

ANNUAL SUPPLEMENT
HISTORY OF THE
57TH ASLT HELICOPTER BN COMPANY

1 January 1969 - 31 December 1969

prepared by

1LT James R. Perry
WO1 Terry L. Weber
WO1 William G. Rainey
WO1 Paul R. Williams

APPROVED BY

BYRON E. BYERLEY
MAJ CE
Commanding

KONTUM, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. FORWARD
- II. COMMAND AND CONTROL
- III. MISSION AND ORGANIZATION
- IV. INTRODUCTION TO UNIT OPERATIONS
- V. UNIT OPERATIONS
- VI. HONOR ROLL
- VII. APPENDIX
 - A. AIRCRAFT DAMAGE AND CASUALITIES FOR FOB
 - B. AWARDS SUBMITTED FOR ACTIONS PERFORMED ON FOB

F O R W A R D

The year 1969 has once again shown that the 57th Aviation Company "Gladiators" can meet and perform any mission assigned to it in a manner that exemplifies the highest qualities to be found in Army Aviation.

The officers and men of the 57th have shown such courage, dedication, and professionalism that the Gladiators have developed a reputation for accomplishing any mission, at any time, in spite of adversities. However, the 57th is not content to let its reputation go unchallenged. Our motto, "Try Us", is an open invitation for all to test the 57th "Gladiators" and learn that these officers and men are soldiers in the finest tradition of the military service.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

1969

MAJ. ROBERT M. WILLIAMS, INF

27 August 1968 - 20 February 1969

MAJ. JAMES T. KEARNS, CE

20 February 1969 - 14 August 1969

MAJ. JOHN D. CHARLES, INF

14 August 1969 - 23 January 1970

MISSION AND ORGANIZATION

The mission of the 57th Assault Helicopter Company is to provide tactical air mobility of combat troops, supplies and equipment and to provide attack helicopter fire support within the II Corps Tactical Zone.

On 10 February 1967, the 57th was reorganized from an Airmobile Fixed Wing Company(CU-2) to an Assault Helicopter Company by General Order 52, Headquarters, Third U.S. Army. The company consists of Company Headquarters, two Airlift Platoons, and Armed Platoon and a Service Platoon.

The following units are attached:

- 154th Medical Detachment
- 52d Security Detachment

The 57th, with its attachments, are authorized 20 Commissioned Officers, 51 Warrant Officers and 262 enlisted men. The 333 men operate, maintain and secure a total of 23 UH-1H troop carrying helicopters and 8 UH-1C attack helicopters.

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT OPERATIONS

The 57th Assault Helicopter Company is in general support of the II Corps Tactical Zone but has been primarily in support of the Kontum Province area in the northern sector of the Central Highlands. This is near the tri-border area of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The 4th Infantry Division, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Field Forces, MACV, and various ARVN units have all been supported by the 57th. These units have been served well but the 57th primary mission has been to support the 5th Special Forces Group, Command and Control Detachment (FOB #2). Formerly, this mission was on a 60-day rotation basis with all the companies in the 52d Battalion participating, but, during parts of 1968 and the first of 1969, the 57th had accomplished such a remarkable record of successful missions with a minimal loss of aircraft and personnel that it was requested and approved that the 57th remain on the mission for an extended period of time.

The following narrative submitted by LTC Frederick T. Abt, Commander of FOB #2, will give an insight as to the type of obstacles that were met and overcome by the men of the 57th. The men of the Gladiators and Cougars take distinct pride in receiving this "Job Well Done" recognition.

UNIT OPERATIONS

As the beginning of the new year the 57th experienced little enemy activity around the Kontum area. A distinct change from the same period one year ago as the 1968 Tet Offensive was getting under way. Tet, 1968, served as a steady reminder to what could possibly occur in 1969 and preparations were well into being completed to meet any action initiated against the compound.

Working on the perimeter defense and building permanent living quarters meant long extra hours to be put in after a day of flying but the men realized the need to get the job completed and were quite enthusiastic, complaining little.

All this activity failed to keep the men of the 57th from meeting the daily missions. It appeared that there would be continued success with the FOB #2 mission as it was being performed in the manner that was unparalleled by any previous unit. At the same time the unit was fulfilling its responsibilities to the other organizations in the area.

