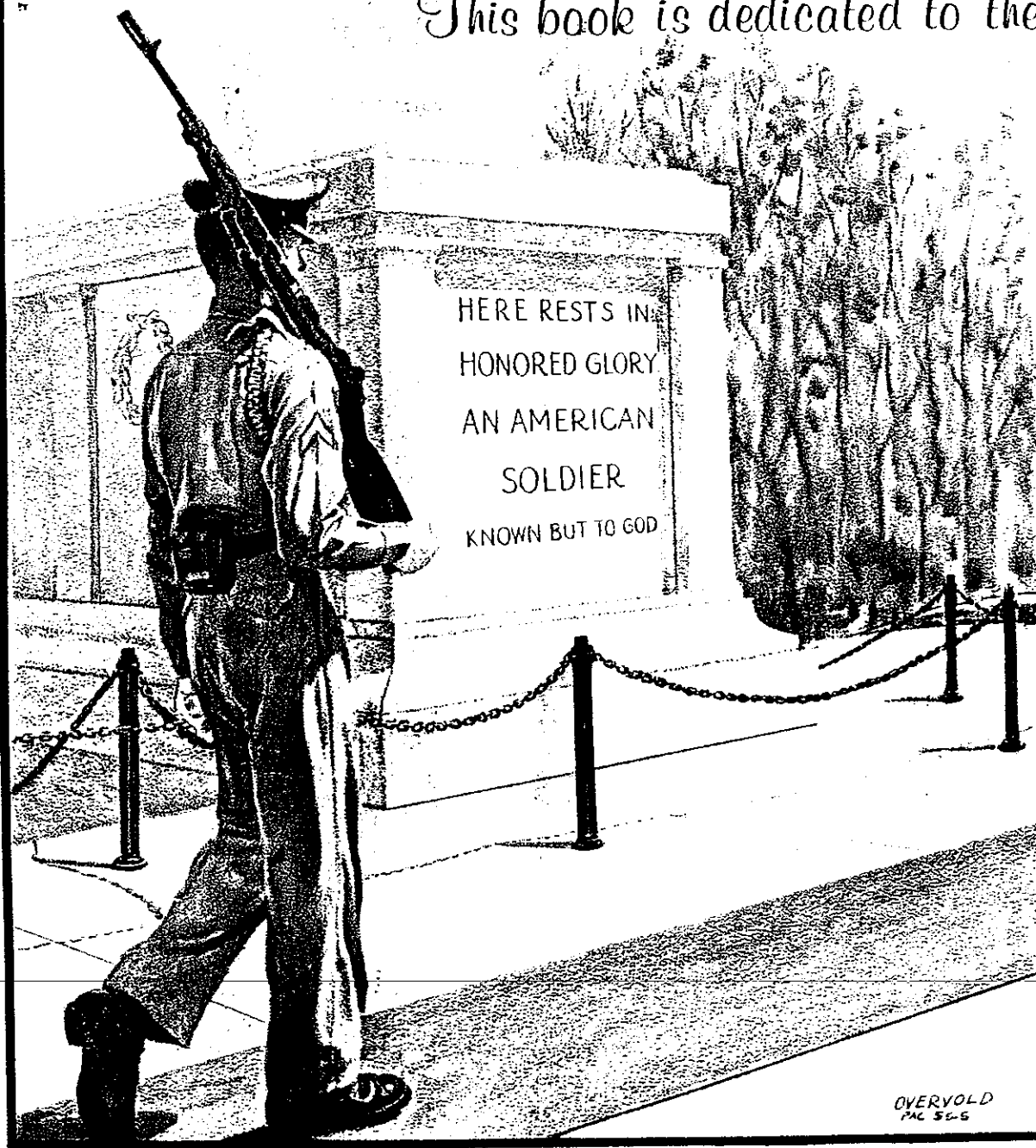


1966

Saker

This book is dedicated to the following brave men



CPT Donald R. Clark

1Lt Carl J. Mangold

2Lt George Gutierrez

CWO Robert M. Douling

CWO Russell W. Kistler

WO1 Ray E. Bradley

WO1 William B. Wilson

WO1 Michael Uhlig

Sp5 William H. Eberhardt

Sp4 Christopher J. Lantz

Sp4 Lee E. Rosenwasser

Sp4 Louis R. Goward

Pfc Gary R. Artman

Pfc Domingo Escalante

Pfc Douglas M. Homer

Pfc Wayne A. McCollum

Pvt Donald L. Arcand

OVERVOLD
PAC 56-5

COVER—CPT William Wiener
DEDICATION PICTURE—GYSGT Edward D. Overvold
MAPS—Roger Fidler
ARTWORK AND LAYOUT—CPT William Wiener
TECHNICAL ASSISTANT—SSGT Harvey D. Corey

COMMANDERS



Maj. Joseph Masterson
15 Dec 1965—20 Aug 1966



Maj. Floyd C. Gober
21 Aug 1966—1 Jan 1967



EXECUTIVE OFFICERS



Maj. Ernest Smart
1 Mar 1966—15 Aug 1966



Maj. Anthony Advesa
27 Jul 1966—3 Oct 1966



Maj. Gordon Ferris
2 Nov 1966—1 Jan 1967

UNIT HISTORY

Activated on 25 July 1962 at Okinawa, the Utility Tactical Transport Helicopter Company became the first and only armed helicopter company in the history of the U.S. Army.

Its primary mission was to provide air transportation for movement of combat troops in the battle zone, but in the months that followed its activation, new horizons were explored and the unit was not limited to its original mission.

Because of the growing Communist threat in Southeast Asia, the UTT, commanded by Major Robert Runkle, was sent to Thailand for a 90-day period. From there it went on to South Vietnam, where its role was to provide close armed protection for unarmed troop-carrying helicopters. Nine days after arrival, elements of the company had engaged the enemy and left no doubt that Army aviation would prove effective in a new role.

On 21 November 1962 Major Ivan Slavich assumed command of the unit. Soon after, the unit started to receive UH-1B's armed with the XM-6 system. This aircraft and system were a big improvement over the older model aircraft and fixed-weapons system, but an extensive training program had to be initiated.



Throughout 1963 the UTT was used as a test unit for the Army to determine the effectiveness of armed helicopters. It was demonstrated that armed helicopter employing the tactics and techniques developed by the UTT could provide adequate protection for air-mobile operations against an insurgent force similar to the Viet Cong.

On 2 January 1963 Sergeant William L. Deal was the first UTT man to be fatally wounded, in the heaviest fire fight to that date. It was realized that the effectiveness of helicopters against prepared positions was limited.

The new year also brought many changes in types of missions. In addition to escorting transport helicopters, providing reconnaissance, convoy protection, and close support for ARVN ground troops became major roles.

The company was not always together as a unit. In February 1963 one platoon was deployed to support the U.S. Marines in the mountainous region around Da Nang.

In April 1963 planning and coordination between the UTT and ARVN commanders brought about the operation of a concept called "Eagle Flight." Because of its success, this type of operation was used extensively in the months following. Before the first year of combat was completed, 41 Eagle Flights had been conducted.

In early June armed helicopters were initiated into other companies, and the UTT armament section was requested to assist with installation of the weapons and to train personnel.

On 22 June 1963 Major Robert Reuter assumed command of the UTT. Throughout the summer and fall the Viet Cong became more bold as more weapons and ammunition fell into its hands. Larger units were engaged, and it became evident that the war was not being fought against a group of disorganized guerrillas.

Because of its outstanding accomplishments during the year, the UTT was awarded the outstanding aviation unit award by the Army Aviation Association of America.

On 16 December 1963 Captain Calvin R. Bean was assigned as commander of the UTT. The platoon from Da Nang joined the company, and for the first time in many months the whole company could work as a unit. Many successful Eagle Flights finished out 1963.

In January 1964 the most notable event was an air assault on the 17th and 18th of January 1964. It was the largest heliborne assault operation ever executed by U.S. forces in support of ARVN troops.

Because of the UTT, future armed helicopter pilots and commanders will have many tried and proven principles to use as guides. As Major General E. L. Rowny wrote, "The UTT has made an outstanding contribution to the development of battlefield tactics for the U.S. Army. It will be known as the pioneer unit in which armed helicopters were engaged in combat."

Over the months and years, the company adopted permanent call signs that became well known by all ground elements in Viet Nam. The headquarters section was known as the "Sabers"; the 1st platoon, the "Playboys"; 2nd platoon, the "Raiders"; and the 3rd platoon, the "Dragons."

As the Playboys, Raiders, Dragons and Saber elements fell to the task under the guidon of the new company designation, the 68th Aviation Company, an impressive and at times an amusing fact became apparent: The UTT had accomplished its pioneer all armed helicopter mission so well that to the ground advisers in the field any armed helicopter was referred to as "UTT." No manner of explanation seemed to avail as the members of the new 68th Aviation Com-

pany attempted to explain the name change. The name "UTT" for any armed helicopter that roamed the skys, rice paddies and canals of Viet Nam stuck and is now a source of pride to those who remember the pioneer days of the old "Utility Tactical Transportation Company." The mottoes: "The one thing we do not do well is quit" and "We lead the way," became indomitably embroidered into the fiber of the 68th Aviation Company and the 571st Transportation Detachment that supports it.



As the wet season of August passed into the dry season of December, the personnel of the 68th and the 571st fell to the task of continued superior support of the ARVN troops. August and September saw many new faces appear as an increased stream of replacements began to flow from the States. On 12 August 1964 Lieutenant Jarold L. McNeil was awarded the distinguished service cross for having given his life at Ben Cat, the largest airmobile operation held to date. In mid-September Lieutenant Price was wounded by a .50 caliber machine gun in the vicinity of Ben Cat, however Captain Timmermyer successfully flew the ship back to Saigon Navy Hospital.

October saw the Dragon platoon at Nha Trang and Ban Me Thuot supporting Special Forces during a Montagnard insurrection. The Raiders, with the assistance of a certain reporter, precipitated an argument with the Air Force over a VC .50 caliber fight which received front page previewing with the New York Times. The Playboys began operations with the 48th Regiment at Tan Uyen, which was to grow into a deep mutual respect between the 68th and the 48th ARVN regiment. Bien Hoa and Tan Uyen mortared; alerts—alerts—alerts—!!!

November saw the company engaged in the largest heliborne assault to that stage of the counter-insurgent effort in Viet Nam.

