DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 269TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION
APO 96353
"DISCIPLINED PROFESSIONALS"

AVGC-F 1 February 1968

SUBJECT: Departing Battalion Commander's Reflections

THRU: Commanding Officer
12th Combat Aviation Group
APO 96265

TO: Commanding General
1st Aviation Brigade
APO 96384

This document is submitted in compliance with VOCG 1st Aviation Brigade on 19 August 1967. It is a resume of both the accomplishments of the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion, and the lessons learned by the unit during the nine months that I commanded the battalion, from 1 May 1967 to 1 February 1968. It extends through the entirety of the 1967 Monsoon Campaign and into the initial months of the 1968 Dry Season Offensive. The report is unique in that it is a documentation of the development of a newly formed unit, inexperienced but adament, and the methodology it has found to be successful in the conduct of its operations.

At the time I assumed command of the 269th, the unit had been operational for one month and eleven days. It was comprised of two assault helicopter companies, the 116th, located at Cu Chi, and the 187th, based at Tay Ninh. The Battalion acquired the 188th Assault Helicopter Company, in May and assigned it to duty at Dau Tieng. On 29 June, the 21st Reconnaissance Airplane Company, and on 27 July, the 242d Assault Support Helicopter Company, arrived in country to take their posts at Tay Ninh and Cu Chi. The 269th thus had its assets positioned throughout the entire western portion of the III CTZ.

The operational mission of the 269th was primarily the provision of airmobile support for the 25th Infantry Division. During the period of this report the division's brigades, for the main part, were committed to participation in operations Barking Sands, Kole Kole, and Diamondhead. The 269th CAB also participated in operations Manhattan, Junction City I and II, Atlanta, Yellowstone, and Saratoga.

AVGC-F 1 February 1968
SUBJECT: Departing Battalion Commander's Reflections

In the conduct of most of the operations the location of the assault helicopter companies of this command proved to be of considerable value. Since the operational areas of the three infantry brigades were in the proximity of Cu Chi, Tay Ninh, and Dau Tieng, the stationing of an helicopter company at each of these locations afforded ground commanders an inestimable convenience in planning and coordination. In addition, the co-location of the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion Headquarters with the Headquarters of the 25th Infantry Division assisted us in establishing a relationship between the two units which I consider worthy of further discussion.

Based on a study of ORLLs in Washington prior to coming to RVN and discussion with various senior officers, rated and non rated, during my first two months in country I was convinced that the key to success in conducting airmobile operations with a particular division was to operate as if you were assigned to that division. Therefore, upon my assuming command, every man in the 269th received this guidance; "You will operate as if you were the patch of the 25th Infantry Division". As a result, in a short time, the division accepted the 269th as a member of the family. The results of the relationship speak for themselves. In airmobile combat operations involving the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion and the 25th Infantry Division, all decisions from the PZ to the LZ, with few exceptions, are made by this battalion.

It should be noted that this relationship did not always exist but resulted from a concentrated effort on the part of the 269th to demonstrate to the 25th Division that we could, and would, produce the desired results. The most essential element in this effort has been the unusually close working relationship between the two organizations. I work with the division commander as if I were assigned to him. Further I maintain a close working relationship with the ADC's and the Chief of Staff. My staff sections maintain close daily liason with their counter-parts in the division. Each of the 269th assault helicopter companies is assigned a brigade for which it primarily provides support. The company commanders are directed to work for that brigade commander as if they were a part of his organization.

Within a few short weeks after initiating this "joint effort" a significant change was observed in the division/battalion relationship. Petty differences of opinions on both sides disappeared or were settled by two men who now discovered they had a common purpose. The success of the infantry brigades and their battalions subsequently became the success of the supporting helicopter company. A satisfying and highly beneficial mutual confidence developed. The ground commanders soon learned that the success they sought was identical to that sought by their supporting assault aviation units. As success was achieved mutual respect for each others abilities grew. My companies knew the requirements of the ground force and the ground force commander learned the capabilities and limitations of my companies. As confidence developed the ground commanders soon accepted our recommendations as policy. Within three months of working with the division in the manner described above all decisions involving the air movement phase of an airmobile combat operation were being made by the air mission commander.

