

SECTION VI - Inventory of Flight Class Information

For the last several years, the VHPA Directory has carried a nine page inventory of the Army flight training class information that the VHPA Database Committee has collected over the years. For each flight class, identified by this committee, the class number and type, the hat color, the military base where the training was given, the number of members in the class, an indication that the committee does or does not have copies of the orders assigning wings or hazardous duty orders or social rosters or class pictures pertaining to this class, and, finally, the date the wings were awarded. The introductory material asked the membership to send in copies of orders, rosters, or pictures that the committee did not have. Each year, the committee receives a dozen or more significant additions and several historical comments about a given class, which is exactly what the committee wanted!

The VHPA Database Committee is in the process of reorganizing the subcommittee that works with the Flight Class information and databases. Besides checking the completeness of the data it already has, the subcommittee wants to take a more proactive mode - to do research into the histories of various classes and flight schools and to contact VHPA members and others to specifically obtain that they know they are missing. If you are interested in serving on or supporting this subcommittee, please contact GARY ROUSH, THE VHPA DATABASE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, either via VHPA Headquarters or directly at 43 OVERBROOK ROAD, PAINTED POST, NY 14870, also 607-936-3687.

The Database Committee asked that the flight class inventory not be printed this year but promises to have an impressive presentation next year.

SECTION VII - Inventory of Unit Patches

For the last two years, the VHPA Directory has carried the Directory Committee's catalog of unit patches. The VHPA Unit Patch Project was launched in 1995 to identify and record the individual patches pertaining to helicopter units and associated support units that served in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam Era (1961 to 1975). We estimate that more than 800 different helicopter unit patches were made during this period. The archive has grown to include unit calling cards, plaques and reproductions of patches. One of the goals of this project is to publish the collection in various media for the membership, interested individuals, other associations, and institutions. Subsets of the collection have already appeared in the VHPA Newsletter, the Membership Directories, and the Historical Reference Directory. When this collection is published, your patch may not be represented if we do not have a copy of it.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT this patch collection rarely includes the physical cloth patch but does include high quality, color, photo copies and computer generated graphical images. If you wish to help with the Unit Patch Project, send a high quality color copy of your unit patches to Jay Riseden, 4267 Bannister Road, Fair Oaks, CA 95628 or to VHPA Headquarters. PLEASE NOTE - WE DO NOT WANT TO BORROW YOUR PATCH, we only ask for a high quality color copy of it. If you find that your patch is already listed in the following roster of patches, please consider sending your copy anyway. There are considerable differences and variations in unit patch designs. Some of the copies on hand need to be upgraded as they are damaged or are of unsuitable quality.

Due to technical problems, the inventory of unit patches will not be printed this year but will be next year.



The 13th Combat Aviation Battalion Headquarters at Soc Trang in late 1968



Bac Lieu airfield in Bac Lieu Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



New Camau airfield in An Xuyen Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



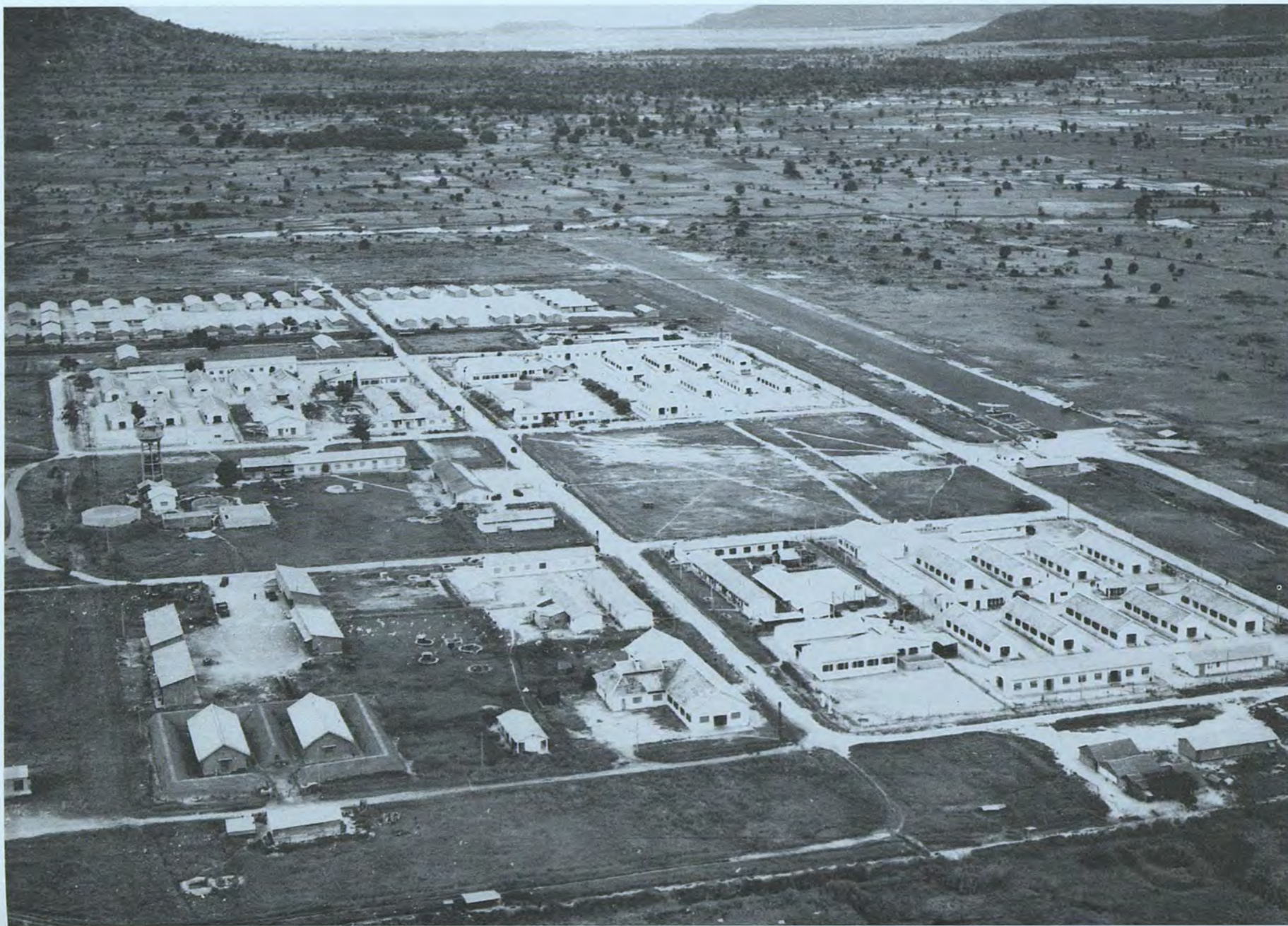
Old Camau airfield in An Xuyen Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Can Tho airfield in Phong Dinh Province. Photo taken in 1968 by Greg Roche when he was in the 271st ASHC.



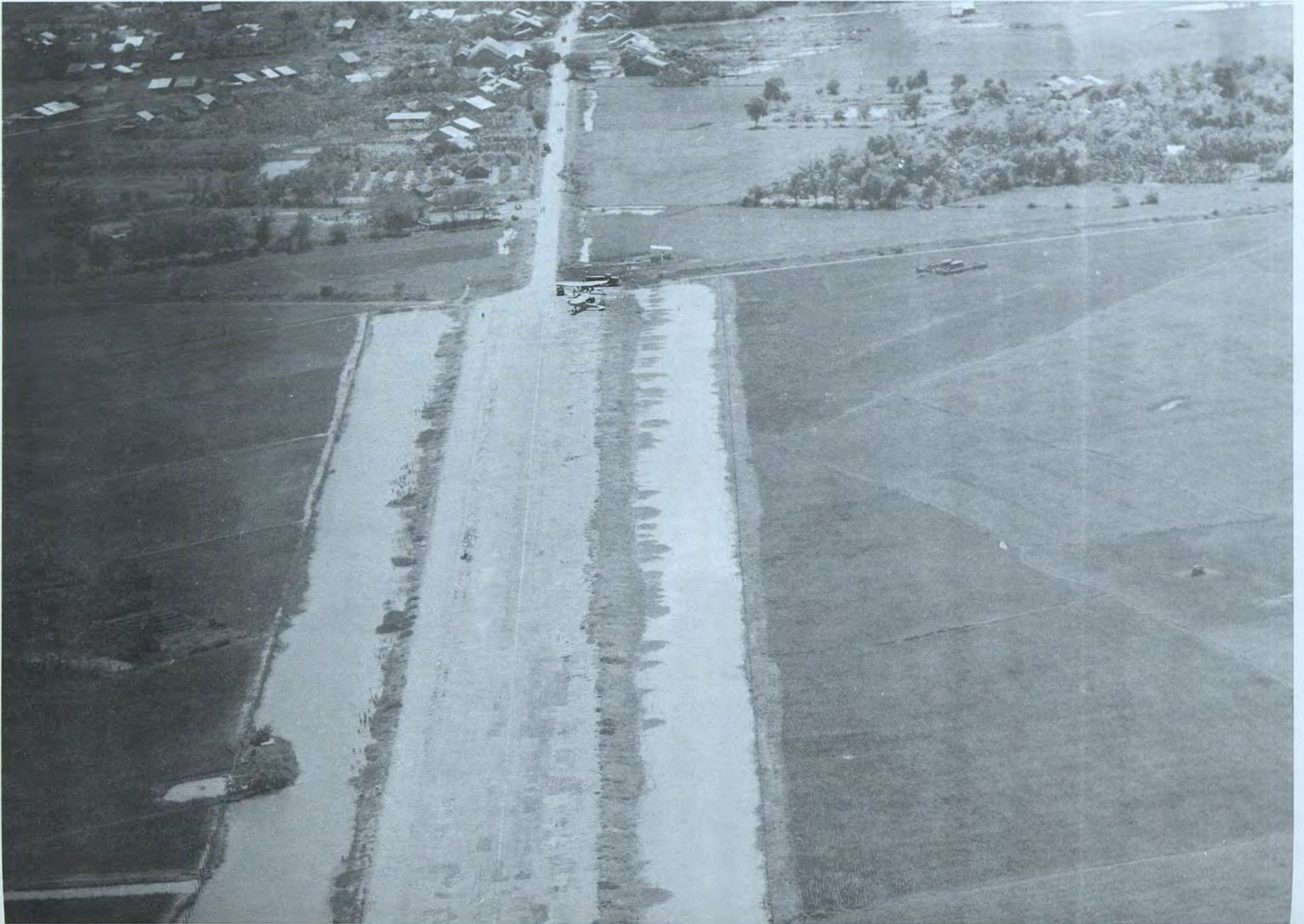
The IV Corps Headquarters at Can Tho city. Photo taken in 1968 by Tony Robinson when he was in the 164th CAG.



Chi Lang airfield in Chau Doc Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



The Dong Tam 9th Infantry Division basecamp. Photo taken in early 1969 by Dennis Clay when he was in the 9th Aviation Battalion.



Go Cong airfield in Go Cong Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Long Xuyen airfield in An Giang Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Moc Hoa airfield in Kien Tuong Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Rach Gia airfield in Kien Giang Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Soc Trang airfield - the 04 end of the runway. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



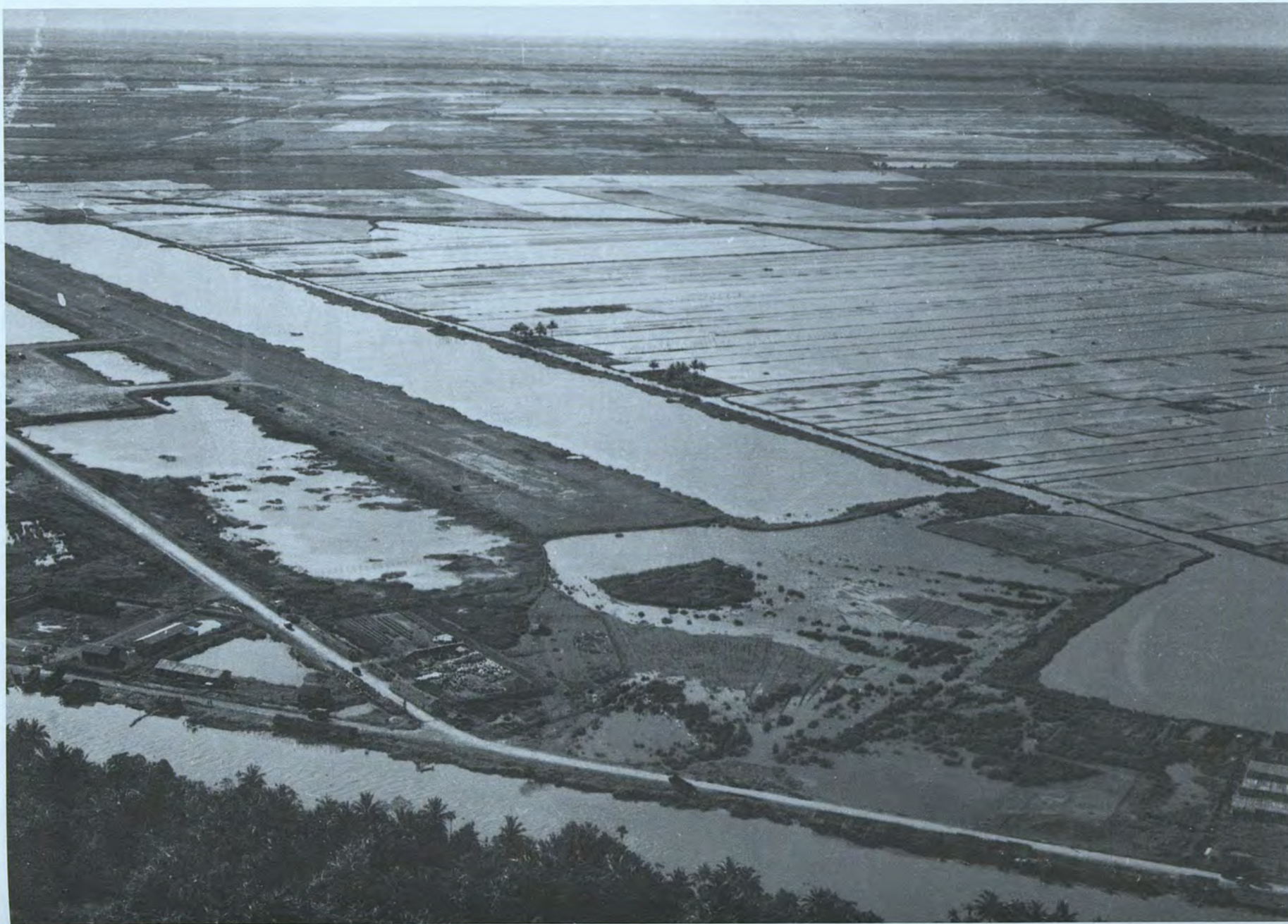
Soc Trang airfield - the 22 end of the runway. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Soc Trang airfield in Ba Xuyen Province in 1969. The town would be to the left and the Tiger's Tail to the right.
Photo taken by Tony Robinson when he commanded the 121st AHC. Home to the 13th CAB,
the 121st and 336th AHCs, the 82 Med Det, and the 221st RAC.



Tan Hiep airfield in Dinh Tuong Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Vi Thanh airfield in Chuong Thien Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Vinh Long airfield in Vinh Long Province. Photo taken in 1966 by Jim Paul, then S-4 in the 13th CAB.



Vinh Long Army Air Field in December, 1968. Photo taken by Jim Spiers when he flew for the MAVERICKS, the gun platoon of the 175th AHC. At this time Vinh Long was home to the 114th and 175th AHCs, the 611th TC CO, the entire 7/1st Air Cav Squadron and the 73d RAC.

SECTION VII - The Helicopter History of IV Corps

It is a custom for the VHPA Directory to present a small helicopter related history and for the cover photos to relate to the theme of that history. These histories are not written as definitive works, rather their primary purposes are: to be educational and informative to the membership, to present a quality selection of the historical material available with a bias toward helicopter related activities, and to provide a format for individual VHPAers and VHCMAers (and other interested parties) to provide their personal comments. Other sources, listing in the References on page 145?, are simply used to help organize the personal comments and to round out the story. All VHPA histories are "living" meaning that additions and corrections are always welcome. All VHPA histories are periodically reprinted.

For the purposes of this VHPA history, IV Corps is defined as the area made up of these sixteen provinces (An Giang, An Xuyen, Ba Xuyen, Bac Lieu, Chau Doc, Chuong Thien, Dinh Tuong, Go Cong, Kien Giang, Kien Hoa, Kien Phong, Kien Tuong, Phong Dinh, Sa Dec, Vinh Binh, and Vinh Long) plus the off-shore islands, most notable Con Son and Phu Quoc. This area covered most of the Mekong Delta area in South Vietnam. The scope of this history includes the helicopter units stationed in this area as well as the battles fought and significant events that occurred in this area from a helicopter perspective.

