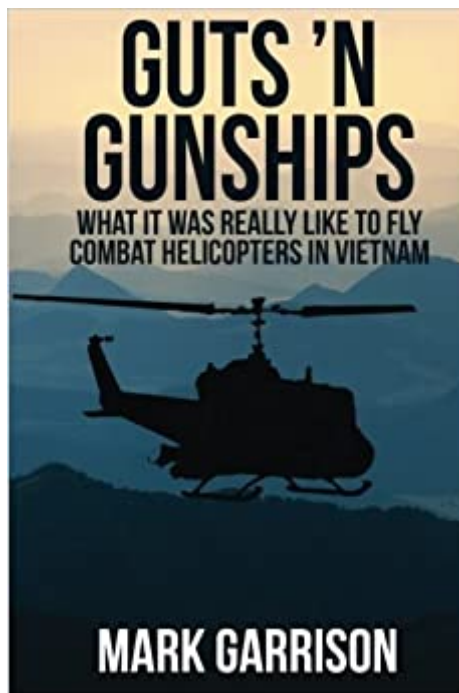




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# Guts 'N Gunships: What It Was Really Like To Fly Combat Helicopters In Vietnam



## Synopsis

Straight from college, to the US Army, to command pilot of a four ton gunship with a four man crew in Vietnam. From college chess games to a game of life and death. It was surreal to say the least. In this book I pour my heart out and bare my soul to tell you what that was like, from basic to Vietnam and back.

**Synopsis** In the summer of 1967, Mark Garrison had dropped out of college at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, just before entering his third year. He had run out of money and had to work for a while. These were the days before the lottery and the draft soon came calling. In order to somewhat control his own future, he enlisted in the U.S. Army's helicopter flight school program. Little did he know that this adventure would be the most profound experience of his life. Garrison flew hundreds of missions for the 119th AHC, stationed in the Central Highlands at Camp Holloway in Pleiku, Vietnam. He was awarded twenty-five Air Medals, four campaign Bronze Stars, and The Distinguished Flying Cross among numerous other awards. His narrative takes you through the whole process, from basic training, flight school, flying combat in Vietnam, and his return to the United States. His description includes many incidents in combat flight, including being hit by rocket propelled grenades and being on fire in the air, over hundreds if not thousands of enemy troops. But this is not all. He elaborates on the daily lives, emotions, and nuances of the pilots and what they considered their mission to be. **GUTS 'N GUNSHIPS** is a must read if you are to have a realistic understanding of what flying helicopters in Vietnam combat was all about.

**Review** "Mark Garrison's *Guts 'N Gunships* is more than just another Vietnam flashback. It is a portal which will transport readers to a most painful American experience. These were definitely goodbye times in America and the author bares his soul with his narrative. The author reveals how he, his friends and family, like millions of other Americans were sucked into the Vietnam whirlwind while the nation's leaders wrestled with a domino theory pressed upon the nation by think tanks tied to the military industrial complex. *Guts 'N Gunships* follows Garrison's true life story of being on the short list for the draft, and then going all in by signing up for helicopter pilot training. After just a few months training, he found himself in the mountains of Vietnam flying Huey helicopters into small holes in the triple canopy jungle. He had been assigned to duty with the Crocodiles and Alligators of the 119th Assault Helicopter Company, just a few short miles from the dreaded Ho Chi Minh Trail. His one year recounting of his numbered days there is painted with blood, pathos and hilarious incidents, stemming from hard drinking and furious nap of the earth flying, while the helicopters were blown apart with the pilots and crews in them. Most uplifting of all is the author's first person accounting of a unit of pilots who saw the American mission failing but renewed vows among themselves that they would give the enemy no quarter and would cut no

corners in their attempts to bring home alive every American they possibly could. No one has ever before addressed the American helicopter pilot experience in the way Garrison does.â • â "Ron Gawthorp

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Mark V. Garrison was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army on December 31st, 1970. He went on to receive a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University in 1973. Garrison then completed four more years of study at the oldest and largest chiropractic school in the world, Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa, where he received a doctorate in 1977. Dr. Garrison then practiced in Illinois for 30 years before retiring in 2006. Dr. Garrison and his wife of 42 years, Lynn, have four children and five grandchildren. His hobbies include flying, painting, drawing, playing his guitars, and writing. He is now starting his second book about things he encountered in medical practice.

