

The Recruiter

By [James "Derry" Ray](#)

The year was 1967, having graduated from high school a year before, I was already coming to terms with a daunting reality. I was quickly failing out of Wright State University.

During this time my brother David brought home a (at the time) popular magazine called Boy's Life. While casually flipping through it, I came across a recruiting advertisement for Warrant Officer Candidates (WOC). The specific line that captured my attention said "become a helicopter pilot."

In December of 1967, and with questions about WOC, I made my way to the Army Recruiting Office in Springfield, Ohio. I met with a Recruiting Sergeant, and quickly informed him of my aspiration to fly helicopters. He told me that in order to do so, I would have to pass three exams; a physical, an eye examination (with a minimum vision of 20/20), and a basic intelligence test. Feeling overly confident, I signed up. On my way out, the Recruiter stopped me and said, "When you get out of flight school, come back and see me. I would like to know if you made it."

Upon arriving home, I informed my father (a Master Sergeant in the Air Force) of my intentions, and was surprised when a look of concern crossed his face. "Derry," he said "you didn't sign anything, did you?" Upon telling him that I had, in fact, signed everything, he responded "Derry, all you have is a high school diploma. They're never going to let you fly a helicopter."

In February of 1968, I left for basic training. The eye test (which claimed a number of hopeful candidates) went smoothly. The physical was a walk in the park.

When it came time to take the intelligence test, we were informed that basic recruits would need to score at least 90 to pass. Those in the WOC, however, needed a score of at least 110 (which my recruiter had failed to mention). It turns out my father was almost right. My score: 110.

After flight school, I returned to Springfield to see my recruiter. I was dressed in my Officer's uniform with flight wings and a 1st Cav patch on my left shoulder. I informed him that I was on my way to Vietnam. Once again, as I was leaving, my recruiter said, "When you get back from Vietnam, come and see me. I would like to know if you made it."

In February of 1969, I went to Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry. Upon arriving in the country, I was assigned to the 189th Assault Helicopter Co. (AHC) in Pleiku; call sign "Ghostrider 27". The 189th AHC, along with the 57th AHC, 119th AHC, and 170th AHC all flew Command and Control Center (C.C.C.) missions for the 5th Special Forces - with the 57th doing the majority of the flying. These flights were always, to say the least, interesting.

In late January of 1970, I was involved in my most unusual flight. Warrant Officer Del Cornell and I parachuted a 5th Special Forces team into Cambodia. It was a single ship night mission - no lights and no guns on the aircraft. We lifted off at 2am from The Parrots Beak, and while flying to the drop zone, we could see the lights of Phnom Penh. (As a side note; did anyone else parachute troops out of a helicopter into Cambodia?)

That was my last mission in Vietnam. When I returned to the United States in 1970, I again went to see my recruiter. When I did not see him, I inquired into his whereabouts. I was then informed that he was

actually in advanced helicopter training at Fort Rucker, AL. I do not remember the name of my recruiter, however, if the man I am talking about is you. "I would like to know if you made it."

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