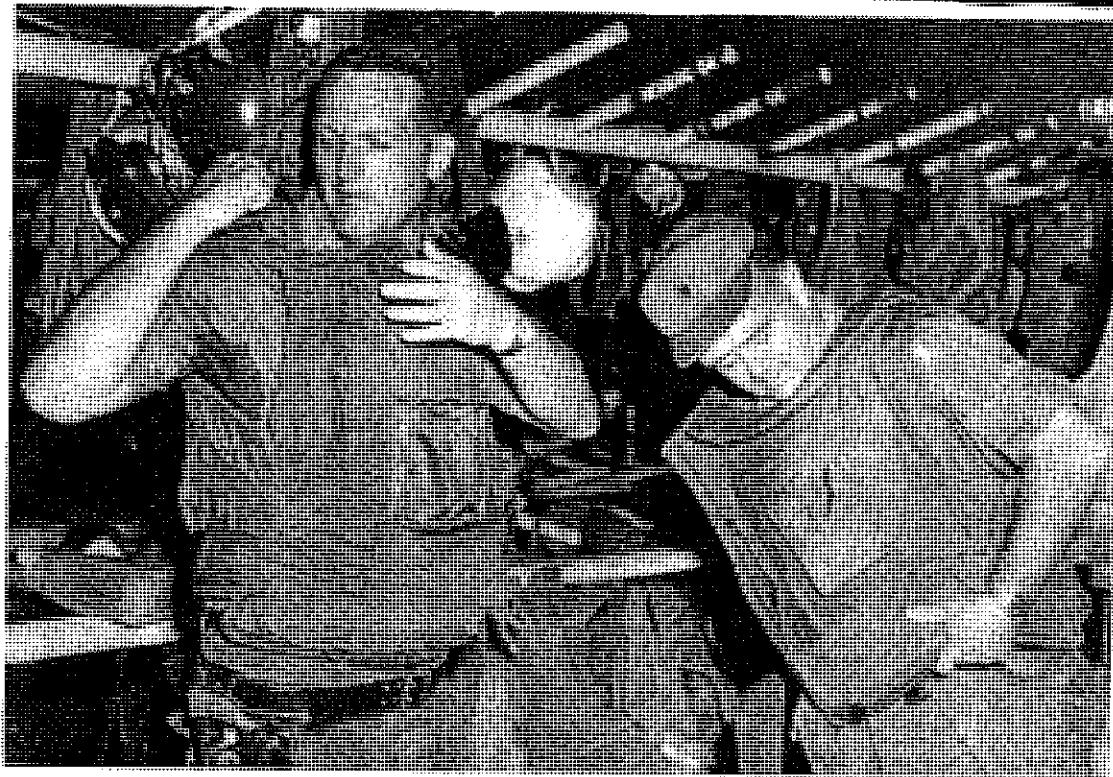


Oct. 23, 1968



Helping the Odds

Ranch Hand crews of the 12th Special Operations Squadron have the dubious distinction of being the most shot-at group in Vietnam, and take all precautions to cut the odds in their favor. Donning bullet-proof ceramic vests are Capt. Richard R. Wagoner, Bedford, Ind., UC-123 pilot (left) and Lt. Col. James R. Slay, Alexandria, La., squadron targeting officer.

Famed SOS Ranch Hands Celebrate Second Birthday

BIEN HOA — The Ranch Hands of the 12th Special Operations Squadron marked their second anniversary Oct. 15.

They have been in Vietnam since January 1962, but were not designated as a separate unit until October 1966.

The Ranch Hands have compiled an enviable record, officials noted, creating a tradition of their own that binds men with an esprit de corps found only in elite units.

Their oldest tradition stems from one of their earliest missions. On that occasion the Premier of the Republic of Vietnam flew on a mission with the Ranch Hands, and upon landing, removed a purple silk scarf from around his neck and presented it to the aircraft commander. To this day the men of the "Ranch" proudly wear purple scarves, embossed with the squadron emblem.

Pilots and navigators are

Flying their daily defoliation missions, the UC-123 aircraft and crews are favorite targets of the enemy as they make their passes over suspected enemy areas.

More than 3,000 hits from enemy ground fire have been taken by the 12th SOS. "And that's only since they started counting," said Lt. Col. Arthur F. McConnell Jr., Manchester N.H., commander of the squadron.

"We had one UC-123 nicknamed 'Patches' that took 546 hits from ground fire before she

was sent back to the U.S. in June," he added.

Colonel McConnell also mentioned the record of Ranch Hands, past and present, who have accumulated 11 Silver Stars, 47 Purple Hearts, 135 Distinguished Flying Crosses and 608 Air Medals.

The colonel also mentioned on the second birthday of the unit that none of their missions could be accomplished without the maintenance men. "You don't have a professional outfit without top-flight maintenance," he concluded.



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Pilots and navigators are awarded VNAF wings after flying 200 combat hours—and they do mean combat hours. They call themselves "the most shot-at unit in Vietnam."

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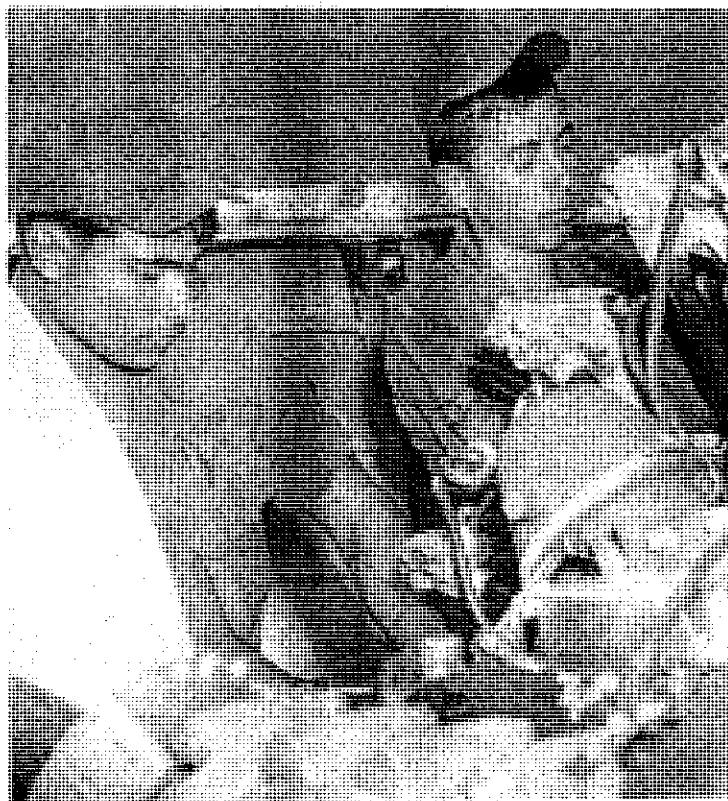
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Backbone of Success

The 12th Special Operations Squadron commander attributes the outstanding performance of his unit to maintenance men such as Airmen First Class Donald L. Smith, (left), Pottsville, Pa., and Gary H. White, Cullman, Ala., engine mechanics.