

August 8, 1996

Mr. Tom Marshall
[REDACTED]

Dear Tom:

Thanks for sending the recent copy of **The Price of Exit**. It's coming along nicely but still needs some polishing.

I read through some eleven pages and have made comments in the margin. Generally speaking you are still using too many quote marks where none are called for. Perhaps you want to italicize a word for emphasis, but don't use quotes. It is bad form.

I would caution against the too frequent use of military acronyms. Only other Vietnam vets will freely associate with them, and you don't want the rest of your readership thumbing back through pages to see where AO or CA was first identified. This is a text not a military document, so as a good writer write out the words. If you must use some such as NVA give the written explanation first then the acronym in parenthesis.

Don't use more words than are necessary in a sentence, and don't end a sentence with a preposition.

I scanned the rest of the text and had the feeling that it was well written, with the exceptions noted above. However, I still question the length. I make it near 120,000 words. You don't need to relate every incident in order to get your story across. but only you can decide what to cut.

Sincerely,

Jack
John W. Lambert
President

1. Several places throughout the manuscript you refer to CCN as Combat Command North. This is incorrect, it was Command and Control North.
2. Page 222. I did not go directly into Aviation, Officers commissioned with a regular commission had to serve a year ground duty before flight school. After graduation from West Point I attended Infantry officers basic, Ranger School and Airborne School. Then I served year in Germany in an infantry battalion. I DEROs back to the states in Jan 70, started flight school Feb of 70.
3. I took my in country check ride with Paul Stewart on about Jan 18 or 19. Part of my check ride consisted of flying down to Division headquarters so he could talk to personnel about the change in policy regarding Warrant Officers getting out of the service after a one year tour, without having to extend 6 months. That is when he was informed that he would just have to serve the additional thirty days to make up for the leave that he had taken. This next item I am going to tell you is absolutely spooky in light of the events of Feb 8, but it is the honest truth. We were doing emergency procedures (autos, hydraulics off, stuck pedals, etc) in the pattern at Camp Evans and I asked Paul about tail rotor failures. I felt that the program at Rucker had really covered stuck left and stuck right, but had been kind of vague about what to do if the tail rotor just stopped turning. Paul's comment was that you extend your right foot to the right and your left foot to the left then bend over between your legs and kiss your ass goodbye. After that he proceeded to tell me about having to evaluate exactly how bad it was affecting the aircraft and wind considerations for a running landing.
4. Page 234. The infamous Nighthawk incident. This was about my fifth or sixth day of flying missions. I had flown all day with Dean Grau, and because he was not yet an Aircraft Commander, but just a First Pilot, I had flown in the left seat. This had been my first exposure to left seat flying in the Huey. I did not know Don Mears from Adam until I met him that evening while preflighting the Nighthawk. I knew nothing about him or his capabilities. He informed me that he would have to fly the right seat because he was not an aircraft commander. I did not know that he had his AC orders revoked for lack of judgement for hovering into the tail rotor of another aircraft while forming up for a mission at Mai Loc. I also did not find out until weeks or months later that he was extremely poor on instruments. The platoon leader, John Bottman had just transferred in after being the group safety officer for 6 months and I am sure that he also probably was not aware of the situation. The weather had generally been marginal all day, in fact that evening just before dark Dave Nelson took four aircraft up to Quang Tri in response to a Prairie Fire with CCN. They tried to get into Laos but had to turn back because the weather had really gotten a lot worse. By the way Dave probably save my life that evening, but more about that later. We got the call around 11:30 PM to respond to a

