

1966

HISTORY

OF

1ST AVIATION SUPPORT HELICOPTER COMPANY

1 January 1956 - 31 December 1966

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BIOSKETCHES, NOTE

All Dates, Orders and Tables of Organization and Equipment indicated in the text were authenticated. All statements including facts, figures, and percentages made in the text were verified--either from conversation with responsible individuals or extracts from authenticated records. The author has reviewed all comments with providence and feels there is no doubt to their validity and accuracy.

SEP 11, 1958
Captain, PG
Unit Historian

I. MISSION AND ORGANIZATION:

On 1 January 1966, the 178th Aviation Company, including the 400th Transportation and 774th Medical Detachments, was located at Fort Benning, Georgia, and was assigned to the 10th Aviation Group. During January, the company completed training and preparation for overseas movement to Phu Loi, Republic of South Vietnam. The sequence of movement to Vietnam was as follows:

A. Advance Party: The advance party, composed of the Commanding Officer, Major Roger J. Shields; the Supply Officer, Major Davis Clark; and the 400th Transportation Detachment Commander, Major Eddie D. Monroe, departed Fort Benning on 26 January and arrived in Saigon on 1 February. Travel was made by military and commercial jet aircraft. The advance party made preliminary arrangements for reception of the company at Vung Tau and Phu Loi.

B. Aircraft: The company's sixteen CH-47 Chinook helicopters were flown from Fort Benning to Sharpe Army Depot, California, by 178th flight crews during the period 20 January - 1 February. Despite adverse weather conditions enroute, all helicopters arrived in California safely and without incident. The unit's two OH-13 Sioux helicopters were transported to Sharpe Army Depot by US Air Force aircraft. A maintenance team of six officers and thirty-four enlisted men, under the command of the Service Platoon Commander, Captain Arthur A. Williams, remained with the helicopters and accompanied them to Vietnam. The helicopters departed California aboard the aircraft carrier BRETON on 26 February, arriving at the port of Vung Tau on 18 March. The helicopters were flown from the BRETON to Phu Loi, closing at the new home station on 25 March.

C. Other Equipment: Remaining unit equipment, accompanied by CWO Gerald Lyon and two enlisted men, was transported from Fort Benning to the port of Savannah, Georgia. This equipment, which included all unit motor vehicles, departed Savannah aboard the Victory Ship LAKEWOOD VICTORY on 4 February, arriving at Saigon on 18 March. The equipment was convoyed to Phu Loi, arriving on 21 March.

D. Main Body of Unit Personnel: The main body of officers and men, under the command of the Executive Officer, Major Jack L. Keaton, departed Fort Benning via jet aircraft on 16 February and, traveling first to Oakland Airport, arrived at the Oakland Army Terminal on the same day. The main body departed San Francisco aboard the troop ship USNS GENERAL NELSON M. WALKER on 18 February, arriving at the port of Vung Tau on 10 March. These personnel were airlifted, on the same day, to Phu Loi by CH-47's of the 147th Aviation Company, stationed at Vung Tau. The Commanding Officer, Major Shields, greeted the main body upon their arrival at Phu Loi with a three-piece "band" provided by the 13th Artillery. The men were treated to their first cold beer since departing CONUS.

Despite the adverse conditions of a totally new environment, intense heat, and daily torrential monsoon rains, the 178th became fully operational on 31 March. This period of time--only twelve days from arrival of the unit's TO&E in Vietnam until the achievement of fully operational status--is offered as a record for an aviation unit of this size.

Upon arrival at Phu Loi, Vietnam, the 178th, with detachments, was assigned to the 11th Aviation Battalion, which in turn is assigned to the 12th Aviation Group. At this time the 774th Medical Detachment was reassigned to the 145th Aviation Battalion and the 178th was supported by the 11th Aviation Battalion Medical Detachment. During the period 1 April through 31 December the 178th supported combat operations as described in Section II (Operations and Training) in implementing its mission "to provide logistical and tactical airlift for movement of troops and supplies." Inclosure 1 depicts the unit's location and operational area in the Republic of Vietnam.

On 15 June 1966 the unit was redesignated the 178th Assault Support Helicopter Company, assigned to the redesignated 11th Combat Aviation Battalion. No General Order had been received by 31 December 1966 to support this redesignation.

A personnel "infusion" program, designed to alleviate the DEROB "hump" facing this and like units, resulted in the loss of four commissioned officers and six warrant officers to the 1st Air Cavalry Division in April, fifteen enlisted personnel to the 147th Assault Support Helicopter Company at Vung Tau in August and an additional fifteen to the same unit in October. In return, three commissioned officers and six warrant officers were received from the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and thirty enlisted personnel were gained from the 147th. Various small levies were received which aided the infusion program's goals.

