

SUPPLEMENT TO
THE HISTORY OF
THE 336TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

1 SEPTEMBER THROUGH 31 DECEMBER 1966

PREPARED BY
1/LT JOSEPH G. MULHERAN JR
UNIT HISTORIAN

APPROVED BY
LOUIS H. JACQUAY
MAJOR, SIGC
COMMANDING

13TH COMBAT AVIATION (DELTA) BATTALION
UNITED STATES ARMY VIETNAM

SEPTEMBER 1966

September was a very active month for the "Warriors", and it found us participating in Combat Assault operations on 17 of the 30 days.

We started the month with a four day operation near the town of Vi Thanh in Chuong Thien Province. On the second day of the operation the "Warrior Slicks" were receiving intense mortar and automatic weapons fire in the landing zone, but thanks to the close and effective fire support from the T-Birds and USAF air strikes, only one slick was hit by hostile fire and it was flown back to the stagefield for minor repairs. This was a very successful operation and the final results were very impressive. 309 Viet Cong kill in action, 13 captured, 21 ARVN killed in action, 73 ARVN wounded in action.

A large arsenal of weapons and ammunition was captured to include 4 20mm cannons, over 168 small arms, 11,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and numerous grenades and recoilless rifle rounds.

The other operations during the month consisted of the normal resupply and command and liason type missions, and, of course, swatter.

September proved to be another bad month for DEROS, with the "Warriors" still losing quite a few people, but gradually getting "New Blood". Losing a lot of old timers in a short period always makes for increased hardship and longer hours for the other aircraft commanders. The "Warriors" flew a total of 2,201 hours; 1,717 flown by the slicks and 484.0 by the "T-Birds". The high aviator for the month flew 155.4 hours.

OCTOBER 1966

The middle of October found the "Warriors" in a bind for aircraft.

On the 18th, most of the "Warriors" were on routing Command and Liason and resupply missions, when about 1100 hours Paddy Control began issuing a recall for all "Warrior Slicks" to return to Soc Trang as soon as possible. We all began to wonder what was going on.

Upon arrival back at home base we were given a short briefing and were told that we would be carrying a raiding party of Chinese mercenary soldiers (Nungs) on a surprise raid; where exactly, none of us knew.

Within an hour after our briefing we were in the thick of battle with a Viet Cong regiment at the 'Infamous' Vi Thanh.

Almost immediately one of the units which has landed 1200 meters from the proposed landing zone because of bad visibility, came into heavy contact and the two American advisors were wounded. Help was requested and a medevac shopper came into the landing zone, but came under heavy automatic weapons fire, and badly damaged, the aircraft returned to the stage field.

Viking Lead then decided to attempt a medevac with his ship. On approach to the landing zone, a burst of machinegun fire shattered the right windshield killing the pilot instantly. With the controls shot out the armed helicopter went into a forest of mangroves and crashed. The three survivors, still under enemy fire, escaped the wreckage and crept away, only to spend a harrowing night evading the Viet Cong, killing four in hand to hand combat in the process. The next morning the three survivors were picked up by a "Dustoff" medevac chopper.

The results of the battle were: 100 Viet Cong killed in action. The 336th suffered 3 U.S. wounded in action, one seriously, with 6 armed trans-

ports and 2 gunships damaged enough to be declared unflyable.

This month found a change in the slang expression for troop carrying helicopters. The word "slick" has been deleted and replaced by armed transport.

On the 22nd at approximately 0030 hours the Viet Cong made an unsuccessful attempt to mortar Soc Trang Airfield, thereby breaking a two month dry spell. Six rounds were fired but all landed 200 meters short of the SW end of the runway, and no damage resulted.

The "T-Birds" were scrambled and put in several target attacks against the suspected mortar positions. Because of darkness it was not possible to determine the number of casualties inflicted on the enemy.

The remainder of the month was comparatively uneventful with most missions consisting of command and liason and resupply.

This month the transports flew 1752 hours while the T-Birds flew 547 hours for a company total of 2,299 hours. The high aviator this month flew 163.5 hours breaking an all time record for the Company.

