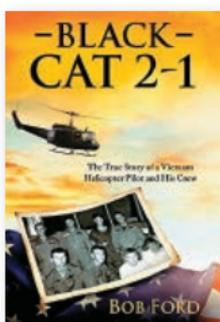


Black Cat 2-1: The True Story of a Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and His Crew

by Bob Ford. Brown Books, 2015. 288 pp., \$24.95.

IN 1967, BOB FORD BEGAN a one-year tour in Vietnam in which he would fly more than 1,000 missions in U.S. Army UH-1 Hueys. Since returning home



and separating from the service, he has been managing one of his family's flour mills and enjoying civilian life. He writes that after a visit to a local school to tell his story, a

teacher suggested he write a book. His depth of memory of details that date back almost 50 years is remarkable, and unless he was taping his entire tour, a reader has to assume the conversations depicted here are reconstructions—a reasonable accommodation for war memoirs.

Ford experienced a lot because of a propensity for volunteering. He asked to fly helicopters, and once in-country, sought the northernmost outpost he could find in order to be closest to the action. He saw plenty.

Ford's approach to even the most arduous of combat situations is relentlessly upbeat, and only in his account of the final weeks of his tour do the events seem a bit disjointed. The Tet Offensive, a massive coordinated attack by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army in 1968, brought the war to the very compound where his unit was housed, and during the action, his closest comrades were killed.

His descriptions of combat helicopter flying are vivid, and marred only by repetitious descriptions of how low they flew and why. Overall, this memoir is hard to beat.

■ ■ ■ **GEORGE C. LARSON IS THE FOUNDING EDITOR OF AIR & SPACE.**