

SECTION VI - The Helicopter History of Northern I Corps

Introduction from the VHPA Historical Committee

by Mike Sloniker

This is my second shot at compiling your history. I assisted Mike Law with the 1994 Directory's Lam Son 719 history, where I learned a serious lesson about our history. It isn't recorded very well anywhere. Many of the Vietnam era books merely state, "we owe our lives to the accuracy of the Cobra crew." Who were they? In "Ripcord," Keith William Nolan frequently states that Cobra crews scrambling out of Camp Evans. We all know that was Charlie Battery 4/77th ARA, but they are not specifically cited. The Cav troop that constantly was over the beleaguered 2/506 Inf companies, obviously was C/2-17th Cav, but they were not specifically cited. We have a few options. We can complain. YOU can write your own book. Or, lastly, you can compile it as a unit, and get it forwarded to the VHPA Historian.

Last year, I took the baton to get the helicopter history of the 1972 finished when Ron Timberlake, who was writing it, died after a motorcycle accident in May 1999. After having read Dale Andrade's "Trial By Fire," that focused on the Easter Offensive, I could not believe he had not include the names of the Aviation units that hung it out for the ARVN during this offensive. After all, he is an Army Historian and his notes state he used the vast Army libraries as a source. In those very same libraries are the manuals that show what units were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for valor. The 229th AHB was awarded the PUC for the Easter Offensive, yet this fact was not cited in the book.

In compiling the history last year, I was totally amazed at the daily common bravery displayed by a handful of aviators AFTER most of the units had gone home, circa March 1972. The high number of Distinguished Service Crosses awarded OH-6 crews for saving lives was unprecedented and unknown until you, the VHPA membership, stepped up with facts.

Last Fall, I requested information for the historical portion of the VHPA 2000 directory from the membership in the VHPA Newsletter. It is my intention to have the VHPA history be a "living document" that is not all inclusive, can be updated and is history from the membership that they "want" to share. That is what makes our history unique. It is "our recollections" and not a literary effort that will eventually sell a book.

In January 1971, after consulting with Mike Law, Gary Roush, and Tom Payne, we decided that "I Corps north of Da Nang 1964 up to Lam Son 719" would be the scope for this year's history effort. This subject was not adequately covered in past VHPA histories. This would include the early 52d CAB detachments that sent B Model gunships up to Da Nang to cover the Marines in the CH-34s and much, much more.

Ralph Young wrote "Army Aviation In Vietnam, 1963-1966" which he sold at the VHPA 2000 Reunion. This excellent book with glossy clear pictures, examples of all unit patches, clear text and fantastic research really covers the early years in Vietnam better than we will in this history. The book is available from The Huey Company INC.

The excellent cooperation between the author and the subjects is clear in the accuracy that prevails in that book.

The Complete History is on the CD

This history will be in two formats. About four pages of text and a few pictures in this Directory and over 90 pages of written text on the CD ROM being produced. The VHPA Historical committee is accumulating so much history, in the form of pictures, text, audio tapes, video tapes that we are remiss if we don't get it on the current technology for all who want to invest in a CD ROM reader on their computer.

The units that sent in data which is on the CD ROM were:

A Battery 4-77th ARA

B Battery 4-77th ARA

C Battery 2-20th ARA

An U.S. Air Force A-1 pilots account

The UTT Detachment to Da Nang

The use of helicopters in the Son Tay Raid, November 1970

D Troop 1-1st Cav

VNAF H-34 maintenance by a USMC Flying Sergeant

Companies A, B, C, and D of the 159 ASHB

108th Arty Group

B Company 229th AHB

Avn Sec 1/5th Mech Inf Bde

Compilation of data from 227th AHB

The Chinook and Caribou Middair over Evans

We are putting visual and audio tapes, many pictures and a major load of text on our second attempt at a CD ROM which will be offered this fall.

Believe me, I am loving every minute of this time consuming effort. Thanks for the incredible output by the membership this year.

Mike Sloniker, VHPA Historian

The UTT at Da Nang by Captain Jack Johnson

Where did the "X" on the windshield come from and where did we learn about carrier landings in officers clubs? This might be the starting point....

Jack Johnson went to Vietnam on his first tour in May 1964, assigned to Utility Tactical Transport (UTT) company at Tan Son Nhut in Saigon. He came to Vietnam after having served at Ft Rucker in 62-63 as an instructor pilot in the UH-1B gunship. He was assigned to be the platoon commander of the second platoon, "the Raiders." On Nov 9th, he was ordered to take four gunships (M-60s flex mounted with two rocket pods and one B model gun with the XM 4 rocket pod kit to Da Nang to support the Marines of HMM-365. The platoon leader usually flew the gunship with the 48 rocket XM-3 system. He also had ten slicks from the Saigon area also assigned to go along. The detachment returned on 7 Dec 1964.