A basic map of IV Corps (adapted from Summers' Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War)



IV Corps Resident Helicopter Units

DATE	UNIT	LOCATION	COMMENTS	DATE	UNIT	LOCATION	COMMENTS
62 Apr 18	HMM-362	Soc Trang	The first helicopter unit	69 Jul 28	2d Bde, 9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Departed Vietnam
62 Aug 1	HMM-163	Soc Trang	Replaced HMM-362	69 Aug 12	1st Bde, 9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Departed Vietnam
62 Sep 16	HMM-163	Soc Trang	Relocated to Da Nang	69 Aug 18	Div Arty, 9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Departed Vietnam
62 Sep 19	93d TC Co	Soc Trang	Relocated from Da Nang	69 Aug 20	E/709th Mnt Bn	Dong Tam	Departed Vietnam
63 Jan	211th VNAF Sqdn	Binh Thuy?	Raised from 1st Sqdn H-34 assets at Saigon	69 Aug 23	9th Avn Bn	Dong Tam	Departed Vietnam
63 May 5	Delta Avn Bn (Prov)	Can Tho	Raised in Vietnam	69 Aug 27	9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Departed Vietnam
63 May 10	114th Avn Co (AML)	Vinh Long	Arrived from Ft. Knox	69 Aug ?	247th Med Det	Dong Tam	Relocated to Vung Tau
63 Jun 25	121st Avn Co (AML)	Soc Trang	Raised from 93d TC Co	69 Aug ?	162d AHC	Can Tho	Relocated from Dong Tam
64 Mar 1	Det A, 57th Med Det	Soc Trang	First resident DUSTOFF unit in the Delta	69 Aug ?	191st AHC	Can Tho	Relocated from Bear Cat
64 Sep 18	13th Avn Bn	Can Tho	Arrived from Ft. Bragg	69 Sep	214th CAB	Vinh Long	Relocated from Dong Tam
64 Oct 4	Delta Avn Bn (Prov)	Can Tho	Merged into 13th Avn Bn	69 ?	Det 8, HA(L)-3	LST Hunterdon County	Patrolled the Mekong near Cambodia
64 Oct 3	62d Avn (AML)	Vinh Long	Arrived from CONUS	69 Sep ?	Det 9, HA(L)-3	Binh Thuy Naval Base	Last combat det to be organized
64 Oct 26	82d Med Det	Soc Trang	Relieved 57th Med Det	70 ?	211th VNAF Sqdn	Binh Thuy Air Base	Converted from H-34s to UH-1s
64 Dec 14	A/502d Avn Bn	Vinh Long	Arrived from Ft. Bragg	70 ?	217th VNAF Sqdn	Binh Thuy Air Base	Converted to UH-1s
64 Dec 14	62d Avn (AML)	Vinh Long	Departed Vietnam	70 Mar 20	C/16th Air Cav	Can Tho	Raised from assets of D/1/4th Air Cav
65 ?	Corps Flight Section	Can Tho	The unofficial IV Corps flight section came into existence	70 Apr ?	D/3/5th Air Cav	Vinh Long	Relocated from Tan An and attached to the 7/1st ACS
65 May	A/101st Avn Bn	Soc Trang	Arrived from Ft. Campbell	70 Jun ?	147th ASHC	Can Tho	Relocated from Vung Tau
65 Sep 15	Det 10, 38th ARRSq	Binh Thuy Air Base	Arrived	70 Oct ?	135th AHC	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat
65 Dec	217th VNAF Sqdn	Binh Thuy Air Base	H-34 equipped, relocated from Tan Son Nhut	70 Oct	225th VNAF Sqdn	Soc Trang	Raised from assets of 121st AHC
65 ?	AA Section	Can Tho	Established	70 Nov	227th VNAF Sqdn	Soc Trang	Raised from assets of 336th AHC
66 Aug ?	611th TC Co (ADS)	Vinh Long	Relocated from Vung Tau	70 Dec 10	121st AHC	Soc Trang	Departed Vietnam
66 Sep	Det 3, HC-1	Vinh Long	First resident SEA WOLF detachments	71 Feb ?	D/3/5th Cav	Vinh Long	Becomes C/3/17th Cav
66 Sep	Det 4, HC-1	Soc Trang		71 Mar 15	336th AHC	Soc Trang	Departed Vietnam
66 Sep 1	175th AHC	Vinh Long	Raised from A/502d Avn	71 Jul 1	Det 10, 38th ARRSq	Binh Thuy Air Base	Departed Vietnam
66 Nov 10	336th AHC	Soc Trang	Raised from A/101st Avn	71 Jul 1	DRAC	Can Tho	Raised from assets of 191 AHC
67 Jan	3d Bde, 9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat	71 Jul ?	135th AHC	Dong Tam	? Relocated to Phu Loi
67 Mar 10	2d Bde, 9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat	71 Aug 15	18th Avn Co (CAC)	Can Tho	Raised from assets of DRAC
67 Mar 10	3d Bde, 9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Relocated to Tan An	71 Aug 31	235th AWC (Escort)	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
67 Jun 2	Mobile Riverine Force	Dong Tam	Officially established	71 Sep 26	271st ASHC	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
67?	Det 1, HA(L)-3	LST Jennings County		71 Oct 1	191st AHC	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
67?	Det 3, HA(L)-3	Vinh Long	Raised from Det 3, HC-1	71 Nov ?	82 Med Det	Soc Trang	Departed Vietnam
67?	Det 4, HA(L)-3	LST Garrett County	Raised from Det 4, HC-1	72 Jan 3	214th CAB	Vinh Long	Departed Vietnam
67?	Det 5, HA(L)-3	LST Harnett County		72 Jan 26	HA(L)-3	Binh Thuy Naval Base	Departed Vietnam
67?	Det 6, HA(L)-3			72 Feb 20	175th AHC	Vinh Long	Departed Vietnam
67?	Det 7, HA(L)-3	Binh Thuy Navy Base		72 Feb 29	114th AHC	Vinh Long	Departed Vietnam
67 Sep 20	Phantom Avn Bn (Prov)	Can Tho	Raised in Vietnam	72 Mar 17	147th ASHC	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
67 Nov 1	235th Avn Co (AHC)	Can Tho	Arrived from Ft. Benning	72 Apr 1	13th CAB	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
67 Dec 20	307th CAB	Can Tho	Raised from assets of Phantom Avn Bn (Prov)	72 Apr 3	162d AHC	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
68 Feb 1	164th CAG	Can Tho	Raised from assets of the DELTA (Prov) Group	72 Apr 7	7/1st ACS	Vinh Long	Departed Vietnam
68 ?	13th CAB	Soc Trang	Relocated from Can Tho	72 Apr 7	C/3/717th Cav	Vinh Long	Departed Vietnam
68 Feb 26	271st ASHC	Can Tho	Arrived from Ft. Benning	72 Dec	249th VNAF Sqdn	Can Tho	CH-47 equipped
68 Jun 3	7/1st ACS	Vinh Long	Relocated from Bear Cat	73 ?	AFAT-4	Binh Thuy	Departed Vietnam
68 Aug	9th Inf Div	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat	73 Feb 26	C/16th Air Cav	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
68 Aug	9th Avn Bn	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat	73 Mar 13	611th TC Co (ADS)	Vinh Long	Departed Vietnam
68 Aug	E/709th Mnt Bn	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat	73 Mar 14	164th CAG	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
68 Aug	D/3/5th Cav	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat	73 Mar 27	18th Avn Co (CAC)	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
68 Oct ?	235th AWC	Can Tho	Raised from 235th AHC	73 ?	Det H, 259th VNAF Sqdn	Can Tho	Medevac detachment
68 ?	Det 5, HA(L)-3	Rach Gia	Relocated from LST Harnett County	73 ?	Det ?, 259th VNAF Sqdn	Binh Thuy Air Base	Medevac detachment
68 Nov 15	214th CAB	Dong Tam	Relocated from Bear Cat	73 ?	255th VNAF Sqdn	Can Tho	Raised in Vietnam
68 Dec 24	247th Med Det	Dong Tam	Arrived from CONUS	74 ?	217th VNAF Sqdn	Can Tho	Relocated from Soc Trang?
69 May	HA(L)-3	Binh Thuy Naval Base	Squadron HQ relocated from Vung Tau	75 Apr	AA Section	Can Tho	Departed Vietnam
69 Jul 26	D/3/5th Cav	Tan An	Attached to 3d Bde, 9th Inf (Sep)				
69 Jul 26	3d Bde, 9th Inf Div	Tan An	Separates from 9th Div				

IV Corps

The IV Corps area is bordered on the east by the South China Sea, the west by the Gulf of Siam and the Cambodian border, and the north by the southern III Corps boundary with the provinces of Hau Nghia and Long An. It is approximately 175 nautical miles long and varies in width from 150 nautical miles at its widest to 20 nautical miles as it tapers to a point at its southernmost extremity. It is almost flat with a mean elevation of less than 20 feet MSL.

The area is transversed by two major rivers, the Bassac on the south and the Mekong on the north. The Mekong divides into three branches near Vinh Long.

The dry season lasts from November to April with barely a drop of rain and in the latter months temperatures are in the 80s and 90s. Between May and October, clouds block the sun, the humidity increases, but periodic storms offer little relief from the heat.

The area produced two-thirds of the food produced in Vietnam and had over half of the country's population. Generally the population density was highest in the northern portions.

The ARVN Order of Battle

On Dec 22, 1962, President Diem announced a restructuring of the ARVN command system. IV Corps was established to cover the Mekong Delta area with a headquarters at Can Tho. Prior to this time, the area was part of III Corps.

The 7th ARVN Div was headquartered at My Tho with the 10th, 11th, and 12th ARVN Infantry Regiments until late 1969 when it relocated to Dong Tam.

The 9th ARVN Div was headquartered at Sa Dec with the 14th, 15th, and 16th ARVN Infantry Regiments until ? when it relocated to Rach Gia.

The 21st ARVN Div was headquartered at Bac Lieu with the 31st, 32d, and 33d ARVN Infantry Regiments.

The 44th STZ (Special Tactical Zone) was headquartered at Chau Duc and later at Chi Long and was responsible for a huge AO along the Cambodian border. The 44th STZ was not a division level command, however by 1972 it controlled the 4th Ranger Group, the 4th Armor Brigade, plus the 41st and 42d Ranger Border Defense Groups which actually made it larger than an ARVN Div. Traditionally the bulk of its troops were RF/PFs.

The American Order of Battle

The IV Corps Tactical Zone MACV headquarters was collocated at Can Tho with the ARVN IV Corps headquarters. In April 1968 it was redesignated the Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC) and in October 1970 Military Region 4. It was also known as the Delta Regional Assistance Command (DRAC).

The 9th Infantry Division arrived in Vietnam in late 1966 and was based at Bear Cat in III Corps until July 1968 when it moved to Dong Tam. In August, 1969, the 9th was one of the first major commands to leave Vietnam.

The 1st Brigade was based at Dong Tam and Cai Lay.

The 2d Brigade, also known as the Mobile Riverine Force (MRF), was based at Dong Tam.

The 3d Brigade (Separate) was the "stay behind" unit from the 9th Infantry Division, was based at Tan An in III Corps, and was attached to the 25th Inf Div.

The Marines Started It All

SHUFLY aka T.U.79.3.5

Soc Trang was an old, abandoned Japanese airfield but on 15 April 1962 it would become the home to HMM-362. With help from HMM-261, they flew off the USS Princeton, to become the first helicopter unit to be based in the Delta.

The 1991 VHPA Membership Directory was dedicated to the early American helicopter pioneers and section XIV featured the first IV Corps resident helicopter unit, HMM-362 who called themselves ARCHIE's ANGELS after their commander LTC Archie Clapp. Section XIV quotes liberally from a wonderful record LTC Clapp published so this history will not duplicate that material except to say that if the reader is

interested in reading about the UH-34Ds, about early Delta helicopter operations, about adapting to work with the Vietnamese, about the life and times at Soc Trang - this is still a special history.

Briefly, the 3280 foot macadam airstrip at Soc Trang received 50 sorties of supplies from Okinawa from 9 to 14 April, 1962. Then starting at first light on 15 April, HMM-362, assisted by HMM-261, moved 264 personnel, 100 tons of cargo, and their 24 UH-34Ds over 30 miles from the USS Princeton (LPH-5) to begin Operation SHUFLY under the direction of MACV. Their first tactical troop lift mission was on 22 April. As good VHPA luck would have it, while member John Konek was exhuming some US Air Force Aerospace Rescue and Recovery documents, he obtained a copy of the Marine Corps Operations Analysis Group Study No. 1 - Characteristics of U.S. Marine Corps Helicopter Operations in the Mekong Delta, 1962. This 33 page report is extremely well done and is a peer to the US Army Concept Team in Vietnam (ACTIV) reports. The following highlights from this report should ring a familiar cord to most everyone who flew in IV Corps.

To use U.S. helicopters, both the Senior Corps advisor and helicopter unit commander must concur even though the request may have started at a lower echelon. In no case could SHUFLY generate its own requirements for operations nor, with the exception of a pre-morning limited reconnaissance on its own behalf, would it generate intelligence.

During 1962, SHUFLY conducted 178 operations and half of them involved 16 or more aircraft, not counting a spare that was flown to the troop pickup point. The CH-21C equipped U.S. Army 57th TC Company and VNAF helicopters contributed lift in 17 operations.

The concept of an airborne reserve or "Eagle" flight included ideas from the Senior Advisor, 21st Infantry Division; such as - prior planning must insure that fuel for four relays of Eagle aircraft (although four are seldom required) is available - terminate the operation before the fuel supply at the airfield runs low - don't split the Eagle forces by a canal or other impassable object unless they are working against less than 20 VC - if the helicopters want to fire on the way in at targets of opportunity, the ground commander needs to be warned else he will think the VC are using automatic weapons.

During July, SHUFLY pilots reported 10 suspect activities observed during their missions. These were passed through channels to Corps and area commanders, but there was no known follow up.

The command communications net involved a Vietnamese L-19 with a USMC or MAAG advisor on board, a Vietnamese observer-interpreter in a FARMGATE T-28, a VNAF AD-6, the ground commander, and the helicopter commander. The report states: "to provide better coordination between air and ground elements; the use of a helicopter as an airborne CP has also been successfully attempted."

After a lengthy discussion of maintenance and battle damage issues, the report makes a profound statement: "viewed in its simplest terms, SHUFLY provides only a means of military mobility to the Vietnamese government forces not otherwise available to them. In that it permitted (in terms of averages) the rapid movement of two companies of infantry over 20 miles of otherwise impassable terrain every other day. A determination of the degree that SHUFLY influenced the course of the counter-insurgency campaign for better or worse is difficult to make."

One of the pilots of this era recalled the first night medevac performed in IV Corps. Three ARVN officers had been injured, two rather seriously, and the Marines sent a two ship section to retrieve them. The ARVNs were very surprised and very impressed that the Marines would do this at night.

In closing, we need to add that HMM-362 was replaced by HMM-163 as part of the normal USMC helicopter squadron rotation policy on 1 Aug 1962. Then on Sep 1962, SHUFLY moved to Da Nang and the Army 93d TC Company moved to Soc Trang.

The 93d Transportation Company (CH-21C)

In September, 1962, the 93d TC Company moved from Da Nang to Soc Trang thus become the first Army helicopter unit to be based in the Delta. The 1991 VHPA Membership Directory was dedicated to the early American helicopter pioneers and section XV featured the CH-21C companies so this history will not duplicate that material.

At this time the 45th Transportation Battalion at Tan Son Nhut commanded the Army helicopter units in Vietnam including the 93d TC at Soc Trang. The practice at this time, which continued until 1965 and 1966, was to mass aviation assets to support the larger ARVN operations. Even though the 93d was based in the Delta, many of their missions were flown in III and even II Corps. The histories note that it was not until 23 Dec that their first operational mission was flown in IV Corps.

On 2 January 1963, the famous Battle of Ap Bac took place in IV Corps about 14 miles northwest of My Tho and the 93d TC Company participated in it as outlined in the 1991 Directory.

On 10 January, a 57th TC Company CH-21C crashed while enroute from Soc Trang to Saigon. Four 93d passengers died in this crash; three pilots and one EM.

In March, the 1st Machine Gun Platoon of one officer and 20 EM arrived for 90 days of TDY for duty as helicopter door gunners.

"Tuffy" the Soc Trang Tiger

While the Royal Bengal Tiger named Tuffy is often mentioned in unit histories of the 93d TC Co and the 45th TC Bn, the story of how this unit acquired Tuffy is not widely known. R.A. Jones was an Army Captain flying for MAAG LAOS and Air America in 1961 and recalls:

Later that year I was drinking with some White Star Troops (Special Forces) in Vientiane and offered a bounty if they could get me a tiger cub. A short time later they brought me the cub and he lived with me in my old French apartment in downtown Vientiane. Whenever I went out in public, I kept Tuffy on a long chain. Tuffy loved to ride around on the windshield of my jeep and was very good natured as a cub. When the Americans were kicked out of Laos, Tuffy transferred to the U.S. Embassy where some of the staff guards cared for him. I moved to Thailand and was still flying mostly fixed wing when I happened to visit Soc Trang not long after the 93d TC moved there. Captain Leon Curry of the 93d was a friend of mine and I felt sorry for them - I mean, they called themselves the SOC TRANG TIGERS but didn't even have a tiger! I knew Tuffy was getting too big to stay in the Embassy and when the 93d agreed to take him as their mascot, I arranged for Air America to fly Tuffy to Soc Trang.

I still remember how everyone gathered around the C-47 and slowly opened the door. Tuffy came bounding out and everyone scattered to the wind - they didn't know he was on a chain!!