sniper team that had been reporting movement around them and then contact had been lost. We departed Camp Evans in real shitty weather and headed out towards the first ridge line right beyond FSB Jack. Mears was flying and he was 300 to 400 feet AGL. He started getting into the scud and then told me to take over that he had vertigo. I took the controls and descended us back out of the scud to some sort of visual conditions. After a few moments Don said he was OK and took the controls. Within just a few seconds he was again starting to get into the scud. Again he had me take the controls and get us "VFR". This same thing happened once or twice more then when I was on the controls we hit a big updraft and started climbing at close to 1500 fpm. I gradually reduced to collective to almost flat pitch but we continued climbing and then started getting ~~some~~ pretty good turbulence. We eventually leveled off somewhere between 3000 and 3500 feet. At this point either I or Mears told Evans GCA (we'd been talking to them all along) that we needed an immediate GCA back to Evans. Mears announced to me that I would have to do it because he was still "fucked up". GCA started to give me right turns to get away from the mountains, but I was having a very difficult time controlling the aircraft in right turns. In fact, immediately after the crash and for several years afterwards I was convinced that there was something wrong with the controls, that we had either broke or overstressed something during our turbulent climb. Now I believed that I was probably starting to get vertigo and that right turn from the left seat was too disorienting for me. Any way, they started giving me left turns and that seem to be working out, then we hit some more good turbulence and I lost control and we descended to around 2600 feet. There for a short time I seemed to have control again, but I'm positive I must have been pretty screwed up by now. We started descending out of control again. Somewhere in this final descent Mears got on the controls again but to no avail. He eventually threw his hands up in the air and announced that we were going to crash. I got back on the controls but was having no success in correcting the out of control descent. Mears was no longer focused on the instruments and that's probably what saved us, because he was looking up when we broke out of the clouds, saw the lights of Camp Evans, got back on the controls and started to try to correct our steep bank just ~~before~~ we impacted. Obviously, we still crashed, but I believe that the little bit of corrective action that he took probably righted us enough that we didn't take the full brunt of the crash completely inverted. I also believe that if I hadn't got back on the controls after he threw his hands up in the air, we most likely would have come out of the clouds completely inverted and no corrective would have been effective.

After the crash, I was trapped in the left side of the cockpit for 5 to 10 minutes while Mears and the crew tried to free me. Earlier that evening when Nelson had launched on the Prairie Fire he realized that he didn't have his chicken plate so he asked to borrow mine. He told me I wouldn't need it on Nighthawk. I know if I hadn't given it to him I would have been wearing it during the crash. It was sized Extra Large-long and

it would either have broken my neck or crushed my larynx and suffocated me. I was completely compressed down by the roof of the chopper and could only take about a quarter of breath as it was.

Okay Tom this is the complete incident. I would not want to see Mears hurt by any of this so I would trust your judgment in sanitizing this a little bit. I never told the accident investigators about his unwillingness to take the controls or throwing his hands off the controls. I knew he was DEROSing and ETSing so no purpose would be served and I on the other hand had eleven months to serve with people I wanted to get along with and learn from, whom I didn't want "hating me as some rat fink RLO". Also, the crew chief was a fellow who had ten months in country, and he broke his arm so he also was sent home. It was not Bobo. The gunner was PFC Robertson who was with Bobo, Stewart and Doody on Feb 8. Robertson had come over from a grunt unit where he had been wounded by grenade fragments, and he was on the aircraft that crashed in the LZ in November killing a grunt.

3. Page 246. Maj Lloyd graduated from Clemson in the early sixties and was only in his very early thirties in 1971. He was still on active duty in 1990. If your information was correct that would have made him almost sixty with forty years in service and the Army doesn't allow full Colonels to stay past 30 years service.

4. Page 250, Chain 65, Battalion Commander was LTC Peachey.

5. PAGE 251, Stewart's transmission was that his tail rotor drive shaft was gone.

6. Page 254. I take issue with the statement we were combat ineffective. We DEROSed a lot of aircraft and suffered a lot of battle damage, but we always put up 10 to 12 aircraft and sometimes we put up as many as 15. We always got replacement aircraft within about 48 hours.

7. Page 291. Doan and McKeane rescued Lloyd and the crew chief and the gunner. When they were on there way out Bottman first tried to determine if they had everybody. They replied that they didn't have Nelson. Then we asked them if Nelson had even escaped the burning aircraft. After some confusion they told us the crew chief had pulled him out. Bottman then called Butler to cover us that we were going after Nelson. On the way in I kept glancing down thru the trees and everywhere I looked I saw NVA. We got to Ranger South and Bottman brought the Huey to a hover facing north. We sat there for about thirty seconds and John was getting ready to leave when I saw Nelson out my side running thru the trees towards us. This was when he ^{DW} ~~got~~ into the cargo bay and flipped on his back to protect his spit shined boots. That night in the club Skip came up to me and informed me that he was completely expended before Bottman even started in but decided if he escorted us closely he might keep some heads down. I guess it worked we didn't take any hits.