NOVEMBER 1966

On November 19, 1966, a heavy fire team from the "T-Birds" was at Ben Tre in support of a 7th ARVN Division sector operation. The team was on standby at the stage field. About 1000 hours an armed transport from the 114th Assault Helicopter Company landed at Ben Tre and reported that he had received automatic weapons fire while resupplying Ba Tri outpost. Shortly thereafter word was brought that Sector Headquarters had not received any radio transmissions from an ARVN patrol and their two American advisors, that were supposed to be operating in the Ba Tri area and subsequently requested that the "T-Birds" take off and try to locate the patrol.

Upon arrival in the area the "T-Birds" observed an estimated 300 uniformed Viet Cong complete with helmets camouflaged, ammo bandoleers and automatic weapons, running down an abandoned road towards a heavy palm grove. At first it was hard to believe that this many Viet Cong had been caught in the open, but when they turned and began firing at the gunships, there was no longer any doubt about them being "Charlies". The "T-Birds" assumed their fighting formations and the free for all was on.

There was a furious twenty minute battle while the "T-Birds" expended all of their ordinance, and when the dust cleared the three gunships had killed a fantastic 167 hard core Viet Cong.

The three "T-Birds" limped back to the stage field to re-arm and refuel while "Warrior 6" stayed airborne over the scene of battle to keep an eye on the fleeing Viet Cong.

After landing, one of the "T-Birds" made a pedal turn to clear the active and experienced anti-torque failure. The aircraft spun around $1\frac{1}{2}$ times before the pilot could execute a successful hovering autorotation with no damage to the aircraft. The aircraft had taken 19 hits, one bullet partially severing

the tail rotor control cable causing it to fail on landing. The high professional competence with which the aircraft commander handled this emergency is indicative of all of the pilots in this company.

The other two gunships received 11 and 2 hits respectively. The pilots and crews of all three ships miraculously escaped without a scratch.

It was learned later that this battalion of Viet Cong had ambushed the ARVN patrol that hadn't reported in, killing one American advisor and capturing the other, and were about to attack the outpost at Ba Tri when the "T-Birds" spoiled their plans.

The remainder of the month both before and after Ba Tri was occupied by regular command and liason and resupply missions.

This month the armed transports flew 1,945.0 hours and the "T-Birds" 625.0 for a total of 2,579.0 hours.

DECEMBER 1966

On the 6th of this month two Naval aviators and their two enlisted aircrewmen arrived at Soc Trang to begin training with the T-Birds in preparation for their assignment to the U.S. Navy Armed Helicopter Detachment, the Sea-wolves, in support of Operation Gamewarden. The "water soldiers", as they are affectionately called, have adapted themselves very well to their new Army environment and are very competent gunship pilots.

On the 22d, a heavy fire team was scrambled to Vi Thanh in response to an urgent call that a Vietnamese outpost and hamlet 5 miles north of the city were being overrun by a battalion of Viet Cong. The enemy was in the open when the gunships arrived and a fierce fire fight ensued resulting in quite a few Viet Cong being killed, but in the process the three T-Birds took several hits. T-Bird chief's ship took a round in the transmission oil line forcing him to return to the stagefield for a precautionary landing. Another light fire team of T-Birds was scrambled from Soc Trang to help out. On the second target pass the fire team lead took a hit in the main hydraulic line, after the bullet clanced off the gunners knee wounding him, and forcing that fire team to return to the stage field where the team leader executed a successful running landing. The wounded gunner was treated and the hydraulics hurriedly repaired. Another gunner was recruited from one of the other downed ships, and the team returned once again to the operational area. After one target attack the hydraulics again failed, this time due to faulty repair, and the team had to break off the attack and return to the stage field where the team leader once again executed a successful hydraulics off landing.

Soon airstrikes were called in on the target, and all the gunships returned to Soc Trang. An actual body count of Viet Cong killed by the gunships was not available but the crews estimated 18 Viet Cong killed by armed helicopters.

