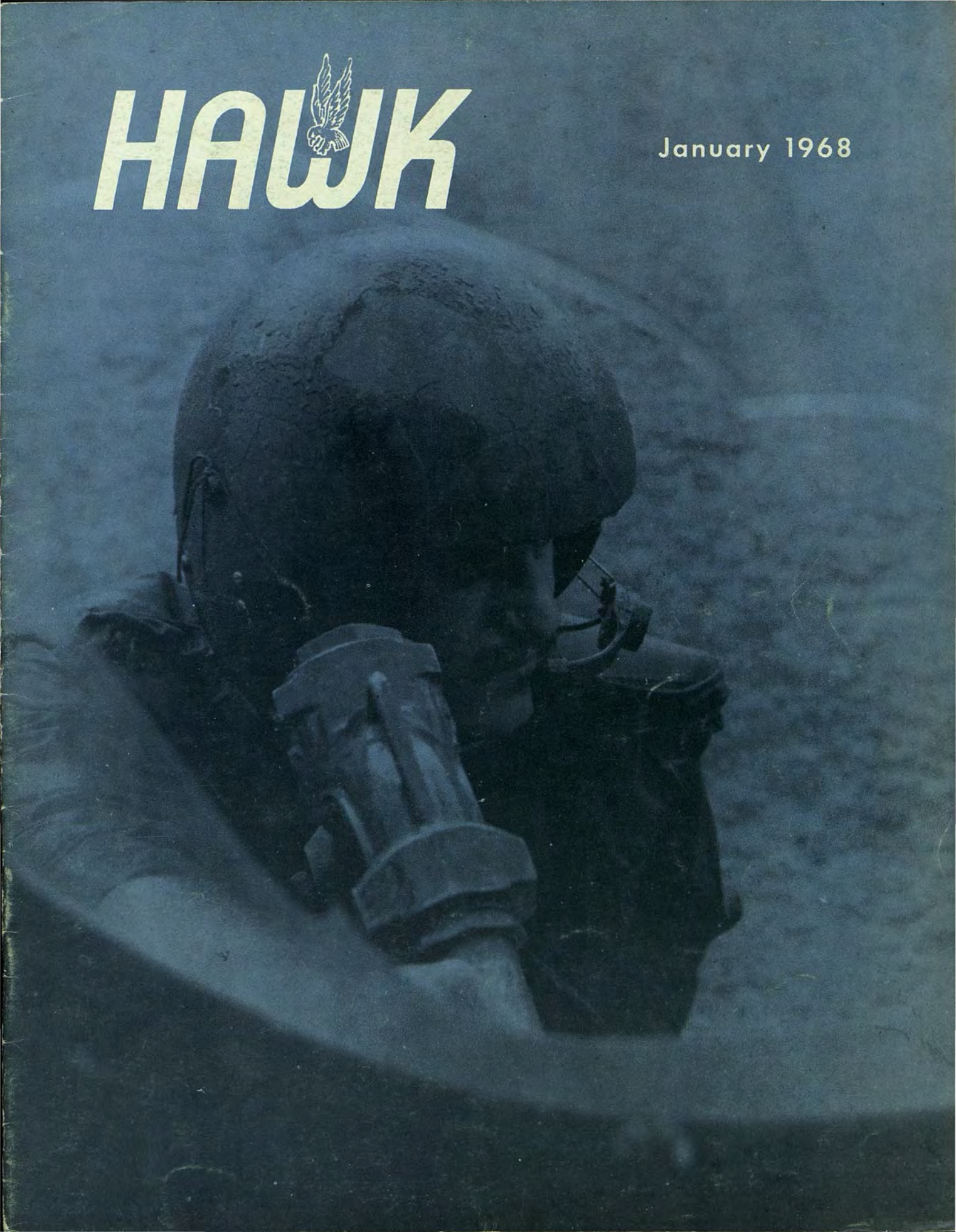
HAWK

January 1968



1ST AVIATION BRIGADE

HAWK

JANUARY 1968 VOLUME 1 NUMBER 5

THIS MONTH

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NEWSLETTER

COLONEL JACK W. HEMINGWAY became Deputy Brigade Commander for Operations in November. Colonel Hemingway has served in Europe, Korea, Japan and now Vietnam. Before joining the brigade, he was the Deputy Senior Advisor to the IV ARVN Corps.

