

SECTION IV – *Our Helicopter War* The 161st Assault Helicopter Company by Garland Lively and John Hastings

In keeping with the traditions set by past VHPA Directories, the Directory Committee presents a few pages to support the theme of this Directory – *Our Helicopter War* ~ a 501-page book prepared by VHPA Member Garland Lively and VHPA Subscriber John Hastings as a tribute to all who served in and around the 161st Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) and its 'descendants' ~ specifically Company A and the Aero Scout Company of the 123rd Aviation Battalion. Due to page limits, only a portion of this material is printed in the paper edition. The complete History Section of 500+ pages including pictures is on the membership directory web site at directory.vhpa.org.

After reviewing several early manuscripts of *Our Helicopter War* in 2020, Directory Committee had a 'meeting' with Garland Lively and John Hastings. The VHPA put forward the idea that the VHPA could help their effort by formatting their material, preparing a publication-ready set of PDFs, and 'featuring' it as the History Section of the 2021 Membership Directory. Garland and John 'took the deal' and immediately started organizing the 'final' version of all their material, etc. John started building a Microsoft Word document using the VHPA's formatting standards. Several months later he 'got 'er done' complete with a Table of Contents, imbedded photos with captions, indexes, etc. His effort 'saved' the VHPA Directory Committee several hundred hours! Even during the dark days of the Covid restrictions, Garland, and several close friends, selected H.V. Chapman & Sons of Abilene, Texas for the printing and binding of *Our Helicopter War*. The First Edition quickly sold out. It will not be sold on Amazon or in bookstores. It is only available via the 161AHC Association. Please contact John Hastings, 704 Rosewood Place, Aledo, Texas 76008 also john.hastings.839@gmail.com.

The Directory Committee believes that Garland's ideas contained in the Forward (First Edition) and then in the Introduction (Second Edition) summarize the collective effort it took to bring *Our Helicopter War* together for the general public as well as the VHPA Membership Directory readers. We especially applaud the mention of 161st and 123rd veterans Leslie "Les" Hines, Mark How, and James Mouw for their motivation and guidance. While Katherine "Kate" Hambright is not a veteran her contributions were HUGE! This History Section now includes The Introduction section followed by pages from the body of the book.

Our Helicopter War The 161st Assault Helicopter Company

Introduction

The Vietnam War has been sometimes referred to as "*The Helicopter War*." This is the story of "*Our Helicopter War*." It is an account of the young men who served in the 161st Assault Helicopter Company during the conflict in Vietnam. While the focus is on the air crews, they could not possibly have accomplished their mission without the support personnel of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company and its supporting detachments, the 406th Transportation Detachment, the 449th Signal Detachment, and the 434th Medical Detachment. It is also a detailed account of the 14th Combat Aviation Battalion and, the 174th Assault Helicopter Company, the 176th Assault Helicopter Company, and the 178th Assault Support Helicopter Company. Operations conducted by all the companies were closely entwined, and it appears to be near impossible to address the history of one, without mention of the others.

This effort began years ago when one of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company crew chiefs, John Harold Hastings, established a website. John contacted former members of the 161st and requested that they post their stories and photographs. The website was a tremendous success, and soon there were numerous personal accounts posted, as well as hundreds of photographs.

Another crew chief, Leslie "Les" Hines, Americal Division Historian, began extensive research on Task Force Oregon and the Americal Division, headquartered at the Chu Lai Combat Base. Les accumulated a wealth of official documentation, maps, etc., and made them available to interested individuals.

Like many others, I had previously contributed several articles and photographs to John Hastings' website. John and I had discussed the feasibility of compiling all his various articles into a manuscript, but neither of us ever seemed to find the time or motivation to get started. In the fall of 2018, my best friend, Les Crowl, a Vietnam Marine Veteran from VFW Post 2148 in Waco, Texas, died suddenly. Les' death was all the motivation I needed to begin this effort, while some of us were still alive.

After contacting John Hastings, he provided me all the first-hand accounts he had on his website. John had a roster of former members, and we established an email list, to broadcast our intentions to all members. The response was overwhelming, as a deluge of new stories began flooding in, John's list of members expanded rapidly,

as the word spread around the internet. We managed to establish contact with individuals I had not seen or heard of in over fifty years. When Les Hines was notified, he began to provide us with official documentation and maps. I contacted my good friend and colleague, Katherine "Kate" Hambright, from the Hill County, Texas Historical Commission, and requested her assistance in locating additional documentation and to conduct the editing process. We then commenced the process of compiling all the first-hand accounts, supported by Les Hines' and Kate's documentation.

Although I, Garland Lively, am listed as such, there is no author of this document. It was written by the members of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company, affiliated units, and Special Forces MACV SOG personnel. It was written by these individuals for their fellow members of these organizations. I merely served as the "Chief Scribe."

We were all just a bunch of twenty something kids (mostly WO1s and SP4s) and knew little or nothing about the grand plans of the military forces we supported. As someone stated, we merely hauled stuff or people from here to there. For this manuscript, we devoted a great deal of effort to reviewing official documentation to define the environment that our first-hand accounts were based upon. Les Hines and Kate Hambright both deserve a great deal of credit for obtaining the official documentation. I am extremely grateful for their major contributions. I cannot possibly credit all who contributed to this group effort. In our narrative, I tried to credit everyone as best I could.

It was soon discovered that we were seriously hindered by the passage of over fifty years since the actual events occurred. We could all agree that a major event occurred, but details were often obscured by our failing memories. Being the self-appointed "Chief Scribe," and frequently lacking proper documentation, I sometimes had to select what I considered to be the best version of several alternatives.

An extraordinary effort was spent on our three chapters about our aviation support of MACV SOG Operations. These operations certainly left a permanent impression upon our souls and was well worth every minute expended upon it. Fortunately, David Sebright, and several other members of the 176th Assault Helicopter Company, assisted us in defining their support of MACV SOG Missions. We could not have possibly completed this segment without the support of former Special Forces members Harlan E. "Rip" Van Winkle, Stephen T. "Tim" Kirk, and Robert C. "Bob" Green, of MACV SOG. Our three MACV SOG chapters are primarily their story.

Early on a decision was made to self-publish our manuscript rather than submit it to an established publishing company. Other published authors strongly recommended that we establish a Limited Liability Company (LLC) to publish and distribute our book. Mark How and his Legal Assistant, Jenna Flores, provided pro bono legal assistance from Mark's Dallas, Texas, based law firm (How Frels & Duke), to John Hastings. With Mark and Jenna's legal assistance, John established 161AHC Association, LLC, as a Texas Limited Liability Company. John and I were appointed as managers.

Although I am listed as such, there is no author of this document. It was written by the members of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company, affiliated units, and Special Forces MACV SOG personnel. It was written by these individuals for their fellow members of these organizations. I merely served as the "Chief Scribe." John Hastings was designated as co-author for his constant support. He worked tirelessly to conduct a final edit and format our manuscript for publication.

I cannot possibly credit all who contributed to this group effort. In our narrative, I tried to credit everyone as best I could. Thus, the story of "Our Helicopter War" has evolved. It would certainly never be accepted as a proper historical document. It was never intended to be. It was written as a labor of love by helicopter crew members, for helicopter crew members.

