FIRST AIR CAVALRY DIVISION in Vietnam

Ledger-Enquirer Newspapers

Lt. Colonel J. B. Stockton and his mount offer an interesting contrast to the Airmobile concept of the modern Cavalry.

1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE) MAJOR COMMANDERS & GENERAL STAFF
CHRISTMAS 1966

From left to right

FIRST ROW

Lt.Col. William H. Palmer	*ACofS: G-1*
Lt.Col. William B. Ray	*ACofS: G-2*
Lt.Col. James T. Root	*ACofS: G-3*
Lt.Col. Robert A. Tolar	*ACofS: G-4*
Lt.Col. Harry J. Phelps	*ACofS: G-5*

SECOND ROW

Maj. Ande G. Broumas	*XO 8TH ENG*
(Lt.Col. Charles G. Olentine, *absent*)	
Lt.Col. Walter J. Bodman	*CO 13TH SIGNAL BN*
Lt.Col. Robert W. Reisacher	*XO SUP COMD*
(Col. Jonathan R. Burton, *absent*)	
Col. Herbert E. Wolff	*CofS*
BG William A. Becker	*ADC-A*
MG George S. Blanchard	*CG*
Col. William F. Brand	*ADC-B*
Col. Howard L. Eukens	*CO DIV ARTY*
Lt.Col. A. T. Pumphrey	*CO 11TH AVN GP*
	CO 1/9 Cav

THIRD ROW

Col. James C. Smith	*CO 1ST BDE*
Col. George W. Casey	*CO 2ND BDE*
Col. Charles D. Daniel	*CO 3RD BDE*

A UN-1 helicopter provides support and observation

Intense research, development and experimentation followed World War II, and out of that effort came the greatest contribution to tactical mobility in military history. This was the application of the vertical rising helicopter, which proved itself during the Korean War. The next question was: How could this experience be utilized in the 1960's and 1970's?

Several weeks after the Howze Board convened, a few answers were forthcoming in revolutionary recommendations for the creation of new types of completely air mobile units—air assault divisions and air cavalry brigades. These recommendations even went a step further with the request that the number of Army aircraft be increased substantially and that special purpose air units be formed to give additional reconnaissance and lift capability to the army's airborne forces.

From the recommendations of the Howze Board sprang the concept embodied in the Army's experimental 11th Air Assault Division. Developing and testing the new concept began in mid-February 1963, six months after the Howze Board made its recommendations, and the 11th Airborne Division, which saw service in the Pacific during World War II and later in Germany in the mid-fifties, gave birth to the new air mobile test division.

It was also during this period that the U.S. Army's 16 divisions, the limit permitted under law, were organized under the new ROAD (Reorganization Objective Army Division) concept. Initially, four types of divisions were organized under ROAD—infantry,

Mobility . . . the jeep, the CH-47A Chinook, and the Sky Trooper

armored, airborne and mechanized. However, little was said about the fifth type of division – the air mobile division – under command of then Brigadier General Harry W.O. Kinnard, an airborne officer whose perceptive ideas were undergoing sharp scrutiny in the Pentagon.

A series of field experiments were held beginning with Sky Soldier I in the fall of 1963 through the Hawk Arrow series in 1965. Utilizing troops from the 2nd Infantry Division stationed at Fort Benning, along with the Army Aviation units incorporated in the 11th Air Assault Division, the major "bugs" were soon eliminated from the air mobile concept. But there were other problems in the early months of 1965. The 1966 arms budget had been cut by $300 million dollars, and soon rumors were rife that the 11th Air Assault Division was slated for disbandment. Defense Department officials announced that the experimental division had fulfilled its purpose in testing the Army's novel concepts in air mobility and "it is being eliminated."

Meanwhile, events 12,000 miles away in Southeast Asia began to influence the thinking of Defense Department officials in Washington. In the Republic of South Vietnam in early 1965 some 20,000 American officer and noncommissioned officer advisers to that wartorn nation's military forces were faced with a serious problem. Communist insurgents were gaining ground. The young nation, forged from the former French colony of Indo-China, had been suffering through a quarter of a century of war since 1940 – beginning with the Japanese invasion, and following

Maj. Gen. Harry W. O. Kinnard

Recovery exercise using a CH-34 helicopter

World War II the nationalist uprising that resulted in division of the colony into the nations of Cambodia, Laos, and North and South Vietnam.

North Vietnam, a Communist nation closely allied with Red China, had in effect "invaded" its southern neighbor – first with a force of guerrilla insurgents directed from Hanoi, north of the 17th parallel dividing the two Vietnams; then by early 1965 with contingents of regular troops. It was apparent in Washington that unless the Free World sent assistance to the Republic of South Vietnam, this rice-rich and fertile country would fall to the Communist insurgents.

If the events occurring thousands of miles away from Fort Benning had any immediate impact, it was on the pilots of the 11th Air Assault Division, many of whom had served in the embattled Southeast Asia nation. Week after week additional pilots and enlisted crew chiefs, gunners and ground crews volunteered for duty in South Vietnam and departed quietly, their empty slots filled by newly commissioned pilots fresh from the Army Aviation center at Fort Rucker, and enlisted ground crews who had just completed their specialized training as fixed wing and helicopter mechanics.

It was in mid-February 1965 that the first rumors began to emanate from Washington concerning the retention of the 11th Air Assault Division under another name – the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile). In far-off Korea, below the DMZ that stretched across the length of the 155-mile long strip of land that divided the armed forces of Communist North Korea and the Republic of South Korea, the "Troopers" of the First Cav mounted a continuous vigil. Fifteen years earlier, older brothers, and in some cases fathers, of these young men of "The First Team" had battled the Communist invaders from the north to a standstill along the Pusan Perimeter before turning them back in a massive counter-offensive that for the troopers led to yet another "first" – the first American unit into the enemy capital city of Pyongyang.

Although the Korean War was "ancient" history to this new generation of Cav troopers, the course of events in Asia would soon affect this historic Army division in a manner not envisioned in early 1965.

From Saigon the reports of spreading Communist insurgency throughout the Republic of South Vietnam were disturbing. Political problems in the strife-torn nation added to the problem of maintaining South Vietnam's freedom from ultimate Red domination. A decision was made by President Johnson to build up U.S. forces in South Vietnam, and in the Pentagon the wheels of mobilization began to grind as important strategic decisions came one after the other

The massive Goldfire II maneuvers had been scrubbed in January, and the role that the 11th Air Assault Division was to have played in this joint

CH-53 Skycrane totes a heavy load

exercise fell into limbo. But there was Hawk Arrow I, II and III, a series of four-day exercises, followed at the end of April by Oneida Bear II at Camp Drum in upstate New York. Nor did the far-flung role of the United States in crisis situations deter the use of the Division in the Dominican Republic crisis. The Division's units had been alerted for some time but in May, Alpha Company, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion flew into Santo Domingo from the aircraft carrier Guadalcanal.

Meanwhile, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara on June 16 approved the 11th Air Assault Division's role as an air mobile unit better suited to fight in such terrain as the jungles of Southeast Asia. He approved Army plans to convert one of its 16 active duty divisions into a permanent air mobile unit on July 1, 1965. At the same news conference he declared that the division would be "combat ready" in eight weeks.

As it turned out, the new air mobile division would be given less time than the eight weeks announced by the Secretary of Defense. The date of the General Order activating the new division was also a red letter day for General Kinnard. He received orders from the Pentagon to achieve REDCON-1,—Readiness Condition of Highest Combat Priority—no later than July 28, exactly four weeks later.

Once the announcement was made public on that sunny day in mid-June that a new, permanent air mobile division would be established, an air of feverish activity permeated Fort Benning. The colors of the 2nd Infantry Division would be returned to Korea and swapped for the famed First Cavalry Division colors, which were to be returned to the United States for the first time in 22 years. The "Cav," as it was known to old soldiers within and without the service, was to become the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile) incorporating the troops of the former 2nd Division and the experimental 11th Air Assault Division. In Korea, the personnel of "The First Team" became members of the famed "Indianhead" Division, which had seen heavy duty in that once embattled nation during the Korean War which had ended 12 years earlier.

On the first day of July, General Orders Number 185 spelled out the activation of the new Air Cav Division, as a new chapter began in the history of a unit with a tradition that spanned more than a century.

To say the least, the task of building up a combat ready force in four weeks was formidable.

On July 28, President Johnson held a press conference at the White House and solemnly announced: "I have today ordered to Vietnam the Air Mobile Division . . . " Thus came the climax to the long months of training and testing what originally had been announced as a concept.

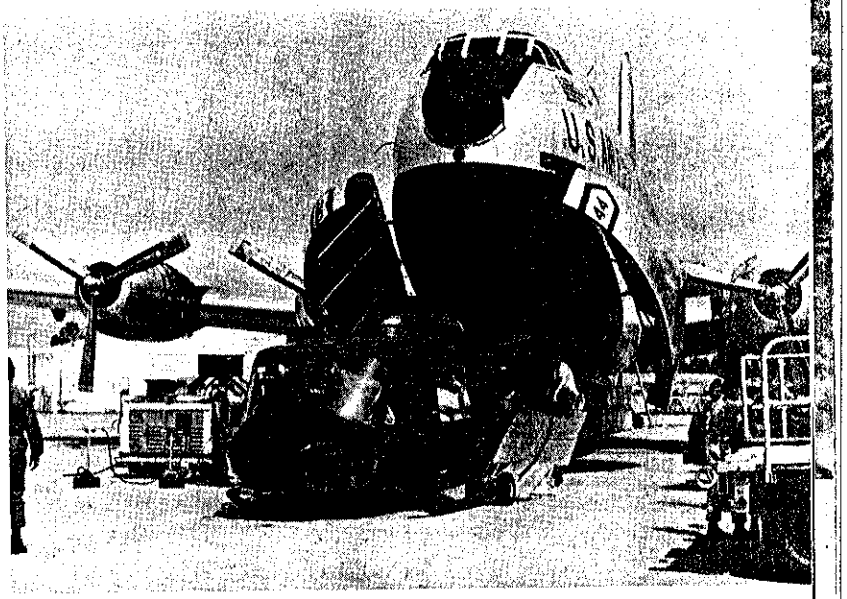
The "Sky Troopers" were on the way.

Artillery exercise

could fly along the security wire, once established, and fire at any enemy outside the defense line without fear of striking the defenders within.

