

c.3
HISTORY OF THE 57TH AVIATION COMPANY (AIR MOBILE FIXED WING)

1 JANUARY 1966 TO 31 DECEMBER 1966



PREPARED BY

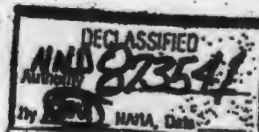
MAJOR THOMAS BRANSFORD, UNIT HISTORIAN

SP5 RALPH A SHINN JR, CLERK TYPIST

APPROVED BY:

Thomas Bransford

THOMAS BRANSFORD
Major, Infantry
Commanding



SECTION I

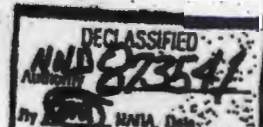
CONTINUED HISTORY OF THE 57TH AVIATION COMPANY (AIR MBL FW)

Upon arrival in the Republic of Vietnam, the 57th Aviation Company and its maintenance support unit, the 138th Transportation Detachment (AACFT REP) (CARIBOU) were assigned to the 11th Aviation Battalion at Nha Trang. Orders from this unit set 16 January as our operational date and in late December 1965 and early January 1966 all efforts were aimed at this goal. For the pilots and crews this was a difficult time as few airplanes were flyable and living conditions that first month left much to be desired. This notwithstanding the the company quickly achieved an operational status on 16 January 1966 and began flying an average of 1500/55 hours a month/day.

The assigned mission of the 57th Aviation Company was to provide airlift of supplies and personnel as directed by United States Army Vietnam while performing necessary maintenance to support this airlift. To accomplish this, ten (10) CV-2B aircraft were made available daily. These ten were further broken down among using agencies in the following manner:

A. MACV	2
B. FF VII	4
C. USARV	4

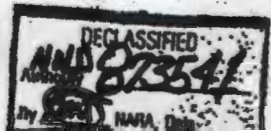
To recognize the above facts is one thing. To allow them to dominate your thinking, to the exclusion of the personnel involved, is another. For any accomplishment can be put forth as fact. For instance, during 1966 the 57th Aviation Company flew its 1500 hours a month as compared to a scheduled program of 1120 hours. In totaling this one must remember not the four hundred odd hours that we outflow our schedule but think instead of the crews and mechanics, cooks and clerks that slogged in rainy pre-dawn darkness for months at a time to turn the record out. If the crews were willing to fly a week straight without seeing Vung Tau in daylight, taking off before daylight and landing after dark-the credit must be passed along the line to the mess hall, the personnel clerks who provided a smooth well-fed organization. When, as was the case for almost the entire year, twenty engines cranked, ten planes flew, one can't forget the mags that were timed, the leaks that were fixed in the harsh glare of arc lights at three in the morning. These people write the history. At Lai Khe one day, two pilots brought Gray Tiger 97 in with no brakes and stroring after all hydraulics were shot out. Special thanks! Of course. But their actions reflected credit on a company, a training program, as well as themselves. To a large degree each action in our 9036.4 total combat hours was a credit to no one in particular and everyone in general. If we flew that extra mission, volunteered that plane, we'd break our scheduled program but we'd do it. For often it was the difference between ammo or no ammo, food or no food and just as important to a soldier, beer or no beer. No other company in the Republic can claim the breadth of mission that we enjoyed. From Ca Mau in the southernmost Delta Regions to Dung Hoa on the DMZ,



troops were exposed to and supplied by the familiar aircraft of the 57th Aviation Company, "The Grey Tiger Lines".

To return to the facts we were commanded by Major Weldon C. Britton until his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, at which time he was transferred to the newly formed 222nd Aviation Battalion, Fixed Wing as Executive Officer. This battalion replaced the 14th Aviation Battalion as our parent unit. As LEO Weldon Britton departed, Major Maynard A Austin who had served as Executive Officer since before departing, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, became the Company Commander and Captain, soon to become Major, Joseph H Erwin left his job as Maintenance Officer to assume the duties of Executive Officer. Into the Maintenance Officer's position came Captain Richard C. Johnson and the company continued to march.

In the fall, the 57th Aviation Company took part in a unique assimilation program, Operation "Red Leaf". Earlier in the year General Howard K. Johnson, Chief of Staff of the Army had agreed to transfer the CV-2B Aircraft from the Army to Air Force control effective 1 January 1967. Operation "Red Leaf" was the title of this joint plan. As Air Force personnel filled our ranks in August through December, we had the additional mission of intergrating and training the Air Force personnel so that there would be no interruption of combat support to supported units when the United States Air Force took control 1 January 1967. It is a credit again to the organization and spirit that by early December when most Army personnel had departed and a skelton crew under Major Thomas Bransford commanding the company, the Air Force was completely qualified to carry on our tradition. For us the war was over.



SECTION II

OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

In a year as important as that past it would be a failure not to include a more detailed look at certain operations.

THE QUI NHON, DA NANG AND AN KHE TEMPORARY DUTY

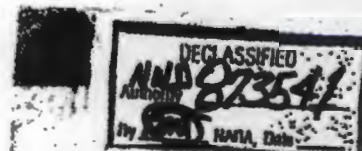
Three times during the year, the 57th Aviation Company was called upon to provide extended long term temporary duty support. In each case an airplane and crew was assigned to the base strip of one of the other Caribou Companies and on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, remained in a detached support role for up to two and one half months.

At Qui Nhon we were in direct support of the 1st Logistical Command and responsive to it. During the period 6 July thru 30 September we hauled fuel, ammo and troops to Chen Reo, Bong Son, Da Nang and Dong Ha to name but a few.

The crews were housed with the 92nd Aviation Company (CV-2B) at Qui Nhon and our maintenance was borrowed in part from them.