An Old Scorpion, *Garland R. Lively*

A New Phase of Conflict

The United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) was a joint service command of the United States Department of Defense. MACV was established on 8 February 1962, with its headquarters in Saigon, Republic of Vietnam. It was created in response to the increase in United States military assistance to South Viet Nam. MACV was a subordinate command of the Pacific Command in Hawaii, a joint service command, directly under the control of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with responsibility for the Pacific Theater of Operations. The first commander of MACV was General (GEN) Paul D. Harkins. In January 1964, Lieutenant General (LTG) William Childs Westmoreland was appointed as the Deputy Commander of MACV. On 20 June 1964, LTG

Westmoreland was promoted to General and appointed as the commander of MACV.

During 1964, the United States considered sending combat soldiers to Vietnam to protect key United States installations. In August 1964, North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked United States destroyers *USS Turner Joy* (DD 951) and *USS Maddox* (DD 731). On 7 August 1964, the United States Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that authorized President of the United States, Lyndon Baines Johnson, "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States."

In a document entitled "HQ USMACV COMMAND HISTORY, 1965" dated 20 April 1966, GEN Westmoreland submitted his summary of the major events that occurred in the Republic of Vietnam during

the year 1965. GEN Westmoreland stated that when the year began the Viet Cong were winning the war. Viet Cong recruitment and North Vietnamese infiltration were on the rise. Viet Cong units were being equipped and trained by the North Vietnamese and supplemented by regular North Vietnamese Army units. The United States Military commitment consisted mainly of an advisory role, supporting the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). United States Military personnel consisted of only 15,000 individuals.

MACV subdivided the Republic of Vietnam into four separate tactical zones of responsibility that corresponded to the areas of responsibility of the four existing South Vietnamese Army Corps. I Corps (Eye Corps) was the northernmost of the Corps areas and extended from the Demilitarized Zone in Quang Tri Province to Quang Ngai Province in the south. II Corps was the largest of the Corps areas and extended from the Binh Dinh Province in the north to the Binh Thuan Province in the south and included the vast Central Highlands. III Corps included the area around Saigon, which was designated as the Capital Tactical Zone. IV Corps was the area south of the Mekong River known as the Mekong Delta.

Viet Cong activity, supported by the North Vietnamese, in the II Corps Tactical Zone increased dramatically during the period from 28 December 1964 to February 1965. The plan of the North Vietnamese Army was to isolate the Central Highlands from the remainder of the Republic of Vietnam, split South Vietnam into two sections, and seize control of the northern provinces. The North Vietnamese had dramatically improved their infiltration route into South Vietnam over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In February 1965, the Viet Cong seized control of the Mang Yang Pass (An Khe Pass) in the Phu Cat Mountains, west of Qui Nhon, and severed the vital supply artery of Highway 19. All United States sponsored civilian family members were evacuated from South Vietnam in February 1965.

MACV Contingency Plan 32-64 had been previously established to deploy the III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) to Da Nang in the I Corps Combat Tactical Zone to protect the airbase and block North Vietnamese infiltration. The III MEF consisted of the Third Marine Division in Okinawa, commanded by Major General (MG) William R. Collins, and the First Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW). The First MAW had squadrons at Iwakuni, Japan and Okinawa and was commanded by MG Paul J. Fontana. On 22 January 1965, Brigadier General (BG) Frederick J. Karch assumed command of the Ninth Marine Expeditionary Brigade. The Brigade consisted of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment and the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment. BG Karch's command had embarked on Seventh Fleet's Task Force 76 since he assumed command and were positioned in the South China Sea, seventy miles southeast of Saigon.

On 7 February 1965, the Viet Cong attacked the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion's airfield at Camp Holloway, near Pleiku in the central highlands. A mortar barrage on the United States advisor's quarters and the airfield killed nine Americans, wounded 128, and damaged or destroyed 122 aircraft. After another attack on Qui

Nhon on 11 February 1965, GEN Westmoreland forwarded a request to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 22 February 1965, through PACOM Headquarters, requesting that two battalions of Marines be landed at Da Nang, while a third battalion remained off shore in reserve.

On 27 February 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) approved the deployment of the Ninth Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) from Okinawa to Da Nang, in accordance with Contingency Plan 32 - 64, to protect the Air Force Base and Naval port facilities. The Third Battalion of the Ninth Marine Expeditionary Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Charles E. MacPartlin Jr., landed without incident on Red Beach at Da Nang on 8 March 1965. This action reflects the first deployment of combat forces to Vietnam. An additional 5,000 Marines of the Ninth Marine Expeditionary Brigade were landed at Da Nang, bringing the total strength to 8,767, and offensive operations were commenced.

GEN Westmoreland, however, did not believe that the Marine strength at Da Nang was sufficient to secure both Da Nang and Chu Lai. On 20 April 1965, a high-level conference was conducted at the Pacific Command Headquarters in Honolulu, Hawaii. The conference was attended by Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara; his assistant, John McNaughton; General William Childs Westmoreland; and Admiral (ADM) Ulysses S. Grant Sharp Jr., Commander in Chief, Pacific Command. GEN Westmoreland requested that an additional Marine Regiment be deployed to Chu Lai. The conferees reached an agreement and recommended 42,000 United States servicemen, including 5,000 more Marines for Chu Lai, be deployed to Vietnam. On 1 May 1965, GEN Westmoreland was informed that his request for additional forces and the Marines for I Corps Tactical Zone had been approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the fall of 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the construction of two new airfields at Da Nang and Chu Lai to support the deployment of additional Marine Corps forces to Viet Nam.

"Chu Lai" does not have its origins in the Vietnamese language. LTG Victor Harold Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, selected a site for the new base on an inspection tour in 1964. As the locale he selected is cluttered with small hamlets, and not named on map sheets, LTG Krulak designated the area Chu Lai, the Mandarin Chinese equivalent of his surname. On 30 March 1965, Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, approved the construction of the Chu Lai Airstrip. Although several thousand Marines were scheduled to land at Chu Lai and construct an airfield, no arrangements had been made to obtain the property rights to Chu Lai. GEN Westmoreland dispatched an Engineer and a Finance Officer from his staff to Chu Lai to resolve the property issue. The two officers inspected the area with Vietnamese provincial officials and paid 1,800 landowners \$620,000 worth of Vietnamese piasters for twenty-four square kilometers of land on which the Chu Lai Combat Base was constructed. Negotiations were concluded ten days prior to the arrival of the Marines.

On 25 April 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson approved the deployment of Colonel (COL) Edward P. Dupras' Third Marine Expeditionary Brigade to Chu Lai. The Second ARVN Infantry Division and a company of Marines from Da Nang secured the area for the landing. On 7 May 1965, three battalions of Marines landed at Chu Lai at 05:00 AM on 7 May 1965. All elements of the Marine Corps Regiment were landed by 07:00 PM that evening. Work on the Marine Short Air Tactical Strip commenced immediately and by 28 May 1967, the Douglas A-4E Skyhawk fighter squadrons of Marine Air Group (MAG) 12 arrived to provide close air support.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that the term Marine Expeditionary Force was not politically acceptable to the South Vietnamese Government and directed that the III MEF be changed to III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF). On 6 May 1965, MG William R. Collins was designated as the first commander of III MAF, in Da Nang. On 4 June 1965, MG Lewis W. Walt replaced MG Collins as commander of III MAF. At the time there were 16,500 Marines in the I Corps Tactical Zone located at Da Nang, Phu Bai and Chu Lai.

