



# -BLACK- CAT 2-1

BOB FORD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## VIETNAM WAR MEMOIR GIVES VOICE TO THOSE WHO SERVED WITH HONOR

### Huey Aircraft Commander Pens Tribute for All Generations

**DALLAS, TEXAS**—*Let's crank it up, kick the tire, and light the fire.* In the Vietnam War, 2,197 helicopter pilots and 2,717 crew members were killed. Bob Ford was a Huey aircraft commander who flew over one thousand missions from July 1967 to July 1968 and survived.

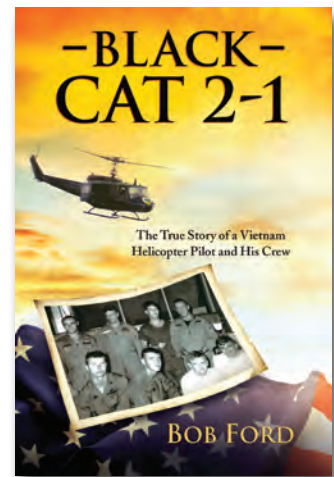
Now Ford pays tribute to the valiant men he served with and to those who risked their lives for the troops on the ground in his praiseworthy memoir *Black Cat 2-1: The True Story of a Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and His Crew* (Brown Books Publishing Group). Ford has written a gripping page-turner that reads like a thriller, captures the humor of the men at war, and resounds with respect for those who served with honor.

“No braver men have taken to the field of battle than the pilots who flew the iconic Huey helicopters,” says David Maurer, Special Forces Veteran and author of *The Dying Place*. “Ford’s account is a priceless contribution to the literary canon of that war.”

To learn firsthand what Black Cat 2-1 really means, Ford invites readers inside the cockpit of the Huey helicopters he flew when he and his men dared to protect and rescue troops on the ground. They would holler, “Let’s crank it up—Let’s kick the tire and light the fire” before starting the Huey’s turbine engine—even though they had skids and no tires—they figured that’s what the guys that flew high performance jets said.

Chuck Yeager, Sergeant York, Audie Murphy, Eddie Rickenbacker, Ike, and Jimmy Doolittle—these are the men who first captured the imagination of Bob Ford and instilled in him the feeling that every man should be willing to serve his country in the military. For readers who served in Vietnam, Ford recreates the danger they survived. For others who knew little about this war, he offers a positive story about men who served, giving voice to those who fought but were silenced, and to those whose stories have never been told. To learn more, visit: [www.BlackCat2-1.com](http://www.BlackCat2-1.com).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## BOB FORD



From July 1967 to July 1968, Bob Ford flew over one thousand missions in Vietnam. After the first six weeks, he became an aircraft commander and took over the command of a helicopter detachment at Hue, forty miles from the DMZ—the farthest northern helicopter unit in Vietnam. His tour included the beginning of the siege of Khe Sahn and the Tet Offensive in February 1968 when he and his men manned the perimeter for a three-day and three-night ground attack.

Ford made his commitment to flying helicopters when he was still in college at the University of Oklahoma. He completed ROTC training and received a commission in the US Army in 1966. He volunteered for army helicopter flight school and within one year was flying combat in Vietnam. When he completed his tour in Vietnam, he became an instructor pilot at Fort Wolters, Texas. Following his discharge in 1969, he moved to Okeene, Oklahoma, to head the Okeene division of the family flour milling business, which he still actively manages.



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## Q&A WITH BOB FORD



### What inspired you to write *Black Cat 2-1*?

I wanted to preserve the memory of those with whom I served in Vietnam. I also wanted my kids and grandkids to know why we did what we did.

### What does the Black Cat logo represent, and what is the significance of the cat having only three legs?

It was picked as a nickname for our company in 1965 before the 282nd left for Vietnam. The three legs were merely for simplicity of design.

### Where did the name for the Huey helicopter derive?

The proper name is UH-1—Utility Helicopter-1st design or type. Army personnel used the letter “I” instead of 1 then changed the order of UH to HU “I.” The pronunciation evolved into Huey.

