

## SECTION XV - U.S. Army Helicopters

### THE EARLY YEARS IN VIETNAM

#### Introduction

This section contains an abbreviated history of the first few U.S. Army helicopter units deployed to Vietnam. The following units are treated in this order: 8th Transportation Co., 33rd Transportation Co., 45th Transportation Bn., 57th Medical Detachment, 57th Transportation Co., 81st Transportation Co., 93rd Transportation Co., 339th Transportation Co., and the UTT (Utility Tactical Transport) Co. We would have liked to include additional units but space and time constraints prevented this. Please review the References and Credits page for a complete list of contributors and source material.

#### Background Information - USA

The Army had over 5,500 aircraft, most of which were substandard, of 15 different varieties by 1960 and was in a state of transition in two major areas. First, turbine powered helicopters - the decision had been made to replace its light fixed-wing observation airplane (L-19) and the light observation helicopters (H-13 and H-23) with a single light turbine helicopter based on the Bell XH-40 design. The Vertol Chinook was on the drawing boards to replace the piston powered H-37. Second, a long range plan - the Rogers Board had established a board strategy for Army Aviation for the 60s and 70s and set the ground work for the Howze Board that would ultimately give us the Airmobile Division. The airlift "work horse" for each Army Division was a single Transportation Company equipped with the CH-21C Shawnee. The Army had just started receiving UH-1As. It was designed as an air ambulance, but seemed to have other capabilities.

#### Background Information - RVN

In early 1961 USA General Maxwell D. Taylor, who was then the Military Advisor to the President, made a situation survey visit to Southeast Asia. During his visit he felt that the lack of adequate roadnets, lines of communication, and means of mobility contributed heavily to the government's problems in South Vietnam. As a result of General Taylor's recommendations, President John F. Kennedy approved a more active support program to South Vietnam to assist in the fight against the communist-directed Viet Cong. Generally, the support included the establishment of a joint headquarters for directing the program; increasing the number of U.S. advisors for the South Vietnamese armed forces; and additional support through Army Aviation, communications units, and Navy and Air Force units. This began a chain of events culminating in the arrival in Saigon of the 57th and 8th TR Cos on 11 Dec 1961.

#### 8th Transportation Company (H-21)

#### Deployment Preparations

The 8th was stationed at Fort Bragg, NC and supported the XVIII Airborne Corps and 82nd Airborne Division. The 8 November Movement Directive instructed the commanders of the 8th and the 140th Trans Detachment to "prepare and move ... from home station through appropriate Army Terminal to overseas exercise area... a temporary change of station for a period in excess of 30 days." VHPA member, Joe Murray, who was with the 8th as it deployed still laughs at this Movement Directive. Some 30 years later he would look at these orders and remark that the Army didn't lie to them; it was overseas, it was in an exercise area, and it was for more than 30 days!! In November they flew their H-21s cross country to Alameda NAS in California. The helicopters were prepared for overseas shipment and loaded on the USNS Core (not the Card as named in several US Army histories). Joe also got a kick out of the last paragraph of the Movement Directive which reads: 'No public announcement will be made of preparations for this exercise. In event of inquiries from the press, only the following reply may be used: "This unit has been alerted to be prepared to take part in an exercise on or after 8 November. This is a readiness test of the unit and we have not been informed of the location of the exercise area. This unit is a part of the Strategic Army Corps and frequently participates in alerts to determine its state of readiness." ' He said the California cab drivers all wished them well and had exact details on their sailing date, destination, and arrival schedule!!

#### Actual Deployment

**21 November 1961** - The USNS Core sailed on this date with the men and equipment of both the 8th and the 57th TR COs.

**11 December** - The USNS Core docked in Saigon. The 57th history is somewhat better documented for this period because of a paper dated 7 Aug 62 from the commander, MAJ Milton P. Cherne (he was the Ops Off during their deployment). The paper's subject is "The Hughes Outstanding Aviation Unit Award". Joe remembers living and working on the boat for about 2 weeks, getting the helicopters ready to fly to Tan Son Nhut. They were issued civilian passports and told not to wear their uniforms downtown. They drew TDY pay for the first month or so. Each of the companies had separate areas for their helicopters at Tan Son Nhut but they were near each other. The 8th moved into a brand new hotel; in fact it was so new there was no water in the swimming pool yet and the electrical system didn't function all the time.

**22-23 December** - On these dates the 8th and the 57th jointly conducted a training exercise north of Saigon with ARVN paratroopers and used 30 H-21s for their first combat assault. See the 57th's history for more details.

**2 January 1962** - The 8th and 57th teamed to deliver a large number of troops (1,036) to a previously inaccessible area; again see the 57th's history for details.

**10 January** - The 8th relocated to Qui Nhon, in II Corps. This left the 57th as the only American helicopter unit for the Delta area until the USMC SHUFLY squadron arrived in April. This appears to be part of a plan to put one H-21 company in each Corps area because on 26 Jan the 93rd Trans deployed to Da Nang. Joe remembers refueling at Phan Thiet and really enjoying the flight up the coast. At Qui Nhon they pitched tents on the city's soccer field near the market place and the beach. (Joe is still trying to get that smell out of some of his clothes!!)

According to Joe the 8th (and for that matter every H-21 unit that flew in RVN) had a strict standing policy - there were NO SINGLE SHIP MISSIONS. Even for a single person med evac, 2 ships were sent.

Even though Qui Nhon was "home", the 8th kept at least 2 aircraft in both Ban Me Thout and Pleiku most of the time. These were usually on a 2 week rotation. No one seemed to mind this at all. Their quarters in Ban Me Thout were the former hunting lodge and they were still treated as "guests for dinner".

**7 February** - The aircraft maintenance and logistical support for the 8th improved greatly when the 339th Trans (ADS) (Aircraft Direct Support) deployed to Nha Trang. The 140th Trans Det that had accompanied the 8th was only equipped for 1st and 2nd echelon maintenance activities; but the 339th could provide 3rd. It wasn't until the 330th Trans arrived in Apr, 1963 that 4th echelon support was available for the helicopter companies.

**15 July, A Bad Day** - CW2 Joseph A. Goldberg was the co-pilot of an H-21. According to Joe Murray, the crew chief reporting seeing some VC, so the pilot circled back around for another look. They must have gotten a "little too close a look"; because they got shot down. Every one of the crew survived except Mr. Goldberg who became the first American helicopter pilot to die in Vietnam.

**17 September** - The 81st TR landed in Saigon and after getting their H-21s ready, would fly up the coast to Qui Nhon and hence to their base at Pleiku. Now there were 2 H-21 companies in II Corps.

**October-November** - A UTT platoon started providing regular gunship escort support for the H-21s companies in II Corps.

Also starting about this period of time it would not be uncommon for III Corps H-21 companies to move several aircraft into II Corps and team with their sister companies there for a week or so to support a large ARVN operation. Conversely, the 8th traveled to Pleiku and to III Corp often for large operations in those locations. The US Marine SHUFLY history mentions numerous joint lifts into southern I Corps and northern II Corps where their H-34 squadron would team with Army H-21s for multi-battalion lifts.

Joe recalls the much publicized story of the H-21 flown by "Pappy" Kuhn that was hit by an arrow near the two openings in the rear while on an operation. He also said that the H-21's wheels came in very handy once. His ship was full of ARVN, the day was hot and dry, without much wind. Only after they had already committed to land in a dry rice paddy did they realize that the paddy area was on a slope. They rolled about 2 to 300 yards after they landed. He said it was like landing on a wash board as everyone bounced along over the dikes between the paddy fields until the helicopter rolled up the side of small hill and came to a stop!