On the 23d, the T-Birds and Warriors were on a combat assault south of Ca Mau, Republic of Vietnam. During extraction the T-Bird fire team on station began receiving heavy automatic weapons fire, which has become almost the rule rather than exception when we have operations in this area. T-Bird chief flying the "hog", decided to put a target attack on the tree lines and wooded dike lines around the pickup zone. During the attack there was a malfunction in one of the rockets on the left side. After leaving the tube the rocket motor exploded, seriously wounding the crew chief and causing heavy structural damage to the door and left side of the aircraft. The pilots escaped with minor injuries.

Beginning Christmas and New Years Eve 48 hour truces were called by both sides, during which time there was a lull in the war with only minor Viet Cong instigated incidents occurring.

On the 29th, the Viet Cong mortared the ARVN training center 4 miles South of Soc Trang. The T-Birds scrambled and put several target attacks on the suspected enemy mortar positions. Because of the darkness it was not possible to determine the extent of damage inflicted on the enemy.

This month the Warrior transports flew 1,954.0 hours while the T-Birds logged 625.0 hours.

FEBRUARY 1967

This month saw the beginning of intensive use of night "Firefly" operations by the Thunderbirds. Firefly missions were flown on 12 of the 28 days of February.

The mission of the Firefly is to interdict sampan traffic on canals, rivers and other waterways during the hours after curfew, in an effort to prevent resupply of Viet Cong elements and to harass and disrupt Viet Cong units during their movement at night.

A Firefly team consists of a light fire team of armed helicopters and one armed transport which is used as a light ship. The principle of operation is as follows: The lightship, cruising at approximately 1000 feet absolute altitude, flies down the selected canals and rivers training its powerful light in search of targets. Behind the lightship flies the lead gunship of the light fire team, at 600-700 feet and in position to put fire on any targets of opportunity or suppress any enemy fires directed at the lightship. The trail gunship flies blacked-out at an altitude of from 500-600 feet and the primary mission of this ship is to protect the lead gunship from enemy fire. The mission usually lasts from 2200-2300 until 0400 or 0500 in the morning.

On the 15th of this month the Warriors and T-Birds went to Vi Thanh in support of the 21st ARVN Division. On the first day of this operation the ground troops encountered light resistance from the enemy. On the morning of the second day the transports were put into a landing zone approximately 100 meters from a heavily wooded dike line. As the transports touched down the Viet Cong opened up with automatic weapons on the lead aircraft. Warrior lead flown by Captain Robert L. Stewart was shot down and Captain Stewart was mortally wounded. The second and third aircraft in the flight were also shot down wounding another pilot and several crew-members.

Warrant Officer Jack Grimmer, pilot of one of the aircraft shot down, braved the intense enemy fire to rescue the wounded co-pilot from the lead aircraft. Warrant Officer Grimmer has been recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism. The operation ended on the 17th with a total of 331 Viet Cong KIA. The 21st ARVN Division suffered a relatively modest 31 KIA with 109 WIA. One American was killed and 3 wounded.

On the 21st of this month, the Warriors went to Tay Ninh in support of Operation Junction City, one of the biggest and most successful campaigns of the war. The Warriors remained until the 26th then returned to Soc Trang. During their stay at Tay Ninh, the Warriors airlifted companies from the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions along with some elements of the famous 173d Airborne Brigade. For most of the Warriors this was their first experience working with American ground forces and all enjoyed the opportunity.

This month the Warriors flew 1,387.2 hours and the Thunderbirds 470.4.

MARCH 1967

On the first at 2000 hours the T-Birds took off from Soc Trang enroute to Bac Lieu for a Firefly operation. Arriving at 2030, the pilots proceeded to airfield operations for their briefing. Approximately fifteen minutes later recoilless rifle rounds began to fall into the center of town causing panic and numerous casualties among the civilian populace. Almost before the second and third rounds had fallen, the T-Birds were off the ground and putting target attacks on the Viet Cong weapons emplacements. Due to the instant response and the intensity of the attacks by the armed choppers, the enemy broke their attack and fled but not without suffering heavy casualties.