The 93d built a large cage for Tuffy and everything was fine for a few weeks. In the wild, tigers are nocturnal hunters and as Tuffy matured he began to act more and more like a tiger and less like an oversized kitten. If you ever get to a 145th CAB(V)A Reunion you can see several photos of Tuffy on their traveling display boards. Notice that Tuffy was about the size of the tire on a CH-21C. We called him C/Msgr because he had lots of stripes!

Not long after this, a couple of pilots had had too much to drink one night and decided to go play with Tuffy. They may have been a little tired and drunk, but the tiger wasn't! I heard they were so scratched up that they couldn't fly the next day. Anyway, Tuffy had to go.

Somehow, the Toledo Zoo got involved and agreed to take the tiger. I returned to the States about the same time Tuffy arrived and in November, I went to see him. The Zoo people weren't going to let me near him; but were surprised that Tuffy actually recognized me by rubbing up against his cage and even letting me pet him. It really broke my heart to have to let him go.

To put an end to this story, Tuffy was euthanized due to kidney failure on June 13, 1980. His first mate produced a large number of cubs and his second produced 12 but not all lived. Later the cubs were provided to various zoos but the Toledo Zoo no longer keeps tigers.

The SOC TRANG TIGERS and VIKINGS

On 25 June, the 93d TC Company was redesignated the 121st Aviation Company.

In March, 1964, the 3d platoon of the UTT came to Soc Trang to help train the forming gunship platoon of the 121st as they were receiving UH-1Bs at this time.

On 12 April, the Battle of Kien Long was fought. This is the first recorded

incident where the VC fought with a regimental sized unit. VHPA member John Givhan was wounded during this battle and PFC Matsuura, the CE on MAJ Mike Baldasare's ship was KIA. John's book *Rice and Cotton: South Vietnam and South Alabama* gives considerable attention to this battle. He points out that the 120th came all the way from Saigon to do this operation while the 121st was assigned to another mission and that no UTT gunship escorted them. There are many unanswered questions and many unknown details about this important battle.

In early 1965, the 121st began preparing for the arrival of their sister unit, Company A, 101st Aviation Battalion. They arrived with UH-1Ds and the 121st soon converted their slick platoons to the UH-1D as well. The 1965 history states that prior to the arrival of the "Winged Warriors" and the "Outlaws," they had been in virtual direct support of the 21st ARVN Division. With the presence of four fully operational airmobile helicopter companies in the Delta, units had a more general support role. It also mentions the arrival of the 1st platoon, 134th Caribou company and the 221st RAC.

On 1 December 1965, the Gunner Platoon became organic to the company. Prior to this they were TDY from the 25th Inf Div in Hawaii.

Bill Wilson, from the Viking Platoon in 1965, recalls:

The Vikings had a tradition of awarding black berets to all "qualified" members. To get the opportunity to fly with the Vikings required that you have at least 200 in country hours in slicks and then you could "apply" to the Vikings. You were on probation for a 30 day period during which time you were evaluated by various members of the platoon during trips to Range A as well as your actions during actual missions. If you passed, you were officially "qualified" and were eligible to wear the black beret which had a blue diamond sewn on the side over the right eye. You wore your rank in the blue diamond. Over the blue diamond was embroidered the words "Blue Diamond Devils of the Delta." Refer to the photos on page 138.

The nose art for our aircraft was a Viking looking character complete with blonde beard and hair with a horned helmet. The Viking was holding a load of 2.75" rockets under each arm and a M-60 blazing away in each hand. This was all painted on a large blue diamond. Tradition had it that earlier in the 1960's Hanoi Hanna referred to the Vikings as the "blue diamond devils of the delta" which was immediately taken as a compliment and the slogan stuck!

When you completed your tour with the Vikings, the platoon gave you a "Viking helmet." The helmet was a pod cover from a rocket canister that was painted silver with a smaller version of the nose art painting. It also had water buffalo horns for a special effect. It was lined and had a chin strap to insure that it didn't slip off while you were wearing it back home; since you would obviously be "stewed" when wearing it!

The Soc Trang compound changed a lot by the end of 1965. It had 165 buildings, 45 were added in 1965. On 1 July a 750 foot well was completed along with a new water storage tank. The MARS Radio Station went into operation on 28 December. The new ATC tower was started in the fall and would be finished in 1966. Sadly, they were unable to obtain a workable filter for the swimming pool.

The 1966 history mentions the swimming pool, the ATC tower manned by Det P of the 125th ATC, improved radar, permanent runway lighting, a new hangar for the 336th AHC, the 21st MP Sentry Dog Platoon for added security, plus the 68th Inf Det and the 78th Arty Det (counter mortar radar).

In April, they helped train crews from the newly arrived 25th Avn Bn and got to use UH-1B (540s) for the first time.

Both the 1965 and 1966 unit histories are very detailed and provide a good overview of the combat operations as well as the basecamp activities at Soc Trang. We need to thank VHPA members Tony Robinson and Greg Roche for their extra help with this history.

As best the VHPA databases can tell, the 121st Honor Roll includes 9 pilots and 13 enlisted (this does not include the four KIAs from the 93d TC Co). There are 38 battle damage, 55 accident, and 17 helicopter loss records in the VHPA HELICOPTER database.

The TAILBOARDS

The 611th Transportation Company (ADS) arrived in country on 5 Oct

1962 but was initially based at Vung Tau. They performed direct support and direct support backup maintenance on Army aircraft and aircraft armament systems. They provided supplies, repair parts and aircraft rigging support to all Army nondivisional aviation units in IV Corps. They also provided recovery for all aircraft downed by enemy fire or maintenance difficulties. Several VHPAers remember CH-37 aircraft coming out of Vung Tau for IV Corps recoveries in the early years. Since the ADS company in II Corps had CH-37s, one could guess that maybe the 611th did as well for IV Corps.

About Aug 1966, they moved to Vinh Long. The VHPA has a copy of the 765th Transportation Battalion history for 1967 which includes the 611th. The good news is that this history lists all 66 officers and the approximately 1,100 EM that were in this battalion in 1967. The bad news is that only two pilots are listed in the VHPA Directory and both of them have old addresses that are no longer valid.

VHCMA member David Vollmar was in the 611th's recovery team during 1967 and 1968. It was based as a detachment at Soc Trang and they had a CH-47 with a placard that read: '611th Recovery Soc Trang, "We Rig All Dead Birds," and beneath that "The Bird Shippers."' It has a side view illustration of a CH-47 slinging a large white stork like bird that looks a little sick. The history states that in fiscal 1967 they rigged 237 downed aircraft. Since the 271st ASHC would be the first resident chinook company in IV Corps when they arrived in Feb 1968, the 611th has the honor of being the first CH-47 unit in IV Corps.

The 611th departed Vinh Long on 13 Mar 1973 with ten and a half years of service in Vietnam!

The DELTA Aviation Battalion (Provisional)

Depending on which source you consult, this provisional command was formed on either 5 May or 4 July 1963 by LTC Ace Phillips at Can Tho. This was during the transition period when all the helicopter Transportation Corps units were being redesignated Aviation units. VHPA member Jack Mackmull (who would later command the 13th CAB, the 164th CAG, and the 1st Avn Bde) provides the following:

The DELTA Battalion would command the 114th and 121st Aviation companies. LTC J.Y. Hammack took command about the time the 13th Battalion arrived in Vietnam. Obviously, there was no need for two battalion HQs in IV Corps, so both units were combined.

Again, depending on which source you consult, this provisional command discontinued on 30 Sep or 4 Oct 1964.

DELTA GUARDIANS

The 13th Aviation Battalion command at Ft. Bragg in Aug 1964 for deployment to Vietnam during September. Jack Mackmull recalls:

The 13th Battalion headquarters included people like Millard Whitten, who would later command the 121st; George Derrick, who would later command the 114th and then the 7/1st Cav; Charlie Licha and Dan Stanke.

In Dec, 1964, I returned to IV Corps to command the battalion. Tom Anderson, who organized and deployed with A/502d Aviation, would later command the battalion.

These were the beginnings of 'Delta Legends' - in this case officers who would serve several tours in either the same or different units in the Delta. There would be Warrant Officer 'Delta Legends' as well.

Understanding the role of this battalion is critical to understanding the helicopter war in the Delta. In a nut shell, if the Battalion Commander withdraw his resources; the ARVN operation didn't happen.

The policy for commanding air operations seemed to be - let an individual company run its own missions, but when significant assets from more than one company were involved; then the battalion staff would fly as the control. This seemed to work well even after the two new helicopter companies joined in 1965.

Until the second build-up of aviation assets (associated with the 9th Inf Div and when the 7/1st Cav moved into Vinh Long), the battalion represented virtually the "entire aviation family" in IV Corps. Many VHPAers express strong feelings about this "family." The death of COL Dempsey in the Battle on Easter Sunday sent a shock wave across the entire organization.

The 13th Combat Aviation Battalion played a central and critical role in

IV Corps even after the 164th Group was organized in 1968. The headquarters relocated to Soc Trang during 1968 and remained there in 1969. Sources indicate that it returned to Can Tho during 1970 and would there close out its tour in February 1972.

DELTA DUSTOFF

Even though the 57th Med Det, the first DUSTOFF unit to come to Vietnam, was initially based outside IV Corps; the famous MAJ Kelley and the small three ship detachment based at Soc Trang made DUSTOFF a household word by mid-1964. The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War, Dust Off by John L. Cook and the History of Air Ambulance Units in the 1993 VHPA Directory provide ample evidence that much of the tradition of DUSTOFF was born and raised in and around the Delta.

The 82d Med Detachment arrived in Soc Trang in October, 1964 and, after exchanging personnel and training with the 57th, took over the Delta as their area of responsibility. John Cook's book makes cute point when he states: "When it came to a radio call sign, no matter what the 82d called themselves, the units they supported insisted on calling them DUSTOFF."

Since this five ship detachment lived with the 121st Aviation Company at Soc Trang, there was an especially close relationship between these units.

Flight Surgeon Bartecchi was stationed at Soc Trang from about Sept 1965 to Sept 1966 as best as can be determined. His 201 page *SOC TRANG* first published in 1982 contains some rather interesting ideas.

After just a few days of being with the officers, the medical staff and helicopter crews, he says: "I realized that these weren't men living out a penance in hell. They were nice guys, going a difficult job, and enjoying their work in spite of the hardships."

A bakery in town made a delicious, hard crusted, French bread that the base purchased instead of making their own bread. Sometimes it had worms in it. The doctor inspected the bakery and the Vietnamese tried to keep their flour clean and dry but at times it was difficult.

The small hospital, dispensary, and Dustoff HQ were all near each other. During his tour, they built an operating area inside a bunker because the mortar attacks were serious enough to motivate them.

The 121st had a dog as a mascot named Sam. The dog became an alcoholic, chased a landing fixed wing once and was injured. They put a metal rod in his damaged leg so he became a "bird dog" because he had an airplane part inside him. Sadly, they had to destroy Sam when he started biting people and they thought he had rabies.

The men on the base had lots of pets including other dogs, pythons, monkeys, and cats.

There was an above the ground, concrete supported, swimming pool inside a pyramid of sandbags with a worn out rotor blade for a spring board.

Early in his tour it was not safe for an American to go into the town, but that after the Americans started helping the orphanage and medical clinic it was better.

Details about the base Catholic Chaplain, Major Harold Paul, and Mother Bruno with the Vietnamese Sisters of Providence Order at the Soc Trang Orphanage and how over time many American soldiers got involved in helping the orphanage and then a Soc Trang Clinic established prior to the U.S. Navy medical team establishing a better equipped civilian hospital.

The 82d Med would cover itself with glory on several occasions. The Dec 21, 1967 issue of THE ARMY REPORTER, USARV's weekly newspaper, carries a photo of Gen Westmoreland presenting a DSC to SP5 Hook for his actions in the Battle on Easter Sunday.

As part of the US Army policy to make certain each standard Army Infantry Division be supported by at least one air ambulance unit, the 247th Med Det brought its six UH-1Hs to Dong Tam after coming ashore at Vung Tau in November, 1968. During the first half of 1969 the 247th and 82d both served IV Corps. With the withdrawal of the 9th Inf Div, the 247th Med Det relocated to Vung Tau in Sep or Oct 1969.

The VHPA databases do not record any 247th Med KIAs and there are only two helicopter accident records for the period of time this unit was based at Dong Tam. Sadly, we have few details about the history of this unit.

VHPA member Mike Novosel earned his Medal of Honor while flying as DUSTOFF 88 for the 82d Med Det on 2 October 1969 in support of an ARVN unit that made contact along the Cambodian border in Kien Thuong Province. He and his son, Mike Jr., flew together in 1970.

The 82d would depart Vietnam in November, 1971. As best the VHPA can determine, the Honor Role for the 82d Med Det has two pilots and four crew members. On 19 October 1968 they lost a ship with the entire crew. The VHPA HELICOPTER database has records of six helicopter losses, 21 with battle damage, and 13 for accidents.

The Knights of the Air

The 114th Aviation Company was the first Huey transport (this was even prior to the airmobile light (AML) days) company to deploy to Vietnam. (For the record, the first Huey unit was the 57th Med Det and the first Huey company was the UTT.) They were also the first helicopter unit to be based at Vinh Long; a platoon from the 73d airplane company was already there. Their history states they had 25 factory fresh UH-1Bs when they arrived from Ft. Knox on 10 May 1963. The 544th TC Det provided maintenance support. A few months later they adopted the nickname KNIGHTS OF THE AIR with the RED KNIGHTS and WHITE KNIGHTS being their 1st and 2nd platoons. The gun platoon was known as the COBRAS. Eventually when the Army and Bell Helicopter got around to naming the AH-1G, the Cobra, the project team acknowledged that they were taking up a name that had been used for some time already in Vietnam by the 114th. Their headquarters section took the name GOLD KNIGHTS and in later years maintenance became the BLUE KNIGHTS. As was the custom at the time in other locations in Vietnam, the Bird Dog platoon was attached to the helicopter company.

With the 93d TC CO (soon to be renamed the 121st AVN) and the recently formed Provisional Delta Aviation Battalion, they provided helicopter support for the entire IV Corps. Their first combat assault was a joint effort with the 57th TC CO lifting ARVN troops from Bien Hoa into an LZ 15 miles northeast of Tay Ninh on 11 June. Their history mentions Eagle Flight operations and the use of a BUG (or Firefly) light equipped ship with two gunships for night operations. Like other helicopter companies, the 114th received door gunners from the 25th Inf Div in Hawaii on a 90 day TDY basis. The first man to die while serving with the 114th was SP5 Carl Ballard on 6 July 1963.

1964 was a busy year for the 114th. Early in the year, they were able to dismantle the 'Tent City' and move into permanent buildings. On 4 June they were designed an AML unit. They would receive a Valorous Unit Award for their actions during the 26 June 1964 battle near Tra Vinh and would share in the 13th CAB's Meritorious Unit Citation for the period 1 July 1963 - 30 June 1964. A glance at the KIAs by Date section shows that between March and 29 June, 1963, 16 men from the 114th died in at least five separate events! In October they helped their new sister company, A/502d Avn Bn (later to become the 175th AHC), arrive at Vinh Long. In early November they sent five aircraft TDY to I Corps to assist in flood rescue operations and in early December the entire 1st and 3d platoons conducted Eagle Flights from Da Nang. The history states that all their aircraft and equipment remained in Da Nang when the 114th personnel returned to Vinh Long. Could this have been the origin of the I Corps Aviation Company? The Bob Hope 1964 Christmas Show visited Vinh Long.

In 1965 they earned another Valorous Unit Award for their actions during 4 - 6 April (in which they lost an entire crew and at least one ship) and a Presidential Unit Citation for their support of DAN CHI 157 in Can Tho Province during 27 - 28 August.

From 28 - 30 January, 1966 they supported another DAN CHI operation with the 13th CAB. Later the entire 13th CAB would receive the Fourragere of Gallantry Award, the first even presented to an American combat unit. In June 1966, the 114th added a second gun platoon - the LANCERS and on 2 July they were reorganized as an Assault Helicopter Company (AHC). Starting in August and continuing until 1967, they replaced the UH-1B transports with UH-1Ds. They helped train the HA(L)-3 crews and even gave them three of their aircraft. On 26 September they lost another crew with their gunship.

Starting in January, 1967 and continuing until August, 1968, they replaced the COBRA and LANCER 'B' models with 'C' models. As noted elsewhere, the 114th fought in the Battle on Easter Sunday on the 26th.

In October the LANCERS were disbanded and the 114th returned to have just one gun platoon, the COBRAS. On 26 October they lost another entire crew with their gunship.

Tet of '68 was very intense around the airfield. The 114th would have one pilot and their maintenance officer KIA but situation immediately outside their perimeter was anything but stable for several days. As outlined in the 2d Brigade, 9th Inf Div section, the MRF was finally able to send in two of their battalions, that had to have been exhausted by this point, and they were able to kill and move out enough of the VC around the airfield for the locals to regain control. That the airfield received massive and sustain attacks by fire for weeks is proof that the ARVN forces did not have "enough control" or as much as was desired. In June, the Air Cavalry troops started arriving at Vinh Long.

Starting in February, 1969 and continuing until September, six AH-1Gs replaced eight UH-1Cs in the COBRA platoon. In October, the 114th was reassigned to the 214th CAB which relocated to Vinh Long.