Upon arrival in the Da Nang area they were attached to the 52d Aviation Battalion. The mission assigned was to conduct Eagle flights using Vietnamese troops with a mix of Army and Marine transports supported by our gunships and to assist the Marines in arming their H-34s. They began by teaching combat assault tactics to the ARVN who were making combat assaults from UH-1's for the first time. Next they went out west of Da Nang, conducted low level reconnaissance missions with the intent of getting shot at. It did not take long for the gunships to scare up some targets, call the slicks who in their brought the ARVN who would land and conduct search and destroy missions.

The VC in the area were not used to having aircraft out looking for them, so they were easy to find. In fact, early on a column was caught walking down a trail, tried to look like day time farmers carry weapons instead of farm implements and were engaged..

The Marines and Jack's unit worked closely together during the day...and at night in the club. "Carrier qualifications" became the norm with the "carrier" being two eight foot long tables. The Marines would carry the Army pilots around the pattern and four to five feet from the table throw the Army pilot at the table. Success was to hook your toes on the end of your table... The table was made wet by soaking it down with beer. These moments made life long friendships between the two services.

The CH-34 Squadron Commander, USMC Col J J Kohler had some of the USMC 34's armed with 18 shot rocket pods. The Army unit taught the Marines how to shoot without using the gunsight since they also had none. The "X" mark on the windshields on the UH-1Bs soon showed up on the USMC armed CH-34's. Many may wonder how this procedure worked, and Jack Johnson explained, "with head held back, and shoulder harness locked the Marines found they could get a fairly good fix on where the rockets would hit." Soon the Marine '34s were joining the Army UH-1Bs on the Eagle flights.

When the mission was completed, Jack, then a captain, was met by BG Delk Oden who debriefed him. Oden indicated the unit had been very successful as evidenced by the 52d Avn Bn after action reports and from reports from the ARVN in I Corps. Oden then took Jack Johnson, who had just landed from the long flight from Da Nang to see General Westmoreland, the Commander US Forces MACV, COMUSMACV.

In attendance, besides Oden, Johnson, and Westmoreland, were BG Stillwell and Col Jack Klingenhagen. The meeting lasted an hour and focused on the success of the Eagle flights. The combat effectiveness of this early use of gunships and slicks on Eagle flights was recognized as quite successful in high places, and was a heady experience for a young captain.

Jack went back to flying in III Corps and was wounded on 9 Feb 1965. He was medevaced to the Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver for almost a year of recovery. When he released, he got requalified in aircraft type, then went to the Command and General Staff College at Ft Leavenworth Kansas. Upon completion he was reassigned to Vietnam and in Dec 1967 took command of the 188th Assault Helicopter Company at Dau Tieng in III Corps. During Tet 68, his unit was sent north to LZ Sally. The continuation of his story, which will be on the CD ROM, will continue when that unit becomes part of the 101st Airborne Division in I Corps.

VHPA Historian: In the past, the aviation maintenance types have not said a lot, nor participated in the collection of their particular contribution to Vietnam's aviation history. We would not have been able to fly the missions had they not been up all night with the NCO and enlisted maintenance folks turning the aircraft around. I got a very unique response from Paul Moore, who was a flying Sergeant in the Marine Corps during and after the Korean War. During the Vietnam War he was still on active duty when he came to Vietnam in 1963.

VNAF CH-34 Maintenance by USMC MSgt Paul Moore

I was Quality Assurance Chief in H&MS during 1963 and we brought UH-34Ds to Da Nang in USAF C124s where they were assembled and turned over to the H-34 Squadrons there. I transferred to the fleet reserves and hired in to Sikorsky Field Service. I was assigned on contract to the USAF Advisory Group in Vietnam July 1964. The Marine Corps had turned over one Squadron of H-34s to a VNAF unit at Da Nang. The USAF Advisory pilots did not have the H-34 in their inventory. They were given 20 hours time at Chicago Airways and that was the extent of their capabilities. I flew with the pilots at Saigon and was able to aid them in their learning cycle. The Col was impressed and recommended to the CG that I be placed on flight orders and rotate to each VNAF Squadron to fly with and help train the VNAF and Advisory pilots. I had been in enlisted pilot training in WW11 for six months and had flown civilian fixed wing. I also had flown in the co-pilot seat in Bell HTL-3, HO5S, H19 and H34 helicopter every chance I had since HMX-1 in 1950. Briefly then I flew four years rotating Saigon, Nha Trang, Da Nang and Binh Thuy (near Can Tho). I flew any time or whatever they had an open seat. The missions carried, pigs, chickens, families, returning dead soldiers to their villages etc.

