



In the Quiet of the Jungle, Stalk...

the "TOP TIGERS"

The quiet of a jungle clearing in III Corps is disturbed by the thumping of rotor blades as a flight of Huey slicks flare out and begin to lower toward the high grass. The peacefulness is shattered by the miniguns and exploding rockets

Two ARVN's head for awaiting chopper in pick-up zone.

from Charlie-model gunships providing the slicks with air cover. What was a few minutes before a scene interrupted only by the calls of birds is now a bustling landing zone (LZ). ARVN troops are rapidly moving toward cover. The

gunships buzz low as another element of troops is approaching the zone in a second lift of slicks. If Charlie is in the area, he knows all too well that he is about to be made an unwilling host to the formidable 68th "Top Tiger" Aviation Company (Assault Helicopter).

The 68th AHC supports the 18th and 199th ARVN units. Usually this support is in the form of flying combat assault (CA) missions. Beside supporting these ARVN units, the 68th also keeps busy flying III Corps general support missions.

Whether flying CAs or general support missions, the day begins early for the men of the 68th. Run-up time is at 0530. The crew chief, gunner and pilot check the helicopter and armament one last time before taking off. Then breakfast and take off time at 0730.

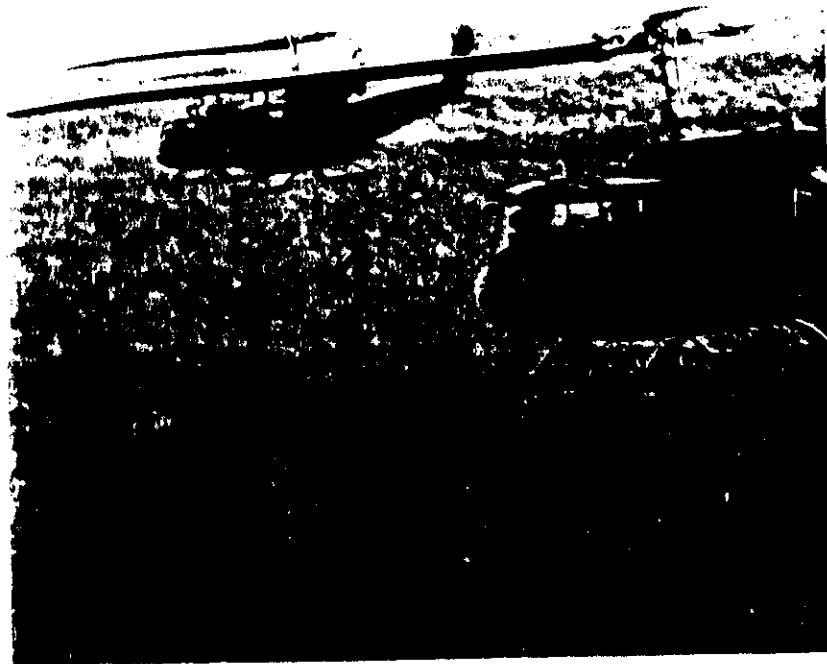
*Story by
1LT Peter B. Howson*



*Photos by,
SP5 Chas Boots*

Areas of operation include every place from the northern Mekong Delta region of Tan An to the rugged mountains and dense jungles of Song Be. Landing zones for the CAs vary from minute openings in the jungle, where only one chopper can hover, to large clearings that are able to accommodate the entire assault element. Ships from the "Mustang" gun platoon, commanded by CPT Albert V. Cite, Jr., "prep" the area for the ships from the first lift platoon "Super Heroes," commanded by CPT Tom Walker, and the second lift, the "Feline Fokkers," under the command of CPT Charles H. McKeen. The Mustangs pour in fire from miniguns, M-60 machine guns, and side mounted 2.75 rockets. As the ships from the two lift platoons enter the LZ they also lay down a heavy barrage of M-60 fire. One of the objectives of the 68th during combat assaults is to attain and maintain superior fire power, thereby giving the infantry a chance to establish itself. As the former commanding officer of the 68th, MAJ Thomas G. Moody put it, "We put the enemy's head

"Offerings" are made of VC rice caches.



Top Tiger slicks give ARVN's a lift to work.

down before he has a chance to return fire."