**23 June 1963** - The 8th was redesignated the 117th Aviation Company.

### **33rd Transportation Company (H-21)**

VHPA member, Peter Fabien, was kind enough to provide a few details about his company that based out of Bien Hoa. The 33rd and the 81st Trans Cos were on the boat together and unloaded at Saigon. He is not aware of any written history of the 33rd; however, should any VHPAer come across one, please send a copy to the Historical Committee.

Peter provided some insight into various techniques to increase the payload of the H-21. In the photo on the rear cover please notice the 3 closest H-21s have no vertical stabilizers. Some brilliant person had determined that the H-21 would fly just about as well with or without the stabilizers which weighed about 150 pounds. Removing them effectively increase the payload by "one ARVN". Peter said the H-21 companies in III and IV Corps used to operate this way rather frequently while he believed the ones that flew in the mountains of II Corps left them on. Finally Peter warned that the pilot had to be a "little careful" when flying without the vertical stabilizers "because it would 'waddle a little on you' and 'swap ends' if you weren't careful!" (Say that would get everyone's attention both inside the ship and in the formation!!)

After talking with Peter it became abundantly clear that there are two "camps of former 21 drivers"; those that "loved it" and those that "hated it". Peter (with a good sized group of others) is firmly in the "loved it" camp! Yes it was noisy - yes it was under powered for a hot climate like Vietnam - yes it had a "little history" of control failures and engine problems for the first 50 hours after a rebuild; but the cockpit was comfortable and the ship took considerable skill to fly well, so there was great joy when you were its master.

Basically the 33rd teamed with "everyone and anyone, all the time". Being further north, they would go to II Corp some to work with the 81st or the 8th out of Ban Me Thout. Peter said on most any day you could find a 20 ship lift somewhere in the Delta and most likely all 3 H-21 companies (33rd, 57th, and 93rd) had "donated to the pot". Peter said the 33rd was a safe company (they never lost anyone) and had good maintenance and availability. Those are certainly good attributes to have!

On 23 June 1963 the 33rd was redesignated the 118th Aviation Company and in July they started getting Hueys and they still had a few left when he rotated home in October.

### **45th Transportation Battalion**

**1 July 1962** - The 45th arrived at Tan Son Nhut from Ft. Sill, OK to provide command, control, staff planning and administrative supervision over the employment of several Army H-21 helicopter companies (the 8th, the 57th, and the 93rd were already in country and at least 2 more, the 33rd and 81st, were on the way) and one U-1A Otter company (the 18th Aviation). Besides the planning and supervisory duties, it also was responsible for overseeing maintenance, logistical and medical service for its assigned and attached units.

VHPA member, Kenneth Mertel, who was the second commander of the battalion, supplied some further details. The battalion headquarters provided the standard S-1 through S-4 functions for the companies and reported to BG Joseph W. Stilwell, CO of the Army Support Group. Operationally each of the H-21 companies received support requests directly from the American advisors and the ARVN Corp and Division commanders. If a company could accommodate a request with its own assets, then the battalion would not be involved. However, the battalion staff got involved for all new and major operations and all operations that required assets from more than one H-21 company. Everyone had a lot of learn in those days and sometimes the H-21 company commander would need "support" if the advisors or the ARVN made un-realistic requests or demands. Likewise, Vietnam was a "large place" and the units were "some distance from high headquarters". An aviation company commander enjoyed considerable freedom to operate as he determined best. But if he "determined" unwisely or not in a safe manner or outside the guidelines set by MACV or USARV, then it was the battalion commander's task to correct these conditions.

Ken also pointed out that coordinating the extraction of a downed bird was both serious and complex. The VC were masters at ambush. If a bird or its crew could not be extracted within a few hours, there was a good chance the VC would use it as "ambush bait". As good as the aircraft recovery techniques were in the individual companies and augmented by the recovery platoons in the 339th and 610th Trans Cos; they were not intended to be "ambush busters". Some serious planning and coordination with the CH-37s in the 339th and 610th, with the UTT for gunship escorts, with the ARVN for infantry, with the USAF and VNAF for pre-strikes and on call support, with the logistical elements for fuels and ammo, possibly with the medical units, etc., etc. And all of these activities were "out of plan" and completely unknown even a few hours ago. Additionally, the unit that had lost the bird was naturally very concerned about the matter; but "life goes on" and they had other missions to perform even as they were diverting resources for the downed bird exercise. Often times the battalion had to find substitute resources to make certain priority missions were still accomplished.

Ken spent the majority of his time visiting the companies. He, like so many others of that era, talk about the "gentleman war" conditions that existed then. "You could fly all day putting in troop lifts and shooting up canals in the Delta; but at night you could come back to Saigon, shower, change into civilian clothes, go to a fine French restaurant with your friends, and have a great meal and a good time!" Then in the next breath he says the same thing that so many VHPAers say: "Hell, when I came back with the Cav in '65 - there was war all over the place!!"

**19 March 1963** - The 52nd AVN BN deployed to Pleiku. The 45th helped train the various 52nd staff members that would take the 81st TR CO (which became the 119th AVN).

**5 May** - The Delta AVN BN (Provisional) was activated at Soc Trang. Again the 45th helped train these staff members as it had the 52nd CAB earlier.

**24 September** - The 45th was redesignated the 145th Aviation Battalion.

### Battalion Commanders:

Hoffman, Robert L.	62	AUG(?) 63
Mertel, Kenneth D.	AUG(?) 63	29 NOV 63
Grandelli, Charles M.	29 NOV 63	30 MAR 64
Hughes, John C.	30 MAR 64	21 JUL 64
Cunningham, Robert K.	21 JUL 64	24 JUN 65

### The 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (Vietnam) Association (145 CABVA)

Because the 45th was "First In Vietnam" it was also 'the only in Vietnam' during some formulative months. Its successor, the 145th CAB, had a long history in Vietnam and finally left on 2 Apr 1972. On that date only the 52nd CAB (not counting the 224th ASA Bn) was still in RVN and it would depart on 26 Apr! With a length of service that spanned 10 years (minus 3 months) plus "first", "only", and "almost last" status, it is not surprising that an association can now be put together that includes a long, long list of subordinate units.



**145th COMBAT  
AVIATION BATTALION  
(Vietnam)  
ASSOCIATION**  
JAMES L. BODKIN



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The following is taken directly from the association's Newsletter: "The 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (Vietnam) Association is a fraternal Veterans organization filed under IRS Code section 501(c)19. We are established for the purpose of holding reunions, writing unit and battalion history, and to re-establish the comradery of the Battalion, units and Detachments associated with the 145th CAB, (45th Trans BN in the early days). We are trying to locate everyone who served with the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion and 45th Trans BN. in Vietnam, the units of HHC, 8th, 33rd, 57th, 81st, 93rd, 339th Trans Co's, the UTT, 18th, 25th, 68th, 71st, 74th, 117th, 118th, 119th, 120th, 121st, 135th, 147th, 184th, 190th, 197th, 213th, 242nd, 334th, 335th AVN Companies, CO A-82nd AVN BN, CO A-501st AVN BN, 57th MED, and all Detachments. Many of these units served with the 145th Battalion for just a short time in Vietnam. To truly re-establish the comradery of the units we welcome everyone assigned to these units to join in with us. To us a unit is a unit no matter what other battalions it may have been assigned to."

Dues are \$10 per year for which you receive a quarterly Newsletter and Directory. Also available is the "145th Combat Aviation Battalion History", compiled by James L Bodkin. Jim is the association's National Director/Coordinator and is a "good ol' boy" in the finest sense of the words. Jim always makes certain the 145 CABVA has kind words to say about the VHPA.