### From July 1967 to July 1968, you flew over one thousand missions in Vietnam to protect and rescue troops on the ground. Noting that 2,197 helicopter pilots and 2,717 crew members were killed, what kept you focused and motivated? Did you ever think you might not make it home?

Any call over the radio from ground troops or a call from a forward air controller wanting us was clear motivation. This happened every hour. Flying in combat kept all of us focused. Every day I thought I might not make it home, but I was only concerned that my body would get back. I completely trusted my crew.

### Each chapter begins with a *letter home* based on the real letters you wrote home to your wife Diane. Were these letters a driving force that propelled you to survive?

Not a driving force, but they did serve as a mental break from the war; by writing home and visualizing what was going on there and the closeness of my wife and family, I persevered. I remember hoping to resume that life again.





**Can you describe what a routine day was like over a 24-hour period?**

From preflight inspection of the Huey to post-flight inspection, there was no set routine. There is constant change in war, so I helped wherever needed.

***Black Cat 2-1* presents a positive story about men who served. Can you elaborate?**

At this time of the war, July '67 to July '68, we all were cut about the same—all volunteers, highly skilled, and motivated to serve our country.

**How many of the men in your detachment survived, and do you remain in touch today?**

Of the nine pilots, including myself, two were killed in action (KIA) and four were wounded in action (WIA). I am still in contact with three pilots and three crew members. We have a reunion every two years.

**Unlike many Vietnam vets portrayed in movies like *Platoon* or *Born on the Fourth of July*, you stand firm that your team remained clean of drugs. How was your group able to pull that off?**

Our detachment knew drugs were present but they were rarely discussed and never considered. We knew those on the ground depended on us, and flying impaired was not an option. We had a saying, “Twenty-four hours between the bottle and the throttle.” We only had an occasional beer. There was always daily humor among our detachment.

**Quite often you use the phrase “ready to crank it up.” Was that a term used as a pre-mission pump-up?**

Yes it was. We also would holler before starting the Huey’s turbine engine, “Let’s kick the tire and light the fire.” Even though we had skids and no tires, we figured that’s what the guys that flew high performance jets said, and it sounded neat.

**How do you hope this story will impact readers, including former Vietnam vets, their family and friends, as well as those who know little about the war?**

A combat friend told me, “You guys are one good thing that came out of this war; you did good every hour of every day.” Also a twenty-seven-year-old school teacher said after reading the manuscript, “I never heard or read a positive story about the Vietnam War or what you pilots did.” The story deserves to be told to honor all veterans and their families.







**Recently a twelve-year old boy read *Black Cat 2-1* and was mesmerized by its contents making it clear that your story is an enlightening and engaging read that reaches a younger audience who previously knew nothing about the Vietnam War. How does that make you feel?**

I felt I was taking a chance when I asked the twelve-year-old's mom if he could read the manuscript. A month later he wrote me a note, which is included in the book. When I asked him in person his thoughts, he said he read and reread every word. It made me proud he understood and enjoyed the entire book. It makes me feel I have done something right.

**As a student attending the University of Oklahoma, you were a member of the ROTC and made a commitment to flying helicopters. Have you always been intrigued with helicopters? Who or what instilled in you the thirst and willingness to serve your country in the military?**

I was not always interested in flying helicopters until my ROTC instructor stated the best way to serve my country in Vietnam was to be a helicopter pilot.

**You carry with you a customized “Black Cat” coin. What is its significance?**

It is a challenge coin whose history goes back to the Revolutionary War and identifies the unit, date, and time one served in combat. It's a way to show pride in your unit.

***Black Cat 2-1* is a tremendous tribute to those who fought in the Vietnam War. What is the primary takeaway message of your book?**

I want people to realize war is sometimes necessary and we Americans enjoy the freedoms we cherish because of those who stepped up and fought with honor and sacrifice. There was something good that came out of this war, and I feel lucky to have been a part of it. If I can write a book about my experiences, anybody can and should—you, your family, and friends will be proud.





