

Huey

By

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This story is dedicated to all those brave young men that flew Hueys and to the crew members that lost their lives in the Vietnam War.

Chapter 1

It was in the middle of August in 1957.

All across American, the vast majority of young boys were growing up with dreams of being pilots. Many teens recently bragged how they were going to become jet pilots. They wanted to be like John Glenn. Marine Major John Glenn set a transcontinental record in July of 1957. This was for a flight from Los Angeles to New York in an F8 Crusader. So many young boys wanted to be like John Glenn. But other young boys had dreams of flying different types of aircraft like helicopters.

The evening was cooling down in Glendale, California, to comfortable seventy-two degrees. All the young lads in that town were inside homes with their eyes glued to their favorite TV shows. Many had their eyes glued to the TV to watch *Gunsmoke* with dreams of being Cowboys or a famous Marshall.

But at the Grayson home, young Michael had dreams of going on high-flying adventures. He was one of those youths that had dreams of being a helicopter pilot.

Micheal was a typical blonde-haired boy. He wore denim blue jeans, plaid colored shirts, and black converse sneakers. He sat in the middle of the living room with his eyes glued to the black and white Zenith brown wooden console TV.

On TV, this evening was his favorite show called *Whirlybirds*. This was a helicopter adventure show. Pilots Chuck Martin and Pete (PI) Moore flew around saving the day. He never missed an episode since the show first aired in February. Tonight was the new episode called *Cycle of Terror*.

The opening credits of *Whirlybirds* appeared on the TV. It showed a Bell 47 helicopter flying through a rocky

mountainous area. This TV show sparked Michaels dreams of becoming a helicopter pilot.

In the kitchen, Elaine Grayson was Michael's shapely blonde haired mother. She had an apron around her dress and waited by the oven. Inside it was baking cookies for Michael to munch while he watched TV.

In the garage, Harry Grayson was Michael's brown-haired crew cut father. He was tuning up the V-8 engine of his green 1953 Chevrolet four-door Bel-Air. He finished wrenching in the third new spark plug in the engine.

Harry had a Zenith transistor radio on the workbench. He listened to the local radio station that played the *Chances Are* song by Johnny Mathis.

Harry whistled *Chances Are* while he removed the fourth old spark plug from the engine.

Kevin Coogan had flaming red hair with freckles sprinkled all over his pale skin. He ran down the street toward the Grayson home. Kevin was a regular at the Grayson home in the evenings since his family did not own a TV.

Elaine pulled the pan of twelve mouth-watering chocolate chip cookies out of the oven. She placed the hot pan on the top of the stove to give them a few minutes to cool off.

She walked over and opened the refrigerator. She reached inside and removed a milk bottle and poured some into a glass. She placed the milk bottle back into the fridge.

She walked over to the stove and scooped up four of her delicious chocolate delights and placed them on a plate.

She grabbed the glass of milk, and plate then walked out of the kitchen.

Elaine walked into the living room and over to Michael.

He sat on the floor with his eyes glued to the Whirlybirds show. After placing the plate and glass on the floor, she kissed Michael on the top of his head. "Don't spill

your milk or get crumbs on the floor," Elaine reminded him while she headed back to the kitchen.

"I won't," responded Michael. His eyes were still glued to the scene where Chuck and PT took off in their Bell 47G helicopter from the airport.

Michael grabbed a cookie and took a bite while he watched the Bell 47G ascend into the sky.

Back in the kitchen, Elaine walked over to the refrigerator, opened it up, and removed a can of Olympia beer.

She walked over to the counter by the sink and removed a can opener from one of the drawers. She heard a knock on the front door while she opened the can of beer.

She walked out of the kitchen and went through the living room to the front door out in the hallway.

Michael was too involved in the Whirlybirds show to answer the front door.

Elaine opened the front door, and Kevin Coogan was anxious on the front stoop.

"Hi Misses Grayson," Kevin said out while he bolted through the opening and bolted down the hallway.

"Hello Kevin," Elaine said with a light chuckle. She closed the door and watched while Kevin bolted into the living room.

Elaine walked back in the kitchen and headed into the garage to give Harry his beer.

Kevin ran up to Michael. "Mom was late with dinner," Kevin said while he plopped down by Michael's side.