### 57th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance)

#### THE BEGINNING OF DUST OFF IN VIETNAM

Since Dec 1961, USA and (after 15 Apr 1962) USMC helicopters had been conducting medical evacuation missions in Vietnam, but on 26 Apr 1962 the 57th Med Det arrived. It was the first helicopter unit deployed whose primary mission was medical evacuation. Months of hard work, bureaucratic wrangling, disappointment, true "aviation pioneering", death, and success would pass before the legend of "DUST OFF" would become a household word. The following account is taken liberally from: "The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War, Dust Off" by John L. Cook as outlined in the References and Credits for this edition.

### Background Information

As part of the medical support build-up in late 1961 in Vietnam, the 8th Field Hospital was deployed to Nha Trang with primary responsibility for the hospitalization of all US military, dependents, and civilians living (about 8,000 total US citizens) in Vietnam and secondary mission to supply all medical units in country. The 57th Medical Detachment (hence forth referred to as the 57th Med or 57th but should not be confused with the 57th Transportation CO which was also serving in Vietnam) would be the "wheels" for the 8th. Both MACV, which had just become operational, and MAAG were undergoing changes in roles, commanders, and staff. The Vietnamese were very much in "control" of anything that needed changing. Aviation in general was still the "new kid on the block" and the "chain of bureaucratic" for requesting even medical evacuations was ill-defined at its very best.

### Deployment Preparations

The 57th Med was given a two month alert prior to leaving America. Being a rather small unit (7 officers, 22 enlisted men, 5 UH-1As) and being one of the first to go to Vietnam, few could tell them where they were going or what conditions would be like when they arrived. Their biggest unanswered questions centered around support, so they prepared for the worst. The supply officer even converted a 2 1/2-ton truck into a mobile kitchen for a unit that had no cooks and in the end brought a 6 months' supply of C-rations because of the uncertainties about support. There weren't many Vietnam Vets around in early 62, so the men made up kits of things they thought they might need - a machete, canned water, extra ammunition, compass, a signaling mirror!

### Actual Deployment

The 57th Med arrived via a DC6 at Nha Trang, a sleepy coastal town in the middle of South Vietnam which at that time was the Headquarters of the US Special Forces and the only just operational 8th Field Hospital (and the 339th Trans Co). No one in Nha Trang was aware that the 57th was coming but the CO of the 8th was kind enough to point out an area where the 57th could pitch their tents.

In early May, CPTs Temperelli and Bill Ballander went to Saigon to pick up 2 of their 5 UH-1As that had finally arrived. Nha Trang at 320 KMs NE of Saigon was far beyond the range of a UH-1A and there were no refueling points along the way. Indeed the only place JP-4 was available other than Saigon was at Nha Trang. Temperelli asked if the useless cockpit heaters could be removed to accommodate additional fuel cells - no. Enter "field expediency" - put 55-gal drums in the cargo bays, fill them with JP-4, load a manual pump, and head up Route 1. With the help of a "temporary ground crew" at the Song Mao Special Forces camp, they accomplished the first manual refueling of a Huey in Vietnam! They encountered a strong headwind proceeding north and with both fuel

gauges reading zero requested an immediate clearance to land from the Vietnamese tower operator. On shut-down they had 7 gallons "too much" fuel but were now ready to go to work in Nha Trang. A few days later the other UH-1As arrived and Temperelli sent 2 to Qui Nhon, 160 KMs to the north. No one in Saigon seemed concerned about the lack of JP-4 in Qui Nhon and all fuel allocation and storage points had to be approved by orders of President Diem, so Temperelli moved one of his two 1200-gallon storage tanks to Qui Nhon and filled it with fuel flown from Nha Trang in 55-gal drums.

## 1962 Operations

The first casualty evaced by the 57th was a wounded Vietnamese soldier flown from an LZ near Cam Ranh Bay to the Vietnamese hospital in Nha Trang. The irony of this act was the MAAG prohibition placed on the 57th again evacuating Vietnamese. Temperelli found this policy unrealistic since he was dependent on the Vietnamese for radio communication channels since MACV had neglected to assign him radio frequencies. Anyway, the 57th was "in business".

By the end of June, the 57th had evaced only 12 Americans and 14 Vietnamese and it became clear that the coastal area of central Vietnam was not the best location of a med evac helicopter unit. Saigon reasoned that the 57th had to be co-located with the 8th despite Temperelli's arguments that being located on the coast wasted half of the operational radius since they weren't picking anyone up from the South China Sea! He recommendations that the 57th Med relocate to Saigon were denied. Logistical support was an even more serious problem because the 57th owned the only Hueys in Vietnam at the time. Being a small unit, in a remote location, with unique requirements, they were forced to send requisitions for spare parts to the US Army, Okinawa. When other aviation units began receiving Hueys, they thought their supply problems would be solved; but nothing could be further from the truth. To their horror, they learned that the combat aviation units were demanding what few remaining spares the 57th had!! Stories of the low helicopter utilization had spread and the other units were near Saigon (and hence closer to the commanders). Finally in November when the ARVN planned a major operation into the "Iron Triangle" and several of the new Hueys in the lift companies //this is an error, only the UTT had Hueys at this time// had faulty starter generators, they were ordered to deliver their 5 to Saigon. Temperelli took the 5 starters to see BG Joseph W. Stilwell, CO of the Army Support Group, in Saigon. During this meeting the full range of problems were reviewed: cannibalizing the 57th until it was now grounded, proper logistical support, relocating the unit to Saigon, that helicopter med evacing was still in the "test phase" (much like the UTT for armed helicopters at that time). Stilwell presented an old argument that med evac helicopters ought to be transferred from the Medical Corps to the Army Transportation Corps, which controlled all other Army helicopters in Vietnam. In the end Temperelli won the rights to continue med evac operations in Nha Trang with the Medical Corps BUT with only one flyable Huey! So the end of 1962 were dark days indeed for a concept that would ultimately become the much respected and very famous DUST OFF.

## 1963

There are many accounts of the 2 Jan Battle of Ap Bac, but the bottomline is that the VC "stood and fought" with these results: all but one the 10 H-21s and 5 UH-1B gunships received hits, 2 H-21s and 1 gun were shot-down and destroyed, 2 more H-21s could not fly after making emergency landings, 3 Americans were killed (an Advisor and one H-21 crew member died and most likely could have been saved by earlier evacuation), 8 Americans were wounded, about 80 ARVN were killed and 100 wounded. One of the lift ships and the gun were attempting to rescue the crew of the first H-21 downed when they were shot-down and one of the emergency landing H-21 was also damaged in a rescue attempt. On 16 Jan the 57th was ordered to move to Tan San Nhut. In Feb MAJ Lloyd Spencer assumed command of the 57th and Temperelli returned to the States. On 11 Mar the 57th turned in their As and on 23 Mar was declared operations with brand new Bs. In Apr, two Bs were reassigned to Pleiku and would fly 2 ship missions in support of the Special Forces camps for the next 3 months. John Cook's book outlines several reasons why the VNAF were, in general, "reluctant to respond quickly and effectively" to the increasing numbers of Vietnamese med evac requests. Several VNAF pilots started flying with the 57th but these training missions had "little long-term effect". As a result, the MACV prohibition on US med evac helicopters supporting Vietnamese forces was routinely ignored and when VNAF refused to fly, the 57th picked up the slack.

