

UNIT HISTORY



Dagabonda
of
VIETNAM

TENTH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION
1965 - 1966

HISTORY OF THE
TENTH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION
23 AUGUST 1965 TO 31 DECEMBER 1966

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17TH COMBAT AVIATION GROUP
NHA TRANG, REPUBLIC OF
VIETNAM

1ST AVIATION BRIGADE
SAIGON, REPUBLIC OF
VIETNAM

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HERALDRY

DESCRIPTION OF UNIT CREST

The "Soldiers of The Sky" crest approved by the Institute of Heraldry, United States Army, and authorized for wear by members of this unit, consists of a gold colored metal and enamel insignia $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height. The components are a blue annulet surmounted by a pair of gold wings with a black bolt barbed and flighted with gold. Beneath the basic insignia and crossing over the bolt is a gold scroll inscribed "Soldiers of The Sky" in black letters.

SYMBOLISM

The wings represent the aviation function of the battalion. The bolt, also referred to as a "quarrel" is an arrow used with the crossbow and represents the military personnel transported by the battalion. The annulet, symbol of fidelity, refers to faithfulness to duty. The bolt and annulet also suggest the characters one and zero which corresponds to the battalion's numerical designation.



I

30 JUL 65 - 31 DEC 66

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NHA TRANG 28 DEC 66
DONG BA THIN
PHAN RANG

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III

FOREWORD

The 10th Combat Aviation Battalion with its base camp at Dong Ba Thin, adjacent to Cam Ranh Bay, is the only aviation battalion in the Republic of Vietnam with a completely mobile field headquarters and forward operating base. This battalion is unique in its capability to displace to any required location in the republic with its assigned helicopter companies to undertake combat operation within twenty four hours after receipt of an alert order. While the battalion has been continuously committed to the command and control of massed aviation assets in support of the Free World Military Assistance Forces in the Republic of Vietnam, it has concurrently secured and developed an efficient military post, serving over 3,500 personnel, from a densely vegetated tropical swamp. The significant accomplishments and unique capabilities of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion have earned for it the nickname "Vagabonds of Vietnam" on battlefields from the sandy beaches of Tuy Hoa to the mountainous jungles of Kontum. The history of the battalion is more than the chronology of a combat support unit, it is rather an integral part of the development of the Free World effort in the central sector of the Republic of Vietnam.

CHAPTER I

FORMATION

23 AUGUST 1965 - 31 DECEMBER 1965

CHAPTER I

FORMATION

23 August 1965 - 31 December 1965

On 23 August 1965, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 10th Aviation Battalion was activated at Fort Benning, Georgia by General Order Number 258, Headquarters, Third U.S. Army. The first task facing the new unit was the reception and processing of personnel and equipment in preparation for the long journey to the Republic of Vietnam. Under the supervision of the 10th Aviation Group, the unit experienced little difficulty reaching deployable status by 8 October 1965. The major questions remaining to be answered as the Headquarters and Headquarters Company departed Fort Benning on the morning of 9 October were the procedures and the techniques that the unit would utilize to perform its control function in combat operations.

The officers and men travelled by bus to Muscogee County Airport and thence by commercial aircraft to Oakland Army Terminal. There was no time wasted on the move and late on the evening of 9 October, the main elements of Headquarters and Headquarters Company were bound for the Far East aboard the MSTS McGraw.

On 15 October 1965, a small advance party for the battalion arrived at Ton Son Nhut Air Base to determine the destination and assignment of the unit. The advance party was briefed at Headquarters, USARV and were notified that the 10th Aviation Battalion was assigned to the 12th Aviation Group under the operational con-

trol of I Field Forces Vietnam. The location selected for stationing the new unit was Dong Ba Thin, a small strip of land on the western shore of Cam Ranh Bay.

Cam Ranh Bay is one of the finest natural harbors in the Orient. Until the eastern peninsula had been selected for development into a major airfield and logistical base by US Forces, the bay was used only by the local fishing fleet. When the advance party arrived on 17 October, they found the mainland side of the bay had been improved only to the extent that a small dirt airstrip and a Special Forces Detachment, Team B-51, were precariously perched on the only dry ground in the vicinity. The party was greeted by the 117th Aviation Company (AML), which had established a temporary bivouac along the periphery of the airstrip, and by the advance party of the 129th Aviation Company (AML) which was enroute from Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Basically, the Dong Ba Thin area was a swamp with dense jungle vegetation inundated by the heavy rains of the Northeast Monsoon season. The advance party performed initial site selection and started a clearing operation in an effort to permit further improvement of the area.

At 1000 hours on 28 October 1965, the MSTS McGraw docked at Cam Ranh Bay and by 1500 hours the main body of the 10th Aviation Battalion had closed at Dong Ba Thin. The total movement time had been 13 days. The new arrivals were greeted by Major Constance of the 117th Aviation Company, Major Wiggins of the 129th Aviation Company, the battalion advance party and torrential rains.

The construction of a suitable base camp demanded the efforts of all personnel to accomplish the clearing and the filling with sand to raise the area above the seasonal water level. As the fill was completed, concrete pads were poured for latrines, showers, offices and living quarters.

The third unit to join the 10th Aviation Battalion was the 48th Aviation Company (AML), which arrived at Phan Rang, approximately 25 miles south of Dong Ba Thin, on 26 November 1965. The tasks facing this company were similar to those at Dong Ba Thin and the numerous clearing and construction projects were accomplished through the concentrated effort of all personnel. As soon as minimum acceptable operating and billeting areas were secured, the attention of the entire battalion was focused on processing of equipment, advanced training and in-country orientation for air crews to achieve operational readiness in the shortest possible time.

The 117th Aviation Company was operational upon arrival at Dong Ba Thin, see Chapter III, on 28 September 1965. The 10th Aviation Battalion and the 129th Aviation Company became operational on 15 December 1965 following the completion of training exercises conducted in the Dong Ba Thin area. On 25 December 1965, the 145th Airlift Platoon was assigned to the 10th Aviation Battalion with home station at Nha Trang, RVN. This platoon was assigned the mission to provide helicopter support and transportation for Headquarters, I Field Forces Vietnam.