Captain "Ed" Riley and CWO "Doc" Holloway were shot down on this operation while reconning an LZ (landing zone). The aircraft and crew were evacuated successfully after a few moments of excitement. The Raiders left for a month's support of I Corps at Da Nang after a severe flood had crippled central Viet Nam, leaving the Playboys and Dragons to cope with one typhoon warning after another in Saigon.

December saw the Dragons replace the Raiders at Da Nang and the Raiders returned to Saigon to join the Playboys in the Christmas spirit of keeping the pressure on ole Victor Charlie. Mid-December ushered the name of Binh Gia into the after-action reports as becoming a "hot area." Just before Christmas the Playboys replaced the Dragons at Da Nang. On 29 December 1964 Lieutenant Paul D. Murray and WO Daniel Sullivan were shot down by enemy ground fire in heavy action in the Binh Gia area. Lieutenant Murray and his gunner, SP4 Casprowitz, received injuries so serious that they had to be evacuated from Viet Nam. On 30 December 1964 WO Roy G. Azbill, WO Steve G. Morgan, Sergeant Franklin Porter and PFC Theodore Winowitch were killed in action when their helicopter was shot down by .50 caliber machinegun fire at Binh Gia and crashed in enemy territory.

January action in Binh Gia was classed as the heaviest of American participation in the counter-insurgent effort of Viet Nam. Playboys returned home, Raiders lost Captain Lyle Erwin and PFC Alton Hornbuckle (571st) to a wire strike while escorting a convoy of the 48th Regiment to Saigon and Dragons slicked.

February saw the company getting used to the idea of no longer being all armed. Dragons attack the slick missions with the same vigor that has become traditional in the "UTT," 68th, 571st: "The one thing we do not do well is quit."

On 9 February AM, Raider 21, Lieutenant James L. Reed, was shot down while escorting Dragons into an LZ near Binh Gia, WO John Urban, co-pilot, was killed by the same fire, and SP5 Robert L. Carroll was wounded by Viet Cong fire after landing. Captain Jack O. Johnson was wounded while marking VC positions for an Air Force strike. Lieutenant Luther D. Young was wounded when he entered the LZ in order to get suppressive fire on VC positions.

On 9 February PM, WO Mark King, WO Larry Kammerer, SP5 Carroll Zanchi, and SP4 Bobby Hudler were shot down while flying overhead cover for Red Hat Troops. The aircraft was destroyed, but the crew was recovered. Captain Johnson, WO King and SP4 Hudler subsequently were evacuated to the States as a result of wounds received this day.

Rumor persisted of still another name change—to the "197th"—and company wide contest yielded a new patch design. Officers and men endowed with the same esprit de corps that marked the UTT 68th, and 571st, now kept the spirit and drive and maintained the fight through another name change.

"We lead the way." "The one thing we do not do is quit."

On 1 March 1965 the 68th Aviation Company (Airmobile Light) (Provisional) was deactivated and the 197th Aviation Company was born. The new patch showed the old UTT flying horse with a "68" branded on his foreleg, the "UTT" on his rump, and a "197" over the wings. All this leaves no doubt as to the reputation this fledgling 197th Aviation Company will carve.

On 26 April 1965 the 197th Aviation Company became the first



Army unit in Viet Nam to be awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation by the President of the United States for action at Duc Hoa 1 to 3 April. The history of this unit runs deep and its actions run swift.



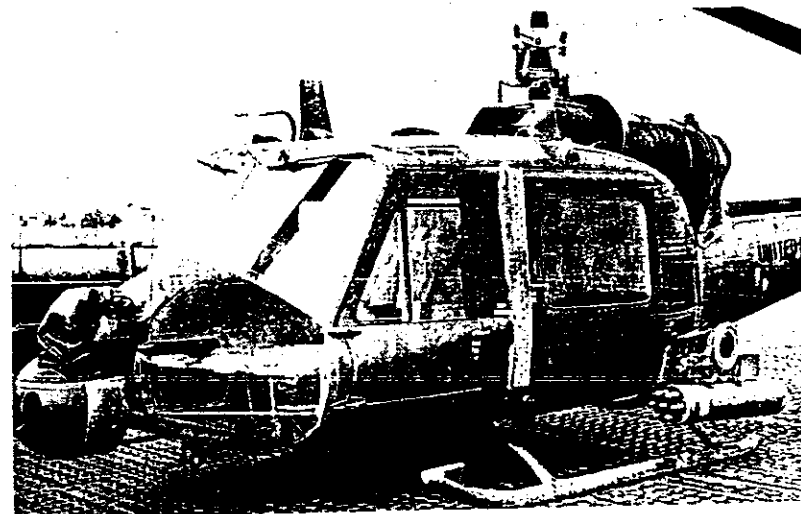
On 11 May the newly activated 197th Aviation Company was engaged in its first major operation, an attack on Song Be by an estimated Viet Cong regiment with supporting 77 millimeter pack howitzers and anti-aircraft machine guns. The 197th responded to desperate calls for aid and the Dragons arrived over Song Be at 0300 hours, to be greeted by the sight of interlaced tracers, explosions and fires in the compound and market place. The Viet Cong had

mortars and .50 caliber machine guns emplaced within 300 meters of the province headquarters and the American compound, and were locked in hand-to-hand combat with the Americans who were still able to fight.

The Dragons immediately began to fire on all the weapon positions they could locate and succeeded in silencing many of those that were doing damage to the defenders, who were still desperately fighting for their lives. Just as dawn was breaking, the remainder of the 197th arrived and began to reverse the tide in favor of the defenders. The Air Force A1E's and B-57's were putting on a demonstration of close air support that probably was unequalled in Viet Nam up to this battle. What followed was a remarkable exhibition of what an armed helicopter unit is capable of doing in time of combat.

The pursuit and destruction of the Viet Cong force that attacked Song Be continued for the next seven days and 197th helicopters worked closely with their longtime friends, the 48th Infantry Regiment of the Vietnamese Army. During the first day of the battle of Song Be, the 197th fired 429 rockets, 53,500 rounds of machine gun ammunition, hauled 201 troops, and flew 81 hours to contribute greatly to the defeat of a determined enemy.

On 19 May, Dragon 31 was reamed, making the 197th fully armed once more. They began to develop new night tactics and employ the newest weapon: the M-5 40 millimeter grenade launcher.



They did such a good job that they laid the ground work for a revolutionary development called "Lightning Bug" that was to help destroy Viet Cong night superiority.

June started slowly until the 7th, when a Viet Cong force attacked and overran the training camp at Gia Ray. The 197th responded as usual and selected, reconned and marked the landing zone for the relief force. After Song Be, this was considered an "easy" task and was a job well done.

On 10 June the little-known village of Dong Xoai became all the Binh Gia's, Duc Hoa's, and Song Be's of our past experience rolled into one. Onto the Special Forces team and a party of Seabees

who were constructing an airstrip fell the combined weight of the largest Viet Cong force ever concentrated for a single set battle up to this point.

The 197th was scrambled and at 0315 hours the first fire teams arrived at Dong Xoai. The Dragons again were the first on the scene and were immediately fired upon simultaneously by eight .50 caliber machine guns ringing the town. The combined efforts of the Air Force and the 197th armed helicopters firing at any and every target that the defenders requested failed to suppress the Viet Cong superiority.

At 0700 hours the Playboys arrived. They detoured and suppressed Viet Cong fire long enough to land slicks inside the compound to evacuate all the living and wounded troops they could carry before the enemy began to overrun the compound. All three of the helicopters used in the evacuation lifted off from the compound and flew through a hail of bullets. Miraculously, they had made it.

It now was late in the day and action had to be taken to secure the compound and aid the Cambodian Strike Force that was still holding out on the east side of the town of Dong Xoai. A bold decision was made to put this last force into the soccer field directly south of the compound. Saber 6 and 7 went into the soccer field to draw enemy fire and, in doing so, accurately locate the heavier weapons so they could be neutralized. The weapons were found, and while they were silenced by Air Force strikes, the lift came in.

The force that had now landed in the soccer field fought their way into the compound and secured it for the night. Early the next morning two of the Playboys escorted slicks into the location of the Cambodian Strike Force and resupplied them with ammunition and evacuated their wounded.

For the next two weeks the 197th supported numerous ground actions in and around the Dong Xoai area as the Viet Cong were pursued and attacked at every opportunity.

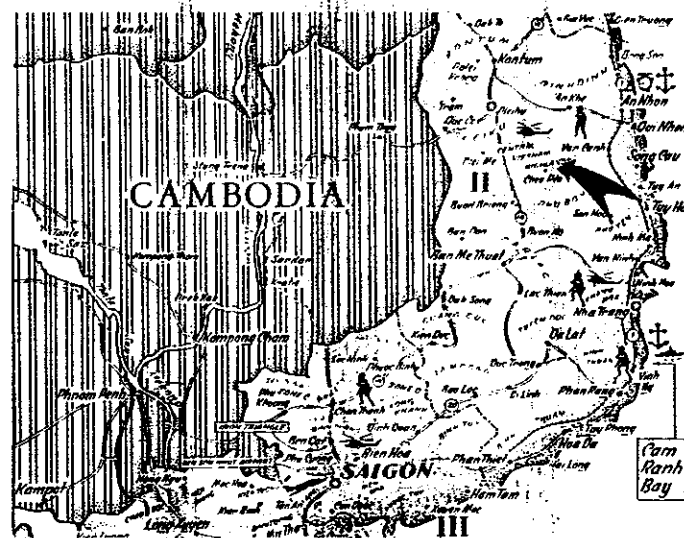
The night of 22-23 June brought into use a new idea in helicopter tactics when the Playboys used the searchlight ship, flown by Saber 7, to illuminate target areas around Dong Xoai, which

was again under attack by Viet Cong. Contact was broken as soon as the helicopters arrived overhead at 2345 on 22 June, and remained overhead continuously until 0745 the following morning.

June also ushered in the supporting of the American 173d Airborne Brigade in all of its operations. It was a welcome pleasure to give close support to fellow Americans a mutual respect was kindled.

"Lightning Bug" was slowly being developed and the remainder of June was spent training crews in night navigation, directing the searchlight, and in night gunnery training.