## The Origins of the DUST OFF Call Sign

John Cook's book provides the following summary. "As 1963 wore on, the number of US advisors grew. The 57th was flying many more missions than the year before, but had not yet firmly established itself in the minds of the high command. It still had no tactical call sign, nor a dedicated communications frequency. Most requests for evacuation continued to be passed through Vietnamese channels and the helicopters used any vacant frequency they could find. Since the unit had no way of knowing what frequency they would be using, it was impossible for the advisors on the ground to contact evacuation helicopters directly. The time lost in passing communications through Vietnamese channels was both precious and costly. People were dying because there was no frequency or call sign dedicated to the 57th." Spencer visited the Navy Support Activity (the unit responsible for assigning radio call signs and frequencies), looked through the SOI for an unused call sign and decided to try the name DUST OFF. It must have worked fine; because just a few months later when the National Security Agency (NSA) decided to change all the call signs for all units in Vietnam, DUST OFF was assigned to the 118th. However, the 118th refused to use it and the 57th refused to give up their newfound identity!

## Operations during the last part of 1963

The three Delta based 57th ships stayed busy. In Sep in one day they evaced 197 Vietnamese from 3 locations near Ca Mau during a VC assault on several hamlets in the area. The last fight out was after dark and under enemy fire, but they didn't take any hits. By the end of the year the 57th had flown 1,485 missions, evaced 1,825 Vietnamese and 157 Americans.

## 1964 Operations

On 11 Jan, MAJ Charles L. Kelly became the 57th's third CO and the DUST OFF legend would advance another giant step. In Feb the Pleiku detachment (headed by CPT Patrick H. Brady) returned to Saigon and on 1 Mar, Det A, 57th (headed by Kelly) moved to Soc Trang. John Cook's account continues: "Just as predicted, the move to Soc Trang dramatically increased business for the 57th. The number of patients evacuated climbed from 193 in February to 416 in March. Very soon, Kelly and his crews in Soc Trang were burning up the Delta. Some of the pilots were flying over 100 hours a month. They quit logging at 140 hours for fear the flight surgeon would ground them. It was during this period that Kelly began pioneering a new concept in medical evacuations - night missions. Recognizing the need to fly the wounded out of combat as soon as possible, it was apparent to Kelly that night flights would save lives. Almost a quarter of all evacuations flown during March were flown at night. The Delta, which was flat and level for most part, was ideal for night operations.

Still, the issue of dedicating aircraft for the sole purpose of evacuating wounded was not settled. Members of General Stilwell's staff were attempting to take away Kelly's helicopters and place portable red crosses on other helicopters. In short, make any available helicopter a DUST OFF. The fact that Kelly was achieving tremendous success apparently wasn't enough. Returning from one such meeting with Stilwell, Kelly called his pilots together and said, referring to Stilwell, "That man is not our friend." He told them that the 57th was in for the fight of its life - the unit had to prove its value beyond a shadow of a doubt. Up to this point, the 57th had quickly responded to any and all calls for assistance. Now, under the threat of being disbanded, Kelly went looking for business.

Night missions became routine. Kelly flew almost every night. He was determined to prove that he could cover the Delta - all 12,00 square miles. At dusk, he and his crew would leave Soc Trang and head southwest for the marches of Bac Lieu, home of two signal units and a team from the 173rd AVN. Then they would head south to Ca Mau, one of the original strongholds of the Viet Cong. From the forested swamps of Ca Mau, Kelly would fly south to Nam Cam, almost

to the tip of South Vietnam. From Nam Cam, Kelly would turn and head north to an area called 'Seven Canals'. After a check for casualties at Vi Thanh, Kelly would turn northwest and fly to Rach Gia on the Gulf of Siam. Then on to the Seven Mountains region on the Cambodian border. From there, he would head southeast to Can Tho, where 14 small American units were stationed, then northeast to Vinh Long on the Mekong River. From there, the course was due east to Ben Tre, south to Tra Vinh with a handful of US advisors, and, finally, home to Soc Trang.

If any of these locations had patients, they were loaded aboard and the flight continued, unless the wounds required immediate attention. In that event, the wounded would be flown immediately to the nearest medical facility and the circuit would resume. This nightly route covered over 700 KMs and took over three hours to fly. On many nights, Kelly would carry 10-15 patients. Many would have died without a night evacuation. The 57th installed AN/APX-44 transponders to work with the 'Paddy Control', the Air Force's radar at Can Tho. In Apr, the 57th flew 113 night hours and evaced 99 patients.

Kelly became a legend and an inspiration not only for the pilots in the 57th but all over the Delta. His "rules" - you do NOT refuse to fly a mission - you don't leave UNTIL you have the wounded on-board. He was deeply embroiled in a political fight with the Surgeon General's office who did not think that flying med evac was a proper mission for Medical Service Corps (MSC) officers and wanted them to fly in "regular" aviation units. Kelly was firmly convinced that DUST OFF needed to extra skills of MSC officers and that they were gaining much more combat and critical flying experience than in a "regular" unit. John Cook's book contains many fine stories and accounts of Kelly and the 57th during the first half of 1964 including when they hauled "preventative medicine" (ammo) to a unit and their "farewell presentation" to Stilwell.

On 1 Jul Kelly was killed trying to evac a wounded American sergeant from a hot area despite repeated suggestions from the American advisors to leave the area. CPT Pat Brady assumed command of the 57th and maintained Kelly's style of operation and risk taking. The news of Kelly's death quickly swept the country and had a profound effect. He was awarded the DSC posthumously plus two Vietnamese awards. Senior Vietnamese and American officials all sent their condolences and he was eulogized throughout Vietnam and in the USA. The newspapers picked up the story of the "Mad Man" that "put his ass on the block" for others that had been wounded. John Cook writes: "With such an outpouring of praise and honors for this man of mercy, things could never be the same for medical evacuation in the war zone. With his life, Kelly had made the final payment on the insurance policy that would guarantee the continued existence of DUST OFF. His death resolved, once and for all, the issue of portable red crosses. As the war grew in intensity, no one would ever again question the wisdom of dedicating helicopters for the sole mission of evacuating the wounded. The political battles that Kelly had engaged in while living were easily won now that he was gone. DUST OFF had finally arrived, the hard way, but it had arrived to stay."

"Each new pilot entering the DUST OFF business would learn of Kelly and the standards he had set. They were expected, in no uncertain terms, to maintain those standards. The tradition and mystique would deepen over the years as the reputation of DUST OFF grew. There would be other pilots and crew members that would make invaluable contributions to the legacy, but there could be only one Kelly. And others would die in the jungles and rice paddies and mountains. They, too, would add to the legacy. However, Kelly had brought the right attitude at the right time to the high risk business of flying evacuation missions. No compromise. No rationalization. No hesitation. Fly the mission. Now. And so, he became the embodiment of the perfect DUST OFF pilot, the one you would want to come and get you if your guts were hanging out, at night, in the rain, surrounded by Viet Cong. This was the legacy that Kelly left and this was his most valuable contribution."

In late summer the Surgeon General's office was ordered to name five more detachments that could be sent to Vietnam. On 26 Oct MAJ Henry Capozzi's 82d Med Det deployed to Soc Trang and learned to fly from the 57th. When it came to a radio call sign, no matter what they called themselves, the units they supported insisted on calling them DUST OFF. MAJ Howard Huntsman, the CO of the 57th, allowed the 82nd to use the DUST OFF call sign. Soon Det A, 57th returned to Saigon and the 57th was "whole" again. During the last two months of 1964 both DUST OFF units were busy as both the VC and the ARVN stepped up operations.

## 57th Transportation Company (H-21)

On 11 Dec 1961, the USNS Core docked in Saigon carrying 32 U.S. Army helicopters belonging to the 8th and the 57th Transportation Companies (Light Helicopter) and the history of the VHPA began!!