At An Khe from mid June to the end of September our planes and crews had an unique mission. Flying from An Khe to Pleku, twenty minutes east-west through the Mang Yong Pass we carried troops. From An Khe strip to the larger Pleku Air Base we carried troops with one day remaining in Vietnam. These were the combat veterans fighting with the 1st Cavalry Division. At Pleku we picked up replacements who twenty-four hours before had boarded a C-119 in San Francisco to begin there year at war. Housed at the 1st Cavalry Division base camp we got our maintenance support from the 17th Aviation Company (CV-2B) at An Khe.

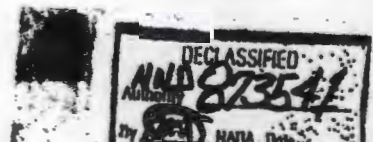
At Da Nang twice aircraft were in direct support of Special Forces for one month, delivering construction material for new outlying compounds. After this our missions continued as the normal flying program. We continued to train Air Force pilots and make all our missions till 31 December 1966.



INTRODUCTION TO UNIT OPERATIONS

The 57th Assault Helicopter Company is in general support of the II Corps Tactical Zone but has been primarily in support of the Kontum Province area in the northern sector of the Central Highlands. This is near the tri-border area of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The 4th Infantry Division, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Field Forces, MACV, and various ARVN units have all been supported by the 57th. Those units have been served well but the 57th primary mission has been to support the 5th Special Forces Group, Command and Control Detachment (FOB #2). Formerly, this mission was on a 60-day rotation basis with all the companies in the 52d Battalion participating, but, during parts of 1968 and the first of 1969, the 57th had accomplished such a remarkable record of successful missions with a minimal loss of aircraft and personnel that it was requested and approved that the 57th remain on the mission for an extended period of time.

The following narrative submitted by LTC Frederick T. Abt, Commander of FOB #2, will give an insight as to the type of obstacles that were met and overcome by the men of the 57th. The men of the Gladiators and Cougars take distinct pride in receiving this "Job Well Done" recognition.



UNIT OPERATIONS

As the beginning of the new year the 57th experienced little enemy activity around the Kontum area. A distinct change from the same period one year ago as the 1968 Tet Offensive was getting under way. Tet, 1968, served as a steady reminder to what could possibly occur in 1969 and preparations were well into being completed to meet any action initiated against the compound.

Working on the perimeter defense and building permanent living quarters meant long extra hours to be put in after a day of flying but the men realized the need to get the job completed and were quite enthusiastic, complaining little.

All this activity failed to keep the men of the 57th from meeting the daily missions. It appeared that there would be continued success with the FOB #2 mission as it was being performed in the manner that was unparalleled by any previous unit. At the same time the unit was fulfilling its responsibilities to the other organizations in the area.

On the 8th of January the first rocket attack of the year occurred and as it turned out it was the only one for the month. Eight rockets impacted in the Kontum city limits. The 57th suffered no damage, except for nerves, but it was felt by all that the well-earned name of "Rocket City" was going to be retained for the year 1969.

Tensions began to subside somewhat as no incoming rounds were experienced for the remainder of the month but the Tet truce in February was on everyone's mind and last minute preparations were being under taken with a sense of urgency.

The first and only serious aircraft incident for the month of January happened on the 13th 1½ miles south of Kontum. While enroute from Kontum to Pleiku WO1 Joseph Mulkey had an engine failure but landed successfully causing only minor damage to the aircraft.

Starting the new year in such fine form gave everyone hope that this year would not be a repetition of the one just passed.

The month of February caused this feeling to be short lived. Although no Tet offensive was initiated, the unit was to suffer its first combat casualty of the year.

On the 16th of February while trying to insert a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) in an LZ one mile northeast of Polei Kleng, the aircraft, piloted by WO1 Norman Perron and Arthur Papale, received an unknown number and type of hits from enemy ground fire. WO Perron radioed on climb out that the controls were erratic. The aircraft then began to show spiral

UNIT ACTIVITIES AND OPERATIONS

January and the new year, 1960, brought the 57th AML its first disaster and its first bitter taste of the war. A North Vietnamese sapper platoon slipped into the Gladiator compound on the morning of 10 January. Executing a well planned attack, the sappers blitzed the 615th maintenance area and motor pool, planting charges in helicopters and in most of the unit's motor vehicles. At the time the 615th Trans Det had its night shift working in that area. In the surprise attack, the sappers killed 6 members of the unit and wounded 17 others. At 0200 the compound was shocked into stunned consciousness by the sound of gun fire and exploding demolition charges. Quickly rallying, the unit's personnel rushed to the maintenance area where the enemy sappers were quickly routed. Nine NVA were killed inside the perimeter and 10 others were found the next morning outside the fences. Dawn on the morning of the 10th found parts of the maintenance area a smoldering ruins. The NVA had destroyed 7 ships and damaged several others. The unit Ammunition Shop, Airframe Repair Shop and Electrical Repair Shop were completely burned to the ground. The motor Pool was almost completely paralyzed. Vehicle damage was assessed in the vicinity of 3 million dollars, not to mention a much more serious toll, the live of our 6 friends who were killed in defense of their compatriots. As a result of the 10 January attack, an all out effort to improve the unit's perimeter was made. Bunkers were improved and added. Concertina was strung in second rows, a mine field was laid on the perimeter, Lights were strung around the perimeter. The 52nd Bn. Sent a security detachment of 40 troops. The 57th was determined not to be unprepared again.

In recognition of those soldiers that died for their country, the 57th has petitioned the 17th Aviation Group to make 10 January the annual Organization Day. The unit has also decided to name the compound Camp Pfeister in honor of the Pfeister twins, who were members of the 615th Trans Co. The twins were working in the maintenance area at the time of the attack. SP4 Robert Pfeister was killed and his brother William was wounded. It should be noted that they had submitted a DA 1049 form in order to come to Vietnam together, even though one of them could have remained in the United States.