By this time the Vikings, the armed platoon of the 121st Assault Helicopter Company, had been scrambled from Soc Trang and were enroute to relieve the T-Birds. The two gun platoons continued to relieve each other until almost midnight when it was decided by the Vietnamese commander to put a 10 ship troop lift into the enemy area in an attempt to make contact with the fleeing Viet Cong. A flight of ten Tiger transports, led by Captain Robert Greene, were scrambled to Bac Lieu; and Captain Thomas Beauchamp, second section leader of the T-Birds, found and marked the landing zone and directed the Tigers to a pin point landing. No contact was established with the enemy that night, but the next morning the ARVN ground forces found numerous blood trails and expended recoilless rifle casings where the T-Birds had put their strikes.

On Easter Sunday, the 26th, Colonel Jack Dempsey, Battalion Commander of the 13th Aviation (DELTA) Battalion was killed in action while attempting to rescue the crewmembers of two downed choppers.

A flight of armed transports had been put into a "hot" landing zone and one of the aircraft was shot down. A Dustoff medevac helicopter went in after

the crew but it also was hit by intense enemy fire and went down. Colonel Dempsey then attempted to rescue both crews in his own ship and was mortally wounded. USAF tactical fighters and armed helicopters from all five gun platoons in the delta put continuous air strikes on the enemy emplacements for almost seven hours before Dustoff could get in to remove the dead and wounded from the three downed aircraft. Colonel Dempsey was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for Valor in attempting to rescue his men.

T-Bird 4 and its crew: 1/Lt Bill Miller, WO Doug Lape, SP/4 Buege, and SP/4 O'Bannon were shot down only a few hundred meters from the other downed ships. With the controls shot out, WO Lape made a crash landing, but none of the crew was seriously injured, and all were rescued immediately. SP/4 Gary Wilcox, a first platoon second section gunner was killed by hostile fire on the first lift into the landing zone. A total of three Americans were killed, and eight wounded in the battalion. The number of 9th ARVN Division casualties is unknown, but 160 Viet Cong were killed by body count.

This month the T-Birds flew Firefly missions on 22 nights. They flew 446.1 hours for a total of 518 sorties. The Warriors flew 2,087.5 hours with 6,996 sorties. The total cargo weight carried was a very impressive 190.8 tons!

JUST ANOTHER DAY

CAN THO, Vietnam (13th Cbt Avn Bn 10)--How's the war coming along in the Delta? Don't you guys ever do anything down there? I'm invariably asked this by a tired looking American soldier from the northern battle zones when I make a rare trip to Saigon. Until a few weeks ago, we didn't have American infantrymen down here, so how are we fighting the war?

The war in the Delta is being fought and won by Vietnamese Regulars, their American Advisors, and Huey Gunships. As a member of the "T-Birds", the Gunship Platoon of the 336th Assault Helicopter Company located at Soc Trang, I'm going to take you on a typical daily experience in the Mekong Delta, an actual experience.

At 0400 in the morning you're shaken out of bed and an hour later you've gulped down a breakfast and are sitting in the ready room for a briefing. A half hour and perhaps a second cup of coffee later, you amble out to your assigned gunship for preflight. Standing there in the darkness with the flashlight in your hand, you see the patches over the bullet holes, recall briefly how they got there, and wonder silently how today's operation will end up. Unconsciously you feel for the St. Christophers medal around your neck.

Yours and four more gunships take to the darkness above and touch down an hour later at Ca Mau, the southernmost airstrip of the Delta, as

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three deafening explosions rip through the air. The Viet Cong had set off mines planted alongside the airstrip.

You make a hasty departure and recon the area. The enemy has lost themselves in the tall elephant grass so you reluctantly land once more. Immediately, flight upon flight of Huey transports begin landing and lining up in neat rows along side the strip. "Must be at least 30 of them", you mutter to yourself.