### Deployment Preparations 1961

For several years the 57th supported the 4th Infantry Division stationed at Ft. Lewis, WA. In addition to supporting a STRAC unit it repeatedly assisted the local community with Search and Rescue, flood relief, transporting fire fighters in the rugged hills and mountains of eastern Oregon, medical evacuations, etc.

**6 November** - 20 H-21's departed Gray Field, Ft. Lewis and arrive at Stockton, CA on the evening of the 8th without incident. This included a night flight over the Sierra Mountains, reaching an altitude of 10,500 feet.

### Actual Deployment

**21 November 1961** - The unit departed for "destination unknown" aboard the USNS Core. See the comments by VHPA member Joe Murray in the 8th TR CO's history.

**11 December** - The USNS Core docked in Saigon and crowds gathered to gaze at the big US Army helicopters. Bill Greenhalgh, the VHPA Historical Committee Chairman, writes: "Although only a story passed down from those early days, it is rumored that the first US Army helicopter unit in Vietnam was officially the 57th. It seems the CO of the 57th was senior to the CO of the 8th and hence the 57th's colors were carried off the ship first!" The Directory committee talked with several members of the 57th and the 8th while preparing this material. While no one remembered this story, no one disputed it either. Indeed MAJ Dillard was senior to MAJ Hardesty. Maybe other VHPAers can help "set this pressing matter" straight!!

As rapidly as possible the protective cocoons were removed, engines pre-oiled, the wooden rotor blades reinstalled and the helicopters prepared for the flight to Tan San Nhut. According to VHPAer Joe Murray, who was with the 8th, the companies worked and lived on the boat for about two weeks before everything was unloaded. Then they moved into hotels and the companies had separate areas on the airfield.

### 1961 Operations in Vietnam

**22 December** - On this day the 57th and the 8th jointly conducted a training exercise north of Saigon with ARVN paratroopers. 30 H-21s were used to train the ARVNs how to load, ride, and unload from a helicopter and to help the aircrews learn how to work with the ARVN. A large percentage of the missions flown during the next year would include training the various Vietnamese units for airmobile operations.

**23 December** - Intelligence had for some time been trying to fix the location of a VC radio. The first operational use of the new airmobile capability would be a surprise landing of ARVN troops with the objective to capture the radio and the VC using it. Again the 57th and the 8th teamed to provide 30 H-21s. The selection of the LZ left a lot to be desired and is described as "an almost impossible zone. Perpendicular rows of pineapple fields deep in mud and water. If

ever pilot training and technique paid dividends, this was the day. Small arms fire broke out immediately and several of the aircraft were under fire as they departed that area to return for additional troops and reinforcements. All the aircraft departed this area but one. As the pilots looked back they could see the cloud of black smoke and orange flames reaching for the sky and there was little doubt as to what had happened. Another, but undesirable first for the 57th; the first aircraft to be lost to insurgent activity while on an operational mission." VHPA Member, Ulyses Lamkin, was there that day and said that Bob Sword was the pilot and was "credited with an aircraft accident" and that maybe the Army was a little too proud to admit that he might have been shot down. Ulyses believes LTC Stockton (of 1st CAV fame) and not yet helicopter rated was Bob's co-pilot. Anyway he got cut during the crash and was awarded a Purple Heart; Bob just got an accident on his record!

**24 December** - Spec 4 George F. Fryett was reported kidnaped by the VC. The 57th and the 8th were jointly alerted to prepare to mass a large number of troops as soon as the location of this American soldier was determined. No rescue mission was ever flown and on 23 June 1962 Fryett was released by the VC.

**2 January 1962** - For the first time a large number of troops (1,036) were delivered into an otherwise inaccessible area. The LZ was no more than 300 yards by 150 yards. The ground was soft and the zone was further confined by isolated trees and brush growing at random. Tall, towering jungle trees ridged the area and the VC roamed at will throughout the surrounding jungle. The operation was conducted without incident.

**10 January** - The 8th relocated to Qui Nhon from Saigon which left the 57th as the only American helicopter unit for the Delta area until the USMC SHUFLY squadron arrived.

**11 April** - LTC Archie J. Clapp's HMM-364 deployed to Soc Trang. This gave the ARVN and American commanders the capability of using more than 15 helicopters for airmobile operations in III and IV Corps for the first time since the 8th had moved north.

**19 July** - For the first time 40 helicopters were used to airlift 480 troops to an area SW of Ben Cat. The 57th teamed with HMM-364 and VNAF for this operation.

**24 July** - By this point, the 57th had flown 4,583 hours in support of the Vietnamese forces, logged a grand total of 133,464 cargo ton miles and carried 51,358. Flying as many as 850 hours per month they have added a new dimension to modern warfare.

Remember this "love it" or "hate it" discussion we began in the history of the 33rd? Well, Ulyses is in the other camp. He called the H-21 "the Army's secret weapon" because "as they flew over Vietnam they dropped enough parts and stuff to kill everyone below". VHPA Member, Charles Reagin, who was with the 339th Trans at about this same time agreed with Ulyses on this point. He said "if you ever looked behind yourself in flight, all you'd see was a stream of parts" but then he also agreed with Peter that the H-21 was really a neat aircraft to fly.

When asked about flying with the SHUFLY squadrons, Ulyses said the 57th and the Marines got along fine and that he was on several joint operations with them. He said they were good pilots and their H-34s were more powerful and performed better than the 21s. Ulyses laughed that when loaded the 57th "always flew at tree top level because we couldn't get any higher and it was safer that way". He said the Marines were very interested in flying at about 500 to 800 feet even though "we told them that wasn't too good an idea. After a few weeks the Marines were either on the trees with us or at 2,000."

Ulyses reaffirmed that the 57th spent a good percentage of its time during his tour training ARVN units on how to use the helicopter properly. "Most days we had 2 ships here and 2 ships there training some unit. Then the next day we'd lift them to some practice area. They'd get out and fix lunch. We'd come back in a few hours and they'd still be in the same place that we'd lift them." He remarked that even during "real operations" the same thing would happen all too frequently.

**23 June 1963** - The 57th was redesignated the 120th Aviation Company. About this time the unit started getting Hueys and Ulyses said many would cheer if they "bent a 21" because that would be one less to fly.

#### **HQ 57th Transportation Company (H-21) Association**

The 57th Trans also has an active association and membership is open to anyone that was once assigned to the company or attached to it. The current association president is Jim Tarrant who works with Maurice "Mo" Bone. "Mo" commanded the 57th some time before it was sent to Vietnam. For more information about this association, that really helped VHPA pull together material for this Directory, write: HQ 57th Trans CO (H-21), P.O. Box 57, Bullard, TX 75757. "Mo" and Jim can be reached at the Maxwell Lumber Co, 903-894-7246.

#### **81th Transportation Company (H-21)**

VHPA Members Roger Messick, Raymond O'Cain and William Zensen were kind enough to provide material and information for their unit's section; but I am sorry to say that I ran out of time meeting the deadline and could not complete this section. I will try to get the Newsletter Editor to publish this material. Respectfully, Mike Law.

#### **93rd Transportation Company (H-21)**

##### **Deployment Preparations 1961**

The 93rd was previously stationed at Fort Devens, MA and on 15 December departed from Quonset Point, RI, aboard the USS Carr. After arriving at Subic Bay, Philippines Islands, the company transferred their men and equipment aboard the USN Princeton, the same ship used by the Marine HMM squadrons. The H-21s were readied for flight operations.

The 145 CABVA, mentioned above in the 45th TR BN's history, published a history of the 93rd that was written some time ago. Most of the material that follows was taken from that history. VHPA Member, Jim Thomas, deployed with the 93rd and has some neat pictures of them launching from the Princeton.