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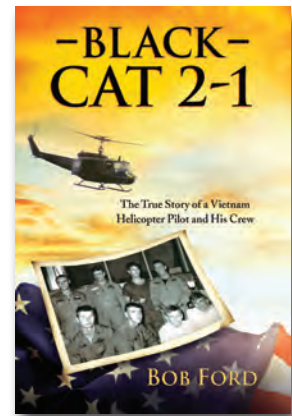
BOB FORD

## PRAISE FOR BLACK CAT 2-1

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*In the annals of war, no braver men have taken to the field of battle than the pilots who flew the iconic Huey helicopters during the Vietnam War. I saw their unwavering resolve time and again as they flew through withering gunfire to carry us safely away from the gates of eternity and bring us home. Bob Ford's account of his year in the command seat of his ship of salvation is a priceless contribution to the literary canon of that war.*

—David A. Maurer  
Special Forces Veteran  
Author of *The Dying Place*



*Serving as a crew chief in Hue was a life-changing experience. It was an opportunity to serve with the best of the best, the cream of the crop. The pilots and crews were fearless. The bonds grew so strong that today when we meet, we still feel the connection. The Hue experience and these dedicated men will always be in my heart.*

—Heidi (Bud) Atanian  
Crew Chief  
Hue Detachment 282 Assault

*When Lt. Ford joined the company, he rapidly became an aircraft commander. He soon commanded a detachment located in Hue, sixty-one miles from our company. During the Tet Offensive in January 1968, Bob and his crew flew hundreds of missions in support of US and ARVN troops. On all of these missions, they were under enemy fire. Bob exemplified the best qualities of an army aviator. He never let me down. I am proud of him.*

—Lt. Col. Chuck Ward, Retired  
Commanding Officer 282 Assault

*I thought the book was exciting from start to finish. I feel I learned a lot about the Vietnam War and what the American soldiers, as well as the Australians and the South Vietnamese, went through. My favorite part in the first of the book was when Bob flew between two hills and got shot at. It was exciting, and I wanted to read more to find out what else would happen. The pictures were cool and helped me understand the story even more.*

—Alek Winter  
Age 12  
Okeene, Oklahoma



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EXCERPTED FROM CHAPTER ONE

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## GOING IN HOT

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*I'm in San Francisco, and I got processed in OK. Both arms are real sore from the eight shots they gave me. My stomach feels terrible from the malaria pill. I leave for Vietnam tonight at 2100 hours in a C141—no windows, seat backwards—for 18 hours. Met a lot of infantry lieutenants. All good guys. All of us admit we're scared. We had heard there was a one in seven chance of getting killed or wounded.*

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25 JUL 67 Letter to Diane

**A**s our helicopter neared the landing zone, the radio barked, “Alley Cat 3-4, this is Black Cat 6.” Alley Cat was the call sign for our gunships.

“6, this is 3-4, go.”

“Roger, Alley Cat. Start your run at LZ tango.”

“Roger, 6. Starting prep now. 3-4 out.”

Hebert, the pilot, told the gunners we were going in hot, which meant our two door gunners were to shoot their M60 machine guns continually at any enemy or suspected enemy emplacement. Adrenaline rushed through me as I heard the explosions of the 2.75-inch rockets from the gunships finding their targets in and around the landing zone. I heard the sound of the M60s in the back of our ship start firing.

The landing zone (LZ) had been prepared by the gunships, and every ship in the lift had ample room to land. I did not see any enemy muzzle flashes. The troops jumped out and were gone within seconds. I was surprised when Hebert said, “You got it,” which meant he was transferring control of the ship to me.

“I got it,” I responded, taking control. Hebert lit a cigarette.

It was my fourth day in Vietnam.



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★★★★

Light rain, the smell of human waste, and a mass of military activity—these had been my first impressions of the country. After a brief stop at Wake Island, we had landed at Pleiku, in the central highlands. I headed toward the Command Center to receive my first assignment. As I carried my army-issued air force duffel and L.L. Bean canvas bag, my legs felt like rubber from pure fear. Mud oozed through the airstrip's perforated steel planking.