July started with a composite platoon of Playboys and Raiders being hastily dispatched to Cheo Reo in II Corps, where a district



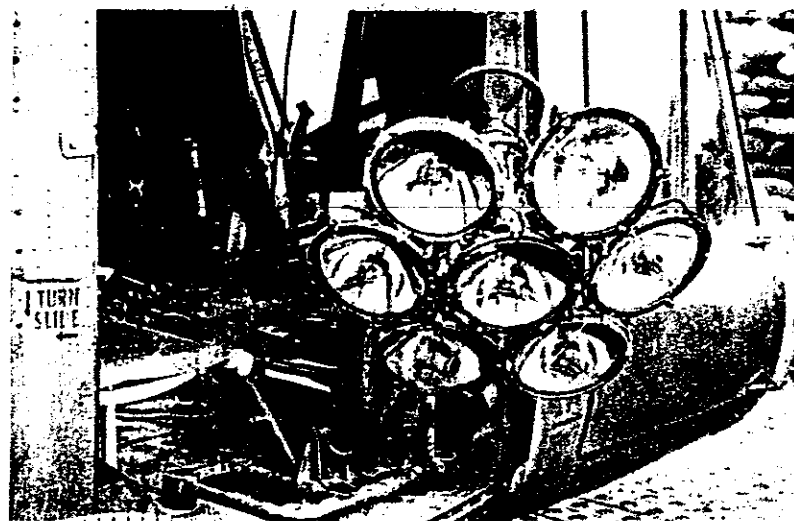
headquarters was under attack. Numerous missions were flown supporting the 52d Aviation Battalion and all of the 197th personnel had the unnerving experience of sitting through a mortar barrage on the airfield.

The Playboys and Raiders were going great guns with "Lightning Bug" and the perfection of tactics using the M-5 40 millimeter grenade launcher; they found it to be the most effective aerial night weapon in the country.

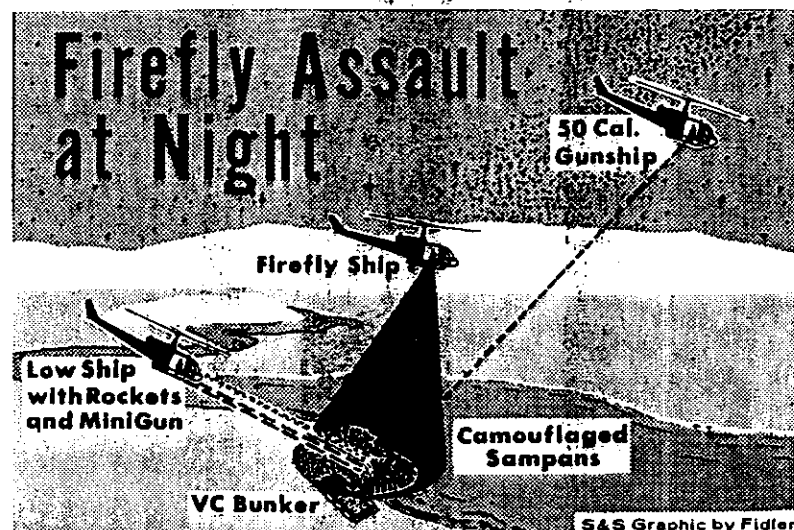
The 197th was flying support missions all over III Corps and getting acquainted with new American advisors. Support of the 173d Airborne Brigade and 5th Special Forces Group took up much of the effort of the company.

The 1st Infantry Division arrived in country and the 197th immediately began supporting them in their efforts to clear the Viet Cong from their perimeter. The Playboys and the Raiders put on an impressive firepower demonstration to show all of their commanders what armed helicopters had to offer when called upon for support.

The Dragons were fortunate enough to participate in a Naval engagement while at Ham Tan on 26 July. Three large ocean going sampans were attacked by them and the largest one sank before it could escape into international waters.



In August emphasis was shifted from day to night operations. "Lightning Bug" was becoming more and more effective and as the day time activity of the Viet Cong slackened, more flying hours were utilized to search them out during darkness and carry the fight to them. The large number of sampans sunk and damaged by "Lightning Bug" seriously hindered the Viet Cong's ability to mass any force large enough to pose a serious threat to any installation in the western portion of III Corps.



The American 1st Cavalry Division sent a number of the members of its advanced detachment to train with the 197th, and they were fortunate enough to participate in some relatively hot operations. Playboys and Dragons set up a training mission for the benefit of the attached aviators on 27 August. This resulted in a confirmed 37 Viet Cong killed and 50 Viet Cong wounded in the Rung Sat Special Zone. An intelligence report received the same afternoon confirmed this claim and verified that the strike had practically eliminated a Viet Cong regimental headquarters.

On 31 August Playboy spent the day at Ham Tan and fired 340 rockets and 60,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition into two Viet Cong villages. Later intelligence reports credited 200 VC killed, 30 ox carts destroyed, many water buffalo killed, and 20 structures destroyed. The province chief was very happy, to say the least.

September began with the tragic loss of Raider 23: 1/Lt Carl J. Mangold, 2/Lt George Guittierrez, SP5 William Eberhart, PFC Donald L. Arcant, and their ARVN observer were all killed in action on 1 September when their helicopter was struck by ground fire and exploded in the air while flying cover near Ben Cat. Their names are added to the growing list of those who have given their lives carrying out the mission of the 197th.

"Lightning Bug" continued successful operations but activity had dropped to such a low ebb that it was extremely rare to find even one small sampan, all the more indication of "Lightning Bugs" effectiveness.

Playboys had the pleasure of controlling artillery and a flight of F-100 Air Force fighter-bombers on targets south of Phuoc Vinh in an area where heavy automatic weapon fire was encountered. The Air Force FAC had radio difficulties and the 197th fire team marked and directed the F-100's, who did a tremendous job.

September 13 found the outpost at Cao Dinh under heavy attack. The Playboys responded, and after firing on numerous targets for the adviser in the compound, they organized and controlled the ammunition resupply and medical evacuation of 21 wounded. This mission resulted in all 197th participants being awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

Activity by Viet Cong in the Capital Military Region on 19 September and again on 20 September gave the Raiders an opportunity to demonstrate to the CMR advisers and the Tan Son Nhut ground defense personnel the value of the STARCOM standby fire team. Both times, the Viet Cong broke contact immediately upon seeing the fire team overhead.

On 28 September 1965 the Dragon platoon, reinforced by the Playboy 13 fire team, departed Saigon for a long stay at Qui Nhon. The Dragons and the Playboys began to work with HMM 363, a Marine H-34 squadron, and the 498th Dust Off Company.

October was a high month for escort missions with Dust Off working overtime to evacuate the many wounded resulting from clearing operations by the 1st Infantry Division, 173rd Airborne Brigade, and the 5th and 25th ARVN Divisions. The armed ships of the 197th also made seven medevacs themselves.

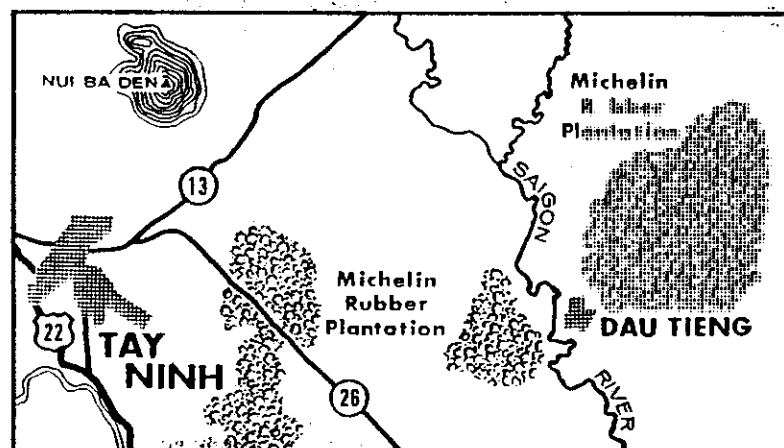
"Lightning Bug" continued its path of success, when, on the night of 23-24 October after being scrambled to Duc Lap, close to Bao Trai, 20 sampans were sunk and 13 more damaged. This prevented the Viet Cong force which had overrun Duc Lap from withdrawing by water, forced them to move overland, and contributed greatly to the body count of more than 200 VC killed, plus the body of a confirmed Chinese Communist adviser found the following day. The Playboys once again hit the sampan jack-pot.

The 197th added the name of one more man who gave his life in this war. PFC Homer D. Nelson was killed at Qui Nhon while performing as a gunner with the Dragons in support of the United States Marines on 28 October.

On 27 October, HMM 363 conducted its largest operation to date. Before dawn HMM 363 started lifting the 1st Battalion, 327th Airborne Infantry into landing zones two miles behind the Viet Cong lines along the Song Cau river. As Marine helicopters lifted out of the landing zone, the Dragons were forced to use their rifles and pistols to protect them, because all of their ammunition had been expended. Sergeant Harry M. Kitchens, gunner for Dragon 36, kept up his rifle fire even after he had been shot through the left arm.

November cost the 197th the life of Captain Donald R. Clark, who was shot down 9 November by intense automatic weapon fire while flying a "Lightning Bug" mission. The aircraft was totally destroyed, but the other three crew members were rescued by WO Kent F. Paxton, who landed immediately despite the heavy volume of enemy fire, and pulled them from the burning wreckage. "Lightning Bug" continued with steady results throughout the month and accounted for the destruction of 42 sampans with an additional 17 sampans damaged.

November 27 saw the bloodiest battle yet staged in the Michelin rubber plantation north of Dau Tieng. The 7th ARVN Regiment had its headquarters and one battalion completely overrun by a Viet Cong regiment. The 197th armed helicopters supported the remainder of the 7th Regiment while it reformed and fought its way out of the plantation. An American adviser estimated between 100 and 200 VC killed by the 197th armed ships. Late in the afternoon the armed ships hauled out a total of 52 seriously wounded Vietnamese soldiers and 4 wounded American advisers. For the next three days the 197th helicopters supported the ARVN and the 1st Infantry Division as they pursued the Viet Cong. A few days after this the Saber fire



team was scrambled to Bao Trai to support units of the 25th ARVN Division, which had been hit hard by the Viet Cong while on a search and destroy mission. Thirteen Viet Cong were caught in the open resulting in 7 killed and 6 wounded.