On 7 June 1965, GEN Westmoreland requested that the two remaining Battalion Landing Teams of the 3rd Marine Division on Okinawa be deployed to Vietnam, increasing the strength of III MAF by an additional 8,000 Marines, for a total strength of 24,500. In addition to the 8,000 Marines, GEN Westmoreland requested another Marine Regiment be deployed to I Corps. On 14 August 1965, the 7th Marine Regiment arrived in Vietnam, increasing the total Marine Corps strength to 38,000. By the end of 1965, Marine strength had increased to 40,000.

On 11 February 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that Secretary of Defense McNamara deploy a Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division to Thailand and the 173rd Airborne be deployed to Vietnam. On 21 March 1965 GEN Westmoreland, with the concurrence of ADM Ulysses S. Grant Sharp Jr., forwarded a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he had formulated a plan for the employment of the new 11th Air Assault Division (later designated the First Cavalry Division) in the Central Highlands along the Qui Nhon, An Khe, and the Pleiku axis of Highway 19.

During a period from 8 April 1965 to 10 April 1965, ADM Sharp hosted a conference at his Pacific Command Headquarters in Hawaii, that was attended by GEN Westmoreland and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Earle Wheeler. ADM Sharp recommended that a United States Army Division be deployed to the Central Highlands as soon as logistically feasible. He also recommended the deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade from Okinawa to the Bien Hoa – Vung Tau area as soon as possible. The 173rd Airborne Brigade constituted ADM Sharp's strategic Pacific Command Reserve, and he requested that it be replaced by another Brigade as soon as possible. GEN Westmoreland requested that another airborne Brigade replace the 173rd. In June 1965, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Wheeler, designated the First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division as the replacement Brigade. The

Hawaii Conference of April 1965 also defined a separate Brigade to secure the enclave area of a Qui Nhon, Nha Trang and Cam Rahn Bay triangle to protect logistical bases along Highway 1.

Secretary of Defense McNamara, Ambassador to Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, ADM Sharp, and GEN Westmoreland attended a subsequent conference. A decision was made to deploy the 173rd Airborne Brigade to Bien Hoa – Vung Tau by 15 June 1965. A corresponding increase of logistical units and personnel were scheduled to support the buildup of combat forces. During the same conference, it was decided that the 11th Air Assault Division would be deployed to the Central Highlands by 1 August 1965. The main body of the 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in Viet Nam on 5 May 1965, representing the first United States Army combat force in Vietnam.

The First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, commanded by BG Willard Pearson, arrived at Cam Ranh Bay on 29 July 1965. The First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division was scheduled to relieve the 173rd Airborne Brigade, but on 2 August 1965, GEN Westmoreland was authorized to retain the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam. The First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division was deployed to Qui Nhon in the Binh Dinh Province of the II Corps Tactical Zone. The 11th Air Assault Division (First Cavalry Division), commanded by MG John Norton, was deployed to An Khe in the central highlands of the II Corps Tactical Zone on 12 September 1965. On 29 December 1965, BG Glenn B. Walker's Third Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division was flown directly from Hawaii to Camp Holloway at Pleiku in the central highlands of the II Corps Tactical Zone.

Prior to the 1965 increase in armed forces, helicopter assets in Vietnam were limited to a few helicopter companies. The United States Army deployed the 8th and 57th Transportation Companies, equipped with Piasecki CH-21C Shawnee tandem rotor helicopters, to Vietnam in 1961. A United States Marine Corps Sikorsky UH-34 Seahorse Squadron deployed in April 1962. By 1964 two additional helicopter companies had been deployed to Vietnam, equipped with Bell UH-1A and UH-1B Huey helicopters. The CH-21 Shawnees were phased out and replaced with Huey's during 1964.

During briefings conducted with the Chief of Staff United States Army, GEN Harold Keith Johnson, on 7 March 1965, GEN Westmoreland conveyed a request for three additional Assault Helicopter Companies in the Republic of Vietnam. Shortly after GEN Johnson returned to the Pentagon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved GEN Westmoreland's request and they issued a directive to the Third United States Army to create the three new helicopter companies. On 27 June 1965, GEN Westmoreland expressed a need for a total of thirteen new airmobile aviation companies to support the aviation requirements for the additional combat units scheduled to arrive in Vietnam. Secretary of Defense McNamara visited GEN Westmoreland's Headquarters on 16 July 1965. During his visit, GEN Westmoreland stated a requirement for forty-four additional combat battalions. He also asserted a

requirement for twenty helicopter companies, seven Marine helicopter squadrons, and three new helicopter battalions, some of which were already in Vietnam. However, twelve new helicopter companies were required in Vietnam. In early August 1965, another conference with Robert S. McNamara was conducted in the Pacific Command's Headquarters in Hawaii. An additional seventeen helicopter companies had either been approved or were in transit to Vietnam and included thirteen Bell UH-1 Huey helicopter companies and four CH-47 Chinook helicopter companies. The additional helicopter companies were scheduled to arrive in Vietnam between 16 November 1965 and 1 October 1966.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff added a Medium Helicopter Company to GEN Westmoreland's original request on 7 March 1965, for three new helicopter companies. The Third United States Army, at Fort McPherson, Georgia, was directed to establish, equip, and train four new helicopter companies for deployment to the Binh Dinh Province of the II Corps Tactical Zone in the central region of the Republic of Vietnam. Three of the companies were to be Air Mobile Light Aviation Companies equipped with Bell UH-1 Iroquois (Huey) helicopters. The fourth company was to be a Medium Helicopter Aviation Company, equipped with Boeing CH-47 Chinook Helicopters. The new aviation companies were being established to enable Korean and ARVN Army forces to conduct airmobile operations to protect the southeastern flank of the First Cavalry Division to be deployed in the Central Highlands of the II Corps Tactical Zone. Consequently, the Third United States Army issued orders to the United States Infantry Center at Fort Benning, Georgia to organize and train the three new companies. The 10th Aviation Battalion was established at Fort Benning to provide administration, logistics, and training for the four new aviation companies in accordance with Third United States Army General Order Number 264.

161st AHC Organization

The Medium Helicopter Company was designated as the 179th Medium Helicopter Company. The three Huey Companies were designated as the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company, the 170th Airmobile Light Aviation Company and the 174th Airmobile Light Aviation Company. All three of these three "Sister" Huey companies were organized under the provisions of Military Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) 1-77E. All three "Sister" companies were authorized three flight platoons with eight aircraft each; a service platoon (organizational maintenance); a direct support maintenance detachment; a signal detachment; and a medical detachment. There was also the company headquarters that provided the administrative functions. The only exception to the standard MTOE was the 174th Airmobile Light Aviation Company. Its third flight platoon was issued new Bell UH-1C Huey Helicopters fresh off the Bell Helicopter assembly line. All three companies received new Bell UH-1D Huey Helicopters. The third flight platoons of both the 161st and the 170th Airmobile Light Aviation Companies were provided older Bell UH-1B Huey Gunships, obtained from other aviation companies.