On the 8th of January the first rocket attack of the year occurred and as it turned out it was the only one for the month. Eight rockets impacted in the Kontum city limits. The 57th suffered no damage, except for nerves, but it was felt by all that the well-earned name of "Rocket City" was going to be retained for the year 1969.

Tensions began to subside somewhat as no incoming rounds were experienced for the remainder of the month but the Tet truce in February was on everyone's mind and last minute preparations were being undertaken with a sense of urgency.

The first and only serious aircraft incident for the month of January happened on the 13th $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Kontum. While enroute from Kontum to Pleiku WO1 Joseph Mulkey had an engine failure but landed successfully causing only minor damage to the aircraft.

Starting the new year in such fine form gave everyone hope that this year would not be a repetition of the one just passed.

The month of February caused this feeling to be short lived. Although no Tet offensive was initiated, the unit was to suffer its first combat casualty of the year.

On the 16th of February while trying to insert a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) in an LZ one mile northeast of Poley Kleng, the aircraft, piloted by WO1 Norman Perron and Arthur Papale, received an unknown number and type of hits from enemy ground fire. WO Perron radioed on climb out that the controls were erratic. The aircraft then began to show spiral

descent, it crashed and burst into flames upon impact. All four of the crewmembers were killed as were the 4 LRRP team members aboard. The Gladiators are a tight knit group and the loss of any of them has an effect on the entire unit but the losing of lives is expected and soon the company was back to normal with a mission to accomplish.

On the 23rd, 24th and 25th a total of 40 enemy rockets were fired into the Kontum area but fortunately the company's luck held and there was only minor damage.

February also marked the moving out of some of the tents as the first billets were completed. This was something to rejoice about which isn't often done while in Vietnam.

Along with the month of March came hot weather and hazardous flying conditions. The entire area had limited visibility as all the farmers were burning their fields causing a haze that would not dissipate. It also marked the completion of the living billits and stowing away of the tents that had been home for such a long period of time.

The 57th was still living up to its reputation in flying the FOB #2 mission in a remarkable manner. It wouldn't be much longer before it was time for the mission to be rotated to another unit but there was speculation that the 57th would have the mission for another 60 days.

16 March the 57th suffered an unusual accident. WO's Mark Towne and Kenneth O'Keefe landed their aircraft at Firebase 29, one the passengers jumped off and stepped on a mine. The blast carried shrapnel through the aircraft causing extensive damage. WO Towne and crewchief SP4 John White suffered wounds that demanded immediate evacuation.

On the 25th the 57th lost another aircraft. The type of weapon that did the damage is one feared by all aviators but seen by few. 1LT Gene Carpenter and WO Fredrick Brown were flying at 2000 feet AGL and 80 knots when the aircraft was hit by 37mm anti-aircraft fire. The engine sustained major shrapnel damage causing an engine failure. The aircraft was autorotated into the most accessible area. It descended 50 feet through trees and, after ground impact, caught fire and was totally destroyed. All the crewmembers made it safely out of the crash and were immediately picked up by another 57th aircraft.

April found the Gladiators busy at work improving their new living quarters. Rocket boxes by the hundreds were utilized to build walls and ceilings for individual rooms. Paint, pictures, state flags and war souvenirs were used to make the rooms unique. After the rooms were completed a joint effort was put forth on many projects to make living quarters and facilities better. The three main projects to be completed prior to the monsoons were showers, sidewalks and clubs.

April was extremely rough on the Gladiators as three aircraft were lost. Although the three aircraft were totally destroyed, it is fortunate, however, that only one fatality was incurred.

The first loss occurred on the 1st when an aircraft was trying to climb out of a hot LZ and sustained .50 cal hits causing the engine to fail. The pilot entered autorotation but the terrain did not permit a successful termination and the aircraft crashed and burned.

The AC, WO Thomas Hestand, received a broken arm and the crewchief SP4 Alvin T. Gay died instantly from a .50 cal wound. The pilot and gunner were fortunate enough to escape without injury.