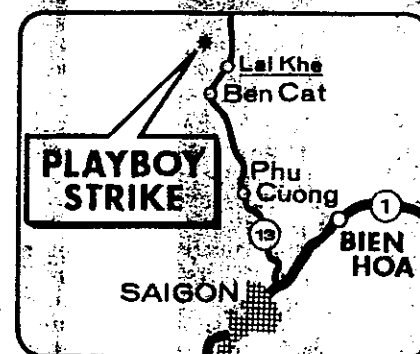
On the 13th and 14th of November the Dragons once again rejoined the company in Saigon.

December was a month full of many and varied missions conducted by the 197th. On 1 December Saber and Playboy fire teams provided LZ pre-strike, recon and mark for an assault conducted by the 173d Airborne Brigade.

On 5 December Playboy 16 and 17 were returning from a mission when they heard a call for air support from ambushed elements of the 1st Division northwest of Lai Khe. Under cover of USAF and 197th air strikes the friendly elements were able to withdraw their casualties and prepare for medevacs.

Another large-scale operation began on 31 December when several ARVN battalions were helilifted into the 25th Division's plain of Reeds near the Cambodian border. LZ pre-strike, recon and mark, and overhead cover were provided by the Sabers and the Raiders.

Christmas Day saw the Dragon platoon accept one of the toughest combat missions of the war—overhead cover for the Bob Hope Show in Bien Hoa. At the end of the performance the Dragons made



an impressive fly-by over the stage, colored smoke trailing from the skids.

Quin Nhon absorbed the Raiders' attention during the first three weeks of December. Dust Off and Marine H-34 escorts continued to be the order of the day, with occasional airmobile assaults in the Tuy Hoa and Song Cau areas. The Dragons replaced the Raiders "on station" several days after Christmas.

Two changes in the chain of command occurred during December. On 10 December First Sergeant Wesley Rose went to A/501st in Bien Hoa, to be replaced by First Sergeant Johnny V. Naron of that unit. On 14 December Major James W. Booth turned over his command to Major Joseph H. Masterson in ceremonies at the flight line. Major Booth was sent off to the U.S. the next day with a five-ship fly-by.

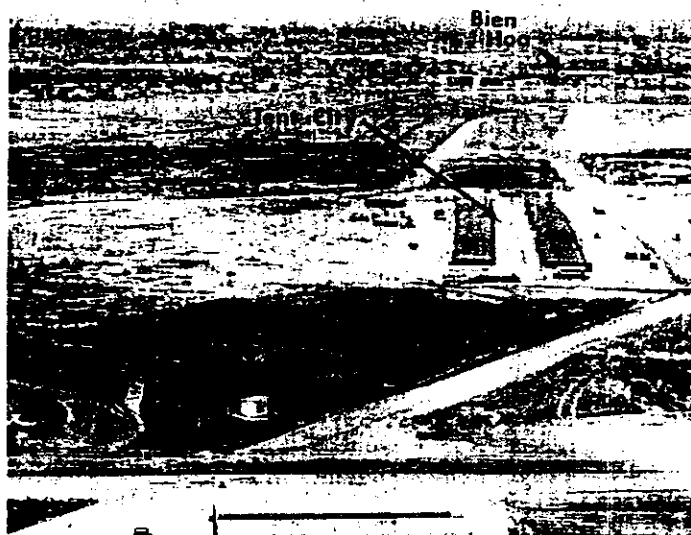
Beginning 14 January 1966 the unit began to receive new UH-1B/E 540 aircraft. The unit was assigned 21 UH-1B and 10 UH-1B/E 540 helicopters.

During January the unit supported the 145th Aviation Battalion in seven air assault operations in support of the ARVN III Corps, 10th Division, American 173d Airborne Brigade and other units. On 22 January the 3d armed platoon (Dragons) returned from a month's TDY supporting the USMC in the II Corps area. Normal missions were conducted daily to include "Lightning Bug" operations. On 26 January the unit began a regular commitment of one light fire team for overhead cover of the Nha Be tank farms. The casualties for the month of January were high. One officer and two EM were killed when their ship was shot down 10 miles southwest of Tuy Hoa. During the month there were 19 aircraft hits.

During February the unit supported the 145th Aviation Battalion in 12 air assault operations in support of the ARVN 10th Division, 25th Division, Special Forces, 1st Infantry Division and other units. The Raiders spent the 24th and the 25th in IV Corps area in support of the 13th Aviation Battalion. On 28 February the unit responded to a rapid reaction order of the 145th Aviation Battalion to support an ARVN Infantry battalion hard hit just north-east of Vo Dat in the "Ricebowl" area. The 197th provided overhead cover while a ground reaction force was organized, and it also medevaced some of the more seriously wounded ARVN.

Normal daily missions of "Lightning Bug" and two light fire teams for Nha Be standby and Rung Sat overhead cover were performed. Casualties were totaled at 2 killed and 6 wounded in action. There were 13 aircraft hits.

During the month of March the company performed its regularly assigned missions of "Lightning Bug", overhead cover for the shipping in the Rung Sat Special Zone area, and the Nha Be tank farm standby. On 4 February during the RSSZ mission the fire team on station came to the support of a freighter under mortar attack. On this same day the fire teams put in strikes resulting in several sampans destroyed, 15 VC killed, 4 wounded, and 1 VC who turned himself in because of the flight of his companions. Also during the month the company supported the 145th Aviation Battalion during 10 airmobile operations by reconning, marking and pre-striking landing zones. Two of the operations were rapid reactions to reinforce units helilifted in which had run into heavy contact. Toward the end of the month missions were reduced to daily recurring missions to allow the company to make its move to Bien Hoa Airbase. On 25 March 1966 the 197th made a PCS move to Bien Hoa to a tent city which they constructed. At this point the welcome addition of the 774th Medical Detachment, commanded by Capt. Julio Balette, was made.



Commencing 23 April 1966 the unit began moving from tent city into permanently constructed billets, closing into the last billets on 28 April 1966. The orderly room was temporarily located in a building slated for another unit, adjacent to the operations building. Mess facility still is awaiting completion of a permanent building, currently under civilian contract. Officers attempted to patch up a "new" villa built for them in Bien Hoa within the "Honor-Smith compound."

Overhead cover continued for the shipping in the RSSZ operational area, and the Nha Be tank farm standby. The company supported the 145th Aviation Battalion in seven airmobile operations by reconnaissance, marking, pre-striking, and overhead cover. The unit also participated in a rapid reaction to Tan Son Nhut while it was under mortar attack. April 4, while flying advance recon for

the U.S. 25th Infantry Division's mech force, one fire team encountered 13 VC in a trench and placed the VC under fire, resulting in four confirmed VC killed. On the 11th, after taking an estimated 40 to 50 VC under attack, a fire team captured a VC running from an operational area and returned him to Cu Chi. On the 20th the



first combat employment of the 20mm cannon system, being evaluated and tested by this unit, was started. On the 25th the unit gave the first demonstration of the 20mm cannon and CBU system. On the 29th Bao Tri was under mortar attack, so the "Lightning Bug" was diverted to that location: the VC withdrew upon their arrival. On the last day of the month the Playboys ended RSSZ river patrol with a bang when they accidentally spotted a camouflaged VC sampan. They received permission to fire and their fire was returne. In this action they claimed 2 VC killed, 6 sampans destroyed and 2 damaged. Later intelligence reports indicated 3 VC killed, 7 critically wounded, and 9 sampans destroyed.

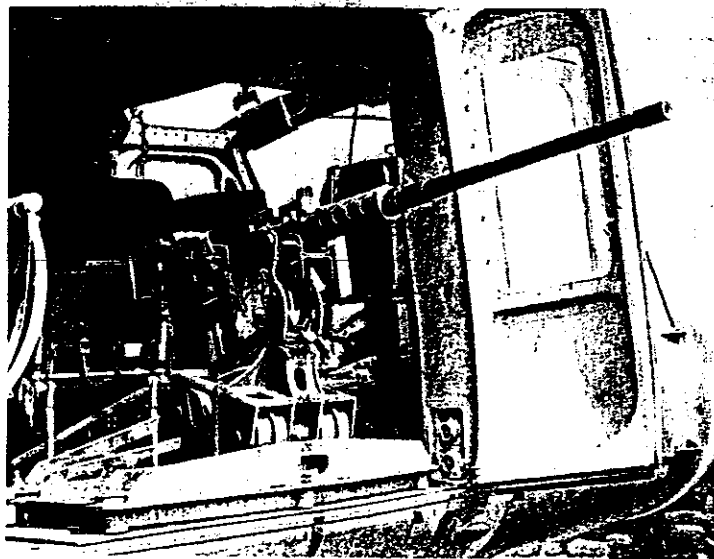
On 1 May Raider platoon elements destroyed two sampans and

two structures, a Playboy platoon fire team destroyed two villages while flying overhead cover for a Special Forces detachment at Hon Quan. In addition they flew overhead cover for two demolition teams who destroyed a bridge. Upon completion of this mission they learned of the flight of 96 men on a patrol operating near Minh Thanh who had been cut off from all resupply that day. They stripped their aircraft of all unneeded non-firing equipment in order to airlift in approximately 3,000 pounds of ammunition and food.

On 9 May a Dragon fire team rescued 11 survivors of a downed CH-47 that had crashed in Rung Sat. Around Tay Ninh a Playboy fire team destroyed a sampan moving toward a VC village, and while making a low level reconnaissance of the area they discovered one building after another until a total of eight buildings were discovered. The Playboys called in airstrikes on the clandestine VC village and recorded a secondary explosion from one of the bomb drops.

May 14 saw a Dragon fire team make strikes resulting in 17 VC possibly killed and a dozen hootches destroyed. May 18 a Playboy fire team destroyed one sampan and one building, destroyed one 30-foot sampan and damaged another while on Lightning Bug. A Dragon element put in an airstrike resulting in two structures destroyed and 12 damaged. On 21 May two Playboy fire teams destroyed a 20-foot sampan with the possible "liquidation" of two comrades. May 29 saw a Raider Lightning Bug team destroy a 30-foot sampan and one smaller motorized sampan with the confirmed KIA count of seven VC . . . certainly not a good night to be paddling down the river!!

The past few months had become a constant routine: cover the same territory, examine it every day from every angle and altitude, constantly seek out the various areas the VC were probably using, and suddenly the huts, bunkers, trenches, sampans and little men were no longer impossible to find. By persistence we had found ways to deprive Charlie of his precious supplies, facilities and personnel.