The 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company was organized on 25 August 1965 at Fort Benning, Georgia and activated on 1 September 1965 in accordance with Third United States Army General Order Number 264. The company was activated at zero strength and equipment for deployment to the Republic of South Vietnam with Major (MAJ) Michael R. "Mike" Thomas, a Transportation Corps Officer, appointed as the first commander on 1 September 1965. Donald S. Rupert was assigned to the company as First Sergeant (1SG). Personnel and equipment from other Army installations were transferred to Fort Benning, Georgia during the months of September and October 1965 to bring the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company to full Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) strength prior to 28 November 1965. On 21 October 1965, MAJ Thomas completed a roster of the personnel of the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company. The roster listed 173 assigned individuals:

- twelve O-4 Majors
- twenty-four O-3 Captains (CPT)
- Eight O-2 First Lieutenants (1LT)
- ten CW2 Warrant Officers
- one WO1 Warrant Officer
- three E-7 Sergeants First Class (SFC)
- six E-6 Staff Sergeants (SSG)
- one E-6 Specialist Six (SP6)
- three E-5 Sergeants (SGT)
- eleven E-5 Specialist Fives (SP5)
- ten E-4 Specialist Fours (SP4)
- (23) E-3 Privates First Class (PFC)
- (38) E-2 and E-1 Privates (PVT) (See Appendix One).

At the time, there was a shortage of rotary wing aviator captains in the United States Army. In October 1965, there were twenty-three majors assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia. Most all these field grade aviators were assigned to company grade (captain) positions in the 161st and 170th Airmobile Light Aviation Companies. The two most senior majors were designated as commanders, while the remaining majors were assigned to captain positions as platoon leaders, etc. MAJ Davey Stanley was assigned to Fort Benning as the commander of the Third Flight Platoon of the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company to organize the gunship platoon. SSG Santos was designated as MAJ Stanley's platoon sergeant. The gunships were given the name of Scorpions, and MAJ Stanley's wife drew the scorpion emblem that was painted on the aircraft. There were several majors in the company assigned to positions normally held by captains. Retired COL Stanley stated the following: *"The pilots were mostly too senior for the jobs we held, but in those days if you could fly a helicopter, you went to Nam."*

The 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company was attached to the 10th Aviation Battalion at Fort Benning for training, administration, and logistical support. Among the original commissioned officers of the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company were thirteen of the twenty-three majors assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia:

- MAJ Michael Thomas Commander
- MAJ James N. Hembree Commander
- MAJ Davey Stanley, Third Flight Platoon
- MAJ Frank H. Miller, First Flight Platoon
- MAJ Russell L. Meeks Commander 406th Transportation Detachment
- MAJ Lee D. Ellis Jr
- MAJ Nick J. Basic
- MAJ Bradley R. Harris
- MAJ Thomas A. Ingram
- MAJ John C. Thorpe
- MAJ William B. Wash
- MAJ Donald B. Stewart
- MAJ Richard K. "Dick" Dietsch, Third Flight Platoon Commander, after MAJ Stanley became Operations Officer.
- The remaining ten majors at Fort Benning were likely assigned to the 170th Airmobile Light Aviation Company.

Among the original company grade officers in the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company were:

- CPT Robert D. Arrington, Second Flight Platoon
- CPT David E. Baeb, Scorpion pilot
- CPT Donald Ray Bryant, Scorpion pilot
- CPT Murray Parker, Aviation Maintenance Officer
- CPT Langley Jerry "Lang" Chavis, Second Flight Platoon
- CPT Jerry W McNabb, Scorpion pilot
- CPT Arthur P. Wright, Scorpion Pilot
- CPT Gerald L. Zeigler
- CPT Robert F. Forsyth
- CPT James L. Bomkamp
- CPT William E. Calvert
- CPT David R. Drake
- CPT Victor M. Hernandez; Jr.
- CPT Homer P. Holman
- CPT Ralph W. Johnson
- CPT Richard I. Lewis
- CPT Gary G. Lobin
- CPT Orin D. Plooster
- CPT Joseph L. Schmitt
- CPT John J. Shine
- CPT John D. Lacourse, Assistant Operations Officer
- 1LT Tilmon James "Jim" Reeves
- 1LT Walter R. Shafer
- 1LT Frank H. Gager
- 1LT Wayne Cone.

CPT Langley J. Chavis was an African American officer (now deceased) who returned to Vietnam for his second tour as a Major in 1969 and was placed in command of Company A of the 123rd Aviation Company of the Americal Division. Company A was established from the 161st Assault Helicopter Company in December 1967. Retired Colonel Davey Stanley referred to CPT Chavis as "*One of the best slick pilots in the country.*"

Warrant Officers included: Marvin H. "Mike" Arthur,

Melvin Breeden, Vladimir R. Broz, Larry P. Lawson, James E. Matthews, Robert E. McAfee, William M. Parker, Ben Westmoreland, Robert L. Williams, Billy Wood, and Perry T. Yowell. Officers of unknown rank include James "Jim" Stotler and Cecil Dale Thomas. Identification of officers is based upon information provided by retired COL Davey Stanley and a roster of former members of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company developed and maintained by webmaster, John Harold Hastings. There are far too many enlisted personnel to attempt to list, but information on them and the officers are all included in John H. Hastings' roster, attached as Appendix Two.

After completion of the training, all company personnel were granted a fifteen-day Pre-Overseas Movement leave. The Atlanta Army Depot issued the aircraft to the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company. The 406th Transportation Detachment and the 449th Signal Detachment, which were attached to the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company, were both organized at Atlanta Army Depot. CPT Murray Parker was the Aviation Maintenance Officer. The 449th Signal Detachment (Avionics Repair) was organized and trained by WO1 Porter. WO1 Porter did not deploy to Vietnam with the detachment. SSG Richard Anderson was designated as the NCOIC of the avionics repair detachment and deployed to Vietnam with Avionics Technicians SP5 Stan Allen, SP4 Stephen Wall, PFC Hal Forward and PFC Lawrence Taber.

161st AHC Deployment

Upon returning to Fort Benning, Georgia after their leave, all TOE equipment was transported to Savannah, Georgia for shipment by sea to the seaport in Qui Nhon, Republic of Vietnam. Unit personnel flew from Fort Benning to the Sharpe Army Depot at Lathrop, California in United States Air Force aircraft. An advance ten-man party led by MAJ Russell L. Meeks, Commander of the 406th Transportation Detachment, set sail on the *Private Joseph F. Merrell* (AK-225), a World War II victory ship operated by the Merchant Marines. Other known members of the advance team were CW2 Melvin F. Breeden, an aircraft maintenance officer, and an enlisted man by the name of Leonard Joe Eversole. The remainder of the 161st embarked on the troop ship USNS *General John Pope* (T-AP-110), a Navy transport ship operated by merchant marines of the Military Sea Transportation Service and arrived at Qui Nhon on 21 December 1965. Their aircraft was shipped on the WWII Escort Carrier *USS Point Cruz* (CVE-119, commissioned 16 October 1945), and arrived the following day, 22 December 1965.

After their arrival at the port in Qui Nhon on 21 December 1965, the personnel of the 161st Airmobile Light Helicopter Company conducted a one-hour bus ride from Qui Nhon and arrived at their new home in the Phu Tai Valley, also known as the An Son Valley, in the Binh Dinh Province of the Republic of Vietnam. MAJ Eugene P. Tanner describes the establishment of the base camp of the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company from his account of their arrival written on 1 February 1967:

On 21 December 1965 [Monsoon Season], the ship

arrived at Qui Nhon, and after a one-hour bus ride, the main body arrived at the An Son Valley. There, they discovered a scrub covered hill, covered with mud that was to be "home" for the next 11 months [for MAJ Eugene P. Tanner]. "Hex" tents [Squad Tents] had been set up, but with the rain and mud, dry clothes and feet were considered a luxury.