Kevin snatched one of the cookies off the plate and took a bite. "Did I miss much?" he asked Michael who had a mouth full of cookie and watched the commercial for Post Cereal.

"Naw. Some bad guys on motorcycles are shooting at people. They shot at the Chuck and PT while they in the Whirlybird," Michael said while he grabbed his glass of milk and took a sip.

Kevin looked concerned. "Did they crash?"

"Naw. They're okay. Only hit the gas tank and some gas leaked out," Michal said while he grabbed another cookie and took a bite.

Kevin looked relieved and wiped his forehead with his left hand. "Whew. You scared me."

Elaine walked back into the living room. She had four replacement chocolate chip cookies and another glass of milk.

She dumped the cookies on the plate and set Kevin's glass of milk in front of him.

"Thank you, Misses Grayson," Kevin said while he snatched up one of the cookies.

Elaine gave Kevin a loving smile then she walked out of the kitchen.

Michael and Kevin pretended they were flying helicopters while they watched the show. But that changed in five minutes. They both had two sawed-off broomsticks in their hands.

One broomstick was the cyclic control.

The other broomstick was the collective control.

In their minds, they were flying helicopters chasing after the bad guy on the motorcycle.

"You can't get away," Michael yelled at the TV.

"Let's get him," Kevin called out from his pretend helicopter.

On TV, Chuck flew the Bell 47G inches over the head of the motorcycle rider. The rider hit the ground with his motorcycle and rolled down an incline.

Chuck descended the Bell 47G and PT jumped out and went after the motorcycle rider.

Michal and Kevin clapped and cheered when PT and Chuck again stopped the villains.

Kevin jumped off the floor. "I gotta go home," he said while he watched the ending Whirlybird credits.

"I'll see ya tomorrow, Kevin," Michael said while he stood up and collected the two plates and glasses.

Kevin ran out of the living room.

Elaine was finishing up with a little light cleaning of the countertops in the kitchen.

"Goodnight Misses Grayson," Kevin called out while he ran out and slammed the front door closed.

"Time for bed, Michael," Elaine said while he walked into the kitchen.

"Can't I stay up late?" Michael said while he handed her the two plates and glasses.

"Best you get to bed early, since you're hard to wake up in the morning," she said.

Michael looked disappointed while he walked away and headed down the hallway.

"Pick up those broomsticks in the living room," she said while he headed out of the kitchen. She knew it was a tradition of Michael and Kevin pretending to be helicopter pilots.

Elaine placed the plates and glasses in the sink and started washing them by hand.

Later that night, Michael had the covers pulled over his head. He used a flashlight to read his favorite magazine. This was the June 10th issue of Life magazine about a helicopter safari. Michael loved this article since it contained pictures of the Bell 47G helicopter.

The next day arrived, and Michael and Kevin decided to play in the backyard since it was a sunny day.

Last night's Whirlybird episode show stirred their imaginations.

They played their usual game. This was where Michael would climb and sit on the horizontal pole of his mom's closeline pole. This was his seat of an imaginary Bell 47B helicopter. Kevin sat on his bicycle, pretending to be the bad guy causing terror with his motorcycle.

The boys recreated last night's Cycle of Terror Whirlybird episode.

Kevin rode his bicycle in circles around the clothesline pole.

Michael made helicopter sounds while he looked down at Kevin. "You can't get away from me, as I always get the bad guys."

"You'll never catch me, whirlybird man!" Kevin yelled while riding circles around the clothesline pole.

"I'll get you because I'm the best helicopter pilot in the whole world!" Michael yelled down at Kevin then made more helicopter sounds.

Michael leaned to his right side to bank his imaginary Bell 47G to the right.

In her kitchen, Elaine washed dishes in the kitchen sink wearing her yellow rubber gloves. While she scrubbed a breakfast plate, she glanced out the window to check up on the boys. She cracked a joyful smile when she saw the boys playing and glanced down at the dish she was washing. Her eyes lit up with an idea.

She rushed out of the kitchen and headed down the hallway to her bedroom.

Elaine returned with her Kodak Signet 30 camera in hand.