On 31 December 1965, the 48th Aviation Company became operationally ready to join its sister units which were already supporting combat operations in the bitterly contested Tuy Hca Valley. As the year drew to a close, the 10th Aviation Battalion was composed of the following units:

Headquarters and Headquarters Company

48th Aviation Company (AML)
286th Medical Detachment
279th Signal Detachment (Avionics)
390th Transportation Detachment (CHFM)

117th Aviation Company (AML)
130th Medical Detachment
256th Signal Detachment (Avionics)
140th Transportation Detachment (CHFM)

129th Aviation Company (AML)
433rd Medical Detachment
296th Signal Detachment (Avionics)
394th Transportation Detachment (CHFM)

145th Airlift Platoon

UNIT COMMANDERS
31 December 1965

10th Aviation Battalion	LTC GREGORY T. OLNEY
Headquarters Commandant	CPT WALTER KUEHN, JR.
48th Aviation Company	MAJ CHARLES H. DRUMMOND
117th Aviation Company	MAJ HARBIN A. CONSTANCE
129th Aviation Company	MAJ LEON H. WIGGINS
145th Airlift Platoon	MAJ KEVIN E. MURPHY

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT

1 January 1966 - 31 December 1966

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT

1 January 1966 - 31 December 1966

The expansion of Army Aviation commitments in the Republic of Vietnam was accompanied by several changes to the command relationship and structure of the 10th Aviation Battalion during calendar year 1966. On 26 January 1966, the signal detachment previously assigned to each of the three helicopter companies was attached to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 10th Aviation Battalion. This change was undertaken to alleviate the problems created by shortages of qualified technicians, repair parts, and TO&E equipment in each detachment. Through consolidation of administrative and technical supply functions a considerable savings of manpower was realized, and under the operational control of the Battalion Signal Officer, individually tailored repair teams were deployed to provide on-site avionics support at field locations. The advantages of this task organization to support the widely dispersed units of the battalion continued to be evident as the balance of personnel and equipment were received, and the consolidated avionics teams are still employed.

Beginning on 1 February 1966, a series of changes took place in the structure and function of the 145th Airlift Platoon at NHA TRANG. The 10th Aviation Battalion received the assignment of the 2nd Platoon, 171st Aviation Company per General Orders Number 4, Headquarters, 12th Aviation Group, dated 25 January 1966. This

platoon was organized with two sections, the first composed of the assets of the 145th Airlift Platoon and the second was composed of an airlift platoon formerly attached to the 145th Aviation Battalion stationed at BIEN HOA, RVN. By the end of March all of the assets of the 2nd Platoon, 171st Aviation Company were stationed at NHA TRANG and under operational control of 5th Special Forces Group (ABN).

The 10th Aviation Battalion was released from 12th Aviation Group and assigned to 17th Aviation Group on 1 March 1966 per General Order Number 1051, Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, dated 15 February 1966. This action reduced the distance to next higher headquarters from 170 nautical miles to 15 nautical miles (NHA TRANG versus SAIGON), which materially improved the responsiveness of command and administrative actions.

Base development had progressed sufficiently at DONG BA THIN during early 1966 to permit the stationing of fixed wing aviation companies. On 10 March 1966, the 135th Aviation Company (FWLT) arrived from Fort Benning, Georgia and was assigned to the 10th Aviation Battalion under operational control of Headquarters, I Field Forces, Vietnam.

On 14 March 1966 command of the 10th Aviation Battalion passed from LTC GREGORY T. OLNEY to LTC ALBERT J. FERN. The ceremony took place at DONG BA THIN and was attended by MAJOR GENERAL STANLEY R. LARSEN, CG I Field Forces Vietnam; COLONEL GERALD M. SHEA, CO 17th Aviation Group; COLONEL RAYMOND G. JONES, CO 12th Aviation Group; and COLONEL C.A. DEASON, CO Nha Trang Support Command.

On 9 June 1966, the 281st Aviation Company with its 483rd Transportation Detachment and 499th Signal Detachment debarked from the USNS W.H. GORDON at NHA TRANG. This company had been activated at Fort Benning with the headquarters and support elements of an airmobile company, less the flight platoons. The assets and mission of the 2nd Platoon, 171st Aviation Company were assigned to the 281st Aviation Company and, upon receipt of eight additional aircraft in July, this unit attained the same structure as the other three light helicopter companies of the 10th Aviation Battalion. The 281st Aviation Company was assigned to the battalion in accordance with General Order Number 27, Headquarters, 17th Aviation Group, dated 14 July 1966 and under operational control of the 5th Special Forces Group it support reconnaissance and long range patrol activities throughout the Republic of Vietnam.

The 183rd Aviation Company (Reconnaissance Airplane) was stationed at DONG BA THIN in late June, and assigned to the battalion per General Order Number 27, Headquarters 17th Aviation Group, dated 14 July 1966. With the addition of this unit, the ranks of the 10th Aviation Battalion had swollen to encompass six aviation companies engaged in almost every facet of combat and combat support activity in the II Corps Tactical Zone.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL B.L. HARRISON assumed command of the 10th Aviation Battalion during ceremonies conducted at DONG BA THIN on 12 July 1966. The distinguished guests included BRIGADIER GENERAL GEORGE P. SENEFF, CG 1st Aviation Brigade, who presented LTC ALBERT

J. FERN the Legion of Merit for services performed in the Republic of Vietnam. During late July, the designation of the unit was officially changed to 10th Combat Aviation Battalion and each of its numbered airmobile companies was redesignated Assault Helicopter Company. These new titles more accurately portrayed the role and functions of the battalion in support of Free World objectives.

On 4 September 1966, the 135th Aviation Company and the 183rd Aviation Company were assigned to the newly activated 223rd Combat Support Aviation Battalion, however, these units remained stationed at DONG BA THIN. Also during the month of September, the battalion provided temporary stationing, orientation briefings, and flight standardization training for the newly arrived aviators of the 4th Infantry Division.