Immediately, permanent structures were planned, but due to a lack of engineer support, materials had to be "locally procured" and work had to be done by the men themselves. Officers and EM undertook the task of clearing the hill for living quarters, and materials were gathered from various sources.

With Christmas approaching, morale was extremely low. Due to the efforts of Captain Robert Arrington, the Mess Officer, the mess hall was partially completed, and pieces of lumber were "scrounged" so that a "sit down" Christmas Dinner was available on Christmas Day. Mess personnel worked long hours, and their efforts renewed high morale and the desire to improve the area.

The goal was "every man out of a tent and into a building ASAP!" Soon the goal was attained, and the unit changed its immediate efforts to becoming operational. Aircraft arrived and were quickly made airworthy after the long journey from the States by aircraft carrier. By late January, the 161st was able to notify the 52nd Battalion in Pleiku that it was operational and ready to accept missions.

The 170th Airmobile Light Aviation Company was also organized on the same (MTOE) 1-77E at Fort Benning, Georgia. It followed the same timeline as the 161st and even deployed to Vietnam on the same troop ship and aircraft carrier. After arrival in Vietnam, 170th Airmobile Light Aviation Company proceeded up Highway 19 to Camp Holloway and established their headquarters near the 119th Assault Helicopter Company. On January 10, 1966, the 170th Airmobile Light Aviation Company was designated the 170th Assault Helicopter Company and assigned to the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion, the famed "Flying Dragons."

The 179th Medium Helicopter Aviation Company was organized and activated at Fort Benning, Georgia on 15 December 1965 in accordance with Third United States Army General Order Number 389, dated 2 December 1965. MAJ Turner J. Trapp was designated as the first commanding officer. During the month of January 1966, all aviators of the company were assigned to temporary duty at the United States Army's Primary Helicopter Training School at Fort Rucker (Mother Rucker), Alabama to attend the ground school for the CH-47A Chinook Transition Course. The enlisted crewmembers and maintenance personnel also attended a twelve-week course on the CH-47A Chinooks at Fort Rucker, Alabama. When the flight crews returned to Fort Benning, the 177th Medium Helicopter Aviation Company conducted CH-47A transition training for the aircrews of the 179th Medium Helicopter Aviation Company during the month of February 1966. By 3 April 1966, the 179th Medium Helicopter Aviation Company was fully organized and trained. On 3 April 1966, the company participated in a three-day field exercise at Eufaula, Alabama.

On 28 April 1966, the 179th Medium Helicopter Aviation Company began to ferry their Chinooks to the Sharpe Army Depot, operated by the Army Supply and Maintenance Command in Lathrop, San Joaquin County, California. The technicians at Sharpe Army Depot prepared the helicopters for overseas shipment. By 13 May 1966, the last of the company's Chinooks had been ferried to Sharpe Army Depot. On 15 May 1966, all TOE company equipment was transported to Savannah Port at Savannah, Georgia, where it was loaded onto ships for shipment to the Republic of Vietnam. An advance party departed Fort Benning, Georgia on 13 June 1966 in an airplane and arrived at Dong Ba Thin, Dinh Binh Province of the Republic of Vietnam, on 17 June 1966. The main party of the 179th Medium Helicopter Aviation Company departed the United States via naval vessels on 6 June 1966 and arrived at Dong Ba Thin on 17 June 1966. Sharpe Army Depot technicians loaded the sixteen CH-47A Chinooks of the company onto the Navy Escort Aircraft Carrier *USS Point Cruz* which departed on 22 June 1966 for the port of Qui Nhon in the Republic of Vietnam.

On 28 July 1966, the CH-47A Chinooks arrived on the Escort Aircraft Carrier *USS Point Cruz* at Dong Ba Thin. On 1 August 1966, the TOE equipment arrived at the Port of Qui Nhon. Upon its arrival in Vietnam the 179th Medium Helicopter Company was assigned to the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion and was designated the 179th Assault Support Helicopter Company and relocated to Camp Holloway by 10 August 1966. On 25 August 1966, the 179th Assault Support Helicopter Company began flying missions supporting the Korean Capital Infantry Division, the Korean 9th "White Horse" Division, and the 22nd ARVN Division. During the month of August 1966, the 179th Assault Support Helicopter Company carried 3,351 passengers, 1,288.4 tons of cargo, flew 667 missions consisting of 939 sorties, and recovered four downed aircraft, while logging 473 hours and 35 minutes of flight time. Unit aviators and crewmembers earned 82 Air Medals during the month of August 1966. SP4 Don W. Hopps was one of the original members of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company. SP4 Hopps and SSG Santos were two of seven individuals selected by MAJ Stanley to accompany the aircraft on board the Escort Aircraft Carrier *USS Point Cruz*.

On 7 April 2016, SP4 Hopps wrote a memoir of his experiences in Vietnam. Below is an excerpt describing his trip to Qui Nhon:

One day Major Stanley came in and said he had volunteered for the movement to go to Vietnam and I asked him if I could go and be his crew chief, he asked how much training have you had and, said that I had just finished training the month before, and he said ok. That's when the adventure began, I met up with Vern my buddy who knew everything about helicopters and asked him if he would teach me some things I need to know about the chopper, of course he said yes, but before we could get together he was sent with the troop carriers out of San Francisco and I was sent with the equipment on a merchant marine ship out of Oakland, CA. There were 7 of us assigned to guard the equipment on the ship while it was on its way to

Vietnam.

We stopped in Hawaii for fuel or something and I called my aunt Judy, she came to the ship and picked me up and we spent the day together, she showed me all around the island, remembering I had went to high school there in Kailua in 1960. We then arrived in Guam, we stopped there to refuel and water, I spent the day looking around the island and drinking beer. We left Guam and headed for Vietnam, we arrived just before Christmas and anchored in the mouth of the Mekong Delta just outside Saigon harbor. There were dozens of ships waiting to take cargo up to Saigon, we set there for three weeks. While there I got my first taste of war, we would see and hear the bombers dropping bombs inland and could see the concussions of the bombs, later we would see bodies floating down the river and into the bay. I counted at least twenty bodies floating by one evening.

I finally got a ride to shore and was taken to the airfield in Saigon, there by chance I saw three of our helicopters on the flight line, I ran over to see Major Stanley and he said "Where have you been?" "We have been here three weeks looking for you. I got aboard and we flew to our new home in the jungle, called Camp Lane. Our camp was outside of a town called Qui Nhon about a hundred miles north of Saigon on the coast.

161st AHC Vietnam Arrival

Upon the arrival of the 161st Airmobile Light Aviation Company at the port in Qui Nhon, approximately 227 miles north of Saigon, on 21 December 1965, the company was attached to the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion, located at Camp Holloway. The company was re-designated the 161st Assault Helicopter Company. Their base camp was established on a hill in the Phu Tai Valley near the village of An Son, about twelve miles west of Qui Nhon. The camp was located southwest of the intersection of Highway 1 and Highway 19, which connected Qui Nhon to An Khe in the central highlands. Construction of the base camp was conducted by unit personnel, local Vietnamese labor, and the 70th Engineer Battalion from An Khe. SP5 Richard "Rick" Davis (Retired First Sergeant), crew chief of Scorpion 734, made the following statements:

I am proud to say that I was one of the original members that went the Fort Benning route via Troop ship from San Francisco to Qui Nhon. Sp5 at arrival. Left there SSG. Scorpion 734 with Craig Chandler. Don Hopps and Vern Goslin. If my memory serves me Major Thomas was senior officer on troop ship, USS John Pope. We complained about the food being on the raw side. Major Thomas took our complaints to the cook and he came after Thomas with a large kitchen knife.