We had four squadrons of H-34s, they were CH-34Cs, UH-34Ds, UH-34Gs from all the US assets including new MAP program UH-34Ds. Needless to say their maintenance was terrible. One UH-34G I was going to test fly, the blade pin pulled as I engaged the rotors and slapped down on the tail. Another the tail pylon came off as I recovered from an auto rotation. At Binh Thuy I was there in January during Tet '68 when the VC overran the base. We made our stand in a bunker in the middle of the base with gunships flying around our position all night. The attacking Viet Cong blew up all our H-34s, the AD fixed wing aircraft and blew up our hangars.

Later, I also helped Air America at Udorn locate and recover some crashed H-34s in the field which VNAF never bothered to recover. I was the only civilian to receive the USAF VNAF wings and one of their medals which I cannot identify.

I was still technically a Marine, being in the Fleet Reserve status during that 4 year tour. I flew something over 900 pilot hours during that time. I have copies of my flight orders for test pilot and missions also copy of the Vert-flight magazine story of my status getting wings along with flying personnel ID tag. It was funny sometimes I landed at Tan Son Nhut air field at operations, sometimes in my civilian clothes. The USAF air police would come and take me in to custody thinking I hijacked a helicopter.

I had roving orders and could go about anyplace, which I did, sometimes flying to Okinawa from Da Nang on Marine KC-130 to visit my friends on Okinawa. On a flight from Nha Trang to Saigon the VNAF took a young

buffalo intending to have a feast in Saigon. It was loaded with the legs tied together. While flying over the mountains it managed to break loose and went berserk in the cabin with the crew chief frantically trying to cut its throat. He finally managed to do so. The helicopter was a real mess of sh#t and blood, plus several damaged panels in the cabin section.

I was visiting my Marine friends at Marble Mountain the night in 1965 when VC overran the base. We had a Wednesday afternoon barbecue/beer party and about 8 PM I returned to the VNAF base. About midnight I heard the gunfire and explosions of that action. I remember one day at Da Nang I was in the copilot seat waiting for one of their resupply missions with dependents, chicken, pigs etc. I had no idea what was in the cabin below until I pulled up the collective trying to get off the grass area. Finally I had about 43" manifold plus 2800 rpm and still was going no place. After shutting down and taking inventory besides all the livestock there was thirty some Vietnamese with all their gear nonchalantly waiting to go home.

The time the tail pylon came off about 10 miles south of Nha Trang AB. I had just autorotated down the side of the mountains where we observed US Army UH-1s doing an insertion. As I flared and pulled in collective and left pedal all hell broke loose. A vicious spin pinned me so I could not move. Remembering that loss of tail rotor required cutting torque, I immediately chopped the throttle and from about 150 feet the nose was tucking under. I immediately dropped the collective full down and remembering the fire probability I shut off the battery switch and struck the ground nose down on the left side. The blades wrapped around the top of the cockpit just above my head. I found my left leg caught and the Vietnamese pilot in the right seat climbed out the right window which was straight up, then he ran off and left me. I can still hear the glup, glup as the fuel leaked out and the inverters running down. Figured it would go up in flames any minute, I finally got out and climbed up through the window. About 50 feet away standing in the fuel, the VNAF Captain was firing finger flares into the air. I stopped that nonsense and reminded him we were several miles out in possible VC territory. After about 20 minutes I heard the Army UH-1s crossing and then fired flares. They were reluctant to come down but circled for several minutes, finally approaching us with the door guns trained on us. Was happy to see Nha Trang AB that day!!! These are examples of my four years along with troop insertions, etc., which turned out to be a most exciting and hilarious time. I am very happy to have survived. Certainly more than a Marine MSgt would have expected to be able to participate.

A few final thoughts that come back after all these years, perhaps you can assemble what you think is pertinent. Another mission which VNAF utilized the H-34 was with a spray rig and agent orange which they utilized to defoliate the areas around their outposts. I was on one of those missions near the town of Phan Thiet (Nuoc Maum producing area) you could smell the place from about five miles out.

On the technical , logistic and operational side, the mixture of Army CH-34C, Navy UH-34G and Marine UH-34D was a nightmare for standardization. The older H-34s Army and Marine models 145 series and below had the low engine exhaust system. At night there was a three foot blue flame along the side of the helicopter. The model 148 series and subsequent had a cluster exhaust with a ventura which eliminated most of the flame and alleviated back pressure in the cylinders. The older models had engine oil clutches while the newer models had hydraulic clutches. The older models had electric fuel pumps for the center and aft fuel tank transfer, the new models had an ejector utilizing venturis for these transfer system. The Army CH-34Cs had no ASE and utilized dummy motors to center the Aux servos. The UH-34D and G had ASE, but VNAF had no facilities to support ASE. I had the director of Maintenance remove the amplifiers and all inputs to ASE after centering the ASE motors, thus disabling the ASE. As you can see there was a huge problem for supply, maintenance and pilot orientation. When you flew a different ship each day, you were faced with a different configurations. The UH-34G was tail heavy and we had installed lead weights in the engine section to counteract that problem. One of our many maintenance problems was most enlisted Vietnamese Air Force maintenance personnel could not read English. I still preached to them to use the manuals!! One day at

Da Nang I noted a young Vietnamese mechanic on the work stand busy with the tail servo, and an open manual next to him. I climbed up to congratulate him and found that it was an H-19 manual!!! The VNAF had H-19s prior to 1963.