The advance party of the 180th Assault Support Helicopter Company arrived at DONG BA THIN on 12 October 1966 and was followed one week later by the main body which travelled by military aircraft. The new unit was provided billeting and maintenance areas at DONG BA THIN and in-country orientation training was supervised by the staff of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion. During late November, the CH-47 helicopters were processed through the field maintenance facility at VUNG TAU and ferried to DONG BA THIN where additional unit training was conducted. The 180th Assault Helicopter Company became operational on 1 December 1966 and was attached to the battalion per VCG 17th Combat Aviation Group.

As calendar year 1966 came to a close, the 10th Combat Aviation

Battalion was composed of the following units:

Headquarters and Headquarters Company
279th Signal Detachment
256th Signal Detachment
296th Signal Detachment
238th Counter-Mortar Radar Detachment
Pathfinder Detachment

48th Assault Helicopter Company
286th Medical Detachment
390th Transportation Detachment

117th Assault Helicopter Company
130th Medical Detachment
140th Transportation Detachment

129th Assault Helicopter Company
433rd Medical Detachment
394th Transportation Detachment

281st Assault Helicopter Company
483rd Transportation Detachment
499th Signal Detachment

180th Assault Support Helicopter Company
403rd Transportation Detachment

UNIT COMMANDERS
31 December 1966

10th Combat Aviation Battalion LTC B. L. HARRISON
Headquarters Commandant MAJ CLANCEY J. FAUCHEUX
48th Assault Helicopter Company MAJ JOEL L. WILLIAMS
117th Assault Helicopter Company MAJ KENNETH L. KETZLER
129th Assault Helicopter Company MAJ RONALD H. MERRITT
281st Assault Helicopter Company MAJ WILLIAM P. GRIFFIN
180th Assault Support Helicopter Company LTC THOMAS F. PERKINS

CHAPTER III

UNITS OF THE
10TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION

CHAPTER III

UNITS OF THE
10TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION

48TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

The 48th Aviation Company (Airmobile Light) was activated on 5 July 1965 at Fort Benning, Georgia in accordance with General Order Number 200, Headquarters, Third U.S. Army, dated 12 July 1965. The company then was attached to the 10th Aviation Group. Activated and attached to the 48th Aviation Company were the 390th Transportation Detachment (CHFM); the 286th Medical Detachment; and the 279th Signal Detachment (Radio Repair Avionics). From 5 July to 4 November 1965, the company received personnel and accomplished individual and unit training in preparation for overseas movement. On 4 November, the unit departed Fort Benning enroute to Vietnam. The main body closed at PHAN RANG, RVN on 26 November 1965 and was assigned that date to the 10th Aviation Battalion in accordance with General Order Number 13, Headquarters, 12th Aviation Group, dated 11 December 1965. The company established its base camp at PHAN RANG, conducted orientation training and processed organizational equipment rapidly. The unit was declared operational on 31 December 1965, only 35 days after arrival in Vietnam.

TRADITIONAL CALL SIGNS

GUNSHIPS JOKERS

COMMANDERS

MAJOR CHARLES H. DRUMMOND

5 July 1966 - 4 April 1966

MAJOR HARRY MCK. ROPER, JR.

4 April 1966 - 25 September 1966

MAJOR JOEL L. WILLIAMS

25 September 1966 - 31 December 1966



117TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

The 117th Aviation Company was activated at QUI NHON, RVN on 25 June 1963, in accordance with General Order Number 236, Headquarters, USARPAC, dated 14 June 1963. It was assigned to the U.S. Army Support Group, South Vietnam. The source of the personnel and the equipment assigned to the 117th Aviation Company was the 8th Transportation Company (Light Helicopter) which was deactivated by the same general order.

The 8th Transportation Company, a STRAC unit, was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina until 7 November 1961. On that date the unit departed home station with fifteen H-21C "SHANNEE" helicopters for Stockton, California. The remaining personnel and equipment were moved by Military Air Transport Service to Alameda Naval Air Station, California, on 17 November 1961. The unit was augmented with five additional H-21 helicopters and then loaded on three surface vessels; the USNS GORE; the USNS MoGRAW; and the freighter HAWAIIAN PILOT along with the aircraft of the 57th Transportation Company. They arrived in SAIGON on 20 December 1961 and two days later, the two units conducted a joint training exercise to familiarize Vietnamese soldiers with heliborne operations. The 8th Transportation Company moved to QUI NHON, RVN on 10 January 1962 to provide helicopter support in the II Corps area. The unit remained at that location until 28 September 1965, at which time it moved to DONG BA THIN for assignment to the 10th Aviation Battalion.

TRADITIONAL CALL SIGNS

COMMANDERS

MAJOR HARBIN CONSTANCE	28 September 1965 - 1 March 1966
MAJOR HARRY J. ZELLMER	1 March 1966 - 25 October 1966
MAJOR KENNETH L. KETZLER	25 October 1966 - 31 December 1966



129TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

The 129th Aviation Company (Airmobile Light) was activated on 5 July 1965 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky in accordance with General Order Number 200, Headquarters, Third U.S. Army, dated 12 July 1965. Concurrently, the 394th Transportation Detachment; the 296th Signal Detachment; and the 433rd Medical Detachment were activated and attached to the 129th Aviation Company. From the date of activation until 30 September 1965, the activities of the 129th Aviation Company included reception of authorized personnel and equipment, and training in preparation for overseas deployment. On 30 September 1965, the unit departed Fort Campbell, Kentucky and the main body arrived at DONG BA THIN, RVN on 21 October 1965. The 129th Aviation Company was assigned to the 10th Aviation Battalion on 28 October 1965 in accordance with General Order Number 8, Headquarters, 12th Aviation Group, dated 11 November 1965. From 21 October to 31 December 1965, the company busily prepared to support combat operations and on 15 December 1965 the 129th Aviation Company (AML) was declared operational.

