

*Set against the beautiful yet mortal backdrop of Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom, Ramrod follows the trials of Maxwell Hugo, a helicopter pilot of varying misfortune who labors against a misled war, a misfit crew and a painful customer while flying supplies to remote military bases.*

## **RAMROD**

by Steven Athanas

**Order the complete book from the publisher  
[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

**<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9912.html?s=pdf>  
or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**

# RAMROD

A Novel of Civilian Aviation in Afghanistan



**STEVEN ATHANAS**

Copyright © 2018 Steven Athanas

ISBN: 978-1-7322551-0-4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2018

First Edition

Hugo should've felt foolish, but didn't. He nodded at the lighter on the table. "Vietnam? Clearly you were too young, unless you were a drummer boy."

The man smiled deeply now, revealing government-supplied veneers the size of Chicklets. "It belonged to my dad. He flew Skyraiders."

"Awesome aircraft, the Spad. Your dad still with us?"

"He is but it's not his Air Force anymore. Nor his world."

"I hadn't noticed," Hugo lied. Any more was interrupted by an overhead Prowler pilot cracking his engine throttle, searing the eardrums of every Bagramite not shielded by a wall or a roof.

Bagram's most notable feature was its sound, which abated only slightly when the sun set, otherwise around the clock. Everyone had a list, written down or not, of things they wanted to do once they returned home. It wasn't uncommon for a country drive to be on such a list, where a Bagram veteran could sit in a meadow and listen to ... nothing. Just heal.

Until then, there would be pain. The air base's footprint was compressed around its helipads and single runway, making an aural escape impossible. The helipads were heavily used, accommodating choppers in formations of two or more, common for a cluster of dissimilar scout, transport, and gunship types to scream out looking for trouble.



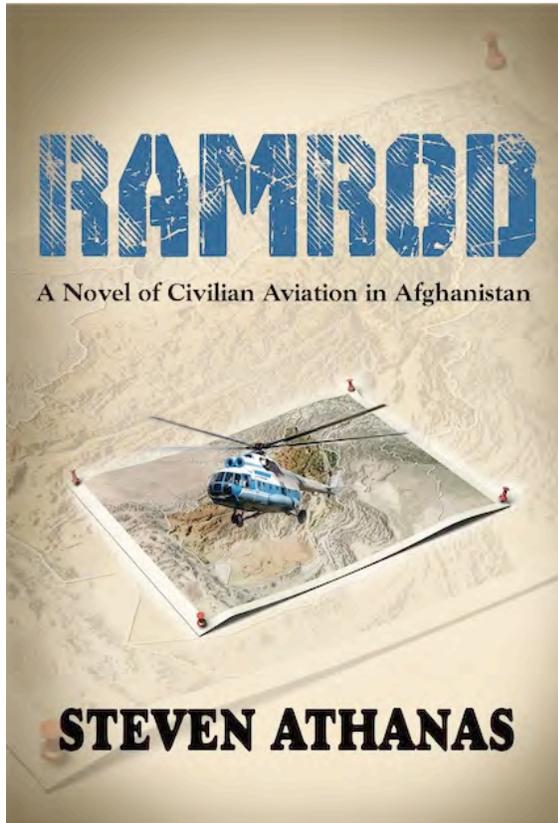
Hugo knew the approach angle wouldn't become dangerous until the Mi decelerated, when the rotors would begin recirculating their own dirty air. This would start dominoes; lift could only be maintained with more horsepower, which would clang against the thin air and the rising temperature.

There was more. If one of the Klimov motors coughed or ingested a bird, its twin would be unable to keep them from the boulder-strewn terrain beneath the helicopter's belly. There they'd perish in a fiery mess, their popping .50-caliber payload dismembering what was left of their charred bodies.

Hugo saw something new ahead. A thin column of smoke had drifted from the FOB, probably from a cooking fire, and only visible because it were close. He took a half second to assess it, decided, then took his flattened left hand and placed it in Vladimir's field of view. He moved his hand up and to the right. Abort. You've got a tailwind. Fly out of it. Try again.

It made no sense but he wasn't angry when Vladimir rejected his hand. Instead he thought of the nameless NATO lieutenant who would write in his mishap report that the civilian aircrew perished because they were too stupid to live. What would go unrecorded was the contributing factor of Russian pride.

A second later Vladimir pulled back on his stick to decelerate, and when the Mi fell below critical speed, its



*Set against the beautiful yet mortal backdrop of Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom, Ramrod follows the trials of Maxwell Hugo, a helicopter pilot of varying misfortune who labors against a misled war, a misfit crew and a painful customer while flying supplies to remote military bases.*

## **RAMROD**

by Steven Athanas

**Order the complete book from the publisher  
[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

**<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9912.html?s=pdf>  
or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**