AVGC-F 1 February 1968
SUBJECT: Departing Battalion Commander's Reflections

Weather decisions are always made by the 269th. Never has the battalion's judgment in this matter been questioned. The problem of landing troops downwind is nonexistant. No ground commander in the 25th Division would consider having one of my companies land downwind over the objections of the air mission commander. If, in fact, we land troops downwind it is because we have made the decision to do so based on the tactical situation. The above rationale also applies to preparatory fires. All LZ's must be within supporting range of an artillery fire support base. No area where VC are known to be located in bunker positions is assaulted without an adequate preparation by air, artillery, and gunships. In fact, combat assaults are never conducted into areas without prior preparatory fires except when the mission demands such action. In this regard, I can think of only two such possibilities; when complete surprise is desired, or when civilians are in the area and the probability of killing friendlies is too high.

The normal coordination conference between division and battalion elements consists of the involved ground force commander and S-3 informing myself or another air mission commander from the 269th, where he desires to go, where he wants to land, and what time he desires to arrive. The rest of the operation is our responsibility. It is an assumed responsibility and has been taken because, in my judgment, the air mission commander is the most qualified individual to make the decisions in the conduct of an airmobile operation up to the point where the infantry leave the helicopters and commence their assault. I have found the ground commanders only too happy to let us make these decisions. They appreciate the interest and professionalism shown. First, however, you have to show them that you can produce. They have to believe that you are capable and have the same desire for success and regard for failure that they possess.

In the 25th Division we are blessed with capable leadership from the Commanding General on down. Not only are the ground force commanders capable, but also they are wise enough to see the best way to do a job and then to follow that course of action. Here, of course, is where the combat aviation unit commanders come in. We show the way. When the division does something wrong the CG or other appropriate commander is told that there is a better way. Likewise when the 269th makes a mistake the division is informed of this and the involved aviation unit commander is the one who admits the mistake. Further, he presents a plan to preclude it from reoccuring.

To illustrate what the division thinks of our relationship, I cite a comment from the after action report of Operation DIAMONDHEAD, dated 25 December, by the Brigade Commander of the 3d Bde, 25th Infantry Division:

> "An extremely close working relationship developed between the Brigade's two infantry battalions and the 116th, 187th, and 188th airmobile companies. This rapport played an important role in several

short notice missions. Having worked with each other in the past, planning and coordination time was greatly reduced and operations were executed without confusion."

In addition to the above, the Commanding General, ADC's, Chief of Staff, Brigade and Battalion Commanders, all to a man, have indicated overwhelming satisfaction for the support received from the 269th. While receiving their praise I always noted that it was very obvious that they considered us to be one of them. It was a matter of pride in one's organization. I cannot say enough about the importance of the correct relationship between the combat aviation battalion and its supported division.

During the past nine months the 269th has conducted over fifty battalion sized combat assaults. These varied from two hours to twelve hours in length and from 30 aircraft to 130 aircraft in size. In addition, daily, at least one, and normally two, of the assault companies conducted assaults. The extensive experience gained by the battalion in conducting these operations has afforded us with an opportunity to refine the various intricacies involved in the airmobile assault. A discussion of the 269th's basic technique in this area follows.

The mechanics followed in pre-operation coordination probably varies little from one unit to the next. However, in the 269th there are certain rules which we always follow, their necessity having been proven in previous operations. At the conference we use a checklist to insure that no necessary information is overlooked. After the briefing, we require the ground commander, his S-3 and his artillery LNO to participate in a reconnaissance of the proposed LZ(s) and PZ(s). Also on board the reconnaissance flight we have the gunship pilot who will be responsible for dropping the marking smoke round and the pathfinder who will be responsible for the organization of the PZ(s). With these people aboard you have everyone available to answer any possible question concerning the operation and to make, or obtain, necessary decisions. In addition to the above we carry an assistant S-3 whose duty is to sketch the LZ(s) and PZ(s) for attachments as annexes to the operation order. On these sketches we depict the actual touchdown spots of all participating aircraft. During this flight we spend as much time on the PZ as the LZ. Early in the game, we learned that the PZ was the place where things consistently go awry. It is during the reconnaissance that we also select the flight routes considering always the terrain, enemy locations, the locations of fire support bases, and, of course, the mission to be accomplished.

