

BATTALION HISTORY 93rd Trans / 121st AHC Early History

On 15 December 1961, the 93rd Transportation Company departed from Quonset Point, Rhode Island, aboard the U.S.S Carr for their long voyage from their deep rooted homes at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, to a new challenge in the Republic of South Viet Nam. After arriving at Subic Bay, Philippines Islands, the company transferred their men and equipment aboard the U.S.S Princeton and continued to Da Nang, Viet Nam, arriving on 25 January 1962. On 1 February 1962, only six days later, the 93rd Transportation Company was operational and began their dangerous flying mission in Viet Nam.

The 93rd Transportation Company readily accepted their new challenging tactical mission of providing air transportation for combat troops of the Republic of South Viet Nam to expedite the tactical operations and logistical support in the forward areas of the combat zones. This also includes transportation of troops, equipment and supplies into inaccessible areas and evacuation of combat casualties.

The CH-21 Army helicopters rapidly became "the pack horses of the Viet Namee mountains and jungles" flying dangerous supply routes that a few months earlier took land parties week to negotiate. Soon the helicopters crews were much at home shuffling equipment across the mountains. Loads varied from howitzers attached to slings riding below the ships to disassembled parts of two bulldozers which were flown to a U.S. Army Special Forces outpost to build an airstrip.

On 27 June 1962, General Hightower selected the 93rd Transportation Company and attached units as the most outstanding company visited in the Republic of South Viet Nam. General Hightower visited a majority of the organizations in Viet Nam but chose an aviation unit, the 93rd Transportation Company as the most outstanding.

On 2 August 1962, the 93rd Transportation Company conducted the first large scale heliborne operation ever conducted in the I Corps Tactical Zone which consisted of a two company raid on the Viet Cong 5th Region Headquarters in the Do XA area. The participation of the 93rd Transportation Company permitted the rapid capture of the Viet Cong radio station and caused heavy casualties to be inflicted upon the enemy.

On 30 August 1962, the 93rd Transportation Company participated in Operation "Lam Son II" another air-mobile combat assault against a hard-core Viet Cong Battalion deep in the jungles of Quang Ngai Province, complimented by 10 CH-34 helicopters of the 1st Helicopter Squadron VNAF, a heavy ground fog covered the landing zone preventing the first lift until two hours after the pre-strike, instead of immediately after the strike as planned. Despite encountering heavy fire from the alerted and prepared Viet Cong the loss of two CH-21 helicopters to enemy ground fire and the wounding of four crew members, the 93rd Transportation Company successfully completed two air lifts into the heavily enemy infested landing zone. Of the twelve helicopters from the 93rd Transportation Company, nine were hit and damaged by enemy fire and two shot down. Six persons were killed and five wounded in helicopters during "Lam Son II". All objectives were taken, 40 Viet Cong guerrillas were killed, six prisoners were taken, many enemy supplies including an ammunition dump were destroyed and valuable intelligence documents were seized. The psychological effect of this successful raid deep within enemy held territory was immeasurable.

On 12 September 1962, the advance party departed Da Nang on a classified mission to relocate the 93rd Transportation Company. On 19 September 1962 the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing of Soc Trang and the 93rd Transportation Company of Da Nang exchanged locations, the 93rd saying farewell to the mountains and jungle thus moving to their present location at Soc Trang Airfield in the flat Mekong River Delta. Air lifting the company to Soc Trang required transporting 47 loads; 855,299 pounds of cargo; 196,142.2 cargo-ton miles; 53,068 passenger miles and 96 hours of flight time. On 23 September 1962, the first operational mission in the Delta area was flown.

On 17 December 1962, orders were received assigning the 18th Aviation Operating Detachment from Okinawa to Soc Trang per General Order 45, USASG, effective 5 December 1962. The 18th A.O.D. has the mission of facilitating all Army flight operations by providing flight information planning data, coordination of day, night and instrument flights, navigational aids, and Air traffic control for the aviation unit to whom it is attached. The 18th A.O.D. is

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established with 39 Enlisted Men and 5 officers to provide it services for handling a daily air traffic count of 50. At Soc Trang, the 18th A.O.D. normally handles as aircraft count of 103 daily.