She rushed back to the kitchen window and snapped a picture of Michael and Kevin playing. She snapped another picture for Kevin's parents. She set the camera down on the counter. She glanced out the window in time to see Michael while he leaned to his left to bank his imaginary 47G. He leaned too far and fell off the pole. Her eyes widened in fear when she saw him fall. Her body tensed the second Michael slammed hard on the ground. "Michael!" she yelled out, then dropped the dish into the hot water in the sink.

Elaine ran out over to the back door in the kitchen.

Out in the backyard, Michael lay in the grass in pain, crutching his right arm.

Kevin jumped off his bicycle and ran over to his best friend. "Are you okay?"

"My arm hurts!" Michael cried out in pain, still crutching his right arm.

Elaine ran over to Michael and immediately knelt by Michael's side.

"My arm hurts, mommy," he cried out in pain.

Elaine got Michael up on his feet and rushed him back to the house.

Kevin looked worried while he stood in the yard and watched Michael go back inside with Elaine. He walked over and picked up his bicycle and headed back to his house.

Later that evening, Michael sat on the floor and watched TV with his right arm in a cast.

Harry worked as an animator for Disney and took a break from his work in the garage. He drew up a cartoon of a pilot falling out of a helicopter on Michael's cast.

Michael started the fall term at school in September, and he was somewhat of a hero with that cast on his arm.

Michael and Kevin were inseparable during the rest of their high school years. They spent their summers surfing and chasing after the sexy bikini-clad girls at the beaches. But becoming a helicopter pilot was still a dream of Michael's. He knew he could fulfill that dream by joining the US Army. Michael would take countless rides on the Ferris wheel on the Santa Monica Pier. This gave him the feeling he was flying in the sky.

Michel and Kevin graduated from high school in June of 1968. They spent two weeks at the Santa Monica Beach and tried their best to inside the bikinis' of sexy girls. That did not happen. But Kevin did meet Nancy Myers, and he fell in love.

It was now late June, and Michael was old enough to enlist in the Army without his parent's permission.

This upset Elaine. But Harry was proud his son wanted to serve for his country. But deep down inside, he

was a little nervous with the potential that Michael could fight in Vietnam. He knew that there was a high potential this would happen.

Kevin opted not to join since he started a loving relationship with Nancy. Plus he got a job at a local grocery store stocking shelves. He had planned on working his way up to one of the manager's slot then he would marry Nancy in a few years.

On Monday, July 15th, 1968, Michael left for Army boot camp at Ford Ord in California.

It was ten weeks of a rude awakening for Michael. Everybody dressed the same in those plain green fatigues. They all had the same buzzed haircuts. They lost their privacy with sleeping in bunks in a huge opened aired room. Plus taking a shower with other guys was awkward. Especially if you were not blessed down in the groin department. Michael endured his training missing his mother, father, and best friend Kevin.

Elaine would lay awake at nights thinking about her baby. She recalled those sleepless nights when Harry was in the Air Force stationed in the Korean War. Harry worked for the Stars and Stripes newspaper in Korea. Elaine still worried the communist might take away the love of her life.

Harry was still concerned that Michael would be fighting in Vietnam. He tried to believe this was his son's duty to stop the evil communist aggression in Vietnam. He and Elaine never mentioned the Vietnam possibility to each other.

Chapter 2

After completing Army basic training, Michael passed the qualification exams. He was going to become a helicopter pilot for the US Army. Michael was in heaven. His childhood dream was becoming a reality.

Michael's next assignment was at Fort Wolters. It was four miles northeast of Mineral Wells in Texas.

It was Monday, September 30th. Michael sat on a bus that drove through the main gate of Fort Wolters. By the gate on a brown stone pedestal was an orange Hughes 269 helicopter. The Army designation was TH-55 Osage. An arched entrance over the road that read "US Army, Primary Helicopter Center, Fort Wolters, Texas." On another brown stone, pedestal was a green and orange Hiller Model 360 helicopter. The Army designation was the OH-23 Raven.

The happy young men on the bus were eager to start their training in helicopters.

They stepped off the silver MCI bus with their suitcases in hand and huge grins.

They headed off to the Administration building to get processed into the base.

Michael in class 68-45a-1. He was on his way for his primary helicopter flight training as a Warrant Officer Candidate.

During the preflight training days, Michael and the other candidates marched to class.

His preflight training consisted of classroom instruction on the basics of aerodynamics. Michael hated the bookwork but knew it was a required.