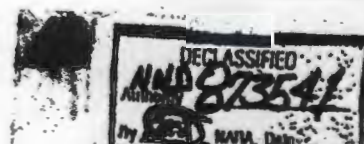
The missions flown during the month of January were in support of Northern II Corps. Flights in support of the 24th Special Tactical Zone, MACV, Special Forces Camps, ARVN II Corps and the 4th Division in the Dak-To area were the normal day's mission assignments. At the end of the month, the 57th began preparations for assuming the FOB II Special Forces mission from the 119th ALC. The 57th was to have the FOB missions for the normal tour of 60 days. The mission consisted of supporting Special Forces reconnaissance team which operate along Vietnam's Western border providing intelligence as to the movement of NVA troops and equipment units infiltrating the country along the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail.

Following the 10 January attack, the 57th began a new policy of sleeping with one eye open. The unit's personnel began pulling 25%, 50% and even 100% alert depending on a particular night's intelligence reports.

As the month of January was coming to a close, a new devastating section of the war's history was about to begin. Coming in from a long day flying the FOB II mission on the evening of 29 January, several of the unit's ships received fire as they came in over Kontum city on final for the Coliseum, the unit's aircraft revetment area. This was attributed to the ARVN's celebrating the arrival of Tet. Throughout the night of 29 January, small arms fire could be heard from the city as streams of bright red machine gun fire brought all members of the 57th AML out of their tents and to their battle stations. The Cougars scrambled 4 gunships while slicks became airborne to provide flare support. The compound as well as Kontum city was under siege. The Tet offensive had begun. When the main NVA attack came along the unit's eastern perimeter, the company poured M60 machine gun and small arm fire from every bunker. Neighboring Cav elements wheeled several tanks and APC's in along the northern flank and opened up with murderous beehive rounds. Overhead, the Cougars, along with the Buccaneers, Avengers and Croc gunships of Pleiku made pass after pass along the perimeter spewing hail of machine gun and 40MM fire. After breaking the ground attack, they turned to the numerous mortar positions which were spotted by blazing muzzle flashes. Rolling in on these positions with 2.75 rockets brought great satisfaction to many gun pilots as numerous secondary explosions resulted from direct hits. As dawn broke on the Gladiator Compound and Kontum City, it appeared that the attack was over. This assumption was quickly dispelled as throughout the day the compound was subject to numerous sniper rounds. In Kontum the battle was waged from house to house. A partial police of the unit's eastern perimeter accounted for 59 enemy dead. It can easily be assumed that the actual number of enemy dead was somewhat higher.

The second night of the offensive, the battle shifted to the western neighbors, MACV, B24, Special Forces, and the 43rd Signal Compound. The three units occupy a square section on the north-west side of Kontum City. They came under sustained mortar and ground attack on the nights of 31 January thru 2 February. At one time the NVA took 2 bunkers on B24's perimeter. The courageous gunship crews, along with several other attack helicopter teams from Pleiku again saved the day. Two Gunships remained in the air throughout each night as the Gladiator flare ships circled overhead providing an eerie dry light brightness over all of Kontum City. The 57th took continual sniper fire through the 4th of February when the city was finally cleared and the NVA withdrew. Miraculously no members of the unit were killed, though 26 were wounded, none critically. During the 6 day period of 30 January to 4 February, the body count in the Kontum area reached 785 NVA troops dead.

Due to the TET offensive in January, the 57th was forced to fly its aircraft the maximum amount of time physically possible. Many hours of additional blade time were logged on the company's aircraft during the early part of February, as they provided continuous illumination and protection each night. At the end of the 6 day period, the aircraft as well as the unit's personnel were in need of rest and a chance to complete some much needed maintenance. As a result, the daily requirement for the FOB II mission of 11 slicks and 6 guns was cut in half. The operation continued on a limited basis through the third week of February when the operation went back into full swing.



The unit's first combat aviation casualty occurred on 19 February. A long Range Reconnaissance Patrol consisting of 10 members was surrounded and called for extraction. Air Force Two Air bombed and strafed the area before the slicks went in for the pick up. After the Two Air had expended, the first slick went in and extracted half the team. The second ship, piloted by LT Richard Griffith and WO John Cooke, followed and picked up the remaining 5 members. As they started out of the LZ they came under intense hostile fire. The ship burst into flames and plummeted to the ground. At this time the chase ship, piloted by WO John Herbold, descended into the area and was able to pick up LT Griffith, WO Cooke, the crew chief and one member of the LRRP team.

The remainder of the patrol and the gunner perished in the fire. WO Cooke died two days later of the burns he had suffered in the fire. WO Herbold was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroism.

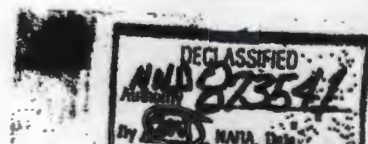
The month of March saw the unit completing the FOB mission. The 57th had accomplished a demanding job in a highly professional manner. At the end of March, the unit was presented a plaque by the Commander of FOB II in recognition of the outstanding performance.

During the month of March the unit encountered two problems in maintaining its top notch performance. The first was weather. During this period the Montagnards burn their fields in preparation for the growing season. The smoke from this burning creates a dense smoke which on some days reduces visibility to only 2 or 3 miles.

The second problem encountered during March was the loss of sleep due to 122mm rocket attacks. The unit was hit five times during March. Through out these attacks, the unit's luck held. No casualties and only minor damage resulted from the enemy bombardment. The heaviest attack came on 4 March when 23 rockets were fired. The compound was hit again on the 17th of March with 14 rockets. On the 20th of March, 3 rockets hit, slightly damaging one ship. Again on the 21 of March, one round hit a small arms ammo connex, causing several secondary explosions. On 24 March the 57th was hit for the last time that month with seven 122mm rockets falling just short of the northern perimeter.

