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## The Price of Exit

by [Tom Marshall](#) (Preface)

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#### Book Description

"The risk of a fatal catastrophe was constant. The NVA was the enemy, but the ultimate opponent was, quite simply, death. . . ."

For assault helicopter crews flying in and around the NVA-infested DMZ, the U.S. pullout from Vietnam in 1970-71 was a desperate time of selfless courage. Now former army warrant officer Tom Marshall of the Phoenix, C Company, 158th Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne, captures the deadly mountain terrain, the long hours flown under enormous stress, the grim determination of hardened pilots combat-assaulting through walls of antiaircraft fire, the pickups amid exploding mortar shells and hails of AK fire, the nerve-racking string extractions of SOG teams from North Vietnam. . . . And, through it all, the rising tension as helicopter pilots and crews are lost at an accelerating pace.

It is no coincidence that the Phoenix was one of the most highly decorated



assault helicopter units in I Corps. For as the American departure accelerated and the enemy added new, more powerful antiaircraft weapons, the helicopter pilots, crew chiefs, and gunners paid the heavy price of withdrawal in blood. For more than 30 Percent of Tom Marshall's 130 helicopter-school classmates, the price of exit was their lives. . . .

### Synopsis

A startling and sober account by a survivor of the air war in Vietnam--thirty percent of whose flight-school comrades died. The author begins with the dreadful losses and impossible bravery of the helicopter pilots who flew through NVA antiaircraft fire at Firebase Ripcord and goes through the terrifying invasion of Laos in 1971.

### About the Author

Tom Marshall enlisted in the United States Army in the Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Pilot course in 1969. During his one-year tour in Vietnam, he received the Bronze Star for meritorious service after two months of action with the 4th Infantry Division at An Khe, where he flew OH-58s for 1st Brigade, Headquarters Company. He was next assigned to the Phoenix, C Company, 158th Aviation Battalion, before transferring to the 163rd Aviation company at Camp Eagle to fly Hueys and Loaches. At the end of his twelve-month tour, he had accumulated 1,087 hours of combat flying time.

When he returned to the World in 1971, he served as an instructor pilot at Fort Rucker, Alabama, in OH-58 Kiowas, where he transitioned former air force jet pilots into helicopter pilots. He also instructed army fixed-wing aviators and foreign officers. He used his G.I. benefits to obtain a commercial multiengine-instrument airplane rating.

He lives in Pensacola, Florida.

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### Customer Comments

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**sblaker@web-o.net from Seattle, WA , October 8, 1998 ★★★★★**

**Written from the heart , factual and detailed. Well written.**

Tom Marshall has written about his experiences as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam with close attention to detail. His thoughts and feelings are very real about his fallen comrades. This book is an awesome tribute to them and their families. As a Vietnam Veteran, he has professionally told his story, and their stories need to be told and read. They are our best resource to the factual history of the VN war. Thank you Tom Marshall.

**Michael J. Wheeler 102733.1650@compusreve.com from Wisconsin , October 7, 1998 ★★★★★**

**Powerfull!**

To most Americans, and in most history books, the American effort in the unpopular war in Viet Nam ended in 1970. However, many nineteen and twenty something year-old helicopter crews; pilots, crew chiefs, gunners and medics,



continued to fly dangerous missions in support of ARVN soldiers and a dwindling number of US troops, well into 1973. In fact, the last US helicopter pilot killed in Southeast Asia gave his life in 1975.

In "The Price of Exit", Tom Marshall gives voice to those of us helicopter pilots and our crew members, living and dead, who served with honor and distinction during a period of time when few Americans knew of, and even fewer cared less, of our efforts. Marshall writes of his own participation during this difficult time. Even though he could have written a complete book of his own valor, Marshall has elected not to do so. Rather, he writes of the valor of others.

In the spring of 1971, the Army of South Viet Nam (ARVN) embarked upon an ambitious helicopter borne invasion, called Lam Son 719, into the NVA sanctuaries of Laos. Very few Americans knew then or will recall now that the helicopters that undertook this invasion were flown by American crews.

Marshall puts a human face on young men who will never grow beyond the ages of 19, 20 and 21 they had reached that terrible spring of 1971. "The Price of Exit", in part tells of 45 days in March and April 1971 when American helicopter crew flew sortie after sortie into Laos. We are allowed to view incredible valor as these American pilots take off, time and again, only to face huge volumes of anti-aircraft fire.

But it is not just pilots Marshall pays tribute to in this wonderful work. As we are reminded many of the aircraft were crewed by equally young enlisted crew members. In many ways Marshall shows us an even higher level of valor that was demonstrated by these crew chiefs, gunners, flight engineers, and medics. "The Price of Exit" tells us how, without questioning, these unsung heroes climbed willingly in the rear of helicopters they had no control over and made the harrowing trips into an airborne hell.

We are instructed by Marshall that the US employed 659 helicopters in Lam Son 719. Of these 659 helicopters, 444 were shot down or otherwise damaged by hostile fire. We are also instructed that it was the best of American youth in those 659 helicopters. Without these American helicopters and crews Lam Son 719 could never have been undertaken.

What Marshall has accomplished in "The Price of Exit" is to tell the story of the uncommon valor shown by young helicopter crews at places with names like Ripcord, Khe Sanh, Lolo, Sophia, and Brown. The reader may not be as familiar with these places as one might be with those visited by the World War II generation of airman. However, thanks to Marshall's efforts history will now recall a time when young men willingly paid "The Price of Exit" from an unpopular war, not for their country, but for each other.

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