



1969

HISTORICAL SUPPLEMENT

101ST AVIATION BN. CAN

1969

ANNUAL SUPPLEMENT TO
THE HISTORY OF THE
101ST AVIATION BATTALION

1 JANUARY 1969 THROUGH 31 DECEMBER 1969

PREPARED BY ORDER OF
LIEUTENANT COLONEL THOMAS R. MEADOWS

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2LT FA
UNIT HISTORIAN

COMMANDING OFFICERS

1969

101st Aviation Battalion

1 January 1969 through 30 April 1969
30 April 1969 through 29 October 1969
29 October 1969 through 31 December 1969

LTC John D. Kennedy
LTC Arlen R. Suddaby
LTC Thomas R. Meadows

Company A

1 January 1969 through 7 July 1969
7 July 1969 through 31 December 1969

MAJ Kenneth Wall
MAJ Charles James

Company B

1 January 1969 through 13 March 1969
13 March 1969 through 14 September 1969
14 September 1969 through 31 December 1969

MAJ Vernon Grigg
MAJ Stephen McIntyre
MAJ Charles Pease

Company C

1 January 1969 through 27 May 1969
27 May 1969 through 31 December 1969

MAJ Wayne Boles
MAJ Donald Moss

Company D

1 January 1969 through 18 June 1969
18 June 1969 through 22 December 1969
22 December 1969 through 31 December 1969

LTC Ronald Perry
MAJ Eugene Grayson
MAJ Ronald Condon

Headquarters Company

I January 1969 through 23 October 1969
23 October 1969 through 31 December 1969

CPT Kelly Robinson
CPT Ronald Sunseri

Summary of Events-Calendar Year 1969

The Beginning

The year 1969 began with the battalion located at Camp Eagle, Republic of Vietnam. For the first three months of the year it would be the only aviation battalion supporting the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). The monsoon rains were ending and with signs of better weather the battalion would become involved in the division's offensive activity. The battalion's "Gun" Company, later re-designated an Attack Helicopter Company, had begun to receive the AH-1G Cobra as a replacement for the UH-1C gunships.

Training the 158th

To provide more aviation support for the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) an additional Aviation Battalion was needed. Thus early in the year the 158th Aviation Battalion arrived in the Division. Before they could become an operational unit, however, they would require a great deal of training and familiarization. An extensive training program evolved and it was coordinated, managed, and executed by the 101st Aviation Battalion. The result was that approximately one hundred and thirty 158th Aviation Battalion Aviators received 2,800 hours flight time with instructor pilots and aircraft commanders of the 101st Aviation Battalion. This training was carried out with both the UH-1H and AH-1G helicopters, and with the assistance given by the 101st Aviation Battalion the 158th was operational by 1 April 1969.

Operation Massachusetts Striker

The first two months of 1969 found the battalion involved with the final phases of Operation Nevada Eagle. Upon the conclusion of this operation the division was to conduct the first of many operations in the new Spring-Summer Offensive. The operation was called Massachusetts Striker and was conducted by the 2nd Brigade (Reinforced), 101st Airborne Division. It consisted of a major combat assault by helicopter into the A Shau Valley with the mission of destroying the enemy and his supplies, disrupting enemy operations in the valley, and creating barriers to the enemy's use of key trails and defiles in the area. The helicopters were to be provided by the 101st Aviation Battalion.

Adverse weather precluded all attempts to open the initial fire base and thus the operation was postponed. When the weather did begin to clear the battalion was given the mission of landing C Company, 1/502 on Fire Base Veghel. The assault force, under the control of A Company, 101st Aviation Battalion, swept in at 1700 hours and took the enemy by complete surprise. The armed helicopters of D Company accounted for several enemy KIA's and one machine gun which was disrupting friendly movement on the LZ. The enemy, although surprised, was not unprepared. When the assault force approached Veghel they encountered the enemy in dug-in positions inside the perimeter. Claymore mines had been emplaced and aimed skyward against the helicopters, and the area was heavily booby-trapped. Most of these, fortunately, had been destroyed in the artillery preparation of the fire base as an LZ. However, four of the first five helicopters to land took hits—but none were destroyed. As bitter fighting ensued the clouds closed in and cut off further air support.