With each attack the EVA adjusted its fire and by the end of the month were placing a high percentage of hits inside the compound. The attacks culminated in a 22 rocket barrage on 5 April which damaged 10 aircraft and wounded 3 personnel. The following day three B52 strikes on the hills northeast of the compound put an end to the 122mm rocket threats for the next two months.

The month of April brought a combined Change of Command and Presentation of Awards ceremony. With the Kontum Army Airfield hard stand serving as a parade ground, the event took place under bright spring skies on 3 April 1968. Major William D. Gess Jr. received the symbolic unit guide on from LTC George E. Durnison. Both the 17th Aviation Group Commander, Col Smith and the 52d CAB Commander, LTC Lehrman, were present at the ceremony. Following the Change of Command Ceremony, the Air Medal was presented to many of the unit's personnel.



During the month of April, several battalions from the 173rd Airborne Division moved into an area of operation east of Kontum. Headquarters for this operation was located in a vacant field on the unit's western perimeter. Throughout the month of April, the unit supported the 173rd in addition to its normal II Corps support missions.

The 1st of May saw the 173rd Airborne change places with the 3rd Bde of the 4th Div, who had been employed north of Qui-Nhon. The 3rd Bde set up its Base Camp in Kontum and began establishing fire bases west of Polei Kleng, along the Cambodian border. The 57th participated in numerous combat assaults throughout the months of May & June. At times fighting raged fiercely. The unit had one aircraft shot down and enemy others were hit. Being mortared out of LZ's became quite common as the Gladiators did their best to provide the ground command with vital airborne support. The support of the 3rd Bde was characterized for the month of May by the tactical emergency, which seemed to plague the 3rd Bde's LRRPS. On many occasions the 57th was called on the make night extractions which were always successfully accomplished. Providing valuable close fire support, the unit's Cougars worked quite closely with units in contact with NVN. The Cougars were also called upon to come to the aid of ambushed road convoys between Pleiku and Dak To.

May saw the 615th's Commanding Officer, Major Niles C. Clark promoted to Battalion Maintenance Officer, as Cpt Hugh Smith moved from the 57th's Service Platoon Command to become the 615th's Commanding Officer.

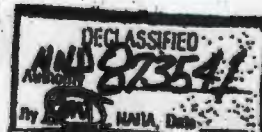
The Gladiators had set a fine safety record, not having had an accident since arriving in Viet-Nam. In May however, the unit had its first accident. One of the unit's gunships had an engine failure while flying convoy cover. CWO Dean Smith did an outstanding job of autorotating his aircraft into a field, however the main blade chopped off the tail boom. Fortunately, there were no injuries.

In May the unit finally received its much needed Engineer support. A platoon of the 615th Engineer Battalion arrived to construct maintenance hangar and some permanent billets in hope of beating the South West monsoon rains.

June arrived and with it, the weather began to change for the worse. Scattered thunderstorms developed every afternoon. The dust in the compound turned to mud. The grass started growing and the countryside's dull brown hills changed into a lush green.

The unit continued to support the 3rd Bde. However, at the beginning of the month the unit supported the 101st Airborne in change operations at Dakpoc and the 1st Bde of the 4th division at Dak To.

By the month of June most of the unit's personnel had been in Vietnam for eight months and had taken the well earned rest and recuperation leave. The sites of the leaves were numerous and each man swore the place he had chosen was the only to go for R&R.



during the month of July, the 57th worked with the Demons and Devils of the 134th AHC in An-Khe. Insertion and extraction of Mike Forces northwest of the base camp in An Khe was the primary responsibility of the cooperating elements. Air mobility enabled the Mike Forces to successfully harass the enemy with the acquisition of valuable intelligence information coming as an additional bonus.

Despite hazardous weather conditions encountered in the form of low ceilings and high winds, the 57th lost neither a ship nor a crew member during this period. The completion of this mission was marked by now found respect mutually exchanged by all three participating organizations.

Additional factors contributing to the 57th's enjoyment of the stay at An-Khe were the excellent facilities of the state-side like exchange, enlisted and officers clubs where juicy steaks were available, plus nightly movies.

As August arrived the 57th was supporting the 1st Brigade, 4th Division, based at Dak To. Because of the weather of the monsoon season, flying hours were held to a minimum. During the month of August, the Battle of Hill 1258, or Firebase 19, took place. To fortify the allied position, the 57th was to airlift a company onto Hill 1258. After landing less than a platoon onto the hill, intense enemy fire erupted from nearby positions. The Cougars quickly responded with highly accurate and intense fire around the friendly's position. A F4C aircraft called in jet bombers which dropped high explosives and napalm on the enemy positions. Under the protective umbrella of fire provided by Cougar gunships, the Gladiator second flight platoon was able to deliver much needed reinforcements and supplies.

A dust off aircraft attempted to evacuate wounded but was downed by enemy fire. One of the second platoon slicks, piloted by Captain Edward E Gast, braved the hazards of torrential rain, fog, darkness and intense enemy fire to successfully extract the entire dustoff crew and the seriously wounded men of Hill 1258. Captain Gast's action was a perfect example of the Gladiator Cougar "Can do" attitude.

On 27 August, the leadership of the 57th was accepted by Major Robert M. Williams (ARTY) as Major William Gess Jr (ARTY) returned to the United States. The change of command ceremony, held in Kontum was attended by LT Col William Stanley, XO, 17th Combat Aviation Group and LT Col William Chamberlain, the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion Commander.