Upon completion of the coordination conference and reconnaissance we prepare a detailed five paragraph field order. In this order the most minute details are covered. Nothing is left to chance. No margin is left for error. A sequency of events annex gives all supported units and/or aircraft a specific

time for each action. All tactical frequencies which may be required are added in an annex as are drawings of the PZ(s) and LZ(s). Included also as an annex is an overlay depicting the flight routes, LZ(s), PZ(s), and any other appropriate information. Copies of this order are immediately disseminated to the supported ground force commander who uses it as his operation order up to the point of touchdown in the LZ.

Following preparation of the operation order a detailed briefing is held for all of the involved aviation units. At this briefing, the operation is described in great detail. Personnel with critical missions such as gunship pilots, lead pilots, and commanders are given individual instructions as to their duties. We require every man to know his job cold so that if we encounter enemy resistance he will automatically know what his next move is.

On the day of the assault the weather decision is made by the air mission commander and relayed by radio to all involved units. During the conduct of the assault the air mission commander, his S-3, the ground force commander and his artillery LNO are all in the same aircraft. Decisions can be made instantly. Is the artillery effective? Should it be moved? Where should the guns place the majority of their fire? What must be done if the LZ is hot? All of these questions and many more must be made quickly if possible disaster is to be avoided. Only if the ground force commander and the air mission commander are together can this be accomplished. There have been days when this working relationship has really paid off. You can get away with the ground force commander flying in one ship and the air mission commander in another for awhile <u>but</u> one day you will step into it and the separation of the two could result in disaster.

On the subject of artillery I cannot stress enough the necessity of the artilleryman's understanding that once the plan is finalized he must not add fires from additional fire support bases lest it place the aircraft flight routes in the GT line. Also, the air mission commander and the artilleryman must come to a firm understanding as to when the fire will be cut off, how this will be effected, and how the C&C aircraft will be notified, so that the flights might touch down as soon after the last round has landed as possible. Too many times in early operations we observed artillery landing long after we had been assured that the last round was on the ground. To put an end to this dangerous situation we spent considerable time with the artillery to point out the possible catastrophic results and to determine how the problems could be eliminated. The solution we arrived at involves the following. Two minutes prior to the artillery's ceasing fire we require the LNO to give us checks every 30 seconds in order to assure that his time and our time are together. After we are notified that the last round has been fired we add the time of flight which we previously obtained from the LNO. This enables us to determine when the last round will be on the ground. A final safeguard used by the 269th is having the air mission commander or S-3 monitor the artillery frequency. The results have been foolproof. We have

never had an aircraft been endangered of being hit by our own artillery.

Clauswitz said, "Fools learn from experience while wise men learn from the experience of others". The 269th, unfortunately, had to learn much from experience because there was no other way. We decided early in the game, however, that we would help those coming after us to avoid the pitfalls we stepped into. To accomplish this we conducted detailed comprehensive debriefings after each operation. The lessons learned have been documented and are discussed in the 269th's Operational Reports Lessons Learned. Following, however, is a brief summary of certain DO's and DON'Ts which are based on our lessons learned.

DO's

1. Do carry complete map coverage of your entire CTZ in your lead aircraft of a flight of lift ships.

Tactical emergencies continually arise and flights may be rerouted to any point, any time.

---

2. Do use coded "H" hour in planning OPORD's.

Intelligence reports indicate an increase in VC radio intercept capabilities. PZ or LZ times transmitted in the clear constitute a potentially grave security violation.

---

3. Do have the gun platoon leader who will mark the LZ in the actual assault aboard the aircraft on the pre-operation reconnaissance flight.