November 1968 rolled around. Michael completed his preflight training. He was ready to start with his four-month primary flight training at Fort Wolters.

It was a warm day, and the temperature was sixty-eight degrees. Michael stood in formation outside his barracks.

He stood with forty-nine other Warrant Officer Candidates.

All dressed in fatigues.

All the candidates wore yellow baseball caps.

This indicated their class color.

Michael stood next to Eric Wilson.

Eric was the same age as Michael and was from Burbank, California. They immediately became the best of friends since they were both from California. This helped overcome their occasional feelings of being homesick. Like Michael, Eric was also an avid fan of the old Whirlybirds TV show. And that show also sparked his dreams of flying helicopters.

While in formation, the sound of flapping of blades of TH-55 Osage helicopters filled the air. This made their mouths water. They all were itching to get their hands on the controls of a copter.

A few minutes later, a green Army International bus drove up and stopped by the formation. The door opened, and SSG Vincent "Vinny" Moore stepped off the bus looking tough.

Vinny was an Army lifer with two years left until he was eligible to retire. He sported a crew cut that did not hide his bald patches. His starched fatigues had creases that appeared sharp as a knife. His black combat boots were spit-polished to a mirror shine.

"Okay Candidates. I'm Sergeant Moore. I'm going to take you to the flight line," Vinny said in a raised voice while glaring at the formation of candidates. "So get on my fucking bus!"

Michael, Eric, and the other candidates stood with a look of disbelief. They thought their basic training days were long gone.

"And I mean now!" Vinny screamed at the candidates. He used his old Drill Instructor voice even sprayed spit at some of the faces of the candidates.

Moore glared at the candidates while they scrambled over to the bus like a bunch of boot camp recruits.

After the last candidate stepped on the bus, Vinny stepped on the bus and the doors closed.

The pimply-faced Army Corporal drove the bus away down the street. The candidates all had widened eyes and smiles. They couldn't wait to get inside a helicopter.

Vinny sat in the seat behind the driver. He rolled his eyes when he heard all the excitement with flying helicopters. It was an all too familiar sound he was not fond of hearing over and over again.

Michael and Eric sat side by side in one of the two-person seats.

"I can't believe it. I'm finally going to fly choppers. I've been waiting for this moment since I was a kid," Michael told Eric.

"I could tell you love helicopters by how you aced all those tests," Eric replied.

"Yeah, I've been studying everything I could about those machines since I was nine years old," Michael said. He had sparkles in his eyes. He simulated his right hand was on the cyclic control while his left hand was on the collective control. "I'll be flying that baby within the first hour of having my hands her controls. I should have my wings by the end of the week," he added with an air of arrogance.

A candidate sitting in the seat behind Michael rolled his eyes when he heard his arrogant claim.

"I should be taking lessons from you," Eric said while he played along with his friend's arrogance.

"Don't worry. I'll give you some pointers, my friend," Michael added and looked serious.

A candidate sitting in the seat behind Michael rolled his eyes.

He looked at the guy next to him. That candidate rolled his eyes, indicating he heard Michael's arrogance.

The bus drove down the flightline of the Downing heliport. All the candidates were chattering up a storm with eyes big and bright.

The mouths of the candidates drooled. A sea of Hiller (OH-23 Raven) and Hughes (TH-55 Osage) helicopters were in formation on the flightline.

The bus drove down the flight line with the candidates almost wetting their pants.

The bus stopped by a large building, and the Corporal driver opened up the doors.

"Get the fuck off my bus!" Moore yelled at the candidates.

The candidates jumped up and ran off the bus with Vinny right behind them.

Outside the large doors of the building stood Captain Bill Ernst. He was the flight leader with a clipboard in hand. He watched while his fresh candidates ran off the bus.

The candidates stood in formation.

Vinny walked over to Ernst. "Here are your fresh candidates, sir," he said, snapped a salute.

Ernst saluted back and looked at the formation of young kids.

"Listen up. I'm your flight leader Captain Bill Ernst. Now, the first order of business. Wear your hats backward," Ernst told the formation while he walked back and forth in front of the front line.

Michael and Eric looked at each other thinking that was stupid.

"What the hell is that all about?" Michael leaned over, asking Eric.

"Beats me," Eric replied.

