



# Chickenhawk

*Robert Mason*

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## **Chickenhawk** Robert Mason

More than half a million copies of *Chickenhawk* have been sold since it was first published in 1983. Now with a new afterword by the author and photographs taken by him during the conflict, this straight-from-the-shoulder account tells the electrifying truth about the helicopter war in Vietnam. This is Robert Mason's astounding personal story of men at war. A veteran of more than one thousand combat missions, Mason gives staggering descriptions that cut to the heart of the combat experience: the fear and belligerence, the quiet insights and raging madness, the lasting friendships and sudden death—the extreme emotions of a "chickenhawk" in constant danger.

## **Chickenhawk Details**

Date : Published (first published 1983)

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Author : Robert Mason

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# From Reader Review Chickenhawk for online ebook

## Steve Rezabek says

If you are interested in history, war or aviation, this book is a must. I am a pilot so I understand many of the details being told and the logistics and complexity of what they were doing in their helicopters. Mr. Mason does an amazing job of covering the hardships they faced and the progression to get where you need to be to survive. I now have a new appreciation for the men (and woman) who served in Nam, and am embarrassed for the way they were treated when they came back home. I will never look at a Vet the same way. Robert Mason helped me live that experience through his style and gripping memoir of that war.

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## Tasha says

A great, great memoir of a vietnam huey pilot. mason really puts you right in the action with amazing detail, personal (emotional and physical) experiences and some humor thrown in for good reading. I keep wavering between a 4 and 5 star read. I still may change it. I thought his writing was brilliant as it really put you in the jungles of vietnam, provided experiences on so many levels (emotional, physical, and personal to him) and even in glimpses of the vietnamese people. really a powerful read. My struggle between a 4 star and a 5 star is the technical aspect of the flying of helicopters. Initially it went over my head and I kind of skimmed through it. But as his experience as a pilot grew, I grew with him (at least in my imagination) and could follow more of the descriptions and images of the technical flying scenes with greater detail, thanks to mason and his writing style. So, I guess I'll call it a 4.5 star read for the time being.

1/10: ended up giving this one a 5 stars. The 4 star rating just doesn't do this one justice. The story sticks in my head like a great 5 star read does, so up it goes.

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## Athan Tolis says

I've never flown a helicopter, but after reading Chickenhawk I reckon I have the experience.

The author is at his total best when he's recalling his maneuvers getting in and out of "hot LZ's" (to you and me, that's landing zones where the enemy is shooting at you) and I could probably read about every single landing and takeoff detailed in here ten more times and not feel it's been a waste of time.

So this is first and foremost a story of derring-do and an ode to flying. Anti-war it may be, but I'm pretty sure "Chickenhawk" has inspired generations of pilots.

It's that good!

It's anti-war, that said, and never better than in the following passage from pages 445-446:

"While the First Cav slipped unceremoniously back to An Khe, the 101st decided to end the operation with a parade. There would be no spectators except for the news reporters – unless you want to count the men in the parade as spectators, and of course they were.

Hundreds of bone-weary soldiers gathered at the artillery emplacements and began the five-mile stretch back

to the airstrip. They marched, in parade step, along the dusty road. Insects buzzed in the saturated air. No virgins threw flowers. No old ladies cried. No strong men wept. They marched to their own muffled footsteps.”

And it’s cynical, witness this passage from page 361:

“The platoon leader, a skinny second lieutenant, came over and shot the sh1t for a while.  
‘Find anything,’ Riker asked.  
‘Just some old campsites.’ The lieutenant patted his blouse for cigarettes. I offered him a Pall Mall.  
‘Thanks.’  
‘We hear the VC don’t want to fight the Cav.’  
‘Can’t blame them, can you?’ said the lieutenant. “Every time they do, we clobber the sh1t out of them.’  
Yeah, as long as we have helicopters, Phantoms, and B-52 bombers, I thought. I said ‘Maybe the war is almost over.’”

And it’s about anti-heros. Its very title, comes from pages 242-243:

“‘Do you ever think about quitting?’ Gary asked.  
‘Sometimes.’  
‘Me too. Sometimes. Guess that makes us chickens.’  
‘Maybe. But we do go fly, don’t we? That’s got to make up for feeling chicken.’  
‘Yeah, I guess it does.’ He paused. ‘And when I’m flying the assaults, I start feeling brave, almost comfortable in the middle of it all. Like a hawk, maybe.’  
‘I do, too. When I’m in the middle of it. But times like now, I’d quit at the slightest excuse. So what am I? A chicken or a hawk?’  
‘You’re a chickenhawk.” Gary smiled.  
‘Yeah.’ There was silence. Yes, I thought. We’re both scared out of our minds. It felt like we were near the end of our wait on death row.”

