



VIETNAM WARRIOR

This Huey fought in the war, has the bullet holes to prove it and is deeply impressive to fly

By Pat Malone

You know you're flying something special when the whole airport stops to watch. Thousands of people gathered at hangar doors as we turned finals, marshalls, refuelers, air traffic controllers who wouldn't normally interrupt a tea break to watch an aircraft suddenly produced video cameras or took pictures with their mobile phones. A Ryanair queue outbreak to Tenerife pressed its noses to the plate glass. Physically, we machine-gunned the lot of them.

We had red grass that spouted jets of fire and made a cacophonous death-grille, but they heard us coming long before the shooting broke out. You feel this machine before you hear it: it pounds a deep bass rhythm in your chest, then the sensation slowly resolves itself into an audible thump as each massive rotor blade smashes the advancing airflow. At a couple of miles the turbine churns in, engers and rising, then the conductor brings in the buzz-saw tail rotor and the wide Wagonian crescendo materialises in the circuit as one of the most

recognisable silhouettes of this or any aviation era. And if, like me, you

inadvertently descend with maximum blade slap, you're planning your noise footprint with a hover-boom stamp that guarantees you a tall house.

I have to say that Huey-royer Phil Connolly has the best boy's top in the world, bar none. His Vietnam-era garrison trumps

any other plaything. You may be the richest man on Earth, but if you haven't got a Huey you win second prize in the game of life. I often say I'll buy this or that thing when I win the lottery, but I've only been kidding. In fact, when I win the lottery I will buy a Huey, and I will put guns on it and fly it around just like that. No kidding.

Just what a UH-1H 72-21509 is doing in



Angling the tail up reduces the risk of a tailstrike and gives a helicopter greater ground manoeuvrability

Blackpool wearing US 129 Assault Helicopter Company livery and a CAA registration is a long story, but if you're sifting contentably, then I'll begin. The tale revolves around Phil Connolly, a determined and successful businessman who Gets Things Done. Phil

wanted a Huey and had the wherewithal to buy one. Not only that, but Phil is Carbonium Man, able to grind down the will of the most booby-minded bureaucrat from the Department of 'No'. It has taken years of battling on two continents, much frustration and no little treasure to bring G-UHH to Lancashire and into the air. The story of how the 'Type Rating' was written would fill several pages. But hey, what's the thick end of £375,000 and five years out of your life when you've got a Huey? And as for the £1,100 an hour it costs to keep her aloft, that's the best use of money yet devised.

G-UHH, known as Huey 509 or Miss Jo after Phil's wife, is as authentic as modern practical aviation will allow, and is

unsurprisingly much loved – pristine, cleaned and dusted to a fault. There is grease oily where grease ought to be, and the paintwork is as immaculate as it was on the day in 1973 when she was packed up and shipped to Vietnam for what turned out to be the last year of the war. She carries the original kit and clocks, augmented by GPS and VOR, and even has the original armour plates behind and beside the pilots' seats. Although it's a 1973 helicopter, it was still at work in 2000 and sports lots of in-service mods like roof antennae, wire cutters and MAWS fittings.

If you can answer in the affirmative the second question normally asked of helicopter pilots ('Have you read *Chickenshank?*' – which comes immediately after 'whaddaya do when the engine stops?') then you'll understand what an extraordinary privilege it is to get Phil Connolly's Huey is a living memorial to the airmen of the 129 who died in Vietnam, and their names are inscribed on a door.

THE £55,000 HITCH

It cost £55,000 to get Phil's Huey across the Atlantic here's the story. As a boy, Phil Connolly's quest and partner the model aeroplanes, joined the Air Training Corps, wanted to be a pilot in the RAF but didn't get the grades, instead, as an adult he got into deep sea diving, riding the North Sea of boom. It wasn't too long he says – 'the horrendous death rate of the early Seventies had tailed off a bit by then, and you got to ride in a lot of helicopters. Later he formed his own successful company supplying the oil industry. After taking his 2P, he bought a

Chipmunk. Finding himself one day at RAF Stanbury checking out Chipmunk spares for auction, he heard of some RAF capsules for sale nearby. Someone's head took him to Phillips Auction house in Bond Street, and somehow his hand went up before the hammer went down. A short while later, wife Jo returned home from a shopping trip. 'I've just seen a big helicopter on a wagon in our village', she said. 'I can explain,' said Phil.