Other major personnel changes were as follows: Sixteen gunners had been assigned by 29 April 1966. Four Pathfinders were authorized to the unit by Verbal Order of the Commanding Officer, 11th Combat Aviation Battalion. Significant individual changes were as follows: Major Roger J. Shields, the unit's original Commanding Officer, was reassigned to the 12th Combat Aviation Group in September. Major Lewis J. McConnell, the unit's original Operations Officer, assumed command of the unit and was followed by Major Clyde F. Klick in December. Major McConnell was replaced by Major Malcolm D. Rixon as Operations Officer. Major Eddie D. Monroe, the original Commander of the 400th Transportation Detachment, was reassigned to the 12th Combat Aviation Group in May and was replaced by Captain Arthur A. Williams, the original Service Platoon Commander. In November, Captain Williams was reassigned to USAREUR and was replaced by Major Davis Clark. In July Major Jack L. Keaton, original Executive Officer, departed to assume command of the 147th Assault Support Helicopter Company at Vung Tau. Captain Pat L. Moss assumed duty as Executive Officer and was followed by Major John M. Kalina in December. First Sergeant William N. Coker became Sergeant Major of the 11th Combat Aviation

Battalion in August and was replaced by First Sergeant Thomas E. Tocco from the 400th Transportation Detachment. First Sergeant Tocco was replaced by Sergeant First Class Andrew C. Moore.

Two permanent buildings were completed during the period--the unit mess and the unit orderly room. Arrangements have been made to name the unit mess in honor of Specialist Five Ross A. Brown and to name the first completed Bachelor Officer Quarters in honor of Captain John S. Seeley, each of whom was fatally injured in separate CH-47 accidents. Further, construction on EM and Officer billets, showers, and an enlisted club was initiated. Improvements in dust and drainage problem areas were made. Normal officer and enlisted rotation occurred at a routine pace. Enlisted replacements were untimely.

On 1 September 1966 the unit observed its first anniversary of Organization Day. Both the 178th and the 400th Transportation Detachment developed and adopted distinctive unit insignia. Inclosure 2 depicts the 178th insignia and Inclosure 3 shows that of the 400th Transportation Detachment. The unit was authorized two UH-1B helicopters in lieu of the two OH-13 helicopters. One UH-1B (540 system--redesignated as the UH-1C) was received. Throughout the period, members of the unit participated in general administrative functions in conjunction with the performance of the combat mission. Full participation in USARV's Rest and Recuperation Program has proven very beneficial. Many unit personnel have extended their foreign service tours. Since activation, the company has exhibited an exceptional degree of morale and esprit de corps.

II. Operations and Training:

Under the supervision of Major Lewis J. McConnell (Operations and Training Officer), a make-up POR training cycle was conducted during the period 3-15 January 1966. During the period 3-21 January, this unit conducted training by sections and platoons for the purpose of increasing the unit's ability to accomplish its mission in combat. This training was conducted under field conditions to the maximum possible extent and included the following:

- a. Pilot and crew refresher flight training in the Chinook helicopter.
- b. Actual day and night troop and equipment airlifts (including artillery lifts and field training with Pathfinder teams).
- c. Individual section training on borrowed equipment (including Communications, Air Traffic Control, Service, Operations, Maintenance, and Mess Sections).

Upon arrival at Vung Tau, Vietnam, and while awaiting the arrival of 178th unit equipment, the pilots and enlisted crews joined with the 147th Aviation Company for initial combat flight orientation. During this period (18-30 March 1966) the 178th flight crews received an average of 15 combat flying hours each. During the period 1 April 1966 through 31 December 1966, the unit participated in Operations "Abilene," "Birmingham," "El Paso," "Lexington II," "Montgomery," "Shenandoah," "Charleston," "Leeds," "Fairfax," "Tulsa," "Lam Sam II," "Bismark," "Baton Rouge," and "Attleboro" in support of the 1st Infantry Division; in Operations "Fort Nisqually," "Ala Moana," "Kailua," and "Kalihi" in support of the 25th Infantry Division; and in Operations "Denver," "Sioux City," and "Toledo" in support of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate). Concurrent with these operations, the unit provided general support to the 1st Infantry Division, 4th Infantry Division, 25th Infantry Division, 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), 196th Light Infantry Brigade, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, US Special Forces, the Australian Task Force, the Army of Vietnam and the US Aid Mission. For a one month period, support of a classified nature was given which resulted in favorable comments of the unit from US State Department officials and other echelons of command. During the month of April, in support of Operations "Abilene" and "Birmingham," the unit flew 1068.7 hours which, as of 31 December 1966, is a calendar month-flying hour record for a CH-47 unit in this theater. During the period 5-25 November 1966, in support of Operation "Attleboro," the largest ground operation of the war as of 31 December 1966, the unit flew 1529 sorties, 508 hours, and airlifted 2525 tons of supplies and equipment. Night operations involving the airlift of artillery units and the resupply of ammunition to these units were the most extensive conducted by a CH-47 helicopter unit in the III Corps Tactical Zone. Almost 80 hours of night flying time were logged. One of the unit's primary missions was recovery. During the nine month period in RVN, 178th Chinooks recovered 166 downed aircraft, including the following types: OH-13, OH-23, UH-1B,

