

HISTORY OF THE
129TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

JANUARY 1967 - JUNE 1967

COMPANY HISTORICAL OFFICER
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SUBMITTED
ESPECIALLY

FOR
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10TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION

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The start of the new year found the 129th Assault Helicopter Company still in the central highland province of Kontum in support of the 101st Airborne Divisions, 1st Brigade. Preparations were being made to move the 101st to a different area of operations. One combat assault was made with the 2nd 327th Airborne Battalion and went very well until one of the Cobra gunships with the "Red Baron" at the controls set the landing zone ablaze. During the second week of January, the final extractions of the 2/327 and the 2nd 502nd Airborne Infantry Battalion were accomplished.

There were some changes in the command structure of the company at this time; Major Steckly became the new Bite and Strike Operations Officer and Captain Groover took command of the third flight platoon. The word was finally put out that the 129th was going home on the 19th of January. Before moving, however, the company still found time to make two ARVN lifts, one on the 17th of January moving 382 troops and one before leaving for Dong Ba Thin on the 19th lifting 350 troops.

The "tropic paradise" of Dong Ba Thin was reached at long last. The Bite and Striker's were home for the first time in over a year. A grand party, "The Vagabond Roundup," was held for the reunion of the elements of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion. An awards ceremony was held and Captain Chapman of the Cobras was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by the Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Harrison. Among the dignitaries present for the party was General Pearson of the 101st 1st Brigade.

The remainder of the month was spent at Dong Ba Thin and regular Battalion support missions. This support was mainly to the 101st 1st Brigade, at Phan Rang, and resupply missions for the 9th Republic of Korea Division in the Ninh Hoa area. A well carried out night extraction of the 2/502 was the Bite and

Strike special for the end of the month.

The company moved to Phan Thiet at 1930 hours 31 January, concluded a night briefing and slept under the stars.

A well done for the month goes to Lieutenant Wallace and WO-1 Leach who crashed in Bulldog 868, everyone escaped without injuries.

From a night under the stars at Phan Rang, the company made a 90 mile combat assault to Bao Loc. A bit of rough going in support of the operation; a 48th gunship was lost along with a hook from the 180th and a C-130. The pallets did not arrive, so another enervating evening was spent under the stars at Bao Loc! The company took part in many combat assaults around the area, but contact remained light. The pallets finally arrived and the company set up camp and we had a roof over our heads.

Moving day again came, back to the Phan Thiet area to support subsequent operations to the north near Song Mao. Tragedy struck in the first day at Song Mao, Lieutenant Judson and WO-1 Morse were killed on a night flight to Saigon, their aircraft struck a power line and crashed into the Saigon River.

It looked for awhile as if Major Merritt wasn't going to be around to pass command of the 129th over to his successor. On the 16th his aircraft lost power in flight forcing him to auto-rotate, and on the 17th he lost hydraulics and made an emergency landing at Phan Thiet. After all this, he made it for the ceremony on the 18th. The command was passed to Major Fernander at Phan Thiet by Lieutenant Colonel Harrison the Battalion Commander. At the same time 1st Sergeant Fildes succeeded 1st Sergeant McLendon as the field 1st Sergeant. Major Steckly was now the Executive Officer and Captain Simerly became the new Operations Officer.

At this time Major Steckly and the advanced party were at Tay Ninh preparing the way for a move to that area by the company in the very near future. The move to Tay Ninh came off smoothly thanks to a good job of organization by Major Steckly and 1st Sergeant Fildes. Missions at Tay Ninh started with our arrival and were hot and hectic, Charlie was taking a good toll of aircraft in the landing zones. Fortunately the 129th aircraft received only minor damages. The name of the operation was "Junction City," and was the largest single air operation of the war date.

On the 25th of February the company was alerted for a tactical emergency move to Song Mao. The aircraft departed in thirty minutes after the order was given leaving personal gear behind to be brought up later by the C-130's. The alert force closed on Song Mao at 2045 hours and again slept under the stars, but always mission ready.

The Song Mao period lasted two weeks and a few days, but Bite and Strike was out there hauling the goods for the 101st as usual. There was a night assault and a few surprise day assaults that netted the Cobras some VC in the open which were promptly disposed of in short order with 40 mm grenades and rockets. A combat assault on the 9th of March moved the 2/502 and 2/327 thirty miles below Phan Rang. The landing zone was obscured by smoke but a well executed formation landing was accomplished although conditions were far from favorable. The following day the company moved back to Dong Ba Thin by air and a ground column which was under the command of Lieutenant Hilderbrand ably assisted by the companies Ambassadors to Vung Tau Lieutenant (Sir) Lawrence and WO#1 (Knope) Royce.

At Dong Ba Thin, the company resumed normal Battalion missions while getting reorganized. The VIP missions for IPFV at Nha Trang was taken by

the second platoon. The 101st was not forgotten and the 129th supplied them with aircraft for command and control and ash and trash.

A derailed train west of Dong Ba Thin caused the Cobras to go into action and a team led by Captain Newman killed three VC and wounded twenty according to VC prisoner. The attack broke up an attempted ambush of the security element at the site of the derailed train.

Bulldog 495 crashed south of Phan Rang while on a mission for the 101st. Captain Parrish, a real professional, was at the controls and did an outstanding job, the crew escaped unhurt even though the aircraft was totally destroyed by fire.