To preclude any misidentification of an LZ, the marking gun pilot must see the LZ and identify the touchdown spot of the lift aircraft.

---

4. Do insure that all elements of an airmobile operation, including the supporting artillery, are on the same time hack.

Variations in time result in discrepancies in the execution of the sequence of events.

---

5. Do request "Daisy Cutters" in LZ preparations when mines are expected.

"Daisy Cutters" effectively destroy command detonated mines pre-positioned in trees and on shrubs by shearing the growth slightly above ground level. Conventional bombs have little effect.

---

6. Do use standard release points (RP) in the conduct of all airmobile operations.

Release points on the periphery of an AO afford an AMC a simple means to quickly position lift ships in a pre-determined area and orient them on an inbound heading to a selected LZ.

---

7. Do use photos of landing zones in planning assaults and briefing pilots.

Photo reconnaissance is an extremely useful oreintation vehicle to insure positive identification of LZ. They are especially valuable in RVN because of the inaccuracy of most maps.

---

8. Do expect to receive fire from tree lines, river banks, creek lines and hedge rows.

Fire is seldom received while overflying heavily wooded areas. Enemy forces are generally imbedded in areas affording an ample field of fire, with a substantial degree of cover. The most probably location of VC bunker systems is along creeks which run into primary waterways.

---

9. Do demand precision in the cut off of an artillery preparation.

A delay in determining the time of the last round's arrival in the impact area could result in the flight's having to circle. This results in up to four minutes delay in the landing, since about four minutes are required by lift aircraft to complete one 360° orbit at the RP.

---

10. Do have all fire missions to be fired in the AO cleared through the C&C ship.

The C&C party must remain abreast of all missions fired in the AO to preclude the intersection of artillery trajectories and the flight path of participating aircraft.

---

11. Do maintain unity of command by controlling an airmobile operation from one C&C aircraft, regardless of the number of units involved.

The precision and rapidity required in the conduct of an airmobile assault demands that only one primary C&C ship be employed.

---

12. Do employ an alternate C&C ship.

An alternate C&C aircraft insures a maximum depth of control, and in the event of the loss of a primary C&C party, may continue to direct the assault.

---

13. Do assign specific responsibilities to the alternate C&C aircraft.

The employment of the alternate C&C should afford the primary C&C complete freedom in attending solely to the conduct of the operation. The alternate C&C should handle all other matters such as monitoring the PZ, making weather checks, and the recovery of downed aircraft.

---

14. Do stay abreast of FAC operations.

The incompatability of some ground units' radios with those of FACS' may require the AMC to control air strikes in support of the ground operations.

---

15. Do monitor artillery nets during an assault.

The precision and speed of a combat assault demands that the C&C party be immediately and continually aware of the progress and termination of supporting artillery missions.

---

16. Do employ smoke correctly in marking targets.

To identify a target location:

a. Drop smoke.

b. Give the distance from the smoke to the target.

c. Give:

(1) Either an azimuth heading from the smoke to the target, or,

(2) A directional reference, i.e., East of the smoke.

17. Do delineate responsibilities within the C&C party.

Effective C&C operation requires a specific understanding of each persons responsibilities. Overlapping of responsibilities results in confusion and reduced efficiency of operation.

---

18. Do insure that the ground force C&C element consists of the AMTF Commander, his S-3, the artillery LNO, and an NCO handling radios.

The above personnel provide all of the representation necessary for efficient C&C operation.

---

19. Do assign a gunship orbit area as the holding position for gunships prior to a combat assault.

A gunship orbit area assures the C&C element of the position of gunships at all times. It also keeps them out of the LZ prior to the time they should enter it.

---

26. Do know your weapons systems.

Complete knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of weapons systems will insure a more rapid destruction of targets.

---

21. Do use two smoke grenades of different colors to mark LZ by gunships.

Two grenades insure at least the use of one should the other malfunction. Two different colors insure visual reference to at least one should weather, clouds, or smoke conditions, preclude the immediate identification of the other.

---

22. Do use gunships to lead a flight into an LZ.

The use of gunships completely eliminates the possibility of a misidentification of an LZ by the lift lead.