Another day I was preflighting for a flight and I noted a circular metal patch installed with metal screws that appeared to be in the spar of a main blade. I verified that it was in the spar and after checking the records found it had flown 122 hours with a bullet hole completely through the spar with the patch and eight drilled screw holes!!! I departed Vietnam in July 1968 and went to Malaysia, where I flew with RAF and Malaysian SH-3D helicopters for 2 1/2 years in Malaysia and Brunei. Finally in 1973 I joined MAG-36 at Okinawa where I served with all the rotating personnel and units for 14 years until 1987. In 1975 was on the LPH Okinawa for Frequent Winds evacuation of Saigon with HMH-462. I seldom mentioned my past in Vietnam since even as a "no s#%&ter" doubted anyone would believe me anyway.

VHPA Historian: Over the past five years, Ray Knight from D/1/1st Cav from the Americal Division had been telling me how the true history of the first air cav troop in the 101st never showed up in the histories of the 101st. I asked him to write it down. Here is Ray's well written offering to correct history.

Delta Troop, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry by Ray Knight

On the night of July 21, 1967, the Delta Troop 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment outfitted in Jungle Fatigues, LBE, with our personal weapons secured in shipping boxes loaded up on chartered buses and departed Fort Hood for Lackland AFB San Antonio Texas. There we loaded up on a chartered Continental Airline's 707 and departed for South East Asia. Even though we were flying on a commercial airliner, MAC rules were applied and there was no "booze" served on the airliner. This did not stop the enterprising troopers from enjoying themselves on the flight, and by our first stop in Honolulu HI the canteens were dry. En masses the pilots headed for the lounge only to find that it was 12:01 a.m. and the bar had closed at 24:00. Dejected they reboarded the aircraft beginning to sober up, as they were now as dry as a Bible belt dry county. Our next stop was Guam for refueling after several attempted calls home from the last "pay phone" available we replanned for our final leg. We arrived early morning on July 21st, the day before we had departed.

It was at Da Nang that our orders were changed. Instead of going to Chu Lai and the Americal Division, D/1/1st was diverted and attached to the 101st Airborne Division, where we became the forgotten Cav Troop.

This was a great time of confusion within the Division as this was the time that the 101st was being reorganized from "Airborne" to "Airmobile". One day we were going to be "Airborne" the next the unit was supposed to be designated as Airmobile and the tab was being redesigned. Finally the word came down that the distinctive unit insignia would not be changed. The 101st was and would remain an Airborne Division only the method of delivery would change. With a few exceptions our aviators were on their first tour and had no aviation experience in country. The exceptions were those who had served as enlisted before going to flight school. Our TC and one commissioned Scout Pilot who was on his second tour. He had taken a direct commission on his first tour. As the 101st had no Air Cavalry units there was no one for us to take our incountry training from. Our gun and Aero Rifle pilots were sent to the Kingsmen who had recently been redesignated as B Company 101st Aviation Battalion. Our scout pilots were sent to the 1st Cavalry to fly with C Troop 1st Squadron 9th Cavalry and learned scout tactics. During our first month in country our aircraft had still not arrived, so all of our flying was done with other units. Then our aircraft arrived and much to our dismay, the honeycomb decking on all of our gunships had separated grounding every gunship. We did our insertion work with our Aero Rifles and Scout work with heavy white teams.

Our first unit infusion also took place at this time. Hardest hit was the Gun Platoon. At this time the Division sent over it's qualified Cobra pilots and we lost approximately 50 percent of the original gun platoon. It was also during the time frame of late August and early September that Bill Bootle and Billy Brooks (CW2's by this time) and a couple of other gun platoon pilots were sent down south to Vung Tau for Cobra Transition. They came back to the Troop and Division flying brand new

AH-1G Cobras, the first ones to be assigned to the 101st Airborne Division.

D/1/1st began to feel it's combat effectiveness when on a last light recon mission the Loach piloted by 1LT Gordon Skinner was engaged by ground fire. LT Skinner was killed. This loss was felt deeply as by this time the troop had been together for more than a year for most of the pilots. This was to be the only combat loss to the Troop for the next six months.