On 4 and 5 June a Playboy Lightning Bug team destroyed seven sampans and four hootches. On 6 June another Playboy Lightning Bug team showed how effective the "light in the sky" is when they destroyed 30 sampans in one night. It turned out that their target was an escape fleet to be used by the VC the next morning, and the destruction of the fleet meant near annihilation for the VC ground force that had to stand and fight against a pursuing ARVN Force. Two days later the Playboys boosted their record of sampans sunk by another 38 when they intercepted a VC supply convoy moving northeast of Tan An.

On 18 and 19 June a Raider fire team destroyed one sampan and damaged three others along with five hootches which yielded two confirmed VC KIA. June 23 had a Raider fire team destroying two 30 foot sampans and one large hootch, an action which gave them credit for another three VC KIA's. On the same day a Playboy fire team destroyed three hootches and damaged 20 with four confirmed VC killed. That night a Playboy Lightning Bug team destroyed three sampans, three hootches, and one foot bridge.

The end of the month resembled the beginning: On the 29th the Playboys on Lightning Bug destroyed 25 sampans and damaged 15 structures resulting in three confirmed VC killed and one possible.

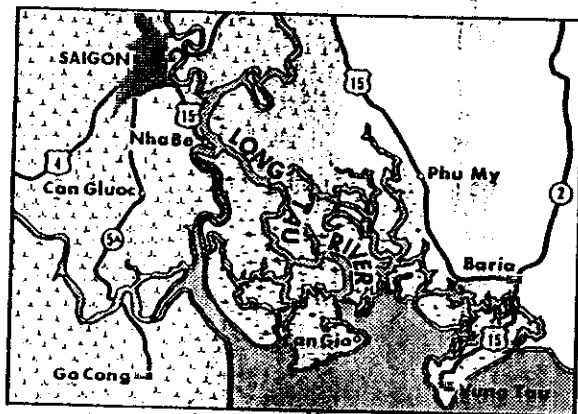
Late June and early July saw the addition of some "comfort and convenience" additions to the company area on Bien Hoa airfield: Shelter bunkers between the EM barracks, the opening of the new latrine-showers, further construction of the permanent orderly room final setting of the operations office, and the slow increase in the always-welcome additions to the company roster.

The first day of July had the Playboys out of Lightning Bug again: Their tally for the night was 23 sampans and one structure destroyed with one confirmed and one possible VC dead. The next night they again went out and stopped 17 sampans in their tracks and at the same time dropped seven VC so they would never again make any tracks. July 3 was another good night: 34 sampans and six structures. On the fourth we gave a fireworks demonstration by day and night: Raiders got three hootches destroyed and two damaged, the Playboys on the Bug got 17 structures and one confirmed VC who obviously wasn't going to celebrate anything again. The momentum, spirit and success of Lightning Bug was momentarily stalled on 5 July when Playboy 13 crashed west of Duc Hoa. Somehow all crew members survived the exploding fuel and ammunition, although the copilot had to be medevaced to Hawaii. Back in action on 11 July around Tay Ninh, the Playboy fire team showed it was back in business by pursuing and capturing a VC who was attempting to escape an area after a bomb strike. Raiders added to their box score with 24 sampans and three confirmed VC, but managed to outdo themselves (and everyone else) on the 19th of July when they sent 40 sampans to the bottom. July came to a conclusion with the happy report that each day and night was a serious and dedicated attempt to repeat the astounding records achieved by the various fire teams in their day and night missions.

The period saw the beginning of changes on the horizon: The rumor had it that new aircraft, an improved version of the UH-1B540, was on the way . . . and could that be an augmentation of D model slicks on the horizon? And finally, time to bid farewell to the commanding officer, Major (soon to be Lt. Col.) Joseph H. Masterson.

On September 22, 1966, the 197th moved again—to Fort Benning, to join the 197th Light Infantry Brigade. But its officers, men, helicopters, and reputation remained in Bien Hoa as the new 334th Aviation Company. The Sabers, Playboys, Raiders, Dragons, and Gangbusters (Headquarters, first, second, third and fourth platoon call signs respectively) continued their outstanding support of counter-insurgency operations in the III Corps area and elsewhere whenever called. The company continued under the command of Major Floyd C. Gober, Armor.

From its inception the 334th Aviation Company assumed the mission of the rotated 197th Aviation Company: to provide armed helicopter and a limited amount of transport helicopter support for the Republic of South Vietnam as assigned by the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion. In practice, each of the three armed platoons had a three-week schedule that seldom varied: two weeks of day time missions and one week of night missions. The day missions consisted of overhead cover of the Long Tau River shipping channel from Saigon to Vung Tau in the Rung Sat Special Zone; emergency



stand-by (five minute reaction time) at Bien Hoa, with two daily recons of the Dong Nai and Bien Hoa-Long Binh areas; and other light fire team missions as required, such as landing zone pre-strike and reconnaissance, troop carrier escort, and overhead cover of ground operations. The night missions consisted of emergency stand-by and Firefly, a search and destroy mission to inhibit Viet Cong water traffic, which was pioneered and developed by the 197th in the Spring of 1965.

The fourth platoon, the Gangbusters, equipped with UH-1D slicks, was developing Task Force Gun-Slick at this time, utilizing an infantry platoon from the U.S. 25th Division and Vietnamese national police in eagle-type flights against road blocks, Viet Cong tax points, and other such targets.

Captain Byron Byerly, Dragon 33, printed a handsome first page for the history of the 334th. On 22 September, our date of birth, he killed a confirmed three insurgents, was credited with a probable three more, and destroyed three sampans and a hut while supporting Narrow Seadog, an American unit operating near Long

Thanh, southeast of Bien Hoa on Highway 15.

Captain William Telfair, Dragon 31, and his wingman, Lieutenant William Wiener, Dragon 37 while screening for a River Assault Group waterborne operation in the Rung Sat special zone landed and captured a Viet Cong suspect who was trying to flee from the oncoming troops.

During October 1966 the 334th added several new projects to its bag of tricks, Gober's Gasser, a gas-laying helicopter designed for use during airmobile assaults, made its debut. Toward the end



of the month the company began experimenting with the Starlight Scope as a possible adjunct to the Fire Fly capability. The Gangbusters began infiltrating and exfiltrating recon teams, and the armed platoons on 2 October commenced a daily mission in support of the Australian Task Force at Nui Dat, north of Baria. It was on this mission on 3 October that Lieutenant Ken Tompkins, Raider 23, was detailed to support a Vietnamese Ranger Battalion in close contact with the enemy in the coastal mountains southeast of Baria. After wounding two Viet Cong in a firing pass, Lt. Tompkins had a change of heart: he landed, picked them up, and flew them to Baria to get bandaged and answer some questions.

On 6 October in the Rung Sat, Captain Fred Steiner probably saved two freighters bound for Saigon from a quick trip to Davy Jones' Locker. With 250 rockets and many 7.62 rounds he broke

up a Viet Cong ambush of a U.S. Navy minesweeper only 800 meters from the merchant ships. Rung Sat operations center was convinced that his continued suppression of the channel banks prevented the VC from command detonating several mines near the merchantmen.

During a Fire Fly mission over "automatic alley" southwest of Tan Son Nhut on 14 October, Warrant Officer Bob Wallas and Warrant Officer Vince Rodel had their tail rotor shot off by a VC weapon they had exposed; through skillful pilotage they made it back to Saigon where they crashed on the active run way, with only minor injuries to the crew and the technical observer.

On 7 November the Raiders lost another ship. After making a night rescue of two crew-members from a downed 120th Aviation Company aircraft, Captain Steiner found himself caught in the middle of a severe squall line. On approach to Nha Be in 0-0 weather conditions the aircraft struck the water. One crew member drowned, but the rest managed to pull each other ashore. Captain Steiner bounced back into action rapidly, however, and on 16 November was credited with killing a probable 30 Viet Cong near Tan Son Nhut.

In addition to the 24 hour emergency stand-by requirement, the Rung Sat back-up requirement, and the Australian Task Force mission, which developed into primarily a stand-by mission, in November the company received the requirement to assume the 24 hour Starcom stand-by at Tan Son Nhut. This mission normally is assigned to the 120th Aviation Company Razorbacks, but they were TDY at this time. "We stand by while others fly" was an oft-repeated refrain, but the Razorbacks resumed the mission in December and tempers cooled.

A perennial complaint on the Rung Sat mission is the frequency with which the fire teams are required to carry administrative passengers back and forth in the zone. On 28 November Warrant Officer Ben Gray, Raider 27, picked up some out-of-the-ordinary passengers, however. In the morning he rescued the crew of a VNAF H-34, and in the afternoon he offered a ride to a rather surprised and hesitant VC suspect, who accepted reluctantly at the sight of the door gunner's M-60.

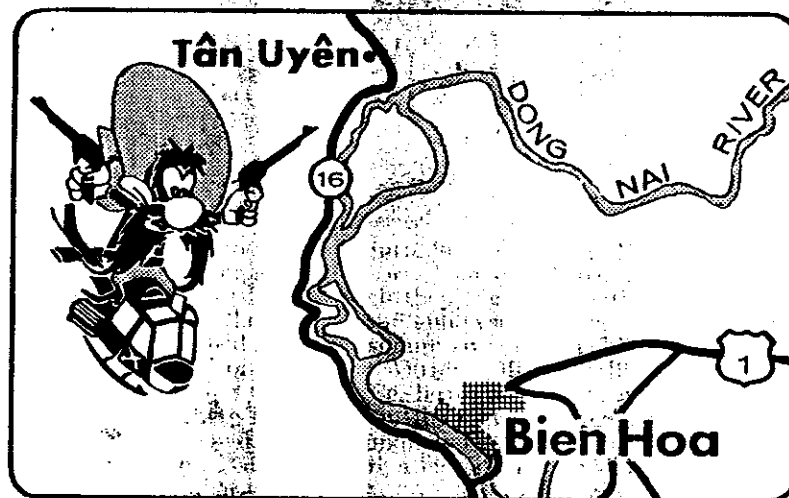


November also saw the introduction of the XM-47 weapon system to the company inventory. The early operations with the system were successful, although they were frequently hairy.

In December the XM-21 mini-gun system arrived, which greatly enhanced the armed platoon's suppressive fire capability.

On the third of December Warrant Officer Hollis Scott of the Gangbusters, flying near Nha Be, heard a distress call and hurried to the scene, where he picked up the crew of a U.S. Navy Seawolf helicopter which had a forced landing. On 8 December the Playboys left for Hue-Phu Bai to support a classified Special Forces mission until 26 December.

