

February 19, 1998

Dear Les,

Thanks for the copies of BMTB and for the nice words about the FOB stuff for the next Directory. I am getting some material and am **getting** ready to start printing drafts which I will circulate - that will help get more input.

While working a unit history from the 361st Escort Company, that was based at Camp Holloway and had FOB as their primary mission, I came across the following narrative about December, 1969. Something clicked in my mind and I thought of something I'd read by the 155th folk. I believe in one or more 155th narrative about this battle, there are reference to Cobras along with a question - who were these guys? I was generally of the opinion that the only Cobras that worked this area belonged to the 7/17th Cav since B/7/17th was based at Ban Me Thuot East during this battle. That was my old Troop and my old platoon - I'd DEROSed in July just after they moved back to Camp Enari from Phan Thiet. A good friend of mine was killed in this battle, so it has always had a special priority with me. Anyway, after reading this Pink Panther stuff, it all becomes clear. They had six snakes working your OA for most of December. Without a doubt, when any of the 155th guys mention AH-1Gs during that month - they should be Panthers.

If this info is 'news to you' then maybe putting it in the BMTB would help others get this little piece of history 'correct in their minds.'

I hope to make it to your 155th Reunion this summer. Cheers!



Mike Law, Directory Editor

361ST AWC
1989 UNIT HISTORY

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Lee on this day continually showed the mettle that they have by exposing themselves to a heavy mortar attack to aid their wounded comrades when the enemy mortared four UH-1H helicopters of the 57th Aviation Company which had shut down next to the Dak Pek airstrip. Continually these two brave men exposed themselves to the falling mortar rounds to give medical aid and carry wounded personnel to waiting helicopters. For their actions they received impact awards of the Bronze Star with a "V" device, and were later recommended for upgrading to the Silver Star by the F.O.B.#2 commander, LTC Frederick Abt.

On 15 November, WO Jim Meyer personally destroyed a 50 caliber machine gun position by diving from high above the primary fire team of Cobra gunships and placing his rocket fire onto its position which was a mere 200 meters from the reconnaissance team that was to be extracted. Later WO Meyer and his wing man, WO Alan Dean volunteered to aid in a search for the crew of a downed Vietnamese troop-carrying helicopter which had been downed just to the north of that extraction right near a well-used enemy road. All of the helicopters and fixed wing observation aircraft received highly intensive fire from what was reported later to be known 50 caliber anti-aircraft positions within effective firing range of the maneuvering aircraft. Nevertheless, WO Meyer and his fire team voluntarily went down to suppress the enemy anti-aircraft weapons in the vicinity of the downed helicopter to enable another volunteer from the 57th Aviation Company to look around the landing zone in his UH-1H helicopter. They went down despite the intensive fire and found no sign of life in the area. No sign of the downed crew has ever been seen despite these attempts.

The F.O.B.#2 mission being mainly a reconnaissance (small team) mission has resulted in very few confirmed kills by the "Pink Panthers." Undoubtedly there have been many due to the extremely high number of troops in contact missions flown by the "Pink Panthers" in this extremely dangerous enemy controlled territory. On most days, some kind of enemy fire will be received by the "Pink Panthers" from the enemy and returned many times over. For their extraordinary achievements, voluntary actions, and gallantry in covering this mission, both the 361st Aviation Company and the 57th Aviation Company have been recommended for Presidential Unit Citations.

On 3 December, the 361st Aviation Company was placed under the Operational Control of the 10th Aviation Battalion at Ban Me Thuot due to the Bu Frang/Duc Lap conflict to the west and southwest of Ban Me Thuot. The "Pink Panthers" had already been aiding in the battles in that area for some time previous to that when the stand-by fire team of Cobra gunships were sent on that mission on a day by day basis. From 3 December to 28 December, six Cobra gunships were committed daily in three light fire teams for support of the 23rd ARVN Division in their successful defense of Bu Frang and Duc Lap.

On 5 December, the fire team of WO1 Jim Meyer/CPT John Schachleiter in the lead aircraft and WO1 Alan Dean/CW2 Tom Blanchard in the wing ship silenced three confirmed enemy rocket and mortar positions after the 1st Bn/45th ARVN Regmt. received its normal dosage of rockets on the Volcano, an actual cold volcano, 8 kilometers SSW of Duc Lap village. The Volcano became infamous for its steady mortar attacks forcing resupply missions to

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be attempted through extremely heavy enemy fire. The team estimated 20 NVA KIA's, and achieved a number of secondary explosions during firing runs at the enemy. Their two aircraft received a total of three hits by enemy fire.

On 14 December, the fire team of WO1 Charles Moutenot/CPT Ken Otto in the lead ship, and WO1 Jack Lease/CPT Tom Grant in the wing ship combined with the 1st Bn/53rd ARVN Regt. to trap an enemy company and kill a confirmed 38 NVA soldiers, capture one, and capture seven AK-47 rifles and one 57mm recoilless rifle. The Panthers worked excellently with the 1st/53rd to keep the enemy pinned down while the ARVN battalion moved around the enemy and finally blocked their escape route and surrounded them. The NVA company was destroyed as an effective fighting force. The coordination necessary for this operation was outstanding with a Pterodactyl pilot (CPT John Strange), an O-1 Observation pilot directing much of the Cobras' fire in conjunction with the ARVN adviser. The Panthers worked over the NVA for nearly four hours and expended fully three times onto the enemy positions. The action took place in a running battle just to the northwest of the Bu Prang Special Forces camp.

In action in the infamous Happy Valley area (to the southeast of Ban Me Thuot), an enemy stronghold throughout the entire war, the "Pink Panthers", with WO1 Jack Lease/CPT Brian Sweet, and WO1 Charles Moutenot/CPT Ken Otto, along with Pterodactyl observation pilot, CPT Dyson, found VC in the open and killed a confirmed 10 enemy soldiers in a rare encounter with enemy in the open. Basically they have no chance against Cobra gunships in the open.