UH-1C, UH-1D, CH-34, CH-43, O-1A, CV-2, and A1-H. Recovery aircraft also airlifted vehicles, including a captured tractor. Statistics for the period follow: Hours flown: 6930.2; Cargo airlifted (tons): 254838; Passengers airlifted: 62846. Unit CH-47 aircraft received numerous small arms and automatic weapons hits throughout the period which resulted in several aircraft being forced to land. One CH-47 helicopter was taken under mortar attack after being forced down, resulting in one warrant officer wounded. One aircraft came under ground attack after being forced down and nine enemy casualties were confirmed with no further damage to the personnel or aircraft. Sixteen personnel of the unit have become eligible to receive the Purple Heart. The unit suffered two casualties during this period. Specialist Five Ross A. Brown was lost in the crash and subsequent total destruction of a CH-47 aircraft on Tay Ninh (Black Virgin) Mountain on 30 May 1966, and Captain John S. Seeley was killed in a CH-47 crash in the vicinity of Dau Tieng on 27 June 1966. On 26 December 1966, three CH-47 aircraft were damaged by a mortar attack on Phu Loi Army Airfield. Concurrent with the operational mission, extensive training was conducted. Two CH-47 Instructor Pilots were received from the 1st Air Cavalry Division and a Flight Standardization Program was instituted. CW3 Dennis Pullen became Unit Standardization Pilot and, in turn, checked out five additional instructor pilots. A Unit Standardization Board was formulated and the entire program achieved notable success. Classes on local weather procedures, weather conditions and characteristics of various loads were conducted. A majority of the pilots were given proficiency checks in the OH-13 aircraft and, subsequently, in the UH-1C, to offer more flexibility in the unit's operational and administrative requirements. Small arms familiarization, CBR classes, Escape and Evasion classes, a ten-hour block of formal instruction in general administrative techniques and complete familiarization of flight engineers and crew chiefs with loading techniques were accomplished. All gunners were totally oriented to flight engineer and crew chief duties other than actual maintenance. Training in all phases received attention with emphasis on the Instrument Qualification Program. Since the unit has been in existence, numerous Instrument Certificates have been renewed--both fixed and rotary wing. Pilots with fixed wing certificates only have been issued initial rotary wing certificates upon completion of requisite training. Two pilots with no prior instrument qualifications have successfully obtained initial Rotary Wing Certificates. These accomplishments are noteworthy because the requirement for maintaining instrument certification has been waived during service in the Republic of Vietnam. Nevertheless, the gaining and maintaining of these certificates were completed during the accelerated preparations at Fort Benning and during the performance of combat operations in the Republic of Vietnam. Aerial gunnery training for all assigned gunners, utilizing the coastal waters near Vung Tau, was conducted with outstanding results. Training in the utilization of the "Trooper Ladder" with members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade was accomplished with 928 personnel participating. This training resulted in the first known written procedure pertaining to this concept. As a result of participation in aforementioned operations, comprehensive techniques pertaining to utilization of the CH-47 helicopters in the airmobile role were formulated, became policy for this unit and forwarded to the infantry divisions and other supported

elements for implementation. Because the combat environment demanded optimum employment and utilization of limited CH-47 resources, training of supported ground units became continuous. A Unit Mobile Training Team was formed and visited nearly all levels of command in an effort to impart detailed instruction on air mobile techniques, particularly that pertaining to the preparation, rigging, and loading of externally transported cargo. Due to this unit's efforts, the most taxing problem encountered during the period, that of CH-47 misutilization, has been solved to a large extent and is now seldom encountered. Further, this program recognizes the personnel rotation problems faced by supported units, and has kept abreast of that training requirement. A CH-47 operations manual has been prepared by this unit for publication by higher headquarters. The Army Aviation Maintenance Training Assistance Program courses in Vung Tau were utilized to the maximum and were a major factor in maintaining a high level of proficiency among unit maintenance personnel.