Three days later, on the 4th another aircraft was lost and, although injuries were sustained by all crewmembers, there was no loss of life. While on short final to an LZ, WO Daniel Medince heard explosions and noticed mortars were impacting in the LZ. When he pulled pitch in attempt to go around he suffered a loss of power which resulted in a crash.

Undaunted by these losses, the Gladiators continued in their mission of supporting the FOB #2 missions. As fate would have it, the cycle continued and 3 days later, on the 7th, still another crash occurred. The aircraft was a total loss but this time there were no serious injuries. While on final to an LZ the aircraft received .50 cal hits in the engine compartment causing a fire. WO Paul Brammon accomplished a safe landing in his crippled aircraft and the crew evacuated before the aircraft was consumed by fire.

As the saying goes the third time was the charm and the 57th lost no more aircraft during the month of April.

The winds were shifting and the scattered showers brought signals of the oncoming monsoon season.

The month of May came on strong. May 11th, Mother's Day, a day to be remembered by the Gladiators. The compound began to take incoming rounds at 0200 hours consisting of B-40's, 122mm rockets and mortars. A sapper and ground attack advanced under the barrage. Thanks to the alertness and bravery of the Cougar gunship crews who ran to their gunships immediately, the ground attack was repulsed. The following morning 13 dead enemy soldiers were found in the concertina wire and in foxholes dug the previous night. The rockets and mortars had done their damage though approximately 6 million dollars worth. Six aircraft were totally destroyed, four heavily damaged, our large maintenance hanger with all its equipment destroyed. Although various other buildings were hit, no one was killed and only three people were wounded.

The siege of Ben Het also began in the month of May. The resupply and medical evacuation was the primary mission for the 57th, due to the requirement of FOB #2, but the Gladiators did make numerous trips into Ben Het and helped play a vital role in the defeat of the enemy.

The area around Ben Het played havoc with the Gladiator's aircraft as three were badly damaged. On 6 May, WO John Donato received numerous small arms hits which knocked out instruments and caused the loss of hydraulics. WO Donato made a successful running landing, and no one was wounded. On 21 May another aircraft was heavily damaged but made it safely back to a secure airfield. Again no one was wounded. On 23 May a Gladiator ship was in the process of lifting off an LZ when B-40 rockets hit close to the right side causing damage to the aircraft and wounding WO Delos Ditch, crewchief PFC Daniel Moon, and the doorunner SP4 James Booth. Thanks to the excellent flying ability of WO William O'Dell the aircraft cleared the LZ and got to medical facilities for the wounded.

With June came the full force of the monsoons and the low flying time. Bet Het was still under seige but, with aviation continually resupplying and providing fire support, it looked as if it could hold out for an indefinite period of time.

Firebase 6, approximately 10 kilometers to the southeast of Bet Het, was the scene of an unusual loss of another aircraft. WO Thomas Hollendorfer had just brought his aircraft to a hover for a pinnacle take-off when a 75mm recoilless rifle round hit below the tail boom. The tail rotor and 90° gear box became separated from the aircraft and it began spinning to the right. Another RR round hit below the tail boom and a hovering autorotation was successfully executed. It was remarkable that WO Hollendorfer had been able to keep the spinning ship over the pad. If he hadn't, it would have been a sheer drop for some 200 feet. None of the crewmembers were wounded but they were very shaken.

It was in June that the 57th was given the word that it would be moved out of Knotum to Camp Holloway in Plieku. The Gladiators began earnest training of the pilots from the 189th AHC, who were to take over the FOB #2 mission, and making arrangements to move. The team at FOB was making every effort to retain the 57th. Maj. James T. Kearns, then the commanding officer of the 57th, put it to the men making if they wanted to continue the mission and, with everyone's support, he asked that the 57th remain on FOB #2 for an indefinite period of time. It became established that the Gladiators would not move.

July was a quiet month mainly because of the monsoons. There were many days when the aircraft were unable to launch and others where only a few hours flying were possible.

It was on one of these days that the company was to lose a ship and its crew. Four slicks had departed for a mission and, after accomplishing the mission, headed back for Knotum. While enroute the ceiling lowered to 300 feet in rain. Three of the ships made it back safely but the fourth, piloted by WO Eric Bargquist and 1LT James Carr, went IFR and had initiated a surveillance radar approach to the field. On a three mile

final to runway 28, contact was lost on radar.