**25 January 1962** - While still 10 miles off shore and in less than ideal weather (it was monsoon season), the 93rd flew off the Princeton and landed at Da Nang. While this was a routine Marine operation and while other H-21 companies had practiced this in the States, this was the first (and may be the only) time an Army unit deployed from a carrier in this manner and so far from shore.

**1 February** - The 93rd was operational within 6 days. They, like the Marine SHUFLY squadrons that followed and were also based out of Da Nang, supported the two ARVN divisions stationed in I Corps and the numerous Special Forces camps that still existed at this time along the Laotian border.

The H-21s rapidly became "the pack horse of the Vietnamese mountains and jungles" flying dangerous supply routes that a few months earlier took land parties to negotiate. Soon the helicopters' crews were much at home shuffling equipment across the mountains. Loads varied from howitzers attached to slings riding below the ships to disassembled parts of two bulldozers which were flown to a U.S. Army Special Forces outpost to build an airstrip.

Jim related a few stories about flying into the A Shau Valley years later in a 1st CAV Chinook. At that time the CAV people thought they were the first to operate helicopters in the valley. However, when Jim showed them the "bodies" of some H-21s that the 93rd had left there, the story changed.

**27 June** - General Hightower visited a majority of the organizations in Vietnam but chose an aviation unit, the 93rd, as the most outstanding.

**2 August** - The 93rd conducted the first large-scale heliborne operation ever conducted in I Corps. It consisted of a 2 company raid on the VC 5th Region HQ in the Do Xa area. A radio station was captured and heavy casualties inflicted on the VC.

**30 August, A Bad Day and A Good Day** - The 93rd participated in Operation "Lam Son II", another air-mobile combat assault against a VC battalion deep in the jungles of Quang Ngai Province. Complimented by 10 CH-34s from the 1st Helicopter Squadron VNAF, a heavy ground fog covered the landing zone preventing the first lift until two hours after the pre-strike, instead of immediately after the strike as planned. Despite encountering heavy fire from the alerted and prepared VC, the loss of 2 H-21s to enemy ground fire and the wounding of 4 crew members, the 93rd successfully completed 2 lifts into the heavily enemy-infested LZ. Of the 12 H-21s used, 9 were hit and damaged by enemy fire and 2 shot down. Six persons were killed and 5 wounded in helicopters during "Lam Son II". All objectives were taken, 40 Viet Cong guerrillas were killed, 6 prisoners were taken, many enemy supplies including ammunition dump were destroyed and valuable intelligence documents seized. The psychological effect of this successful raid deep within enemy territory was immeasurable.

**12 September** - The advance party departed Da Nang on a classified mission to relocate the 93rd to III Corps.

**19 September** - The Marine SHUFLY task unit in Soc Trang and the 93rd exchanged locations. Air lifting the company to Soc Trang required transporting 47 loads; 855,299 pounds of cargo; 196,142.2 cargo-ton miles; 53,068 passenger miles and 96 hours of flight time.

**23 December** - The first operational mission in the Delta was flown. In December the 93rd established another mile-stone and record by flying 1,017.2 hours in a single month in RVN.

**2 January 1963, The Battle of Ap Bac** - The 93rd started the new year on a tragic note. While supporting the 7th Div from a staging area located at a small dirt strip at Tan Hiep, the entire flight of 10 H-21s escorted by 5 UTT B Model guns, were ambushed by an entrenched hard-core reinforced VC battalion on the fourth assault rifle lift committing the reserve forces. In the final stage of the approach from contour level, heavy machine gun and automatic rifle fire was received. Without regard for personal safety, the ten helicopters proceeded past the armored personnel carriers and the main advancing body to land their troops in the designated landing zone. Not one helicopter aborted or failed to complete its mission of getting the troops into the landing zone.

Although hit by ground fire the first four aircraft were able to make successful takeoffs from the area. The fifth craft, however, was shot down due to heavy ground fire. The crew of the sixth H-21 unhesitatingly diverted their take-off and attempted to pick up the crew of the downed aircraft and were immediately shot down also. The landing zone was untenable due to enemy fire which prevented further rescue attempts. The remainder of the flight departed for the staging area although the second aircraft had to make a force landing due to damage from the ground fire which prevented further rescue attempts. The remainder of the flight departed for the staging area although the second aircraft had to make a force landing due to damage from the ground fire received. The downed crews were left to fend for themselves in the rice paddies ahead of the main attacking force, where they remained under enemy fire for the next eight hours. One man was dead and five had been wounded by enemy fire.

Upon return to the staging area, assessment of damage to the seven remaining helicopters revealed only two were flyable. Approximately one hour later information was received from ground troops in the area that firing had subsided and evacuation of the downed crews could be made. The rescue aircraft was landed despite sporadic ground fire and damage to the aircraft. When the loading of the wounded and crews was attempted, the tempo of enemy fire increased and a heavy volume of fire entered the cockpit wounding the pilot. This forced the aircraft to make an immediate takeoff leaving the wounded and crews behind. The aircraft was flown out of the landing zone, but 1/2 mile away a forced landing had to be made due to damage from enemy fire. Meanwhile, at the staging area, two other helicopters had been rapidly repaired from parts of other downed aircraft. For the remaining hours of the afternoon, ammunition and medical evacuations were flown by these ships into the first three landing zones.

Approximately eight hours from the time they were shot down, the crews and their wounded were finally picked up by ARVN armored personnel carriers. Then they had to ride for approximately two hours through attacks with the armored personnel carriers until an area was reached where they could be reached by helicopter.

At days end, nine Americans had been wounded and one killed in action. Of the ten helicopters committed on the mission, all ten had been hit by enemy fire, four had been shot down and only three helicopters were flyable to return to the airfield.

Other accounts of the Battle of Ap Bac are presented in the UTT section and see Neil Sheehan's book listed in the Reference and Credits.

**3 & 4 January** - Maintenance personnel from the 93rd worked to retrieve the downed aircraft from the battle field. VHPA Member, Gordon DeGeest, flew a UTT gun during part of the battle and saw first hand some of the battle damage to the H-21s when they returned to the staging area. They cut some of the H-21s still at Ap Bac up into pieces and he used an unarmed B model to try to pull pieces from the mud. Buy him a beer sometime and have him relate the "politics" of those efforts!

If the history of America's involvement in Vietnam teaches us anything, it should be the principal that once you start something new (like using helicopters for troop lift) - it isn't new for long and the enemy not only must but will react. The Battle of Ap Bac is a classic example of this principal - as good as the H-21s and gunships and APCs and, and, and were; the VC could wait and plan and make a very good showing for themselves.

**10 January, A Very Sad Day** - The 93rd suffered another air tragedy when a 57th H-21 enroute from Soc Trang to Saigon crashed with three 93rd officers riding as passengers. All seven persons aboard the aircraft were killed. The 3 officers from the 93rd were Captain Donald B. Toth, 1st Lt. Lewis L. Stone and 1st Lt. Charles M. Fitts.

**The Soc Trang Tiger Name Started** - On the brighter side in January the unit received a playful 9 month old Bengal tiger mascot named "Tuffy" from MAAG Laos. After his arrival, Tuffy was showered with attention and affection from Privates to Generals. Tuffy was good natured, playful and usually harmless. For many in the company a scratch or scar from Tuffy was a treasured memory never to be forgotten. Tuffy's diet was not that of a normal tiger. His favorite dishes included wieners, steaks, meat balls, and spaghetti. In the cool of the evening, Tuffy always took his daily swim in his own private swimming pool. Thus with a playful Bengal tiger as company mascot, the members of the 93rd soon became widely known as the Soc Trang Tigers.