After another quick briefing to catch up on the latest enemy activity, yours and the other 4 aircraft depart South to the mangrove swamps to recon the proposed LZ (Landing Zone). Arriving over the operational area, you're flying wing position on your team leader as the two gunships of your team break off and descend to 20 feet off the deck. The other team has done the same, and looking up through the overhead plexiglass seeing "T-Bird Chief" 800 feet above, you smile inwardly knowing his banks of rockets and his 40mm Grenade Launcher might pull you out of a tight spot before the day is over. The transports are inbound to the LZ when suddenly your team leader calls "Receiving Fire, Breaking Right". Your co-pilot suppresses the area with the 4 aircraft mounted machine guns, as you sight it in on the rocket sight. You touch the red button on the control stick and the spot erupts with an explosion. You hope you got him. Now the transports have started their descent into the LZ so you escort them in suppressing the area with machine guns and rockets. They unload the Vietnamese soldiers and are airborne again in 10 seconds. You escort them out of the LZ and no one reports a hit. "Good" you think to yourself. You depart to recon another LZ site. This time the other team receives enemy fire and as you monitor your radios you hear the wingman call a hit. You strain at your earphones to see if anyone was wounded. Fortunately, no one was. On one radio you can hear

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T-Bird Chief giving landing and departure instructions to the transports. Once again you're escorting them into an LZ. Nothing happens, and the transports dislodge their troops and depart safely once more. You're getting low on fuel and another gunship platoon relieves you. Arriving back at Ca Mau you find the other wing ship is unflyable. The hit he received was through the splice on the rotor blade. T-Bird Chief was having maintenance difficulties in the air and his aircraft is also unflyable. The other team leader takes the responsibilities of "Chief", and your team is still in tact. Throughout the day your team and the other gun platoon relieve each other. Once the transports are finished lifting troops, your job is to provide aerial support for the ground units and protect your team leader. Throughout the day, isolated guerrillas fire at your aircraft and you fire back, but the big job is being done by the Vietnamese troops and their advisors. As the day wears on, you are again relieved on station and the other gun platoon begins the extraction of troops, just before darkness settles in. As you sit back at the strip, you watch the transports coming in and out unloading the troops, the day is almost over. An advisor rushes up in a jeep. "Scramble!", he yells. "The pick up zone is getting hot and the gun platoon out there is almost expended on ordance!" Within 90 seconds you're airborne and pushing your aircraft as hard as you dare. The other platoon pulls off as you descend to the pick-up zone. Your leader immediately calls receiving fire and the noise of the machine guns firing drowns out the popping of the enemy fire as it whizzes by your own ship. The Viet Cong have infiltrated into the mangroves surrounding the pick up zone. You hear a loud crash and look sideways seeing a jagged hole above your co-pilots helmet. Your team leader continues calling receiving fire, and you protect him with everything you've got. A flight of transports are

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on short final to the PZ, and you blast away trying to protect them from the enemy fire. In a matter of seconds they're loaded and coming out. Your team leader tells them to suppress going out and 20 machine guns open up on the enemy infested mangroves. They're out safely but 3 loads of troops are still on the ground. The Viet Cong moves in closer, surrounding the small group. Thunk, Thunk, Thunk, three more rounds rip into your cabin section. Out of nowhere three more transports come winging into the PZ. Somewhere in your mind is a voice screaming "Protect them, Protect them". Caliber .30 tracers fly across your flight path. Out of nowhere a .50 caliber nearly rips your skids apart wounding your crew chief with shrapnel. The two enlisted door gunners are expended on machine gun ammo; your co-pilot is also expended and is down to firing his .45 cal pistol out the window. You hear the sound of an automatic M-14 as your door gunner fires it and you hope he's got enough ammo to get everyone out safely. The transports are lifting off and that last rocket you've been saving goes blasting into a spot where bracers are coming from. The troops are out, the transports are out, and also you got out. Now at altitude and going back to the strip, you look back at your crew chief with his ragged pants leg where the shrapnel got him then over at your gunner and see the blood on his hand from shrapnel. Tears of emotion creep into your eyes and you silently thank God no one was killed. You get to the strip as fast as possible so medical attention can be given your crew. Upon landing you ask the medic how bad the crew is hurt. With the words "Not bad, it could have been worse", he makes you feel a little better. You walk back to your aircraft and stand there looking at the twisted metal, the holes gouged by the enemy. Your co-pilot walks over and says it has 12 holes, and will have to be evacuated by Chinook. You reach up and touch the St. Christophers medal and wonder what tomorrow will bring.