On 8 January, 1970, they lost an entire crew with their UH-1H. During the spring, the 114th supported the Cambodian incursion as outlined in the COUGAR section. They were delighted to report no crew or equipment losses. That summer they began OJT programs with VNAF personnel. On 5 August, the ammo dump blew up causing extensive damage to aircraft, buildings and equipment but no fatalities. By the end of the year the last of the UH-1Ds had been traded in for UH-1Hs.

On 2 December, 1971, they lost an entire crew with their UH-1H.

On 29 February, 1972, the 114th stood down after almost nine years of service in Vietnam! As best the VHPA databases can tell, the 114th Honor Roll includes 28 pilots and 34 enlisted. There are 268 battle damage, 78 accident, and 40 helicopter loss records in the VHPA HELICOPTER database. The only known MIA or Body Not Recovered members are CPT Mosburg and SP4 Foster who were lost on 26 September 1966 over the water.

Today the KNIGHTS OF THE AIR have one of the finest unit associations and, without much argument, the best unit Newsletter. Their superb organization and impressive success is a credit the love and hard work of VHPA member George Young and VHCMA member John Brennan and many, many others. After working on a unit history for several years, this summer the association commissioned Bob Chenoweth to interview each and every KNIGHT and pull together their history. This effort may well set a new standard for other units in this area.

The Royal Coachmen?

The 62d Aviation Company (AML) arrived at Vinh Long in 3 Oct 1964 from Ft Benning and officially departed on 14 Dec 1964 which is the same day that A/502d Aviation Battalion arrived. The 114th's history is very specific on this point but more details would certainly help clear up the VHPA's understanding of these event.

The OUTLAWS and MAVERICKS

As mentioned above, A Company, 502d Aviation arrived from Ft. Bragg on 14 Dec 1964 to begin a long and colorful history at Vinh Long. It is not known if they received assets from the 62d Aviation as mentioned above.

On 1 Sep 1966 they officially became the 175th Aviation Company (AML) while retaining all their platoon and unit names.

The good news - because of the efforts of several good VHPA members, especially Jim Spiers and Jim Hardbeck, we have some good photos of MAVERICK ships. The front cover photo is a perfect example.

The bad news - we do not have much in the way of historical material on the 175th. Clearly we know they participated in the Battle on Easter Sunday and that the 175th and 114th were sister companies for several years. The VHPA needs help from 175th folk to round out this history.

On 20 February, 1972, the 175th stood down after over seven years of service in Vietnam! As best the VHPA databases can tell, the 175th (and A/502d) Honor Roll includes 20 pilots and 11 enlisted. There are 111 battle damage, 54 accident, and 40 helicopter loss records in the VHPA HELICOPTER database.

Green Delta Flight Section

When and how the unofficial Corps aviation flight section was established is unknown. The fact that there was an I Corps Aviation

Company in the 64-65 era that supported MACV advisors to ARVN units could indicate that a similar section for IV Corps could have been established at any time. The first known reference to a "IV Corps helicopter" is the aircraft that picked up Jon Myrhe during the Battle on Easter Sunday. VHPA member Frank Potts, who joined the section in May, 1968, provides these ideas:

The flight was comprised of four UH-1s which became H models in the summer of 1968; one for the Senior Advisor IV Corps, one for the Deputy SA, one for the Chief of Staff, and the fourth for the Senior Advisor COORDS. The missions were controlled almost exclusively by the person to whom the aircraft was assigned and if there were no missions by that person on a given day, then the aircraft and crews might be loaned out to others by that person. This person decided when his pilots would have a day off and whether the aircraft would be flown.

The section was controlled by HQ 164th CAG with a captain as the section leader. The logo (there were no patches) was a drunken Snoopy resting on a cloud with champagne nearby. The nose of each aircraft was painted with "IV" circled in red and white.

Pilots were seconded from other units to form this flight. They were still carried on the books of one of the Delta helicopter units, but they lived at Can Tho. It was very possible to belong to say the 336th at Soc Trang and for the pilot to never have set foot in the company area. You might start out coming from one unit and find yourself carried on the books of another depending on the whims of personnel. It is possible the same policy applied to the EM.

The aircraft came from the parent units based on this same policy. They were maintained by the individual units that owned them. When an aircraft was down for maintenance, a replacement was provided. The aircraft were usually low-time and nearly new; they were well maintained. And regardless of their real tail numbers, the ships were called "Green Delta" 707, 777, 727 and 767.

One perk of belonging to the flight was that you were the individual's pilot and you only responded to that person when it came time to account for where you were and what you did with the aircraft. When you went somewhere, that person generally took care of his flight crew - they were not forgotten. A personal relationship quickly formed; you knew what each expected of the other - it was generally pleasant duty.

Naturally, you were almost always single ship except for rare occasions when an entourage of VIPs went some place. You went to many more out-of-the-way places because these people were always going to look at one thing or another. The places we visited were often unusual for most Delta pilots.

Short Story - during Frank's tour the SA had an ear problem and his aide would not let us ascend or descend over 500 feet per minute despite our protests of being exposed to fire. One day we were taken him into an outpost using a circling overhead approach. He was sitting in the back reading his newspaper when a 50 cal round came up through the floor, went through his paper and exited the roof with a loud noise. He looked down, then up at where it exited and then went back to reading. You still did not mess with this general's ears!

If this flight section still had "unofficial status" prior to the time when the 18th CAC was formed, this flight section was certainly incorporated immediately into the CAC.

The SEAWOLVES

The VHPA has always held the Seawolves from Helicopter Attack (Light) 3 squadron in high esteem, especially in its publications. Photos and Seawolf material are in the VHPA calendar and periodically in the VHPA Newsletter. The 1993 VHPA Membership Directory and Vol. I of the Historical Reference Directory reprinted subsets of the unit histories. Other than the VNAF units, the SEAWOLVES were easily the largest and most significant non-Army helicopter unit in the Delta.

Most of the Army VHPAers who contributed to this IV Corps helicopter history share a common feeling - that the Seawolves they knew were hard working, fun loving guys who knew how to eat well. "I need to tell you this - we helped train the Seawolves." can be heard from Army gunship pilots in most every unit in southern III Corps and IV Corps. And you know, because there were Dets at four locations when HC-1 started flying and because the Delta B Model gunship "club" almost had the

status of a religious fraternity - we have to believe all these Army guys. Maybe because HA(L)-3 was a one and only it has been the subject matter for so many, good quality publications. The Seawolf Association recommends A History of HELATKLTORON THREE The Seawolves by James D. Sprinkle that originally appeared in the Winter 1988 issue of The Journal of American Aviation Historical Society. In the finest traditions of writing Vietnam helicopter histories, Sprinkle used the three known unit produced histories plus the command chronologies and, best of all, liberal input directly from the officers and men who served in HA(L)-3 and its predecessor HC-1 Detachments (Dets). What follows was extracted from Sprinkle's work.

On 11 March 1966, a unit from the 197th Aviation Company, 145th CAB with 20 support personnel began training exercises from the USS Belle Grove (LSD-2) preparatory to supporting Operation JACKSTAY on the 26th. (The 197th lineage was from the 68th Aviation Company and the 68th from the UTT Escort Company.) During this large-scale operation, which was the first allied attempt to penetrate the VC stronghold southeast of Saigon known as the Rung Sat Special Zone, two Army gunships operated from the Belle Grove providing close air support to the Navy patrol boats and landing craft. JACKSTAY ended on 4 April and the Navy activated Task Force 116 or Operation GAME WARDEN to continue this effort against the VC. The primary GAME WARDEN vehicle, the PBR (Fast River Patrol Boat), was a 31-foot fiberglass, shallow draft boat built on a pleasure craft hull and armed with three .50 caliber machine guns, at least one M-60 machine gun and a range of other light weapons including grenade launchers. The need for aerial support became quickly apparent. Even with .50 caliber machine guns, the boats were no match with the 57mm recoilless rifles that were concealed on shore.

Note how careful Sprinkle is with his next paragraph! "This arrangement of Army air crews flying in support of naval operations from Navy ships caused difficulties which both services were quick to discover. Even though the Army pioneered the armed helicopter concept and developed much of its tactics, they did not have experience in supporting naval riverine operations. While that experience could undoubtedly have been gained over a period of time, it was felt naval aviators trained in gunship operations would more quickly and readily adapt to the mission requirements."

Additionally the GAME WARDEN commanders wanted dedicated air support and the Army's promise of "priority" versus dedicated did not seem to address the Navy's needs. Because the Army had proven that helicopters had at least half the reaction time of fixed wing support, the answer was obvious - Navy crews in armed helicopters controlled by GAME WARDEN commanders.

The first eight pilots and enlisted crewmen of HC-1, Det 29 deployed to Vung Tau on 1 July 1966 from NAS Ream Field, Imperial Beach, CA. On the 17th and 29th of July, Dets 27 and 25, respectively, followed. Det 21, the last of the original HC-1 dets, arrived during the last week of November. Officially eight UH-1Bs were borrowed from the 197th AHC that summer to form the nucleus of the Navy's armed helicopter component. //Other Army units report both training Navy crews and providing UH-1Bs. See the 114th AHC section in this history.//

On 30 August 1966, after completion of their familiarization training, Det 29 relieved the Army fire team operating from the USS Tortuga, which had relieved the Belle Grove on 19 April, and the era of Navy armed helicopters was born.

The unit, officially known as HC-1 Detachment Vung Tau, was composed entirely of volunteers and was divided into four detachments with headquarters in Vung Tau and detachments at Nha Be in the Rung Sat, at Vinh Long and aboard the USS Comstock (LSD-19).

On 31 October the Navy gunships joined PBRs on the My Tho River, which had spotted a group of about 75 enemy sampans and in a three-hour engagement they destroyed 50 of the enemy boats and inflicted heavy casualties among the troops aboard. By this time the Army had given the Navy flyers a new name, the SEAWOLVES.

On 11 November, the USS Jennings County (LST-846), the first of the specially configured LSTs, arrived off Vung Tau to replace the USS Comstock as a base for the PBRs and two UH-1Bs. These LSTs were stationed along the lower Bassac, Co Chien and Ham Luong Rivers of

the Delta and moved around periodically for security purposes and to be close to trouble spots. Between January and April, 1967, the four original dets (29, 27, 25, and 21) changed numbers (1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively) in preparation for transition to squadron status. On 1 April, the squadron HA(L)-3 when was officially commissioned at Vung Tau. At this time there were 32 officers and 32 enlisted men utilizing eight UH-1Bs. Between May and August, unit strength was increased as the squadron received additional UH-1Bs from the 1st Cavalry Division.

Unit strength quickly increased to 94 officers and 240 enlisted men. From April through December, the squadron was engaged in continuous combat operations. By December three more dets were operational because two more LSTs had arrived and aircraft allocation had risen to 22 helicopters. Detachment locations at the end of December, 1967 were as follows:

Det 1 - Aboard the Jennings County (LST-846).

Det 2 - Nha Be in the Rung Sat Special Zone.

Det 3 - Vinh Long.

Det 4 - Aboard the Garrett County (LST-786) on the Co Chien River.

Det 5 - Aboard the Harnett County (LST-821) on the Ham Luong River.

Det 6 - At Dong Tam located on the My Tho River.

Det 7 - At Ninh Thuy Naval Base near Can Tho City.

1967 was coming to an end and the Seawolves had proven their worth in 9,744 hours of flying and successfully completing over 7,300 missions. Seven members had been killed and 50 wounded. They flew a lot at night. Some pilots flew 200-300 night hours in addition to 600+ daylight hours during their tour.

During 1968, HA(L)-3 continued its support of the river patrol boats and TF 117, the Navy part of the famed Mobile Riverine Force (MRF). Their primary mission was fire support and armed reconnaissance; but, as Navy operations expanded, the gunships were pressed into other duties. Most often this involved insertion and extraction of Navy SEAL teams. Before the introduction of the UH-1Ls in 1969, this was accomplished by 'slick' versions of HA(L)-3's B Models. They also performed medevac and civic action missions.

The published Navy SEAL and Army Special Forces histories mention weeks of tough fighting at Chau Doc and other areas in western IV Corps during Tet of '68. At Ben Tre, PBRs and the Seawolves provided fire support in a 36 hour running battle which prevented the city from being over-run. While no det are known to have suffered major loss or damage to personnel or equipment, they were very busy during this period!

In late 1968, Operation GIANT SLINGSHOT, designed to deny the VC use of waterways along the infiltration routes near the Cambodian border, was implemented with Dets 4 and 7 in full support. Det 5 moved twice this year; first to Rach Gia and then to the YRBM-16 on the upper Bassac River.

Changes were in store for HA(L)-3 as 1969 began. The unit was to grow and move, new types of aircraft would be introduced and a new mission would be added to the list of activities. To assist the command in the primary area of operation, a new helicopter maintenance facility was constructed at Binh Thuy. By early 1969 this facility was completed and headquarters and maintenance crews made the move from Vung Tau to the new base. By this time, many Army gunship unit were exchanging their UH-1B for UH-1Cs, so the Army raised the number of helicopters that would be deliverable to the Seawolves from 22 to 33.

Early in 1969, HA(L)-3 was called upon to support Operation SEAFLAT, an attempt by the RVN to open areas of the lower Camau Peninsula previously tightly held by the VC. Participation in this effort continued through the end of the year; and indeed, remained an active mission up until they departed Vietnam.

In September, Det 9, the last of the combat dets, was activated at Binh Thuy but soon moved to the YRBM-21 on the upper Mekong River.

Also during this period Navy passenger transport, mail communications and other liaison duties that were carried out by a small short flight detachment stationed at Tan Son Nhut air base was given to HA(L)-3. In November, the Sealord Det at Binh Thuy was established with four UH-1Ls. The UH-1L was a limited production variant for the Navy, being built as a utility and a training version and powered by the up-rated Lycoming T-53-13 engine. It was an improved version of Bell's earlier

UH-1C model and had its Army equal in the UH-1M. Also in November, the squadron received its first two UH-1Cs. By the end of 1969, the Game Warden program had reached full strength with about 22 squadrons of PBRs ranging the Delta and Rung Sat. Floating support bases, shore installations, repair ships, LSTs and large numbers of barges were based around the Delta to ensure coverage of all areas.

1970 would see the mounting of new operations in the area and greater demands would be placed on HA(L)-3. Sealord strength would grow and areas of operations would change. In mid-January, four additional UH-1Ls arrived giving them eight aircraft. Although the allocations from the Army had jumped to 33 helicopters in early 1969, HA(L)-3 was still short of this number and most commanders felt that even this number was insufficient.

In May, the war took a new turn with the controversial invasion of Cambodia by US and ARVN forces. For Game Warden forces, this operation was code named Tran Hung Dao XI and several of the squadron's aircraft made history by being the first American helicopters to reach Phnom Penh.

Sprinkle does an especially good job documenting the Incident at "VC Lake" on 15 September 1970 southwest of Camau. DUSTOFF 86 and 80, SEAWOLF 306 of Det 3, SEAWOLF 313 of Det 1, SEAWOLF 312 of Det 6, SEALORD 3, CRUSADERS 32 and 39 were all involved. 312 and 313 were downed and LJG Pedersen and ADJ Ramos were killed.

In November, some Navy HH-1Ks came on board.

Despite difficult operating conditions and a new mission and the loss of five aircraft, the Sealords performed admirably. Along with the logistics missions in support of virtually every Navy unit in the Mekong Delta, Sealords inserted and extracted Army units and SEAL teams and flew as Command and Control aircraft on numerous combined ground/air/water missions. They moved 7,287 passengers and 245,791 pounds of cargo while flying 6,100 missions. By the end of the year, HA(L)-3 had 35 Bell Iroquois helicopters comprising 27 UH-1Bs, two UH-1Cs, two HH-1Ks and four UH-1Ls.

In July 1971, a VNAF Indoctrination and Familiarization program started. The purpose of the program was to teach the Vietnamese Seawolf tactics, including night and instrument flying, and problems involved in quick reaction gunship support of the Vietnamese units while operating from outlying bases and airfields. The first VNAF class, consisting of ten pilots and ten gunners, underwent the squadron's pilot and aircrewman's ground school syllabus the first two weeks in July. Then a pilot/gunner team was sent to each detachment except for DET 2 which received two sets. This first group finished its Seawolf tour on 30 September 1971 with each participant logging approximately 75 flight hours. The qualifications attained by these Vietnamese aviators were seven Attach Helicopter Aircraft Commanders, two Attack Helicopter pilots and nine aircrew gunners with four of these gunners additionally qualified as plane captains. A second group started the ground school on 20 September.