September finally arrived to the delight of the 57th "Oldtimers". The pilots and crew members that had come to Vietnam with the company were finally going home. At anytime during the day or night one could step outside of his quarters and hear the anxious and joyous shout, "SHORT" the 57th regretted the loss of these men; they had established and spread the reputation of the 57th AML over the entire II Corps area as being, "The Best of the Best". September marked another 'milestone' and left the remaining men with the task of maintaining, if not augmenting the Gladiator reputation.

During the last week of September the 57th began the FOB II mission. The FOB II mission is the insertion and extraction of Long Range

Reconnaissance Patrols by October the Gladiators and Cougars had completely taken over the FOB II mission from the Ghost Riders and Avengers of the 189th A.H.C. Aircraft requirements for the month of October included 8 slicks and 4 gunships for the FOB II mission with the remainder of the 57th's Hueys allocated to miscellaneous mission.

Although the monsoon season was nearly over, it's dying throes forced the Gladiators and Cougars to abort several missions. During the final weeks of October, the 57th's Aircraft commitment for the FOB II mission was lightened as a direct result of support received from the 361st Armed Helicopter Escort Company. The Pink Panthers of the 361st daily provided a pair of lethal cobra gunships to aid the Gladiator - Cougar team, and the 57th's commitment was cut to 4 slicks and 2 UH-1C gunships.

The end of November Marked the completion of the demanding FOB II mission. The men of the 57th had again displayed their outstanding

Professionalism but had paid a costly toll. Two aircraft, 167 and 449 were lost to enemy fire, while aircraft 173 was returned to the United States for vital repair. Although four men were wounded during this two month period only one was injured seriously enough to require hospitalization in the United States.

November also saw many improvements made in the physical make-up of the compound. Wooden, semi-permanent billets were constructed to replace the tents which had housed the personnel of the 57th. Also, security was improved as guard towers were erected in key positions on the perimeter and a counter rotor radar unit from the 2nd Brigade, 4th Division was placed in the TOC bunker.

December's mission included support of the 1st Brigade of the 4th Division, at Dak To. Special Forces 24th Special Tactical Zone, MACV and numerous other miscellaneous units.

This final month of 1968 was some what less than enjoyable. The elusive Viet-Cong, after a two month respite, hit the Compound with mortars and rockets. Attacks were launched on the 14th, 21st, and 22nd. As a result of these bombardments, a portion of the officer's billets was destroyed, the runway was slightly damaged and Lt. Donald Richards was wounded so severely that he required evacuation to the states.

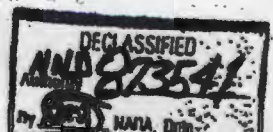
Disaster again struck on 30 Dec as a Cougar gunship crashed in the revetment area. Fortunately, no one was injured, but the aircraft was destroyed and an outstanding safety record of 231 accident free days was shattered. In retrospect, every man was secure in the thought that he had contributed.

To a company's accomplishment that stood second to none. Many hazardous missions had been completed, a first place number of hours in the battalion for the past year had been flown, and an esprit de corp of the highest caliber had developed.

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT OPERATIONS

The 57th Assault Helicopter Company is in general support of the II Corps Tactical Zone but has been primarily in support of the Kontum Province area in the northern sector of the Central Highlands. This is near the tri-border area of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The 4th Infantry Division, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Field Forces, MACV, and various ARVN units have all been supported by the 57th. Those units have been served well but the 57th primary mission has been to support the 5th Special Forces Group, Command and Control Detachment (FOB #2). Formerly, this mission was on a 60-day rotation basis with all the companies in the 52d Battalion participating, but, during parts of 1968 and the first of 1969, the 57th had accomplished such a remarkable record of successful missions with a minimal loss of aircraft and personnel that it was requested and approved that the 57th remain on the mission for an extended period of time.

The following narrative submitted by LTC Frederick T. Abt, Commander of FOB #2, will give an insight as to the type of obstacles that were met and overcome by the men of the 57th. The men of the Gladiators and Cougars take distinct pride in receiving this "Job Well Done" recognition.



UNIT OPERATIONS

As the beginning of the new year the 57th experienced little enemy activity around the Kontum area. A distinct change from the same period one year ago as the 1968 Tet Offensive was getting under way. Tet, 1968, served as a steady reminder to what could possibly occur in 1969 and preparations were well into being completed to meet any action initiated against the compound.

Working on the perimeter defense and building permanent living quarters meant long extra hours to be put in after a day of flying but the men realized the need to get the job completed and were quite enthusiastic, complaining little.

All this activity failed to keep the men of the 57th from meeting the daily missions. It appeared that there would be continued success with the FOB #2 mission as it was being performed in the manner that was unparalleled by any previous unit. At the same time the unit was fulfilling its responsibilities to the other organizations in the area.

On the 8th of January the first rocket attack of the year occurred and as it turned out it was the only one for the month. Eight rockets impacted in the Kontum city limits. The 57th suffered no damage, except for nerves, but it was felt by all that the well-earned name of "Rocket City" was going to be retained for the year 1969.

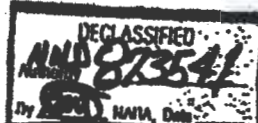
Tensions began to subside somewhat as no incoming rounds were experienced for the remainder of the month but the Tet truce in February was on everyone's mind and last minute preparations were being under taken with a sense of urgency.

The first and only serious aircraft incident for the month of January happened on the 13th $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Kontum. While enroute from Kontum to Pleiku WO1 Joseph Milkey had an engine failure but landed successfully causing only minor damage to the aircraft.

Starting the new year in such fine form gave everyone hope that this year would not be a repetition of the one just passed.

The month of February caused this feeling to be short lived. Although no Tet offensive was initiated, the unit was to suffer its first combat casualty of the year.