After storing my gear, I was told there were no openings in the First Cavalry, so I spent the rest of the day familiarizing myself with the compound. I was given the location of a bunker in case of a rocket or mortar attack. The next morning, there was still no assignment. I was beginning to feel more relaxed. My fear of death was subsiding, but it was replaced by a fear of the unknown.

As I walked by a Quonset supply hut, I saw an infantry captain who looked like a real veteran. He wore regular olive drab fatigues and carried a pair of worn jungle fatigues that were faded from his year in the field. He started to toss the old fatigues into a small pile of discarded clothing near the hut, and I asked what he was going to do with them.

“Leave them right here,” he answered.

He was about my size. I hesitated and then asked, “Do you think I could have them?”

He smiled slightly, sensing that I didn't want to look like a new guy, before giving them to me. “They're yours. They got me through this year.”

Before he could walk away, I asked, “What does it take to make it through a year of flying helicopters?”

“Well, I'll tell you,” he said. “You'll have to put personal safety aside and do everything you can for the troops on the ground. No matter what.”

He spoke with such intensity that his words were permanently etched in my mind. I could tell he had respect for pilots and that he'd depended on them to stay alive. It made me proud to be an army aviator.

I had been in the country for two days, and I was still walking and breathing. The third day, I stood before the administrative officer, awaiting my assignment.

“Lieutenant Ford, you are to report to Major Meyers for assignment with the 17th Aviation Group in Nha Trang,” he began. “They need lieutenants. If this weather subsides, we may be able to get you there today.”







I liked the idea of being needed. This assignment meant I would get into the war. I felt calm and prepared, and within fifteen minutes, I was ready to be transported to my new destination. I boarded a noisy Caribou, a medium-size, twin-engine cargo airplane, and was on my way.

After landing in Nha Trang, I went in search of Major Meyers. A sergeant who ran the office with obvious efficiency greeted me, and then I reported as ordered and saluted the major. His desk was filled with papers, maps, and a nameplate that held a pen and pencil on each end. I chuckled to myself and thought, *This must be what the terms “desk jockey” and “paper-pusher” mean.*

On the wall behind Major Meyers’s desk was a large map of South Vietnam divided among four corps. The northernmost was designated as I Corps. Within each area, the army aviation companies were labeled with their designated numbers. The 282nd was the farthest north within I Corps. As I looked at the map, I noticed red Xs next to each company and wondered what they meant. There were many more Xs next to the 282nd than any other company.

The major interrupted my thoughts. “Well, Lieutenant, I have just gone over your personnel file. Do you have any idea which unit you want to join? Do you have any friends stationed in country?” He walked toward the map.

“No, sir,” I replied. “I’m the first guy in my flight class to get here.”

“Take a look at the map, Lieutenant. Is there any location where you want to go?”

I looked at the red Xs at the top of the map near the 282nd. “Sir, what are those red Xs by each company?”

“Those, Lieutenant, are known aircraft hits from hostile fire in the past seven days.”

“Do they need lieutenants, sir?”

“They always need lieutenants.”

“That’s where I want to go.”

He looked at me. “Are you sure you want to go there?”

My gut feeling was that the year would pass more quickly if I were a part of the action, so I nodded. “Yes, sir, I’ll go there.”

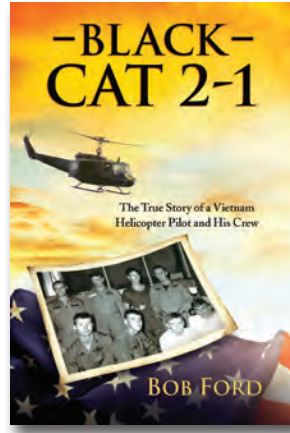
The major assigned me to the 282nd Assault Helicopter Company stationed at Da Nang. He informed me that there would be a C-130 flight leaving the next morning at 7:00 a.m. Then he handed me my orders and added, “It will be interesting.”





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### SYNOPSIS

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