"Do it now!" Vinny hollered at the candidates the second he realized they were stalling.

The candidates obeyed Sergeant Moore and wore their yellow baseball caps backward.

"Now, you'll always wear your hat in this configuration while on my flight line. You'll wear it this way until you solo. After that. You're authorized to wear it in the proper configuration," Ernst addressed the candidates. He glanced at his clipboard then glanced at the candidates. "I want you to go over to those tables and get your flight gear starting from left to right. Then get back into formation," he added while he pointed back inside the hangar.

The candidates looked inside the building. They saw tables lined up in a straight line. On the tables were all sorts of flight gear with enlisted men waiting behind the table to assist.

The candidates started marching into the hangar and over to the tables.

Vinny stood in the doorway and watched the candidates. "I can't wait for my orders to come through," he talked to himself, as he hated this assignment in Texas. Vinny longed for some real action. He had the irresistible itch to put his old Army training to work killing Communist in Vietnam.

A little while later, the candidates were back in formation outside the building. Their arms held a flight suit, flight helmet, and flight gloves. They also had a flight computer, student notebook, and the owners manual for a TH-55 helicopter.

"Look at all this cool gear," Michael leaned over and told Eric.

"This sure beats combat gear," Eric replied.

Michael nodded in agreement. "We're fucking lucky we get to fly helicopters," Michael added.

Eric nodded in agreement with sparkles in his eyes.

A little while later, Ernst had the candidates back in one of the rooms of the building. They sat in assigned seats arranged in small groups.

Ernst stood in the front of the room facing the candidates. Then he started pacing around for a short distance.

"Today will begin your flight training. You'll meet your instructor pilots shortly," Ernst added while pacing back and forth. He stopped and glared at the candidates. "Now, I only have one rule. And that rule is," he said and paused. "Don't fuck up any of my copters," he said in a raised voice. "We have over twelve hundred helicopters here at Fort Wolters. I don't want you crashing them," he said, then stopped pacing and looked the candidates square in their eyes. "Do you understand me?"

"Yes sir," all the candidates sang out in unison.

Ernst hesitated for a few seconds while he stared at the door of the room. The door opened.

Instructor Pilots (IP) walked inside. Some of the IPs were civilians and wore the standard green Army flight suits. There were also Army Warrant Officer instructors.

"Gentlemen, here are your new students," Ernst told the IPs while they stood in the back of the room.

The IPs broke off in different directions and headed to the tables in search of their students.

IP George Perry started his helicopter career in the Army during the Korean War and flew the Bell 47.

He ferried wounded soldiers to a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit. IP Perry retired from the Army in 1966.

Then he started working for Southern Airways as an instructor pilot in Fort Wolters.

IP Perry walked up to the table where Michael and Eric sat when he realized he located his students.

"Hello, gentlemen. I'll be your instructor pilot. My name is George Perry. Now tell me who you are."

"I'm Michael Grayson."

"I'm Eric Wilson."

"I'm Bruce Weston."

"I'm Calvin Jones."

"Okay. Today will be your first lesson. I will take each of you up and let you get a feel for the controls of the chopper. Are there any questions?"

They were too anxious to get in the air than ask questions.

"Okay, then. Let's go up in the sky," said IP Perry said while he started walking off to the door.

Michael and the rest of the guys stood up and followed IP Perry out of the room with childish grins.

"Man. I'm getting a boner thinking about flying in a copter," Michael said with sparkles in his eyes.

"I'm starting to worry about you," Eric replied while they walked out of the room with IP Perry.

The candidates walked with IP Perry out of the building.

IP Perry stopped by the corner of the building.

"Grayson will be my first victim, and the rest of you can ride the bus over to the stagefield. We'll be at one called Ramrod," said IP Perry while he pointed at the waiting Army bus.

Michael had a huge grin on his face while he strutted over to IP Perry.

"Are you ready?"

"Since I was eight years old," Michael replied with an ear-to-ear grin.

"Let's crank her up," IP Perry replied with a smirk. He's instructed tons of kids that thought flying a helicopter was a piece of cake.

Michael and IP Perry walked over to the flightline. They headed over to the formation of helicopters.

"Show him how it's done," Eric called out to Michael.

Michael turned around and gave Eric two thumbs up sign with a huge grin.

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