



FLYING FROM THE BLACK HOLE
The B-52 Navigator-Bombardiers of Vietnam
By **ROBERT O. HARDER**

—ADVANCE PRAISE—

“No one ever worked as hard or as long at a dangerous task than B-52 navigator-bombardiers. They fought their battles in dark cold discomfort and were absolutely vital in making the B-52 an effective weapon. In this long overdue account, distinguished combat veteran Bob Harder tells the amazing story of skill, dedication and valor of the men who were most feared by the North Vietnamese, and he tells it well.”

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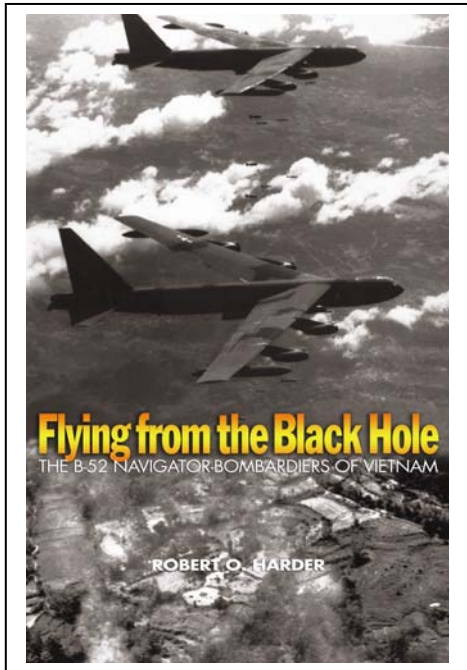
—ROBERT VAUGHAN

author of *Touch the Face of God*

“This book accurately traces the development of navigation and bombing techniques from the earliest days of aviation to the defining Vietnam War air battle over Hanoi. Must-read heavy bomber history, artfully told from the B-52 navigator-bombardier’s point of view.”

—BGEN JOHN J. (JOE) ALLEN, USAF (RET.)

Air Force Academy instructor navigator, forward air controller in Laos



pilots, their contributions misunderstood or simply unknown to the public. This was especially the case with the B-52 non-pilot officer aircrews in the Vietnam War. Yet without them it would have been impossible to execute nuclear war strike plans or fly conventional bombing sorties. Here, one of their own reveals who these men were and what they did down in the “Black Hole.” It is the only work to detail the B-52 air war in Vietnam from the perspective of a navigator-bombardier.

The book begins with the war’s climactic 1972 Hanoi Christmas bombing, an operation so poorly planned that it nearly became a disaster of epic proportions. The author then offers a background history of the development of bombing techniques and the evolution of bomber aircraft, focusing on the Vietnam-era B-52. The final chapters return to the eleven-day “Christmas War” over Hanoi and Haiphong for an insider’s view of that defining battle, described by the author as the last massed, heavy bomber raid the world will ever see. Harder concludes his history with a discussion of the B-52 and its capabilities in the twenty-first century.

U.S. Air Force navigators and bombardiers have long labored under the shadow of

ROBERT O. HARDER was an Air Force ROTC Distinguished Military Graduate at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. He served in the Strategic Air Command and flew 145 combat missions during the Vietnam War as a B-52D navigator-bombardier. He later became a commercial pilot and certificated flight instructor. Now a retired retail executive, he lives in Chicago and summers at his cabin on Big Sandy Lake, Minnesota.

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Publication date: **June 2009**

320 pages. 30 b/w photos & illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index.

ISBN: **978-1-59114-359-8 / \$34.95**

**AT BOOKSTORES,
ONLINE, OR DIRECT:**

**Customer Service
U.S. Naval Institute
291 Wood Road
Annapolis, MD 21402
800-233-8764/410-268-6110
www.usni.org**

**MEDIA INQUIRES & REVIEW
COPIES, CONTACT:**

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Annapolis, MD 21402
410-295-1028 / Fax: 410-295-1084
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**IN ENGLAND AND
EUROPE, CONTACT:**

**CASEMATE PUBLISHING
17 Cheap Street
Newbury, Berkshire
RG14 5DD U.K.
Tele: 011-44-1635 231091
www.casematepublishing.co.uk**

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