NEWS RELEASE

Cleared for Release
By MACOI
7 December 1966

CHARLIE GOES TO SCHOOL - THE HARD WAY

SOC TRANG, Vietnam (336th Avn Co IO)—Some 300 Viet Cong took a lesson in the "school of hard knocks" on a steaming Saturday morning near Ba-Tri in the Delta Region of South Vietnam recently. Some of the 300 will live to remember their lesson - others died without passing the final examination.

The lesson being taught was "don't tangle with armed helicopters". Teachers of the lesson were members of the "Thunderbirds", the armed helicopter platoon of the 336th Assault Helicopter Company.

The Thunderbirds known locally as the "T-Birds", were "scrambled" in response to a report that an ARVN patrol and its American advisor had been ambushed, and that the outpost of Ba-Tri was threatened by a large force of VC. When spotted by the "T-Birds", the VC were disregarding all previous lessons and were walking in force through the open rice paddies.

Warrant Officer Peter J. Galanos of Los Angeles, California, a veteran of six months with the "T-Birds", was one of the first to sight a group of VC moving on a dike between rice paddies. "We cut up the head of the column with our shipmounted M-60 machine guns and the rest of the VC jumped into the water" recalls Galanos. After that it was a mad scramble. The VC in panic, were running in all directions. A few headed toward cover and the "T-Birds" attacked them with rockets and finished the job with machine guns.

While Galanos and his crew were taking care of these VC, another large group was spotted by Lieutenant Colonel James E. Kennedy of Austin, Texas, Commanding Officer of the 336th, and Major Louis A. Jacquay, Fort Wayne, Indiana flying in the company's command and control ship. They directed another "T-Bird" fire team to intercept this new threat.

Captain Teddy Allen of Monterey, California, armed helicopter fireteam leader, described this part of the action. "It was a classic example of the armed helicopter's effectiveness against insurgents. We had them where we wanted them...out in the open. We had them! We knew it and they knew it too".

But this part of the day's lesson was not so easy. The Viet Cong blazed back in desperation with every automatic and small arms weapon they had. The armed helicopters flew through intense VC fire and took several hits, but continued to fly in seeking out Charlie with rockets and machine guns until this group too was disorganized and ineffective.

Every combat action brings out individual acts of courage and this was no exception. Special Fourth Class Richard A. Honyoust of Benton Harbor, Mich., was observed leaning far out over the helicopter's skids, delivering accurate

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machine gun fire directly into the midst of the now terror-stricken Viet Cong. There were several bullet holes within inches of his legs and even nearer to the one strap that was the lifeline between himself and oblivion. Specialist Fourth Class Chester L. Groce of Chickamauga, Georgia picked up his M-14 rifle and continued to fire when his machinegun ammunition was gone. All the T-Birds had been hit by the intense Viet Cong fire. The command and control aircraft had also been hit and Major Jacquay slightly wounded while their door gunners added firepower to that of the T-Birds during the engagement. Such acts were typical of the courage displayed that day by these American fighting men.

With all their ammunition gone the T-Birds reluctantly broke off the attack leaving the command and control aircraft to keep tabs on the VC while they reloaded and rearmed. As the T-Birds returned to their base to rearm, a tailrotor control cable on one of the aircraft, which had been partly severed by a VC bullet, finally broke causing the helicopter to spin rapidly several times before the aircraft commander, Warrant Officer Galanos, was able to land. Demonstrating great professional skill, he landed the aircraft without further damage or injury to the crew.

After inspecting his helicopters, Captain Allen found only one, his own, able to fly back into action, and his crew eagerly volunteered to do just that. Meanwhile, the command and control helicopter had continued to deliver machine gun fire into the remaining enemy from an altitude of 700 feet, well within range of VC small arms fire. When the lone T-Bird returned to the scene of battle, it joined the command aircraft and engaged what was left of the enemy. Again they expended all their ammunition..

An American Sergeant, the advisor with the ambushed ARVN patrol had been captured earlier during the VC attack on the patrol. During the chaos caused by the T-Bird attack he escaped to freedom.

So ended one of the most successful engagements of its kind during this bitter struggle for the rice-rich Mekong Delta. The Viet Cong dared return only under the cover of darkness to drag away their dead. The T-Birds had done their job well.