---

23. Do use the staggered left and right formations in pick up zones.

Ground forces are best able to prepare or position themselves for a pick-up in these formations. Heavies require considerable training and orientation of ground forces, and invariably result in a loss of formation control once aircraft are in the PZ. The Pure Trail is hazardous.

---

24. Do require maintenance of formation discipline.

Units tend to get careless in the maintenance of formation flight. Results are a loss in tactical integrity, and the creation of hazardous flight conditions.

---

25. Do maintain a minimum of 1 minute separation between companies into LZ capable of handling only one company at a time.

Any frequency less than one minute increases the possibility of necessitating a "go-around" or a "run over" of the initial lift.

---

26. Do use a heavy left/right or V Formation whenever possible in flight and for touch down in any LZ.

A heavy or V formation is far safer than others in that each aircraft is in its own undisturbed air and is not following another aircraft. The heavy formation has an advantage over the V in that it allows you to weight the right or left with the preponderance of your forces depending on the ground tactical plan.

---

27. Do use a code word to transfer all airmobile units to an alternate frequency when necessary.

Frequencies occasionally become so cluttered that to continue the conduct of an airmobile assault on such a frequency greatly increases the possibility of error. A far better solution is to have everyone switch to a predesignated frequency by transmitting a predetermined code word on guard.

---

28. Do require that prior to the final approach to a landing zone all personnel are reminded by radio to have their helmet visors down, shoulder harness locked, and force trim on.

The policy of the "CA Lock-up" has on many occasions proved of immeasurable benefit to the safety of crews.

---

29. Do require all aircraft to fly above 1000 ft. to and from an AO.

The tendency to fly at low altitudes increases the hazard of unnecessary aircraft damage. Special notice should be given to gunships who tend to stay down on the deck. At times this is not required nor desired.

---

30. Do conduct combat assaults at varying times of the day.

Charlie expects you at dawn - it's a good idea to fool him and hit him at no fixed hour.

---

31. Do employ pathfinder personnel in PZ's.

PZ activities require stringent control to insure proper coordination and placement of loads. This is an especially critical requirement when conducting joint US-Allied operations. The only way to insure that troops or supplies will be in the right place is to use pathfinders.

---

32. Do assign altitudes to aircraft entering an AO for purposes of observing airmobile operations.

The orbiting of numerous aircraft unrestricted by altitude separation and intent on observing action on the ground creates a potential mid-air collision.

---

33. Do require flight crews to report to aircraft at least 30 minutes prior to the scheduled "start engine" time prior to an airmobile operation.

Thirty minutes is the minimum time during which all crews can satisfactorily pre-flight aircraft, brief all members of the crew, and take action to replace aircraft with spares as necessary.

---

34. Do allow sufficient lead time in making weather decisions.

To preclude departures of lift companies from distant base camps to a PZ or AO which has restricting weather conditions, make your weather check early.

---

35. Do take action to insure that the logistical support required for an airmobile operation is available.

Although normally not the aviation units responsibility, we found that there was only one way to insure that JP4 would be available in the quantity required, that the pumps would work, and that an area would be covered with dust suppressant. This was by having the aviation unit S-4 make sure all necessary actions were taken.

---

36. Do specify a time that all actions will be taken in all airmobile operations.

Lift flights should be told when to crank, when to lift, when to hit the PZ, RP, and LZ. Similar instructions must be given to all other elements participating in the operations such as artillery, TAC air, and gunships. Such instructions should be in writing, proferably as a part of the operations order. Nothing must be put on an "approximate" or "on or about" basis. Split second timing throughout all airmobile operations is necessary to assure success.

---

37. Do take enough time for sufficient planning.

This is the most important rule of all. The primary cause of failure in combat is insufficient planning. It is up to the aviation commander to explain the danger in rushed decisions involving airmobile operations. To rush into an operation with insufficient planning is folly of the highest order.

DON'Ts

1. Don't plan final approaches to landing zones over, or closely paralleling, waterways or canals.

Flights are exposed over an area having a high concentration of VC forces, since rivers and canal lines serve as the enemy's primary lines of communication.

