

This came to me from another Army Aviator who received it from an Aviation company commander currently in Iraq. It is a wonderful tribute to the people who were in the helicopter units in Vietnam and expresses deep appreciation and thanks from today's aviation soldiers to those of us "old soldiers" who served in another war 40 years ago. Thought you'd appreciate reading it.

Tom

On Veterans Day this Thursday, November 11th we will honor all those service members and their families that have served and sacrificed before us. We deeply respect and admire the dedication and selfless service of all combat veterans.

Task Force 185th Aviation would like to dedicate our success here in Iraq to the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots, crewmen and all support people that developed the basics of our modern day Army Aviation doctrine. Thanks to our predecessors we have the most modern high tech aircraft, we have tried and true tactics, techniques and procedures and we have the proven skills to accomplish our mission. When we arrived in Iraq we were more than prepared for the challenge.

In contrast the helicopter pilots of Vietnam were young men that went from high school to flight school and then straight to Vietnam. The average age of a helicopter pilot in Vietnam was in their early 20's and the concept of helicopters in combat was a novelty. 35 years later, the average age of TF 185th pilots is 34 and the average flight experience is almost 3,000 hours. Despite their inexperience, the Vietnam era pilots were fearless and innovative as they adapted and developed ways to utilize the helicopter in combat.

The 185th is mostly a National Guard and Reserve task force. While most Vietnam Veterans have long been retired, 10% of our pilots are Vietnam "old timers" in their mid 50's. Over the years these veterans along with many others have been our mentors and role models as we trained and prepared for combat.

The enemy in Vietnam was more ferocious, smarter, and dedicated. Iraqi insurgents are cowards, picking on the innocent, or using hit and run tactics to avoid a fight. The Viet Cong may have used hit and run tactics, but they were deliberate in their prosecution of the war. When in a situation they couldn't back out of, they fought fiercely.

Shoulder fired man portable anti-aircraft missiles appeared at the end of the Vietnam War, so the aviators did not have to contend with them for long. What they learned about these new, small heat seeking missiles was critical to our tactics today. The greatest threat to our aircraft in Iraq is encountering new versions of this man portable anti-aircraft missile.

Due to the enemy threat and dense airspace usage here in Iraq detailed and time consuming mission planning is a way of life. Fortunately we have the computers, software and internet transmitted airspace coordination means to create computer generated maps and mission data for each flight. We also have GPS navigation systems, long range radios and complete flight instruments. For protection we only fly in pairs

here, while in Vietnam they many times flew single ship with minimal pre-planning time using only a map and compass.

Today in Iraq, safety is paramount to everything we do. We even say our biggest enemy is ourselves in the form of an accident. We are required to conduct thorough risk analysis and track our duty time to prevent fatigue. In contrast, Vietnam Vets developed safety procedures only after frequent accidents or shoot-downs. In Iraq we also enjoy the tactical advantage of flying "blacked out" at night with Night Vision Goggles that were not invented back then.

But, perhaps the greatest difference between Iraq and Vietnam is the support at home. Today we enjoy widespread support on the home front. Even those who can't see why we are fighting rarely slander soldiers when they protest the war. This may be in part due to 9/11, but it is also because our nation remembers the nature of 1960s war protesters, and their actions toward returning Vietnam Vets. Such conduct is no longer acceptable in mainstream American society. This quote by Vietnam Veteran CW4 Ronnie Wells makes it clear:

"When comparing Vietnam to Iraq, there were a few things that were painful. First, we went as individuals, not as units. We came and went at different times. We often left in the middle of the night, coming home to a town that may or may not have known you even left. We were cursed, called baby killers, and completely disrespected for many years. You, however, are seen as heroes and should receive the accolades you deserve."

We in Task Force 185th have a lot to thank the Aviators and men of the helicopter units of Vietnam for, from their pioneering tactics in Air Mobile Warfare; to the way they proved what was needed in the way of future aircraft. The burdens they bore both at war and at home have made our success in Iraq possible. We could write a book about this issue, but not at this time. We ask that you forward this email to a Vietnam aviator, crewmember or mechanic and thank them.

On this Veterans Day we also want to give a special thanks to our family members for their sacrifices this year while we serve in Iraq. Your thoughts, support and prayers are literally a God send. Our families are now veterans too and they are our heroes!!!

Catfish 6  
Bradly MacNealy  
TF 185th Aviation  
"In the Sunni Triangle"  
Commanding  
DSN:302-527-2401/302-559-2444  
[bradly.macnealy@us.army.mil](mailto:bradly.macnealy@us.army.mil)  
[bradly.macnealy@us.army.smil.mil](mailto:bradly.macnealy@us.army.smil.mil)