III. Maintenance and Supply:

As of 1 January 1966, the most serious maintenance problem was the fact that nearly one hundred newly assigned aircraft mechanics were not qualified in the 1964 model CH-47 helicopter (the model assigned to the 178th). Having anticipated this problem, Captain Arthur Williams (Service Platoon Commander), made the necessary arrangements for government contracts to permit required AAMTAP courses to be conducted by factory representatives on the 1964 model Chinook helicopter at Fort Benning, Georgia. These courses included instruction in general Chinook familiarization, the Lycoming T-55 engine, the stability augmentation system, advanced hydraulics and periodic inspections. The result of this instruction was the qualification of 130 assigned mechanics. These maintenance men proved their worth on the ferry flight from Fort Benning to California. All maintenance problems were quickly and efficiently solved. The short time required for the unit to be operational in Vietnam after arrival was due in large part to the enthusiasm and professional ability of Major Eddie D. Monroe's (Maintenance Officer) maintenance personnel. The supply section under the supervision of Captain Davis Clark did a very efficient job of processing, shipping and issuing the unit equipment and spare parts. The movement of the unit equipment from Fort Benning to Vietnam was under the supervision of Captain John Carroll (Movement Control Officer). The movement plan and operation was so efficient as to receive a commendation from the Inspector General of the Department of the Army. The maintenance and supply areas began their first organized efforts on 1 April 1966. No difficulties were encountered during April when the company gained the record of hours flown and cargo moved. Three major components, engine mechanical transmissions, flight control actuators, and combining transmissions, accounted for the majority of aircraft non-availability. The cannibalization program and component changes placed additional work loads on maintenance personnel. Many critical ground support items of equipment, such as test stands, maintenance tents and avionics test equipment, were not available and their absence further complicated required maintenance. Maintenance personnel became acclimated and reached a satisfactory level of proficiency. Working conditions of adverse weather and night shifts became routine. In July, aircraft availability continued to be a problem due to shortage of parts and lack of maintenance facilities. These problems had been recognized by higher headquarters and during the assistance visits from supporting units, the streamlining of parts supply for CH-47 aircraft made a noticeable difference. Many items of ground equipment were issued and greatly improved the avionics and hydraulics repair and test capability. A lack of maintenance facilities (hangars, lights, maintenance tents) continued to adversely affect the maintenance effort. Approval was granted for the construction of a 30' X 100' building and a 75' X 202' hangar but actual construction was not started. The Field Maintenance Detachment was assigned the task of recovery and rebuilding of an ACH-47A helicopter that had been shot down. This task was completed in record time with outstanding results. For the period 1 October 1966 through 31 December 1966, the maintenance posture showed steady improvement in the latter portion of the period despite

unusually high commitments and parts shortages. Lack of maintenance facilities continued to be a problem area. Construction was started on one maintenance building 20' X 100' which will be utilized by the allied shops. A well was dug which is utilized for aircraft and vehicle washing. Revetment of aircraft was initiated and grading and penpriming of the parking area has started. The Field Maintenance Detachment completed five 6th periodic inspections. These have been completed without support from higher echelon and without interrupting the flying program. Availability rates for the period were as follows: aircraft availability: 64.9%; equipment down for maintenance: 13.1%; equipment down for parts: 22.0%. The airfield service section became proficient in the art of refueling at field locations and under enemy fire. Engineer equipment maintenance support did not reach the desired level. The availability rate on engineer equipment averaged 50%. Availability of engineer equipment increased in the latter part of the period but parts supply continued to be a problem. Motor vehicles availability, while the highest in the Battalion, fast became a problem with the M35A1 2½ Ton Truck--parts availability accounting for the majority of the problem area. Unit supply experienced extreme difficulty in obtaining TO&E items which were to be shipped from CONUS subsequent to the unit's departure. Follow up action and command emphasis did not solve this problem.

IV. Special Problems:

A. Education of the supported units in CH-47 airmobile techniques was a continuing problem. To correct this situation, a program of instruction was prepared by Major Lewis J. McConnell, unit operations officer and the unit's Mobile Training Team visited all artillery battalions, brigade headquarters, and other units requiring the training.

B. Lack of parts support for the CH-47 helicopter seriously hampered the accomplishment of the unit's mission. Shortages of ground support equipment caused serious problems in maintaining the CH-47 aircraft. These two areas presented an obstacle to realistic availability rate. Continued command emphasis gave partial relief.