TRADITIONAL CALL SIGNS

LIFT SHIPS	BULL DOG
GUNSHIPS	COBRA

COMMANDERS

MAJOR LEON H. WIGGINS	5 July 1965 - 2 January 1966
MAJOR ROBERT D. STEARNS	2 January 1966 - 19 July 1966
MAJOR LAVERE W. BINDRUP	19 July 1966 - 25 October 1966
MAJOR RONALD H. MERRITT	31 October 1966 - 31 December 1966



281st ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

The origin of the 281st Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam began with the 145th Airlift Platoon of the 145th Aviation Battalion which arrived in this theater during 1964, and was stationed at PHAN THIET, RVN, in support of Special Forces operations in that area. The platoon moved to NHA TRANG and was assigned to the 52nd Aviation Battalion on 6 January 1965 to provide aviation support to Headquarters, I Field Forces, Vietnam. On 25 December 1965, the unit was assigned to the 10th Aviation Battalion by General Order Number 256, Headquarters, USARV, dated 30 December 1965. In early February, the 145th Airlift Platoon and the 6th Aviation Platoon, 171st Aviation Company were combined into 2nd Platoon, 171st Aviation Company per General Order Number 4, Headquarters, 12th Aviation Group, dated 25 January 1966. The mission of the 2nd Platoon, 171st Aviation Company was to provide helicopter support as directed by 5th Special Forces Group (ABN) with headquarters at NHA TRANG, RVN. The 281st Aviation Company (AML) was activated by General Order Number 318, Headquarters, Third U.S. Army, dated 7 October 1965. This order activated the company headquarters; service platoon; 499th Signal Detachment; and the 483rd Transportation Detachment for the 281st Aviation Company (AML). The advance party of this unit arrived in Vietnam on 23 May 1966, and the main body closed at NHA TRANG on 4 June 1966. The company received the assets and assumed the mission of the 2nd Platoon, 171st Aviation Company per General Order Number 27, Headquarters, 17th Aviation Group, dated 14 July 1966.

TRADITIONAL CALL SIGNS

MARDI GRAS (BANDITS)

