

Lasson

161st Aviation Company
14th Aviation Battalion
APO San Francisco 96238

COMPANY HISTORY

The 161st Assault Helicopter Company (AML) was activated on 1 September 1965, by Third United States General Order Number 264, dated 25 August, 1965, at zero strength and equipment. It was located at Fort Benning, Georgia, and local resources were to be used to initially fill required positions.

New arrivals of personnel from other stations during September and October, 1965 brought the unit to TO & E strength for deployment. 10th Aviation Group at Fort Benning provided orientation and training of the unit, and assisted in solving the multitude of problems in preparing for overseas deployment to a combat zone.

After a Pre-Overseas Movement leave and shipment of all TO & E equipment, personnel of the 161st departed Fort Benning by aircraft, on 28 November 1965, and arrived on the West Coast the following morning. There, they boarded a troop ship and departed for "destination unknown", somewhere in Vietnam.

On 21 December 1965, the ship arrived at Qui Nhon, and after a one hour bus ride, the main body arrived at AN Sow Valley. There, they discovered a scrub covered hill, covered with mud that was to be "home" for the next 11 months. "Hex" tents had been set up, but with the rain and mud, dry clothes and feet were considered a luxury.

Immediately, permanent structures were planned, but due to a lack of engineer support, materials had to be "locally procured" and work had to be done by the men themselves. Officers and EM alike undertook the task of clearing the hill for living quarters, and materials were gathered from various sources.

With Christmas approaching, morale was extremely low. Due to the efforts of Captain Robert Arrington, the Mess Officer, the mess hall was partially completed and pieces of lumber were "scrounged" so that a "sit down" Christmas Dinner was available on Christmas Day. Mess personnel worked long hours, and their efforts renewed high morale and the desire to improve the area.

The goal was "every man out of a tent and into a building ASAP!" Soon, this goal was attained, and the unit changed its immediate efforts to becoming operational. Aircraft arrived and were quickly made airworthy after the long journey from the States by aircraft carrier. By late January, the 161st was able to notify the 52nd Battalion in Pleiku that it was operational and ready to accept missions.

Missions came fast and furious. Due to the proximity of the 161st to the Capital ROK Infantry Division, primary support was to be given to the Koreans.

The division was still involved in clearing operations to the north between here and the Phu Cat Mountains. Immediately the 161st was involved in several combat assaults, receiving an early baptism of fire, since several ships received hits. The unit realized that the training was over, and there was no "second best" in combat. This attitude was carried from mess hall to maintenance, from signal to flight line, and every individual strove for perfection in his work. The air crews were introduced to the phrase "normal resupply" which meant long hours of boredom hauling tons of supplies to Korean outposts, and punctuated by occasional sniper fire or lost RPM. Flying in Vietnam was different and at times dangerous, but with an excellent attitude each individual became proficient at coping with the unusual.

The 161st also began working with the ARVN 22nd Division. The first "Eagle Flight" was made in early April. Company sized Combat Assaults were run north of Qui Nhon, and again, many lessons were learned.

Major operations in which the 161st played a significant role during 1966 were:

- a) OPERATION PAUL REVERE I 6-16 May. West of Pleiku. Supported 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division.
- b) OPERATION NATHAN HALE 24 June to 15 July 1966. North west of Tuy Hoa. Supported 2/327 Infantry of 101st Airborne Div.
- c) OPERATION COLORADO 6-9 August. Northwest of Chu Lai. Gun Platoon reinforced Marine Armed Helicopters from VMO-6.
- d) OPERATION THAYER 12-19 September. Northwest of Bong Son. Supported 1st Cav Division. Flew 285 hours, 1,956 sorties, and carried 2,734 passengers and 188 tons of cargo in 5 days of operation.
- e) OPERATION OMEGA 1 October to 31 October. Dah To. Supported 5th Special Forces Group.
- f) OPERATION MENG HO 6-7-8 22 September to 31 December. Phu Cat Mountains. North of Qui Nhon. Supported Capital Republic of Korea (ROK) Infantry Division in clearing operation.

Many times during the year, the "Scorpions" proved their effectiveness. Most significant was 8 September near Phu Ly bridge, HW 1, north of Lane Army Helipad. Large numbers of Viet Cong were observed moving west, away from the Phu Cat Mountains, and the "Scorps" were present. For $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours they viciously attacked enemy positions in the face of heavy enemy fire. Three times, they rearmed and refueled after expending all ordnance. When the smoke cleared, 227 Viet Cong were credited to the platoon.

Throughout the year, the outstanding suppressive fire delivered all but eliminated hits on slicks during Combat Assaults.

In addition to the major operations mentioned above, a large number of independent CA's were conducted in support of US, POF, and ARVN troops. Each time the company performed in a professional manner

which proved that no job was too great, or too small. Every man who departed during the year could say "I'm proud I was a member of the 161st Aviation Company!"

1 SEP 65 -
1 February 1967

Eugene P Tanner
EUGENE P TANNER
MAJ, INF
Commanding Officer

Former C.O.

DISPLACED TO CHU-LAI APRIL 1967 AS PART
OF TASK FORCE ONSCAN IN I CORPS. LATER
AMERICAC / 23rd INF. DIV. BECAME 123rd Avn BN (OCT 67)