Warrant Officer Ben Gray, Raider 27, was conducting the Dong Nai Recon on 19 December when he was diverted to Tan Uyen, which was under mortar attack. He arrived on Station 13 minutes after the first round hit and immediately suppressed the enemy position, wounding one Viet Cong soldier. Friendlies moved into the area rapidly and discovered that the Raider Fire mission had caused the VC to leave in such a hurry that they abandoned two mortars and a 57mm recoilless rifle.



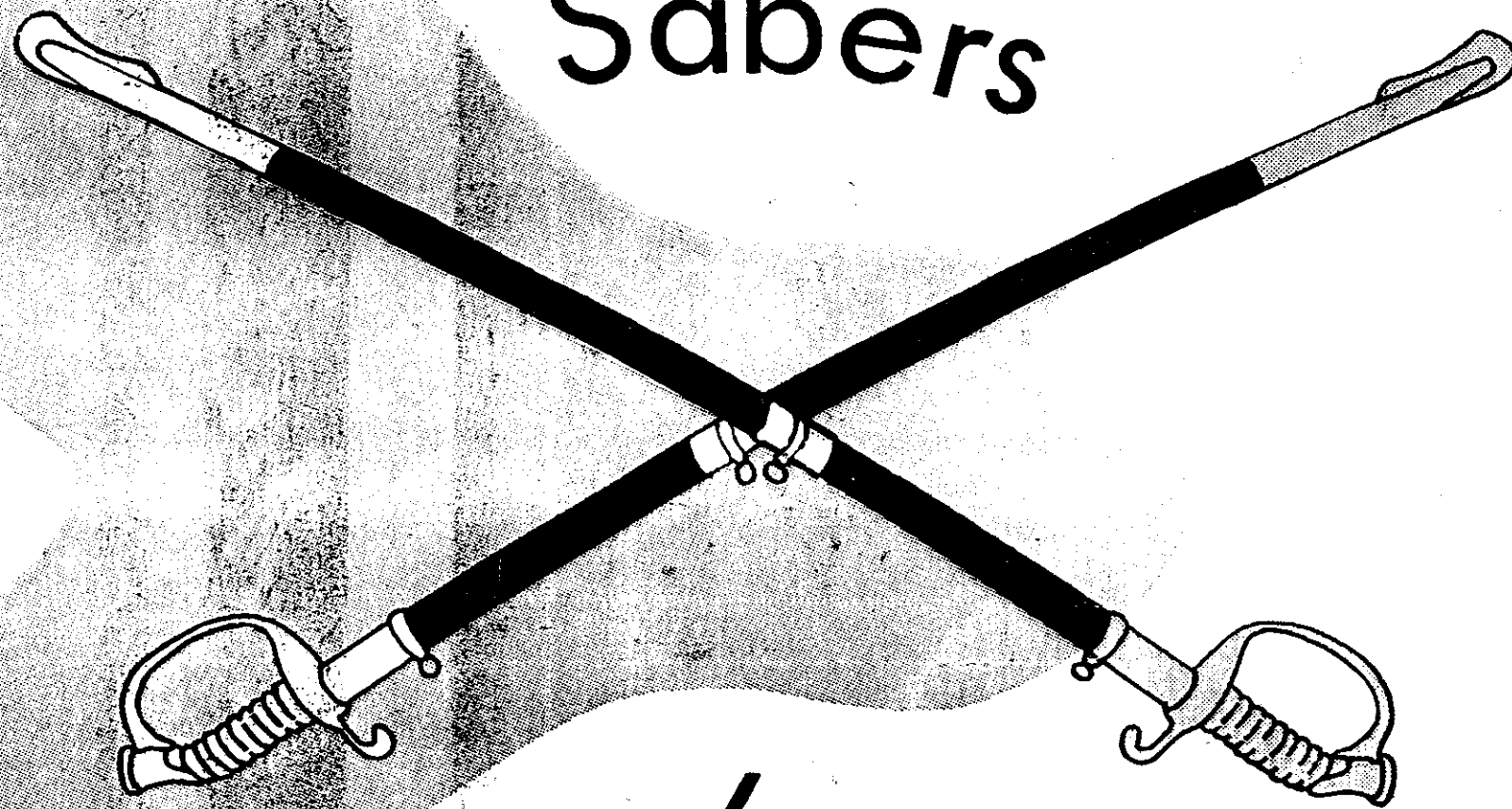
Captain Barry Desfor's Christmas was interrupted by an unexpected forced landing in the Rung Sat. With full fuel and ordnance on his M-3 (HOG) ship and an observer aboard, he had an engine failure and executed a perfect autorotation without damage to the ship or injury to the crew.

On 29 December the Gangbusters began training with Special Forces near Thu Duc for the Sigma mission. The following day Major Gober, flying with only three days remaining prior to relinquishing his command to his co-pilot, Major Gordon F. Ferris, made a precautionary landing after taking several hits on a classified mission for the U.S. 25th Division. No one was injured.

December was also the unit's most successful month for Fire Fly since its inception. On 11 December near Can Giuoc the Raiders sunk 69 sampans; the Dragons escalated on the night of the 23rd, destroying 74.

The 334th is young, but we still lead the way and always will.