Looking for an instructor, Phil (meets up with Neil West, Neil and his partner Heather own two Lightning jets, Neil's long military

career included flying virtually the whole Bell production line. Of Neil's 7,000 hours, some 1,200 are on the Huey.

And if you're going to have a helicopter, it ought to be a Huey, Phil thought. 'You've seen all the films – Apocalypse Now, We Were Soldiers,' he says. 'What else is there?' In his copy of *Trade-A-Plane* there were five Hueys for sale at a total of \$200,000. Phil's had to have a Vietnam combat history, and he found one – 75-21059 had served with 129 Assault Helicopter Company in 1973 and 1974, and the repaired bullet holes in the floor and

horizontal stabiliser told the story. 'When she was deregistered and dismantled, Phil took her on

The US Department of Political and Military Affairs (deregistered to impound the aircraft at the docks if it didn't have a valid export certificate and it took five-and-a-half months to produce one.

Getting the Huey to England called for a ship with a full-stick, but they were all in Iraq – and the export certificate was time-limited. Phil gifted his berth and bought a

£55,000 lot for his Huey on a Lushy 747, and from Belgium it was trucked to Luton Helicopter Centres at Fitchall in three bits.

The Huey flew on a 28-day entitlement, but was exonerated for three months by the CAA, then sat motionless for six months while Phil negotiated with the authority for a Permit to Fly. Not only was the Permit eventually forthcoming but Phil obtained permission to mount two M16 50-calibre Browning machine guns with realistic gas-

fired arm and drag, and later, an official blessing to use the cargo hook for lifting a two-ton

underwing load. Despite some CAA restrictions – they can only fly four-up even though it takes six people to stage a display, and two crew must follow them around in a fast car – the Huey is a major airshow draw, and when it boxes into view with guns blazing and a Jeep carrying under-18s, you don't need the title of the 'Valley's to empty the beer tent.



Restoration to this level doesn't come cheap



HISTORY



Only the B-24 military aircraft was built in greater numbers

The original was one of the first turbine helicopters and was a quantum leap upwards from its piston predecessors. The H was almost identical to the stretched D model apart from an updated Lycoming T53-L3B engine which produced 1400shp and allowed it to carry a pilot and 14 troops. At the peak of the Vietnam War some 3,900 helicopters were operational simultaneously in the country, two-thirds of them Hueys. More H models - about 5,500 - were produced than any other variant, and they saw service with the armed forces of 34 nations. They were built under licence in Germany, Italy, Taiwan and Japan.

The UH-1 - Utility Helicopter 1 - 'Huey' is the second most successful aircraft in military history in terms of numbers (after the B-24 Liberator), with more than 16,000 built to date, introduced to service in 1967, the UH1H was a continuation of the successful Bell 204 line designed in response to a 1955 US Army specification.

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Survivors, quite elderly now, come from America to touch her, sit in her, and think their own thoughts. *Chickentauk* author Robert Mason contacted Phil after seeing his website www.huey.co.uk. Perhaps in England, tired of the baggage that Vietnam veterans still carry at home, you can remember brave men in their own right.

I'd never seen a Huey in the flesh before but it looked as familiar as any machine I've ever flown. The size was right, the shape, the slightly anhedral nose-up, tail-up squatting position looked just as it should. It's tall but not massive, and its length is a warning to attend to your pitch in a hover, or get high, wide and squat, it has hinged doors for the pilots, and behind them two mighty sliding doors three seats wide that allow access for passengers, cargo or stretchers and provide room for two gunners to take care of business ahead and below. The first item on the walk-round was to unscrew the waist guns from the clamps that hold the barrels vertical. The ACM2 50-calibre Browning machine guns have a gas-fired contraption that makes an

unholy din, even with your helmet on, and shoots flames out of the barrel.