March ended with a cook out for a company Easter party and along with it, an alert order to move to a new area. Within the next few days the company moved to a small village called Khanh Duong northwest of Nha Trang. The area was very beautiful with a new airstrip constructed by the engineers and a nice grassy area to set up the much used tents of the 129th. The company was set up in record time. The unit looked like a well toured circus getting ready for the first show at the "Big Top." The mess out did itself for quality of food served in the field and it also supported the Battalion and various other elements who came in to sample the culinary art of the 129th field kitchen. The officers club was also a meeting place for everyone in the area.

A six ship reaction force mission to Bam Me Thaut was commanded by Captain Groover to secure areas near convoy routes, Captain Groover again proved the on the spot versatility of the 129th. On 30 March another on a combat assault with the 2/327 Northwest of Khanh Duong, Colonel Marr, Colonel Bone and Colonel Cord flew with the Bite and Strikers.

Through the month of April most combat assaults were led by the 129th. Adverse weather at times delayed a take off, but the operation went smoothly. Gunships support was always timely and on target. Some rainy night resupply in the valley leading to Nha Trang showed the skill of both the slick and gunship pilots.

The monthly night practice combat assault went off well with both an illuminated and non-illuminated phase. Very good training for new pilots in the company.

On 23 April Bulldog 525 with Warrant Officer Wells and Warrant Officer Saurer, SP/4 James and Walker crashed on take off all sustaining injuries. Mr. Wells was pinned inside the wreckage and while the crewchief went for help the aircraft caught fire and was consumed, his death was a blow to the unit. SP/4 Walker died of injuries received in the crash some weeks later in the states.

The month ended with word the company was to be given the support mission for the Republic of Korea "Tiger Division" at Qui Nhon and the unit began making plans for the move. The area and the new mission took the 129th from its field home in Khanh Duong to the plush living area of Lane Army Heliport near Qui Nhon was a welcome change for the entire company. The new billets were outstanding, better than our old home at Dong Ba Thin. The Officers club had excellent chow and boasted one of the few airconditioned bars in the country. The troops settled into the new surroundings with ease and arrangement.

The new mission did not dull the 129th spirit, the job was new and there was an ever present language problem. Good coordination and planning were the key to successful resupply missions and utilization of aircraft. One advantage the 129th had was a "hot line" from Bulldog 3 to none other than

the Whitehouse, which came in handy.

The first month working with the ROK's saw the 129th smash all it's previous records, flying 12908 sorties while logging 2411.1 flying hours. The Bite and Strikers carried 19494 troops and hauled 2179.2 tons of combat supplies, compared with previous highs of 8393 sorties, 2344 flying hours, 11899 troops hauled and 604.2 tons of supplies carried. Maintenance set records also with an availability rate of 89.4% in spite of the fact that the company had seven engine changes while flying 2411.1 hours.

Another support aspect the 129th has developed and has been the role of gunships support. In the past the CRID has been reluctant to call for gunship support because of the language problem and the fear that friendly troops would be hit. As a means of building confidence the Cobras display their accurate and deadly fire each night during a dusk patrol of each Regimental area of operation, providing armed surveillance, intermintenting Viet Cong movements and bringing suppressive fire on areas containing suspected targets. Another Cobra policy at reducing reluctance to request gunships are classes given to ROK troops of each Regimental area on unplayment tactics, and fire power of the arrived helicopter, also the fact that the gunships always carry ROK observer to communicate with the forces on the ground. During the months of May the Cobras have accounted for 16 VC (KIA) body count and 14 VC (KIA) estimated, 12 structures destroyed and 20 structures damaged.

The tactical support mission for the CRID is somewhat more difficult than the 129th has provided other units in the past. Operating over a large AO the Division's three Regiments occupy semi-permanent areas, maneuvering at mostly platoon and company level, usually be ground movement, and relying on a reaction force for immediate air movement of troops. During the month the 129th reacted to 13 reaction forces request using a practice of appointing a daily mission commander and designating aircraft within each area as reaction force aircraft.

The month of June and the 129th is still at Lane Field in support of the Tiger Division. Since the 129th has been in support of the ROK Division the Commanding General has awarded 4 letters to Commendation to the Bite and Strikers. Again this month the 129th has broken records, the most significant record achievement was in hauling over 2000 tons of cargo, and transporting over 20,000 passengers.

Last month the CRID made a record number of combat assaults emphasizing small unit operations, as 19 platoon sized CA's were made. This month combat operations stepped up as the 129th participated in a CRID record of 18 company sized operations. During these operations, the CRID troops had over 150 NVA KIA's and 75 captured weapons.

One of the most significant features of the 129th's aviation support during the months of June has been the innovation of small simultaneous combat assaults surrounding one objective area. Operating in terrains that restricts aviation to 2 and 3 aircraft sized landing zones, this procedure has the advantage of reducing the number of repeated landings in one LZ and places encompassing troops into blocking and attacking positions simultaneously. In one operation alone the ROK's killed 47 NVA and captured 38 weapons using this technique.

The gunships continued to exact their toll of enemy on the dusk patrol missions, also, the classes on gunship support utilization has been well revived in all Regimental areas.

STATISTICAL DATA

	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>TASKS</u>	<u>TKPS</u>
JANUARY	8673	1996.0	307.6	10,016
FEBRUARY	6273	2212.2	163.1	8,402
MARCH	3865	1623.3	153.7	7,779
APRIL	8411	2147.8	231.1	8,602
MAY	13237	2495.2	2245.6	19,846
JUNE	14932	2486.0	2209.0	20,910