

MAIN IMAGE:
It could almost be Vietnam, instead of Lancashire! We've given the image a 1960s 'feel' to show off the authenticity of the 'Huey'.

FAIR RIGHT: Gunner's eye view from the 'Huey'. The pock-marks in the ground are golf course bunkers and not the result of target practice!

With co-ordinates marked on the map, 'safeties' lifted from the two side-mounted M60 machine-guns and a full load of troops, 16 drab green-coloured helicopters lifted off, dipped their noses and headed off across the scrub and jungle. Airmobile was on the move.

At the landing zone, the Army was busy softening up the area with an artillery barrage. Any 'reception committee' at the LZ would find their plans frustrated, or totally ruined. The choppers held off, awaiting an abundantly obvious signal. Pilots, gunners and troops spent the time deep in their own thoughts about the coming mission.

At a chosen moment, the shells would change from 'mud movers' to phosphorous. The white explosions would show that the salvos were

over. Time for the helos!

At the LZs, the unmistakable 'slap, slap, slap' would fill the air. Gunships skirted the edge of the clearing and kept any surviving heads down. Then in would go the 'Lift Ships' with their M60s blazing.

Down on the ground, the troops were off like corks out of bottles. The helicopter would linger nervously if wounded were coming back, if not they would be away without a second glance.

Such scenes were common throughout the Vietnam war and it was the Bell UH-1 'Huey' that came to symbolise the character of that conflict. The big, beefy warhorse became an icon of the 1960s and its appeal has never gone away.

The allure of the 'Huey' was not restricted to its purposeful looks. The noise of its huge teetering rotor

blades became an anthem for those who relied on them for transport, supply and rescue.

VIETNAM VETERAN

That Vietnam LZ scene was described graphically by Ralph Chappell who completed one full tour in Vietnam. He was four months into his second when the tour was brought to a premature close. Ralph had trained on 'Hueys' but he flew the huge twin-rotor Boeing CH-47 Chinook in Vietnam. (See the panels for the origin of 'Huey' and the background to the type.)

Answering a plea for more ammunition from a beleaguered platoon, Ralph and his crew were getting ready to land when their Chinook took a hail of enemy fire. They got the big bird down, but it was wrecked and the crew scrambled away, to fly another day.

In a field not far from Blackpool, Lancashire, Ralph was talking about his time in Vietnam. It would all have seemed so out of context had it not been that in front of us stood an immaculate 'Huey' with M60s on either side, ready to rock n' roll.

Back in the USA after his spell in South East Asia, Ralph returned to UH-1s, this time with the Army National Guard. Despite the shoot-down, Ralph is passionate about the Chinook. "Without a doubt it is my favourite helicopter", he beamed, adding quickly "but it is followed by the 'Huey'."

He went on to a career flying helicopters in 'civvie street'. He has over 10,000 hours under his belt now - 2,200 are military.

Ralph was on what he called "temporary detachment" to the UK to help 'Huey' owner Phil

Connolly learn the finer points of the UH-1. The pair met at Olympia, Washington State, USA during the restoration. Impressed by Phil's commitment, Ralph volunteered his services.

Lancashire airspace is not unfamiliar to Ralph and he has 'intimate' knowledge of the famous Blackpool Tower. For a while he flew twin-turbine Sikorsky S-58Ts for UK operator Bristow Helicopters. Detailed to ferry an S-58T from Aberdeen to the Liverpool docks for onward shipment to South Africa, Ralph found the visibility getting worse and worse. He chose to keep to the western coast, but can still see the detail on the girders of the tower flashing past the cockpit!

Ralph was in great praise of Phil, explaining that "the art of the instructor is to find what motivates



Bell UH-1H Iroquois G-UH1H

Apr 1972	Built by Bell Helicopter at Fort Worth, Texas, for the US Army as 72-21509; one of a batch of 5,435.
Jul 1972	Joined the 129th Assault Helicopter Company - motto 'Bite and Strike' - in Vietnam. Indications show 550 combat hours flown.
Feb 1973	Returned to the USA and issued to the Army National Guard.
1991	Issued to US Army Troop Support and Aviation Readiness Command.
1992	Issued to a US Army Aviation Support Facility (USARASF).
1995	To the Mississippi Aviation Classification and Repair Depot; the 1108th AVCRAD, Mississippi Army National Guard at Gulfport.
1996	Issued to another USARASF.
Aug 2000	Retired to the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Centre, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona. Moved to North West Helicopters of Olympia, Washington, and stored.
Nov 2003	Restoration started, work being carried out by Brian Reynolds and team.
Mar 10, 2005	Registered as N41574 for flight test.
Jul 16, 2005	Arrived at London Helicopters, Redhill, Surrey, after freighting via a Luxair Boeing 747F.
Jul 30, 2005	Arrived at its new base near Blackpool, Lancs. UK registration G-UH1H reserved.