An immediate search was begun and, before the weather forced the search to a halt, wreckage was found burning approximately 100 meters below the top of a ridgeline. The two pilots, along with crewchief, SP4 Thomas Hinson, and doorgunner PFC Terry Dees, died in the crash.

In August things began to pick up but the monsoons were still affecting the missions. Two more aircraft were shot up but managed to get to a secure airfield. An engine failure claimed another ship.

On 17 August, PFC Bates sustained fatal wounds and SP5 Danny Beistley was hit in the right thigh and left wrist. Over 30 holes were found in the aircraft.

The following day WO Alan Morris had engine failure while making an approach to an LZ with no suitable forces landing area. WO Morris brought the aircraft down in an up-right position and the crew was immediately evacuated.

In September the weather began to break with rain occurring only in the late afternoon. FOB #2 missions were put into high gear. Putting a lot of aircraft back into the air on this mission meant that the expected would soon happen and on the 27th it did.

1LT Raymond Dell and WO David Rhodes were in the process of pulling a string extraction of a LRRP team. Four team members were tied off on 100 feet of rope waiting to be pulled clear of 70 feet of tall trees. Hovering straight up so not to pull the team through the trees, the aircraft had to hover at least 170 feet above the ground and 100 feet above the trees to give the men below on the strings a chance for survival. The aircraft then fell straight down into the trees and, after impact, it exploded and burned. The doorgunner, PFC John Huntly, was killed but the remainder of the crew received only minor cuts and bruises. The crew from another 57th aircraft landed and were quickly on the scene. After doing what they could for the members of the downed aircraft they began to follow the ropes that were still attached to the wreckage. Three of four LRRP team members were alive. LT Dell received the Silver Star for his quick reaction and saving as many lives as possible. The rest of the crew received the Distinguished Flying Cross, including those who assisted in the rescue.

October arrived and found the Gladiators still on the FOB #2 mission. On 25 October the 57th made a gallant, but vain, effort to extract a LRRP team that was surrounded and had suffered 100% WIA or KIA. It was late evening when the slicks arrived. The first aircraft made its approach to the PZ but was unable to land because of the intense ground-fire and darkness. The same ship tried a second approach but received

a number of hits that left the aircraft almost uncontrollable and it had to make a running landing at a secure airfield. A second ship tried to go in but it too was shot out. Between the two aircraft, over 50 hits were counted. Captain Mike Walters who flew the first ship received the Silver Star for his efforts, his crew and the crewmembers of the second ship all recieved Distinguished Flying Crosses. The following day the team was extracted from a different location without further incident.

On 28 October, the 57th sustained the loss of a Cougar gunship. Aircraft Commander WO1 John Whittington and his pilot, WO Terry Morris, were very badly burned but managed to get clear of the aircraft. Mr. Whittington later died as a result of his burns.

In the early morning hours of 6 November the 57th compound was awakened by the all too familiar sound of a mortar attack. Approximately 20 to 25 incoming mortar rounds were received in a 15 minute period. During the attack the Cougar gunships were launched against a sapper unit which was attempting to breach the eastern perimeter of the 57th compound. The varied items of enemy equipment were captured following the attack.

On 9 November 1969, Cougar Gun Platoon Leader Captain Willie Lawson provided another example of the fine flyinh ability which has become a trademark of the 57th. While in support of 5th SFG Mike Forces at Bu Prang, Captain Lawson's gunship received approximately 15 hits in his tail boom which severed his tail rotor driveshaft. Reamining clam, Captain Lawson flew the stricken gunship, minus anti-torque system to Bu Krak airstrip, and made a successful running landing, without further damage to the ship.

12 November 1969 marked a day which will be long remembered by the members of this unit. The 1st Platoon "White Flight", while standing by at FOB #2 alternate launch site at Dak Pek, was mortared resulting in the death of one crew member, SP4 Freddie Haynes and the wounding of eight others. All four aircraft received severe damage and aircraft #774 was completely destroyed. The 57th, already understrength, was now forced to carry on its missions with only a fraction of its authorized crew member strength.