**4 March** - MAJ Edward C. Seymour assumed command of the 93rd from MAJ Paul E. Ewing who was reassigned to the 45th TR BN.

The first Machine Gun Platoon, of 1 officer and 20 enlisted men, arrived for 90 days TDY from the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii for duty as helicopter door gunners.

**25 June** - The 93rd was redesignated the 121st Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light) retaining their men, equipment, location and history.

Also in June, Tuffy, weighing over 250 pounds and 15 months old, departed for the Toledo Ohio Zoo. Tuffy would no longer have his own private pool but would also suffer a reduction in rank from Number 1 Top Tiger of the 121st Aviation Company to Number 6 Bengal Tiger of the Toledo Zoo.

### 339th Transportation Company (ADS)

**7 Feb 1962** - The 339th deployed to Nha Trang and according to VHPA Member, Charles Reagin, provided 3rd echelon maintenance support for all Army aviation in RVN. When the 611th ADS deployed to Vung Tau on 5 Oct 1962, they divided the country at Phan Thiet. Everything north was the 339th's and everything south was the 611th's.

The company was organized into a supply platoon (which filled part requisitions for the line companies), the maintenance platoon (which fixed what it could and returned it to the "owner", or sent what was still salvageable to the 4th echelon level), the quality control section (that inspected and tested the completed work), and two recovery platoons (one for fixed wing and one for helicopters). Charles said that during his tour they had a policy that "if it went down, you went in and got it; even if you had to walk in!". He has a load of experience and stories to support this statement!!

The CH-37s used by the 339th and 611th was well known. Many people in the Delta make statement like: "I escored or saw many recoveries, but not many of them were successful because the CH- 37 was not powerful enough to lift a plane full of mud". Charles said the 339th received their CH-37s after the 611th got their's. They had been rebuilt at Ft. Rucker before coming to Vietnam and really served the 339th well.

### The Utility Tactical Transport (UTT) Helicopter Company

#### Deployment Preparations

What follows is a first person account of the UTT's preparation activities written by a crew chief Al Compton and published in the 145th CAB History compiled by James L. Bodkin. "I arrived on Okinawa, 28 July, 1961. The Company was located on a high hill overlooking the China Sea. The area was known as Sukiran. The airfield was located right next to the seas and known as Hamby Army Airfield. I was originally assigned to the 25th Trans Det, the support maintenance unit, but was assigned to the UTT on 11 Oct. I was assigned to the 3rd platoon and SFC Francis "Smitty" Smith was my Platoon SGT. I believe we had 5 UH-1A models in our platoon. They were all like new 1959 models. We had an old Papa-san who did nothing but walk the line and wax them. They were beautiful. The finish was like glass. I was made crew chief around Dec and my ship no. was 59-1659. I named her the "Virginia Creeper". The CO was MAJ Robert L. Runkle, CPT Ivan Slavich was the XO. Duty on Okinawa was good. We flew missions to outlying islands and sometimes just toolled around the main island. As crew chief I always flew co-pilot position. It was not unusual for the chiefs to get in as much "stick time" as the pilots. Sometime near the end of 1962 an uneasy feeling came over me as our basic missions began to change. I had heard little of Vietnam. We began altering and modifying the ships. Suddenly looks didn't mean as much as they did before. Electricians were all over us making up wiring harnesses and such. Then they brought in 30 cal machine guns. The old air cooled type I had used in the 50's in Korea. These were mounted one on each skid. Then came the tubes for the 2.75 rockets. One on each side of the fuselage. By this time rumors were flying. Then came a briefing and the rumors were confirmed. We were going to Nam as the first attack helicopters formed in the Army. We trained and trained. We lived on the firing range trying to get the bugs out. It was a real home made set up. 30 cal ammo for the guns was laid out in rows on the floor of the ship and hand fed through a chute through the floor to the guns. It took 2 people, one on each side to accomplish this. Hence the goor gunner was born. He would assist the crew chief in his duties. This ammo on the floor thing was terrible. Later on we devised a box to hold it. It had a divider in the center so each half fed one gun. The ammo would still overfeed so we installed a weighted bar to ride on top of it and help control the feed. Then problems with the guns jamming. Once we lifted off, the weight was so bad that the skids rode too low for us to reach the guns to clear. So we installed a long arm to the bolt mech. Now we could reach out and unjam them. Trouble was, the static electricity when we grabbed the handle was eating us up. So we taped foam rubber to them and it worked. The rockets worked pretty well once we got all the electrical bugs out. Only thing was, the pilot had to put a grease pencil mark on the windshield in front of him for a cross hair. Whenever a different pilot flew the ship he would have to re-locate the mark. In Sept we loaded up, bag and baggage, onto Air Force C-123s and C130s at Kadena Airfield, and said goodbye to our families not knowing when or if we would see them again. A platoon had previously been sent to Thailand and would join us at Tan Son Nhut." VHPA Member, Gordon DeGeest, also mentioned that the UTT had been in Thailand before coming to Vietnam.

#### Actual Deployment

**15 September 1962** - Is the official arrival date for the UTT but it is safer to say "September" because personnel, equipment and supplies were arriving from several different places all during the month. We return to Al Compton's account. "We set up in a tent city and squatted over slit trenches. Our main mission was to support troop-carrying H-21s. My platoon was soon sent to Soc Trang. //The 93rd was stationed at Soc Trang; so now the 93rd had a "gun platoon". As we will see the UTT would send platoons to other locations as well.// In the mean-time the company had set up in new quarters with roofs and screened in walls. Tho we still had to sleep with our mosquito nets to keep from being carried away. Right after we first arrived our beautiful ships were flown over to a do it yourself paint shop and everything was painted over except the tail number, with drab rough texture OD paint."

**25 November** - "CPT Slavich made MAJ and took over the company. He was a former Marine and a combat vet of Korea. He acquired the nick-name "Drivin Ivan". He was hell when he was well and he was never sick." Al Compton.

**November** - "Our first casualty was Johnie Lee. I don't remember his rank. He was killed by a round that penetrated the bottom of the ship. He was in Operations but always wanted to fly. On this particular day in the first part of November, Spec 5 Donald Bunner, a crew chief, let Johnie take his flight. Don always felt bad about this afterwards. The old A models were good but we were flying them into the ground. The hours were adding up on them faster than we could count. We encountered severe cracking and just plain not enough power. On the same mission with Johnie Lee was a young CPT named Joel R. Steine. He was flying pilot and took a round through the windshield, instrument panel and hitting him in the chest just over his heart. His co-pilot, a MAAG LTC took the controls, while CPT Steine removed a 30 cal round from the pocket of his flak jacket. He was only bruised." Al Compton.

**Late November:** - "We started receiving the newer more powerful B models. They were fitted with factory made rocket pods and quad 7.62 machine guns. I traded in my old A model and received no 878." Al Compton.

**2 January 1963, The Battle of Ap Bac** - If we combine Al Compton's statements and Neil Sheehan's account (see the References and Credit page), the entire UTT Soc Trang platoon of 5 B models must have escorted the 10 93rd H-21s that flew to Ap Bac, a village near Tam Hiep on this day. According to Sheehan EVERY H-21 was hit during the assault and one pilot radioed that the controls would no longer respond, so he was shutting down in the LZ. One H-21 left the flight and returned to the LZ to rescue the downed crew but was also shot down in the LZ. Then the UTT platoon leader announced that he was going in to get the downed crews. The rest of the guns strafed and rocketed the VC positions when the Lead gunship hovered to located the other Americans. The gunship was hit repeatedly while it was still in the air above and behind the downed H-21s, flipped over onto its right side and crashed into the paddy about 50 yards behind the 2 H-21s. The crew chief, SGT William "Bill" Deal, was killed by a bullet to the head. Later in the day the UTT pilots would be rescued and evaced

by an ARVN mechanized infantry unit but would have to "ride" through repeated APC assaults of the VC positions. This was the first UH-1B shot down by VC fire and destroyed. A picture of this wreck was published in the Time Life "The Vietnam Experience".