I was the crew chief on Scorp 734 as a spec5. 734 was armed with 2 pods of 24 rockets. M60 for me and my gunner Craig SP4Chndler. These were B models and when it got hot, they were reluctant to fly. We had a PSP runway and Craig and I would run alongside 734 and as it picked up forward speed, we would hop in. Usually did the trick. I was a speck 5 until 2 days prior

to going home was promoted to SSG. If I think of more stories, I will send them. I remember Vern Goslin was a crew chief. SP4. I do not remember if he was a slick or not. Our platoon sergeant last name was Townsend [SSG Raymond W. Townsend].

The 70th Engineer Battalion ("Kodiaks") graded the hill top into three separate level tiers, with the company orderly room, operations, mess hall, supply, etc., located on the first terrace at the northern side of the maintenance facilities and the flight line. Enlisted quarters were located on the second terrace. The officers' club and officers' quarters were located on the third terrace at the top of the hill. The security force provided by the Korean Capital Division (Tiger ROK Division) was located on a nearby hilltop. After the terraces were graded level, trenches were dug, and drainage pipes installed. Construction of the quarters was begun by laying out the foundations and tamping down layers of crushed stone. Concrete foundations were poured onto the crushed stone base. Joists were completed and plywood hooches with sheet metal roofs constructed by the occupants. Each officer's hooch was designed to accommodate four officers, with each occupant having a private walled in cubical. A community area was established in the center with a sink and a shower. The hooches were all air conditioned and were really plush for a combat area. The enlisted personnel had decent quarters, but they were far from being as luxurious as the officers' quarters. All were far better than the tents the 161st had previously occupied.

The heliport, first known as An Son Heliport, was later named Lane Army Heliport after CW2 Robert Carl Lane, a Sky Crane pilot who had been killed on 5 January 1966 in the An Sou Valley. CW2 Lane was born on 16 November 1930 in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. His service number was W3150729 and he was assigned to the 478th Heavy Lift Helicopter Company of the First Cavalry Division at An Khe, Vietnam. CW2 Lane was killed on 5 January 1966 while flying a sling load of 155mm howitzer ammunition on a resupply mission to an artillery firebase in a CH-54A Sikorsky Sky Crane, tail number 64-14204. Completing the resupply mission, the aircraft was returning to the An Khe Airfield. Since this was the first time they had flown with a sling load that included a net with a canvas bottom, the crew tried an experiment. They let out all one hundred feet of cable from the belly mounted winch with the cargo net dangling from the hook. Either the cable or the cargo net tangled in the tail rotor and whipped into the main rotor blades. One main rotor blade came off and went through the cabin. The aircraft disintegrated, crashed, and everyone on board was killed. This was the first CH-54A aircraft loss and crewmember fatalities in the Republic of Vietnam. The 478th Heavy Lift Aviation Company had only four CH-54A aircraft. The loss of 64-14204 significantly impacted their operational status. The four additional crewmembers killed on board the aircraft included CW3 Alton Louis Gajan, aircraft commander; SP5 Joseph Edward Hetzer Jr., flight engineer; SP4 Lionel John Jr., crew chief; and SP5 Carver Joseph Jr.

Lane Army Heliport, or An Son Airfield, was located in

the Binh Dinh Province of the northern area of the II Corps (Quan Doan Corps) Tactical Zone, also known as Military Region 2 (MR2). The Second South Vietnamese Army Corps headquartered at Pleiku in the central highlands consisted of the 22nd Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Division at Qui Nhon, the 23rd ARVN Division at Ban Me Thout, and the 42nd ARVN Independent Regiment located north of Kontum.

Upon its arrival in Vietnam the 161st Assault Helicopter Company was originally assigned to the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion (Flying Dragons). The 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion was organized at Fort Bragg, North Carolina on 13 October 1955 and activated on 7 November 1955. On 22 December 1962 it was reorganized and deployed from Fort Ord, California to Vietnam in February 1963, where it was attached to the 12th Aviation Group. The battalion was located at Holloway Army Airfield at Pleiku with the mission of providing direct Army Aviation Support to United States and allied military forces in the 84,000 square area of the II Corps Tactical Zone. Holloway Army Airfield was named after CW2 Charles Holloway who was killed while flying a Piasecki CH-21 Shawnee, tandem rotor helicopter, during a combat assault in 1962. Initially, the Battalion provided support to the II Corps Central Highlands, with emphasis on support of MACV advisors, ARVN and CDIG forces. With the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965, the 4th Infantry Division and 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, were deployed in the Central Highlands, and since their arrival, they received the majority of the 52nd Aviation Battalion's aviation assets. The 52nd Aviation Battalion participated in all the major operations conducted in the II Corps Highlands area, including the battle of Plei Me, Duc Co, and the Ira Drang Valley Campaign.

By 1965, the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion was commanded by LTC Robert L. Cody. The 219th Assault Helicopter Company and the 170th Assault Helicopter Company were both located at Camp Holloway near Pleiku and attached to the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion. The 155th Aviation Company, located at Qui Nhon, was also included in the battalion. The 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion had a composite total of 156 aircraft. During the quarterly reporting period of 1 January 1965 to 31 December 1965, the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Cody, reported that the helicopter assets of the battalion consisted of the 119th Aviation Company, the 170th Aviation Company, the 219th Aviation Company, the 155th Aviation Company, and the 161st Assault Helicopter Company. With the arrival of the 170th and the 161st Assault Helicopter Companies, during December 1965, the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion's helicopter assets increased to a total of 120, while fixed wing assets were reduced to 49. The various locations of the different companies were connected by the major east-west road, Route 19, which linked Qui Nhon, Lane Army Airfield, An Khe, and Pleiku. The 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion was awarded a Valorous Unit Award for its performance during the period of 18 September to 28 October 1965, for its heroic actions during the battle of Plei Me.

The 161st Assault Helicopter Company was composed of three flight platoons with an authorized strength of

eight helicopters each, a helicopter maintenance platoon, the 406th Transportation Detachment, the 449th Signal Detachment, a medical detachment, and the company headquarters section. The 406th Transportation Detachment augmented the 161st service platoon, providing support in the area of rotor maintenance, engine repair, airframe repair and general aircraft maintenance. The 406th used a call sign of "Road Runner." Two of the flight platoons flew the UH-1D Huey ("Slicks") and used the call sign "Pelican." Many of these helicopters were brand-new Huey's right off the Bell Helicopter assembly line and had consecutive serial numbers. The third flight platoon flew the UH-1B Huey gunship and used the call sign "Scorpion." The 161st was the last Army aviation company to be organized with the UH-1B gunship. An observation at the time was that most of the obsolete UH-1Bs were the "Hanger Queens" from various military units across the country. One aircraft had a previous duty station in Puerto Rico.

