

Chris Roris  
Army  
January – February of 1968  
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I enlisted because at the time I was doing very well in school, and the other reason was because I knew I would be drafted soon. I picked the army because it seemed like they offered what I thought I wanted to do, which was an airborne radio operator.

When I first got to Vietnam it was pretty peaceful, when I first got to my unit I went for a drive in the city of Patrang which was probably about twenty or thirty miles away from where my base was, and we drove around town. We were actually at risk at that time, but didn't know it, because shortly after I arrived in Vietnam was when the 1968 Tet Offensive started and the Vietcong had already infiltrated a lot of the cities. Indeed shortly after my little excursion two other officers were shot and killed doing pretty much the same thing we were.

I did quite a few missions before I left the country, including lots of flights over into Trang, which had been partially overrun by the Vietcong during the Tet offensive and our mission was to push them back. A lot of the flying between missions was pretty routine, you fly from one spot to another and I couldn't get over how beautiful the country was. When you finally got to where you were going there was this period of terror because people were shooting at you. One night we were over the city of Patrang and there was a aircraft flying overhead dropping flares and as the flares came down the glow looked like they were as big as basketballs, and we were flying in and around the flares trying to take out Vietcong positions and hoping not to have a flare land on us. The city was lit up with explosions and lights, and the flares were all over the place. It was

kind of surreal; it was like I was in a Fourth of July fireworks display except I was right in the middle of it instead of watching.

I remember flying a helicopter you knew there were dead people down there, you see bodies, you know you killed people, but you really didn't get that full effect that somebody on the ground that was close up did. I think that people on the ground had a harder time doing their job, but there are a lot of people who think just the opposite. They were very happy not to be flying the helicopter having people shoot at them all the time, and the threat of crashing. I thought we had a much easier time than those guys did.

The living there was pretty decent until the night of the Tet Offensive when our base was struck and about a dozen helicopters were blown up with satchel charges. It was pretty frightening because we were all sleeping and then we got woken up by these explosions. We didn't know if we were getting overrun or not so we had to run into bunkers, which nobody had ever been in before because the base had never been attacked. We were all pilots so we only had pistols which wouldn't have done very good if there were actually Vietcong there with automatic weapons. They were just blowing up helicopters so we were actually very fortunate. We actually ended up crawling out of there after a short amount of time and crawling on top of the bunkers and watching the ammunition from the helicopters explode and fire off into the air.

I was actually one of the first casualties in my unit in the Tet Offensive. We were flying a counter-mortar mission. A Vietcong mortar unit had been blasting positions in and around a little town called Can Li. We went up to try and suppress that mortar unit and we took enemy fire. Several bullets hit the helicopter and one of them hit my knee.

We lost a radio and actually flew directly to a hospital. I was shot on my ninth day in country.

I was transferred to a hospital in Cameron Bay, and was in the hospital for about four to five days and then I was shipped out to Dakota Air Force base in Japan. The time in the hospital was pretty difficult because at that time they were doing a lot of research on combat wounds and wound infections. We were part of a study group on how to treat wound infections. Before they closed my wound up they would come by and scrub it with what were called beta dyne scrub brushes, they got plastic bristles on them so it was a pretty painful experience. After a few days they closed my wound and I think it turned out that they proved that doing that didn't make any difference and it would have been just as good if they had just cleaned the wound as good as they could and just closed your wound up, but they did a lot of those things during the war.

When I was in the hospital, I had been shot and I felt bad. Ya know, how come I got shot, how come the guy next to me got shot. It turned out they kept us in groups where we all at pretty much similar wounds. One day I went to physical therapy and a kid who was several years younger than me was in there and he was missing a leg, he looked nineteen years old. When I saw that, from that point on I didn't feel sorry for myself anymore. I realized I wasn't only lucky to be alive I was lucky I didn't lose any of my extremities. I think that kind of sent a message at that time to me that, hey, it could be worse, you came out okay, you're a lot better off than a lot of guys.

I was the only one ever hit in the helicopters I flew in but it turns out that the people I flew with in the helicopter that day, about three or four months earlier were

killed in an attempt to save some other downed pilots. Their helicopter was destroyed and they were all killed.