They don't autorotate the Huey with guns attached and doors open; there are inert rounds in the ammunition racks that might shake free, even though they're tied in, and the soundproofing material could possibly flap loose (although it never has - they're just being super-safe) so I was not to have that pleasure. We have to take pilot Neil Airey's word for its autorotation characteristics. And Neil's word is that yes, it's not an old wives' tale - you really can autorotate to the ground, pick her up, turn her through 180 degrees and put her gently down again, all on the inertia of those massive blades. "You have to be pretty light, and pretty slick," says Neil. "I wouldn't do it myself, but I have touched down, taken off and set her down again engine-off."

Time to get in. Step up off the front of the leg around the skid and slide your stick. The seat has height and fore-and-aft levers, and after I'd set it for maximum comfort (I'm 5 foot 11 inches) I found that while hovering downwind in a 15-knot wind the stick came almost all the way back to the seat. I'll rethink my seat position next time out.

There's a red catch under the seat that allows you to lower the seat back to the horizontal position, in order to slide out a wounded (or worse) pilot - a sharp reminder that these machines were built for a purpose, and it wasn't for me to have fun in.

"ENGINE-OFF, YOU CAN LAND, TAKE-OFF, TURN THROUGH 180 AND LAND AGAIN"



Look closely: you'll see patched bullet holes in the floor

The original four-point harness is still in place. The shoulder straps are inertia reel, with a release handle on the seat, and they loop into a bar on the lap-strap that slides over a pinion on the left strap. Just snap a lever across and you're tied in.

The collective stands at quite a steep angle and sprouts an array of buttons, toggles and a coolie hat. Most of these are for non-functioning equipment such as searchlights; we're interested only in the detent button and the beep toggle. The cyclic has a force trim button falling to the left thumb - indeed the Huey must have been one of the first



Roof control panel

helicopters to use force trim, I suspect. You can choose force trim or 'floppy stick' with a toggle switch on the panel between the seats. With force trim, you set up your cyclic for straight and level (or whatever you want) then press the button and the helicopter will carry on in that manner until you press the button again - very useful in DMC or if you have something pressing that demands your attention.

The pedals, which have 'BELLI' on the left one and 'HUEY' on the right, felt quite far apart, and between them is a third pedal for releasing the cargo hook. There's a big chin

bubble into which Vietnam-era pilots used to stuff their flak jackets. The grunts in the back, of course, sat on their helmets, the better to survive bullets that would come up through the self-sealing fuel tanks and the floor - 590 has several repairs in this area.

The basic 'I' panel is of its era, with a big artificial horizon flanked by ASI and altimeter. Beneath it is the VSI and turn-and-slip, and under the AH is DI and VOR. To the left is a Skymap II, then the engine and rotor condition instruments - a big two-pointer for NI and NR, with the green arcs painted by hand on the glass. The only item of



Collective and cyclic are studded with buttons

The Huey is agile despite its size, though not especially fast

bespoke equipment to mention is the CD player under the panel, which can play *The Ride of the Valkyries* through the headset but not (shame) through a PA.

Between the front seats is a redundant bank of military controls and weapons controls, but at the top you've got the force trim selector, a triangular toggle switch that turns off the mechanical fuel governor, and a hydraulics on-off. Above your head you've got panels of circuit breakers, including one with a red collar for rapid resetting of the

hydraulics (they fail to 'on') and groups of switches for such accessories as nav lights, wipers, heater, cargo hook arm and so forth.

The battery master switch is up there, too. Switch on the master and suddenly it sounds like the daily has come to Hoover. Two avionics cooling fans come into play, and they are not silent. The starting procedure is much the same as for the JetRanger.

At ground idle, with those enormous blades flashing slowly overhead, the word

'parking' doesn't quite cover it. It's like sitting astride a wet dog on a spin dryer with a badly balanced load of washing. I tried to note down some parameters as we waited but found it utterly impossible to apply pen to paper.

When your be-nice-to-the-engine time is up, gently roll the throttle to open and apply a bit of friction. The spin dryer is turned off and she settles into a serene wobble. There's a big fire warning light on the panel but no extinguishing system; if it goes on, get out and run away. Beep the engine up and down to max and min to check the warnings - light only for max, audio and light for min. Check that the governor is working in manual, check the hydraulics, check the bank of warning caption lights have gone out, and go flying.