On 15 November 1969, shortly after noon a CH-34 VNAF "Kingbee" was shot-down northwest of Dak Pek. The four "slicks" from the second flight of the 57th were launched from Dak Pek to search for the downed aircraft. After searching for approximately one and a half hours, the downed "Kingbee" was discovered seemingly intact on a hilltop. WO Lewis Olson volunteered to go down and attempt to rescue the downed VNAF crew. On his first attempt at landing, WO Olson's ship was repulsed by heavy ground fire. After suppressive fire was placed on the area by the cobra gunships, WO Olson again attempted to land near the downed craft. In spite of a continuing hail of small arms and B-40 rocket fire, he and his crew remained in the LZ until it had been determined that the downed VNAF crew had been either captured or killed.

After the eventful first half of November the 57th was due a lull in excitement and thankfully spent the remainder of the month in relative calm.

The month of December 1969 was a busy month for the 57th AHC as the company distinguished itself in many operations against hostile forces. The 57th was also saddened by the loss of several outstanding crew members.

The first accident occurred on 6 December 1969 when aircraft 699, commanded by Captain Charles Ferrell, and pilot, 1LT Phillip Shrock, with the crew chief SP5 Miranda and gunner PFC Ronald Durflinger crashed, killing the crew and given passengers aboard. It is believed that the aircraft was hit by small arms fire, resulting in loss of power at a low altitude above thick jungle canopy.

Then on 20 December, aircraft 540, commanded by Captain Gerald Knieriem lost its tail rotor in a landing zone and crashed. The entire crew escaped with only minor injuries.

Two days later a 57th "Cougar" gunship, commanded by Warrant Officer John Hunsicker and piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Don Burris, with the crewchief SP5 Timothy Barger and gunner SP4 James Kennedy, was hit by hostile fire resulting in the loss of its tail rotor. WO Hunsicker controlled the aircraft as long as possible but after a short period of time, the aircraft no longer responded to the controls and had to be crash landed. Specialist Kennedy, the gunner was lost before the aircraft hit, but the remaining crewmembers sustained moderate to light injuries. They were rescued by Warrant Officers, Malcolm Peterson and Carter Higginbotham, on ropes, but Chief Warrant Officer Burris lost consciousness and fell out of his extraction rig. WO Burris and Specialist Kennedy were great losses to the company.

After celebrating Christmas the 57th was again ready to start a new year of unprecedented service to the U.S. Army in the Republic of Vietnam.

AIRCRAFT DAMAGED ON FOB:

Totally Destroyed.....	5
Major Damage--Returned to CONUS for Repair....	5
Major Damage--Repaired in Country.....	14
Minor Damage--Repaired in Company.....	17

TOTALS	<u>41</u>
--------	-----------

57TH CASUALTIES FOR FOB:

Killed by Hostile Action.....	3
Missing as a Result of Hostile Action.....	2
Wounded as a Result of Hostile Action.....	23
Confirmed Captured by Enemy Forces.....	0

TOTAL CASUALTIES	<u>28</u>
------------------	-----------

HONOR ROLL

UNIT MEMBERS KILLED IN ACTION 1969

HUNTLEY, JOHN N.	PFC	100-42-9151	KIA	27 Sep 69
BATES, CARL C.	PFC	432-84-8409	KIA	17 Aug 69
WHITTINGTON, JOHN	WO1	214-46-9472	WIA/KIA	28 Oct 69
BURRIS, DONALD D.	CW2	196-36-7814	KIA	22 Dec 69
KENNEDY, JAMES E.	SP4	155-42-3333	MIA	22 Dec 69
PERRON, NORMAND P.	WO1	467-72-7036	KIA	16 Feb 69
PAPALE, ARTHUR	WO1	428-88-8069	KIA	16 Feb 69
OLIVER, RICK A.	SP4	555-74-8318	KIA	16 Feb 69
ALCOS, LARRY M.	SP4	576-52-8974	KIA	16 Feb 69
FERRELL, CHARLES	CPT	237-62-5822	KIA	6 Dec 69
SCHROCK, PHILLIP	1LT	362-40-9259	KIA	6 Dec 69
MIRANDA, PETER K.	SP5	585-24-6886	KIA	6 Dec 69
DURFLINGER, ROLLAND	PFC	316-46-8031	KIA	6 Dec 69
BERQUIST, ERIC E.	WO1	437-66-9733	KIA	27 Jul 69
CARR, JAMES A.	1LT	287-40-8913	KIA	27 Jul 69
HINSON, THOMAS A.	SP4	449-82-1373	KIA	27 Jul 69
DEES, JERRY R.	PFC	527-88-6036	KIA	27 Jul 69
HAYNES, FREDDY	SP4	428-98-8920	KIA	12 Nov 69