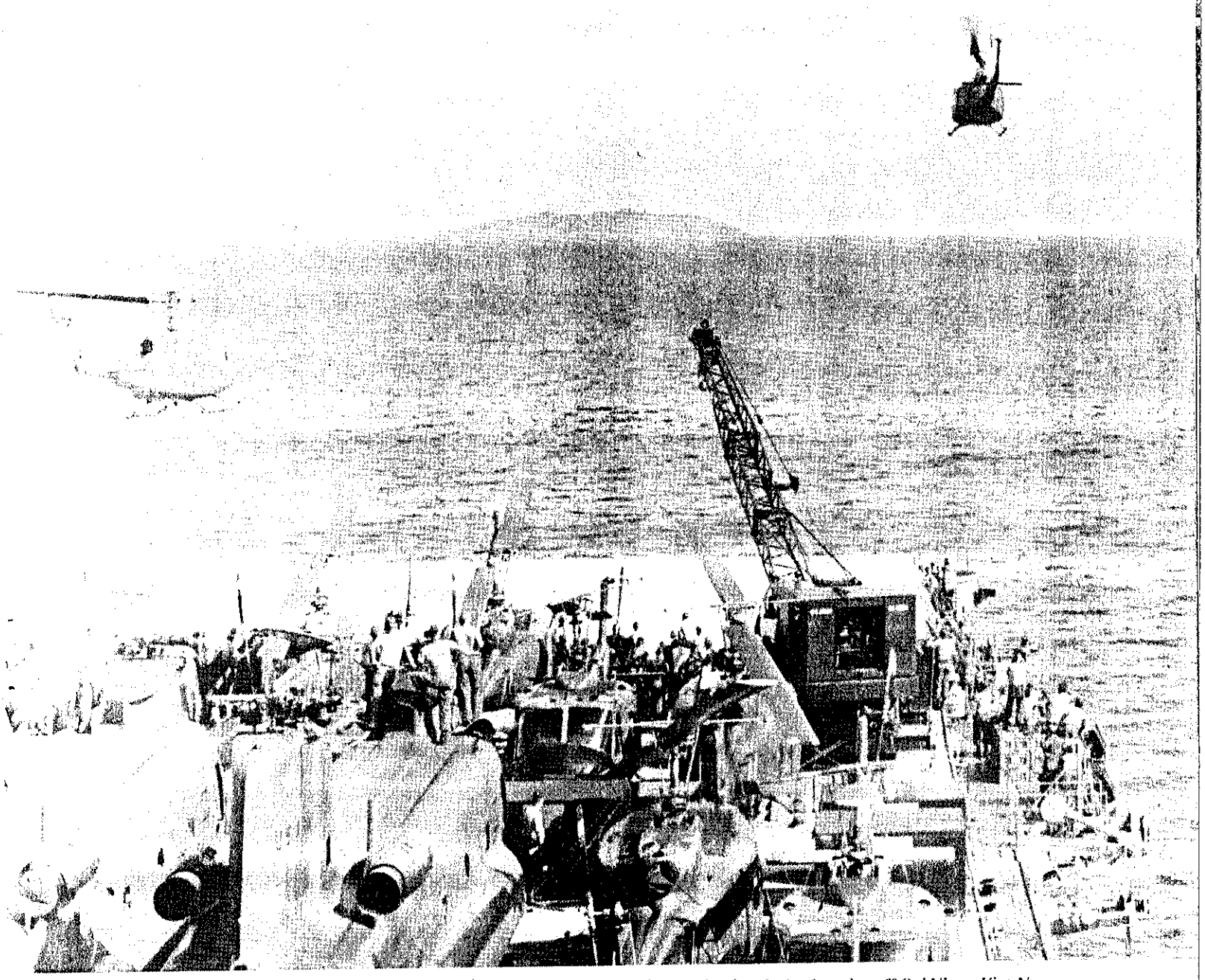
Once the advance party had all assembled at Nha Trang, General Wright finally gave the word to his force of field grade officers and senior noncoms and other key personnel from the Division. "We move out and carve a base out of the jungle," he explained. "A battalion from the 101st Airborne will maintain security. However, once you leave your aircraft the first thing you will do is dig a foxhole. The enemy will be somewhere nearby watching us. So keep alert and be prepared to fight."

Meanwhile, back in the States the "second vanguard" of the Air Cav had boarded ships and loaded equipment at a number of ports of embarkation. For days helicopters had flown in a steady stream to Mayport Naval Air Station at Jacksonville, Florida, where they were taken apart and wrapped in protective cocoons for the month-long ocean journey. Men and



A yawning C-124 Globemaster swallows an HU-1B helicopter being deployed to Viet Nam

Headquarters Company disembarks at Qui Nhon, September 1965



Helicopter leaving deck of carrier off Qui Nhon, Viet Nam

Sky Troopers began landing unexpectedly, taxing the enemy's communications and reporting system.

On the evening of November 3, several of 1/9's scout helicopters along with Alpha Company 1/8 moved to the Duc Co Special Forces Camp and began a reconnaissance in force south along the Cambodian border from which large numbers of enemy troops had infiltrated. An ambush was staked out by one of Alpha Company's platoon leaders, Lt. John B. Hanlon, who deployed SFC Kenneth A. Reveer on the far end of a trail that showed signs of recent use. It wasn't long before a company of enemy troops was spotted moving up the trail toward the ambush site.

The Sky Troopers in the patrol lay tense and quiet, oblivious to the mosquitos that buzzed next to their ears or nipped at their necks and faces. Nervous sweat attracted other annoying insects. Among the silent men crouched Sp4 Raymond Ortiz, a medic, holding back the urge to slap the pesky insects that were making life miserable for himself and his buddies.

It was early evening. Enemy soldiers had halted 100 meters short of the ambush site. They took a 90-minute break, smokingcand alking softly in the darkness while the Sky Troopers silently waited them out. Then the enemy troops formed up and began moving confidently and noisily along the trail unaware that death lurked in the brush. Lt. Hanlon held his breath as one platoon of grey-uniformed men, shadows in the darkness, moved past. Then came the weapons platoon whose members were carrying machine guns, mortars and recoilless rifles.

Now was the time. Lt. Hanlon fired off the Claymore mines set along the 100-meter kill zone. Simultaneously, Claymores at either end of the trail belched fire and steel. Sky Troopers opened up with their M-16s, pumping death into the enemy column. The enemy fired back, but the platoon from Alpha Company had the advantage of surprise.

Lt. Hanlon was hit, and Ortiz scrambled toward the fallen officer. A slug suddenly tore into the medic's left arm, but he kept going. He reached the fallen officer, and began administering first aid.

"Medic!" somebody shouted. "Medic! Over here!" Trying to follow the sound of the voice, Ortiz continued moving forward. A second enemy bullet struck him in the chest. He fell. He gasped for breath for a few moments and then pushed himself to his feet. Another enemy bullet hit him. This still didn't stop the doughty medic as he crawled to a fallen buddy and administered first aid. All in all, he treated six wounded Sky Troopers, despite the fact that he had been shot three times and that his left arm was useless.

Meanwhile, in another sector west of Plei Me, Sky Troopers of Bravo Company 2/12 had hacked their way through heavy jungle underbrush over a distance of 10 kilometers when the point man stumbled into a strong and heavily defended enemy position. He

Arriving in a hot landing zone

6

The Big Lift

The troop-carrying helicopters landed in the open field while machineguns of the escort ships blazed away at the treeline bordering the landing zone. The Viet Cong fired back. Sp4 Douglas Moulton, Alpha Company, 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion, sprayed the area with his M-60. Ruby red tracer smoked from the muzzle of his machinegun.

The pilot of the Huey pulled back on the controls as enemy bullets struck the gun ship. He tried to move out of the line of fire with an evasive maneuver, but one of the enemy bullets struck the rocket pod on his left, near Moulton's feet. Flames and white smoke trailed from the pod.

"Sir, we're on fire," the young crew chief advised the pilot via the intercom. "Rocket pod . . . trailing smoke . . . I'll try to put it out."

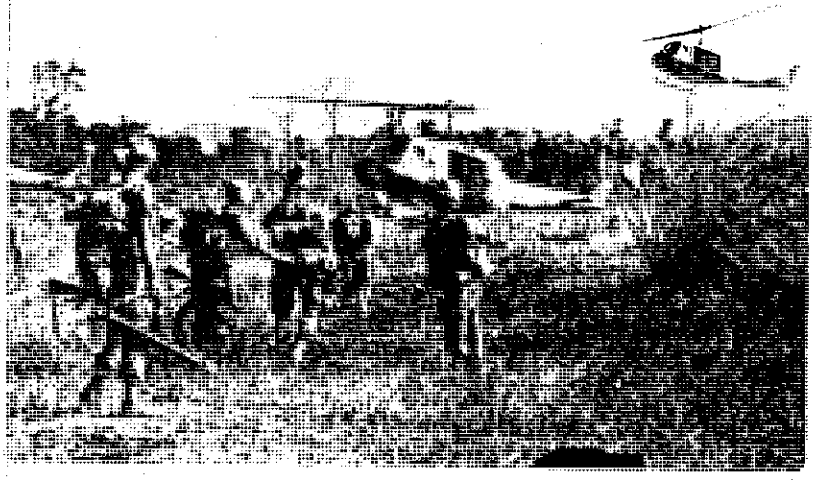
Unsnapping his safety belt, Moulton grabbed a fire extinguisher and sprayed foam toward the burning pod to no avail. The prop wash from the rotor blew the foam away. The pilot tried to fire the rockets, but the electrical system had burned out and the rockets stayed put as intense heat singed the high explosives.

Desperately, the 18-year-old crew chief worked to free the rockets by hand as he dangled half out of the Huey at an altitude of 500 feet. The flames burned his hands and arms, and pain lanced through his body as he pulled and tugged. The rockets still wouldn't budge.

"I'm taking it down," the pilot shouted into his microphone. "Get ready to abandon the aircraft when we touch down." He wondered if he would have time,

Sky Troopers prepare to board helicopters

Air assault troops fan out



All aboard . . . up and away

or whether the rockets would suddenly blow up in flight, killing the four men aboard – himself, the copilot, Moulton and the gunner. Once on the ground the pilots spilled out of the front compartment while the gunner, lugging his machinegun, set up a defensive position in the event enemy eyes were watching.

The crew chief remained with the Huey. Ignoring the imminent danger of exploding rockets, or the shouts from the pilots to "get the hell away from there," Moulton tore at the burning pod with his hands. Finally, the entire rocket pod assembly came free and dropped to the soft ground where the rockets burned angrily in the grass. Then he turned to the machinegun ammunition and pulled it from the twin-mounted guns fixed beneath the rocket pod. With that, the danger was past. Moulton had not only averted disaster; he had also saved a $300,000 helicopter that would fly again and soon.