In December the 93rd Transportation Company established another mile-stone and record by flying 1,017.2 hours in a single month in the Republic of South Viet Nam.

AP BAG - 2 January 1963, on 2 January 1963 the 93rd Transportation Company started the new year on a tragic note. While supporting the 7th Infantry ARVN Division from a staging area located at a small dirt strip at Tan Hiep, the entire flight of the CH-21, U.S. Army helicopters from the 93rd Transportation Company was ambushed by an entrenched hard-core Viet Cong reinforced Battalion on the fourth assault rifle lift committing the reserve forces. In the final stage of the approach from contour level, heavy machine gun and automatic rifle fire was received. Without regard for personal safety, the ten helicopters proceeded past the armored personnel carriers and the main advancing body to land their troops in the designated landing zone. Not one helicopter aborted or failed to complete its mission of getting the troops into the landing zone.

Although hit by ground fire the first four aircraft were able to make successful take-offs from the area. The fifth aircraft, however, was shot down due to heavy ground fire. The crew of the sixth helicopter unhesitatingly diverted their take-off and attempted to pick up the crew of the downed aircraft and were immediately shot down also. The landing zone was untenable due to enemy fire which prevented further rescue attempts. The remainder of the flight departed for the staging area although the second aircraft had to make a forced landing due to damage from the ground fire received. The downed crews were left to fend for themselves in the rice paddies ahead of the main attacking force, where they remained under enemy fire for the next eight hours. One man was dead and five had been wounded by enemy fire.

Upon return to the staging area, assessment of damage to the seven remaining helicopters revealed only two were flyable. Approximately one hour later information was received from ground troops in the area that firing had subsided and evacuation of the downed crews could be made. The rescue aircraft was landed despite sporadic ground fire and damage to the aircraft. When the loading of the wounded and crews was attempted, the tempo of enemy fire increased and a heavy volume of fire entered the cockpit wounding the pilot. This forced the aircraft to make an immediate take-off leaving the wounded and crews behind. The aircraft was flown out of the landing zone, but 1/2 mile away a forced landing had to be made due to damage from enemy fire. Meanwhile, at the staging area, two other helicopters had been rapidly repaired from parts of other downed aircraft. For the remaining hours of the afternoon, ammunition and medical evacuations were flown by these ships into the first three landing zones.

Approximately eight hours from the time they were shot down, the crews and their wounded were finally picked up by ARVN armored personnel carriers. Then they had to ride for approximately two hours through attacks with the armored personnel carriers until an area was reached where they could be evacuated by helicopter.

At the days end, nine Americans had been wounded and one killed in action. Of the ten helicopters committed on the mission, all ten had been hit by enemy fire, four had been shot down and only three helicopters were flyable to return to the airfield.

On 3 and 4 January maintenance personnel from the 93rd Transportation Company flew to the downed aircraft and with disregard for their personal safety and only concern for their equipment and the ultimate recovery of the downed aircraft, they went into the areas for two days under hostile fire, remaining there to effect repairs.

The heroism, esprit-de-corps and comradeship displayed throughout the entire action upholds the common knowledge of the spirit the officers and men to the 93rd Transportation Company have as being perhaps among the best if not the best in the Army.

On 10 January 1963, the 93rd Transportation Company suffered another air tragedy when a CH-21 helicopter from the 57th Transportation Company enroute from Soc Trang to Saigon crashed with Three 93rd officers riding as passengers. All seven persons aboard the aircraft were killed. The three officers from the 93rd Transportation Company were Captain Donald B. Toth, 1st Lt Lewis L. Stone and 1st Lt Charles M. Fitts.