8. Page 293. Ranger South was never overrun. We attempted resupply over the next few days and finally evacuated it about the 25th or 26th. On the 21st we tried to resupply Ranger South. Lloyd and Nelson again led the flight. They only took a couple of other Hueys, most of us remained at Khe Sahn. CW2 Cofer was flying with Ted Olsen. Cofer had less than two weeks in country remaining. He took severe AK wound to the leg. We heard later that he kept the leg but it was a couple of inches shorter. Crew chief and gunner pulled Cofer back into cargo area and got a tourniquet on his leg while Olsen flew the aircraft back to the Khe Sahn medevac pad. On about the 23rd we were involved in another resupply attempt at Ranger South. I was flying with Butch Doan. The ARVNs had a 106mm recoilless rifle set up just off the side of the helipad. As we were on very short final, looking at the ground guide in front of us, there was a tremendous explosion by the recoilless position. My first reaction was that the dumb SOBs had fired that thing right past us. This was followed very quickly by another explosion in the same area. This kind of started us sliding to the left, then there two big explosions on the left that stopped our leftward drift. At this time Butch was grabbing a real armpit full of collective trying to get off the LZ. Just as we slid off the ridge into the draw to the north, two more explosions occurred right where we'd been hovering. As we cleared the smoke from the explosions and starting focusing thru the windscreens, we became aware that the ground guide was now plastered in small pieces all over the front of our Huey. We basically arrived at the Pad at the same time as an NVA 130mm artillery barrage.

9. Page 299. This is just a repeat of the Ranger North adventure.

10. Page 301. Again just a repeat of events that transpired on the Ranger North rescue.

11. Page 306. We did Lolo, Liz and Sophia on Mar 3, 4, and 5, respectively.

12. Page 311. The fellow hit by the rotor blade died right there on the LZ. See the account of Lolo in the 1994 VHPA Directory.

13. Page 322. If you have the map of Laos that was sent along with the 1994 VHPA directory follow along as I tell you what happened. Your account of LZ Sophia and Nelson is somewhat confusing and I believe your directions are a little screwed up. The flight path to the LZ was supposed to right over the valley, basically basically flying west north west between QL9 and the river. As we flew over that hairpin curve in the river just 3 klicks north northeast of Sophia we were to turn straight towards the LZ, and land going straight in. On exiting we were to turn immediately east bound and get back over the valley. Things got screwed up when the first few aircraft (I don't know what unit) flew past that button hook or hairpin. Upon realizing their

mistake they just followed the lead aircraft as he turned south, reached the escarpment then turned back southeast bound right along the escarpment, flying along the escarpment for 2-3 klicks back into Sophia. That's where all the AA was that was doing so much damage. Nelson got hit while he was northwest of Sophia on long final back to the southeast. He then climbed back out to the east and was over the valley to the east northeast of Liz when he exploded. Also as a side note, I've noticed the mention of the surface to air missiles. The NVA weren't shooting at choppers with the big missiles and they had not yet introduced the shoulder fired STRELA. That did not happen until the 1972 offensive. I had been watching Nelson's aircraft for probably a full thirty seconds before he exploded and there was no missile ~~SMOKE~~ trail leading ^{TO THE} aircraft. Again I know a lot of peoples memories have dimmed over the years, but the NVA did not have that shoulder fired SAM in Laos/N^{orthern} ~~1971~~ ten months later they started exacting a heavy toll of helos with it, but it wasn't used in Laos ¹⁹⁷¹

14. Page 332. I not sure of the exact date but it was probably around March 4 or 5th. Doan and I were flying behind WO Knutson and CPT Meredith Lane on short final to hot LZ. Knutson took round in leg. but I was taking pictures and not ready to take ~~THE~~ aircraft. They cr could to their air for that crew to I first felt some radios went dead. ear cups on my he just smiled and sky. My greenho went down the b above and behin aircraft plugge away. Also tw entered the ci console. It w swapped war s' because on th troops into E. Phoenix birds got ass Hac Bao insertion. They were 5. The first flight of four tried go QL9 and all those aircraft got shot to hell and had to turn back before reaching the LZ. The C&C then directed us to fly along the escarpment, telling us when to turn north for the LZ. Flying north we were able to see an small dirt road thru the trees. C&C told us to follow that road to the LZ. All of a sudden we broke out into this big field and felt naked as hell. The whole tree line was solid muzzle flashes. Ted kicked the nose left and sat down on QL9. The Hac Bao unloaded except for one that was already wounded. As we came out of the LZ several different pilots in other aircraft were telling us we were on fire, so we

