



Easy Target: The Long Strange Trip of a Scout Pilot in Vietnam

Tom Smith

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From Publishers Weekly:

Flying scout helicopters in Vietnam was the aerial counterpart of walking point. Initially cast as target-spotters for gunships and air-assault forces, the scout pilots evolved into live bait as enemy weapons and tactics improved. Their small helicopters were vulnerable even to minor damage, and parachuting from a damaged bird was impossible. Casualty rates could be as high as 50%; a scout unit often resembled a WWI fighter squadron, with replacements dying almost before they could unpack. Yet fresh volunteers kept coming, even if only to stay out of the infantry. In his visceral memoir, Smith tells the familiar story of a young man who flunked out of college, sampled the 1960s counterculture and found himself first in the army, then in Vietnam. For Smith, the war was a theater of the absurd whose only meaning was survival. His narrative of low-altitude, high-risk operations in 1969-70 replicates that of others: initial confusion giving way first to proficiency and pleasure in stalking and killing anonymous enemies, later to a sense that both his skill and his luck are running out. Gritty enough to appeal to adventure fans, this memoir makes a useful contribution to a subject, American helicopter pilots in Vietnam, whose recorded history is largely still in its anecdotal stage.

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