On the brighter side in January the unit received a playful 9 month Bengal tiger mascot named "Tuffy" from MAAG Laos. After his arrival, Tuffy was showered with attention and affection

from Privates to Generals, Tuffy was good natured, playful and usually harmless. For many in the company a scratch or scar from Tuffy was a treasured memory never to be forgotten. Tuffy's diet was not that of a normal tiger. His favorite dishes included weiners, steaks, meat balls, and spaghetti. In the cool of the evening, Tuffy always took his daily swim in his own private swimming pool. Thus with a playful Bengal tiger as company mascot, the members of the 93rd Transportation Company soon became widely known as the Soc Trang Flying Tigers.

On 4 March 1963, Major Edward C. Seymour, the present commander, assumed command of the 93rd Transportation Company relieving Major Paul E. Ewing who was reassigned to the 45th Transportation Battalion at Ton Son Nhut.

On 27 March 1963, the first Machine Gun Platoon, of 1 officer and 20 Enlisted men, arrived for 90 days TDY from the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii for duty as gunners on the CH-21 helicopters of the 93rd Transportation Company.

On 25 June 1963, the 93rd Transportation Company was redesignated as the 121st Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light) retaining their men, equipment, location and history.

Also in June, Tuffy, the Soc Trang tiger mascot weighing over 250 pounds and 15 months old, departed the 121st Aviation Company for the Toledo Ohio Zoo. Tuffy no longer will have his own private pool but will also suffer a reduction in rank from Number 1 Top Tiger of the 121st Aviation Company to Number 6 Bengal Tiger of the Toledo Zoo.

In July, the 121st Aviation Company topped their previous record flying time by having a busy flying month totaling 1,064 hours.

On 23 August 1963, the 121st Aviation Company again established another record by having the largest Decorations and Awards Presentations Ceremony in the history of Viet Nam by decorating forty-four (44) individuals (almost 1/4 of the company). Lieutenant Colonel Wayne N. Phillips, Commanding Officer of the Delta Aviation Battalion and Major Edward C. Seymour, Commander of the 121st Aviation Company presented on the date, three (3) Distinguished Flying Cross, one (1) Bronze Star with Valor, thirty-seven (37) Air medals and fifty-four (54) Oak Leaf Clusters to the Air medal, and 14 Purple hearts.

In August the 121st Aviation Company again topped the 1000 hour a month mark by flying 1,019.1 hours.

"In appreciation of the outstanding service and support rendered the 2nd Infantry Division (ARVN) during the conduct of combat operations", reads the inscription on one of the more important unit citations of the many awarded this company during the period they have been in Viet Nam "for outstanding continuous service and support in combat".

During the short period of time the 121st Aviation Company has been in Viet Nam, it has established many milestones and records to include having flown 14,243.8 hours, completed 20,201 sorties, hauled 14,968,952 pounds of cargo, transported 66,781 passengers and evacuated 1,439 medical casualties.

As evidence throughout the history stated above, the accomplishments, milestones and records in addition to being the MOST decorated unit in Viet Nam, one can readily see why the men claim with honor, prompt and pride, the 121st Aviation Company, Home of the Soc Trang Tigers.

SOC TRANG by Carl E Bartecchi, M.D.

Right after writing this Historical Report about the 93rd Trans Co / 121st AHC, I received a letter, book, and membership dues from Carl E Bartecchi who served with the 41st Med Det of the 121st AHC in 1965 and 66. He said his book "SOC TRANG" is no longer available in book stores but he has about 150 copies left. If you would like one he would be happy to send a copy to you for \$4.95 + \$1.50 shipping. Send order to: Carl E Bartecchi, 615 Dittmer Ave, Pueblo, CO 81005.

I've read the first three chapters since receiving the book this afternoon and I highly recommend the book. The book gives a different perspective of the time and place then I have read before. It's very well written and will be very interesting to those who served at Soc Trang. The book is written from the doctors experiences at Soc Trang but still easily understandable. I'm sure all of our members who served in our Med Det will want to get a copy.