---

2. Don't, if at all possible, change a tactical assault plan once an operation has begun.

Changes invariably lead to confusion which results in a loss of timing and effectiveness in the conduct of an assault.

---

3. Don't retain lift aircraft in a forward pick-up zone for any extended time.

Lift flights of 10, 20, or more ships on the ground at one time present a lucrative target for enemy mortars.

---

4. Don't allow white phosphorous ordnance to be fired in the artillery preparation of an LZ.

WP rounds create a semi-IFR condition in the LZ, seriously restricting the visibility of both gunships and lift aircraft.

---

5. Don't engage an enemy target with the C&C aircraft if it will interfere with the accomplishment of the mission.

A C&C ship, downed by enemy fire, would result in the possible loss of all commanders on board, an Army helicopter, and, if lost at a critical time, the success of the operation.

---

6. Don't use "rights" or "lefts" to indicate directions from smoke when attempting to identify targets.

The use of "rights" or "lefts" is terribly inaccurate and difficult to grasp immediately by gunship pilots.

---

7. Don't spend excessive time in orbit over a proposed LZ.

In orbiting a proposed LZ, excessive time spent in a pattern may well be the clue to VC below of an impending assault.

---

8. Don't allow lift aircraft in formation to enter IFR conditions.

The instrument proficiency of aviators in the combat zone generally is far from acceptable.

---

9. Don't use rockets on point targets.

The rocket is an area weapon, proven completely ineffective against hard structures such as concrete bunkers.

---

10. Don't use WP rockets in gunship preparation.

The use of WP in either artillery or gunship preps results in the same conditions, i.e., the restricting of visibility of aircraft inbound to the area.

---

11. Don't use yellow smoke to mark LZ early in the morning on approaches to the East.

---

12. Don't use the same flight routes into and out of an LZ.

Experience has shown the first flight usually gets by OK. It's the follow on flights that get hit.

---

13. Don't plan insertions or extractions at sundown.

Sundown is Charlie's time to fight as he possesses all of the advantages. Aviation units on the other hand, are most vulnerable during this period.

---

14. Don't allow gunships to fire over the heads of friendlies or towards friendly positions.

Gunships should place their fire parallel to the front of friendly ground force positions. The helicopter is an unstable gun platform resulting in an unacceptible probability that an over or short round could result from a firing pass.

---

15. Don't permit unnecessary use of radio communications during the conduct of a assault.

We use a simple rule - Don't say it if it isn't absolutely necessary. Further, we use UHF for overall command and only company commanders, gun platoon leaders and the battalion C&C are on this net. Intra company chit chat is accomodated on the companies FM frequencies. Guns use VHF frequencies.

In addition to the DO's and DON'Ts listed above there are a few other subjects which are considered to be of significant importance. One subject involves the assignment process of officers programmed to command and staff deployable aviation companies in CONUS. Of the four companies which arrived for assignment to the 269th, two commanders had to be replaced within sixty days, having proven to be totally unacceptable. One of the two was passed over for selection to Lieutenant Colonel and I have little doubt that the other will be passed over on his reaching eligibility. I recommended at the time, and do so again, that action be taken by appropriate authority to insure that highly qualified officers be selected for command of units being formed in CONUS for movement to Vietnam. In this regard I further recommend that priority be given to 2d or 3d time returnees. The first few weeks after arrival in RVN are crucial for a new unit. Its commander should not have to be replaced. Instead it requires dynamic effective leadership, more so than at any other time, for the unit, in general, will maintain the quality of job performance with which it starts off.

AVGC-F 1 February 1968
SUBJECT: Departing Battalion Commander's Reflections

A subject that deserves considerable discussion deals with the correct usage of airmobile assets. In the 2nd Brigade of the 25th Division we had an organization that knew how to use its assigned assault company. Not only did the brigade know how to use an assault company but they were aware of the importance of consistently using airmobility in the conduct of the war in RVN. Daily the brigade requested at least one assault company. An excerpt from its aviation support analysis during the period 13 May 67 - 7 Dec 67 OPERATION KOLE KOLE reveals why.