Due to the fact that 2nd Squadron 17th Cavalry as well as the rest of the Division was undergoing the transition from a straight leg airborne division to an airmobile division, aviation assets were at a premium. D/1/1 did not actually function in the normal Air Cav Troop role for its Squadron. At this time 2/17th was a recon Squadron running 1/4ton trucks with either 60's or .50 cal's mounted in the jeep. The Squadron continued to operate in the coastal lowlands as a recon force. The Aero Rifle platoon augmented the 2/17th in providing additional forces for patrols and ambushes. Our aircraft then did the work of an Air Cav Squadron. We provided aerial recon support on a daily basis to each of the Brigades assigned to the 101st. Our slicks took over the job of providing support to F Company, 58th Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol from the Kingsmen of Bravo Co 101st Aviation Battalion. The pilots were John Eiss, Mike Bauman, Douglas Houser, Steven Michaud, Dennis Ponsness, Patrick (Pat) Brocke, and F. Ray Knight, Jr. We learned from experience the art of McGuire Rigs, Rappelling, Fly Overs, extractions on ladders stolen from a hook outfit and cut to fit the back of a H Model. We got to know the Team Leaders and ATL, as well as the operations staff. While the scouts would provide a ship for Command and Control and the guns provided cover. There were first light insertions, last light insertions, and night extractions under fire. The hours of stand by on acid pad (the LRP/Ranger heli-pad) while the team was in the field. With our support and due to the fact that both the LRP's and D/1/1st had been attached to 2/17th Cav the Rangers finally had a dedicated aircrew.

D/1/1st became very familiar with the A Shau Valley. Some of the first in country flights were made while we were still flying with the Kingsmen. This was during the August incursion during which the infamous yellow brick road was discovered. Even though the division later pulled out due to bad weather, the Troop had continuing contact flying in support of the Rangers into the Valley and the edges thereof. We became very adept at Mountain Flying. If we weren't operating in the A Shau it seemed we were flying into the Rong-Rong.

Our Cobra drivers became the demand of the troops in contact in the field. Many times we were called out in support of Divisional units who were in contact. CPT Jack Horton, the Gun Plt Leader, had a large bear head painted on his Cobra. He was well known for his comments that when you were in the woods sometimes you got the bear but most of the time the bear got you and "I am the Bear."

On one night contact mission the ground unit was in danger of being over run when D/1/1st Snakes arrived on the scene. The RTO on the ground was very nervous and excited when CPT Horton came up on the Air. CPT Horton had to calm down the grunt before he could find out where to engage the enemy. He told the young soldier to calm down that Sword was on station. The RTO recognized the voice and call sign and responded "Is this the Bear?" when he received an affirmative answer he almost immediately calmed down and directed the fire team and the beleaguered unit was able to break contact and make it through to morning. Having the only Cobras in Division was a draw back also. For many months we were the targets for all of the NVA rocket attacks on Camp Eagle. It was not until 4/77th FA arrived in country in early 1969 that the rocket attacks shifted away from the Cav Area. There were first light/last light missions every day. Pink teams became the order of the day as we could spread our assets among the Division and provide the best cover. During December 1968 and January 1969 no one could get out to the A Shau due to weather so our AO was restricted to the coastal low lands and the foot hills that led to the A Shau.

We were called out on several interservice missions. We would support the Marines stationed at Quang Tri and LZ Vandergriff. Then in February 1969 we went back into the A Shua, this time from the north, flying to LZ Vandergriff and refueling and staging out of the

Marine camp. Then in March of 1969 weather had cleared enough that the Division wanted to go back into the A Shau. Again it was 2/17th Cav who got the recon missions sending the LRP's and D/1/1st into gather information for the Division to make plans for another assault. Scouts even flew single ship missions with Brigade and Division staff trying to draw as little attention as possible to the upcoming assault.

In April of 1969 the Aviation units of 2/17th Cav, A Troop training at Ft Carson Co, and B and C Troops training at Fort Hood were ready to deploy to Vietnam and assume their duties and make 2/17th a truly Air Cav Squadron. D/1/1st played it's final role for the 101st Airborne Division, after almost nine months of providing Air Cav Support a D/1/1st Cobra piloted Alvie Ledford, Jr (called by all J. R.) was engaged on a mission near the A Shau and both pilots were lost due to hostile fire. D/1/1st finally got their moving orders and were going to join the Squadron in Chu Lai, leaving not only the legacy of their action but a foundation for 2/17th Air Cav Squadron as many of the pilots who had flown for D/1/1st stayed behind and were infused into the new Air Cav Squadron bring with them the nine months of experience in the Division and then imparting it to their new Troops before returning to the States at the end of their tour.