On the 16th of February while trying to insert a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) in an LZ one mile northeast of Poley Kleng, the aircraft, piloted by WO's Norman Perron and Arthur Papale, received an unknown number and type of hits from enemy ground fire. WO Perron radioed on climb out that the controls were erratic. The aircraft then began to show spiral



descent, it crashed and burst into flames upon impact. All four of the crewmembers were killed as were the 4 LRRP team members aboard. The Gladiators are a tight knit group and the loss of any of them has an effect on the entire unit but the losing of lives is expected and soon the company was back to normal with a mission to accomplish.

On the 23rd, 24th and 25th a total of 40 enemy rockets were fired into the Kontum area but fortunately the company's luck held and there was only minor damage.

February also marked the moving out of some of the tents as the first billets were completed. This was something to rejoice about which isn't often done while in Vietnam.

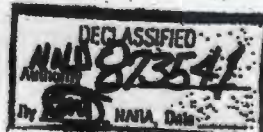
Along with the month of March came hot weather and hazardous flying conditions. The entire area had limited visibility as all the farmers were burning their fields causing a haze that would not dissipate. It also marked the completion of the living billits and stowing away of the tents that had been home for such a long period of time.

The 57th was still living up to its reputation in flying the FOB #2 mission in a remarkable manner. It wouldn't be much longer before it was time for the mission to be rotated to another unit but there was speculation that the 57th would have the mission for another 60 days.

16 March the 57th suffered an unusual accident. WO's Mark Towne and Kenroth O'Keefe landed their aircraft at Firebase 29, one the passengers jumped off and stepped on a mine. The blast carried shrapnel through the aircraft causing extensive damage. WO Towne and crewchief SP4 John White suffered wounds that demanded immediate evacuation.

On the 25th the 57th lost another aircraft. The type of weapon that did the damage is one feared by all aviators but seen by few. 1LT Gene Carpenter and WO Fredrick Brown were flying at 2000 feet AGL and 80 knots when the aircraft was hit by 37mm anti-aircraft fire. The engine sustained major shrapnel damage causing an engine failure. The aircraft was autorotated into the most accessible area. It descended 50 feet through trees and, after ground impact, caught fire and was totally destroyed. All the crewmembers made it safely out of the crash and were immediately picked up by another 57th aircraft.

April found the Gladiators busy at work improving their new living quarters. Rocket boxes by the hundreds were utilized to build walls and ceilings for individual rooms. Paint, pictures, state flags and war souvenirs were used to make the rooms unique. After the rooms were completed a joint effort was put forth on many projects to make living quarters and facilities better. The three main projects to be completed prior to the monsoons were showers, sidewalks and clubs.



April was extremely rough on the Gladiators as three aircraft were lost. Although the three aircraft were totally destroyed, it is fortunate, however, that only one fatality was incurred.

The first loss occurred on the 1st when an aircraft was trying to climb out of a hot LZ and sustained .50 cal hits causing the engine to fail. The pilot entered autorotation but the terrain did not permit a successful termination and the aircraft crashed and burned.

The AC, WO Thomas Hestand, received a broken arm and the crewchief SP4 Alvin T. Gay died instantly from a .50 cal wound. The pilot and gunner were fortunate enough to escape without injury.

Three days later, on the 4th another aircraft was lost and, although injuries were sustained by all crewmembers, there was no loss of life. While on short final to an LZ, WO Daniel Medince heard explosions and noticed mortars were impacting in the LZ. When he pulled pitch in attempt to go around he suffered a loss of power which resulted in a crash.

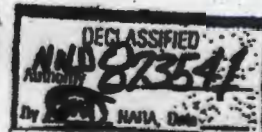
Undaunted by these losses, the Gladiators continued in their mission of supporting the FOB #2 missions. As fate would have it, the cycle continued and 3 days later, on the 7th, still another crash occurred. The aircraft was a total loss but this time there were no serious injuries. While on final to an LZ the aircraft received .50 cal hits in the engine compartment causing a fire. WO Paul Brannon accomplished a safe landing in his crippled aircraft and the crew evacuated before the aircraft was consumed by fire.

As the saying goes the third time was the charm and the 57th lost no more aircraft during the month of April.

The winds were shifting and the scattered showers brought signals of the oncoming monsoon season.

The month of May came on strong. May 11th, Mother's Day, a day to be remembered by the Gladiators. The compound began to take incoming rounds at 0200 hours consisting of B-40's, 122mm rockets and mortars. A sapper and ground attack advanced under the barrage. Thanks to the alertness and bravery of the Cougar gunship crews who ran to their gunships immediately, the ground attack was repulsed. The following morning 13 dead enemy soldiers were found in the concertina wire and in foxholes dug the previous night. The rockets and mortars had done their damage though approximately 6 million dollars worth. Six aircraft were totally destroyed, four heavily damaged, our large maintenance hanger with all its equipment destroyed. Although various other buildings were hit, no one was killed and only three people were wounded.

The seige of Ben Het also began in the month of May. The resupply and medical evacuation was the primary mission for the 57th, due to the requirement of FOB #2, but the Gladiators did make numerous trips into Ben Het and helped play a vital role in the defeat of the enemy.



The area around Ben Het played havoc with the Gladiator's aircraft as three were badly damaged. On 6 May, WO John Donato received numerous small arms hits which knocked out instruments and caused the loss of hydraulics. WO Donato made a successful running landing, and no one was wounded. On 21 May another aircraft was heavily damaged but made it safely back to a secure airfield. Again no one was wounded. On 23 May a Gladiator ship was in the process of lifting off an LZ when B-40 rockets hit close to the right side causing damage to the aircraft and wounding WO Delos Ditch, crewchief PFC Daniel Moon, and the doorgunner SP4 James Booth. Thanks to the excellent flying ability of WO William O'Dell the aircraft cleared the LZ and got to medical facilities for the wounded.