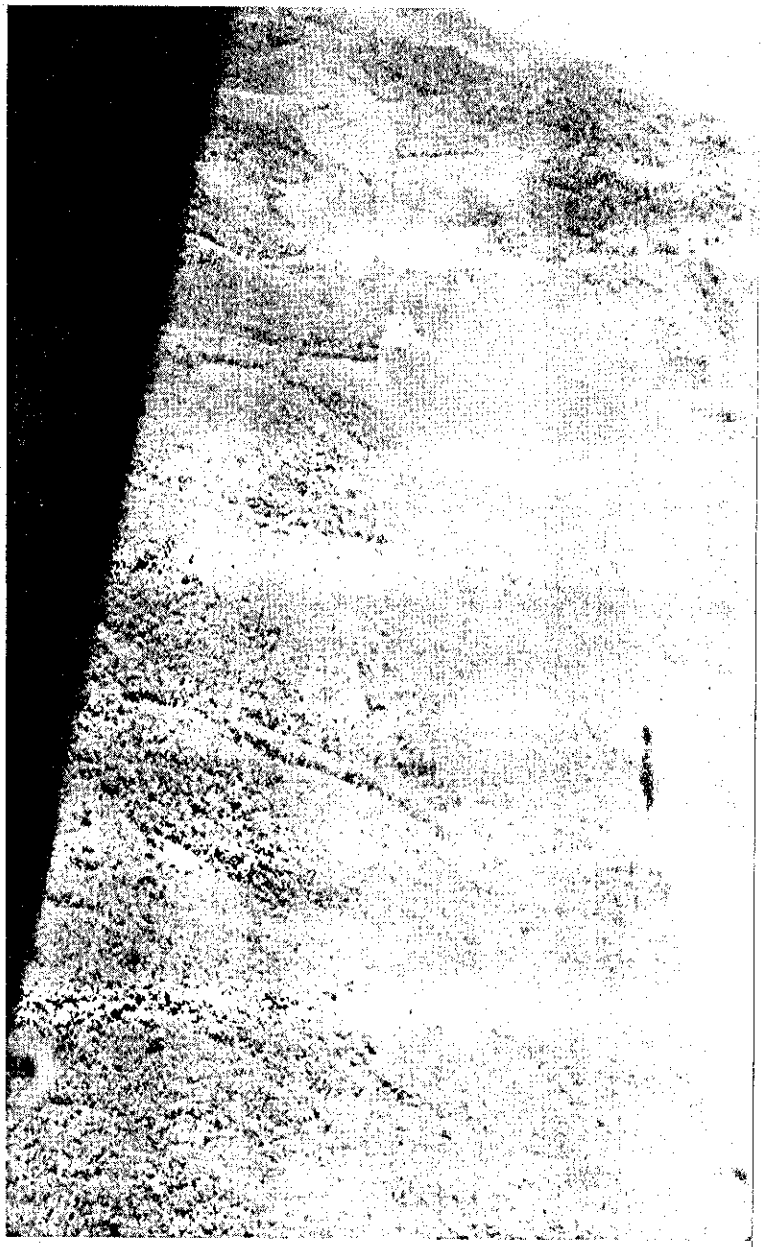
For his heroism, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by General Kinnard.

A century or so ago, the young crew chief might have been a blacksmith serving with the U.S. Army's horse cavalry in a fort somewhere on the great western plains. Today's "blacksmiths" serve the Air Cav's modern mounts – the rotary-wing steeds used to scout the enemy, transport the Sky Troopers into combat and support the troops on the ground with machinegun fire and rocket artillery. It was during the battle for Plei Me that Charlie Company, 15th Transportation Battalion, worked in forward areas repairing a total of 35 helicopters that had been hit by enemy fire and recovering 15 others that had been shot down. Led by Captain Donald N. Mathena, CO of C Company, a 31-man team of these modern "blacksmiths" worked round the clock despite the occasional sniper fire and dangerously close mortar shell bursts.

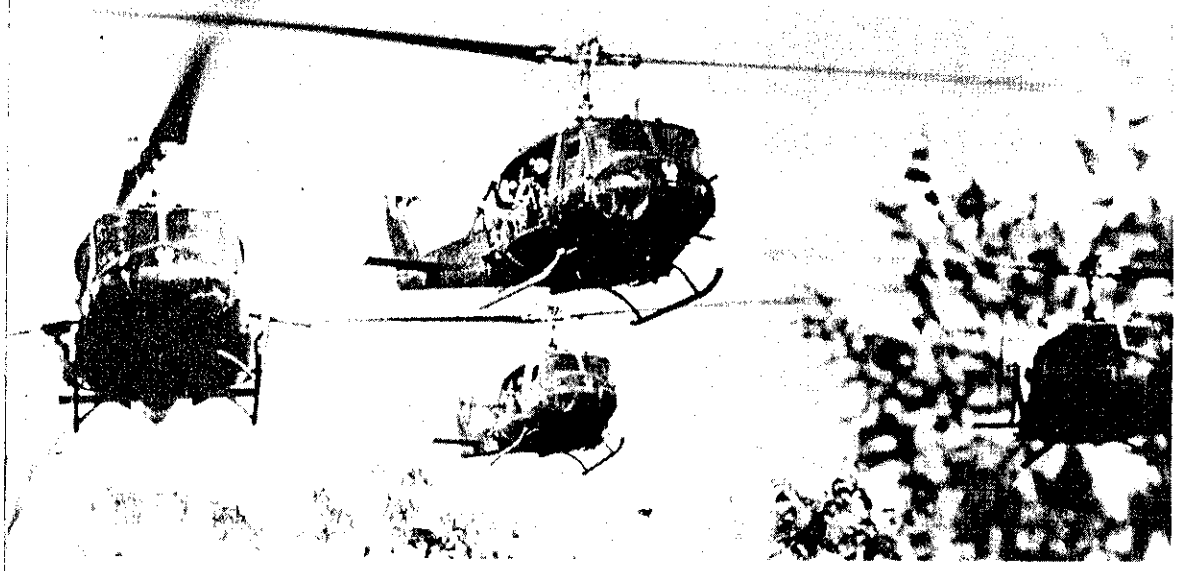
Move out after vertical assault

This was just a small part of the Air Cav's "big lift"—a combination of transportation and fire power that was expertly utilized to defeat the enemy time and again. Although the howitzers carried up forward and slung below helicopters proved to be of indisputable value, conventional artillery batteries couldn't always pull off a fire mission successfully. So the 2nd Battalion 20th Artillery, commonly known among the Sky Troopers as the A-R-A for aerial rocket artillery, came up with a solution.

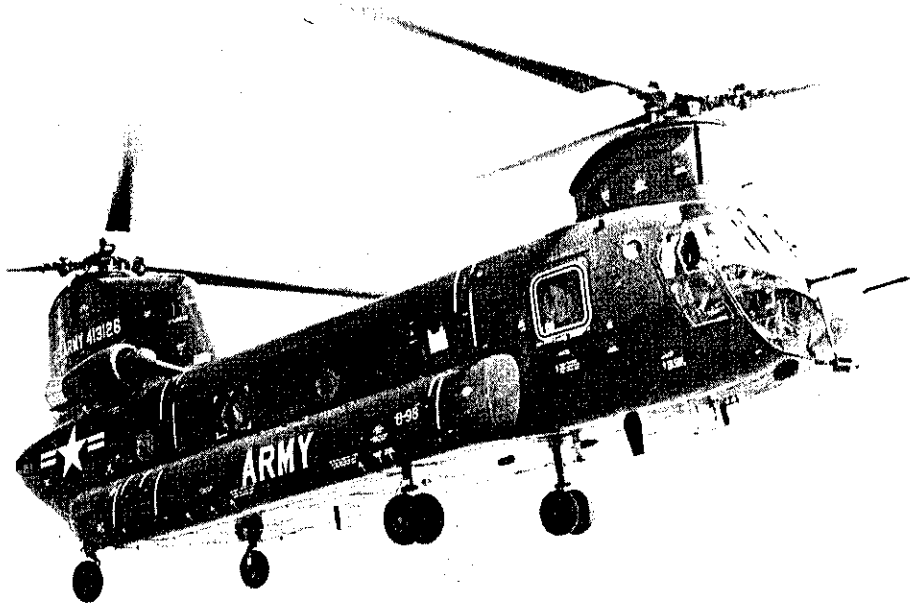
Within the time required for a fire direction center to compute the data for indirect howitzer fire, the flying cannoneers of the A-R-A would wing their rocket-laden UH-1B helicopters toward the target area at speeds approaching 100 knots. Diving on the target, each of the aerial rocket artillery choppers would unleash up to forty-eight 2.75-inch explosive rockets with devastating effect.