161st AHC Fully Operational

By January 1966, the 161st Assault Helicopter Company, commanded by MAJ Michael Thomas, was deemed capable of performing operational missions in the Binh Dinh Province. The 52nd Aviation Battalion assigned the 161st the primary mission of providing direct support to the Republic of Korea "Tiger" Capital Infantry Division. The company's area of operation initially was concentrated in the Phu Cat Mountains just north of Lane Army Heliport. The 52nd Aviation Battalion assigned numerous missions to the 161st Assault Helicopter Company shortly after it became fully operational. The primary mission of the 161st was to conduct combat assaults against enemy positions and provide transport for their logistical requirements. The Pelican slicks transported the troops into the landing zones and the heavily armed Scorpions escorted the Pelicans and provided fire support for the deployed troops in the field. From their first combat missions, the 161st was known for their attitude of "only the best will do." Throughout their operations at Lane Army Heliport, the company compiled an extremely meritorious record and earned a well-deserved reputation of being dependable in any situation.

The 174th Airmobile Light Aviation Company was activated at Fort Benning, Georgia on 1 October 1965 under the authority of Third United States Army General Order Number 50, and General Order 116, Headquarters, United States Infantry Center, Fort Benning, Georgia. MAJ Robert M. Stuart was designated as the first commander of the newly formed company. On 8 December 1965, the 174th was ordered to prepare for movement to the Republic of Vietnam. On 15 March 1966, the 174th flew their aircraft to Sharpe Army Depot near Oakland, California, where they were loaded onto the Escort Carrier *USS Point Cruz* (CVE-119, commissioned 16 October 1845). Their wheeled vehicles were transported from Savannah, Georgia on the *African Glen*. The personnel and equipment were loaded onto the Troop Ship *USS Upshur* (T-AP-198) and transported to the port at Qui Nhon where they arrived on 6 April 1966. On the next day, 7 April 1966, they arrived at Lane Army Airfield

and established their base camp near the 161st Assault Helicopter Company. The 174th Airmobile Light Aviation Company was attached to the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion and designated the 174th Assault Helicopter Company. During the period from 12 April 1966 until 11 May 1966, the 174th Assault Helicopter Company conducted combat readiness training and was considered capable of conducting combat missions in the Binh Dinh Province.

The arrival of the 174th Assault Helicopter Company at Lane Army Airfield marked the reunion of the "Three Sisters" of Fort Benning, Georgia. The 161st, the 170th, and the 174th Assault Helicopter Companies were soon working together and were assigned the mission of supporting the 22nd ARVN Infantry Division, the Korean Capital Infantry Division, and the Korean 9th Infantry Division in the Binh Dinh Province. The "Three Sisters" soon began supporting their mutually assigned mission requirements. The 161st and the 174th Assault Helicopter Companies quickly formed a close working relationship that continued until the 161st Assault Helicopter Company was deactivated on 15 January 1968, during the establishment of the 123rd Combat Aviation Battalion, organized and activated on 8 December 1967 by United States Army Pacific Area Commander General Order 300, dated 2 December 1967.

In April 1964, President Lyndon Baines Johnson requested that other nations contribute military assistance to the Republic of Vietnam for its counterinsurgency efforts. On 22 December 1964, the Free World Military Assistance Office was established under the staff supervision of the MACV J5. Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and South Korea all deployed military units to the Republic of Vietnam. South Korea deployed a mobile surgical hospital, an Engineer Battalion and other support units to the Republic of Vietnam on 16 March 1965.

The Capital Infantry "Tiger" Division was deployed to the Republic of Vietnam directly from Korea as a result of Republic of South Vietnam President Nguyen Cao Ky's request on 1 June 1965 that the Republic of South Korea President, Park Chung-hee, provide combat forces to aid South Vietnam. The South Korean Government approved President Ky's request for combat forces on 12 August 1965. The Capital Infantry Division, the Republic of South Korean Second Marine Corps Brigade, and the Ninth Infantry Division, along with supporting units, were deployed to the Republic of South Vietnam to support United States Army combat operations. LTG Chae Myung-shin was designated as Commander of all Republic of Korea Armed Forces in the Republic of Vietnam. By the end of 1965, there were 20,620 Korean troops in Vietnam.

The main party of the Capital Infantry Division was transported to Qui Nhon by the United States Seventh Fleet on the *USS Vernon County*, Landing Ship Tank 1161. The main party arrived at the port of Qui Nhon on 22 September 1965. Additional elements of the Capital Infantry Division were transported on the *USS Terrell*. The First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division turned over its area of responsibility to the Korean Capital Infantry Division in October 1965, after it had

established itself in the Qui Nhon area. The division was also known as the "Tiger ROK Division" due to its distinctive shoulder patch depicting the head of a snarling tiger. The Koreans referred to the division as the "Maeng Ho" (Brave Tiger) Division. The division was deployed near Qui Nhon where it could protect the vital arteries of Highway 1 and Highway 19. The Capital Infantry Division established its headquarters, known as Camp Thunderbolt, near Bien Khe, and the An Khe Pass on Highway 9, northwest of Lane Army Airfield.

The Capital Infantry Division was an extremely effective combat division. It was comprised of a Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Infantry Regiment, and the 25th Infantry Regiment. Three battalions of 105mm Field Artillery and a battalion of 155mm Field Artillery provided fire support. The Capital Infantry Division provided security for Lane Army Heliport, and members of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company felt perfectly safe at their base camp. Prior to the arrival of the division, Qui Nhon was the only secure town in the entire Binh Dinh Province. On 3 March 1965, several months prior to the arrival of the Capital Infantry Division, the Central Intelligence Agency released the following declassified document:

"The Viet Cong are continuing to make significant gains in the northern and central provinces of South Vietnam, particularly along the low coastal regions. Viet Cong effectiveness in Binh Dinh Province was manifested in their ability to isolate the coastal districts and to restrict government control to all but the district towns and heavily populated areas."

The 22nd ARVN Infantry Division, headquartered at Ba Gi in the coastal lowlands, originally had operational responsibility for the Binh Dinh Province. The 22nd ARVN Infantry Division was created from the 14th Light Infantry Division in 1958. The Division included the 40th Infantry Regiment, the 42nd Infantry Regiment, and the 47th Infantry Regiment. Fire support was provided by one battalion of 155mm field artillery, and three battalions of 105mm field artillery. After the arrival of the Korean Capital Infantry Division, the 22nd ARVN Division's primary mission was the protection of the major population centers of the coastal lowlands.

Amongst senior Army commanders there was a fear that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) might not be able to prevail in Binh Dinh Province, and that the Viet Cong could split the II Corps operational area into half. Splitting II Corps was an objective of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA); the North Vietnamese thought they could obtain success in South Vietnam if the Binh Dinh Province were divided. In August 1965, when the first United States Army combat units arrived in Vietnam, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong controlled virtually the entire Binh Dinh Province, the most populous coastal region. The same held true for Pleiku Province to the west.

By 1965, most of the Binh Dinh Province had been a hotbed for Viet Cong activity during the nearly two decades prior to the arrival of the Americans and Koreans. It was one of eleven provinces that formed the most central military region of the Republic of Vietnam, known as the II Corps Tactical Zone, and

among the most strategic. Route 1 ran north-south from Saigon along the coast all the way to Hanoi, North Vietnam. It intersected with Highway 19 in the southern part of Binh Dinh Province, which ran east to west through the Binh Dinh Province that was the Capital Infantry Division's Area of Responsibility (AOR). Key locations of the Capital Infantry Division AORs included Highways 1 and 19, Qui Nhon, Phu Cat Mountains, Phu Cat Air Base, and An Khe.

