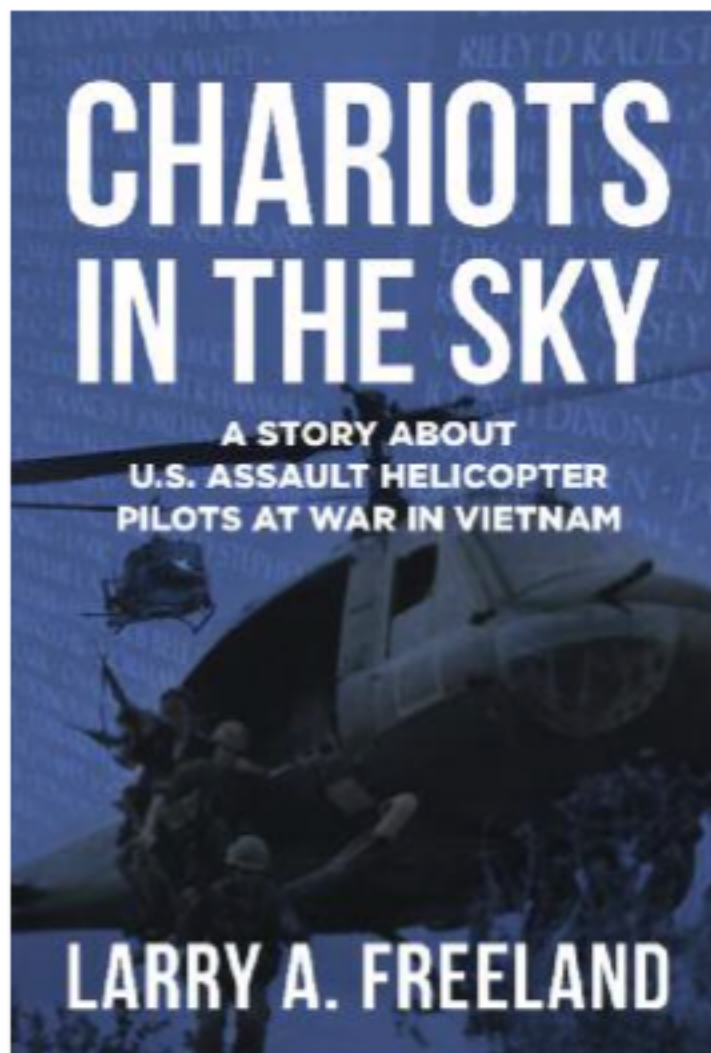


Book Review

Chariots in the sky

Larry A Freeland

Publish Authority



An elderly relation, who spent several years in a Japanese concentration camp during WW2, told me that, "awful though the circumstances were, we were young and could still find things to laugh about". I was reminded of that when I started reading this book about helicopter pilots flying in Vietnam.

The flying was wonderful, challenging and exciting, except for one thing: if you made a mistake, or even were unlucky, it would probably kill you.

Flying conditions were hot, humid, and extremely testing. There was a high turnover of pilots, hence many new recruits who were inexperienced and in 'over their heads.' Worse, sometimes there were commanders who made the situation worse by incompetence or downright nastiness.

In such circumstances, it is not just because you are

young you need to find things to laugh about: without them you would probably go mad.

One particularly nice example of this is the *Helicopter Wisdom*,

a list in the Pilots Club which included:

Cover your Buddy; so he can be around to cover for you.

And: Chicken plates are not something you order in a restaurant.

(Chicken plates are body armour).

Chariots in the Sky is seen from the perspective of Captain Taylor St. James "TJ to my friends," a cocky but extremely likeable Huey pilot. It starts in 1971, with a combat mission.

TJ is leading a formation of Hueys, there are Cobras above. You are immediately there, with him in the sky and living the mission with him, you feel his excitement and trepidation. You empathize with his sorrow over the pilots killed and his relief on returning to base, and his humour.

Sadly, it is not all light-hearted joshing in Vietnam and because Larry has very much pulled us into the story we also suffer the anxiety of the initiation ceremony of the new young lieutenant, his hangover next morning and the sadness of the death of the popular company commander.

After the death of the popular commander, a new man from outside takes his place and, as you might expect, he is not fitting like a glove and our hero gets the brunt of the pain.

Without wanting to give the story away the book then gets extremely exciting and you are wondering whether the hero will return home. This anticipation is increased by weaving into the story his love life with his wife, Sandy, and the information she gives him about how the Vietnam War is now looked at back at home.

As it we know, by 1971 the Vietnam War was no longer popular in the USA and the pilots were not treated as heroes on their return, which led to some sad results.

A nicely written, exciting book. Larry Freeland was in Vietnam himself serving one tour with the 101st Airborne Division as a CH-47 pilot and he replays the feeling of time and place extremely well.

Well worth reading.