LEITA

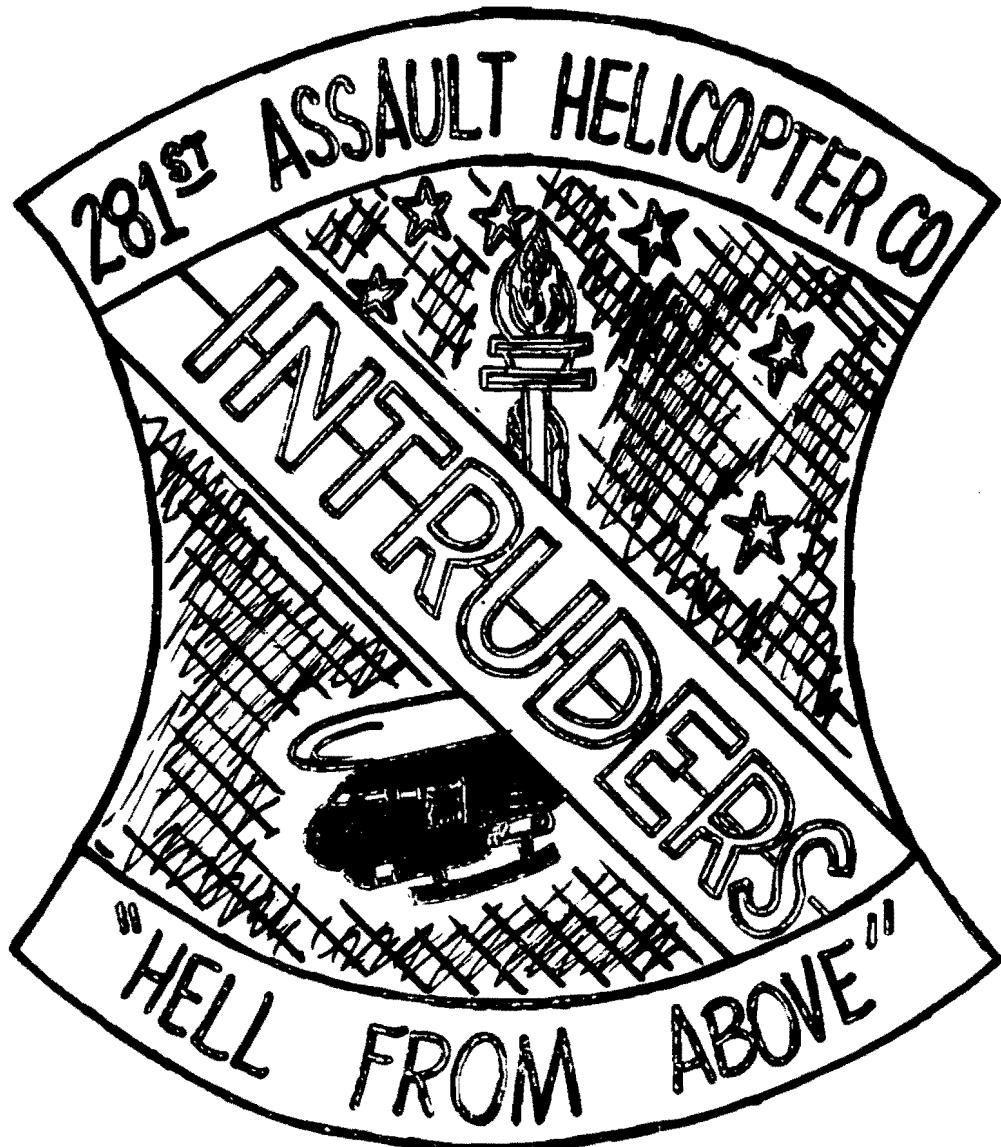
COMMANDERS

MAJOR EVERDUS H. HACKETT

7 October 1965 - 23 July 1966

MAJOR WILLIAM P. GRIFFIN

24 July 1966 - 31 December 1966



180TH ASSAULT SUPPORT HELICOPTER COMPANY

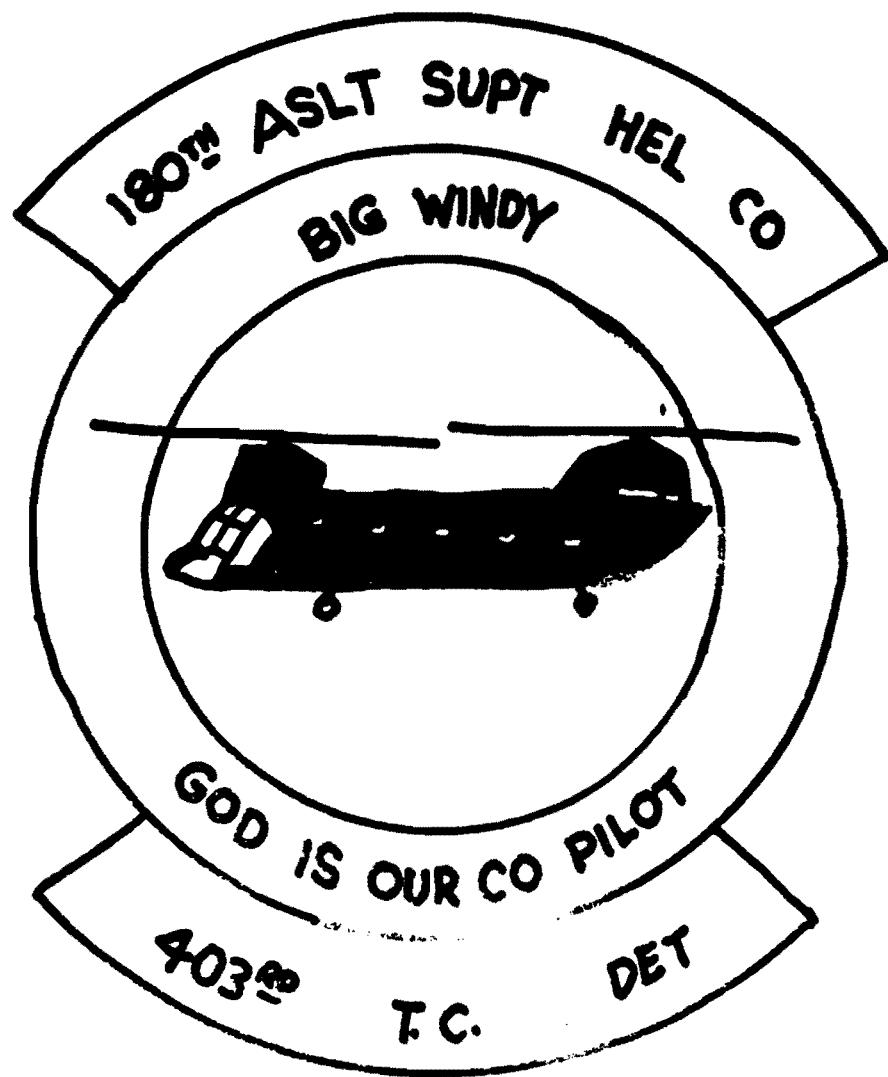
This unit was activated at Fort Benning, Georgia by General Order Number 99, Headquarters, Third U.S. Army, dated 16 March 1966. The general order also activated the 403rd Transportation Detachment which provides the direct support aircraft maintenance for the 180th Assault Support Helicopter Company. The advance party of this unit arrived at DONG BA THIN, RVN on 12 October 1966 followed by the main body on 19 October 1966. The aviators were given an in-country orientation by the staff of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion and were then placed on temporary duty with the 179th Assault Support Helicopter Company and "CHINOOK" units of the 1st Cavalry Division for familiarization with operating procedures and requirements in the Republic of Vietnam. The aircraft for this unit arrived at VUNG TAU, RVN by surface vessel, were processed for issue and ferried to DONG BA THIN. The 180th Assault Support Helicopter Company was declared operational on 2 December 1966 and deployed its flight platoons in support of combat operations as directed by the 17th Combat Aviation Group.

TRADITIONAL CALL SIGNS

UH-1B LITTLE WINDY

COMMANDERS

LIEUTENANT COLONEL THOMAS F. PERKINS 16 March - 31 December 1966



CHAPTER IV

BATTALION OPERATIONS

31 December 1965 - 31 December 1966

CHAPTER IV

BATTALION OPERATIONS 31 December 1965-31 December 1966

OPERATION JEFFERSON 31 December 1965 - 17 January 1966

The first combat operation for the 10th Aviation Battalion was conducted in the vicinity of TUY HOA, approximately 65 miles north of DONG BA THIN, along the coast. From a forward operating base, the battalion supported a series of operations which had the objective of securing the rice harvest of the TUY HOA VALLEY and engaging elements of the 95th NVA Regiment. Operation JEFFERSON was conducted by the 47th ARVN Regiment and the 2nd ROK Marine Brigade to open Highway Number 1 south of TUY HOA and to block the sea infiltration routes of the NVA in the VUNG RO BAY area. With the attachment of HMM 363, USMC (10 CH-34's), the battalion provided the aviation support for the multi-national force and learned many valuable lessons in counterinsurgency warfare. Operation JEFFERSON terminated on 17 January 1966 with the following aviation statistics:

Hours Flown	1,115
Combat Assaults	
Battalion Size.	2
Company Size	1
Troops Lifted.	7,880
Tons of Cargo Lifted	519

OPERATION TYLER
13 January 1966 - 20 January 1966

Operation TYLER was a search and destroy operation conducted to the northeast of PHAN THIET by the 2nd Battalion (ABN), 327th Infantry. The 10th Aviation Battalion provided a reinforced aviation company at SONG MAO, approximately 60 miles south of DONG BA THIN to support this unit of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. The aviation statistics for this brief operation are as follows:

Hours Flown	200
Combat Assaults	
Company Size	3
Platoon Size	3
Troops Lifted	1,100
Tons of Cargo Lifted	4

OPERATION VAN BUREN
18 January 1966 - 20 February 1966

Operation VAN BUREN brought the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division to TUY HOA and marked the beginning of what was to prove to be a winning combination of two fighting units. During this period the 10th Aviation Battalion provided general aviation support to the "Screaming Eagles" and the 2nd ROK Marine Brigade. The requirements of these two units usually exceeded the assets of two helicopter companies, and all units of the battalion were employed on this operation. At the termination of Operation VAN BUREN, 381 casualties by body count, had been inflicted on the 95th NVA Regiment and more than 80% of the rice crop had been harvested by the local farmers. This operation inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, denied him valuable food supply, and stimulated the Vietnamese economy and morale in the TUY HOA VALLEY. Aviation statistics for the operation are as follows:

