

LZ Brick  
by [Mike Peterson](#)

### AWARD OF THE PURPLE HEART

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On July 7 1970 we were assigned a simple ash & trash VIP mission to fly Deputy Senior Advisor I corps General Jackson and South Vietnamese General Lam to fire base Brick just south of Phu Bai.

This would be a short flight maybe 35 minutes. We all thought this would just be another day at the office. It was a good day for flying just a little hazy caused by smoke. It seemed to me there was always smoke. The pilots had tuned to AFVN radio to pass the time. I will always remember this one song Saturday Morning. It was a simple ditty something that would just stick in your mind. The pilots found the LZ with no problem. After landing, the generals and their aids made a beeline to the command bunker.

I walked around the Huey and did a brief inspection, making sure all fluids were full and that there were no lose nuts or broken safety wire. I found nothing out of order, this was a good ship. Little John (Mr. Phillips) my friend and pilot started some small talk standing at the rear of the tail boom. We could see for miles in all directions. The LZ was maybe 1000 to 1500 feet elevation, sometimes that darn smoke would block our view. All around were jungle covered mountains. John and I considered ourselves lucky; hell we were always flying we didn't know what it was like to be humping in the bush. All the guys on the fire base looked tired; they had red dust all over their jungle fatigues.

As we stood there talking we could hear explosions off in the back ground, and sometimes small arms fire. We really didn't give it a second thought, because we heard stuff like that all the time, especially in the area close to the A-Shau valley. As we talked of home I couldn't help but notice the explosions seemed to get louder and closer. I thought it was out going from the 105 howitzers at the fire base. In the distance I could see a CH-47 Chinook (a sort of flying box car) flying in our direction. It had what appeared to be a sling load of supplies. As the Chinook flew closer it seemed the explosion we heard also got closer and more frequent. The mammoth helicopter came to a hover at our 4:00 position approximately 100 ft. from us to jettison its load. Just then an explosion occurred under the Chinook and the crew released the cargo about 20 ft. from the ground. I can still see it falling right where the explosion occurred. The CH 47 did a 180 degree peddle turn and halled ass out of there. Confusion reigned; Mr. Phillips and I stared at each other as if to say what the hell is going on? At that very same time Captain

Woodhouse the general's aid came running out from the command bunker shouting "crank-it-up were under attack". Then and only then did I realize what was happening. The NVA were lobbing mortars in trying to pinpoint our location. By the time Captain Woodhouse made it to the Huey three mortars had found their way ever closer to my ship. Mr. Bledsoe and Mr. Phillips wasted no time in getting to their seats to fire up the Huey. As a matter of fact the pilots started to engage the engine before I had a chance to untie the rotor blade.

I could hear the starter winding up as I frantically tried to get the main rotor untied. As I tried to get the strap released I could feel the tugging of the blades, finally with one hefty thrust upward I managed to release the hook. Instantly the main rotor blades flung forward as if I had released a taut rubber band. I could hear the engine igniters clicking and the smell of raw fuel (JP-4). I knew it was going to be a hot start.

At that point everything seemed to go into slow motion. I guess that is when the adrenaline kicked in. The enemy mortars seemed to stop for a second. I made sure General Jackson was secure, and that his aid was strapped in. I heard small arms fire; I figured it was our guys firing their M-16s. They were not on automatic, but they were firing some rapped bursts. That is when the strangest sound of all went over head, kind of like a high pitched buzz. I knew right then the NVA were firing at us. By this time the Huey had just about come to full operational RPM. I hurried back to the gun well so we could get the hell out of there. Just as I stepped up on the M-60 gun mount to get inside the ship an enemy mortar exploded about 10 feet to my right rear at about our 4 o'clock position. I could see it go off out of the corner of my right eye. Being so close; the force of the blast blew me into the helicopter. I was stunned and shaking. I had dirt all over me.

We were airborne just after the mortar exploded. Somehow they had managed to get enough torque and rpm for a lift off. Just as we cleared the firebase the engine started to lose power, which meant we started losing altitude. This only means one thing we are going down. As luck would have it the south side of the Firebase Brick there was a steep drop-a-way to the jungle valley below. There was just enough altitude to pick up some air speed. Somehow the Huey began to fly dropping to just above the tree tops. Being back in the gun well the only thing you can hear is the engine and transmission, it did not sound well at all. The turbo shaft Lycoming engine was producing a high pitched reverberating sound. I know I had never heard that before. It pulsed up and down like the steady rhythm of a heart. Between the vibrating rhythms we would lose altitude. It seemed the pilots were flying a yo-yo, up and down, up and down.