A NEW ARMY PROMOTION POLICY will make it possible by next May for non-regular junior officers to make captain after two years of extended active duty.

DA Message 837567 of Oct. 24 establishes a new policy regarding promotion of first lieutenants serving on extended active duty.

"Time-in-grade eligibility is gradually reduced so that on May 2 first lieutenants attain elibillty for promotion to captain upon completion of 12 months time-in-grade, computed from their date of rank," the message said.

Time-in-grade eligibility for promotion from second lieutenant to first lieutenant is 12 months.

Those promoted to AUS captaincies may incur an additional year of obligated service.

THE ARMY IS ENCOURAGING MEN WITH VIETNAM EXPERIENCE to volunteer for duty in Korea to provide highly trained and qualified personnel for service there.

Recent DA Message 836157 said a Vietnam returnee may volunteer for ROK assignment provided he is not a drill sergeant or if the move would constitute a second PCS within the same fiscal year.

Personnel in Vietnam may apply directly for inter-theater transfer to Korea, but officials at the Pentagon cautioned that the application rules out "space-required" transportation to CONUS for leave.

The Army is also encouraging other personnel to volunteer for Korea. They must, however, meet the full criteria.

COLONEL EUGENE B. CONRAD assumed duties as Deputy Brigade Commander for Administration in November. Colonel Conrad has served in Europe, and previously in the Asiatic-Pacific command. Before joining the brigade, Colonel Conrad was the Aviation Officer, Third U.S. Army.

AN ARMY ANALYSIS has been completed on aviator career developement which indicates that opportunities for such men will be greatly increased soon. Some ground duty is said to be of major concern to aviators who have not had an opportunity at troop command since entering the aviation program.

TO PREVENT DAMAGE to unexposed film during custom fluoroscoping, film should not be included with other items mailed to the U.S. by parcel post. All unexposed film mailed to the U.S. will be packed separately, and will be clearly identified as "Film" on the package. (USARV Cir. 65-1)

THE ARMY AVIATION MATERIAL COMMAND has awarded a $9 million contract to Beach Aircraft Corp., Wichita, Kansas, for procurement of 41 Army U-21A "Ute" utility aircraft.

Editorial

Knowledge Builds

"A free society devoted to achieving the natural rights of its citizens can be maintained only if the people in general are well educated." – Thomas Jefferson.

One of the most precious fruits of our democratic heritage is the opportunity for every American to obtain an education. Only a well informed people capable of wisely and intelligently choosing their leaders, can retain their rights and help their nation grow. The will to fight created our nation; the will to learn built it.

The United States has one of the most comprehensive educational systems in the world; public schools, colleges, universities, and thousands of private institutions. The benefits of this system are spread beyond the boundaries of the United States to Americans on all parts of the globe.

Thousands of Armed Forces personnel in Vietnam are continuing their educations through service sponsored educational programs, earning high school diplomas and college credits by taking USAFI General Educational Developement (GED) tests.

As a member of a free society, it is the responsibility, as well as the right, of each American to increase his awareness of developments in the ever-changing world about him by gaining a well rounded education.

Only by constantly striving to advance our knowledge can we continue to build our nation and preserve our educational heritage.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

James D. Hull

Flying an airplane in Vietnam demands tremendous self-discipline. While flying, man is out of his natural habitat. He is, so to speak, out of his native element. Added to this primary consideration, the pilot in Vietnam discovers that he is constantly flying over enemy territory. And the hours are long. They are long seven days a week.