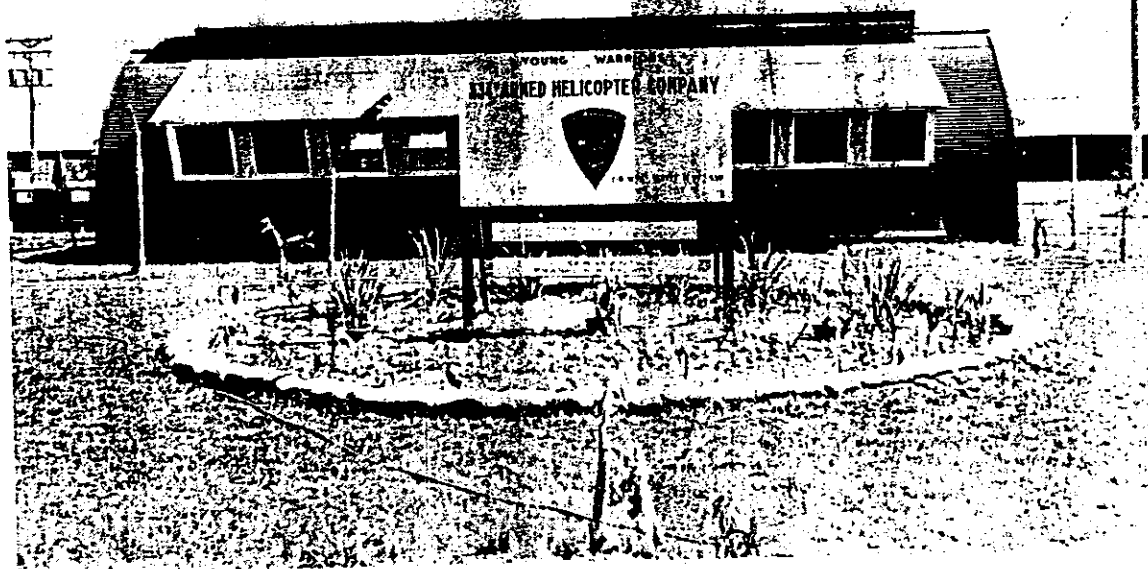
Sabers

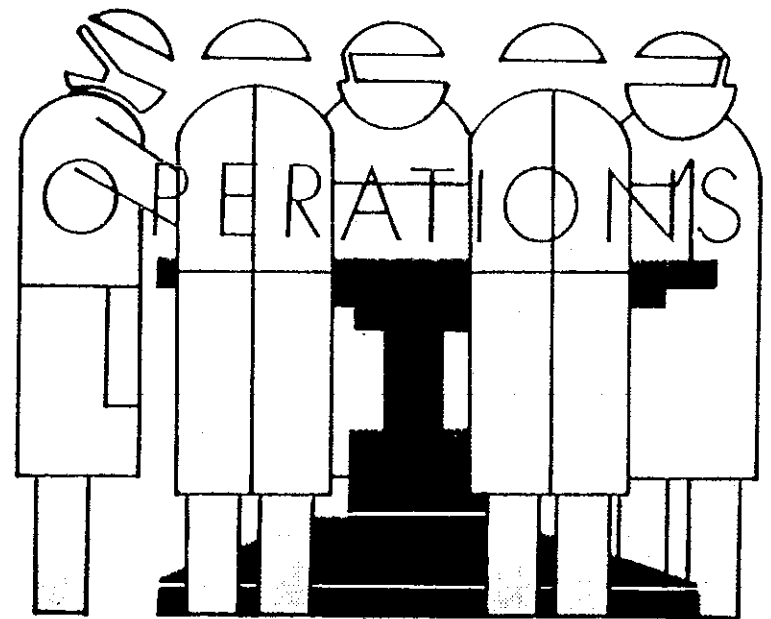
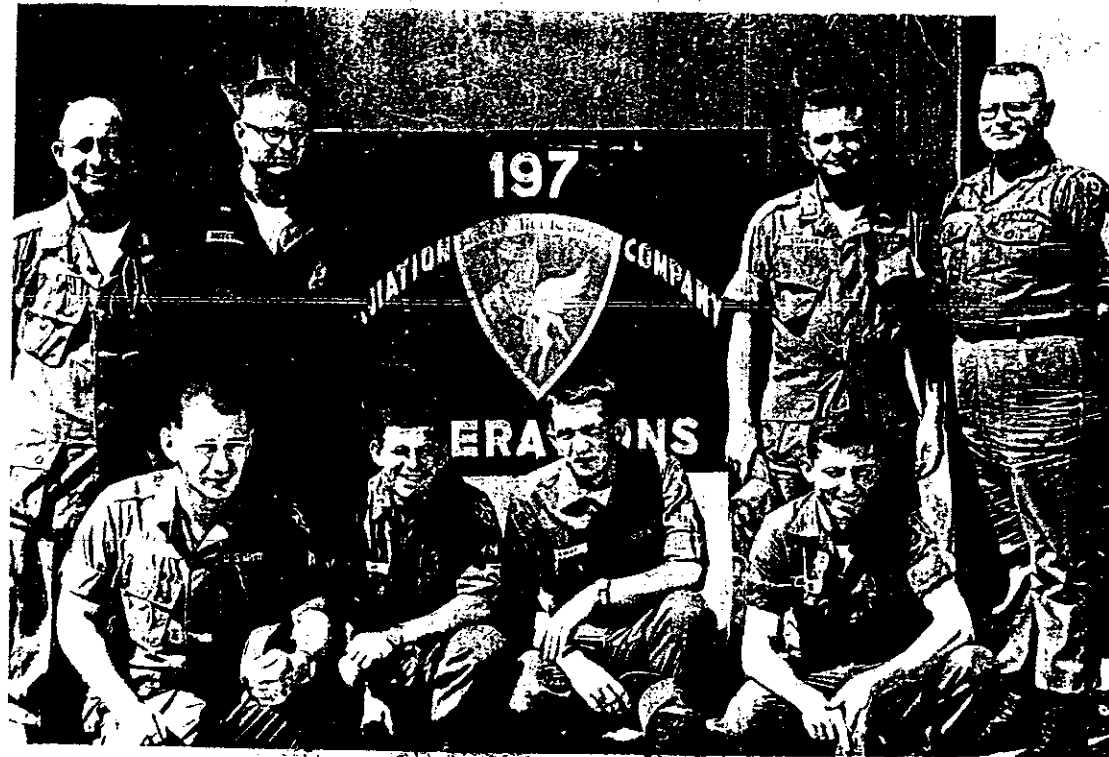
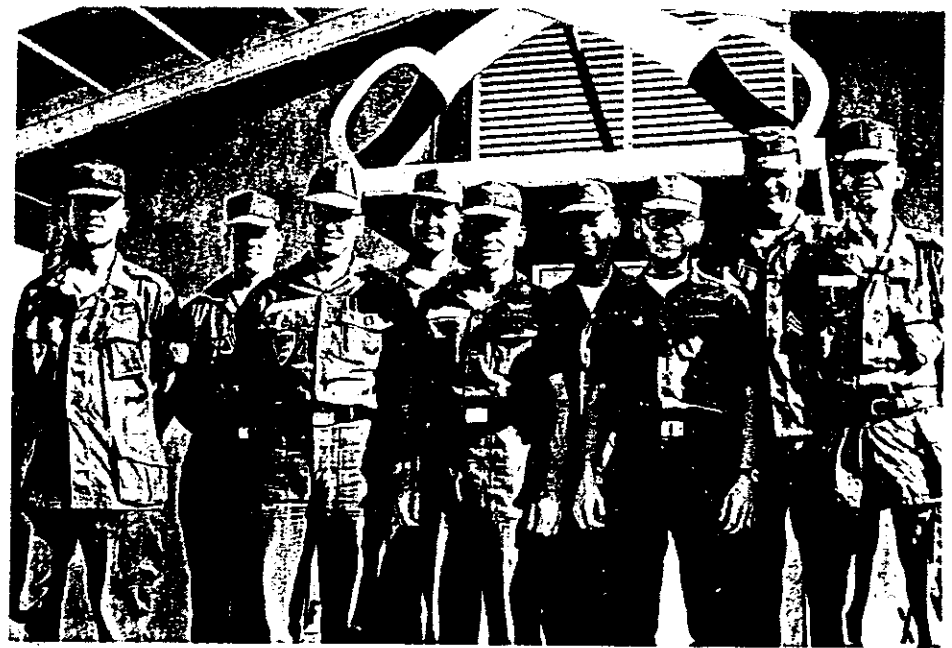


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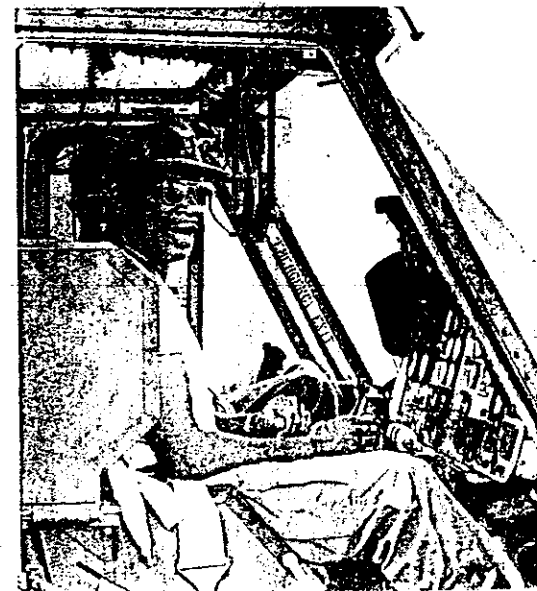
a strap hanger is forever

Headshed





SERVICE PLATOON





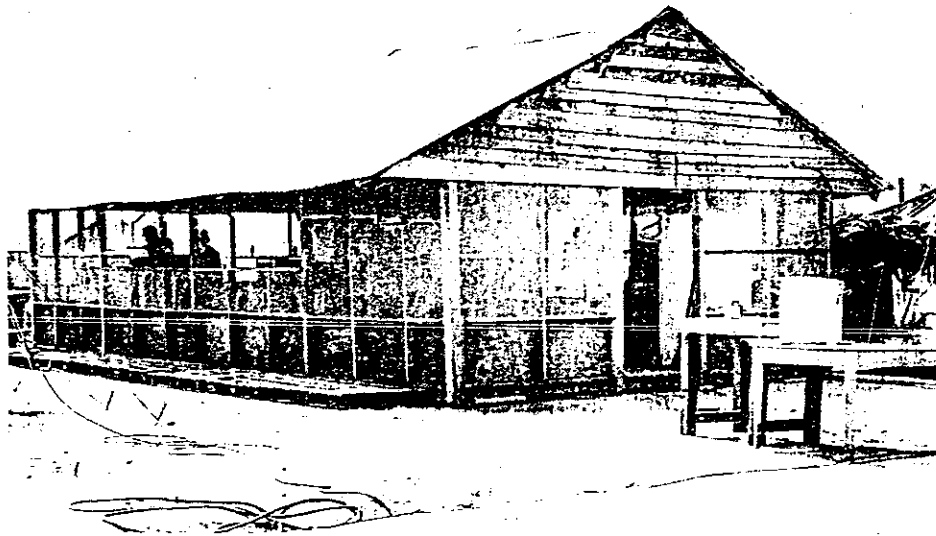


Armament

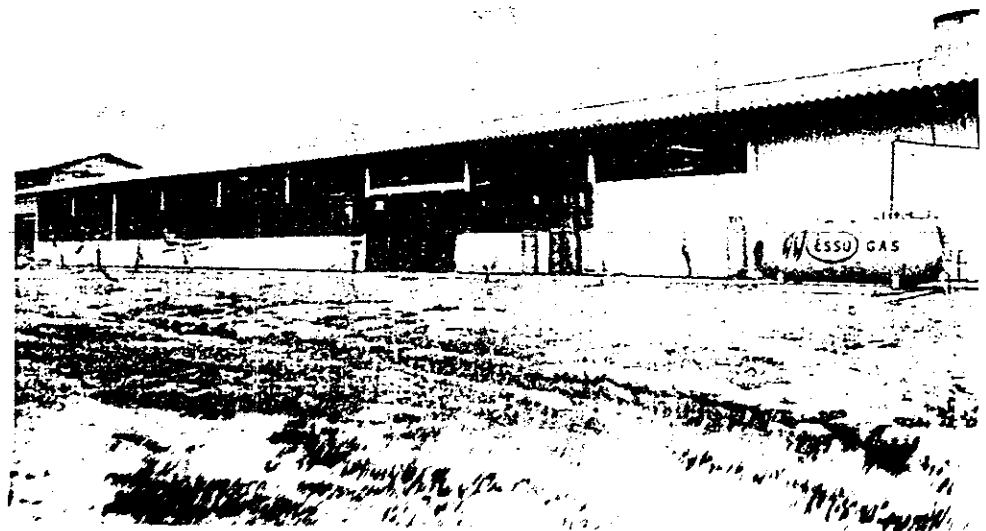
SUPPLY



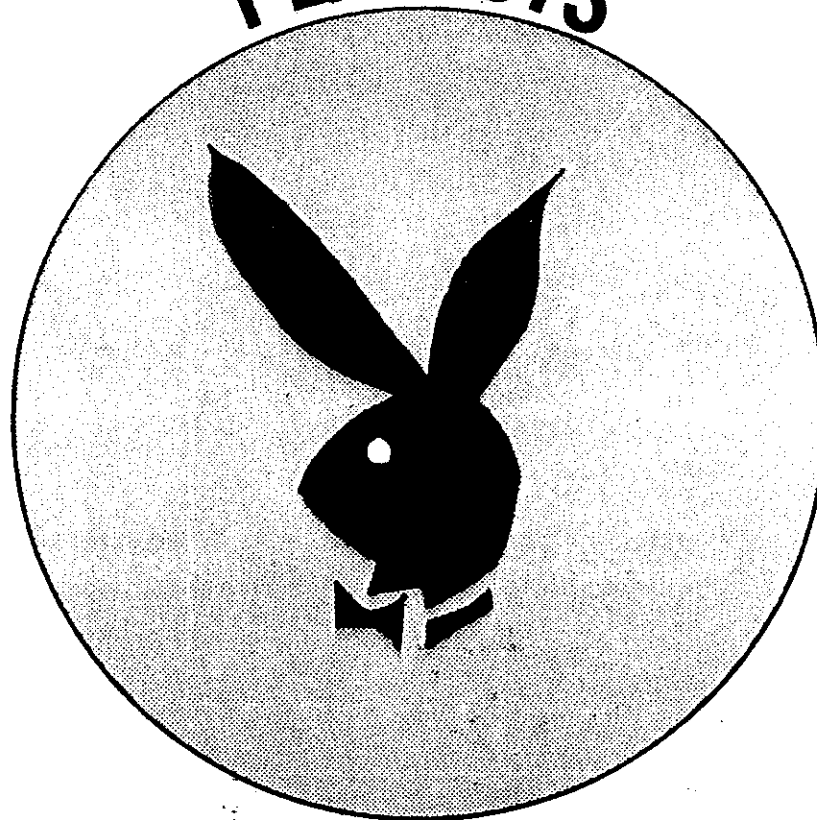
Mess Hall-Then...



Now...