I was still stunned from the blast as I tried to get my senses. Slowly I began to get my bearings to assess that I was all right, but confused. There was blood every where, shaking my head as I looked forward to see where the blood was coming from. At first there was a blur of waving arms and neurotic screaming. Warm blood was now squirting in my face. I realized that Cpt. Woodhouse had taken a piece of shrapnel directly in the back of the head. Immediately I grabbed his shoulders to keep him calm, but he was too strong and in shock. General Lam who was sitting to Woodhouse's left (a big man for a Vietnamese) put his arms around him. I yelled at General Jackson who was sitting in the

center jump seat to reach up and pull down the first aid kit from the bulkhead. He reached up to pull it down but had trouble, it wouldn't budge. I scrambled forward from the gun well to pull the first aid kit off the bulkhead. The break away safety wire was holding it in place. I gave it a massive tug and it came off. After opening it and giving the head bandage to General Jackson I moved back to the gun well.

Cpt. Woodhouse was still waving his arms and head, blood was still squirting from the entrance wound. I assisted the general with the bandage and was able to get back to the M-60 machine gun. We were flying at tree top level, gaining altitude only to lose it because of the damage to the engine, but it was still flying. I cocked the M-60 and watched for any enemy movement, I saw nothing.

Mr. Bledsoe and Mr. Phillips had their hands full trying to keep the Huey in the air. The engine was just screaming it was a definite over rev. I don't know how one of the pilots managed to tune in the fox mike (FM) radio to the surgical hospital in Phu Bai but they did. Mr. Bledsoe was calling for a team of doctors to meet us at the hospital pad we had severely wounded on board. Cpt. Woodhouse would soon be in good hands if they could keep this thing in the air. Flying north east I kept looking for the hospital to come in to view. It seemed to take forever, in reality it was about a 10 minute flight from LZ Brick. With the evac. in view I put the M-60 back in its resting position and began to get ready to off load Captain Woodhouse. Medics were kneeling on a stretcher in the LZ to keep it from blowing away from the rotor wash. We still did not know the extent of the damage to the Huey. I was hoping it would make enough power to hover. Both pilots were on the controls, I could tell it was going to be a rough landing. We came to a hover over the pad and like two valet attendants they hovered taxied off the pad to the side so they wouldn't block the LZ at the hospital. (cool heads).

Medics scrambled to remove the Captain Woodhouse, while we held our breath. Mr. Bledsoe started shutting down aircraft 15224. I helped both generals out and started to look over the Huey for damage. We found holes every where, from the vertical stabilizer, the tail boom, the engine cowl, and the cargo door, inside of the passenger door, the pilot's door, and the chin bubble. I noticed blood in the chin bubble so I mentioned to Mr. Bledsoe to look himself over that he might be wounded. The aft end of the cargo compartment was full of blood. The gun well had blood standing in a pool. That's when I noticed that I was soaked with blood. General Jackson asked me if I was all right. I told him that I thought I was. He had me take off my helmet and flight shirt off. He discovered a shrapnel wound on the right rear portion of my neck, and small shrapnel wounds in my back. He directed me inside the evac hospital to be bandaged. Mr. Bledsoe had received a wound through his boot to his right foot. Although minor we would later receive the Purple Heart.

On further inspection I found 7 pieces of shrapnel lodged in the N1 compressor section of the turbine, this is what caused the unusual noise coming from the engine. There were holes in the tail rotor and the main rotor blade. The 42 degree gear box was seeping oil where shrapnel had embedded itself. I located the log book in the compartment directly behind the radio console and decided this incident deserved a big fat red -X (unable to

fly). We weren't about to fly this ship back to Marble Mountain, Da Nang. Mr. Phillips used a land line to call Marble and tell them to send a ship to come pick us up, we had one totaled Huey.

Back at Marble Mountain that evening we learned that Captain Woodhouse died from his wounds at the hospital ship *Repose*. Needless to say we all felt the pain of losing a comrade to the enemy I know I would never be the same from this day forward. I had looked death in the eye and had lived. Even though I was only nineteen on 7/7/70 I turned forty.

Captain Woodhouse Robert F. JR is on panel 09 west Line 129 of The Vietnam Memorial, he was from New York.