What sustains the book, what connects the flying and the thinking is the author’s humor. You’re reading a book about war, devastation and rotting human flesh, but most of your time reading “Chickenhawk” is spent laughing out loud.

A lot of it is in the style later perfected by Quentin Tarantino, whereby improbably good, complex English is put in the mouth of people in everyday situations, like this dialogue from page 80:

“‘Just remember,’ said Farris, ‘of the thirty-three kinds of snakes over here, thirty-one are poisonous.’  
‘How do you tell them apart?’ asked Resler.  
‘I think that with those ratios, you could afford to come to a prejudicial, sweeping generalization – like, kill them all.’ Farris turned and left.”

A lot if it is pure slapstick, like this little gem from page 118:

“‘You can’t get the clap, Mason. You’re immune.’  
‘What do you mean “immune”?’  
‘It’s one of the advantages of being an officer. We get “nonspecific urethritis.” Enlisted men get the clap.’”

All the humor notwithstanding, you can’t help noticing that the book gets darker as it progresses. You’re not only witnessing the author’s flying and derring-do, you’re also there as he is being broken as a human being, succumbing first to the various temptations, suffering the consequences and losing his mental health and of course eventually dragging his family into it.

You won’t be envying his wife, Patience (how poignant is that!) by the time you’ve finished

“Chickenhawk.” And you won’t think war is glorious.

Regardless, you may well feel this urge to go fly.

I did!

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## **Monica Mac says**

This book was a recommended read by a member of my book club and I am glad I took the time to read it, even though it wasn't my usual reading material.

I had long wondered what it was like for those who were in Vietnam and this account, by Robert Mason, a helicopter pilot, gives us a good look at the conditions which the troops over there had to work under, as well as the author's questioning of why they were there and how to tell friend from foe. So many shades of grey. The troops on the ground undoubtedly had it far worse than the helicopter pilots did and the accounts of bodies piled up or soldiers missing limbs, was a constant refrain.

All in all, I think the book did a good job of describing conditions, as they were for this particular man, in his particular job. It certainly didn't shy away from describing the good, the bad and the very ugly, that's for sure. I am glad it also went on to describe what civilian life was for the author after he came back from Vietnam - the fact that he is still married is a bit of a miracle and I think his wife was aptly named.

This was not an easy read by any means but I think it is an important one if you wish to understand a little more about this most misunderstood war.

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## **Mike says**

Chickenhawk I had to raise my rating on this reread to 5 Stars. This is the story of a helicopter pilot and his experiences from training to combat in Vietnam. He has a great eye for the successes and failures of the new air assault tactics as they are developed and employed. The heart-pounding trips into hot LZ's come through clearly. He was involved in the Ia Drang Valley battle so vividly described in the book and movie of *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young: Ia Drang - the Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam*. He was in the sister unit of the “Snakes” and he went into LZ XRay in that battle. He also has a great eye for some of the humorous, ludicrous and crazy aspects of men in war. Perhaps without intending, it has a “Heart of Darkness” tension as we watch him go from a diligent new pilot to a jaded combat veteran. He goes from trying to learn some Vietnamese to looking at the natives he was supposed to be protecting as less than human. His callousness is not reserved only for the enemy but eventually surfaces for the wounded and dead grunts he pulls out of the LZ's. I would not describe him as a heroic figure but he is certainly brave. You get a gut-wrenching view into the expansion of U.S. combat involvement in the Vietnam War and the soul-destroying strategy of “search and destroy”. You can begin to understand the despair and subsequent descent into alcohol and wild behavior as they keep going back to take territory they had already taken before, with constant loss of friends.

*We'd already taken Happy Valley, but we had to go back out to patch up a few holes in the victory. Somebody forgot to tell Charlie he lost, so he was still out there shooting down helicopters, the dumb*

*fuck....In two days we flew 12 assaults into the same areas we had taken several times before. To add insult to injury, the VC fought even harder.*

This is a very good account of fighting men in war, a short but exciting read.