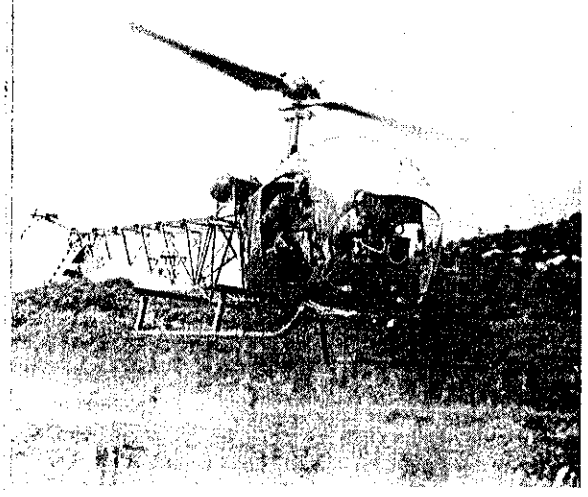
Airborne rocketry



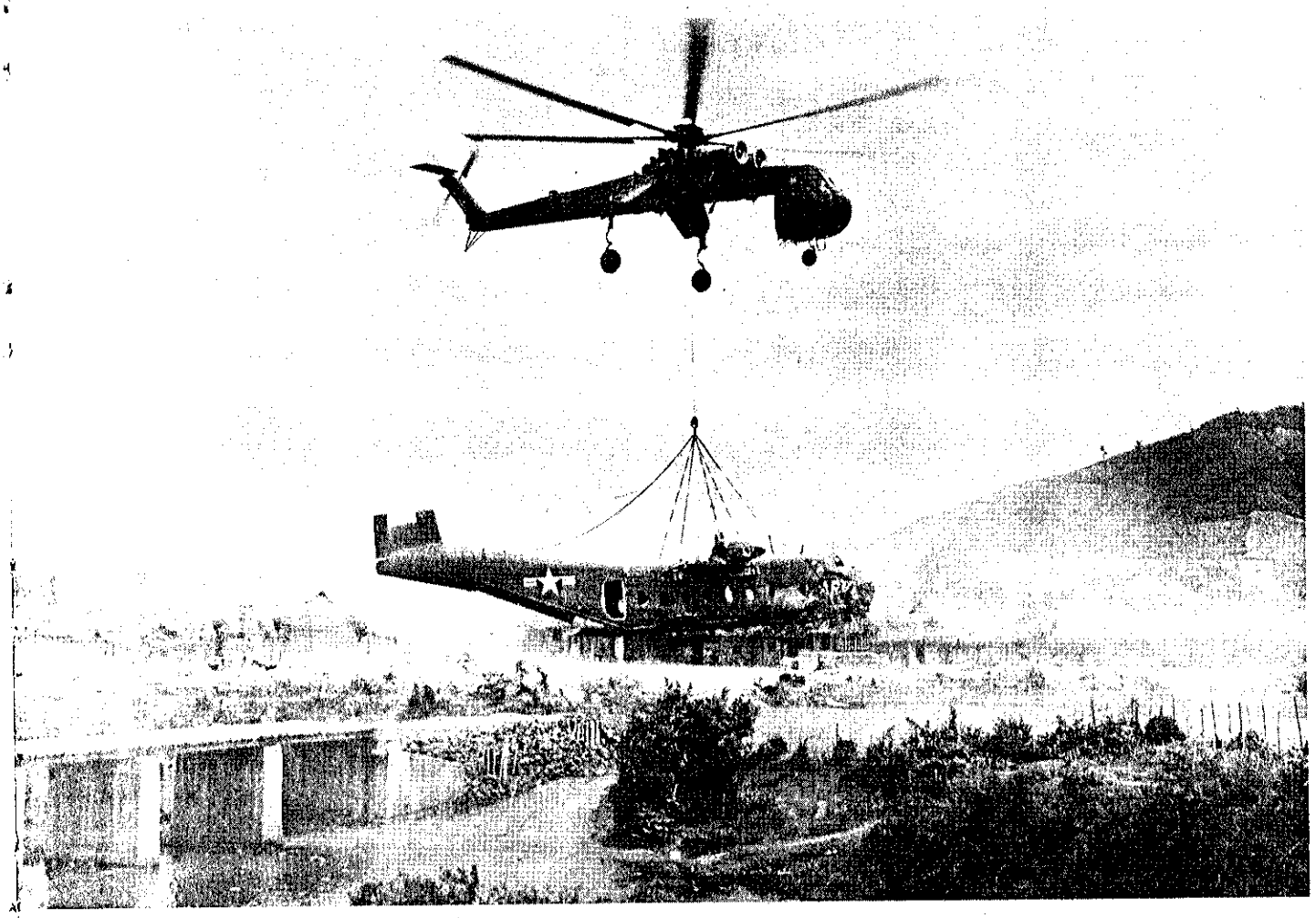
The CH-47 Chinook



Supply copter lands in forward area



Laying communications wire from H-13 helicopter



Flying Crane lifts wreckage of Caribou

The troop carrying HU-1D's were always accompanied by heavily-laden CH-47 Chinooks, the logistical workhorses of the Air Cav which labored day and night to keep the reinforcements moving into LZs used as jump-off points by the smaller and faster Hueys. One night when the Air Cav was battling the enemy at Pleiku, a Chinook loaded with 105mm howitzer shells suddenly pitched downward, out of control. It dropped 1,000 feet in moments, crash-landed, turned turtle and tumbled another 50 feet down into the bottom of a steep ravine where it settled to a grinding halt. The workhorse helicopter was a shambles. Both sets of rotor blades were sheared off, both engines mangled, and its interior a mad jumble of howitzer shells. Miraculously, none of the crew was injured.

However, the wreckage had to be removed along with the artillery shells, lest they fall into enemy hands. Called in to solve the problem (and justify still further the air mobility concept) was a huge CH-54 "Flying Crane" belonging to the 478th Heavy Helicopter Company. The big chopper took off from the base camp helipad with Chief Warrant Officer James Oden in the pilot's seat and CWO Bill Roundy in the co-pilot's seat. Also aboard was Capt. Donald Vosel and the CH-54's crew chief, Sp5 Alonzo Rich. The task assigned to the recovery crew was a formidable one, for the downed Huey with its highly explosive cargo was wedged in a ravine atop a plateau where the temperature was 90 degrees. And the thin, hot air didn't lend itself to full lift capacity for any helicopter. Moreover, the weight to be lifted was nearly 10 tons, a load that the Flying Crane could handle under ideal conditions. But there was nothing ideal about this predicament.

"What do you think?" Capt. Vosel asked CWO

Bulldozer gets an Alley Oop

A CH-54 Flying Crane prepares to lift a truck

Oden through his intercom. The pilot whistled. A rough assignment to say the least. He looked at CWO Roundy.

"What do you think, Bill?" Roundy shook his head. It appeared impossible. Everything was against the men in the CH-54—temperature, geography, technical limitations, even precedent.

The huge helicopter, its single six-bladed rotor churning away, circled overhead while the four men studied the problem. Finally, the pilot made up his mind.

"We'll make a stab at it," he told Capt. Vosel.

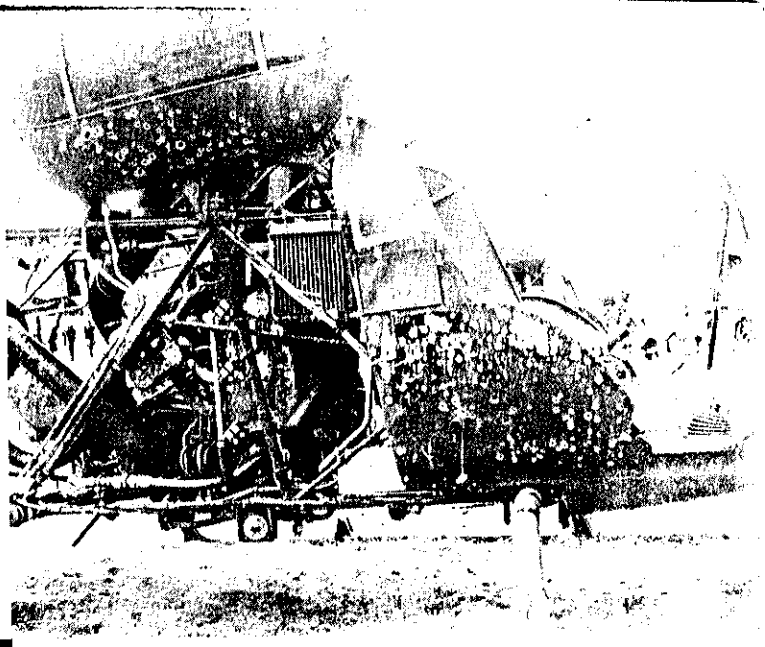
On the ground below men fastened cargo straps to each of the four wheels on the upside-down Chinook. A central ring was connected to the four straps, and the Flying Crane settled in, taking up the slack and the ring with its winch cable. CWO Oden took a deep breath. "Here goes," he muttered to no one in particular as he advanced the throttle to full power. The Crane settled into the ravine, its spinning rotor blades coming quite close to the edge of the steep slopes that lined the defile. The surge of power and the steady beat of the rotors biting into the warm air strained the engine. Nothing happened. Too much weight. The pilot advised all hands that he now would take the Crane to a higher altitude to burn off some of the heavy, excess fuel. The huge chopper had started out with 5,000 pounds of JP-4 fuel. CWO Oden said he'd make another try when 80 percent of the fuel had been burned off. Two more efforts to lift the Chinook failed.

Finally, late in the afternoon when the ground had cooled off and the thin warm air had grown denser in the lower temperature, a fourth and final attempt was made. The Flying Crane's two huge 4,050 horsepower turbine engines groaned, and the Crane shuddered and struggled for altitude as it half-lifted, half-dragged the downed Chinook up out of the ravine and through the tree tops. The mess was deposited on the air strip at the Catecka Tea Plantation, a veritable Garden of Eden in the war zone that was also the second-largest tea plantation in the world. The wreckage was lowered gently to the ground, and the crews from the 228th Assault Helicopter Battalion took over, stripping the engines and removing the artillery shells before the hulk was flown back to the Golf Course.

The Air Cav's "big lift" was made up originally of 434 aircraft, mostly helicopters and a few fixed-wing aircraft. Specifically, the "big lift" consisted of the UH-1B armed "Hueys," the UH-1D Iroquois troop carrying "Hueys," and the CH-47 Chinook transport helicopters. Then there was the OV-1A Mohawk, a fixed-wing reconnaissance aircraft equipped with exotic radar devices that could find and fix the enemy and alert the Air Cav to move in troops. Another in the series of flying equipment in the Air Cav was the OH-13 Sioux helicopter, a fast two-place scout chopper with a bulbous plastic canopy covering the pilot and his observer. The fixed-wing OI-E "Bird Dog" two-seater was a conventional aircraft used for spotting artillery targets for the batteries on the ground, or working as a traffic cop over a target being decimated by super-sonic fighter bombers.

Finally, the short-landing and short-takeoff CV-2 twin-engine Caribou transports, ideally designed to carry men and supplies to tight air strips, performed yeoman service until Washington ordered the 17th Aviation Company to turn over the Caribous to the Air Force.

Such was the Air Cav's "big lift", and it provided tangible whirring proof that the concept of air mobility wasn't just a lot of hot air.



Helicopter damaged in Viet Cong mortar assault

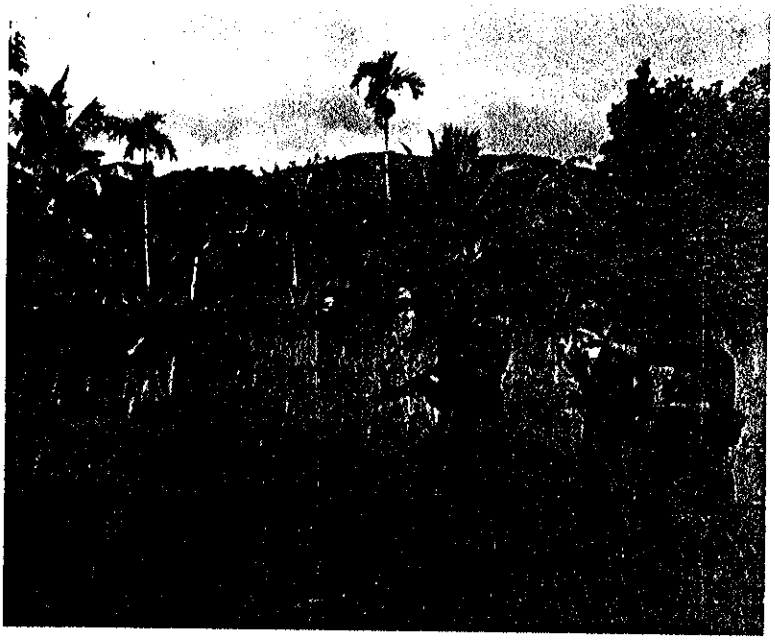
Vertical assault in action

Support also meant building air strips to accommodate the helicopter and fixed-wing transports that were part of the lifeline. It meant having men up forward, but just behind the combat troops, who worked at everything from building roads and bridges to patching bullet holes in helicopters and seeing to it that a platoon of fighting men moving through the jungle got their C rations.

