

DOUBLE TROUBLE

121st AHC AND 21st ARVN DIVISION— "DYNAMIC DUO."



"Famed Tiger" gunships furnish protective fire for ARVN ground troops.

2nd Company, 1st Battalion, 33rd Regiment of the 21st Division of the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) await liftoff just outside of the Battalion perimeter. The day is hot and the humidity is high. The air is saturated to an almost unbelievable 100 per cent. With the pre-flight plan already arranged, the men await in their small groups of designated chalks. The pick-up zone (PZ) is a plowed rice paddy that has baked for days under the hot 90 degree plus temperature. Having the characteristic of a ceramic glaze from the intensity of the sun's rays, the earth acts as a reflecting inferno, which plain-

ly shows on the perspiring faces of these Vietnamese fighting veterans.

Not a breeze is blowing. Not a sound is heard. The time is 1400. As one looks around, he sees the solitude, not only on the ARVN's faces, but also on the faces of the Vietnamese families who were fortunate enough to accompany their husbands to the newly established base camp. Even the children sense an air of concern. They have experienced the sadness of war and watched their fathers leave many times before, praying they will be able to enjoy the comfort of his conversation and strong arms tomorrow.

ARVN's destroy VC resupply cache.



ARVN commander evaluates tactical situation.

HAWK



The cost of war is oftentimes high.

Over at the Command Post (CP) tent the battalion commander and the American advisor stand in the entry, conversing over the day's operation. Suddenly, the drone of aircraft engines is heard in the distance. Movement of the troops is immediate and impulsive. Packs containing rice rations, ammo, cooking utensils and footgear are thrown on backs. Last minute inspections of weapons are made.

The choppers, six Vietnamese UH-1D's and their Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) pilots, land in a line formation stirring up huge dust bowls from the wash of the rotors. Immediately, they shut down. A couple of minutes later, more choppers are heard in the sky. As they approach, you recognize them as three UH-1B "Viking" gunships from the 121st Helicopter Company (Assault), headquartered in Soc Trang under the 13th Combat Aviation Battalion. After they land, the aviators head over to the CP to make coordination with the Vietnamese aviators and ground troops.

Take-off time is five minutes after the arrival of the gunships. The ARVN troops are impatient, for waiting seems to occupy an eternity. The Hueys are cranked up and the insertion troops loaded on. Meantime, the gunships from the

121st are already in the air heading for the prearranged landing zone (LZ).

The area of operation today is approximately 50 miles northeast of Soc Trang in Chuong Thien Province, the mission, search and clear. Find "Charlie's" sanctuaries and resupply caches and destroy them; do not allow him time for a mass troop buildup. These are the

types of operations the 21st ARVN Division prides itself in. Brigadier General Nguyen Vinh Nghi, the young, dynamic, division commander, states, "We protect six provinces in the Southern Delta, conducting search and clear operations in each of them. We clear sections and stay a limited period of time to allow the Popular and Regional Forces to take over control of the pacified area."

The 2nd Company is loaded on the slicks and in a matter of seconds the six Hueys are airborne. The only sounds to be heard are the rotors and the company commander communicating with the lead ship with his PRC-25 radio. A few minutes later the LZ is spotted. The rice paddies seem to spring to life as the gunships roll in, furnishing protective suppressive fire with their mini-guns, M-60's and 2.75 rockets. The dried rice paddies and tree lines immediately burst into flames. The slicks touch down and instantly the aggressive ARVN's saturate all surrounding hedge rows and tree lines with

automatic weapons fire.

Movement is slow and cautious. On this operation a V-shaped formation is used, providing protection to the front and flanks. The point element slows down even more. Charlie has been here. Booby traps are in evidence everywhere. Punji stakes, 40mm grenades and 105mm artillery shells are marked and blown when they are found.

Meanwhile, the 121st continues to furnish protective fire overhead. Bringing their gunships down to almost ground level at high speed, the mini-guns and door-gunners expend their ammo on any suspected target. After moving for 300 meters on the ground, the company commander receives word from the gunships that they are heading back to Soc Trang. With the gunships breaking off, the ARVN's continue on.

Suddenly, the troops draw to a halt. The point element has sighted a small hootch ahead occupied by two Vietnamese women. Cautiously, they move forward. The women do not run. Interrogation proves that the Viet Cong have been here recently.

The Company continues on. Again, the point element spots hootches, these being surrounded by bunkers. Setting up a hasty perimeter around the hootches, a squad is sent in to recon the area. No resistance is met, but ammo and



VNAF slick lifts off for another LZ.

rice caches are found. The commander directs the squad to continue.

In the same instant an explosion is heard; mine! A well concealed 105mm artillery shell has been triggered. Immediately, the CO pulls his troops back and off the main avenues of approach. The medics rush the stretchers forward and the perimeter guard initiates suppressive fire in all directions.

The wounded are extracted from the area and a squad is sent in to blow up the bunkers and set fire to the hootches. Charlie will use this base camp no more.

The Company pulls back and sets up another perimeter in a rice paddy that will be used as a PZ. Later, the slicks come in to pick up the 2nd Company and extract the wounded. It is late afternoon, but 2nd Company does not head back to the base camp. No, they have another LZ to encounter before darkness sets in. For this is the way the 21st Division operates.

As MAJ Walter M. Smith, the American advisory division operations officer and his Vietnamese counterpart, MAJ Truong Phuoc stated, "Many times the ARVN's will remain out in the field for 30 to 60 days and have two or three missions during the day. General Nghi, who plans the daily

operations, does his utmost, tactically, to strike the VC hard, fast and often, to keep them off-balance."

The 21st has a big responsibility, a Divisional Tactical Area (DTA) composing 14,000 square miles in the Southern Mekong Delta. This includes the NVA and VC sanctuary, the U Minh Forest. Tremendous progress is being made through the combined efforts of the ARVN troops and Army Aviation, specifically, the 13th Combat Aviation Battalion. As General Nghi said, "The 21st is very proud to have the 13th Aviation Battalion in support of us. We receive the best of cooperation from them. Their pilots are very courageous and will fly day or night for us."

Respect between the Americans and the Vietnamese is very high. CPT John W. Hicks, American advisor of the 1st Battalion of the 33rd Regiment, and SGT Dennis Taylor, NCO advisor for the same Battalion, reiterated many times, "The ARVN is a very proficient soldier. He is very aggressive and competent under combat conditions."

With the Americans and Vietnamese coordinating aviation assets from the 13th CAB and the ground support of the 21st in the Mekong Delta, the VC and NVA have learned from experience they have "double trouble" to contend with.



Another mission complete, troops head home.