The Seawolves utilized many different armament packages during this time, including the General Electric GAU-2B "Mini Gun". These took the form of the XM-21 system mounted the same as the XM-16 but carrying the "mini gun" rather than twin M-60's. The "mini gun" greatly increase the fire power, particularly suppressive fire on attack runs, but was a less reliable weapon than the M-60 in the dusty environment of the Delta. The ammunition tended to "torque up" (jam) when the guns were fired in short bursts. Extra care was required in the operation of this weapon but when it worked properly it delivered an incredible volume of fire. The .50 caliber remained in use and at one time was employed by nearly all detachments on the lead aircraft. One of the most unusual fits involved not the Seawolf UH-1B, C or M, but the Sealord L & K models. This involved the fitting of a mount to take 500-pound bombs or 500-pound Fuel Air Explosives (FAEs), the latter being a napalm-type weapon. These mounts could also be fitted with the XM-159 rocket pods making the Sealords helicopter available for rocket fire support. Squadron records indicate that the Ls & Ks were converted and that testing was done, there is no record of whether these weapons were used operationally. Throughout HA(L)-3's history the problems of getting parts and equipment for the crews was a persistent one. For example, the first mini-gun was obtained from the Army units at Vinh Long in

1968. When the Army discovered the loss of an XM-21 kit and questioned Det 3 personnel, the system was clandestinely returned. To order parts for an Army UH-1B, the request went from HA(L)-3 maintenance to FASU to the 611th TC at Vinh Long and then to the Aviation Materials Management Center in Saigon. The system was complex and HA(L)-3 supply personnel had to be trained in the Army procedures, which changed all the time. If things were in Vietnam they could be obtained within days; but if they were not, the delay could be measured in weeks. This is why even with 30 or so aircraft on hand, it was not unusual for some detachments to not be operational because of a shortage of parts for the aircraft.

By the end of January, 1972 the last of the Vietnamese training was completed and HA(L)-3 received its stand-down orders. The arduous process of closing down the outlying dets, moving crews to Binh Thuy, returning 31 UH-1Bs and Cs to the Army and disposing of several Navy UH-1Is and HH-1Ks began. On 14 February, Det 6 at Phu Loi was the first to cease combat missions. By 6 March it was all "turned in." On 16 March, HA(L)-3 was formally decommissioned.

As best the VHPA can determine, the HA(L)-3 Honor Roll consists of 18 pilots and 25 enlisted. The HELICOPTER database only has five records that are associated with HA(L)-3; clearly we have a lot of work to do in this area before we can record this history correctly!

We need to thank the Seawolf Association, especially VHPA members Dan Calvert and Conrad Jaburg, for supporting this history effort.

PEDRO

The 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRSq) headquartered at Tan Son Nhut maintained detachments all around South Vietnam to provide local base rescue and a SAR capability within a 75 N.M. radius of the base. The 38th ARRSq was equipped with HH-43s (B and F models) and was part of the 3d Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group (ARRGp). All HH-43s used the radio call sign PEDRO.

Binh Thuy was the only IV Corps air base with a permanent USAF combat aircraft presence. Det 10, 38th ARRSq was based at Binh Thuy with two HH-43s. The exact date this detachment arrived is unknown as the 3d ARRGp history for the 1st quarter of 1966 is the earliest record the VHPA has of Det 10.

The last reference the VHPA has of Det 10 is the 3d ARRGp history for the 2d quarter of 1969. The history for the 3d quarter of 1970 clearly shows that Det 10 was no longer active. The VHPA databases do not record any KIAs for Det 10 and none of the 50 or so 38 ARRS records in the HELICOPTER database have been linked to Det 10.

The Battle on Easter Sunday 26 March 1967

The following is a VHPA enhanced version of this battle as originally outlined in *Vinh Long* by Harvey Meyerson which was printed in 1970. The enhancements are primarily the fruits of conversations with VHPA and VHCMA members plus a certain understanding of history.

There were two phases to this battle. The first phase began at 0100H when the reinforced VC Main Force Bn (the 306th) attacked the 1/16th ARVN Bn in its night defensive position on the Mang Thit Canal. The ARVN Bn had occupied the area for two days and was supported by four ARVN 105s. At the same time the Tam Binh Subsector and the 16th Regt HQ at the Caumoy Bridge were attacked with mortars. Gunships were requested and Spooky arrived. By 0130H the VC had penetrated the ARVN perimeter in two places but were stopped and the ARVN had their artillery firing Final Protective Fires. The ARVN Bn held its own until 0430H when the VC fire slackened and they started to withdraw.

The second phase began when the 9th ARVN Div initiated Operation LONG PHI 999 to intercept the withdrawing VC units near the village of Hoa Binh. During the early morning hours, MAJ Jim O'Neill, the Army Aviation liaison officer to the 9th, worked with the 13th Aviation Bn to provide the support. About 0800H, a flight of 14 slicks landed a company from the 3/16th ARVN Bn in LZ ALPHA. Despite a normal LZ prep, the VC had expertly positioned reinforced bunkers in the dikes and the tree line.

OUTLAW 6, MAJ William Meehan (CO 175th AHC), was flying C&C with the 9th ARVN Div CG, BG Thi, and his adviser, COL Robert Bringham. The flight was escorted by MAVERICK gunships, MAJ Charlie Gordon was MAVERICK LEAD with Dwayne Williams, CP. Others known to be in

this flight were: CPT Lon Paul, AC, with Carson Snow as CP; Tom McCarthy, AC, with Vance Shearer, CP. Initially this appeared to be a normal LZ but suddenly the door gunners started firing because they saw the enemy fire first. Everyone reported taking hits. OUTLAW 17, Jon Myrhe, AC, with WO Jim Martinson, CP, radioed that he was shot down in the LZ.

DUSTOFF 81, MAJ Eberwine, AC, LT Charles Jordan, CP, Mike Kelley, CE, and William Hook, Medic, land about 40 feet from OUTLAW 17. They load three from OUTLAW 17 (everyone save Myrhe) but Kelley was hit in both legs. The DUSTOFF was raked by enemy machine gun fire as it tried to take-off. Eberwine was hit in the left leg, the helicopter jerked 90 degrees to the left, caught the tow of its right skid in the mud, cartwheeled twice and burst into flames. CPT Mitchell, the adviser with the 3/16th ARVN Bn, was killed trying to rescue the Americans in the downed DUSTOFF ship. Mike Kelley also died.

DELTA 6, COL Dempsey (CO 13th CAB), AC, MAJ Don Casper (S-3 13th CAB), CP, SP4 William Rhodes, CE, Jerry Ross, G, land to rescue the air crews from the two downed Hueys. COL Dempsey was hit almost as they touch down and died immediately. MAJ Casper was wounded and with SP4 Rhodes tried to help COL Dempsey but the aircraft filled with smoke. Ross found WO Martinson and loaded him into their helicopter only to learn from Rhodes that they are not going anywhere. Hook used the adviser's radio to request help and direct air strikes. Most of the surviving Americans crawled away from the area to a dike running parallel to the tree line.

Gary Wilcox, a door gunner on a slick from Soc Trang (it had to be the 336th since the 121st does not list him on their Honor Role), was hit in the head during the initial assault. His crew chief, Kenneth Tilstra, saw blood spraying all over the compartment and rushed to help Gary. They land at Vinh Long where the flight surgeon, CPT Jon Hillegas, gave him treatment and had him evacuated to Long Binh. Sadly, Gary died from these injuries.

The second lift was inserted behind a tree line 800 yards northwest of LZ ALPHA. When the American adviser, LT Rex Latham, in this second lift reached the three downed crews, he got the wounded ready for future evacuation and directed the air strikes away from the tree line. The VC emplacements were superbly enfilade and hidden in the dike lines bracketing LZ Alpha; some no more than fifty yards from the downed helicopters. The ARVN plan was to have their 2/2d Armored Cav move through Tam Binh, then ford the Mang Thit and strike at the enemy. The Americans needed to keep the VC on the battlefield and away from the downed crews until the 2/2d could arrive. So MAJ Meehan worked with all the ground personnel at Vinh Long to establish a hot rearm, refuel for virtually all the gunships in the Delta. CPT Dale Sherrod directed incoming gunships to a pad where the ground crews swam over them. The turnaround time was cut from twenty minutes to five.

When the ARVN Cav couldn't ford the Mang Thit, MAJs Meehan and Gordon organized all the gunships in a huge daisy chain to put maximum pressure on the enemy. About this time CWO Jerry Daley and Larry McDonald arrived and Jerry tells the gunship leaders: "I think I have something you can use!" They were in VIKING SURPRISE, a smoke ship. One Dustoff plus three more "volunteer medevac" ships were selected. The three impromptu medevacs were flown by MAJ Millward, the 175th's Maintenance Officer; MAJ Juri Toomepuu, an OUTLAW platoon leader, and LT David Eastman, who was flying the ARVN Regimental CO's C&C bird. There were 11 helicopters in all. The gunships fired in turn, VIKING SURPRISE did a kamikaze act to put smoke down and the four rescue ships landed. The southeasterly breeze carried the smoke away, so Daley made an east-west pass while taking several hits. The Skyraiders continued bombing the tree line and Daley continued to put down smoke, an estimated 12 or 13 passes in all.

The mud and their wounds made it hard and slow for the downed crews and wounded ARVN to get to the rescue ships. As the ships filled, they departed one by one. The Dustoff ship, with 12 on board, settled into the mud on its first attempt. A skid caught the top of a dike on the second attempt and nearly flipped the Huey but they made it out. Only MAJ Toomepuu's ship was still on the ground. He, his crew chief and the gunner, struggled to free MAJ Eberwine's half-buried body from the quicksand like mud. Jim Martinson was also in his fourth helicopter of

the day. The radios were shot out and the ship had lots of holes but they made it out. After a post-rescue head count showed that Jon Myrhe, OUTLAW 17, was still missing; MAJ Bill Gebhardt, LANCER LEAD, went back into LZ ALPHA to look for him without success.

During the rescue, two more ARVN Bns (1/14th and 2/16th) were inserted to the north and east of LZ ALPHA. There were still several troublesome bunkers holding up the ARVN advance to say nothing of the snipers that were everywhere. An Adviser (?Palenchar) crawled forward with a radio operator to pin point the gunships' attack. One by one the bunkers were destroyed by rockets. As night closed around the retreating VC, the ARVN moved from the paddies into the bombed-out tree line. CPT Gary Luff, a battalion adviser, tallied 142 enemy dead and piles of documents and equipment plus a small graveyard with about two dozen carefully prepared mounds and caskets.

Late in the evening, LT Latham, the adviser, was searching LZ ALPHA for dead and wounded when he came upon Jon Myrhe mostly covered with mud and paddy debris. Jon had a broken leg and a shattered pelvis. Though suffering from shock, he had managed to hide himself with only part of his face exposed in preparation for when the VC would overrun the LZ. A medical doctor, Dr. Wiita, was riding SPOOKY 51 just for kicks that evening and radioed Latham treat instructions for Jon until he could be extracted. A IV Corps C&C ship carrying COL Charles Davis, the IV Corps deputy senior adviser, picked up Jon and took him to Vinh Long. Everyone, especially Jon's platoon leader, CPT Ray Leuty, was thrilled that he survived such a terrible ordeal.

The Army used 43 slicks, 29 gunships, 4 Dustoffs, 2 C&Cs, 1 CH-47, and 4 Bird Dogs in this action. The Air Force flew 28 tactical air sorties and 9 Spooky patrols. The VNAF flew 15 tactical air sorties. The statistics for the Battle on Easter Sunday were casualties: U.S. 4 KIA, 12 WIA; ARVN 24 KIA, 69 WIA, VC 184 KIA (plus an estimated 100 dead carried away), 2 POW. The ARVN also captured 45 weapons, some ammo, communications equipment, and documents.

In addition to the three helicopters destroyed in LZ ALPHA, 13 were damaged by enemy fire and one crashed enroute to Vinh Long. Even though Jerry Daley managed to get VIKING SURPRISE back to base, MAJ Millward pronounced it beyond repair.

One point of view

Harvey Meyerson in *Vinh Long* waxes eloquently about the well planned, nicely coordinated VC attack, their orderly withdrawal along a guarded route to prepared positions from which they destroy three helicopters, damage scores more, and hold off most of four ARVN battalions while receiving a pounding from virtually every supporting arm available to the Americans and South Vietnamese. Later in the book, published in 1970, he presents a treatise on the greed of the ARVN leadership for money and control, their "defensive only," and "let the Americans blow away the VC with supporting arms," "stay in the city," "it's time to make money, not to fight a war," "never go out after dark," "always home in time for dinner" mentality, and the fundamental differences between the way American politicians and the Vietnamese viewed the events of those times. Clearly he did some pioneering work that is still worth reading.

Many VHPAers point of view

Most VHPAers have some poignant ideas of their own about those days. A summary of those ideas are:

There was a strong bond between the American advisers, especially those working with the ARVN Infantry and Cavalry units, and the air crews. Everyone seemed to recognize that when "times got bad" (e.g. a helicopter shot down, an adviser wounded) what little future they had, was often in the hands of another American.

The flat topology of the Delta did not allow air mission commanders the luxury of masking an assault formation behind a hill. As a general rule, the enemy could see and hear you coming. Except for Air Cavalry and certain night operations, the element of surprise was difficult to achieve.

Many air assault, smokie, and gunship support tactics were "born in the Delta" and used in other areas of Vietnam. This was especially true in 1963, 1964, and prior to the "build up" in 1965.

The gun platoon leaders from the various Assault Helicopter Companies formed the nucleus of an "airborne tactical operations

center" during tactical emergencies. They would discuss the situations, evaluate options, agree to battle plans, then direct and coordinate the execution. This is not to say that they superseded the C&C birds. The gunships were on station prior to, during, and after the transports; so everyone looked to them for a certain leadership. The Delta helicopter units, especially the AHCs, were like one large family. Pilots from the same flight classes served in each unit. Elements from several companies were often combined for large operations. Everyone quickly got to know everyone else. If you went down, someone in the family would come to get you - bank on that!

A History of SURPRISE

The first published reference to a Delta helicopter carrying the name SURPRISE was CW2 Jerry Daly's smoke ship VIKING SURPRISE in the Battle on Easter Sunday. The 121st history for 1966 is very detailed but does not mention either a smoke ship or SURPRISE. Larry McDonald joined the 121st in November 1966 and SURPRISE was already in use. He believes Jerry was the guiding force behind building this ship's configuration in mid-1966. It was a UH-1D #64-13670 and was assigned to the UH-1B equipped VIKING platoon. Besides being a smoke and a light ship, it could mount Hog rocket pods. Larry said either a 50 cal or a hand cranked 40mm could be mounted and that the light set was removed when the aircraft flew during the day. Jerry's only comment after reading a draft of this history was - "Just after the first SURPRISE was built, the VC put a mortar round right on the head; so we had to start over again."

Initially crewing this ship was assigned by Operations as any other duty. Hal Duensing recalls that it did not fly every day; rather it was available when needed. As on March 26, when the need arose, someone from the VIKING platoon would fly it. The Company and the Battalion Commanders sometimes flew SURPRISE as a C&C ship. It did fly almost every night with a single UH-1B escort. When they found something or if they were going to help an ARVN outpost, a second UH-1B launched. The enlisted men, especially the maintenance guys, loved to fly in SURPRISE so they could play with the light, fire the 50, and do things they did not get to do normally. Hal said there was never a shortage of volunteers to crew SURPRISE at night. Each night, the 121st obtained the best intelligence on enemy activity they could get and then sent SURPRISE in that direction.

The only known loss of a VIKING SURPRISE was #64-13670 on March 26, 1967 that was declared uneconomical to repair afterwards because it had taken 130 hits.

Some time, most likely early 1969, the aircraft moved from the VIKING platoon to one of the TIGER platoons and the name was changed to TIGER SURPRISE.

In July, 1969, CW2 Bob Hofmann took over TIGER SURPRISE when Bill Morrow moved over to the 336th. Bob decided that TIGER SURPRISE should be used in an attack versus a reactive mode, so he plotted the VC mortar tube positions from the recent attacks on Soc Trang. The pattern to the south and west of Soc Trang was very obvious. He changed its tactics from 3,000 feet for flare delivery to tree top attacks at random. To defend the ship, Hofmann flew with a crew of eight and a wild assortment of weapons and ammo.

When Bill Morrow arrived at the 336th, he help build another SURPRISE type ship that was named LUCKY STRIKE. After he DEROSed, a pilot named Connelly flew it.

In early December, 1969, while flying at max gross Hofmann made a tight turn to avoid hitting a tree and tore the transmission plate loose from its mounting but returned safely to Soc Trang. After maintenance prepared the ship for evacuation, a CH-47 accidentally dropped it in a river while slinging it out.

On January 14, 1970, Hofmann was flying a new TIGER SURPRISE. They were hovering and trying to drop "packages" (20lb blocks of C4 taped around a fragmentation grenade) into a bunker. Jim Ellis, flying VIKING 22 (#63-8553), one of the support gunships, crashed in a dry rice paddy during a gun run.

On February 27, 1970, Connelly in the 336th's LUCKY STRIKE went down. On 2 Apr, 1970, Ed Skuza and Bob Sidonio were flying the TIGER SURPRISE (#66-16991) which was destroyed by a B40. It was no

coincidence that the next night, Soc Trang was attacked. LTC Billy McRill was the 13th Bn CO at the time. Later he told Hofmann that the loss of both LUCKY STRIKE and TIGER SURPRISE really shook him up.