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### **Jeffrey says**

A classic. Following Robert Mason into the early days of Vietnam as a young man determined to fly, you are also swept into the flood of technical information and skills necessary for a helicopter pilot. The intelligence and awareness necessary to master flying a helicopter, much less under combat circumstances, is daunting and terrifying. Mason takes you into it, though, as a young man carrying out the duties that he is taught as he tries to learn from his instructors and guides. But as the days tumble by, you also begin to feel the toll of the accruing stress and strain, watching comrades and enemies dying, some by design and some by sheer happenstance. I can see why so many helicopter pilots have read this text, as Mason describes the terrifically challenging circumstances that he deals with for combat landings and take-offs, as well as all too human appreciation for the breakdown in the military and on a person's soul from struggling through such a terrible conflict.

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### **Larry Bassett says**

Add this one to my long list of books about the American War in Vietnam. I am the right age to have been drafted for that war, but was not due to a variety of deferments and a high lottery number. The short story is that I was considering fleeing to Canada if I was drafted but never had to make that momentous decision that would have significantly changed my life. I never came to that fork in the road so will always wonder what I would have done if I was actually faced with that choice.

The book was published in 1983, the year Robert Mason was forty-one years old, eighteen years after he was a twenty-three year old in Vietnam.

This is a personal narrative of what I saw in Vietnam and how it affected me. The events all happened; the chronology and geography are correct to the best of my knowledge. The names of the characters . . . have been changed . . .

Movies and books about Vietnam always have the Huey choppers coming and going from LZs delivering and picking up supplies and men. They are often taking ground fire and sometimes coming down as a result. But this is my first book that I have read that puts the reader in the head of the helicopter pilot, on the ground and in the air. Bob Mason wanted to fly from a young age and had his pilot's license before he graduated from high school. Vietnam made an impression on those who fought there; Mason is writing about events and feelings years later and it seems like you are right there.

Mason has been criticized for being too technical. There is a diagram at the beginning of the book of a helicopter with all the major parts named. There is also quite a bit of detail about how to actually maneuver a helicopter using hands and feet simultaneously. It is way harder than patting your head and rubbing your

stomach at the same time. But this is far from a “how to” book. But it does let you know that being a helicopter pilot in a war zone is a complex job. Apparently you volunteer to be trained as a helicopter pilot so you are in this incredibly dangerous occupation by choice.

How many ways can you say, “War is hell”?

The old man said nothing about Morris except that we ought to get some money together for flowers for his wife, but Sherman took it upon himself to give a little speech that night.

“Well, we’ve been pretty lucky up to now. It was only a matter of time. The other companies have taken a lot more kills than we have, so it’s our turn now. It looks like the overall ratio is one in five. One pilot out of five will get killed. We’ve only lost two guys, which puts us five away from the average. We’ve just been lucky.”

I hated Sherman. Now we were delinquent in our deaths. Running behind in our proper death ratio were we? Well we’ll just see about that. C’mon you guys, let’s go out there and die!”

I will have PTSD just from reading this book. Short scenes and events strung together. Moments in the lives and deaths of a group of men in a war. The big story is the war. The real stories are the individual actions and interactions between the men. And then there is some occasional sane thinking:

I had never heard of a gook or a slope-head or a slant-eye or a dink who did anything but eat rice and shit and fight unending wars. These tools and that waterwheel convinced me that there was a successful way of life going on around us, but all we saw were savages, backward savages fighting against the Communist hoards from the North. Why were all the men of this beautiful village gone just when the Americans were right outside? Wouldn’t people under attack by the Communists welcome the men who were there to save them? Or was I seeing the wrong way? Maybe the only people who wanted us around were the Saigon politicians who were getting rich from having the Americans here. The village was a long way from Saigon. And the people weren’t rich; they were just people.

Robert Mason had over 1000 helicopter missions during his year in Vietnam. Some moments were peaceful, many were not.

At the first sound of the returning ships, I went outside and watched. The Hueys snaked out of the mist and with increasing noise gathered on the field west of the camp. Huey after Huey hovered to a landing. The field became a complicated dance of whirling rotor blades, swinging fuselages, and swirling mist. The roaring rush of the turbines, and the rotors swing lazily as the ships shut down. The crew wandered up to the camp. They all had come back.

...