After the ships touch down in the LZ, it is a matter of seconds before the troops (each helicopter carries 7 to 10 ARVN's with full pack), are out and on the ground, and the helicopters are on the way out of the LZ. Many of the LZs are dangerously treacherous, but

the crews of the 68th, through training and combat experience, are able to adapt to even the most difficult situations with confidence and maturity.

The 68th Top Tigers, commanded by MAJ Luther French and based in Bien Hoa, are from the 145th Aviation Battalion (Combat), "First in Vietnam."

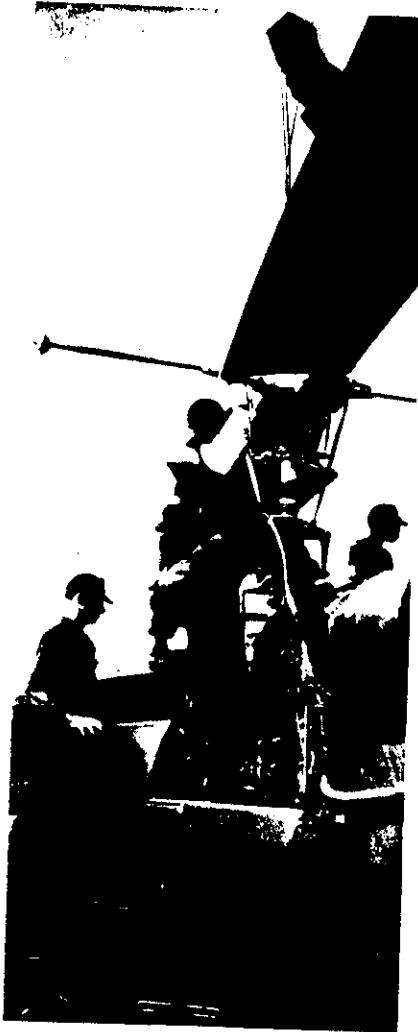
ARVN's rapidly deploy in landing zone.



The company's tour began when it arrived in Vung Tau on November 28, 1965, as a part of the first aviation battalion in the country. During June and July 1966, the company moved from Vung Tau to the present location at Bien Hoa.

During a rocket and mortar attack on Bien Hoa Air Base in the 1968 Tet offensive, a breach in the east perimeter of the base was found in the early morning hours. The Mustangs of the 68th were called into action, and due to the quick response by the gunship crews, the enemy action was eliminated within minutes. When the

Like new shoes, new rotor blades must fit right



initial rocket attack ceased, the 68th lift platoons began flying medevac missions to the 93d Medical Evacuation Hospital in Long Binh.

On June 20, 1969, the 68th conducted a combat assault mission in direct support of the 5th ARVN Infantry Division near Song Be City. The mission called for nine slicks and four gunships on five insertions in the morning and five extractions in the afternoon. The flight inserted the ARVN elements in an area suspected to be a Viet Cong stronghold and received light automatic weapons fire. On each of the five extractions, the flight came under intense fire and rocket propelled grenades. Throughout the operation, the crews maintained a calm efficiency in flying and clearing the aircraft through 150 foot trees and large bushes and stumps two to three feet high. Throughout the operation, the gunships delivered accurate and effective fire in and around the landing and pick-up zone areas. On this operation, the Top Tigers displayed their well deserved reputation of professionalism.

A large amount of the success attained in the missions of the 68th

is due to the outstanding effort put forth by the company's operations section and maintenance platoon. CPT Donald E. Stout, Jr. supervises the operations section, which is responsible for preparation and coordination of missions and briefing all crew members prior to take off time. At the end of each day's mission, operations also analyzes all pertinent information relating to that mission.

The Top Tiger maintenance platoon is under the direction of CPT Larry R. Uzzel. The work required of all maintenance personnel never ends as their effort continues 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Despite the heavy work load placed on the maintenance personnel, the platoon keeps at least 80 percent of the company's aircraft flying every day.

The combat assault has become an essential action in today's war in Vietnam. The men of the 68th AHC are professionals at this type of operation and have added much to the concept of teamwork and more, the quick strike operation is being utilized, and as this happens, helicopter companies such as the 68th can only increase in tactical value.

Going home after a day spent chasing Charlie.