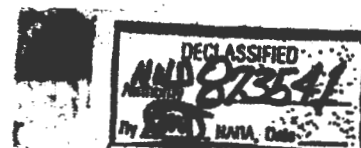
With June came the full force of the monsoons and the low flying time. Bet Het was still under seige but, with aviation continually resupplying and providing fire support, it looked as if it could hold out for an indefinite period of time.

Firebase 6, approximately 10 kilometers to the southeast of Bet Het, was the scene of an unusual loss of another aircraft. WO Thomas Hollendorfer had just brought his aircraft to a hover for a pinnacle take-off when a 75mm recoilless rifle round hit below the tail boom. The tail rotor and 90° gear box became separated from the aircraft and it began spinning to the right. Another RR round hit below the tail boom and a hovering autorotation was successfully executed. It was remarkable that WO Hollendorfer had been able to keep the spinning ship over the pad. If he hadn't, it would have been a sheer drop for some 200 feet. None of the crewmembers were wounded but they were very shaken.

It was in June that the 57th was given the word that it would be moved out of Knotum to Camp Holloway in Plieku. The Gladiators began earnest training of the pilots from the 189th AHC, who were to take over the FOB #2 mission, and making arrangements to move. The team at FOB was making every effort to retain the 57th. Maj. James T. Kearns, then the commanding officer of the 57th, put it to the men making if they wanted to continue the mission and, with everyone's support, he asked that the 57th remain on FOB #2 for an indefinite period of time. It became established that the Gladiators would not move.

July was a quiet month mainly because of the monsoons. There were many days when the aircraft were unable to launch and others where only a few hours flying were possible.

It was on one of these days that the company was to lose a ship and its crew. Four slicks had departed for a mission and, after accomplishing the mission, headed back for Kontum. While enroute the ceiling lowered to 300 feet in rain. Three of the ships made it back safely but the fourth, piloted by WO Eric Bargquist and 1LT James Carr, went IFR and had initiated a surveillance radar approach to the field, On a three mile



final to runway 28, contact was lost on radar.

An immediate search was begun and, before the weather forced the search to a halt, wreckage was found burning approximately 100 meters below the top of a ridgeline. The two pilots, along with crewchief, SP4 Thomas Minson, and doorgunner PFC Terry Dees, died in the crash.

In August things began to pick up but the monsoons were still affecting the missions. Two more aircraft were shot up but managed to get to a secure airfield. An engine failure claimed another ship.

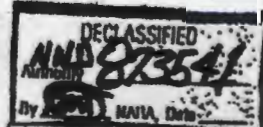
On 17 August, PFC Bates sustained fatal wounds and SP5 Danny Beistley was hit in the right thigh and left wrist. Over 30 holes were found in the aircraft.

The following day WO Alan Morris had engine failure while making an approach to an LZ with no suitable forces landing area. WO Morris brought the aircraft down in an up-right position and the crew was immediately evacuated.

In September the weather began to break with rain occurring only in the late afternoon. FOB #2 missions were put into high gear. Putting a lot of aircraft back into the air on this mission meant that the expected would soon happen and on the 27th it did.

1LT Raymond Dell and WO David Rhodes were in the process of pulling a string extraction of a LRRP team. Four team members were tied off on 100 feet of rope waiting to be pulled clear of 70 feet of tall trees. Hovering straight up so not to pull the team through the trees, the aircraft had to hover at least 170 feet above the ground and 100 feet above the trees to give the men below on the strings a chance for survival. The aircraft then fell straight down into the trees and, after impact, it exploded and burned. The doorgunner, PFC John Huntly, was killed but the remainder of the crew received only minor cuts and bruises. The crew from another 57th aircraft landed and were quickly on the scene. After doing what they could for the members of the downed aircraft they began to follow the ropes that were still attached to the wreckage. Three of four LRRP team members were alive. LT Dell received the Silver Star for his quick reaction and saving as many lives as possible. The rest of the crew received the Distinguished Flying Cross, including those who assisted in the rescue.

October arrived and found the Gladiators still on the FOB #2 mission. On 25 October the 57th made a gallant, but vain, effort to extract a LRRP team that was surrounded and had suffered 100% WIA or KIA. It was late evening when the slicks arrived. The first aircraft made its approach to the PZ but was unable to land because of the intense ground-fire and darkness. The same ship tried a second approach but received



a number of hits that left the aircraft almost uncontrollable and it had to make a running landing at a secure airfield. A second ship tried to go in but it too was shot out. Between the two aircraft, over 50 hits were counted. Captain Mike Walters who flew the first ship received the Silver Star for his efforts, his crew and the crewmembers of the second ship all recieved Distinguished Flying Crosses. The following day the team was extracted from a different location without further incident.

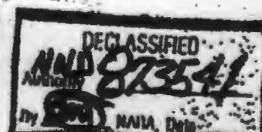
On 28 October, the 57th sustained the loss of a Cougar gunship. Aircraft Commander WO1 John Whittington and his pilot, WO Terry Morris, were very badly burned but managed to get clear of the aircraft. Mr. Whittington later died as a result of his burns.

In the early morning hours of 6 November the 57th compound was awakened by the all to familiar sound of a mortar attack. Approximately 20 to 25 incoming mortar rounds were received in a 15 minute period. During the attack the Cougar gunships were launched against a sapper unit which was attempting to breach the eastern perimeter of the 57th compound. The varied items of enemy equipment were captured following the attack.

On 9 November 1969, Cougar Gun Platoon Leader Captain Willie Lawson provided another example of the fine flyinh ability which has become a trademark of the 57th. While in support of 5th SFG Mike Forces at Bu Prang, Captain Lawson's gunship received approximately 15 hits in his tail boom which severed his tail rotor driveshaft. Reaminging clam, Captain Lawson flew the stricken gunship, minus anti-torque system to Bu Krak airstrip, and made a successful running landing, without further damage to the ship.