D/1/1st continued to serve its Parent Squadron and the Americal Division with pride and honor until the Squadron returned to the States in April of 1972. The men and aircraft of D/1/1st were redesignated D/17th Cav and continued their proud tradition during the Easter Offensive serving back in and around it's old stomping grounds of Quang Tri, Hue and Phu Bai. Yet in the annals of the 101st Airborne Division D/1/1st remains the forgotten Cav Troop. They are not listed in the Division's order of Battle from Vietnam. Their actions are only accredited to the 2/17th Cav.

VHPA Historian: The above is an example of the many units that formed up in the states to be part of the 101st. C/158 sent 43 pages of work, which is fully covered in the CD ROM.

Bravo Battery "Toros" 4-77 ARA by Mike Brokovich

In early March 1969 after predeployment leave all the Toros gathered back at Ft. Bragg. We were loaded on C-141 Starlifter aircraft at Pope Air Force Base and departed for the long trip to Vietnam. We took the northern route and refueled at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska and Yokota Air Force Base, Japan before finally landing at Da Nang. We spent the night sleeping on luggage racks at the unfinished reception terminal and were welcomed to Vietnam that evening with a 122 mm rocket attack. The next morning after breakfast we were loaded on to C-130s and flown to Phu Bai and then taken by truck to Camp Eagle, our new home.

We spent a couple of days getting settled into our new hooches and found out we were getting A Battery's old UH-1Cs as they were getting their AH-1G Cobras. We would never see our UH-1B's again (or at least until they formed F Troop, 2/17 Cav and resurrected some of our UH-1Bs). Three days after our arrival in country, two platoon leaders and the battery commander were sent to the Cobra NETT transition course at Vung Tau. Additionally, the class included three pilots from A Battery who were being infused into B Battery. Three weeks later, B Battery had six Cobra pilots and six more were at Vung Tau for Cobra transition. One week later we started receiving our new AH-1Gs. At this point in time we decided our helipad needed a name, too. In keeping with our Toro theme, we dubbed the helipad "The Bullpen" and went on to call the officer's lounge "Playa de Toros."

Our "official" mission was reinforcing for the 1/321 Artillery who was in direct support of the 2nd Brigade based at Camp Sally. We constantly had a section of two aircraft on 2-minute status as well as a 5-minute section and a 15-minute section. This meant that the 2-minute section had to launch in two minutes or less on a fire mission. When the 2-minute section launched, each of the other sections moved up in the readiness status. We did this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Additionally, we flew daily visual reconnaissance missions covering the OH-6s of A/377 Artillery (The Gunners), landing zone preps, overhead cover after troop insertions, convoy cover, counter battery, and Special Forces support.

Initially, the 2nd Brigade wanted a section on standby at Camp Sally for counter battery. We established a pad and rearming point near the 2/321

Artillery location on the south end of the airstrip. When they realized our Cobras were used as an aiming point for the NVA and we could scramble off Camp Eagle and be overhead in about the same time, they agreed to let us stay at Camp Eagle.

By far the most dangerous and exciting of all our missions was CCN (Command and Control North). This (then) highly classified mission was flown in support of SOG out of Quang Tri and Phu Bai. We flew with 101st lift aircraft, USAF O-2 control aircraft (Covey), VNAF CH-34s (Kingbees), and, in the beginning, USMC UH-1Es (Scarface). Of course, we had the fast mover close air support, as well as the A-1E Spads, when we needed it. Nearly all the missions were well across the border and always in "Indian Country". Initially, we were flying the CCN missions and getting no recognition for our feats other than a feeling of self-satisfaction and the thanks of the CCN folks. We were under the assumption that we could not get awards for highly classified missions because we couldn't relate where we were. That all changed with a new Battalion Commander in June 1969. LTC Tom Spence took over from LTC Lewis Henderson that June. In early July, we had our first Cobra shot down. It was not recoverable because of its location and was destroyed by USAF F-4s. LTC Spence put the crews in for impact awards and personally walked the award recommendations through the system. The impact award ceremony was held three days later and B Battery got its first Silver Stars and Distinguished Flying Crosses. A month later we had another one shot down on a CCN mission. This time the pilots weren't as lucky as the first shoot down. Both were med-evacuated to the States and one was ultimately medically discharged. CCN was the most popular mission among our pilots even though it was the most dangerous. We had very few restrictions on what we could shoot up and we did just that ranging from elephants and water buffalo to NVA troops in the open, antiaircraft guns, and large hooch complexes. CCN was personally gratifying to us all as the CCN folks were great to work with and took good care of us in return.

In early May 1969, C Battery was involved in a friendly fire incident with 3/187th Infantry killing three and wounding 33 American soldiers. A couple of weeks later 3/187th was the unit that really kicked off later became known as Hamburger Hill. C Battery was the primary battery that flew mission on Hamburger Hill, but B Battery flew a lot in support, too, including its first mission flown with protective masks on (due to the CS being dropped by CH-47s).