The ships were shadows in the early morning mist. We took off singly to join up out of the fog. Climbing over vague trees, we saw the earth disappear. Riker, who knew where he was going, told me to turn left. Just as I did we saw the phantom of a Huey cross immediately in front of us. I lurched back on the controls, but that was not what saved us from the midair collision. Luck had been with us.

As he began to suffer from the accumulated stress at the end of his tour, he found he was most comfortable when he was flying.

When I was flying, my life was in my own hands. When I was back at the camp, the army was in control of my destiny.

He suffers from textbook PTSD that eventually drives him out of the air, then out of the army. The nightmares go on and on, sleep comes with the help of alcohol. And his life spirals down.

Death is almost always gruesome as it is described by Robert Mason in this most gruesome book. There is the intensity of heroism too. Eventually there is the heroism of going on with life having experienced so much death.

This book is so distressing, more than most war books I have read. Lots of blood and guts and shattered bodies that were sometimes left to rot for several days so they could be more easily located in the tall elephant grass – by the smell.

Vietnam was a nightmare in so many ways. Now we have unmanned drones that kill from the air and humans that blow themselves up in a crowd.

Robert Mason writes about his experience of the brutality of a war he fought when he was young. He wrote about his time in Vietnam in 1965-66. For a while those fighting thought they were winning a war that would go on for years longer and claim many more victims.

*Chickenhawk* is, I think, a regrettable title for an unforgettable book. It captures the horrors of one man's war, horror that is undoubtedly still with him these many years later. He flew men on his chopper to their death and lived to be haunted by it.

This book may be too raw to give five stars. Too many mangled bodies and destroyed minds. Too surreal a world for too many men. War is not the answer.

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### **Giordano Makhholm says**

A precise chronological depiction of life as a helicopter pilot leading up to and during the Vietnam war. I'll remember passages of extreme violence and gore, and how common these eventually become. Sporadic action but constant fear, and hilarious dark military humor, from kids who had no business being there and only started to understand much later.

I found it unfortunately a bit repetitive: stand-by, pick-up grunts, repeat. Maybe that was the point. A year of flying into hot landing zones must've gotten old quick. In any case, at odds with anything from Tim O'Brien who is a better writer. Maybe also too detailed for me in regards to the intricacies of flying helicopters, all of which went way over my head. Just like helicopters.

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### **Terri says**

What a terrific book. So much more than I expected. More than a memoir, more than a war book. It feels like a window back through time to the jungles of Southern Vietnam where we find a war that is hard to understand and even harder to justify.



While I found myself disliking Robert Mason, his book and his brutal honesty is hard not to respect. He could have shaved much detail from this book and still had a hit on his hands, but he gave everything he had to Chickenhawk and it became a special piece of literature. He presented the world a rare and unshielded view of the Vietnam War. The best non fiction on Vietnam that I have read to date.

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## **Ugo Marsolais says**

I guess I was spoiled by the glaring reviews and endorsements this book got and I was expecting more. Regardless of initial expectations, this is an excellent account of the life of a "slick" (transport) helicopter pilot. Mason piloted the famed Huey helicopters during his tour of duty, initially with the 1st Cav (yes, he did participate in the Ia Drang Valley battle, popularly known through the We Were Soldiers movie).

The last part of his Vietnam tour was with a unit called the Prospectors, and his account of his stay there is quite astounding and very different than the 1st Cav.

As with a lot of Vietnam veterans, his return from the war to civilian life was very difficult, with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that lasted decades.

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## **Travis says**

I first read this book years ago, and it is without a doubt one of the best war memoirs on my shelf and one to which I regularly return (as I just did for the third time, to read during a lengthy trip abroad).

The book recounts the training and duty tour of Robert Mason, a helicopter pilot who served in the air cav during the height of the Vietnam conflict. Many consider it the best book written by a Vietnam vet and I would be inclined to agree (the only close contender would be the sniper memoirs of Carlos Hathcock, penned by Charles Henderson). Chickenhawk is compelling from start to finish.

For one thing, Mason's book contains one of the few really interesting accounts of military training written to date--in Mason's case, of his helicopter flight training. In fact, the first section of the book is so vividly descriptive of the mechanics and procedures of military flight instruction that you finish it believing you could almost fly a helicopter yourself. (To appreciate fully Mason's accomplishment in rendering this experience so fascinating, one need only contrast it with that of Marcus Luttrell's recent "Lone Survivor," which manages to turn what should be an equally fascinating account of Navy seal training into one of the most annoying and sleep-inducing chronicles of push-ups and special ops ever written). And once Mason starts recounting his actual combat experiences, you simply can't put the book down.