A split second delay on a decision during a moment of crisis may prove costly if not fatal. It takes persistant self-discipline for the pilot to keep "thumbs up" at all times. This holds true for everyone in an aviation unit.

Where does the ability to express this self-discipline come from? Why can a pilot, or for that matter anyone else, continue to exhibit this quality day after day? Because it comes from God, the inexhaustable fount of self-government. Do you have the self-discipline to cope with every challenge that comes your way no matter how experienced you are in your field of endeavor?

Heavenly Father, grant all our men and women the self-discipline they need every day in order for them to accomplish their missions safely and successfully.

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

A professional is defined as a person engaged in an occupation requiring a high degree of training and proficiency. More often than not, the term is applied to those engaged in law, medicine, education, theology or athletics.

By the very definition of the word, we in the Armed Forces are in a calling requiring a high degree of training and proficiency.

We also meet other qualifications as members of a profession. The military profession requires specific technical knowledge, has an identifiable, a complex of institutions Peculiar to itself, educational patterns adapted to its own needs, a career structure of its own and a place in society.

The profession of arms, and the men who follow it, have shaped nations and changed the history of the world. Those who follow that profession in today's troubled world hold not only the fate of our nation in their hands, but that of the free world as well.

As a doctor can help heal the sickness of men, a lawyer or educator the illness of society and a member of the clergy the hurts of the heart, the military professional can help heal the sickness of nations.

Walk proudly, for you, too, are a member of an old and honored profession. (AFNB)

ABOUT VIETNAM:

Tet

Tet (tet Nguyen Dan), feast of the 1st day of the year of tet ca (great feast) is a mobile feast corresponding to the new moon and placed half-way between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. It lasts from the first to the seventh day of the first month, but there is only a three-day holiday for the intellectual and manual workers.

On the twenty-third day of the twelfth month, a bamboo ploe, five to six meters high, is put up in front of the house. Near the top is hung a bamboo circle to which are attached paper gold bars, a paper carp (ca chep) and sonorous tables of clay (Khanh). The carp, according to a popular legend, can transform itself into a dragon to serve as mount for the Ong Tao (God of the Hearth) in his trip to Heaven, where he reports to the Jade Emperor on the family's activities during the year.

At the same date, the last of the gods of the house triad, (Tho Dia), ground god, Tho Ky, (earth goddess), Ong Tao, (god of the hearth), are supposed to go up to the sky for seven days, until the end of the thirtieth day of the twelfth month. This absence symbolizes the death of nature during the winter and the return trip brings its rejuvenation and renewal. Tet is thus a critical date which interrupts the continuity of time and puts rhythm into the life of men and things.

Tet is also a feast of the living and the dead. The first day is reserved for the worship of ancestors; the second for close relatives; and the third also for the dead. All acts performed and all events that take place at the beginning of the new year exert a favorable or unfavorable influence on the future.

The first visitor to tread the ground of one's home has to be a happy and prosperous person whose luck will benefit the whole house. This also applies to the first outing and the resumption of all activities which come to life again after the sacred rest and which are celebrated during the "opening" ceremonies.

The fourth day the government offices reopen, and this day is called khai an, which means "opening of the seals". In the countryside, all work on the soil is forbidden, including any act which would disturb it from its sacred rest. The rites of Dong the proceed to the "activation of the soil", designed to neutralize the divine forces which might be harmful to those who work the land.

Perspective:
BIRD DOG

The type of warfare being waged in Vietnam has resulted in the rebirth of a colorful personality that was thought to have disappeared long ago: a personality exemplified by the World War I Flying Ace, whose skill, heroics and fighting spirit made him a legendary figure almost 50 years ago.

In an era characterized by the shriek of jet engines, high altitude flying, and faster-than-sound speeds, the spirit of the World War I Ace has returned—in the form of the modern Army aviator. The old Spads and Sopwith Camels have been replaced by modern, sophisticated aircraft, and the Red Baron has stepped aside for an equally vicious and elusive opponent named "Charlie". But today's aviator fights Charlie with the same courage and determaination that his early counterpart fought the Baron.