Having served in the same unit a year before Mark's tour of duty, it was a great way to reflect back and recall some similar stories of places and events that happened a half century ago. "Guts N' Gunships" is something that every Army helicopter pilot who flew in Vietnam can identify; the fears of going into the heart of the air war battle, the humor of pilots necessary to maintain their sanity, the sadness of losing close friends and brothers of war, and the day-to-day courage that it took to be a part of the "Helicopter War." This is a book that will not only be enjoyed by helicopter pilots, but also by the troops who served in the jungles and rice patties and to the families of these brave young men.

Often, I've wondered what it was really like in Vietnam. Guts 'N Gunships fills a long-time communication gap about what the Vietnam Veterans endured for the rest of us Americans safe here at home. Mark has a way of introducing humor into otherwise serious situations. At the end of most chapters, I felt compelled to read more. His descriptions made me feel as if I was sitting right next to him in that cockpit. What an adrenaline rush!! I never laughed so many belly laughs or had a need for so many kleenex in any book I've ever read, and that's a lot. Thank you Mark (Pigpen), for your courageous service in Vietnam and your lifetime of recovery. We're privileged to have you home!

No frills and no exaggerations, Garrison tells it like it was. Unfortunately, by the end of the war, the helicopter pilot casualty rate approached 30%. Even more unfortunate, the Veterans Administration fought tooth and nail to exclude diseases such as prostate cancer and diabetes from Agent Orange exposure. It is very easy to say "Thank you for your service," it is much more difficult to serve in the face of a hostile homecoming and then watch the country become embroiled in the same kind of wars.

The author presents a point of view from the air that I can appreciate in that we were often the happy campers that these crazy bastards supported. He details the early training and the blossoming of skills that saved his tail and that of many others, in the air and on the ground. His deduction that the politicians were incompetent is accurate, and that the only genuine objective that most felt was to get as many Americans home...alive. One major shortcoming is that his personnel focus was centered on other pilots; the enlisted crew members seemed to be there but no focus of their actions, except in rare instances, and for some reason he did not cite them by name as he did the pilots. I can not understand the oversight of omitting them, because one is virtually nothing except for the efforts of your men. However, perhaps I have misread. He omits much of the drama of inserts and recoveries; each one could be expanded, but one can suppose that if you perform so many, they mingle into a steady stream of....boredom?? These airmen performed beyond human endurance, their courage rates up there with any single classical battle from Gettysburg to Guadalcanal to Pelilue to Iwo Jima to Normandy to Okinawa to the Battle of the Bulge.....and they did it month after month for 12 months. I have a brother-in-law, U.S. Air Force veteran, chopper crew chief out of Thailand and Vietnam 1966-1968 who is suffering mightily from PTSD to this day; I don't dare to send him a copy of this book, but I will send it to his two daughters so that they can

better understand what a magnificent service he and others like him performed, because he would never tell them, especially about how he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross. Capt W. J. Clifford, USMC (Ret) VN Jul 1967- Aug 1968

I thoroughly enjoyed "Guts N' Gunships by Mr. Mark Garrison. The story begins with the author volunteering for the draft in 1968 and signing up for helicopter training. The author takes us through his training, flight school and then on to Vietnam. One thing I enjoyed was that the author has a flare for entertaining as much of his writing is filled with witticism that will make readers smile. War is also funny, especially in the antics these soldiers pull on one another. Although chopper pilots are a special breed of heroes, us grunts held them all in high esteem for they were our saviors and came whenever called. Without them, food, water, ammo, extraction, medivac and fire support would not be there and many more soldiers would have died. Mark's first mission was a baptism of fire, and even he could not understand the "coolness" and patience portrayed by these chopper drivers as they flew through a hail of enemy bullets to land. Soon, finding that he, too, would become a skilled and professional pilot. Mr. Garrison stays away from politics but admits that he will continue to fly and fight the enemy as long as it will help young American Soldiers survive and return home. It's understandable that the pilots work extreme hours and then still get special night projects which results in their getting little sleep, but the war must go on and there are only so many officers to go around. However, on those nights when they didn't fly, it seems that all of them dabbled with booze to erase the tension of the day and be able to sleep at night. It's easy to see the camaraderie developed by this special group of soldiers and the bond that remains even after returning home. If you are looking for a shoot-em-up type of book, then Guts N' Gunships is not for you. If you want to learn what these young men had to endure during training and war - both when it was dangerous and even the boring times - then jump on this one. Highly recommended! Thank you Mr. Garrison! Welcome Home, Brother! John Podlaski, author "Cherries - A Vietnam War Novel" and "When Can I Stop Running?"

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