Partly what makes Chickenhawk such a unforgettable read is that Mason makes no effort either to doctor the facts about his time in Vietnam, his love of flying (even in combat), or about his own flaws and failures. This is no boastful attempt to paint himself a hero (though among the heroes of that war, Mason is surely one), but a gut-wrenching look into a soldier's soul and the soul of a nation at war. The result is one of the most stunning books about war ever written--and I've read hundreds. And I will certainly read this one many times more.

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## **Fred says**

Excellent Read.

Book - Chickenhawk is Robert Mason's narrative of his experiences as a "Huey" UH-1 Iroquois helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War. The book chronicles his enlistment, flight training, deployment to and experiences in Vietnam, and his experiences after returning from the war.

Movie - Chicken Hawk: Men Who Love Boys is a 1994 American documentary produced, written, and directed by Adi Sideman. The film profiles members of the pedophile/pederasty organization North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) who discuss sexual relationships between men and boys below the age of consent.

Book and movie seem like 2 different plots.....

Also reminds me of the "Platoon" movie & "Fields of Fire" book.

A definite read that the Vietnam helicopter pilot may not have been on the ground but the horrors of the war followed him home forever to the United States.

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## **Steven Z. says**

One of the most iconic sounds that people relate to the Vietnam War is the “womp, woosh” of American Huey helicopters. Whether watching a film like Apocalypse Now or reading a book on the war those sounds will reverberate in the reader’s mind. During the war about 12,000 helicopters were deployed by the United States military. Of that number 7,013 were Hueys, almost all of which were US Army. The total number of helicopter pilots killed in Vietnam was 2202, and total non-pilot crew members who died were 2704. The most accurate estimate of the number of helicopter pilots who served in the war was roughly 40,000. ([www.vhpa.org/heliloss.pdf](http://www.vhpa.org/heliloss.pdf)) As we think about these statistics we can only admire the bravery and fortitude of the men called upon to undertake the many diverse missions these pilots engaged in. One of the pilots, Robert Mason has written one of the most important accounts of the war available in his memoir, CHICKENHAWK. Mason’s account is probably one of the most accurate and realistic accounts we have about the American serviceman’s experience in Vietnam. From the vantage point of a helicopter pilot, Mason explores his daily life during his tour of duty. Mason’s approach to his memoir is simple, clear, and honest. As he completes basic training, advanced individual training, and two attempts at passing preflight training, he comments that he never “suspected that the army taught people how to fly helicopters the same way they taught them to march and shoot. But they did.” (23) He realized early on that if you washed out of the flight program you would wind up as a PFC in the infantry. Mason’s journey begins in 1964 and carries him through 1968, a time when the United States, under President Lyndon B. Johnson was ramping up the American commitment to save South Vietnam from communism. Mason’s insights echo those of historians that were written years later. Mason’s memoir was first published in 1983, and was reissued in 2005 with a new afterword describing how the war affected his life for decades following his service.

Mason’s experience in Vietnam was much diversified. Even as a warrant officer he engaged in the activities of a typical grunt rooting out tree stumps, digging fox holes, filling sand bags, and building a perimeter for his assault division. Mason’s primary activity was flying a Huey helicopter that involved him in support of troops in the Bon Song Valley and Ia Drang Valley where in November, 1965 the United States won its first

large scale encounter with the North Vietnamese. Though it appeared to be a victory, Mason questions what American strategy was as we killed the enemy at an increasing rate, but we would withdraw and not hold the land taken. Mason points out repeatedly, that later American troops would fight to retake the same territory as it had won earlier, but at an increasing cost for the United States. Mason's buddy, Connors summed it up well, "Why the fuck don't they keep some troops out there. This is like trying to plug fifty leaks with one finger." (351) This is not the only thing that Mason questions. He did some reading before he went to Vietnam, Bernard Fall's *Street without Victory* having had the most impact on him as it describes the political situation in South Vietnam, the corruption of the Saigon regime, and the lack of commitment on the part of the South Vietnamese peasants who just wanted to till their own soil. The poor training and refusal to fight on the part of the ARVN (South Vietnamese army), the fear in the eyes of South Vietnamese he came in contact with bothered Mason a great deal. The resentment between ARVN and American officers was readily apparent. At times when ferrying ARVN troops to a landing zone Mason had to be careful that once on the ground they would not turn and fire on his Huey. For Mason, there were many times that he questioned why he was in Vietnam.