**13 April** - A UTT platoon had moved to Da Nang and on this day provided the first escort for HMM-162, the Marine SHUFLY squadron.

**Early June** - Four of the H-21 Transportation Cos begin arming helicopters and developing their own gun platoons. The UTT was requested to assist with the installation of the weapons and training their personnel. Soon they would be renamed Aviation Companies with 3 lift platoons and 1 gun platoon.

**15 August 1964** - The UTT was redesignated the 68th AVN Co.

### A salute to the first US Army helicopter units in Vietnam

I trust many VHPAers are like me; I always had a desire to know "how it all began". I have seen the videos and B&Ws of the "Banana's" and heard the UTT tails when I became a Snake driver. It was fun to pull this history together. I hope all will enjoy it and understand the legacy these "pioneers" built for us.

Respectfully presented to the VHPA by Mike Law.

### Early US Army Helicopter Unit Pilot Rosters

What follows is a collection of pilot rosters for all the units discussed previously. The word "VHPA" appearing in the Comments column indicates that this pilot is in the VHPA database and is included in Section IV of this Directory. The word "Dec" means he is deceased. See the References and Credits page for the sources. As always, please send additions, comments, etc. to VHPA Headquarters or directly to Bill Greenhalgh or Mike Law.

Unit	Name	Rank	From	To	Comments	Unit	Name	Rank	From	To	Comments
8th Trans	Allen, George L.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Barnett, John G.	CW2	62	63	
8th Trans	Amos,	CPT	61			33rd Trans	Brandt, Robert J.	1LT	62	63	
8th Trans	Arrington, Alvin D.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Cruz, Tomas Q.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Badia,	CWO	61			33rd Trans	Cullen Jr., Frederick P.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Beau, Henry R.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Daily, James L.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Bouza, Duane J.	CW3	61	63		33rd Trans	De Santis, Robert R.	1LT	62		
8th Trans	Box, William G.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Edwards, Robert D.	CW2	62	63	
8th Trans	Boyd, Barclay		61	63	VHPA	33rd Trans	Fabien, Peter W.	1LT	62	63	VHPA
8th Trans	Brameier, Charles	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Frigeri, Anthony	1LT	62		
8th Trans	Brown,	CWO	61			33rd Trans	Guinn, Render C.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Bryan,	LT	61			33rd Trans	Harvey, Jimmy R.	1LT	62		
8th Trans	Burns, Robert J.	CW2	61	61	VHPA	33rd Trans	Henderson, Joseph E.	MAJ	62	63	
8th Trans	Cain, James F.	CW2	61	61	VHPA Dec	33rd Trans	Henderson, Robert P.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Campbell, James F.	CPT	61			33rd Trans	Holmers, Thomas E.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Cole, Granville S.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Houston, Donald R.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Collins, Richard F.	CW2	61	63		33rd Trans	Keehn, Richard C.	CW2	62	63	
8th Trans	Coryers, Harry H.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Keith, Lloyd D.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Crigler,	LT	61			33rd Trans	Lang, Timothy M.	1LT	62		
8th Trans	Davis, Harold W.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Larson, Walter C.	CW2	62	63	
8th Trans	Dixon, Robert F.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Leonard, Jesse W.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Ellis, Samuel F.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Loynachan, Richard E.	CW2	62	63	VHPA
8th Trans	Farmer, Marvin A.	CW2	61	63		33rd Trans	Luck Jr., Bennie E.	CPT	62		
8th Trans	Flohr,	CWO	61			33rd Trans	Luckner, Henry S.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Fulbright, Billy J.	CW2	61	63		33rd Trans	Meade, Robert W.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Goldberg, Joseph A.	CW2	61	62	KIA	33rd Trans	Morawski, Leo J.	1LT	62		
8th Trans	Graham, Donald E.	CW2	61	62	Dec	33rd Trans	Penny, Bryson E.	CW2	62		
8th Trans	Gripp, James P.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Qualls, Sammy L.	1LT	62		
8th Trans	Hagen, Duane L.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Reneau, Billy R.	CW2	62	63	VHPA
8th Trans	Hardesty Jr., Charles	MAJ	61			33rd Trans	Schexnayder, G. Chuck		63	63	
8th Trans	Kuhn, Robert J.	CPT	61			33rd Trans	Stanton, Kenneth D.	1LT	62		
8th Trans	Kuslira, Anthony G.	CW2	61			33rd Trans	Vierling, Raymond A.	CW2	62	63	
8th Trans	Lilley Jr., Aaron L.	CPT	61			33rd Trans	Willis Jr., Browder A.	CPT	62	63	
8th Trans	Manuel, Jerry L.	CW2	61	63		45th TR BN	Hoffman, Robert L.	LTC	62	63	
8th Trans	McCabe, Raymond E.	CW2	61			45th TR BN	Mertel, Kenneth D.	LTC	63	63	VHPA
8th Trans	McCart, James D.	CW2	61			145th CAB	Cunningham, Robert K.	LTC	64	65	
8th Trans	McDonald,	CWO	61			145th CAB	Grandelli, Charles M.	LTC	63	64	
8th Trans	McKenzie, William E.	CW2	61	61	VHPA Dec	145th CAB	Hughes, John C.	LTC	64	64	
8th Trans	Morgan, Beaver C.	CW2	61			57th Med	Anderson, Dick	CPT	64		
8th Trans	Motlow, Theodore E.	1LT	61			57th Med	Ballanger, Bill	CPT	62		
8th Trans	Murray, Joseph H.	CW2	61			57th Med	Bloomquist, Paul	CPT	64	65	Dec
8th Trans	Norton, Henry C.	CW2	61			57th Med	Brady, Patrick H.	CPT	63		
8th Trans	Parker, William H.	CW2	61	63		57th Med	Conway,	LT	63	64	Evacuated
8th Trans	Patterson, John W.	CW2	61	63		57th Med	Huntsman, Howard	MAJ	64		
8th Trans	Pellman, Dana F.	2LT	61			57th Med	Kelly, Charles L.	MAJ	64	64	KIA
8th Trans	Stubbs, Thomas G.	CW2	61			57th Med	Simmons, Armand	1LT	64		
8th Trans	Tedesco,	CPT	61			57th Med	Spencer, Lloyd	MAJ	63	64	
8th Trans	Upchurch, Barbee F.	CW2	61			57th Med	Sylvester, Ernest	LT	64		
8th Trans	Underwood, Joe D.	CPT	61	62	VHPA	57th Med	Temperelli, John, Jr.	CPT	62	63	
8th Trans	Webb, Wayne H.	CW2	61			57th Trans	Adams, Roy	CWO	62		
8th Trans	White, Ronald B.	CW2	61			57th Trans	Altermeyer, J.E.	LT	62		
8th Trans	Williams,	LT	61			57th Trans	Bailey, James A.	CWO	62		
8th Trans	Wilson, Kenneth W.	CW2	61			57th Trans	Bailey, Roger P.	1LT	61	62	
8th Trans	Wilson, Max H.	CW2	61								
33rd Trans	Anderson, Kenneth F.	CW2	62								