With the defeat of the enemy during the Pleiku campaign of October-November 1965, the third phase of the air mobility concept took effect. The enemy had been thrown off balance. He had been found in the heavily jungled valleys and slopes, and his position fixed so that tactical air support, artillery and heliborne Sky Troopers could smash his formations. Phase Three became the chase; the pursuit to keep him huffing and puffing on the run so that he could be chopped up as he fled and prevented from making a strong stand. It was interesting to note that during Phase Three of the Pleiku campaign, 123 North Vietnamese soldiers who had been captured or surrendered were literally starving, dehydrated, exhausted and thoroughly demoralized. They had figured on attacking the Americans, then escaping into the jungle where they could ambush or elude pursuing forces. But that was not the way it turned out.

There was no longer any doubt. The Cav concept of air mobility tactics had passed the ultimate test. Of course, there were refinements to be made. But as 1965 unraveled and 1966 loomed close, the Air Cav prepared for even greater victories in II Corps, which the enemy now recognized as virtually the exclusive bailiwick of the "flying horsemen."

First Air Cavalry arrives at Qui Nhon, Vietnam

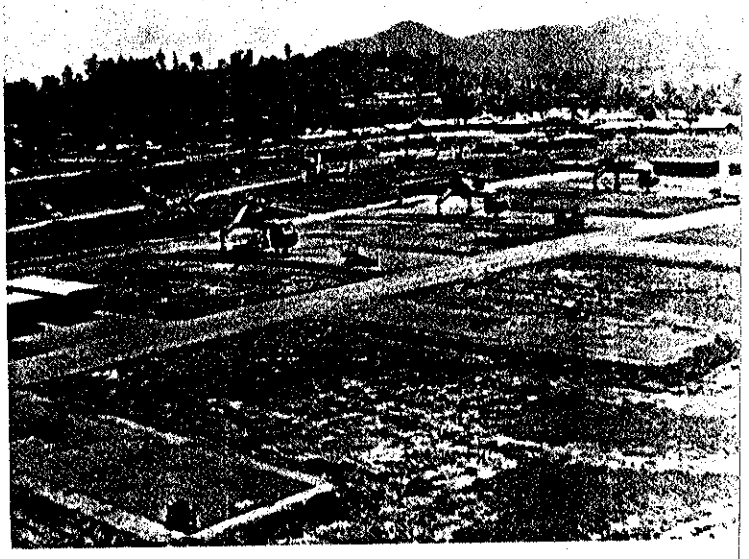


Sky Troopers move in on thatched hut in search of contraband

Staging for vertical assault tactic

1134 helicopters in assault mission

An Ke helicopter port

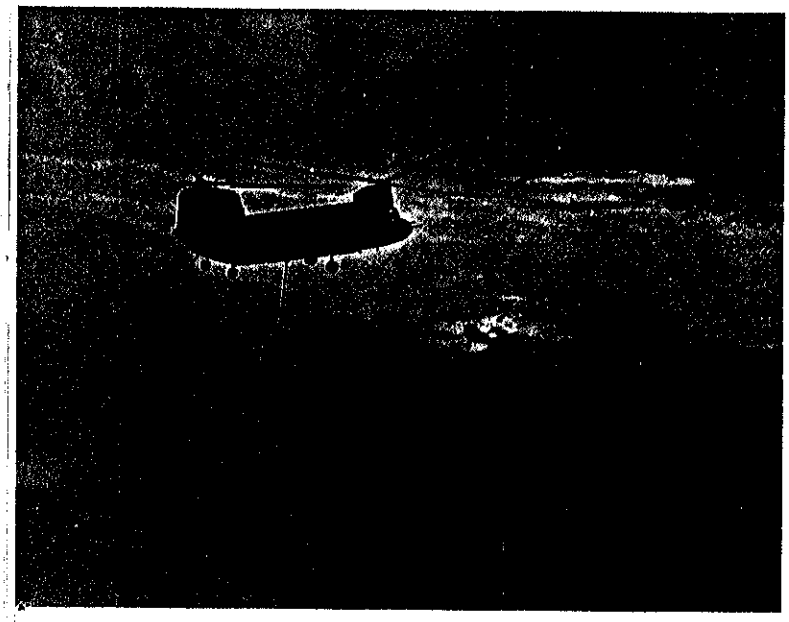


CH-54 Flying Crane pad at An Ke

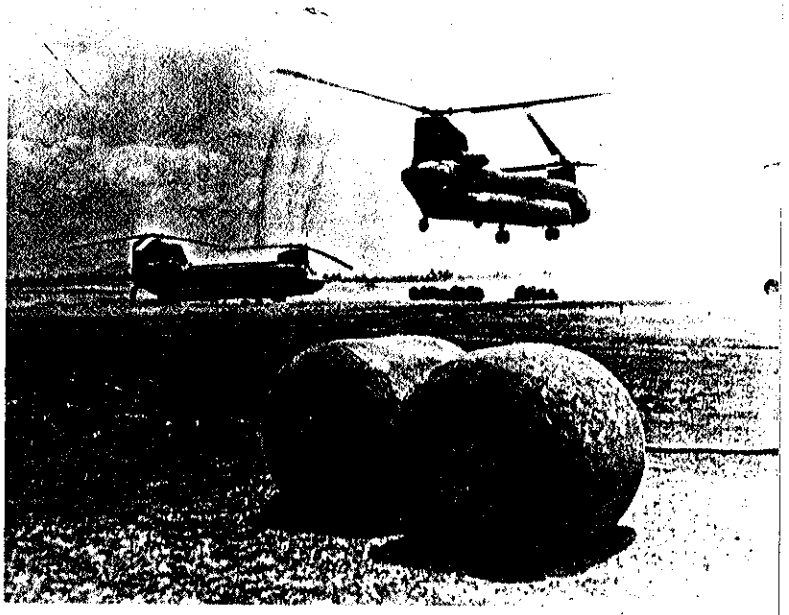
Troops rush from CH-34 Choctaw helicopter

WO-1 Norman R. Allen, CH-47A Co-pilot, in cockpit during resupply operation

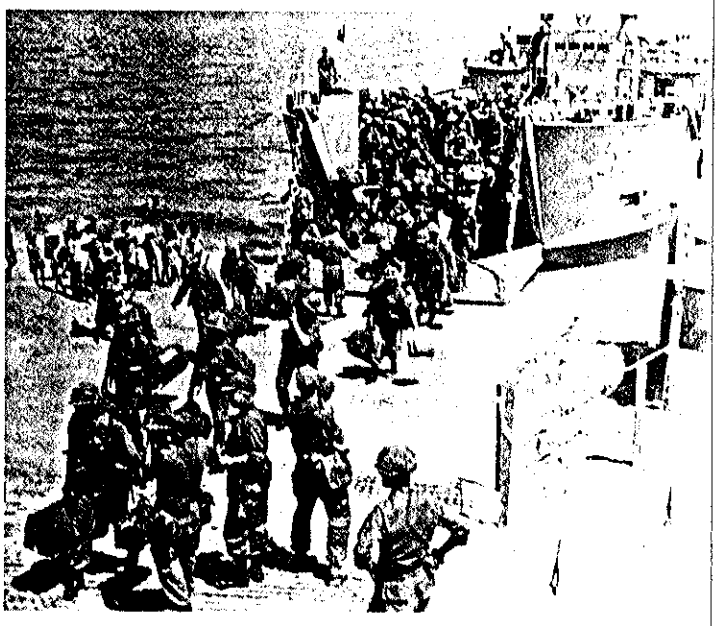
CH-47A helicopter prepares to air lift 105mm ammunition



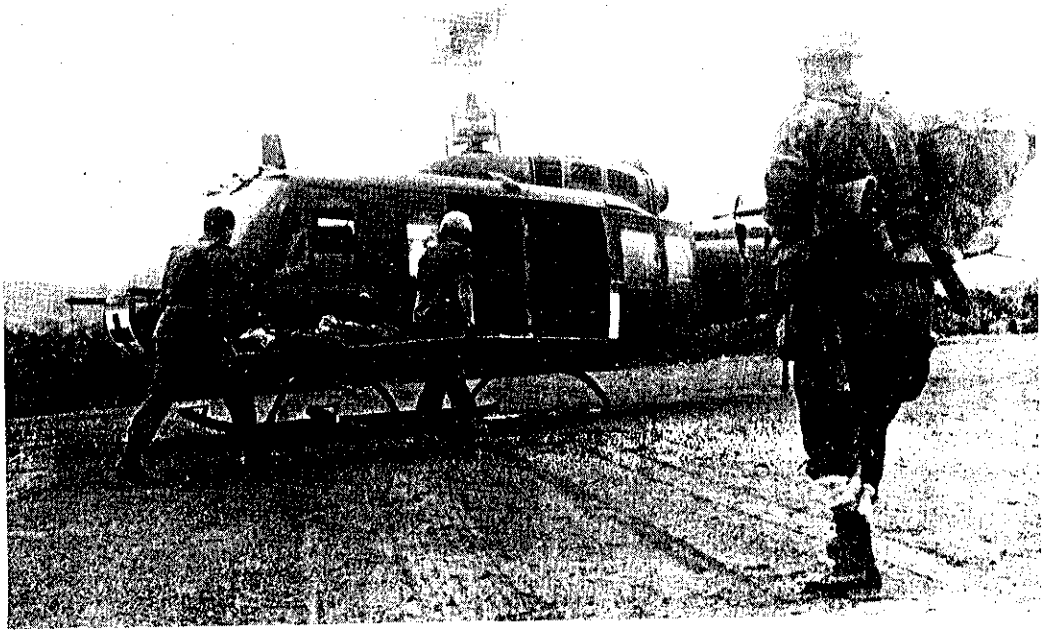
CH-47A lifts off on resupply mission



Sky Troopers occupy Viet Cong trenches



First Air Cavalry arrives at Qui Nhon, Vietnam



to friendly lines," he ordered. "No more than five men in a group. You'll have a better chance that way." He moved on to the next cluster of Sky Troopers and gave them similar instructions.

Young watched the men with him take off one by one in a mad dash for a nearby treeline. Finally, he was the last man. He jumped to his feet and dashed across the open terrain swept by enemy fire. He ran three or four steps when a violent blow to his head knocked him to the ground. His head spun and the day turned red with fireworks. Then he blacked out.