Hours Flown	3,520
Combat Assaults	
Battalion Size	8
Company Size	4
Platoon Size	24
Troops Lifted	19,977
Tons of Cargo Lifted . . .	1,271

OPERATION HARRISON
21 February 1966 - 24 March 1966

The success of the operations conducted in the TUY HOA VALLEY during January and February led to the expansion of the tactical area of operations into the mountains west of the valley. Operation HARRISON was characterized by extensive sweeping and patrolling operations through the dense jungles and precipitous mountain terrain. The battalion and 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division developed techniques for the insertion of Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols deep in enemy territory under cover of twilight. The insertion of these teams at last light made extraction extremely hazardous in the event that patrols engaged enemy forces during the period of initial occupation. The valor displayed by aircrews of the 10th Aviation Battalion, when called upon to extract the patrols during hours of darkness and under intense fire, forged the bonds of mutual respect between the "VAGABONDS" and the "SCREAMING EAGLES". One particularly significant encounter of this operation occurred when a major fire fight developed between a company of the 1st Battalion (ABN), 327th Infantry and elements of the 95th NVA Regiment. During the ensuing night, a platoon size Tiger Force was helilifted into a blocking position. This was the first night combat assault for the 10th Aviation Battalion as well as the assaulting forces. When daylight came, the friendly forces dominated enemy positions; counted 118 enemy dead and estimated another 97 killed.

The 10th Aviation Battalion continued to develop its mastery of night operations and the capability was put to the acid test when the 2nd Battalion (ABN), 502nd Infantry conducted a battalion size combat assault during the hours of 0100 to 0300. This is the first battalion size night assault on record in the Republic of Vietnam. The aviation statistics for Operation HARRISON are as follows:

Hours Flown	2,763
Combat Assault	
Battalion Size	4
Company Size	4
Platoon Size	7
Troops Lifted	16,359
Tons of Cargo Lifted . .	1,363

OPERATION FILLMORE
25 March 1966 - 9 April 1966

The objective of this operation was to seek and destroy enemy units to the southwest of the TUY HOA VALLEY and to protect the April rice harvest of this fertile region. During this operation, the concept of a heliborne Immediate Reaction Force was developed by the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and the 10th Aviation Battalion to execute rapid exploitation and reinforcement missions.

One of the best yardsticks for evaluation of the success of Operation FILLMORE is the April 1966 rice harvest which yielded 33,000 tons as opposed to April 1965 when 9,000 tons were recovered by local farmers. Aviation statistics for this operation are as follows:

Hours Flown	1,928
Combat Assaults	
Company Size	6
Platoon Size	1
Troops Lifted	9,774
Tons of Cargo Lifted . .	513

OPERATION AUSTIN
12 April 1966 - 18 May 1966

In mid-April, the field headquarters of the 10th Aviation Battalion displaced from TUY HOA to PHAN THIET to support a series of search and destroy operations to be conducted by the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division along the southern boundary of the II Corps Tactical Zone. Operation AUSTIN II was highlighted by a night combat assault in which the 1st Battalion (ABN), 327th Infantry was helilifted into multiple landing zones and resulted in 21 enemy killed and seven weapons captured. On 25 April 1966, the battalion moved in-land to the mountainous jungles of QUANG DUC Province, 85 miles northeast of SAIGON, to support the spoiling attacks against North Vietnamese units along the Cambodian border. The flying conditions encountered during Operation AUSTIN IV were extremely hazardous due to the high altitudes and the heavy rains of the Southwest Monsoon. These restrictions to flying not only hampered the responsiveness of aviation support to the tactical units, but imposed limitations on access to the unit base camp where direct support maintenance was performed. As a result of this experience, the 10th Aviation Battalion developed the mobile forward operating base which characterizes its operations to this date.

Aviation summary for Operation AUSTIN is as follows:

Hours Flown 3,337

Combat Assaults

Battalion Size	10
Company Size	9
Platoon Size	25

Troops Lifted 19,417

Tons of Cargo Lifted . . 1,507

OPERATION HAWTHORNE
2 June 1966 - 20 June 1966

Upon completion of Operation AUSTIN, the 10th Aviation Battalion displaced with the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division to the vicinity of CHEO REO, approximately 100 nautical miles northwest of DONG BA THIN, to support planned operations in that area. On 30 May 1966, an order was received to displace 105 nautical miles further northwest to DAK TO to support the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division in countering the anticipated summer offensive of the 24th NVA Regiment. The first task for the battalion was a combat assault to relieve the besieged outpost of TOUMORONG which was astride the enemy axis of advance. Early on the morning of 7 June, an estimated NVA battalion attacked an artillery position in the valley west of TOUMORONG. Armed helicopters of the battalion were called to provide close-in fire support and to relieve the pressure of the enemy attack which had already resulted in the capture of one howitzer. The gunships provided the fire support for a successful counter-attack which resulted in the restoration of the perimeter and inflicted heavy casualties to the attacking force. Operation HAWTHORNE was characterized by continuous enemy contact throughout 16 days and nights of bitter fighting. The highlight of the operation was an intensive B-52 airstrike to destroy enemy forces which had been fixed through the rapid aggressive thrusts of the airmobile forces.