With full fuel and four up we were very light, and with 1,400 shaft horsepower on tap I lifted easily into a slightly nose-high ten-foot hover - presumably she'd be nose-down with 13 grunts on board. Little pitch input was needed, and less pedal than I'd expected. Collective and cyclic felt right, the pedals felt remarkably light, and overall it really did feel just like a big JetRanger. Taxing across and down a 15kt wind was not difficult once you got the footwork figured out - small inputs went a long way. Transitioning forward, I found little need for pedal inputs at all. She

accelerated briskly and I tweaked back the stick to hold 60kt for the climb.

Visibility is very good all round, especially when you've actually got your flak jacket on. There are three windows in the door, the largest of which slides up and down with a screw arrangement to hold it in place. The framework impinges slightly on the view, while the green-shaded Plexiglas panels in the roof are too far above your head to come into play in any normal turn.

At 35 per cent torque we settled out at just over 100kt on the ASI. At Neil's suggestion I beeped the engine down to 6,400rpm.

Setting it at the top of the yellow arc saves more than 10 gallons of fuel an hour.

There was less vibration than one might expect. Control inputs were answered crisply and rapidly. The manoeuvring limits are 30 degrees nose up, 30 degrees nose down and 60 degrees of bank, and we stayed well within them, although I rolled briskly from 40 degrees left bank to 40 degrees right. Lowering the nose in the turn produced a rapid acceleration with little tendency to tighten into a spiral. As with any two-bladed rotor, low-G manoeuvres

can lead to mast-bumping and the loss of the aircraft, but the stabiliser bar enhancement reduces the risk and there was no tendency to roll when levelling off briskly from the climb.

Reverting to the manual governor calls for delicacy and finesse on the throttle; it's difficult even for those who learned on the pre-governor Robinson, which responded like a spinning top to poor wristwork, especially if (when) it had a sticky throttle. Pulling 40 per cent torque and lowering the nose we rattled out to 120kt - the ASI hasn't been calibrated and Neil likes to keep a prudent distance from

the 127kt Vne - to find that the spin dryer was back and the vibrations were borderline unpleasant. Reining her back to around 100kt got rid of the shake.

We landed at Phil Connolly's house to change seats, stampeding his llamas, but that's another story. I strapped into the waist gun position, which feels insecure and exposed given that you've only got a lap strap fixed with a clip that could be easily knocked off with your sleeve. We flew out over Morecambe Bay for a photo sortie, and

all I can say is that those grunts were lucky the Vietnam War wasn't fought on a cold March day in Lancashire. The wind was vicious, but if I live to be a hundred I'll not forget a minute of that flight. With the sun picking out the snow on the Lake District hills, our Huey shadow churning across the sand and our pilot dipping and swooping for the camera, I hung out on the lap strap and laughed like a madman.

You can see Huey 509 at airshows up and down the country this summer - check out the website at www.huey.co.uk for details. The website also has masses of factual and historical information, as well as riveting and moving audio from the men who flew in Hueys in Vietnam. You can also see her fly on YouTube - but whatever you do, don't miss her in the flesh. **C**



SPECIFICATION

BELL UH-1H 'HUEY'



■ Dimensions

Length (with rotors)	57' 1"
Fuselage length	41' 10"
Rotor length	48'
Height	14' 5"

■ Weights & loadings

Empty weight	4,973lb
Max gross	9,500lb
Hook capacity	4,000lb
Fuel capacity	220 US gals (834 litres)
Range (no reserve)	318 miles

■ Performance

Vne	127kt
Climb	1,195fpm
Service ceiling	19,390ft
Capacity	14 (1 crew, 13 passengers)

■ Engine

Lycorning (Honeywell) T53-L-13B producing 1400shp

■ Restorer

Gordon, Johnson and Peter Gilbertson
www.sabr.org.au

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Rugged and reliable Lycoming (Honeywell) T53-L-13B producing 1400shp