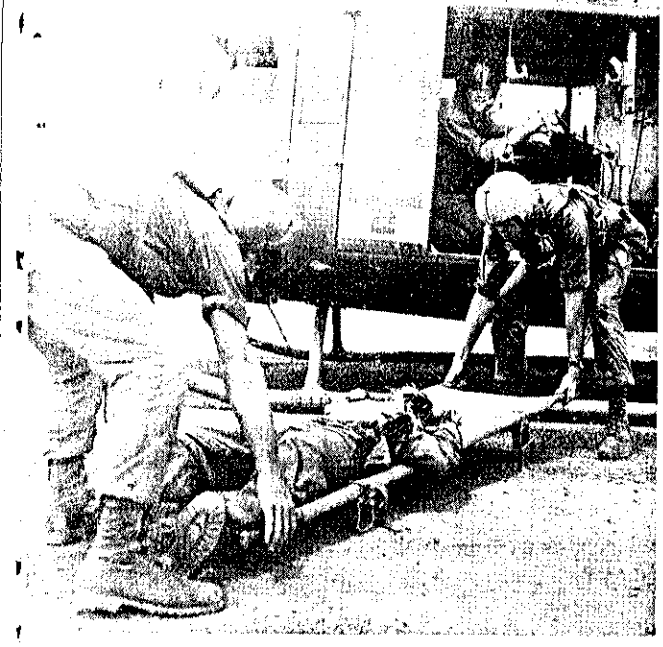
The bullet that had slammed into Young's helmet had penetrated the steel pot with force enough to crease his skull. He regained consciousness a few minutes later and began crawling toward some brush. His head throbbed but he knew that he had to get away because the enemy was all around him. Darkness fell. He covered himself with leaves and remained still while chattering North Vietnamese soldiers moved about the trails. Daylight. He crawled toward the treeline and once within the cover of the heavy foliage, began making his way in the direction from which he thought his company had come. Enemy snipers fired at him twice and he returned fire both times, actually killing one of the snipers.

Surrounded by the enemy, Pfc. Young kept walking and crawling, sleeping at night, continuing on during the day. For three days and three nights he moved eastward until he stumbled into a clearing which turned out to be the area his company had left three days earlier.

Hueys marked with a red cross on a square field of white landed and took off with regularity on their missions of mercy, and Young was soon spotted and evacuated back to the base camp along with other casualties.

It was to the credit of the Air Cav that it had developed still another first – this one in the area of medical treatment. The idea of the "medical pod" first came to Lt. Col. Jueri Svjagintsev, CO of the 15th Medical Battalion when he was serving with the old

11th Air Assault Division. The hugh CH-54's cargo pod had been developed to carry both men and supplies. So, the medical officer reasoned, why not a medical pod—a small emergency operating room and surgical center rolled into one? The medical officer, known to his colleagues as "Dr. Alphabet" because of the conglomeration of letters in his name, gave it some thought. He made some proposals to the Army in late 1964, but there wasn't enough money in the mili-



tary budget to design and build such a pod. "Be satisfied that we've got what we have now," he was told.

But the situation was different overseas, and once the Air Cav had deployed to Vietnam, Colonel Svjagintsev broached the Division's CG on the possibility of building a medical pod for a forward surgical center. "You build it and we'll use it," General Kinnard agreed. The green light was on.

Colonel "Alphabet" got together with Lt. Col. Charles W. McQueary, CO of the 15th Transportation Battalion, and Major T. J. Clark, Jr., CO of the 478th Aviation Company with its four "Flying Cranes." The three officers drafted plans with the help of other members of their respective commands. The medical input came from the 15th Medical Battalion, the actual construction was undertaken by the 15th Transportation Corps Battalion, and the problem of flying the special pod to the battlefield was undertaken by the company of men who flew the giant CH-54s.

In a flush of activity the work was begun to transform one of the cargo pods into a surgical center. The equipment and the parts required were all scrounged by the crew of doctors and pilots, enlisted men and even nurses. An air conditioner was rounded up to purify the air and keep the interior of the pod at comfortable temperatures for both the doctors and their patients. Hot and cold running water, adequate lighting from fluorescent lamps, and a full stock of supplies and drugs were crammed into the pod.

10

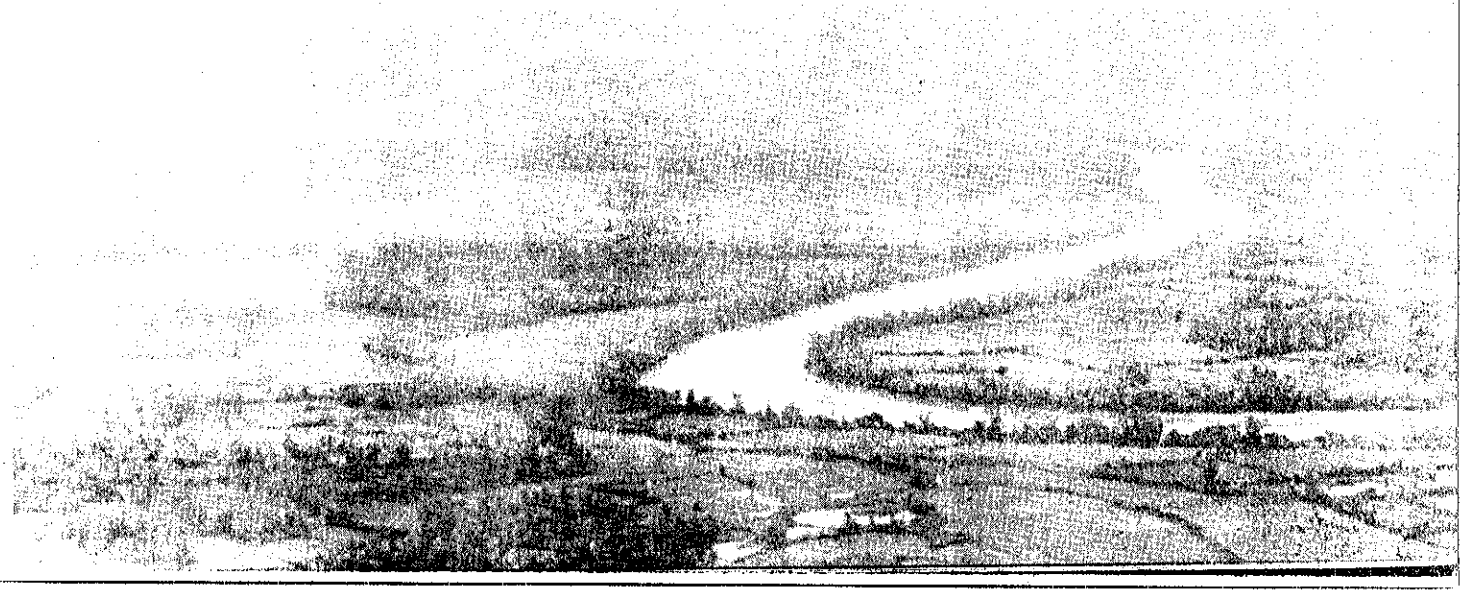
The Bong Son Campaign

By the time it was over on March 6, Operation MASHER-WHITE WING had been the largest joint-service and Allied operation of the Vietnam conflict. It began as a 3rd Brigade operation called MASHER, which phased into a massive search-and-destroy effort called WHITE WING when the 2nd Brigade joined the hunt and was followed by the 1st Brigade. Finally, virtually all combat and support units in the Division were involved. In addition, the 22nd ARVN Division, the ARVN Airborne Brigade, and the ROK Capitol Division took part, with U.S. Marines of the 3rd Marine Division participating during the closing days as they meshed their own Operation DOUBLE EAGLE in the north to fit into the Air Cav's overall operational plan.

The target was the entire eastern portion of Binh Dinh Province along the coast of the South China Sea. The area of operations covered a vast 1,600 square kilometers. Opening air assaults by elements of the 3rd Brigade on January 29 virtually landed on top of a Viet Cong battalion less than four miles north of Bong Son. Three days of tough fighting occurred, ending after the 3rd Brigade overran the VC positions. The enemy attempted to flee to the north, but the "flying horsemen" and the ARVN Airborne Brigade caught up with the retreating enemy's Quyet Chin Regiment, inflicting crippling casualties that added up to a body count of more than 500 dead.

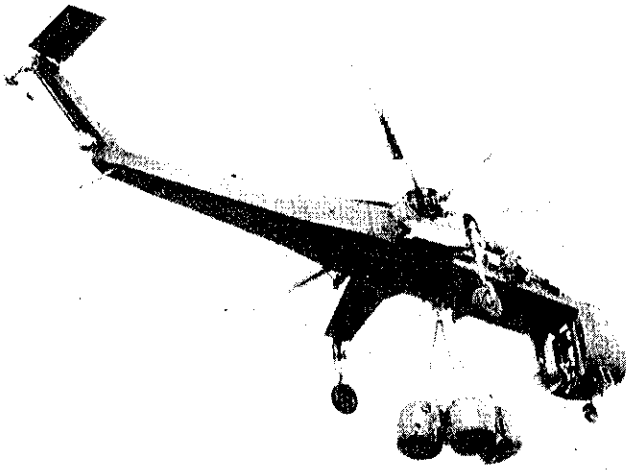
On February 6 the 2nd and 3rd Brigades air assaulted into the An Lao valley after a two-day delay

Lift ship brings troops to Bong Son



Air Force forward air controller checks out O-1 Bird Dog spotter plane during Operation White Wing

Setting up mess facilities at Phu Cat



Sky Crane lifts JP-4 fuel to Two Bits landing zone

caused by bad weather. It was the first and only time in more than six months of combat operations that weather had delayed the Air Cav's operations. In the meantime, Leathernecks of the 3rd Marine Division on their own Operation DOUBLE EAGLE had landed 30 miles north of the Air Cav's brigades, sealing off the northern portion of the central coastal plain and the long An Lao valley. But the delay caused by heavy weather benefited the enemy and enabled his forces to escape into the mountains to the west and the south.

The An Lao River was a favorite route for the enemy who used the shallow and muddy waterway to move men and supplies great distances at night, hiding his sampans during the day. During a sweep up the valley Lt. Henry Butler's 1st Platoon, Bravo Company 1/5, was fired upon from caves on the west bank of the river. The platoon leader hurled a grenade into one of the caves from which the enemy had been firing and then continued with his element without checking the cave. While VC and NVA troops were moving just ahead, one didn't have time to halt a hot pursuit to check a cave.