During Feb, 1972, CWO Hofmann served with the 114th's COBRA platoon. At that time the 114th had already stood down its KNIGHT platoons, so only the AH-1G equipped COBRA platoon remained. Hofmann borrowed UH-1H #69-15031 from A/7/1st Cav and rigged it as a SURPRISE ship complete with lights, flares, and weapons. On 17 Feb, 1972, they were called out to support an outpost with two COBRA gunships. They had found some sampans near the outpost and destroyed them with frags. During a low-level search of the area, Hofmann thought he heard a frag drop to the floor and turned his attention away from flying the aircraft. Both pilots suffered broken backs in the crash. The crew was able to get away from the aircraft. While laying in a rice paddy, they heard Vietnamese voices in the tree line. When a COBRA ship landed next to them, the CE went over to talk to the pilot. The AH-1G pilot wanted to rescue them by having them get on the rocket pods. Hofmann told the CE that with their injuries, that type of rescue wouldn't be possible and to tell the pilot about the VC in the tree line. The AH-1G took off and blew the tree line away, then 7/1st Cav Huey came and got them. Hofmann and 1LT William Gay were evaced and that was the end of SURPRISE.

The DELTA DEVILS

The 235th Aviation Company (AML) arrived at Can Tho from Ft. Benning on 1 Nov 1967. It remained in the standard AHC configuration until about Oct, 1968 when they were converted to an Aerial Weapons Company. This was a large company with 21 Cobras and two UH-1s. Jerry Daly commanded the unit in the fall of 1970 and provides these insights:

In late 1970, the entire company (minus a rear and maintenance detachment) moved to Phu Quoc Island where we dug in (literally). We had an Infantry platoon with all sorts of sensors plus anti-personnel radar to protect us from the local bad guys. We also deployed a platoon of people augmented with operations, rearm, and refuel skills on the USS CLEVELAND. Our mission was to support ARVN and Cambodian Army forces as they moved north from the Cambodian harbor area at Kompong Som or Shanoukville to reopen supply routes into the areas that had been controlled by the NVA and Khmer Rouge without Americans putting a foot in Cambodia as per the Congressional mandate. Those on the CLEVELAND really lived it up - clean sheets, air conditioning, table linen and china. The troops thought they'd died and gone to heaven! We flew our missions either from the island or the CLEVELAND. We saw a lot of action and learned to fly onto and off a ship. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with the Navy and believe the ship's crew enjoyed working with us.

No sooner did we finish that operation and arrived back at Can Tho when we were ordered to I Corps to support Lam Son 719. Thanks to some great planning and priority airlifts, we had part of the company operating out of Hue Phu Bai within 48 hours of receiving the notice! Naturally, flying in the mountains of I Corps was a big adjustment for all of us IV Corps flatlanders. The memory of how quickly pilots learned to dig in at Khe Sanh is still fresh on my mind! Then to our shock we discovered our camp was on top of an old Marine ammo dump! That gave the NVA incoming some added help we really wished they didn't have. We flew our share of missions and lost a couple ships but, thanks be to God, we didn't lose anyone. We were almost the last unit out and as the perimeter got smaller and smaller, we got more and more involved. Our Opns Officer, who had been a grunt on his first tour and made certain the unit knew how to protect itself, even won a SS helping repulse a sapper attack three nights before we pulled out! We were glad to get back to Can Tho!

When we returned to Can Tho, they had given our former barracks to another unit and we were relegated to the 'left overs.' Anyway, we set up shop and went back to work. Not long after I left the unit, it stood down. The DELTA DEVILS were a great unit. The three platoons JOKERS, SATANS, and VIPERS. Ironically (considering my present status) my callsign was DEVIL 6.

On 31 August, 1971, the 235th stood down. As best the VHPA databases can tell, the 235th Honor Roll includes 12 pilots and two enlisted. There are 338 battle damage, 36 accident, and 13 helicopter loss records in

the VHPA HELICOPTER database. The only known MIA or Body Not Recovered member is 1LT Lilly who was shot down in Cambodia with CPT David Schweitzer on 17 March 1971. David was rescued and Lilly was last seen laying on the ground with bloody wounds in his chest.

The SNOW SNAKES

The Aviation Section, Division Artillery, 9th Infantry Division - sadly the VHPA has no details about this unit. Any and all help is welcomed. As best the VHPA databases can tell, this unit's Honor Roll only has one pilot, 1LT David Blackburn who went down in an OH-23G on 28 November 1967. There are two battle damage, three accident, and three helicopter loss records in the VHPA HELICOPTER database.

The ANT EATERS

The Aviation Section, 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry Division. Sadly the VHPA has no details about this unit. There are no recorded KIAs but there are three accident and one loss HELICOPTER records related to this unit. Any and all help is welcomed.

There is another book, *A Battalion Surgeon Journal* by Holley, who served with the 4/39th Infantry Battalion from Oct 1968 until Apr 1969. The good doctor states his battalion was part of the 2d Brigade but in that I believe he errors because during his tour the 4/39th served with the 3d Brigade but more often with the 1st Brigade which was based at Dong Tam a good percentage of the time. His journal describes the life and times of the medical section of an Infantry battalion. To no one's surprise, he has some especially kind words about the helicopters that supported his unit.

The CYCLOPS

The Aviation Section, 2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division was collocated with the brigade headquarters. VHPA member Dale Spratt deployed with the section and recalls:

We had four OH-23s with four pilots, four CEs, an E-6 that was the lead NCO and maintenance specialist plus another couple of mechanics. Major William R. Cave was the section OIC.

We were initially based at Bear Cat and supported the brigade's shake down and training operations in the Rung Sat Special Zone in III Corps. Even when the brigade moved to Dong Tam, it still spent a good percentage of its time in the Rung Sat.

We flew every mission imaginable to help our battalions. Clearly the Battalion COs uses us for C&C a lot, but we also flew resupply. We fashioned litters on the 23s so we could carry water, hot food, ammo, you name it. We flew a lot of courier missions and even recon.

I will never forget one recon mission with LTC Wallace, the relatively new CO of the 3/47th Inf Bn. There was some sort of cease fire for an election or something and we saw several men go in a hooch. LTC Wallace was trying to direct his men to the hooch, so I was bouncing the LOH on its roof when this VC came out with an M1. I sat back just as he fired. The bullet came through the helicopter, broke LTC Wallace's leg and just touched my chin. LTC Wallace was evaced and was awarded a Silver Star while I got my butt chewed for risking the life of a very promising battalion commander!

We also experimented with MADS (Mortar Aerial Delivery System) where we dropped 81mm rounds. The book said the round had to fall 2200 feet to arm but the infantry guys with us would hold them out the door for a few seconds before dropping them. It didn't work very well at all.

When we moved onto the LSTs it was great! The Navy always treated us well. All we did was eat, sleep, and fly. We loved the Navy food and the clean living conditions. It seemed to me that the Navy rotated their LSTs about every 90 days and that they were always named after some county.

COL Fulton, the Brigade CO, was a great guy. While we were at Sharp Army Depot getting ready to deploy, I put some things in a couple of conex containers and was arrested when we got to Vietnam. Naturally, I thought my career was down the drain. When Maj Cave and I first saw COL Fulton, his only comment was: "Why did you get caught?" He made a few calls, saying something like 'you know we have a war to fight here' and we returned an item or two; nothing more happened. COL William Fulton wrote *RIVERINE OPERATIONS* which is an

outstanding source for the development of the famous Mobile Riverine Force (MRF). About April, 1967 he states: "Acquisition of the larger LST was to prove very advantageous in that the entire brigade aviation section, which included four OH-23 helicopters, and the maintenance section were placed aboard the LST and were operated from the flight deck. Limited air resources were not available for combat operations regardless of the remoteness of the location of the mobile riverine base from 9th Division support."

His history is most complimentary of the U.S. Navy and Task Force 117. He documents details about each type of boat used and how everything evolved. He also compliments the battalion from the Vietnam Marine Corps that often served as the MRF's third maneuver battalion. He comes to the following interesting conclusions:

Because the Brigade had all the transportation provided by Task Force 117, there were extended periods of time when it did not have all the helicopter support called for in the original plan. This plan called for the maneuver units to advance on the enemy with boats, on foot or with trucks, and via helicopters.

Even with their portable firing platforms and towed artillery barges, their artillery's best friend was a Chinook.

The intelligence information provided by the Vietnamese Army division and provinces was seldom timely but was 'useful in tracking the enemy's routes, bases, and length of stay in bases.' The best source of timely information came from D/3/5th Cav.

For anyone interested in the MRF, Fulton's book is available via interlibrary loan and is really a gem. There are no recorded KIAs but there are two loss, one damage, and eight accident HELICOPTER records related to this unit.

The MERKINS

The Aviation Section, 3d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division arrived in Vietnam with the brigade on 16 Dec 1966 and was based at Bear Cat. Like the other brigade aviation sections, they had four OH-23s. In Jan, 1967 the brigade headquarters moved to Dong Tam but in Mar, 1967 moved to Tan An which was back in III Corps. This seemed to be the beginning of a rather permanent relationship between the 3d Brigade and Tan An because they would move away for weeks at a time to conduct an operation but eventually return to Tan An.

Some time during 1968, they converted their OH-23s to OH-6As. As mentioned earlier, the 3d Brigade would be the 9th Division's 'stay behind' unit. On 26 Jul 1969, it officially separated from the 9th Division, took up permanent residence at Tan An, and were under the operational control of the 25th Inf Div. They took on the name GO DEVILS. D/3/5th Air Cav was also given to the GO DEVILS at this time.

The Aviation Section was reorganized for its new role and grew in two significant directions. First, at least four (possibly eight) UH-1Hs were added to provide the C&C birds for the brigade and battalion COs. Prior to the reorganization these Hueys were provided by A/9th Avn Bn. Second, a small platoon from E/709th Mnt Bn, which previously provided third level maintenance to all organic 9th Inf Div aviation units, was left to support the MERKINS. VHPAer Jim Palochik served with the MERKINS when they supported the GO DEVILS. He provides the following:

The moral in our aviation section was very high. It wasn't until after I came home that I heard about the wide spread use of drugs and some of the command problems other units experienced. I was always impressed with the EM and the pilots were a good bunch.

There was a very strong bond between the MERKINS and the infantry. If our guys needed anything, we busted butt to provide it. As a result, if it could be done with a helicopter - we did it! Ash & trash, C&C, medevac, ammo & water resupply and much more.

I ended up flying a stand-by nighthawk ship for most of my tour. We had a Xenon light set mounted near one of the gunners and a mini-gun mounted in the cargo bay. We'd carry several metal ammo cans to feed it - sort of a poor man's AC-47 as we were only called out at night. We played with a hand cranked 40mm weapon system but that didn't work for us. Once we scrambled, a pair of Cobras usually linked up with us. I enjoyed these missions but we took a lot of fire!

The GO DEVILS had E/75th Infantry (Ranger) and we spent a lot of time working with them. These LRRPs seemed to "step in it"

frequently. I can remember making gun runs with our M-60s and M-16s from a slick until Cobras could arrive. The GO DEVILS also had a platoon of air cushion vehicles that they used in the Plain of Reeds. One day I was just watching two of them race along the water when one must have hit a mine. We immediately went in to evacuate the survivors.

I know everyone has a SEAWOLF story, but here is mine. Once I traded two M-60s for a case of steaks and a case of lobsters - those Navy guys really had the rations! The men in my unit talked about that meal for weeks afterwards. I was just enough of a friend with a few of their officers to get to eat dinner with them about once a month. They were a fun bunch!

On 17 September 1969 a MERKIN UH-1H was involved in a mid-air with a B/3/17th Cav AH-1G. Twelve died and both ships were destroyed. The Huey was the C&C ship for three Hunter Killer teams provided by the Cav. COL Crittenberger, the Brigade CO and his staff died in this event which is mentioned in *The Vietnam Experience*, *The Army at War* as part of the 9th Infantry Division presentation.

The MERKINS departed Vietnam with their brigade on 11 Oct 1970. As best the VHPA can determine, this unit's Honor Roll has three pilots and two crewmembers. There are two loss, four battle damage, and 14 accident records in the HELICOPTER database for this unit.

The CONDORS

The 9th Aviation Battalion was raised at Ft. Riley with rest of the 9th Infantry Division's aviation units. It moved with the Division HQ from Bear Cat to Dong Tam about August, 1968 and departed Vietnam when the Division HQ in August, 1969. In addition to their letter companies, the JAYHAWKS and the STRINGGRAYS, the LONGKNIFES of D/3/5th Cav were attached to the battalion.

There is only one identified KIA with a unit that reads "9 AVN 9 INF" but there are 25 KIAs with a unit code that reads "9 INF" and we know they are helicopter pilots or crewmembers. It would be wonderful to know which companies these 25 were assigned to when they died.

The JAYHAWKS

Company A, 9th Aviation Battalion was raised at Ft. Riley with the rest of the 9th Infantry Division's aviation units. They selected the name JAYHAWK. Dennis Clay, who served with the JAYHAWKS and the STRINGGRAYS from June, 1968 to June, 1969, recalls:

Basically we lived to support the division which included many different kinds of duty. The new pilots were required to fly ash-and-trash which helped us learn the AO and how things worked. We'd take mail, paperwork, and personnel from the base areas, Bear Cat and then Dong Tam, out to the units in the field, have lunch at the end of the line then return picking up orders, mail and personnel. It was easy duty most of the time. I remember each day a different pilot was assigned to take the Division's dead to the morgue in Saigon. That was somber duty for sure. At any time the call for a medevac could reach our ship and the easy-duty could turn into a get-into-Charles'-face mission to get the WIAs or KIAs out.

We also provided C&C ships for the CG, the ADCs, the Brigade COs, and the Artillery CO. Sometimes the Hueys were actually stacked up over the action on the ground. COL Henry "Hank" Emerson, GUNFIGHTER 6, then a Brigade CO, was my favorite. When you were assigned to fly him for the day you were assured of a day of action. He was troop oriented and truly cared for his men which included close support, hot meals and dry clothing each evening, and always contact with the enemy.

I was flying him the day the ship flying LTC Van Deusen went down in the river. GUNFIGHTER 6 was watching from above and immediately wanted to get to water level as the other Huey went in. We had two magazine photographers (both big guys) on board plus Emerson's staff. That made us too heavy to hover over the water for a rescue. We landed near our troops on one side of the canal to off-load the photographers and immediately started taking mortar and small arms fire. Before we could get to the downed ship, it was underwater.

The event Dennis mentions was covered in the 7 July 1968 *Pacific Stars & Stripes* article *Westy In-law Dies in Viet*. Extracts from this article read Lt. Col. Frederick Van Deusen, brother-in-law of U.S. Army Chief of Staff

Gen. William C. Westmoreland, was killed Wednesday when his helicopter was shot down in the Mekong Delta. Van Deusen, 37, was shot down just a few hours after Westmoreland was sworn in as chief of staff in Washington. He was one of 10 men aboard a UH1E //Editor note: should be UH-1D or H// command and control helicopter hit by Viet Cong gunfire during an infantry sweep in the northern part of the Delta. It crashed into the Vai Co River 18 miles southwest of Saigon. Three survived the crash. Van Deusen and two others have been confirmed dead and four are missing and presumed dead. Van Deusen took command three weeks ago of the 2nd Bn., 47th Regt., 1st Brigade, 9th Div. His battalion had made contact earlier in the day with an estimated Viet Cong platoon in the swamps and paddies along the border of Go Cong and Long An provinces. The Americans reported killing 24 Viet Cong in the morning's fighting with no U.S. losses. Van Deusen's helicopter was passing over for a last look at the battle scene, a newsman reported.

The VHPA believes the Huey was from the 240th AHC and that SP4 Ron Bellinger and SP4 Gary Holton were among the seven who died in the event. Anyone who can provide additional details, should contact the VHPA Directory Committee.

Dennis Clay continues,

I was, and still am, impressed with the Mobile Riverine Force which had boats of all sizes and shapes. Landing a Huey on the troop carriers, Tango Boats, provided an interesting challenge! The landing pads were built on the front half of the boat. As the Huey approached, the boat would be pushed away by the rotor wash. The solution - simply make an approach to a spot near the boat and hover high. The boat would then drive under the Huey and let us know by radio when to sit down. The HQ for the MRF was on the USS Benewah. When we flew the CO's C&C, we usually had lunch on the boat which required us to eat in the air conditioned Ward Room which had delicious meals served by stewards on china with real silver. I still have a copy of the Old Reliable, the weekly 9th Inf Div newsletter, that carried pictures of me and my crew receiving a cake and plaques for making the 10,000th landing on the Benewah.

One interesting part of working with the Navy was the language. Instructions were given to land to the port or starboard. I don't know who came up with the solution for us Army guys, but it was a great one. On the port side of the Benewah, a big P was painted with the ship's primary FM freq displayed under the P; and a big S with their secondary freq on the starboard.

I also remember landing on the 3/34th Artillery's barges. Two Hueys could be running side-by-side if the pilots stayed within the painted red lines on the landing barge, but that left little margin for error. Most of the time, one Huey would land and shut down, then the other would come in.

We also flew parakeet missions which was a cool name for a small Eagle Flight. The lead Huey, with the LRRP CO on board, would fly above a canal with a couple more Hueys on station with a few more LRRPs on board. In the water, a Navy Swift boat would be ready to scoot to the area identified by the lead Huey. Two gunships were overhead to lead a hand when needed. We also flew a variation of this on sniffer missions when a LOH carried the contraption to detect ammonia from VC urine.

The weirdest mission I ever flew - Operations told me to pick up the CG's cook at the main pad. When we took off I asked where we were heading. "To get the general some fresh pineapple," the cook said. I found a pineapple field and landed in the middle. "You can get out if you want, but if we start taking fire, I'm taking off," I told him. Obviously this cook didn't understand that Charlie could be anywhere and that what sounded like an innocent request from the general could become tragic. "I don't see any ripe pineapple, do you?" "Nope" and we took off.

