

Black Widows

188th Assault Helicopter Company "C" Company 101st Aviation Battalion (C/101)

Unauthorized Pocket Patch Collection

After being activated at Fort Campbell, Kentucky in November 1966, the 188th Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light - AML) trained with elements of the 101st Airborne Division until deployment to the Republic of South Vietnam. Arriving in four separate groups, during the end of April 1967, the unit set up base camp in the Western III Corps Area of Operations. We would be living within the Michelin Rubber Plantation, one of the largest in Vietnam, at a place called Dau Tieng. It was also known as Camp Rainier, home of the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division.

On May 2, 1967 the 188th was assigned to the 269th Combat Aviation (**Black Barons**) headquartered at Chu Chi. **Aim High** was the battalion motto. The 269th was under the command of the 12th Aviation Group (**Black Jack**) located in Long Binh. We were designated as the 188th Assault Helicopter **Black Widows** and the gun ship platoon **Spiders**. These were also the unit call signs. Setting up tents in the mud and dealing with the heavy southwest monsoon season's rain, made living conditions deplorable.

Things got worse... On May 17, 1967 while waiting to link up with a convoy in Long Binh, PFC Richard L. Moore was crushed to death. While seeking shade from the heat under a parked trailer, the load shifted, causing the front legs on the trailer to collapse. The safety pin for those legs hadn't been in place. Our unit's first casualty of the **War**.

On the rainy evening of May 19, 1967 (Ho Chi Minh's Birthday) a short round from a 155 MM artillery battery located on the other side of Camp Rainier, impacted through the rear entrance of bunker #4 on our company defensive perimeter. A fuse later found amongst the debris of what was once bunker #4 matched the lot number being used during that fire mission (World War II stock). The explosion killed SP/4 Jerry Beckham instantly, PFC James Stepp was seriously wounded and PFC Harold (Buddy) E. Fetner died of his wounds on May 20, 1967. SP/4 William Bramlett, who was laying on top of Bunker #4, was blown 30 feet into the air and came away unbelievably unscathed.

It kept getting worse... On June 24, 1967 at 11:02 P.M. the Viet Cong walked 100 mortar rounds up and down the 188th inactive runway, also known as the "WEB". The mortar attack damaged 29 out of 31 helicopters, making the Black Widows non-operational within a matter of minutes. Luckily no one from the 188th was killed during the mortar barrage, although twenty-five of our people were treated for shrapnel wounds. The following day, our Commanding Officer, Major Bobby Wofford was relieved of command for not dispersing the helicopters. He had advised both Battalion and Group about intelligence of an imminent mortar attack. He was told that there was nothing to worry about.

On June 26, 1967 LTC James McWhorter and Major Joe Sites took command of the **Black Widows**. To build morale, Major Sites initiated a competition to design a pocket patch which would incorporate both our unit name and logo. Captain Floyd G. Wilson, assistant gun platoon leader, won the competition. He also designed the Spider patch and the first Black Widow nose art for our helicopters. After the mortar attack our unit designed a second Black Widow nose art.

The **603rd Back Bone of the 188th Aviation Company, Transportation Detachment** and the **4th Signal Detachment Avionics** designed their own patches. The **154th Medical Detachment** wore the 188th patch. All of these unauthorized pocket patches were made in Saigon. They were paid for out of the company sundry fund as an unauthorized expenditure. To boost morale even more, battalion gave the O.K. for the flight crews to paint names on the doors of their assigned helicopter.

The **Spider** patch was worn only by the 3rd flight platoon guns (RED-UH-1C). The first (yellow) and second (white) platoon were our lift platoons (SLICKS UH-1H). Color markings for each flight platoon were painted on the cockpit step and on the upper vertical surface of the tail pylon.

The 188th unit insignia was a white circle with a red bulls eye, dead center. These markings were located on both sides of the tail boom and the top surface of the port and starboard tailplanes. C/101 crews also painted the last three numbers on the tail pylon number, and the stinger with their platoon color. From July 9th through August 21st of 1967, in order to build morale, our unit was ordered to move to Phu-Hiep in the II Corps Area of Operations. We were put under the Operational Control of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion (**Soldiers of the Sky**) which was part of the 17th Combat Aviation Group (**Freedom's Eagles**). We were made an honorary sister company of the **Soldiers of the Sky**. Strategically located near the junction of the Song Bo River and Highway I, LZ Sally also had a small airfield. This base camp had been previously used by the French, U. S. Marines and the 1st Air Cav. LZ Sally had been named after the wife of a 1st Air CAV Company Commander. On March 3, 1968 the "Ready to Go!" 2nd Brigade Task Force of the 101st Airborne Division secured LZ Sally as its base camp and our new home.

On March 14, 1968 the unit moved from DAU TIENG to a place called LZ Sally in the Northern I Corps. We were attached to the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion (**Black Adler**) located at Camp Eagle, 7 miles south of Hue. We were under the operational control of the 16th Combat Aviation Group (**Born in Battle**) located in Da Nang. The 308th Combat Aviation Battalion was under the operational control of the 101st Airborne Division. The circular markings of the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion were changed to the diamond shaped markings of the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion. Each company within the Battalion was given a different color scheme, the 188th colors were red and white. The 308th was released from attachment to the 16th CAG on July 1, 1968 and assigned to the 101st Air CAV Division.

The gray oval patch was designed after July 1, 1968 when the 188th was inactivated and constituted as Company C, 101st Aviation Battalion (**Wings of the Eagle**) and activated on December 20, 1968. The pilots from the Spiders were transferred to the new battalion Aerial Weapons Company, (**D/101 Hawk**). The 101st Aviation Battalion was part of the 160th Aviation Group until the group was redesignated as the 101st Aviation Group (**Wings of Destiny**) in June 1969, making the 101st Airborne Division Airmobile. The diamond shaped markings of the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion were carried over to the new **101st Aviation Battalion**. Our color designation changed from red and white to royal blue. A 101st Aviation Group directive ordered the removal of all unauthorized nose art and door art painted on **Black Widow** helicopters. This directive wasn't received well by the flight crews and wasn't good for morale.

The royal blue, diamond shaped pocket patch was designed in late 1970 or early 1971. Designed after the blue diamond insignia, painted on both sides of the tail boom and the top surface of the port and starboard tailplanes of **C/101 Black Widow** helicopters. The unit moved from LZ Sally to Phu Bai in late 1968. After five years in the Republic of South Vietnam the **Black Widows** departed Phu Bai for the United States in February 1972. The 188th wore the authorized patch of the 1st Aviation Brigade, shown both in color and olive drab. The patch illustration is of a golden hawk with a sword in the background. The unauthorized **South Vietnamese 1st Aviation Brigade Patches** are also shown. C/101 wore the authorized patch of the 101st Airborne Division (**Screaming Eagles**).

Narrative and collections prepared by Dick Detra, door gunner with the Spiders from June 1967 to June 1968.

Special thanks to the following contributors:

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Neal Connelly (4th Signal Detachment)
Jim Wilson (603rd transportation Detachment)
Lyle Parker (154th Medical Detachment)
Charlie Maurer (188th A.H.C.)
Chris Miller (unauthorized pocket patch collector)
Without Chris' help I could never have put this collection together.

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