The mission of the Capital Infantry Division was to clear the entire Binh Dinh Province of the enemy. The main objective for the Capital Infantry Division was to secure Highway 19. Highway 19 was high on the Korean list of "things to do." It was a lifeline for allied forces, especially American, operating in Pleiku and Kontum provinces to the west. The Capital Infantry Division began arriving in Binh Dinh Province during September 1965. They quickly assumed defensive positions on Highway 19 (QL19) from Qui Nhon to An Khe in the central highlands. This allowed the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division "Screaming Eagles" to hold its position in and around An Khe. About a month later, the 1st Brigade turned over its area of responsibility (AOR) to the Koreans. Within two months the Capital Infantry Division moved north out of Qui Nhon and progressed halfway to the Phu Cat Mountains. The Koreans quickly secured Lane Army Heliport and all of the key bridges and mountain passes along Highway 19.

During 1966, the North Vietnamese Army continued to build up their combat forces in the Republic of Vietnam by recruiting additional forces in the south and infiltrating regular North Vietnamese Army units. By January 1966, the infiltration rate from North Vietnam had increased to 8,000 North Vietnamese soldiers per month. The North Vietnamese were now capable of establishing and sustaining North Vietnamese Divisions in the south. By the end of 1966, there were nine divisions in South Vietnam, with a total strength of more than 280,000. Seven of the nine divisions were North Vietnamese Army Divisions.

Fortunately, by January 1966, GEN Westmoreland finally had sufficient military forces available to commence offensive operations in the II Corps Tactical Zone. The First Cavalry Division and the Third Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division were both located in the Central Highlands of the Pleiku Province. The 22nd ARVN Division and the Korean Capital Infantry Division were established in the Binh Dinh Province. The First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division and the regiment of the Korean Ninth Infantry Division were situated in the Province near Tuy Hoa. The arrival of the 161st 170th, 174th and 179th Aviation Companies provided the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion with adequate airmobile aviation assets to conduct combat assaults for the allied forces in the II Corps Tactical Zone.

All of the United States ground combat forces in the II Corps Tactical Zone were assigned to Task Force Alpha. Task Force Alpha was a provisional corps command created on 1 August 1965 to control the United States ground combat forces arriving in Vietnam. Task Force Alpha was renamed I Field

Force, Vietnam, on 25 September 1965. LTG Stanley R. Larsen served as the first commander with his headquarters established in Nha Trang. In January 1966, GEN Westmoreland directed LTG Larsen to commence offensive combat operations in the II Corps Tactical Zone with the support of the Free World Military Forces.

LTG Larsen ordered MG John Norton, Commander of the First Cavalry Division, and senior United States officer in the II Corps Tactical Zone, to plan and conduct joint offensive operations. On 24 January 1966, Major General Norton launched Operation Masher. MG Norton's combat forces included the Korean Capital Infantry Division, the Third Brigade of First Cavalry Division, and the 22nd ARVN Division. The operation was terminated on 4 February 1966, when it was named Operation White Wing.

In February 1966, MAJ James H. Hembree replaced MAJ Thomas as Commanding Officer of the 161st Assault Helicopter Company. The Korean and South Vietnamese portion of Operation White Wing, supported by the 161st Assault Helicopter Company, was named Thang Phong II. The operation terminated in March 1966. The Korean Capital Infantry Division destroyed the North Vietnamese Third "Sao Vang" (Gold Star) Division, after killing over 1,700 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers. These series of operations cleared the northern half of Binh Dinh Province of the enemy. The combined operations also secured the boundary between II Corps Tactical Zone and I Corps Tactical Zone. The newly established security along their southern boundary of I Corps enabled the United States Marine Corps Third Division to move into position to conduct Operation Hastings against enemy infiltrators moving through the DMZ, further north. Operation Thang Phong II, conducted from 24 January 1966 until 6 March 1966, is believed to have been the first combat air assault combat mission conducted by the 161st Assault Helicopter Company.

MAJ Davey L. Stanley's Scorpion gunships participated in Operation Thang Phong II. MAJ Stanley selected Scorpion 64-14045 to be the lead aircraft of his fire team. Excerpts from Major Stanley's memoirs:

I put the Scorpions together at Ft Benning. My wife drew the Scorpion for us. I am almost 90 and memories have faded. I remember meeting two pilots at a 161 reunion that told me they were shot down in 045 and that the ship was destroyed. It was true that 045 came home at night with a lot of holes. The maintenance people (Capt. Murray Parker?) gave me the name of "Ole Magnet Ass." I had the 40mm grenade launcher on the nose and two rocket pods on each side with my two gunners. We could put out a lot of firepower. I was told several times to mount only one pod on each side. I ignored the advice. It took some skill to get into the air on a hot day ... one of my gunners ... Pressley ... would hide extra ammo and gun barrels making 045 still heavier. There came a time that we had to make some changes to keep doing our mission. I took over operations and gave the Scorpions to Dick Dietsch [MAJ Richard K. Dietsch]. We lost one ship and crew in a mid-air. That was the

worst loss while I was there. I came back to the States, got promoted and went back to command the 10th CAB with 6 companies and support groups ... total of 2400 troops ... best job I ever had. I have been building experimental planes for about the last 30 years. I just completed (after 8 years work) a three-quarter p-51. The tail number is 045.

Upon his arrival in Vietnam, SP4 Don W. Hopps was designated as crew chief of Scorpion 64-14045 in the Third Flight Platoon gunships. SP4 Hopps' memoirs provide valuable insight into early Scorpion missions in the Binh Dinh Province:

My first weeks was working with Vern [Vernon King] who taught me everything he could about helicopters, including armament and the M-60 machine gun, my favorite weapon. My first encounter was a mission over at the coast where we thought there would be no enemy however, they were there. My first encounter with them was a sobering one, they tried to kill me. I got so excited I was trying to put my bullets in backwards.

Anyway, I survived my first encounter when we returned to camp, I counted the bullet holes in the rotor blades of the chopper.

We started out working with the Koreans dropping them off into LZ's and covering for them in a daisy chain where we would protect them while on the ground, we got shot up many times. We flew into areas like Pleiku, Bong Son, Kontum, Binh Dinh, Phu My, Phu Cat, Tuy Hoa we flew all up and down the interior of Vietnam.

In the first months of my tour not much to speak about as far as combat we did fly a few missions with the Koreans but was minor combat. In early February we

were on a recon mission for the following weeks action, Major Stanley was pilot, we were flying tree top level about 40 knots over some villages to see if there were any enemy troops there and would fire upon us, Presley and I would hang out of the helicopter with red smoke in hand waiting for a shot, then we would pop the red smoke and drop it on the location make a three sixty turn and come back and shoot the heck out of the offender.

However today was different a single shot went thru the canopy and hit Major Stanley in the mouth and exiting his neck, he yelled he was hit and we turned to see three men in black pajamas lying on the grass as we turned and they waved at us like nothing was going on, as we make another turn to see if it was them they began to run that is when I saw the weapons in their hands, I opened up on them and they ran for a hooch I shot one of them before he could get into the door and blasted the hooch with about 50 rounds, we broke off and headed for the hospital at Qui Nhon. Major Stanley was hurt bad and we wanted to get him there fast and said we would drop him off and return to level the village. We were low on fuel by now and had to refuel at the airport. We dropped off Major Stanley and tried to get fuel, but the fuel truck was just starting to fuel the drums for runway lights, it was starting to get dark and we had to wait.

Later that month February 17th Lt. White [LT William C. White] was flying co-pilot and we were involved in a fight with NVA troops on a mission with the Koreans when he took several rounds thru his legs and we had to leave the fight to take him to the hospital.