A Company, 9th Aviation Battalion stood down with the battalion on 23 August 1969. As best the VHPA can determine, A Company's Honor Roll has four pilots and five crewmembers. There are eight loss, two battle damage, and 20 accident records in the HELICOPTER database for this unit.

The STINGRAYS

Company B, 9th Aviation Battalion was raised at Ft. Riley with rest of the 9th Infantry Division's aviation units. Sadly, the VHPA has very little historical information on this unit. Any and all help is welcome.

B Company stood down with the battalion on 23 August 1969. As best the VHPA can determine, B Company's Honor Roll has one pilot and no crewmembers. There are one loss, 12 battle damage, and 18 accident records in the HELICOPTER database for this unit.

The Raccoons

Company E (Aircraft Maintenance), 709th Maintenance Battalion, 9th Infantry Division. Sadly, the VHPA has very little historical information on this unit. Any and all help is welcome.

Tet of '68

Clearly the helicopter history of IV Corps would not be complete without some account of the events connected with Tet of '68. We know there was a "lot going on" at the important airfields at Vinh Long, Soc Trang, and Can Tho but time did not permit a detailed account for this history.

The DARKHORSE

On 20 March 1970, C Troop, 16th Cavalry was raised at Phu Loi (I think) from assets of D/1/4th Cav thus carrying on the DARKHORSE tradition of the Quarter Cav, one of the oldest ACTs in Vietnam. Tragedy would quickly visit the new ACT, when WO Don Graham and 1LT Noel Harris died in a AH-1G on the 22d while working in Kien Giang Province.

The entire troop was known as DARKHORSE, their guns were MUSTANGS, their scouts OUTCASTS, and their lift platoon THE FOUR HORSEMEN. The names, if any were indeed used, for their Aero Rifle and Maintenance platoons are not known.

The troop retained its American Infantry ARP but they were primarily used as perimeter security and individually as door gunners. Possibly the only time they were inserted as traditional Blues was to secure the area and help retrieve the bodies from the 18th CAC CH-47 shot down by a rocket on 31 October 1972.

If C/16th Cav was not activated at Phu Loi, it may have occurred at Soc Trang. By early 1971, the DARKHORSE was based at Can Tho where it remained until standing down. Initially, the ACT received its missions from the 13th CAG. Eventually, it would come under the direct control of the 164th CAG.

Initially, various ARVN commands put Infantry units on stand-by as ARPs and a few C/16th Infantry leaders plus an interpreter were inserted with this force. But by May, 1972 the ARVN no longer provided a stand-by force; so DARKHORSE changed their tactical configuration by adding a chase Huey to the normal deployment of two Scouts, two Cobras, a C&C Huey.

The spirit of DARKHORSE's version of Air Cavalry did not end in the Delta when they stood down in February, 1973. Several men and some equipment moved to the 18th CAC where their aggressive style of flying and wanting to fight continued to distinguish them from others even during this eleventh hour of American involvement in Vietnam.

As best the VHPA can determine, the C/16th Cav Honor Roll has nine pilot and eight crewmembers. There are 30 loss, 89 battle damage, and 25 accident records in the HELICOPTER database for this unit.

The Cambodian Incursion

The official dates for this effort are 29 April to 30 June, 1970 because that is when the US ground combat units and US advisors were involved. The activities west of III Corps, and to a lesser extent those west of II Corps, grabbed all the attention because that is where the Americans were. Not so well known is the ARVN effort west of IV Corps. This was a significant effort for the ARVN commands and their helicopter support units.

The UPTIGHT COUGARS

The 214th Aviation Battalion was formed at Bear Cat in April, 1967 from the assets of the Buffalo Aviation Battalion (Prov) as part of the 12th CAG with the goal to support the 9th Infantry Division as it became operational. On 15 November 1968, the COUGARS relocated to Dong Tam as part of the 9th Division relocation. When the 9th departed, the

214th moved to Vinh Long and became part of the 164th CAG. Sadly, the VHPA is not completely certain which aviation companies came with the COUGARs and which did not. It seems certain that the 135th and the 162th AHCs and possibly the 147th ASHC followed them to IV Corps. When President Nixon authorized incursions into Cambodia in May, 1970, the 9th ARVN Division supported by the 214th CAB was the IV Corps contribution. At this time LTC Larry Baughman commanded the 214th and VHPAer Gary Lozer was the S-3. Gary provides the following:

The first operation on 2 May was into the Parrots Beak area. Most of the ARVN forces moved by ground, so the aviation support consisted of gunships from A/7/1st Cav and a platoon from the 235th AWC. We only conducted a few platoon/company size operations that day. President Nixon had announced that American and ARVN forces would not penetrate more than 21 miles. This created an unusual situation where we saw lots of enemy soldiers pop out of their holes and head northwest to get beyond the 21 mile line. The terrain in our AO was quite open which exposed the enemy as they pulled out and that turned into a real turkey shoot for our Cobras. They got 167 KBAs with no losses due to hostile fire. We did experience one terrible midair about 1430. We had three AH-1Gs from the 235th orbiting at 1200 feet, waiting for some artillery to lift. LTC Baughman and I were holding at 1500 in the C&C when we heard a loud explosion directly under us. I rolled the aircraft and looked down to see two burning aircraft on the ground and only two Cobras in the orbit. This accident resulted when the ARVN IV Corps CG flying in a VNAF Huey descending to land hit the trail Cobra. LT Frank Rice and WO Donald Parker died in this accident. The VNAF crewchief was the only one still alive after the impact. He had jumped from the ship at 50 feet. He was medevaced but his prognosis did not look good.

On the 10th, we conducted the largest airmobile operation run by IV Corps during the incursion to capture the Phu Prek ferry crossing where Highway 1 crosses the Mekong about half way to Phnom Penh. This objective was beyond the 21 miles limit and required special White House clearance. We formed Task Force Cougar with the 7/1st Cav, seven AHCs with 10 slicks each, and two CH-47 companies with 8 ships each. The PZ and final refueling point was established along the K. Dong Canal just east of An Thanh. The night prior, our S-4 had a fuel barge moved into the canal to establish ten hot refueling points. Many of the units came from Bear Cat and Vung Tau and had to arrive as early as 0530 so we could sequence 70 slicks, 14 guns, 16 CH-47s and the 7/1st Cav through refueling to be ready for a 0700 launch from the PZ. During the planning, we could not find adequate maps to select the LZ's, so LTC Baughman and I flew our C&C to recon. We tried to appear as a long, lost Huey wondering through the area.

Using two 50 minute sorties for each aircraft, we were able to insert a full ARVN Regiment plus a 105 battalion from the 9th ARVN on one fuel load. Many of the aircraft had their low fuel lights burning brightly when they finished. Our C&C ship, which departed before the others, was 17 minutes into the 20 minute light!

The COUGARs departed Vietnam from Vinh Long on 3 Jan 1972.

The Seven Mountains in Chau Doc Province

One of the truly unique terrain features in IV Corps were the mountains located near the Cambodian border. Shelby Stanton in *Green Berets At War* provides an interesting perspective.

For 20 years the VC had turned the rocky crags of the Seven Mountains into virtually invincible bastions. The principal peak was a sinister slab of boulder-strewn granite known as Nui Coto. Locally, the mountain was called 'Superstition Mountain' since the populace firmly believed that any VC there were protected from death. Numerous attempts by the Special Forces' Mobile Strike Force (MSF or Mike Force) Command and other allied units to clear Nui Coto had been repulsed with heavy losses. Artillery, airstrikes and even massed B-52 bombing had failed to reduce the labyrinth of underground passages and boulder-protected bunkers. The Tuk Chup Knoll, one height on Nui Coto, was christened 'Million Dollar Knoll' after the amount of ordnance used on it.

When the subject of Nui Coto comes up, most everyone who flew in IV Corps will just shake their head and make some expletive backed expressions to the effect that this was anything but a normal place on the map.

With the relatively low local population and distance for Saigon, the area was not a priority to the 'stay at home' ARVN Infantry Divisions. They established the 44th Special Tactical Zone (STZ) to deal with entire area along the southern border with Cambodia and its problems. However, such a visible, obviously powerful enemy strong point on the infiltration routes was like a 'red flag' to the Americans. As the American build-up in IV Corps continued and after the effects of Tet of '68 and the various mini-Tet's had worn off; the allied command agreed in early 1969 that it was time to do something serious. Since the 44th STZ did not have any 'disposable infantry for this suicidal assault mission,' the job fell to Mike Force mercenaries. Since the 44th STZ had a working arraignment with the 7/1st Cav via Operation BLACKHAWK, the 'can do, let's make it happen' ingredient was added to the battle plan. Clearly one of the CABs (the 13th seems logical) had to be involved to move and resupply the troops. During March and April, 1969 Nui Coto was taken. After the big battle, things became relatively quiet as both side consolidated and reorganized. Operation BLACKHAWK continued. During March and April, 1970 Nui Khet was taken using the SF camp at Chi Lang as the base for the operations. The 7/1st Cav supported this operation as well.

The INNKEEPERS

The first CH-47 company to live in IV Corps was the 271st ASHC who deployed 16 CH-47Bs to Can Tho on 26 Feb 1968 from Ft. Benning with the 361st TC Det. From the time they arrived until Nov, 1968 they were part of the 13th CAB and then the 307th CAB. In Jan 1969 the 307th recommended the INNKEEPERS for a Meritorious Unit Citation (MUC) for the period 1 Mar to 19 Nov. The supporting documentation provides a good summary of their activities.

The INNKEEPERS taught IV Corps ARVN artillery units the techniques for artillery assaults which were conducted simultaneously with the Huey infantry assaults. During the MUC period, they conducted 191 successful artillery assaults.

Two CH-47s can place as many troops in an LZ as twelve UH-1Hs. The principal advantages are that the CH-47s can deposit the troop in a smaller area resulting in better unit integrity with reduced refueling time compared to a flight of Hueys. Initially the Vietnamese Air Mission Commander only used the CH-47s for extractions but then began to use them after the second Huey lift was on the ground. Their first recorded initial CA was on Nui Co To.

Resupplying the numerous ARVN outposts was always a logistics challenge. The CH-47 could carry double the payload of a Caribou with about the same flying speed. Prior to the arrival of the INNKEEPERS, airdrops were used when Hueys, boats, or trucks were not available or could not be used. Their monthly average was 6,411,600 lbs. The Navy radar site on Con Son Island was built with over 800,000 lbs. of materials moved by the 271st in a four day operation. The SF camps at Thanh Tri and My Dien II were also built from large volumes of materials transported by the CH-47s.

During the MUC period, the 271st recovered 276 aircraft, giving them a monthly rate of over 31. The 271st designated one aircraft daily as the IV Corps recovery ship. This also reduced the number and time the ground troops had to provide security.

The 271st helped introduce CS and Napalm drop techniques in IV Corps which was used to force enemy units from their fortifications and hiding places into the open areas where they can be engaged with supporting arms. They maintained a CS standby aircraft which, after initial notification, was loaded with heavy duty rollers and about 20 barrels of CS. They were usually off the ground within 20 minutes after receiving the alert. Normal tactics were to drop a smoke pot to aid in determining wind effect, fly the CH-47 at 50 knots at 2,500 AGL, use a 30 second time fuse to insure a ground burst with only two or three seconds delay after impact. This puts a barrel about every 100 meters as one exits the aircraft every four seconds. The CS standby aircraft can also drop Napalm. The 50 foot flare lanyard is used to extract the safety pin from the fuse after the drum exits the aircraft.

Average monthly statistics during the MUC period: Availability and utilization: 78.2 % OR, 8.0% NORS, 13.8% NORM, and 70.7 HR/AC/NO. Operations: 2,464 sorties, 3,205 cargo tons, 13,120 troops or passengers, 1,125 hours, and 32 aircraft recoveries.

On 13 Jan 1969, the 271st had three aircraft destroyed on the ground in a sapper attack at Can Tho. The pictures of partly destroyed CH-47s are really sad. The 271st departed Vietnam On 26 September 1971.

Special thanks to VHPA member Greg Roche and VHCMA member Terry Pierce for help with this material.

As best the VHPA can determine, INNKEEPER's Honor Roll has one pilot and two crewmembers. There are seven loss, 167 battle damage, and 22 accident records in the HELICOPTER database for this unit.

The HILLCLIMBERS

The 147th ASHC was based at Vung Tau for years and supported many IV Corps activities from there. The VHPA has yet to determine when they moved to Can Tho, but it was some time after the 271st took up resident there. For a period of time, possibly all of 1970 and part of 1971, the 147th and 271st shared the Chinook work in IV Corps. There was a CH-54A element based on Can Tho for awhile but details are sketchy. When the 147th departed on 17 March 1972, at least one platoon moved over to the 18th CAC. As best the VHPA can determine, 147th's Honor Roll has four pilots and five crewmembers. There are six loss, 125 battle damage, and 29 accident records in the HELICOPTER database for this unit; but not all of these records pertain to the period when the HILLCLIMBERS lived in IV Corps.

The LIGHTHORSE

D Troop, 3d Squadron, 5th Armored Cavalry was the ACT for the 9th Infantry Division's Cavalry Squadron and was raised during 1966 at Ft. Riley, KS. They officially deployed to Vietnam on 2 Feb 1967 and were attached to the 9th Aviation Battalion rather than their parent Squadron. In late Feb 68, the majority of the 3/5th Cav Sqdn moved to I Corps to serve with the 1st Air Cav Division but D Troop remained with the 9th Inf Div. Their Scouts called themselves Spooks and flew OH-23s. During June, 1968 this platoon was assigned to the 101st Airborne. The new Scout platoon called themselves War Wagons, flew OH-6As and were lead by Ace Cozallio who would become a LIGHTHORSE legend.

The lineage of the 3/5th Cav dates to pre-Civil War units (Robert E. Lee once commanded it) and Ace maintained that troopers in those days wore white Cav hat as their working hat and the black hat was for dress. Ace always said that the "real Cav" wore white hats as did the Confederate Cavalry. Ace's grandmother made 50 yellow scarves which were immediately welcomed in Vietnam. D/3/5 Cav contracted Stetson and soon were supplied with white Cav hats. Ace even had a full Cav uniform with a saber and spurs.

After his year, Ace went to Cobra school as part of his extension and returned to be the Crusader Platoon Leader. Not long after this, the Troop was covering a hot LZ, that turned into a killing zone. When he recognized the disaster developing on the ground and was unable to get the War Wagons to understand his plan of attack, he directed one Scout to land. Ace traded places with the pilot. Ace worked the minigun and his observer, Wilt Chamberlain, all 5'4" of him, his M-60 against the enemy bunkers. Then Ace landed the LOH, left it frictioned down and running at flight idle, while he and Wilt charged down into the enemy trenches with a CAR-15, a 357, a saber and Wilt's M-60.

By mid-1968, they developed the following unit noms de guerre: LIGHTHORSE for the entire troop, LONG KNIVES for the slicks, WAR WAGON for the scouts, CRUSADERS for the guns, DOUGHBOYS for the infantry, and SCAVENGERS for the maintenance.

In the Fall of 1968, they relocated to Dong Tam as did the 9th Aviation Battalion. Like other divisional ACTs, the 9th Inf Div often assigned their Ranger Company to work with their ACT. In *Rangers At War* during Nov, 1968 we read: "D/3/5th Air Cav inserted a LRRP team from E Company, 50th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division after radar sightings indicated large movement in a normally uninhabited area. The LRRPs surrounded a suspicious hut covered with plastic and called for anyone inside to surrender. When the VC squad inside chose to fight, the team had D Troop's gunship destroy the hut. Elements of the 4/39th Infantry were inserted. A sweep of the area noted 10 VC KIAs plus a cache of medical equipment and documents from the 1st VC Regiment."

How LIGHTHORSE became the Bastard Cav

As the 9th Inf Div prepared to depart Vietnam, it released operational

control of D Troop to the 1st Aviation Brigade. The 3d Brigade, 9th Infantry was the 'stay behind' brigade from the 9th. Normally, 'stay behind' brigades continued to operate in their former division's AO, but USARV kept the 3d Brigade at Tan An and placed it under the control of the 25th Infantry Division. This area of III Corps already had the 3/17th ACS, D/1/4th and D/3/4th ACTs plus the 1/9th Cav from the 1st Air Cav Division; so the decision was made to leave D/3/5th Cav in the Delta. In effect, elements from the 9th Division either returned to the states or move north into III Corps, leaving D Troop an orphan - so to speak. By design, an ACT was a powerful, nearly self-sufficient combined arms team; so the term orphan just won't do when its parents moved away - bastard was a better term!

On 1 Sep 1969, D Troop was attached to the 7/1st ACS at Vinh Long and relocated from Dong Tam to Vinh Long toward the end of August. It is very important to note that all the LIGHTHORSE men will tell you they were indeed attached to, received their mission assignments from and shared ground facilities with the BLACKHAWK squadron; but they were not part of the squadron - they were separate! Even their white Cav hat said to the world: "I am Cav but I am different!" This fit nicely with the Bastard Cav moniker. VHPA member Tom Egleston recalls

The camaraderie, esprit, and moral were extremely high in D Troop. We exulted in getting the job done quickly, efficiently, and with great skill. We had a great 'fighting record' in terms of American losses to enemy casualties. Being the 'Bastard Cav,' we not only feuded the the 7/1st ACS but also the two AHCs at Vinh Long. If someone messed with one of us, they had to mess with all of us. The Troop Commander, Major Livengood, promoted this by leading us in our 'swagger.' He made sure the Squadron and Airfield Commanders knew who we were at all times, even if it meant ignoring senseless guidelines and directives.