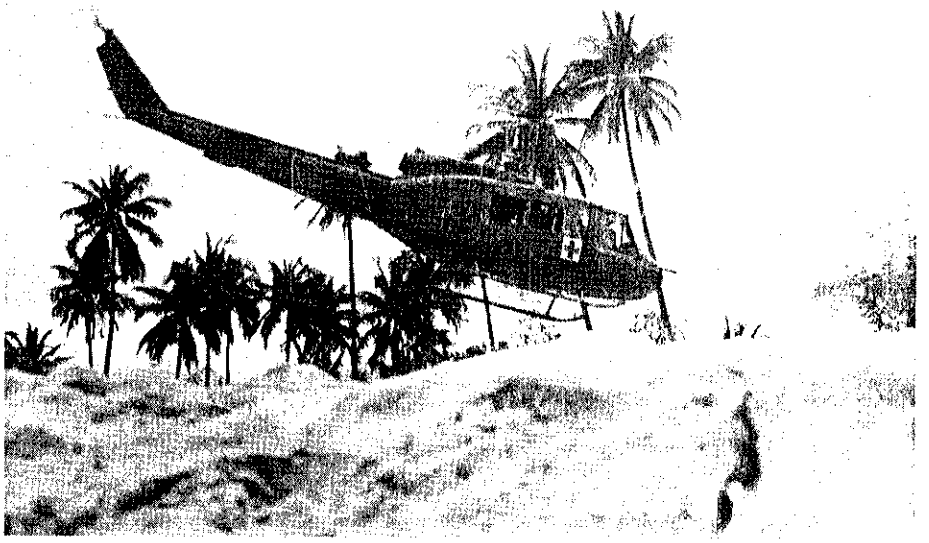
But as it turned out, Lt. Butler was ordered to pull back to this same area of the caves and set up a night perimeter. The troopers were bedding down when the stutter of an automatic weapon sent them scattering. Muzzle flashes were coming from one of the caves. Coincidentally, it was the same cave into which the platoon leader had lobbed a grenade earlier that day.

"Anybody want to take a crack at it?" the lieutenant asked. "Volunteers only."

"I'll give it a try, sir," Sp4 Garry Westcott piped up.

The platoon leader nodded. "Be extra careful," he admonished the young corporal. "We'll cover you."

Cautiously, Westcott approached the entrance to the cave. It was closed. The VC had buttoned up. The 20-



Air medics in action

enemy. Bravo's "Top," 1st Sgt. James A. Dedrich, passed along the orders and watched Sgt. Gary B. Gorton, a weapons platoon squad leader, move his mortar sections forward under heavy fire.

Scrambling everywhere to see that the tubes were correctly adjusted and aimed, Gorton was a one-man dynamo as he tried to supervise the 10 men under his command. Disdaining the enemy's concentrated fire toward his positions, he directed a heavy concentration of mortar fire that fell upon the well dug-in enemy in a pattern that took a deadly toll.

"We're out of ammo!" one of his mortar men shouted above the din of battle.

"I've got two rounds left," another one hollered.

The third mortar section leader cursed when he discovered that he had lobbed his last round at the enemy. In the midst of battle there was no way to get more ammo to the troops. Gorton didn't wait for the enemy to regroup once it became clear that the mortars from his company of the "Black Knights" battalion had fallen silent.

"Spread out!" the squad leader yelled. "Stay down and keep your rifles clean." The company had formed a perimeter, and Gorton's mortar men had slipped into position with an ease born of training, experience and the noncom's own sense of leadership. The rattle of small arms fire and the chattering of both enemy and friendly machineguns echoed through the valley. At one point Communist soldiers tried to outflank the area held by Gorton's squad. Spotting this ploy, Gorton shoved half a dozen grenades in his pocket and, clutching his M-16, ran crouched among the trees until he could move up close to the Communist soldiers. Snipers fired in his wake, and bullets struck the trees he passed and kicked up dirt close to his swift-moving figure. Once he was close enough, he pulled grenades out of his pocket one after the other, yanked the pins and quickly heaved them among the enemy.

"Hey, Gorton," the voice of Sgt. Dedrich boomed, "c'mon back here and stay under cover."

The deep chut-chut-chut of a slow-firing heavy enemy machinegun cut off Bravo Company's top sergeant. Some of his men fell before the enemy's gun. Gorton, seeing this, dashed toward the enemy machinegun and hurled himself to the soft ground, rolling over several times before coming to rest on his stomach with his automatic rifle pointing toward the machinegun position. He fired off two short bursts, got to his feet and dashed forward hurling grenades as he ran and spraying the five men around the machinegune with fire from his M-16. The machinegun coughed once in his direction and then turned silent as the effect of his one-man charge killed all five of the enemy.

Thanks to Gorton's efforts, Bravo Company held out. The weapons squad leader carefully pulled back toward his own positions. Pfc. Douglas A. Fairbanks was one of several Air Cav troopers who covered the lone skytrooper, moving back under heavy sniper fire from the trees. Dozens of bullets winged toward Sgt. Gorton. He decided to make a dash back toward Bravo Company's perimeter when a shot rang out. The doughty sergeant slowly crumpled to the ground. Unable to knock him out with massive fire power, the enemy had to rely on a hidden sniper to kill the heroic sergeant from Bravo Company.

Meanwhile, at the base camp there was feverish activity as General Kinnard prepared to dedicate the Air Cav's base camp to the memory of Major Donald G. Radcliff, who had been killed the previous August at Duc Co. The ceremony was set for February 21. But at 20 minutes after midnight on the previous day an estimated enemy battalion attacked the base camp

The battlefield covered approximately 27 square miles of valleys and center peaks towering as high as 3,000 feet and covered with dense vegetation and a high jungle canopy of second and third generation growths. Movement along the ground was extremely difficult in the mountains. However, the many streams that meandered east into the Suoi Ca Valley and west into the Vinh Thanh Valley afforded routes of movement for both the Sky Troopers and the enemy. To be sure, the CRAZY HORSE area of operations posed numerous problems for the Air Cav, but the big question was: Could the Cav apply air mobility to dense, mountainous, jungle terrain?

Operations Order 6617 spelled it out for the Sky Troopers who were to attack and "destroy enemy forces in the vicinity of Vinh Thanh Valley; conduct offensive operations in vicinity of Division TAOR; conduct tactical route security on Highway 19 . . . and maintain a battalion TF (Task Force) reaction force for I FFORCEV (1st Field Force Vietnam) and Division . . . " The operational plan also called for the construction of "landing zones as quickly as possible, radially north and east of the present enemy contact along major routes and trails. Forces will be deployed into these landing zones to press the enemy against the forces now in contact. The enemy will be pursued regardless of his direction of movement . . . "

This was the type of operational order that would be passed to brigade headquarters and translated into more explicit terms for the benefit of battalion commanders. They, in turn, would relay specifics to their company commanders in the form of simple, clear-cut instructions to men like Capt. Don F. Warren, CO of Charlie Company 1/12. His company would be airlifted to LZ Hereford from which point it would sweep the area.

The ridgeline from which LZ Hereford had been carved was blanketed by a blazing sun broiling the dry landscape with at least 100 degrees of heat, when the first Huey "Slicks" touched down on May 21 after preparatory artillery fires and a machinegun hosing by the gunships. Charlie Company piled out of the Huey "Slicks" as soon as they touched down. The heavily burdened troopers of the Weapons Platoon quickly set up their mortars. Sp4 Paul J. Harrison helped dig a shallow revetment for the one 81mm tube that had been brought along. Working on the mortar itself was Sgt. Robert L. Kirby, the platoon NCO, and Sp4 Charles W. Stuckey. Captain Warren had moved out with his CP element, which he had attached to one of his platoons. The single mortar at LZ Hereford would support the infantry hacking through the dense jungle.

However, the enemy had other ideas. It was obvious to the VC commander in the Hereford sector that if he could wipe out the mortar platoon, he could then strike at the infantry, which would have no heavy fire support to fall back on. Charlie Company's Sky Troopers swept through the heavily forested area unaware that the guerrillas had let them pass unmolested before attacking LZ Hereford.

Meanwhile, at LZ Hereford, *Look* Magazine war correspondent Sam Castan, snapped photos and interviewed members of the platoon, who matter-of-factly replied to his questions. Sgt. Louis Buckley and Pfc. Wade Taste were absorbed in building some makeshift cover to prevent the hot sun from broiling them. Sgt. Paul Buckloo and Sgt. Edward Shepherd huddled together in a foxhole.

When they had finished digging the revetment, Sp4 Harrison and Sp4 Stuckey grabbed their M-16s and moved up the slope. Sp4 John Espranza, the radio operator, remained close to the mortar position, while Kirby directed fire which fell ahead of the main column of Charlie Company working its way through the thick jungle toward LZ Savoy where 1/12 had its CP. As Kirby was advising Capt. Warren via radio that he'd require an ammo resupply, the enemy opened fire

Move out . . . Operation Crazy Horse

ARA artillery firing mission

Arriving at the landing zone

Operation THAYER. Intelligence estimates indicated that elements of the enemy's 610th Division, composed of both VC Main Force and NVA regiments, had moved back into the area following the end of Operation MASHER-WHITE WING, concluded six months earlier. A visit back to the Kim Son Valley was planned and the Cav's gears slowly began to mesh. By the time H-hour rolled around on September 13 the "Jumping Mustangs" of 1/8, the "Cavaliers" of 2/8 and the "Chargers" of 1/12 air assaulted to positions arcing along the high ground immediately south and west of the Crow's Foot network of valleys along the Kim Son River and its tributaries. As had been established during previous operations, the Cav's lift ships placed the Sky Troopers and their supporting artillery on the heights overlooking likely enemy positions. The order was then given to search and sweep—and destroy.

Unlike more recent actions, the enemy decided to remain under cover, and this kept his personnel losses at a minimum. But the Cav implemented a strong Psyops (psychological warfare) program with leaflets and broadcasts aimed at both the civilian population and the NVA troops and VC guerillas. On September 19 Lt. Colonel Thomas H. Tackaberry, CO of 2/8, flew over his battalion's AO in a "Charlie-Charlie" helicopter accompanied by Major Paul Hayne III, S-3 of the "Cavaliers." Below, the Recon Platoon from Delta Company was under heavy enemy fire. The platoon leader, 2nd Lt. Michael D. Derosier, had been killed when an NVA soldier had sprung out of a camouflaged spider hole and shot the officer. Other enemy automatic weapons had opened up on the patrol which had come across an NVA signal company protected by two recon platoons.

"Take me down," Col. Tackaberry ordered the pilot via the intercom

"But sir . . ." the S-3 protested. Battalion COs are not supposed to be on the battlefield functioning as platoon leaders.

"If something isn't done now, they'll all be killed," the CO replied bracing himself for the touchdown. Before the chopper's skids settled on the ground, the battalion commander piled out of the compartment and, with his M-16 clutched in his hands, zigzagged toward Delta Company's recon platoon and slid to a halt beside Pfc. Glen W. Goyer.

To say that the astonished rifleman was surprised to suddenly see his battalion commander sprawled beside him firing an M-16 is an understatement of fact. The trooper's jaw sagged as he stammered a reply to the colonel's question, "Where are your men spotted?"

