



# 25 LIGHTNING

December 1967

*Merry Christmas*



# *Black Barons*

By 1LT Steven Pinces Jr.

In expanding its current aviation capability, the Army created (on paper) the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion on July 1, 1966 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The 269th is nicknamed the "Black Barons", its headquarters are at Cu Chi RVN. The battalion was organized with the aim of augmenting the capability of the ground units, to conduct prompt and sustained combat, incident to all operations on land. The 269th Combat Aviation Battalion accomplishes this mission by increasing the ground units' mobility, fire power, and flexibility. The "Black Barons" think and speak the same language as their ground comrades in arms. They accomplish their assigned missions by adhering to their self-imposed philosophy of being "Disciplined Professionals" and are satisfied with nothing less than perfection.

The nerve center of the "Aim High" battalion is the Battalion Headquarters located at Cu Chi, which provides command and control, and staff planning for all of the "Black Barons" assigned and

attached units. The 269th Combat Aviation Battalion is the primary Aviation support element servicing the U.S. 25th Infantry Division. There are three Assault Helicopter Companies (Aslt Hel Co) in the 269th. Each Assault Helicopter Company has "slicks", which are primarily troop carrying helicopters, equipped with two side-mounted machine guns. Gunships are outfitted with an arsenal of assorted weapons and ordnance. (50 cal., 40mm, 2.75 and 3.5 in. rocket, 7.62mm mini-gun.) The mission of an Assault Helicopter Company is to provide tactical air movement of combat troops in airmobile operations, and to provide tactical air movement of combat supplies and equipment within the combat zone. To fulfill these missions the 269th has the 116th Aslt Hel Co (Hornets) and its gunship element the "Stingers", located at Cu Chi. The 187th Aslt Hel Co (Black Hawks) with their gunships the "Rat Pack", located at Tay Ninh, and the 188th Aslt Hel Co (Black Widows) with their gunships the "Spiders".

The "eyes" of the 269th Cbt Avn Bn are the "Black Aces" of the 21st Reconnaissance Airplane Company (O-1 Bird Dog Fixed Wing Aircraft). The Black Aces are located at Tay Ninh, but fly out of various locations throughout the III Corps Tactical Zone. The Black Aces, in their Bird Dogs provide visual combat surveillance, target acquisition and radio relay in support of the ground forces of the 25th Division. The O-1 pilots conduct various types of missions, it is interesting to note that the majority of all artillery adjustments conducted in support of the 25th is done by either the pilot or observer in a Black Ace aircraft.

The bantamweight aircraft are equipped with smoke rockets, with which the pilots mark or identify known or suspected enemy troop locations or fortifications. It is interesting to note that a lot of targets of opportunity are detected

after the observation aircraft has been fired upon. The Bird Dog pilots have on call, field artillery, helicopter gunship and tactical air support.

The huge cargo and large troop carrier of the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion is the 242d Assault Support Helicopter Company (Muleskinners) located at Ben Hoa. The Muleskinners, with their work horse, CH-47 (Chinook) aircraft have the primary mission of transporting the heavy cargo, in support of the 25th Division. To date the Muleskinners have transported 105mm Artillery Howitzers, all classes of artillery ammunitions, water trailers, 1/4 ton vehicles, portable bridges, and all classes of supplies. They have inserted a multitude of troops into field locations, and have conducted numerous night and day resupply missions, under adverse weather conditions.



US ARMY PHOTO

*Helicopters of the 116th Assault Helicopter Company are given a final check before taking off on a combat mission.*

The 269th has a Pathfinder Detachment (Cavaliers) which provides assistance to the Aviation elements. The Cavaliers provide navigational assistance and terminal guidance for the aircraft and the supported ground units in the preparation and lifting of external and internal loads. The Pathfinders have provided manned release points for aircraft, provided lighting systems for night airmobile operations, have supervised the rigging of loads for Chinook aircraft.

The battalion have their organic, maintenance, avionics, and Airfield Operation detachments. The maintenance sections work around the clock performing maintenance and preparing the aircraft for the next day's missions.

The 341st Aviation Detachment, more commonly referred to as the Airfield Operations Detachment, services the battalion's aircraft. The detachment refuels and rearms the battalion's aircraft.

The detachment currently tops-off the aircraft with an average of 30,000 gallons daily of JP-4 Aviation fuel. The detachment provides airfield notice to airmen (NOTAMS) and crash and rescue service.

Now that we have discussed the "Who" of the Black Barons; the following information and statistics are provided describing the "What" (Achievement) of the "Disciplined Professionals".

The 269th Combat Aviation Battalion conducted its first "Combat Assault" on April 14, 1967, supporting the 2nd Brigade, 25th Division.

Since its inception, the "Disciplined Professionals" of the "Aim High" Battalion have participated in Operations: "Manhattan, Kole Kole, Barking Sands, Diamond Head, Makalapa I and II."

The "Black Barons" operate

primarily in the III Corps Tactical Zone, and have also provided Aviation support for elements of the Republic of Korea Forces in the I Field Force Vietnam area.

In addition to providing Aviation Support for the 25th Infantry Division, the 269th has supported the 1st and 9th U.S. Infantry Divisions, the 199th Light Infantry Brigade, the 5th U.S. Special Forces Group, the 1st Australian Task Force, and the 5th and 25th ARVN Divisions.

Aviators of the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James H. Merryman of Hot Springs, Arkansas, have flown an average of more than 95 hours per month. The three assault helicopter companies have averaged more than 3,000 flying hours per month.

The battalion's Pathfinder Detachment has conducted pick-up zone and landing zone operations in support of every major aviation operation conducted by the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion.

To date, the "Disciplined Professionals" of the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion have conducted 38 battalion size combat assaults. On several occasions, the "Black Barons" have performed operations with more than 100 aircraft in the air at one time.

The "Black Barons" have their own specially modified smoke ship (Smokey Baron) which is utilized extensively prior to inserting infantry troops of the 25th Division into landing zones. "Smokey Baron" can be seen flying at low level, emitting a dense smoke screen, which denies the enemy a point blank target. In the landing and pick-up zones, the employment of "Smokey Baron" has been heartily appreciated by the Infantryman, affording him a little extra something, prior to making contact with the enemy. ● ●