In exploring the Vietnam War from the lens of a Huey pilot the reader will experience with Mason a myriad of situations. Mason provides an excellent description of how he learned how to fly helicopters. He also provides a useful amount of technical information about the problems that pilots faced and how they could maneuver their Hueys out of many tough situations. He engaged in spraying defoliants to eliminate ground cover for the VC (Viet Cong, South Vietnamese communists), not knowing what havoc these chemicals would reap in the future. Mason's primary activities centered on transporting troops, wounded, and bodies to and from the battlefield, but he was also involved with relocating refugees, to training missions, as a mail courier, to picking up and delivering supplies to combat areas and rear compounds. But there were other missions of importance, the pickup and delivery of tons of ice so the officer's club would be stocked and if any was not needed it would be traded for appliances from other units. Further, the transport of small groups of officers on their own "secret" missions, as well as using the Hueys to visit friends a hundred miles away. Some of these tasks were obviously would not be considered "militarily relevant," but to maintain the sanity of people who have flown over 1000 missions they were none the less very important.

Throughout the narrative Mason supplies the reader the historical context of what was occurring on the ground in Vietnam. The intensity of Mason's descriptions of his flights and what he observed provides the reader the feel and the smell of war. Supply shortages were constant in his unit, particularly chest armor that was a necessity for Huey pilots. Mason highlights it further after he transfers to another unit that is overflowing in chest armor. A recurrent theme is the weakness of American intelligence, provoking Connors to comment after a fire fight that "the intelligence branch must have read their maps upside down, [and was] getting its information from smuggled Chinese fortune cookies." (146) Early on Mason was led to believe the reason the French had been forced out of Vietnam was because they weren't "air mobile." Once the American Air Cavalry arrived it was supposed to change the course of the war. For Mason at times he believed the United States was winning, then doubts would creep in based on his experiences in combat. It led to a discussion with his co-pilot, Gary Resler as they tried to determine their attitude toward the war; were they afraid or "chicken," or after seeing the constant pile of dead American bodies they wanted revenge, making them "hawks." Their conclusion was a combination of the two, hence, they were "chickenhawks."

Mason provides the reader insights to his thinking about his personal feelings. He left his wife, Patience, and young son, Jack in the United States, and he integrates his personal letters to his family throughout the narrative. His feelings of guilt are present as he is honest about his activities during R & R in Saigon, Taipei, and Hong Kong. It should be obvious that Mason suffered from PTSD before he left Vietnam. Constant nightmares, anxiety, and fear centered on the murder of VC prisoners, the use of napalm and the damage it

caused, and the casualties he witnessed drove him to use medication after his missions in order to complete his tour of duty. In addition, he pours his heart out about what he witnesses and cannot cope with. Chickenhawk, though written over twenty years ago provides lessons for future soldiers, and it is an exceptional Vietnam memoir that has stood the test of time.

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### **James says**

Perhaps the best book about service in Vietnam,  
so many of the books about Vietnam are literary frauds,  
but this one rings true from start to finish.

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### **Rob Kitchen says**

Chickenhawk is widely touted as one of the best accounts of the Vietnam War from the perspective of a soldier serving there. And for good reason. Mason's narrative is well written, engaging, and often gripping, having the feel of an authentic account given its matter-of-fact, conversational, and unpretentious style that details both highs and lows, often portraying Mason in a poor or ambivalent light. He captures in detail the everyday training, missions, conversations, action, frivolity and mundanity of Army life. Over the course of the book, one comes to know Mason intimately, his buddies, and the drama and trauma experienced. One thing is clear, Mason and his ilk were performing a role not of their making or choosing, undertaking incredibly brave and foolhardy adventures, all the time blind to the politics playing out both in Nam and at home. And they paid the price in multiple ways – either through injury or death, or post-traumatic stress disorder, or social isolation or family break-up on their return. Chickenhawk is a powerful account of a soldier following his dreams to fly helicopters and finding himself on the front line. The only weakness is around the wider, contextual framing - I would have liked the account to have some further discussion of the conflict, the unfolding politics guiding what was happening, and an overarching sense of the battles and how Mason's missions fitted into them. Other than that, Chickenhawk is a compelling read.

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