At the conclusion of Operation HAWTHORNE, the 24th NVA Regiment had sustained over 1,200 casualties by body count and estimates. A large percentage of these casualties were inflicted and confirmed during a brilliantly executed combat assault conducted into the bomb craters of the B-52 strike only 30 minutes after the last bomb was released. The 10th Aviation Battalion maintained an average aircraft availability in excess of 85% during this operation despite the fact that the area of operations was over 200 nautical miles from the base camp. The aviation statistics for Operation HAWTHORNE reflect the intensive participation of the battalion in this classic attack which spoiled the planned NVA monsoon offensive in the Central Highlands:

Hours Flown 2,035

Combat Assaults

Battalion Size	8
Company Size	8
Platoon Size	9

Troops Lifted 11,301

Tons of Cargo Lifted . . . 509

OPERATION BEAUREGARD
24 June 1966 - 14 July 1966

Operation BEAUREGARD was conducted in the DAK TO area to screen the Cambodian-Laotian border and to interdict enemy units infiltrating the area. The battalion had deployed its maintenance and signal detachments to KONTUM, approximately 30 miles east of DAK TO, to support its operations in this remote location. The sustained high level of aircraft availability during Operation HAWTHORNE and BEAUREGARD was graphic evidence of the effectiveness of the battalion forward operating base. Concurrently with the final days of this operation, the battalion received its first Annual General Inspection and received satisfactory ratings in all functional areas. The aviation statistics for Operation BEAUREGARD are as follows:

Hours Flown	2,175
Combat Assaults	
Battalion Size	5
Company Size	8
Platoon Size	7
Troops Lifted	10,704
Tons of Cargo Lifted . . .	712

OPERATION JOHN PAUL JONES
21 July 1966 - 4 September 1966

Following Operation BEAUREGARD, the battalion, under the command of LTC HARRISON, displaced from DAK TO and KONTUM to the now familiar beaches of TUY HOA. It was during this period that the designation of the unit was changed to the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion and each of its light airmobile companies was redesignated as Assault Helicopter Company. Operation JOHN PAUL JONES had the objective of destruction of enemy units in the TUY HOA area and to secure the area for development of a major airfield and logistical base with secure lines of communication. Tactical operations commenced with the clandestine insertion of patrols and blocking forces into the mountains surrounding VUNG RO BAY, a natural harbor immediately south of the TUY HOA VALLEY. The following morning, a battalion of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division was helilifted into a combat assault across the beaches of the harbor. Extensive search and destroy operations in the large tactical area of this operation placed heavy demands on the aviation units of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion which were experiencing severe aviator shortages due to rotation of experienced personnel. It was not unusual during this period to have the officers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company participating in combat assault operations with the assigned units, in addition to their other duties. The objectives of Operation JOHN PAUL JONES were achieved and extensive construction in the VUNG RO BAY and TUY HOA area was well underway prior to the termination of the operation. The

following statistics are indicative of the extensive use of aviation in this operation:

Hours Flown 7,444

Combat Assaults

Battalion Size	12
Company Size	25
Platoon Size	24

Troops Lifted 35,583

Tons of Cargo Lifted . . 1,968

OPERATION SEWARD
6 September 1966 - 25 October 1966

This operation was conducted in the mountains northwest of TUY HOA and north along the coast to block infiltration routes and destroy enemy units in the area. As the operation progressed, the preponderance of the tactical elements of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division were employed on search and destroy missions in an area approximately 30 nautical miles northwest of the main command post at TUY HOA. The 10th Combat Aviation Battalion established a forward operating base and a tactical command post at DONG TRE to provide more responsive aviation support and reduce the number of flying hours which would be otherwise wasted travelling from the field headquarters south of TUY HOA. This further fragmentation of the battalion headquarters placed an additional burden on the command and staff sections, but the tactical advantages that accrued were obvious as the area came under the influence of the Northeast Monsoon rains. The aviation statistics for Operation SEWARD are as follows:

Hours Flown	7,289
Combat Assaults	
Battalion Size	7
Company Size	11
Platoon Size	9
Troops Lifted	37,988
Tons of Cargo Lifted . . .	1,954

OPERATION GERONIMO
31 October 1966 - 4 December 1966

The five day period between Operations Seward and Geronimo was used to conduct intensive night training in formation flying and formation landing. The training had the dual purpose of increasing unit proficiency in night operations and, through selection of training areas, to execute a carefully planned deception. On the night of 31 October, a battalion sized force of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division was helilifted into a night combat assault without the use of artificial illumination. The operation was considered a complete success and the following message was received from BRIGADIER GENERAL WILLARD PEARSON, CG 1st Airborne Division on 1 October: "I heartily commend the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion for its sterling performance in the battalion airmobile assault last evening. It was truly a professional job."

Flying conditions in the TUY HOA area became extremely hazardous during the month of November as a result of the gale-force winds and torrential rains associated with the Northeast Monsoon. The continuous, responsive aviation support rendered by the battalion under such adverse conditions required the utmost vigilance and professional skill on the part of each aviator. The aviation statistics for Operation Geronimo are as follows:

Hours Flown 5,616

Combat Assaults

Battalion Size	4
Company Size	24
Platoon Size	9

Troops Lifted 29,786

Tons of Cargo Lifted . . . 2,535

OPERATION PICKETT
9 December 1966 -

On 5 December 1966, the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion departed "VAGABOND VALLEY", as the area south of TUY HOA was commonly known, to establish a forward operating base in the vicinity of KONTUM, approximately 200 miles northwest of DONG BA THIN. The area of operations is characterized by high mountains and dense jungle vegetation. During operations to date, surface winds in the vicinity of KONTUM have ranged between 10 to 25 knots daily, and winds in the mountains have reached levels in excess of 50 knots with severe turbulence. The battalion has conducted experiments to determine suitable methods for explosive preparation of landing zones in the bamboo and elephant grass thickets which are common throughout the area. On 27 December, a battalion size night combat assault was successfully conducted into landing zones high on the slopes of the mountains northeast of KONTUM without incident.

The last operational highlight for the year 1966 was a visit, on 28 December, by GENERAL HAROLD K. JOHNSON, Chief of Staff, United States Army, to the field headquarters of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion. During this visit, the Chief of Staff received a briefing on the maintenance and operating procedures of this unit. GENERAL JOHNSON concluded his visit by participating in a live-fire demonstration aboard one of the "MINI-GUN" equipped gunships of the battalion.

CHAPTER V

REFLECTIONS

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"In memory's eye I can see them now - forming grimly for the attack, blue lipped, covered with sludge and mud, chilled by the wind and rain of the foxhole, driving home to their objective, and to the judgment seat of God. I do not know the dignity of their birth, but I do know the glory of their death." These words by GENERAL OF THE ARMY DOUGLAS MACARTHUR, spoken on 14 July 1935, ring true today. Three decades later, and in another strange part of the world, Americans answer the call. The methods of warfare have changed, but the sacrifices, hardships, and the many faces of death remain the same.