On the following day multiple assaults were planned by elements of the 1/502 and one battalion of the 3rd RVN Regiment. Weather again delayed the operation. At 1510 hours the weather cleared somewhat and the second lift to Veghel was conducted. This lift, controlled by A Co, 101st Aviation Bn, involved a 20 ship airmobile force, lifting elements of 1/502 from LZ Sally into Veghel. A total of 50 sorties were lifted into FB Veghel in extremely marginal weather. During an earlier weather reconnaissance, the command and control ship received automatic weapons and RPG fire, resulting in a disabled ship. A rapid exchange of C & C aircraft was made and no loss of time on station occurred. The air movement was completed at 1800 hours, resulting in 250 personnel lifted into FB Veghel. As the operation continued more infantry units were lifted into strategic LZ's, and the enemy was indeed feeling the effects of an airmobile offensive.

On 14 March, the Division Commander made the decision to reinforce Fire Base Veghel, due to the threat of the FB being overrun. The weather conditions were again far below minimum, however it was deemed combat essential that the reinforcements be lifted. The adverse weather conditions delayed the operation until 1400 hours, at which time the initial lift from Birmingham began. The Command and Control aircraft, while searching for a route through the weather into FB Veghel, was hit and knocked out of action by enemy fire. As soon as another C & C was obtained, the lift began. The weather by this time had deteriorated to such an extent that the C & C was required to lead each flight from Bartegne to Veghel. The successful completion of this lift must be categorized as one of the most outstanding accomplishments ever performed by this battalion. The weather conditions almost precluded any chance of success, however the lift was completed without incident. Neither the weather nor enemy infested mountainous terrain stopped the operation, and it was completed just prior to darkness.

The following morning two more CA's were laid on. One required an ARVN battalion lifted and the other an American unit. At the end of the day more than 500 Allied troops had been transported in 101st Aviation Battalion helicopters. Tragedy could not be averted forever, and on one foggy, overcast morning a B Company was forced to go IFR and was lost. Several days later the aircraft was discovered to have crashed through the trees on a ridge line and burned. Due to the precarious location of the wreckage, it was determined that a ground drive by US Marines to recover the wreckage was the only feasible method. During the search, the Marines came under an intense attack by NVA regulars and the search aircraft spent the remainder of the afternoon lifting the wounded from the battle area. The services of the 101st Aviation Battalion flight surgeon proved invaluable as he spent the rest of the day treating the wounded personnel. Approximately two weeks later a ground party reached the aircraft accident site and recovered all bodies.

The remainder of the operation involved supporting the 2nd Brigade with company and battalion size assaults throughout the A Shau Valley until 15 April. On this date the AO was expanded to the southeast and C Company conducted a number of combat assaults into various new fire bases. The success of these operations was immediately insured with the discovering of large arms and supply caches throughout the entire area. The "slicks" and "guns" of the 101st Aviation Battalion were intimately involved with every phase of the operation.

Also in March, the battalion was assigned an additional mission of supporting the Della Project. Although classified in nature, the ground forces were primarily involved in reconnaissance operations in support of the 101st Airborne

Division. Supporting this operation proved extremely hazardous due to the area of operations and the intensive enemy trafficability throughout the area. Almost every operation involved either a hot LZ or PZ. The reconnaissance teams were in contact within hours after being inserted, and either a reinforcing mission or extraction under fire were initiated by the 101st Aviation Battalion on a daily basis. The Delta Project proved a valuable intelligence gathering agency for this Division and almost every existing and storage area was first discovered by this element, reported through G-2 channels, and resulted in the vast amount of equipment and material found by the 2nd Brigade.