In September 1969, the intelligence folks at Division thought they had found a large concentration of NVA. They were picked up on a "Sniffer" mission. The G-2 guys told us that the area was a NVA R&R area. It was decided that we were going to conduct an artillery raid on the location. It was truly a thing of beauty. All 36 Cobras flew the mission with the Dragons (A/4/77) and Toros (B/4/77) lifting off from Camp Eagle and the Griffins (C/4/77) lifting off from Camp Evans. We rendezvoused at a point near the A Shau Valley and attacked in groups of 6 Cobras abreast in a spread formation. We expended everything on one pass. Our Cobras were primarily loaded with nails (flechette warheads) and 17 lb. HE. The results were mixed. The most popular version was that we had the largest monkey kill of the war. Others reported a huge NVA kill. Who knows what the real results were?

In October 1969, the monsoons arrived and we received 27 inches of rain in one day. Nothing was flying and we spent most of our time sandbagging the Bullpen to keep it from washing away. On October 4, we almost lost 3 Cobras and crews on an aborted CCN mission. A CCN team had been inserted west of the southern end of the A Shau Valley before the rains came. They called and wanted out. The weather was iffy, but we took our three most experienced aircraft commanders and launched a heavy section of three Cobras with the intent of lifting the 5-man CCN team out on the ammo doors because the lift ships would not try it. We ran into low ceilings and poor visibility and had to take all three Cobras into the clouds. We were extremely lucky as all three had different experiences but all three made it back to Camp Eagle safely. Two weeks later D/158 (Redskins) lost three Cobras and crews to weather trying to do just what we had done.

B Battery continued infusing its original pilots out and by early fall only had about 7 of the original Ft. Bragg Toros left. Another left in November to become Gunner 6 and then with two weeks to go until

the end of the tour B Battery lost its first pilot. CW2 Richard Pawlak, one of the maintenance warrants was killed in bad weather along with the rest of the crew and a group of enlisted personnel from C Battery taking off from Camp Evans. It was a sad time for the original Toros, as Dick was well liked.

A couple of weeks later the original Toros that had formed up at Ft. Bragg that were left in B Battery as well as those who were infused to other units in the 101st (A/477, C/477, and A/377) all proceeded to Cam Ranh Bay to catch the "Freedom Bird" back to the States. We had left a well-trained extremely lethal unit behind with a rich tradition and well-deserved reputation. Those of us who were Toros will always carry that experience as a badge of pride. It was easily the best unit many of us ever served in.

The original Toros that started out at Ft. Bragg, NC were five fewer when we came back to the States. While we only lost CW2 Dick Pawlak in the unit, the others were lost after being infused to other units. All were gun pilots. It's only fitting in a short history of the Toros that they be mentioned. They are: WO Lester Alan Hansen, 170th AHC, WO Nolan Eugene Black, 48th AHC, WO Owen Tetsumi Hirano, 118th AHC, and WO Martin D. Vanden Eykel II, 129th AHC.

159th midair with a FAC by Mike Maloy

It happened about 10:00 a.m. on Aug. 2. Clear skies and visibility unlimited. We had been making two-ship sorties to a firebase west of Chu Lai since dawn. Taking 105mm ammo in and hauling out an occasional wounded. We were getting shot at with 51cal on most trips in and out so we were making steep spiraling approaches from about 4500, drop our load and haul tail back out the same way.....steep spiraling ascent.....at max climb out.

Gene Collings and I led the flight of two the first four loads we took to the firebase that morning, then we swapped off and Al Vaquera and Tommy Dives in 513 led the trail formation. They dropped their load first and we were right behind them.....dropped our load and began the climb out. They were about 100 yards in front and above us climbing out in a steep left hand spiral. At about 3500 feet and from directly behind and below them I saw a puff of smoke and what looked like sticks flying away from 513. The sticks were the blades. My first thought was they had been hit by an SA-7 but then Gene said he saw the Air Force FAC just as they collided. I was almost certain it was a pusher-puller type.....thought that was an O-2 but maybe it is an OV-10. We followed 513 to the ground and I kept calling them on the radio but got no response. To this day I have no idea why I kept calling them.....but at the time it seemed like the right thing to do.....maybe just to say goodbye. 513 tumbled end over end after the blades came off. In the initial mid-air the Hook blades cut the FAC in half.....cut the pilot in half too.

513 hit the ground flat on the belly of the aircraft and the impact broke the cockpit off clean just behind the forward pylon and it bounced about 100 feet forward of the rest of the aircraft. The remainder of the chinook exploded on impact and was engulfed in flames. We landed as close as we could and my crew chief went over to check the cockpit. Both Al and Tommy were squished to about half normal size. We were in indian country so we took off and orbited until we could get some troops flown out to secure the area then we went back to Chu Lai where we were staying TDY.