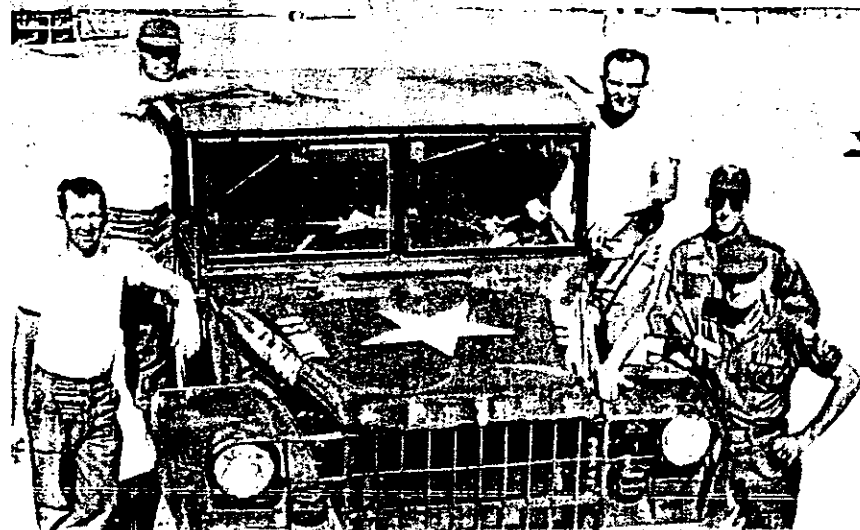
PLAYBOYS

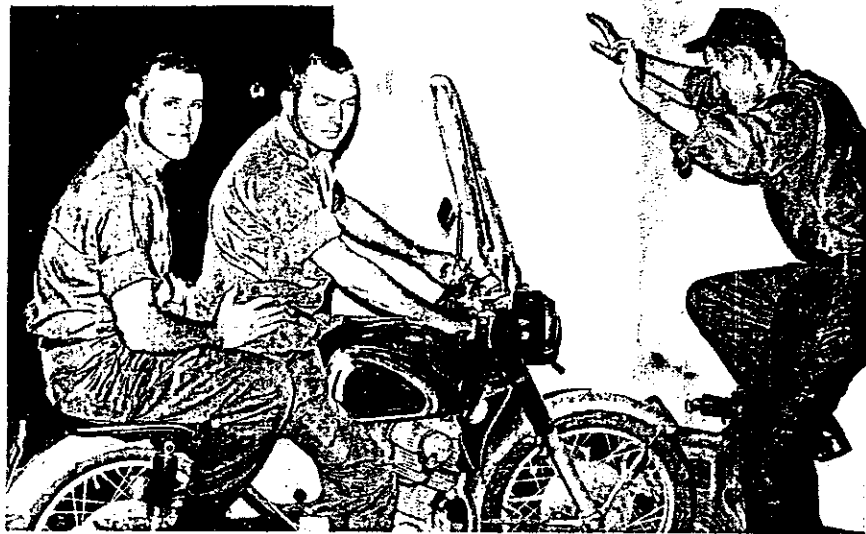


1st













3RD

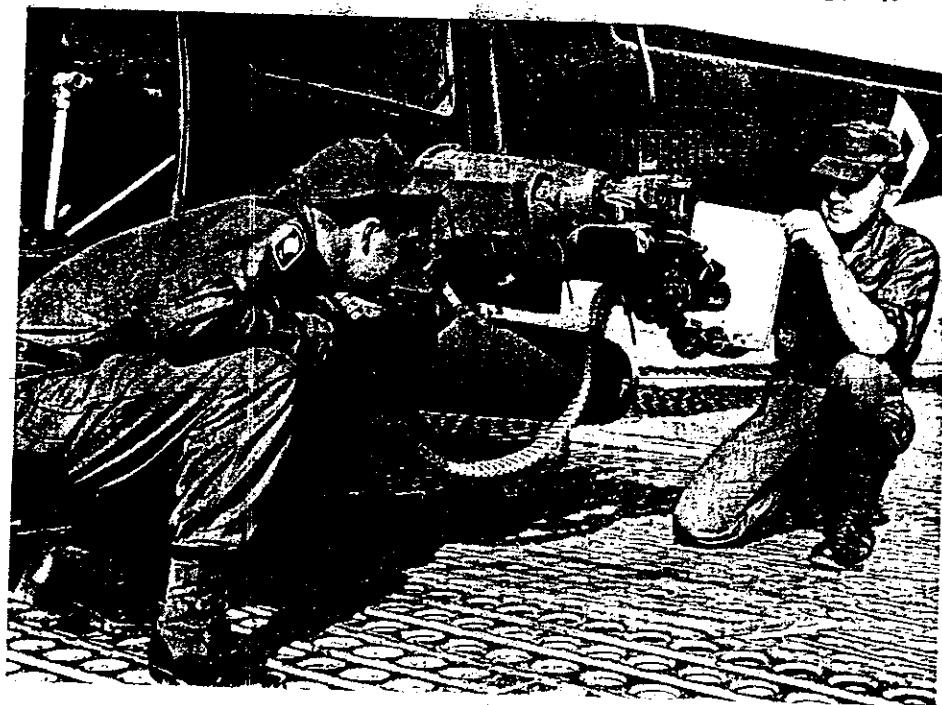
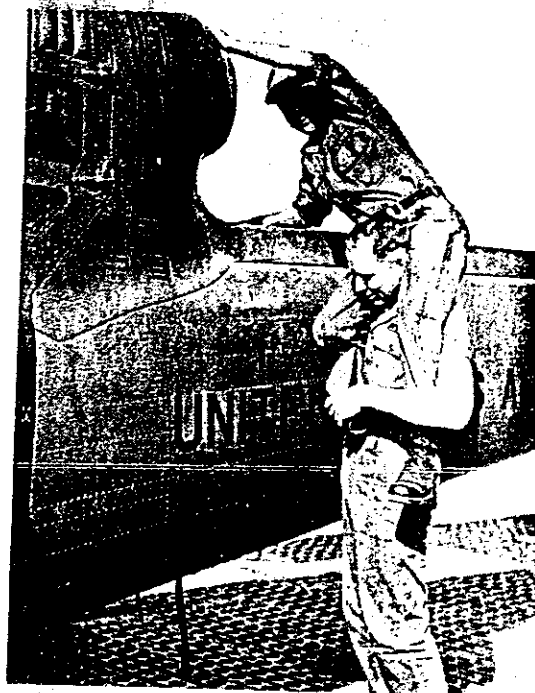


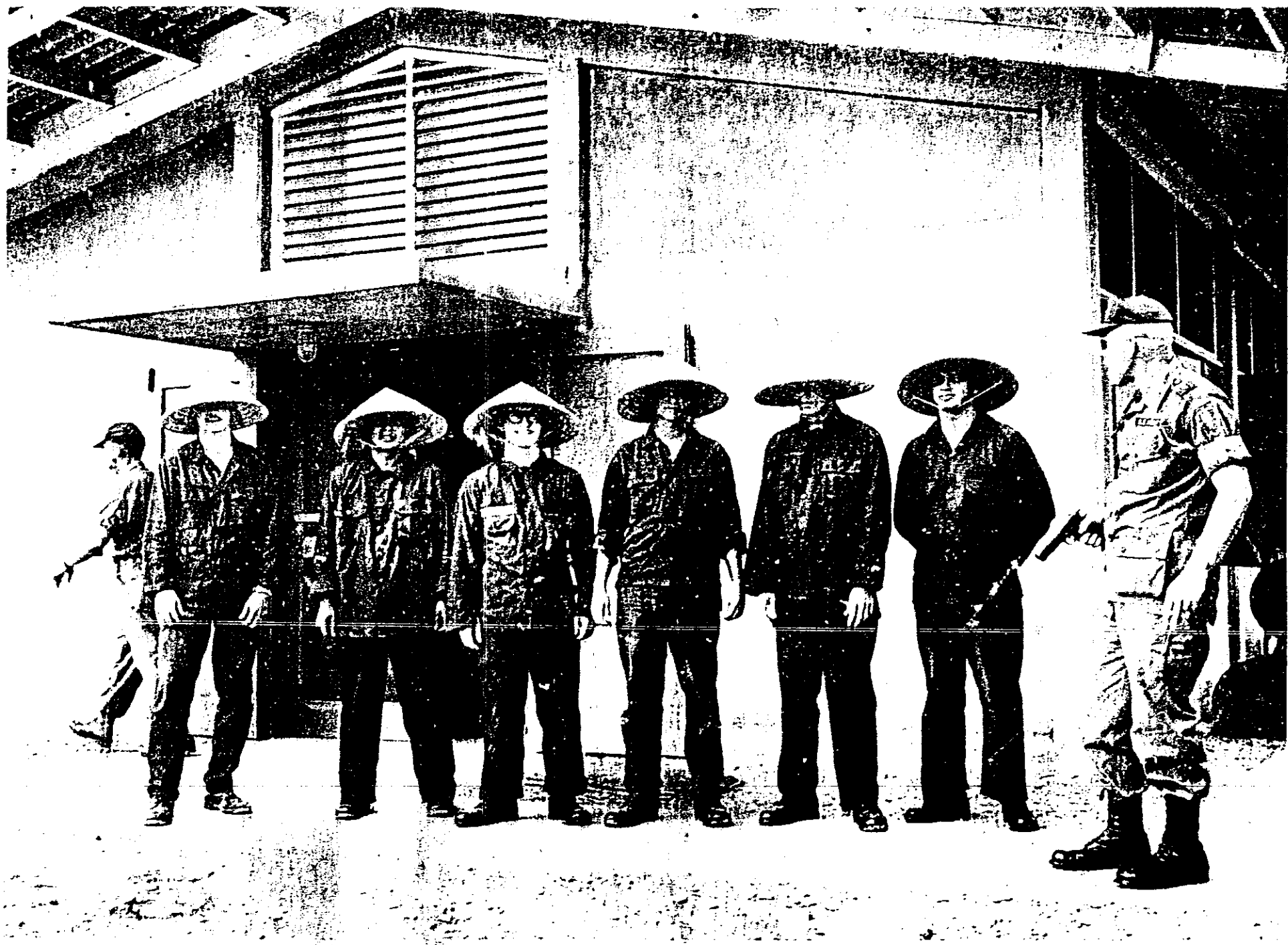
DRAGONS

"a dragon is forever"









Gangbusters



4th