Goyer pointed out the men concealed in flat terrain criss-crossed with hedge-rows spotted with patches of weeds and thickets. The enemy had built a series of bunkers in the area and from these fortified positions they were able to bring heavy fire to bear on the recon patrol, which was back to its full 15 man strength with the unexpected arrival on the scene of the battalion commander.

Meanwhile, at 2/8's CP atop a hill about three miles distant, Sgt. Major Benjamin F. Seago had received the surprising word from the "Charlie-Charlie" that his CO was on the battlefield. Major Hayne had also radioed for lift ships to carry reinforcements to the outgunned patrol. Among the first men to board a lift ship were the battalion's senior NCO and Pfc. Jerry D. Freeman, one of the radio operators at the CP, lugging his PRC-25 transmitter-receiver pack. As far as Sgt. Seago was concerned, his place was at the "old man's" side.

The first element of reinforcements piled out of the Hueys and took their positions as directed by Col. Tackaberry. He had already expertly directed one assault against enemy positions, forcing the NVA to withdraw from some of their bunkers. With the arrival of the first 20 reinforcements, the "Cavalier's" CO had built up his force to 35 men. While the "old man" directed artillery strikes, Sgt. Seago covered the field CP, firing at any of the enemy who tried to flank the position from which Col. Tackaberry was directing the fighting.

The battalion combat commander was everywhere as he began directing his forces to carry the fight to the enemy. Moving up to a bunker, the slim officer would hurl in a grenade and then pour fire into the entrenchment. "On two occasions I watched him showing our men how to clear grenade booby traps from the bunkers," Pfc. Freeman later recalled.

"Disperse! Don't bunch up!" the "old man" shouted whenever he spotted some of his men gradually moving together. At one point, an enemy grenade sailed in his direction and rolled to a stop at his feet. Luckily, it failed to explode. He assisted some of the wounded to safer positions, and as the firefight continued without let-up, he called for more reinforcements. Another 20 men were landed under heavy enemy fire, but the covering fire from the Sky Troopers on the ground forced the NVA to remain under cover. By this time nearly two hours had passed

Dashing into Operation Thayer

number of captives outweighing the number of dead for the first time in the Cav's 13 months in combat.

"Lieutenant, there's some tracks here," Pfc. Gregory A. Smith hollered back to Lt. Ferdinand Hepp, the leader of 3rd Platoon Charlie Company 1/5. The husky young officer hurried forward and studied the indentations in the soft earth on a trail that led to a nearby stream. They were indeed tracks and heading in the same direction as the lieutenant's platoon.

Hepp turned to his 21-year-old point squad leader, Sgt. Larry G. Root, and told him to keep especially alert. "Charlie" was close by. Perhaps too close.

The patrol continued down the trail which led to a small stream. The sharp-eyed point man called back to Hepp once again. A wet footprint was etched on a stone in the middle of the stream. Had they caught up with "Old Charlie," or had the VC set up an ambush? One section of the platoon had halted further back on the trail so that Hepp could make a map reconnaissance of the area. Ahead was a saddle along a ridge. After sizing up the situation, Hepp decided that's where the 3rd Platoon would spend the night—if everything else checked out okay.

"Look it over, Smith, and report back," the officer ordered. The saddle appeared to be a possible enemy ambush site. Several hours earlier Hepp had called for artillery, but for some reason it failed to strike the position he had designated. It was 4:00 p.m. and getting late on that warm mid-October day. Night falls quickly in the tropics, and October 15, 1966, would prove to be a night long remembered by the troopers of the 3rd Platoon.

Sgt. Root called the lieutenant and pointed out the foxholes along the lower part of the saddle.

"Old ones, sir," the squad leader reported. Hepp was reluctant to move his men into what appeared to be enemy foxholes.

Sgt. Root held up two old and rusted C ration cans. It appeared that GIs had once used the foxholes. Lt. Hepp carefully studied the terrain. Heavy foliage on the trees. Rocks and small gullies sliced through the saddle. Off to one side was the crest of a small hill.

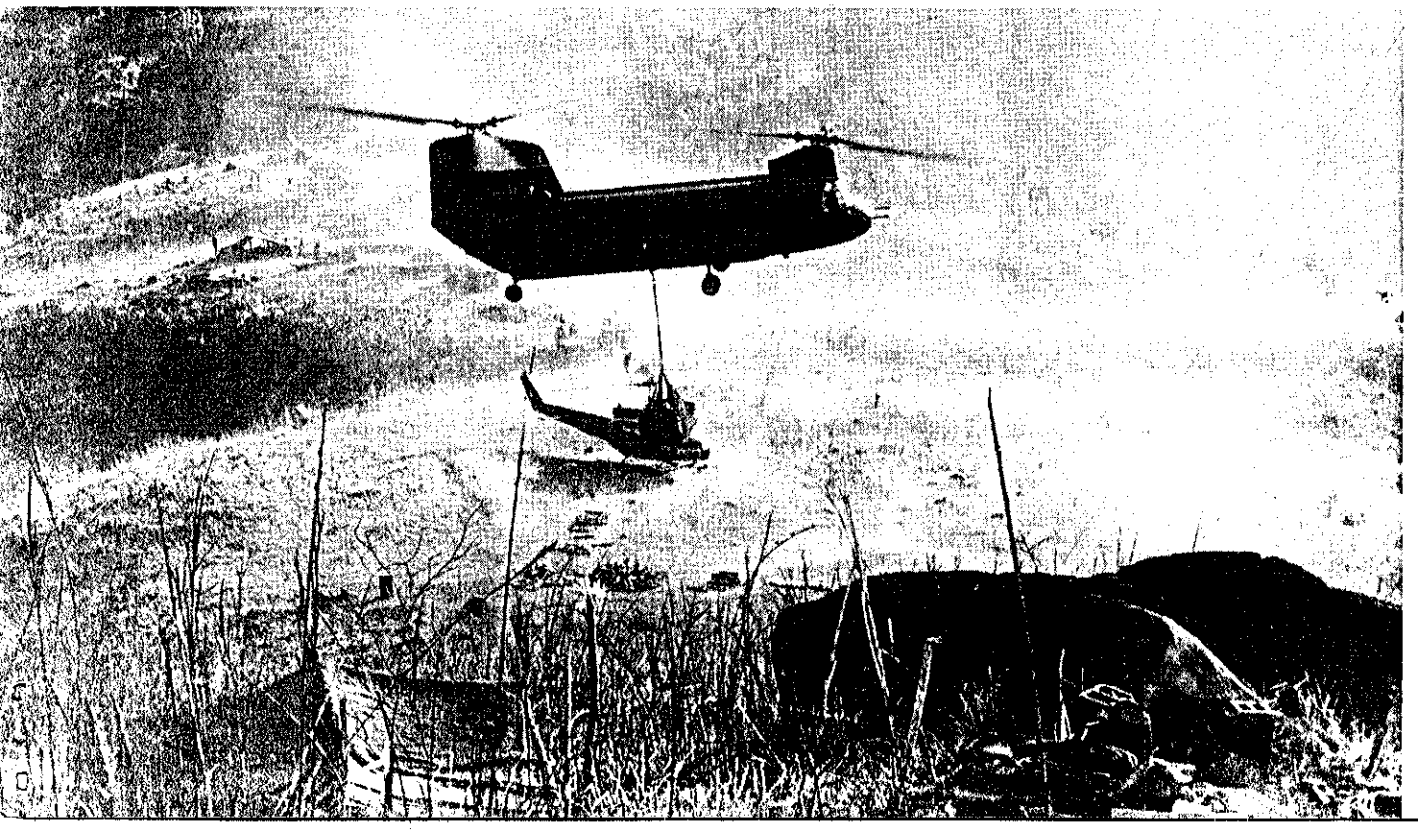
"Anybody check it out?" the officer asked. The squad leader shook his head.

"Follow me," the officer ordered, and both men began trudging toward the top of the hill. They had moved about 75 yards up the trail when Hepp spotted the point man ahead. The lieutenant was about to shout a question when the hillside exploded. "Charlie" had indeed set up an ambush.

Pfc. Smith was struck right away, but the stubborn point man triggered off one short burst from his M-16, cutting down two VC. Hepp ordered his men to pull back down the trail about 50 yards. Suddenly, they were taken under fire from the rear.

"Get into the foxholes!" Hepp shouted to his men, who needed no urging. The enemy force was large enough to have maneuvered behind Hepp's platoon element. His second element had a radio, but his own radioman was pinned down at the bottom of the slope. There was no way to report the trouble he and his men had stumbled into. He was fully aware that his platoon had been attacked by an enemy company dug into the heights above Hepp's men. Fifty-caliber machineguns chattered from dug-in emplacements and the rattle of the enemy's many automatic weapons echoed off the slope. Some of the VC guerrillas rolled grenades toward the Sky Troopers.

Chinook helicopter delivers supplies to a forward unit



With the CO wounded, the CP group with the 2nd Platoon was forced to rely on SSgt. Ernest E. Logan, who was attached from the Mortar Platoon as an 81mm FO. His parent unit had been left behind at LZ Hawk to secure perimeter defense.

Logan began manning the PRC-25 linked to TAC air and the ARA Hueys, and within minutes an 01-E Bird Dog circled overhead and launched a smoke marking rocket against the hill, down which the enemy was streaming.

"Bring it in 50 meters closer to us," the slim FO drawled. "Also hit the reverse slope in case there are more of them coming our way."

The Skyraider roared toward the battlefield, dropping bombs and firing into the enemy, while another flight peppered the far slope of the enemy-held hill with high explosive bombs. The hill was just inside the Vietnamese side of the border. As the 1st Platoon drew up to the 2nd Platoon's position, Sgt. Logan cautioned them to move in slowly, "so you won't hit us—'Charlie's' somewhere in between."

For two hours the two platoons of Charlie Company 1/5 held off the enemy while the 3rd Platoon remained silent, its troopers all dead with the exception of the two wounded survivors. If victory could be measured in numbers, Charlie Company came out on top after the enemy body count reached 145. In Sgt. Giordano words, these were "Big Charlies," fresh North Vietnamese troops who wore brand new uniforms, had new and clean weapons, water-filled canteens and, according to identification cards, were from three companies of the 5th Battalion, 101st Regiment of the 10th NVA Division.

Charlie 1/5 had tangled with an enemy battalion!

By the end of November, Operation PAUL REVERE IV had chalked up 446 enemy dead, and THAYER II had accounted for 165 enemy dead, all by body count.

This was the battlefield during the close of 1966, but there was also considerable cleaning up to do elsewhere in the Cav's AO in areas from which the Communist insurgents had been swept. Along High-

Here we go again!