> The brigade utilized one or more assault helicopter companies on 156 of the 209 days duration of operation KOLE KOLE. The helicopter companies normally furnished by the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion, were used primarily to conduct combat assaults and eagle flights. Battalions assigned to the brigade landed troops in 393 initial landing zones and 265 subsequent landing zones. 89% of the total 797 VC body count achieved were accounted for as a direct result of the use of helicopters and gunships.

A later portion reads:

> Evidenced by the percentage of the overall body count attained through the use of helicopter support, the employment of Army aviation assets greatly improved the effectiveness of the brigade.

A day's operation with the 2d Brigade was a sight to see. Utilizing one or two of its battalions it would place elements ranging from platoon to battalion size in numerous LZ's during the same period. If contact with the enemy was not made after a reasonable period of time the troops would be pulled up and inserted elsewhere. If contact was made it would be reinforced in order to exploit the situation. It would not be uncommon for a soldier to be inserted in 8-10 LZ's in a day on a continuous basis, day in and day out. You can imagine the proficiency developed by the brigade's battalions in the conduct of assaults. You can also imagine the effect on Charlie who was harrassed and slobbered incessantly. During the period covered in the report discussed above the 2d brigade killed more VC then the other two brigades of the division put together. The present commanding general of the division observed the success of the 2d Brigade after his assuming command and as a result has turned the 25th Division into the most airmobile minded division in Vietnam. Now, all of the brigades use airmobility to the fullest extent.

A subject dear to my heart is the use of a UH-1 as a smoke dispenser. I have observed numerous actions during which it was obvious that the smoke prevented excessive loss of men and material. On several occasions troops have been pinned down unable to move regardless of the amount of fire support provided. In many cases the troops were too close to the enemy to call in

artillery. With the smoke ship we have been able to place a wall of smoke between the enemy and our forces, enabling our forces to move. I know of no other means at our disposal which provides a similar solution in such a situation. We give the smoke ship top priority in our maintenance effort- Nothing is spared in keeping this bird flyable. Surprising as it may seem we have only had two men seriously wounded while flying the smoke ship although Charlie consistently fills the tail boom full of holes. I strongly recommend an organic smoke ship for each assault company.

One achievement of which I am very proud is the record established by the gunship's of this battalion. Not once have we injured a friendly soldier or civilian as a result of unauthorized engagement. On arrival at the 269th last May I found many 25th Division ground force commanders quite leery about the use of gunships. In fact, some requested that they not be used. This feeling had resulted from some bad experiences in the past which the ground commanders attributed to a lack of control. (This did not involve 269th gunships per se, but gunships in general) As a result the 269th set out to establish policies which would insure that no aircraft from this battalion would ever engage a target without proper authority to do so. In addition, we made it the responsibility of the aircraft commander to exercise good judgement even if authorized to engage a target. For example, if in the opinion of the AC a target can not be engaged without endangering friendly civilians or troops then it should not be engaged even though authorized to do so. In a short period of time all ground units in the 25th Division developed a healthy respect for the capabilities of our gunships and of utmost importance, complete trust. Now, we decide when and how the guns are to be used. Further, if a complaint exists about our gunships today it is because we can never provide all of the support desired.

A subject of interest and obvious importance to aviators in Vietnam concerns the anti-aircraft capability of the NVA and VC in the western portion of the III Corps area. The period covered by the following data is 1 May 1967 to 7 January 1968.