Apache Snow

While Operation Massachusetts Striker continued in the extreme southern portion of the valley, plans were amended to exploit the "warehouse" area after the G-2 made significant contacts and cache discoveries while making a B-52 strike assessment. The 3rd Bn, 107th Abn. Inf. was selected to raid the warehouse and construct a new fire base on the infiltration route nearby. By 9 May the 3rd Brigade and elements of the 1st ARVN Division were poised to launch the largest airmobile assault of the Vietnam war. Precise timing and surprise were the main considerations of the operation's success.

The 101st Aviation Battalion was to bear the brunt of the assault force. The maintenance crews worked day and night, forward resupply at 1 POL points were established, and on D Day the battalion had 50 ships in the air. In order to effect complete surprise no reconnaissance of the area was allowed. On D Day-1 small recon parties were allowed into the area but the usual visual reconnaissance of the LZ's could not be carried out. D Day came and went—without a flaw. Despite the lack of prior reconnaissance the battalion lifted elements of four infantry battalions into the selected LZ's without taking any casualties or losing any ships. In the ensuing battles the battalion provided support for the Division. The Hawks of D Company, 101st Aviation Battalion made their presence known to the 29th NVA Regiment in the famous Battle of Dong Ap Bia. While the infantry assaulted the hill mass from the ridges below the Hawks blasted the enemy from above. At the conclusion of the operation 675 enemy had been killed, three prisoners taken, 280 weapons and more than 100,000 rounds of ammunition had been seized.

In addition to Operation Apache Snow, the battalion supported a number of concurrent operations throughout the Late Spring and early Summer of 1969. Operation Campbell Streamer involved the assault of Bach Ma Mountain. It proved to be an excellent example of combined operations as the battalion lifted both US and ARVN forces simultaneously into the battle area. Another significant operation involved aviation support to Task Force Hotel, a combined USMC, ARVN, 1st Bde of the 5th Mech Inf Div operation in the vicinity of Khe Sahn on 12 and 13 June. Under the control of the 101st Aviation Battalion Commander, utilizing six aircraft each from B and C Companies and three armed helicopters from D Company, 101st Avn Bn (AH) conducted this mission. The Battalion Commander acted as the air mission commander and the U.S. Marines provided the Airmobile Task Force Commander for this joint services operation. Effective coordinated planning and execution resulted in a highly successful mission. When the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division moved to Chu Lai to carry out Operation Lam Son the 101st Aviation Battalion provided two assault helicopter companies, Alpha and Bravo, and one attack helicopter platoon from Delta Company to support the operation.

As the Spring-Summer campaigns were drawing to a close the Battalion began to consolidate once again in the Eagle-Phu Bai area. By mid-July Alpha Company had returned from Chu Lai and by mid-August Bravo Company had made the move back. The ground troops of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) had, with the support of the "Wings of the Eagle", driven the enemy out of the A Shau valley. To emphasize the Battalion's willingness, skill, versatility, and professionalism LTC Arlen Suddaby, then Battalion Commander, initiated the motto which has become part of the very fiber of the Battalion: *Anything, Anytime, Anytime--Bar Nothing!*

The Fall Campaign

The massive offensive operations into the valley had ceased--they were no longer necessary--but the 101st Aviation Battalion was no less occupied. 15 August saw the beginning of Operation Richland Square, and three days later the Battalion became involved with Operation Cumberland Thunder. As if to say, "your work is never done," the division requested support for a third concurrent operation which was to begin on 28 August--Operation Clamborne Clutch. The 101st Aviation Battalion was glad to oblige. In Operation Cumberland Thunder the Battalion Commander acted as Air Commander and the operation proved unique in that a false insertion was made in order to confuse the enemy. While the 1-327 Infantry and 3rd Bn, 3rd ARVN Regiment were combat assaulted into two "live" LZ's the Battalion made a false combat assault into another LZ with the 2-502 Infantry. It was the old diversionary attack trick and the Battalion pulled it off without a hitch.