During this first year of combat operations, the "VAGABONDS OF VIETNAM" have traced an odyssey the length and width of Vietnam. The 10th Combat Aviation Battalion has a record second to none. The feats of our aviation crews are legendary among ground troops we support. Our successful operations, and contributions toward the effort to stem the rising tide of Communism have not been without cost. Our aviators and enlisted crew members have been called upon to perform many acts requiring courage, and valor above and beyond the call of duty. Many have never returned. They have given their lives fighting for the principles for which we stand.

It is with humility that we dedicate this chapter to our fallen comrades. In our future endeavors, let us be ever mindful of these men, and the principles for which they gave their all.

HONOR ROLL - 1966

SGT CHARLES R. WILLIAMS	8 February 1966
ILT LEON D. FLANDERS	17 June 1966
PT G. W. WHITAKER	7 July 1966
MAJ FRANK J. GUNDAKER	1 August 1966
SP5 ERNEST M. SHUMAN, JR.	1 August 1966
SP4 DONALD D. WALLACE	1 August 1966
PFC RONALD J. RUSSELL	1 August 1966
ILT WILLIAM R. BEASLEY	25 September 1966
PFC LAWRENCE WILLIAMS, JR.	25 September 1966
CPT HARRY T. WHETZEL	7 October 1966
CWO ROBERT F. CHAMBERLAIN	7 October 1966
SP5 ROBERT W. GILLIAM	7 October 1966
SP4 JOHNNY L. NEAL	7 October 1966
PFC GARY B. FLABBI	22 October 1966
CPT JOHN J. LIVINGSTON	11 November 1966
WO TERRENCE M. ROONEY	11 November 1966
SGT MAYNARD J. HUMES	11 November 1966
SCT HENRY T. LEONARD	11 November 1966
SP4 LOREN S. REEVES	11 November 1966
WO DANIEL A. SULANDER	2 December 1966
WO DONALD D. HARRISON	2 December 1966
SP4 WILLIAM T. BODZICK	2 December 1966
SP4 LEE J. BOUDREAUX, JR.	2 December 1966

W. Robleski 281st 115/4AC

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61.6% OCT-66 = 16⁰⁷

AWARDS FOR VALOR

In a unit that is as heavily involved in combat operations as is the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion, valor is a relative thing. Daily, our aviators are faced with dangers that are more real and deadly than one could ever imagine in a peacetime situation. Combat assaults under enemy fire are commonplace; gun-strikes against heavily defended positions are almost a matter of routine; and emergency extractions of surrounded patrols are an unpleasantly recurring fact of life. Yet, out of the vast potpourri of heroic actions experienced by members of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion, we have those individuals whose intrepid gallantry is so conspicuous as to single them out for special recognition. The following synopsis of awards for calendar year 1966 discloses those individuals in the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion who so exemplified the type of heroism common to the "VAGABONDS OF VIETNAM":

3 January - CAPTAIN JOHN R. JENKS, 05307351, and CAPTAIN LA RUE R. ROSENGRANT, 05312474, 48th Assault Helicopter Company, were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for making an emergency extraction of a trapped reconnaissance patrol near PHAN RANG. They defied heavy enemy automatic weapons fire to make the rescue.

10 January - FIRST LIEUTENANT VICTOR L. DONNEL, 098409, 48th Assault Helicopter Company, was recommended for the Silver Star and CAPTAIN ROBERT J. FRAZIER JR., 084709, also of the 48th, was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross for rescuing a five man American patrol that was surrounded by an estimated 100 Viet Cong. While braving heavy enemy fire, they extracted the men from a tiny pick-up zone and carried them to safety.

12 January - WARRANT OFFICER DAVID L. GREEN JR., W315227, 117th Assault Helicopter Company was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for rescuing the lone survivor of a helicopter that crashed in the ocean. He lowered his helicopter until the skids were actually below the surface of the choppy water, allowing the injured man to crawl on the skid. He then skillfully dragged the casualty through the water to safety.

25 January - FIRST LIEUTENANT WILLIE M. WILSON, 05320415, 145th Airlift Platoon was recommended for the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross for braving enemy fire to rescue two American soldiers who had been trapped by the Viet Cong.

28 January - MAJOR KEVIN E. MURPHY, 04021336, and CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER ROBERT A. JOHNSON, W3430291, 145th Airlift Platoon, were recommended for the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross for extracting a five man reconnaissance team that was surrounded by a Viet Cong platoon.

29 January - FIRST LIEUTENANT JAMES A. JACKSON, 05320239, and SECOND LIEUTENANT RICHARD R. BOUCK, 05710611, 145th Airlift Platoon were recommended for the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross for rescuing a single survivor of a Special Forces patrol who was surrounded by a Viet Cong force that was rapidly closing in on him.

29 January - MAJOR KEVIN E. MURPHY, 04021336, CAPTAIN JOHN W. GREEN, III, 05412896, FIRST LIEUTENANT JUNICHI E. YAHIRO, 05406165, FIRST LIEUTENANT JAMES A. JACKSON, 05320329, FIRST LIEUTENANT RICHARD R. BOUCK, 05710611, FIRST LIEUTENANT EDWARD O. LEACH, 05914828, FIRST LIEUTENANT WILLIE M. WILSON, 05320415, and CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER ROBERT A. JOHNSON, W3430291, 145th Airlift Platoon, were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. These men were flying four utility helicopters that extracted twenty one Americans who had become surrounded by a vastly superior force of Viet Cong. The rescue would not have been possible, however, without the assistance of two gunships that poured deadly suppressive fire on the enemy positions. These two gunships were piloted by the following men who were also awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their actions: CAPTAIN JOE B. THURSTON JR., 091708, CAPTAIN DAVID E. HURD, 05405408, FIRST LIEUTENANT FRANK L. MACPHERSON, 05318531, and CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER GARY D. MARTIN, W3200581.

30 January - MAJOR CURTIS L. GARRETT JR., 01890237, and WARRANT OFFICER DAVID SPURGEON, W3152755, 117th Assault Helicopter Company, were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for making two emergency medical evacuations at night through deadly enemy fire.