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headed to the river. Enroute the crew chief and gunner got out on the skids to find the fire and discovered we weren't on fire (yet) but we were losing fuel rapidly and it was leaving a smoke trail. Nelson's death from the day before was very much in our minds but we quickly decided to try for Aloui. Ted really hauled that Huey around in a tight left turn to the east and as soon as he rolled out three .51 Cals greeted us. but they led us by too much and the Cobras quickly got them ducking for cover. We made it to Aloui and with in a few minutes were picked up by the C&C. The next day was March 7th and we got a break from Laos and were only flying REMF missions along the coast. We were back at Evans for lunch. Maj Lloyd approached me in the messhall and asked me to come to his office after lunch. The story as it was told to me was that when Olsen and I went down the day before Lloyd was with Peachey and COL Davis (Group commander) in the tactical operations ^{CENTER} Lloyd was asked who the crew was on the down bird. When he told them, the group commander asked if I was the same Davis who been involved in the Nighthawk. Lloyd said yes, then Davis wanted to know what else I'd been involved in. Lloyd informed him. Davis informed Peachey he thought I should be taken out of flying for awhile. Peachey told Lloyd I would be the new Battalion Supply Officer (S4). That I could fly on an occasional basis, but was prohibited from flying in Laos. I know it sounds wacky now, but I protested this, and expressed my desires to remain a Phoenix. I was told that after the IG inspection in May my status would be reconsidered. After LTC Peachey got shot down and wounded, LTC Phillips took command of the 158th. On the first night he spent at Evans I saw a light in his office and immediately knocked on his door and entered. I attempted to explain my situation and my desire to return to the Phoenix. He literally cut me off at the knees, told me he knew all about me and that I was going to remain the S4 until after the IG inspection. He then kicked me out of his office. On May 6 or 7 the IG inspection was complete and I was called into the ^{XO} Battalion XO office and told I could move into the ~~operations~~ shop or go back to the Phoenix. The next morning I was flying with the Phoenix.

15. Page 360. In 1974 I was attending the Infantry Officers Advance Course at Ft Benning. Most of my 200 classmates had been grunt platoon leaders and company commanders. None of them expressed any sympathy for Calley. They really felt he got what he deserved (before the pardon). Almost all of them had similar circumstances and yet could not and would not condone mass indiscriminate killing of Vietnamese. Most felt very dishonored when Calley was pardoned.

16. Page 374. First of all I had been promoted to Captain while in flight school was a Captain for my whole tour. Because of the over abundance of commissioned officers in aviation at that time and my comparatively recent date of rank I was not a platoon leader yet. The incident I am going to tell you I remember as having occurred on the 17th of May, but it may have happened the day before. I was not involved in administrative duties but was

down on the flight line early (I have never been a late sleeper) preflighting my helicopter. I was very early and the aircraft commander had not yet shown up. I noticed Soyland across the flight line preflighting his aircraft, and I saw his enlisted crew, but I did not see his copilot. After a short while he came over to me and asked if I would fly with him because he was already running late and his copilot (Dale Pearce) hadn't shown up yet. That was fine with me so I transferred my gear to his Huey and we informed operations to reassign Pearce to fly in my place. We went on and departed on the days mission. Sometime in the early afternoon. the call went out over the company frequency for all aircraft to get down to the strip at FSB Birmingham, that there was a tactical emergency involving an American unit in heavy contact. We arrived and got briefed for the mission. Soyland and I would be flying recovery bird in case anyone got shot down. After the lift of reinforcements to the American unit was complete we returned to Birmingham and shut down. After shutting down we noticed Pearce getting out of a Huey a short distance away. Soyland and I had discussed on and off about what to do with Pearce. I decided I was going to chew some ass over his inability to get out of bed that morning, but then Soyland asked if I wouldn't mind switching aircraft again so that Soyland could have first crack at Pearce and then I would talk with Pearce that evening. Realizing that a good ass chewing from a fellow warrant, especially the SIP, would probably have much more affect than one from an RLO, I thought that sounded like a great idea. Soyland was really pissed. So I went over to Pearce and told to get his gear and get in with Soyland and I was going to get back in my original aircraft. Shortly after that, some of the crews got released. Soyland and Pearce were in that group, so they returned to Camp Evans. I can't for the life of me remember who I was flying with now, but we wound up staying on standby at Birmingham until just before dark. We then were released and returned to Camp Evans, where we learned that upon their return from Birmingham, Soyland and Pearce, along with three other Phoenix aircraft had been scrambled out on a CCN Prairie Fire and that they had been shot down and were missing. As a side light to that, the crew chief was SP5 Parker, who had been Olsen's and my crew chief when we got shot up on the Hac Bao insertion to rescue Witchdoctor 5. I always felt especially close to Parker (I never told him this) because the guy could pass for the identical twin of my younger brother. Tom, this is the way I remember it, but this incident of Pearce missing his take off time could have happened the day before, except I don't remember chewing him out that night, which makes think it must have happened the day of the shoot down, so I didn't have the opportunity to talk with him.

PAGE 450 - STEWARD + DAWY WENT DOWN EAST OF PLAIN