C. Personnel infusion continued to compound an already severe personnel turbulence situation. This problem area has been recognized as a necessity to insure operational readiness of all units concerned at any given time; yet, it is of such impact that it is recorded here.

D. While operating in the Quan Loi area, several engine bleed band problems arose. The soil of this area has an adhesive characteristic which defies cleaning. One engine was so badly caked that it required removal and complete tear down.

E. Engine, combining, and forward transmissions continue to fail tolerance checks and are changed before TBO. Upper boost actuators fall in the same category resulting in a high rate of demand maintenance.

V. Miscellaneous:

A. Inspections: This unit received special inspections of unit readiness by the Inspector General, Third US Army on 11 January 1966 and by the Inspector General, Department of the Army, on 18 January 1966. The reports of these inspections resulted in the unit and its commander being commended by the Commanding Officer, 10th Aviation Group and the Commanding General, Fort Benning, Georgia. This unit received several - spot inspections at the section level from the 11th Combat Aviation Battalion which resulted in above-satisfactory reports. This unit received the Annual Inspection General on 21 June 1966. Overall grade was given as "Satisfactory" in the exit briefing. No written results were received. No further formal inspections were received.

B. Awards and Decorations:

Numerous awards and decorations were earned by unit personnel during the subject period. Awards are listed below:

a. Legion of Merit

Major Roger J. Shields

b. Distinguished Flying Cross

Major Lewis J. McConnell

Captain John M. Carroll

Captain George Kieffer

Captain Pat L. Moss

Captain John S. Seeley

CW3 Ellis E. Brabec

CW3 Frank W. Cross

CW3 Alvin Lee

CW2 John D. Green

WO1 Roger L. Lichte

WO1 Sanford E. Parr

c. Bronze Star with "V"

SP4 Robert Blum

d. Air Medal with "V"

Major Roger J. Shields

CW3 Hugh E. Barlow

CW2 Eskill Phillips

e. Bronze Star

Major Davis Clark
Major Lewis J. McConnell
Captain John S. Seeley
CW3 Alvin Lee
SFC Oliver Lamarre
SFC Carl Ritter
SSG Paul Poling
SSG Vincent Savolskis
SP6 Albene Ginglewood
SP6 Lester Grissom
SP6 Gerold Keller
SP5 Howard Speer
SP4 Jerry Carlisle
SP4 Robert S. Lewis

f. Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry

Major Lewis J. McConnell
SP6 Audrey G. Bell
SP6 Norman K. Ford
SP6 Harold Laber
SP5 Ross A. Brown

g. Air Medals: For sustained operations each regular crew member earned an average of eight Air Medals during the period. Due to the high turn-over of personnel, it would be impractical to list each member's individual awards.

h. Purple Hearts:

Major Norman Hughes
Major Lewis J. McConnell
CW3 Howard Eubanks
CW3 Frank Rowan
CW3 Dennis Rowe
CW2 John R. Logan
SP6 Carl Dioffenbach
SP6 Cluster M. Elliott
SP5 Ross A. Brown
SP5 Charles Farnsworth
SP5 Stephen Niedbala
SP5 Joseph M. Boylan
SP4 Robert P. Coughlin, Jr.
SP4 Allen Armiston
PFC Gerald W. Farley

i. Good Conduct Medals:

All enlisted personnel who earned Good Conduct Medals were awarded the medal.

j. Senior Army Aviator

Major Davis Clark
Captain Robert E. Cuyle
Captain Pat L. Moss

k. Fourteen enlisted men earned the Senior Aircraft Crewmember Badge and fifty-one earned the Aircraft Crewmember Badge.

l. On 27 August 1966, the 11th Combat Aviation Battalion was awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm. Personnel serving in the 178th Assault Support Helicopter Company during the period 10 March 1966 through 30 June 1966 are authorized to wear this award as a permanent decoration.

m. In December 1966, the 178th Assault Support Helicopter Company was recommended for the Meritorious Unit Commendation Award.

C. Civic Actions: In keeping with the overall goals of the United States Army efforts in Vietnam, the 178th Assault Support Helicopter Company undertook sponsorship of the refugee village of Vinh Son, located at Phu Loi, Vietnam, as a unit project. Efforts have been made to initiate health and welfare aids such as showers, wells, and waste disposal. Christmas Day 1966 saw a unit sponsored program consisting of Christmas dinner and toys for the children delivered by Santa Claus descending from a CH-47 helicopter.