The August, 1970 issue of HAWK, the 1st Aviation Brigade monthly magazine, carried a three page feature on the troop titled *From Custer To Cambodia*. The Doughboys had been replaced by Vietnamese troopers from at least February, 1970 according to Tom Egleston.

During Jan and Feb, 1971 D/3/5th Cav and C/3/17th Cav exchanged designations; so D/3/5th Cav as a unit was no longer resident in the Delta. However the names Lighthorse and Crusader along with the assets of D Troop continued to live at Vinh Long. Sadly the VHPA has not more information about this unit from this point until it stood down with the 7/1st ACS in April, 1972 but we need to thank VHPA members Rex Gooch and Tom Egleston for help with this history.

As best the VHPA can determine, LIGHTHORSE's Honor Roll has 29 pilots and 21 crewmembers. There are 54 loss, 159 battle damage, and 54 accident records in the HELICOPTER database for this unit. These statistics do include the period when this troop was not in IV Corps and does not include the C/3/17th Cav data.

The BLACKHAWKS

The 7th Squadron, 1st Armored (but really Air) Cavalry Squadron was raised at Ft. Knox, KY for the sole purpose of bring Air Cavalry operations to the Delta. The advanced party arrived at Bien Hoa during the initial days of Tet of '68. The main body and their aircraft arrived by boat at Vung Tau officially on 26 February and moved to Di An. They received in-country orientation and became operational with some help from the 1st Infantry Division and the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry who were still cleaning up their area after Tet. The Quarter Cav was involved in the Battle of Tan Hiep in early May just two miles north of Di An. On 5 May, LTC Canedy, the 7/1st Squadron Commander, was wounded and evaced during this battle. By this time the Squadron had been credited with over 1,300 enemy kills while loosing only 13 of their own - some baptism by fire!

C Troop was the first BLACKHAWK unit to relocate from Di An to Vinh Long on ?. In early June, HHT and A Troop also moved to Vinh Long. B Troop was attached to the 3/17th Air Cav in early May and would not move to Vinh Long until early December, 1968.

Even though the Squadron was based at Vinh Long, they spent a disproportionate share of their time working in the 44th STZ which run along the Cambodian border from the Gulf of Thailand past the Seven Mountains to Chau Doc and in the U Minh Forest along the western coast in southern Kien Giang and northern An Xuyen Provinces. Operation

BLACKHAWK was the formal title for the collective 7/1st activities in the 44th STZ and spanned 1968, 1969, and 1970. In late 1968, D Troop was OPCONed to the 44th STZ and stationed at various places all around Nui Coto, Nui Dai, and Nui Cam while working with the American Special Forces (SF) and their CIDG to clean the VC out of the huge caverns built into those mountains. The SF were especially fond of D Troop's 106RRs which they mounted on air boats called Air Cats and APCs. *The Green Berets at War* by Shelby Stanton contains one of the best accounts of the fighting in and around these mountains in March and April, 1969.

During 1969 this "standard configuration" was to have two Air Cav Troops (ACTs) working in the 44th STZ and D Troop providing FSB security and convoy escorts. The 7/1st Cav ORLL for December 1968 states: "... in support of Operation BLACKHAWK in the 44th STZ, great emphasis was placed on night operations to further interdict possible enemy movement across the Cambodian border. Various methods and concepts were employed. One ACT conducted night operations while the other continued daylight operations giving the border zone 24 hour coverage. During these operations, the ACTs employed various lighting devices to pick up targets and movement along the canals and heavily traveled infiltration routes. The use of flares, deployed at timed intervals to illuminate large areas, proved valuable enabling the ACT to conduct a VR with organic assets. The use of a Xeon light or the C-123 search light cluster in the door of the lead aircraft proved very successful when conducting a VR of a canal line or specific trail. This enable the scout or gun ship to fly just outside the beam and engage detected targets."

The Repatriation of Nick Rowe

The 7/1st Cav ORLL states: The B/7/1st Cav received a mission to VR an AO NW of Camau (VR953490) in support of the 21st ARVN Div Operations. While conducting the VR in the U Minh Forest (VR953490), B Troop located numerous sampans traveling SW along a network of canals, loaded with equipment and ammunition. The sampans were not camouflaged or hidden but were left along the canals as if the personnel traveling in them had departed in a hurry as the aircraft approached. B Troop inserted troops on the various clusters of sampans. As the teams and C&C aircraft orbited overhead, the Troop Commander observed what appeared to be a VC several hundred meters away. He was in tall grass and reeds waving a white cloth. It was surmised that this individual was possibly bait for a trap; however, the possibility of a defection or surrender could not be overlooked. The Troop Commander requested that his scout aircraft cover him while he approached the man to attempt a pick up. On landing in the area, he noticed that the man had a fair complexion and long beard, definitely not a Vietnamese. As the Troop Commander departed the area he notified the 21st ARVN Div, that he had just picked up James N. Rowe, an American officer who had been held prisoner by the VC for 5 years. The expression and relief displayed on Rowe's face after being picked up was enough to convince the men of B Troop that their year in Vietnam would be a memorable one and that 31 Dec 1968, would be a New Year's Eve never forgotten. The Troop dropped Rowe off at Camau to a reception committee of numerous personnel for examination and questioning and returned to the AO. Special Forces Major, then a 1LT, James Nick Rowe was captured on 29 Oct 1963 while on a patrol near Tan Phu. He was only the second American to escape from the VC. An insertion was made in the same vicinity where numerous caches of ammunition and equipment were secured. In one back pack, several pictures were found showing numerous Americans being examined by VC doctors. Rowe was included in some of these pictures. The contents, along with caches, were turned over to the 21st ARVN Div.

In *Five Years To Freedom*, Nick Rowe provides his side of the story. He was being transferred to another location with a detachment of about six guards. They had been traveling for a few days. Some of the guards did not trust their leader and became increasingly nervous as the Air Cav worked around their area. Nick managed to convince one guard that they would be safer making one small path through the reeds than the wide one the group was making; so the guard directed him to separate from the group. Since Nick wasn't walking fast enough, the guard started breaking trail and had Nick follow behind carrying the camp radio the guard had. Other VC in the area were firing at the LOHs and they were returning fire, yet whenever the guard wasn't looking, Nick waved and

tried to attract the attention of the helicopters. The guard had a burp gun and while moving through some thick vegetation, Nick got close enough to him to release the ammo magazine. After awhile the guard discovered this but with the helicopters making wider circles and in a general state of exhaustion, Nick was able to keep him moving. They passed a tree with dead branches where Nick picked up a short limb about two inches in diameter. He quickly stepped up to the guard and hit him at the base of the skull. Two more blows and Nick determined the VC was not going to follow him anymore, so he retrieved his net and the radio. He went a short distance then pushed the useless gup gun into the mud. He had the presence of mind not to wave a weapon at the helicopters while wearing black. He found a small clear area and made it bigger by trampling the reeds while waving the white mosquito net. Nick was very concerned that other VC in the area would see and recapture him. After what seemed to be an eternity, one of the Cobras passed overhead and banked sharply to circle. Nick later learned that initially the C&C had told the guns to kill the lone individual but then MAJ David Thompson decided to try to capture him and directed the other helicopters to cover him. One of the door gunners noticed that Nick had a beard and yelled that the person was an American! They landed about 15 meters from Nick who ran toward them. Seeing nothing but the interior of the Huey and the green-sun-visored face of Mike Thompson, the gunner, Nick dove onto the cool metal flooring and yelled "Go! Go!" After five years he was out of the "Forest of Darkness." The pilot yelled for his name - R.O.W.E. Soon the pilot asked "Are you Nick Rowe?" When Nick said yes, the pilot took off his helmet so Nick could talk with one of his West Point classmates. The gunner, SP4 Mike Thompson, and the CE, SP4 Stevens, opened C-rations for Nick who gulped them down as a miraculous feast. Nick said the voices speaking English were like music and he thought: "O Lord, please don't let me wake up and be back in the forest. Please don't let this be a dream."

Sadly, COL Nick Rowe was killed on 21 Apr 1989 while serving with the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group providing anti-insurgency training for the Philippine military.

Returning to the 7/1st Cav

VHCMA member Michael O'Reilly and several other former D Troopers helped re-establish the Blackhawk Association which publishes a very impressive Newsletter named HAWK TALK. Currently VHPA member Curt Childree is the president. The Blackhawks are actively working to get their history collected and recorded.

The EMUs and TAI-PANs

The 135th AHC was unique in that a element from the Royal Australian Navy made up a third of the company. Officially it was termed "Experimental Military Unit" but EMU is also the name of an Australian bird; so that worked out perfectly. The 135th was a III Corps unit based at Blackhorse and Bear Cat until Oct, 1970 when it relocated to Dong Tam. Even prior to moving to IV Corps, the 135th supported the US 9th Inf Div and the ARVN 7th and 9th Inf Divs especially during the dry season campaigns. The VHPA needs more information about this unit after it moved to IV Corps.

The Search & Destroy Battalion

The 307th Combat Aviation Battalion began its tour in Vietnam as a Combat Support Aviation unit taking over assets from the PHANTOM Aviation Battalion, later it specialized in Air Traffic Control functions. It was the successor to the huge 125th ATC Company and was headquartered at Bien Hoa with one letter company for each Corps. A/307th was located at Da Nang and provided all the ATC assets for Army Aviation in I Corps. B Company was at Cam Ranh Bay for II Corps, C Company at Bien Hoa for III Corps, and D Company at Can Tho for IV Corps. By ?, this organization was in place and operational. By ? (prior to May, 1971 because of Dave Fesmire's orders), it had taken on the mantle of a CAB and controlled at least the 271st ASHC. Exact details are sketchy but it is thought the 307th was based at Can Tho and Soc Trang during this tour with the 164th CAG. It departed Vietnam on 30 June 1971.

The BOOMERANGs and BOUNTY HUNTERS

The 191st AHC was one of the 214th CAB's company that followed it to

IV Corps. They arrived at Can Tho on 24 May 1968. The VHPA needs more information about this unit in IV Corps. They departed Vietnam on 1 Oct 1971.

The VULTUREs and COOPERHEADs

The 162d AHC was also one of the 214th CAB's company that followed it to IV Corps to support the 9th Inf Div. They came to Dong Tam on 1 November 1968. After the 9th departed, apparently the 162d relocated from Dong Tam to Can Tho. The VHPA needs more information about this unit in IV Corps. They departed Vietnam on 3 April 1972.

GREEN DELTA

A 13th CAB order dated 30 Jun 1971 assigned 23 soldiers from the 191st AHC to the Delta Regional Aviation Company (DRAC) (CAC) (Prov) effective 1 July. Another 13th CAB order dated 13 Aug 1971 assigned 25 pilots from the 162d AHC to the DRAC. All four units had APO 96215 which must have been Can Tho.

The 18th Aviation Company was a fixed wing Otter company that arrived in Vietnam on 7 Feb 1962 and departed on 16 Apr 1971. The 18th Corps Aviation Company (CAC) was activated at Can Tho in Aug 1971 using assets of the DRAC (Prov).

Like most CACs, the 18th had several platoons and over time the equipment, missions, and personalities changed. Several people that served in the unit were surprised to learn that it had a Chinook platoon for a period. Not long after CH-47C #69-17119 was shot down by a rocket (31 Oct 1972) and 22 Americans died, the Chinooks were withdrawn. It certainly had a good sized Huey platoon and a OH-58 equipped LOH platoon during most of its life. About the only thing it didn't seem to have was gunships. Since the Americans were not turning over UH-1Cs or AH-1Gs to the Vietnamese, as the Army units which gunships stood down; the guns returned to the States.

The OH-58s were the BAR TENDERS, the CH-47s the HILLCLIMBERS (we certainly know where they came from!), and the Hueys were GREEN DELTA. The maintenance section was SHORT SHAFT. The numeric callsign appended (e.g. GREEN DELTA 77) denoted the Province this crew was supporting.

The missions were assigned by the 164th CAG and were mostly single ship, ash and trash in nature. Many missions supported the US Army Colonels that were the senior Province advisors. Sometimes the US Army Major General, senior IV Corps advisor, was an aviator - but there was a rule that the other pilot in the Huey was always an IP. Several senior CWOs spent their last weeks in Vietnam making certain these Generals didn't kill themselves.

As aviation units closed down, their short timers when home as well and those with over half their tour left ended up in the 18th. As a result, everyone was rather fluid and everyone was 'short' even new guys.

By the end of 1972, the IV Corps that most old helicopter crews remembered was gone forever. The veterans of that period describe the following: There were only a few places (e.g. Vinh Long, Camau, Binh Thuy, and Can Tho) to get fuel or where Americans could stay overnight. Soc Trang Airbase was for all practical purposes abandoned. Even the VNAF Squadrons had relocated to Dong Tam. For all practical purposes, there were less than ten secure staging areas - where a crew could shut down, have some chow, and do a little maintenance while waiting for the next assignment. American helicopter operations had become even more self-reliant by having not only a maintenance bird but also a logistic bird accompany the flight for the day. The thinned rear echelon ranks turned the flow of spare repairs into a trickle. There were a lot of Red X conditions everyone just "flew with" because there really wasn't much of an option. As more American unit gradually stood down, even the bare essentials (like newspapers, mail service, a PX) disappeared. During Feb, 1973 even the mess hall at Can Tho closed! By 1973, the remaining crews only had to fly about once every three days - so it was the club, the pool, and a visit to town for most everyone. Most of the combat flying and virtually all of the fighting was done by VNAF and the ARVNs. Most Americans express ideas along the line, "Gee, if the Vietnamese would have flown this hard and fought this aggressively in the 60s maybe the NVA and local VC wouldn't control so much of the territory!" The ex-DARKHORSE guys were still mixing it up. They always

put up a night flare and light ship. The enemy seemed to respond appropriately. On the morning of the 0530 cease fire, Can Tho had been mortared and the Cav guys were up in a Huey still throwing lead.

The 18th CAC drew the ICCS missions, but again the rules changed even more. Instructions came down that there would be only one weapon per aircraft and that included personnel weapons. Most everyone had a small pistol hidden some place on their person. Things got even crazier when you could only report "receiving alleged fire" or being directed by Polish ICCS members to land where "no one's shooting" because the only the Communists were firing! The poor Canadians were scared for their lives and the Poles were very poor spies who tried to get the Americans drunk and then ask them intelligence gathering questions. Those who were there at the end don't remember turning in any equipment - just getting out of the Huey, getting on a plane for Saigon and getting the Hell Out! The 18th departed Vietnam in March 1973 with the remainder of the helicopter units of the 164th Group.

The 164th CAG

On 20 December 1967, the 164th CAG was activated at Can Tho from assets of the DELTA Provisional Aviation Group which also took some personnel from the 13th CAB, specifically the battalion command COL Robert L. McDaniel. A 1st Aviation Brigade HAWK article states that Tet of '68 delayed its formal activation ceremony. The group would command the 13th, 214th and 307th Aviation Battalions as well as the 7/1st Cav. The Order of Battle also states it controlled C/16th Cav, the 18th CAC, the 163d Avn Co, and the CH-54A platoon from the 478th HHC that was based at Can Tho for awhile.

VHPA member Chuck Wilson found a copy of the Group's in-country "Welcome" packet that contains some important dates and facts. This document was signed by COL Soucek who took command on 2 July 1970; so the packet must be from the second half of 1970.

The packet includes this paragraph: "Once again the 164th CAG was tasked with the training of VNAF Helicopter Squadrons. These squadrons replaced 164th CAG units which were located at Soc Trang AAF. The airfield was turned over to the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program." This supports other sources which indicate VNAF operated at Soc Trang but few VHPAers have been able to provide information on this subject.

The Group departed Vietnam on 14 March 1973.

Air America

Air America maintained a section at Can Tho with two Hueys; one for their contract with USAID and the other for their contract with the U.S. Embassy. It is not known when this section came to live at Can Tho on a permanent basis - certainly it was prior to 1969. These aircraft provided almost daily flights to Saigon and often to areas along the Cambodian border.

The last volume of the official USMC history of Vietnam *The Bitter End 1973-1975* includes a lengthy narrative on Operation FREQUENT WIND, the evacuation of Saigon. The Marine officers who planned and coordinated this Operation and the history in general is most complimentary of Air America flying to the fleet off Vung Tau from all sorts of places at all hours. It also mentions that even with all the chaos at Can Tho during those final days and hours, the Air America section there saved a lot of people from unpleasant treatment or death.

U.S. Air Force Advisory Team (AFAT)

The only known AFAT unit was located at Binh Thuy with the VNAF squadrons. VHPA member Tony Robinson knows a former USAF NCO who served in this unit and has some very valuable information that the VHPA certainly needs.

The VNAF Squadrons

The VHPA certainly needs more information about the VNAF Squadrons. About everything we know is listed in the table on page 246.

References

To save space, details about the source material used in this history are printed on page 287.