269th CAB Ground Fire Incident Summary for 496 Total Incidents (1 May 1967 - 7 Jan 1968)

1. Aircraft which received fire:

a.	Gunships	144
b.	Slicks	253
c.	O-1s	52
d.	CH-47s	47

2. Types of missions being performed when fire received:

a. Combat assaults	185
b. Single ship	167
c. Gunship	144

3. Altitude of aircraft when fire received:

a. 0' - 500	387
b. 500' - 1000'	40
c. 1000' - 1500'	39
d. Above 1500'	30

4. Aircraft hit category:

a. Of the 486 aircraft that received fire, 92 were not hit.

b. Of the 414 aircraft that were hit:

(1) Forced to land	47
(2) Shot down and not recovered	11
(3) Continued to fly	346

5. Number of rounds received per aircraft hit:

a. 1 - 5 rounds	365
b. 6 - 10 rounds	28
c. 11 - 15 rounds	9
d. Over 15 rounds	2

6. Monthly rate of ground fire incidents:

May	47	Oct	43
June	31	Nov	33
July	48	Dec	45
Aug	74	Jan 1 - 7	28
Sep	55		

7. Caliber of hits received (estimated):

a.	30 cal or less	364
b.	45 cal	3
c.	50 cal	18
d.	20 mm	6
e.	M-79	2
f.	Air burst	2
g.	Mortars	6
h.	2.75" rockets	1
i.	Recoilless rifle	2

From the above data the following conclusions may be drawn:

a. 78% of the hits were received at 500 feet or below.

b. No appreciable difference exists in the amount of hits received flying between 500' and 1000', and 1000' and 1500'. 8.07% of hits received were received between 500' and 1000', while 7.86% of hits received were received between 1000' and 1500'.

c. Nearly as many slick aircraft are hit on single ship missions (33.7%) as are hit on combat assaults (37.3%). Gunships account for the remaining 30% of hits.

d. 90.3% of aircraft hit are hit by from 1 to 5 rounds. Only .5% of aircraft hit received over 15 rounds. Considering the cyclic rate of fire of most of the automatic weapons systems used by the Viet Cong, the altitude at which most hits are taken, and the normal airspeed of rotorcraft, a definite indication exists that the enemy in III Corps is not a well-trained marksman.

e. 90% of all hits received were of caliber 30 or less. 4.5% of hits received were 50 caliber.

f. Once aircraft are hit, statistics indicate that 85.5% will continue to fly, 11.7% will be forced to land, later to be recovered, while 2.8% will never be recovered.

AVGC-F 1 February 1968
SUBJECT: Departing Battalion Commander's Reflections

Attached as inclosure 1, find a map depicting the location of the aircraft when they received hits. (Note the preponderance of hits received and their proximity to the major waterways - the Saigon and Oriental Rivers)

In the area of statistics, and in order to give you an appreciation of what the data contained in this paper is based on, the following information is submitted.

From 1 May of 1967 until 25 January 1968, aircraft of the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion have flown 278,909 sorties, logging a total of 93,656 cumulative flying hours. 418,411 passengers were carried and 43,603 tons of cargo were moved in support of ground forces. 529 Viet Cong/NVA forces (BC) have been killed by aircraft of this battalion, while 960 emergency medical casualties have been evacuated. During the period the battalion suffered 20 KIA and 119 WIA. 447 aircraft received combat damage from hits by enemy ground fire.

The above information is very general but the policies followed by the battalion have proven most rewarding. The final point I would like to make is on the importance of the aviation commander's assuming the responsibility to do what has to be done. He must never place the ground force commander in the embarrassing position of having to make or share a decision on a subject about which the non-flyer has little knowledge. On matters pertaining to the air movement of troops, i.e. PZ, air movement and LZ, the aviation commander should inform the ground commander how it should be done. An officer Army aviator is not just a pilot; he is also a qualified ground officer. As such he is the man to guide the ground commander in decisions involving airmobile operations and to make the decision on matters about which he alone possesses sufficient knowledge. If the aviation commander fails to take such action then the Army is getting less than it is paying for.

In closing I would like to express my appreciation for having been entrusted with the command of this fine battalion. In addition, I must inform you that the success of the 269th has resulted in no small measure from the outstanding leadership and splendid cooperation exhibited by the 25th Infantry Division. It has been a memorable year and when this campaign is over, and the books are written, I am confident that all of us will be proud to have been a part of the Army Aviation effort in Vietnam.

James H. Merryman

JAMES H. MERRYMAN
LTC, Arty
Commanding