12 November 1969 marked a day which will be long remembered by the members of this unit. The 1st Platoon "White Flight", while standing by at FOB #2 alternate launch site at Dak Pek, was mortared resulting in the death of one crew member, SP4 Freddie Haynes and the wounding of eight others. All four aircraft received severe damage and aircraft #774 was completely destroyed. The 57th, already understrength, was now forced to carry on its missions with only a fraction of its authorized crew member strength.

On 15 November 1969, shortly after noon a CH-34 VNAF "Kingbee" was shot-down northwest of Dak Pek. The four "slicks" from the second flight of the 57th were launched from Dak Pek to search for the downed aircraft. After searching for approximately one and a half hours, the downed "Kingbee" was discovered seemingly intact on a hilltop. WO Lewis Olson volunteered to go down and attempt to rescue the downed VNAF crew. On his first attempt at landing, WO Olson's ship was repulsed by heavy ground fire. After suppressive fire was placed on the area by the cobra gunships, WO Olson again attempted to land near the downed craft. In spite of a continuing hail of small arms and B-40 rocket fire, he and his crew remained in the LZ until it had been determined that the downed VNAF crew had been either captured or killed.



After the eventful first half of November the 57th was due a lull in excitement and thankfully spent the remainder of the month in relative calm.

The month of December 1969 was a busy month for the 57th AHC as the company distinguished itself in many operations against hostile forces. The 57th was also saddened by the loss of several outstanding crew members.

The first accident occurred on 6 December 1969 when aircraft 699, commanded by Captain Charles Ferrell, and pilot, 1LT Phillip Shrock, with the crew chief SP5 Miranda and gunner PFC Ronald Durflinger crashed, killing the crew and given passengers aboard. It is believed that the aircraft was hit by small arms fire, resulting in loss of power at a low altitude above thick jungle canopy.

Then on 20 December, aircraft 540, commanded by Captain Gerald Knieriem lost its tail rotor in a landing zone and crashed. The entire crew escaped with only minor injuries.

Two days later a 57th "Cougar" gunship, commanded by Warrant Officer John Hunsicker and piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Don Burris, with the crewchief SP5 Timothy Barger and gunner SP4 James Kennedy, was hit by hostile fire resulting in the loss of its tail rotor. WO Hunsicker controlled the aircraft as long as possible but after a short period of time, the aircraft no longer responded to the controls and had to be crash landed. Specialist Kennedy, the gunner was lost before the aircraft hit, but the remaining crewmembers sustained moderate to light injuries. They were rescued by Warrant Officers, Malcolm Peterson and Carter Higginbotham, on ropes, but Chief Warrant Officer Burris lost consciousness and fell out of his extraction rig. WO Burris and Specialist Kennedy were great losses to the company.

After celebrating Christmas the 57th was again ready to start a new year of unprecedented service to the U.S. Army in the Republic of Vietnam.



INTRODUCTION

The 57th Assault Helicopter Company of the 121st Combat Aviation Battalion is based at Kontum Army Airfield in the Republic of Viet-Nam. Kontum is located in the northern sector of the Central Highlands of Vietnam near the tri-border of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The present base camp was established by the 57th in early September 1967, after the field had been used periodically as a base of operations by several other units including the 1st Air Cavalry Division.

Since January 1968, the 57th has supported many units in the II Corps area including the 4th Infantry Division, 5th Special Forces Group and various ARVN Units in operations ranging from medical evacuation to insertions of combat assaults, extractions and insertions of Long-Range patrols and numerous other miscellaneous operations.

14 Dec - 1845- Rockets (8)

21 Dec - 2300- Mortars (10)

22 Dec - 0001- Mortars (16)

22 Dec - 1845- Rockets (28)

TOTALS FOR 1968

Zeppel - 1

Ground attack - 1, duration 147 hours 40 minutes

Mortars - over 110 rounds

Rockets - over 162 rockets

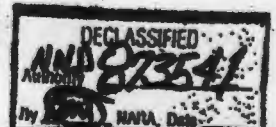
B-40 - over 8 rounds

57th incoming slogan: "Into each life a little rain must fall.

That's okay with me, but these rockets and mortars are a bitch."

TIMES OF HELL FOR THE 57th Avn. Co. (APL) 1968

10 Jan - 0150 - Ground Attack, zappers
30 Jan - 0220 5 Nov 0600 - Ground Attack, rockets, mortars
16 Feb - 2400 - Mortar barrage (40-50)
26 Feb - 0915 - Rockets (7)
4 Mar - 0105 - Rockets (24)
17 Mar - 2300 - Rockets (19)
20 Mar - 2345 - Rockets (3)
21 Mar - 0300 - Rockets (4)
24 Mar - 1810 - Rockets (8)
5 Apr - 2210 - Rockets (23)
13 Apr - 1230 - Rockets (2)
5 May - 1230 - Rockets (8)
6 May - 0645 - Rockets (2)
15 May - 0130 - Rockets (15)
1 Jun - 0930 - Rockets (8)
4 Jun - 0500 - Rockets (11)
23 Aug - 0201 - Rockets (3) - Mortars (30) - B 40 Rounds (8)
23 Sep - 1135 - Rockets (12)
15 Sep - 0020 - Rockets and Mortars (30-40)
24 Sep - 2345 - Rockets (8)
14 Dec - 1845 - Rockets (8)



AIRCRAFT DAMAGED ON FOB:

Totally Destroyed.....5
Major Damage--Returned to CONUS for Repair....5
Major Damage--Repaired in Country.....14
Minor Damage--Repaired in Company.....17

TOTALS 41

57TH CASUALTIES FOR FOB:

Killed by Hostile Action.....3
Missing as a Result of Hostile Action.....2
Wounded as a Result of Hostile Action.....23
Confirmed Captured by Enemy Forces.....0

TOTAL CASUALTIES 28