Enter The Monsoon Season

The Battalion suffered a number of setbacks caused by Mother Nature in the months of September and October. During the first week of September the high winds associated with the typhoon in the Gulf of Tonkin caused considerable damage to the C Company area at Phu Bai. The winds totally destroyed two maintenance tents and caused severe erosion damage to the western edge of the flight line. During the heavy rains in the first 10 days of October erosion damage was again evident along the western edge of the ramp in C Co. The helicopters in that area had to be moved to other spots on the ramp because of the fear of one falling off the edge of the ramp and causing damage.

Delta Company also received water damage during the heavy rains in October. The Company mess hall, motor pool and generator sheds were inundated with more than two feet of standing water. Tools and equipment, vehicle parts and other items were lost due to the flooding. When the rains subsided work began immediately to move the motor pool and generator sheds to higher ground. The mess hall, however, could not be moved and the hungry Hawks were forced to wade to their dinner.

Operation Republic Square began at the end of September, despite the ever deteriorating weather, and continued throughout the Fall. The mission was to destroy any remaining enemy installations and disrupt his rice procurement activities. The mission of the Battalion during this operation was to provide tactical mobility for combat troops, supplies and equipment of the Division during the conduct of combat and airmobile operations. In disrupting the rice collections of the enemy, one very effective method used by the Battalion was the cordon. By inserting troops and cutting off all avenues of escape the U.S. forces were able to enter the villages and capture all VC and NVA engaged in rice collection.

Great effort was directed toward Psychological Operations whereby various means of communications with the local populace were used; namely leaflet drops from helicopters and persuasion by means of helicopter carried loud-speakers. This method of warfare was used extensively around the perimeter of Camp Eagle during the hours of darkness. After a broadcast was made, two Cobra gunships, provided by the Hawks, placed ordnance on the desired area. At the close of Republic Square, four Hoi Chans had turned themselves in.

Another operation which received a great deal of emphasis and which was particularly important to the Battalion was Operation Lifesaver. This was an operation carried out by the Battalion in conjunction with the 101st Aviation Group Pathfinders, the 326th Engineers, and the 2/17 Cavalry. Better known as "LZ Expansion" the idea was to make many poor one ship landing zones into safe two ship LZ's.

Pacification

As the Division turned its eyes toward the Pacification Program so did the 101st Aviation Battalion. Besides supporting the Division's program with aircraft, the Battalion undertook a Civic Affairs project of its own. Unofficially known as Operation School Book the idea was to provide some of schools on Vihn Loc Island with the necessary supplies that would make it a functional, progressive school system. The men of the Battalion contributed over \$1,000.00 and the money was used to purchase over 950 school books, 1100 pens and pencils, 1100 notebooks, 100 lbs. of candy, 150 packs of cookies, and a large number of various toys including 100 dolls. On "D-Day", the 22nd of December, the provisions were transported by helicopters to Vihn Loc Island and were distributed among three elementary schools.

Delta Company undertook a project on its own to sponsor a nearby orphanage and the other companies gave their full support to the Battalion Medcap program. The Medcap program, organized in December, soon began running two Medcaps a week to villages on Vihn Loc Island.

The Year's End

As the year 1969 reached its conclusion the Wings of the Eagle Battalion looked forward to 1970 as an even greater challenge. Some three weeks before Operation Randolph Glen had begun and the Battalion was providing its full support into the Operation which would carry into 1970. The Christmas holidays brought a time of rest, relaxation, and pleasant memories. Bravo Company had the distinct privilege of transporting Bob Hope, Astronaut Neil Armstrong, Actress Connie Stevens, and other members of the Hope Troupe to his presentation of the Hope Christmas Show; and as the New Year began the Battalion looked back at its accomplishments: Over 187,000 sorties flown in support of the 101st Airborne Division during combat and non-combat operations; Aviators in the Battalion were awarded 145 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 20 Silver Stars, over 4,100 Air Medals, and 36 Purple Hearts.

ANYTHING, ANYWHERE, ANYTIME- BAR NOTHIN!

Note: Portions of this historical supplement were taken from: 1) historical records of the 101st Aviation Battalion; 2) the pertinent OR/LL's; 3) personal accounts by members of the Battalion; and 4) Rendezvous With Destiny, a publication of the 101st Airborne Division.