Before we went to Vietnam I flew 513 most of the time and got to be good friends with Jim Stacy (crew chief). WO-1 Jerry Yost and I flew 513 from Ft. Sill to Calif. to ship it to Vietnam in November of 1968. Coming out of El Paso on the second day of the trip our internal fuel bladder came apart and flooded the inside of the aircraft with JP-4. We did a power on auto-rotation and landed safely and ran like hell. Got it all drained out and then discovered that in the excitement we had landed in Mexico. Oops. I gave Jim some stick time on that trip and he was doing good with flying. He wanted to go to flight school after his tour in VN.

Flight & Operational Aspects

Flying in I Corps was a demanding and unforgiving area of operations. Changing weather, low hanging clouds, lack of navigational aids

required that pilots be familiar with every square mile of the flying area. Most of the landing zones would only allow one ship to land at a time through triple canopy jungle. It was usually a vertical descent and ascent. Sometimes you would have to land to a hover and have the troops jump onto the ground. This type of flying demanded the closest crew coordination.

Whichever pilot was on the controls, the other pilot would monitor the engine instruments, radio calls, watch for obstacles and the enemy, and coordinate with the rest of the flight and gunships. The crewchief and doorgunner would tell the pilot that he was clear as well as fire their weapons if needed and watch for enemy activity and try to keep the troops informed as what the situation was. The pilot on the controls only listened to the crew, he had to have total concentration on getting the aircraft on the ground. The rest of the aircraft in the flight would space themselves to allow the aircraft in front enough time to go in and land and unload the troops and the take-off. This would be accomplished by doing S turns or orbiting over the LZ or returning to the pickup zone to get the next load. Flight lead would announce to the rest of the flight what kinds of conditions the landing zone was in as he ascended. Then you would go get the next sortie. Also the Cobras would be making their maneuvers, trying to protect everyone in the flight.

In 1969 you were issued a .38 caliber pistol with six rounds, a chest protector also known as a "chicken plate". The plate was made out of a ceramic material that was effective against small arms fire. We usually took out the back plate so we would have more plates for every crewmember. Plus the pilots were protected by the armored seat. It was made from ceramic material and could be effective against small arms hits. Most of the pilots procured an extra weapon such as a M-16 and extra ammunition. If you were shot down the extra armament could mean the difference between life and death. During the fall of 1969, we were issued pin gun flares. The US Air Force had survival radios but the Army didn't. Bob Andrews of the Redskins had a survival radio but left it on his bunk when he went to fly a mission. Bob crash landed in Laos wishing he had the radio. He made his way back to the A Shau Valley where he was picked up by a pink team from 2/17 Cav.

Sometimes the crews had to educate the ground force on how to use aircraft and aircraft procedures. One day CWO John Eaton and 1LT Gary Earls had a mission to pick up a battalion commander at a site south of Camp Eagle. The Colonel came out and sat down in the seat and the crewchief, Joe Woods, motioned for the Colonel to roll down his shirt sleeves. The Battalion Commander refused. Joe calmly said, "Mr. Eaton, the colonel refuses to roll down his sleeves." John turned as said, "Sir, roll down your sleeves." The colonel mumbled something about flying a lot without rolling down his sleeves. John, said, "Sir, I've been flying for a couple of years, and I still roll down my sleeves." The colonel looked at Earls for moral support. 1LT Earls said, "Sir, Mr. Eaton, is the aircraft commander and under AR 95-1 he is responsible for the safe operation of this aircraft and the final authority on whether it leaves the ground or not." The colonel rolled down his sleeves. He just didn't want to mess up his uniform.

The best ground unit to work with in 1969 was 3/187th Infantry Battalion. The S3 Air had come to the Phoenix pilots in the spring and asked them about aviation operations. He got a class on loads and weight and balance so when we did logistical missions for them, the first load was light and as your fuel load decreased, the amount that you had to carry increased. We could more for them in less time than the other two battalions in the Third Brigade.

As flight lead the job could be easy or hard depending on many factors. You were given the grid coordinates of the landing zone. Usually there had been an artillery preparation and many times the aerial rocket artillery (ARA) Cobras would circle the landing zone area. Fortunately there was an excellent working relationship between the Redskins and the Griffins (C/477) ARA lead would coordinate with Redskin lead on which part of the LZ to cover. The ARA would work the perimeter on the LZ and the Redskins would work the interior in case the LZ was booby-trapped. Or they would rotate depending on which ordnance was available. The ARA would make several runs to expend all of their rockets so the maximum amount firepower would be used on the landing zone. CONTINUED ON THE CD.