AWARDS FOR PERSONNEL ASSIGNED TO 57TH AVN CO (AH)
(PURPLE HEARTS NOT INCLUDED)

NAME	DATE OF ACTION	AWARD SUBMITTED
WO1 JOHN C. BOSWELL	23 Dec 69	DFC
WO1 JOHN D. CRUMB	27 Sep 69	DSC
	12 Nov 69	DFC
CPT RAYMOND C. DELL	27 Sep 69	SS
	23 Dec 69	DFC
SP5 DEAN N. EWELL	25 Oct 69	DFC
SP4 GARY L. FETTERS	27 Sep 69	DSC
SP4 JOSEPH R. FRANCO	27 Sep 69	DSC
PFC MICHAEL GROUNDWATER	23 Dec 69	DFC
1LT THOMAS A. GUNN	12 Nov 69	DFC
	22 Dec 69	DFC
SP4 STEPHEN R. HAMILTON	23 Dec 69	DFC
SP4 FREDDIE HAYNES (POST)	12 Nov 69	DSC
WO1 CARTER HIG. INBOTHAM	22 Aug 69	DFC
PFC GLENN HOOVER	23 Dec 69	DFC
PFC JOHN H. HUNTLEY (POST)	27 Sep 69	DSC
SP4 RALPH KOCH	27 Sep 69	DFC
	25 Oct 69	DFC
SCT MICHAEL E. LABBE	23 Dec 69	DFC
CPT WILLIE A. LAWSON	23 Dec 69	DFC
WO1 DANIEL LINDBERG	23 Dec 69	SS
WO1 MICHAEL F. MC MILLIAN	23 Dec 69	DFC
SP4 MICHAEL KOLAN	22 Oct 69	DFC
	12 Nov 69	SS
WO1 KENNETH P. O'KEEFE	27 Sep 69	DSC
	25 Oct 69	SS
SP4 JAMES PAPANEK	25 Oct 69	DSC
	24 Dec 69	AM"V"
WO1 MALCON W. PETERSEN	22 Aug 69	SS
	22 Dec 69	SS
WO1 WILLIAM S. RAINEY	25 Oct 69	DFC
PFC ROGER S. REED	22 Dec 69	DFC
CPT JAMES E. REMSBURG	23 Dec 69	DFC
WO1 DAVID E. RHODES	27 Sep 69	DFC
SP4 ROBERT C. RIDGE	22 Aug 69	AM"V"
PFC DENNIS ROBITSON	23 Dec 69	DFC
CPT VAUGHN R. ROSS	24 Dec 69	AM"V"
SP4 LARRY R. SCHMIDT	22 Dec 69	DFC

AWARDS SUBMITTED (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

NAME	DATE OF ACTION	AWARD SUBMITTED
WO1 MICHAEL F. SHANE	23 Dec 69	DFC
WO1 JOSEPH S. SOTTILE	23 Dec 69	DFC
SP4 ROBERT STOKKE	24 Dec 69	AM"V"
SP4 ALLAN D. STRAND	22 Aug 69	AM"V"
WO1 ROBERT G. STREBECK	25 Oct 69	DFC
SP5 ROBERT L. THIBEAULT	27 Sep 69	DFC
CPT MICHAEL K. WALTERS	25 Oct 69	SS
	12 Nov 69	SS
WO1 TERRY L. WEBER	24 Dec 69	DFC
PFC FRANK WESTPHALL	23 Dec 69	DFC
SP4 WILLIAM WOOLLEY	23 Dec 69	DFC