Outstanding among the modern day "Aces" is the visual reconnaissance airplane pilot. He flies his O-1 Bird Dog in search of Charlie throughout Vietnam. His trained eyes and familiarity with the topography of Vietnam can quickly spot the most indistinguishable changes in the terrain. Although his ship is armed with only traget-marking rockets Charlie fears and hates him, for those rockets and a few words into a radio can have devastating effects.

Often flying the small plane through a barrage of intense enemy fire, the Bird Dog pilot locates the enemy and directs artillery and air strikes on Charlie's positions. In the process of performing this vital mission, his actions have often equalled, if not surpassed, those of his WWI predecessor.

The 1st Aviation Brigade has nine reconnaissance airplane companies, scattered from the DMZ to the Mekong Delta, and each could undoubtedly fill several pages with accounts of the courage and dedication of its reconnaissance pilots. In almost all major operations in Vietnam since the United States became actively committed to the conflict in 1965, these men and their small planes have played a major role, detecting the enemy and advising friendly forces of his location with almost pinpoint accuracy.

In the Marine's recent Operation Kingfisher, near the DMZ, a Bird Dog pilot flew his ship through intensive small arms and machine gun fire to call in fire support for two hard-pressed Marine rifle companies near Con Tien.

Captain Charles Diebert, of the 220th Recennaissance Airplane Company, had been called for assistance when a Marine spotter plane ran low on fuel and had to depart its station. He quickly brought his plane into position to take over the air strike mission.

Below, the two Marine companies had just broken contact with two NVA battalions. They were trying to regroup and link up

"...praise and thanks from a commander..."

under heavy mortar fire as the Army airplane arrived.

"I had a good idea where the NVA mortars were, so I flew over there to take a look," Captain Diebert reported.

As he flew over the heavily wooded positions, two NVA soldiers were spotted ducking into the trees. A closer look revealed five enemy mortars firing at the beleaguered Marines.

The artillery observer in Captain Diebert's plane, a Marine Lieutenant on his maiden mission in Vietnam, called in Marine jet fighters to blast the mortar and enemy positions. "I knew right away we'd gotten at least three of them," Captain Diebert said.

The O-1 crew later counted at least nine NVA bodies. Pieces of at least three mortars were visible in the woods.

The Army airplane then directed Marine Med-evac and resupply helicopters to the Marine ground positions. Enemy fire, though new somewhat slackened, was still intense.

While circling the area, the O-1 crew noticed about nine heavily camouflaged NVA soldiers maneuvering toward one company's flank. When the aircraft turned to mark their location and take a closer look, the NVA soldiers ran and merged into the foliage of a nearby tree line.

"When we rolled in," reported Captain Diebert, "the tree line began to disappear. There must have been 45 to 60 NVA crouching in a row to look like a tree line."

The Marine helicopter gunships stopped the enemy flanking movement and three flights of jets were directed to complete the job.

This time the O-1 crew confirmed only one enemy killed by air (KBA) but estimated 15 others on the ground before the Bird Dog returned to direct in more evacuation helicopters.

"Next I saw some movement out of the corner of my eye," said Captain Diebert. He looked again and spotted about 45 more NVA. "They were in four groups," he said, "like a platoon in four squads advancing toward the flank of the other Marine company."

He advised the ground commander to expedite the Med-evacs and watch his flank. Then he called in three more flights of fighters. Eight confirmed KBA's were counted this time.

As the O-1 left the area, the companies were able to link up, and the thanks and praise of the Marine regimental commander was coming over the radio.

This is just one example of many operations in which the reconnaissance pilot has proven himself indispensible is support of ground forces. But the Bird Dog pilot's role in the "everyday" aspect of the war, while flying "routine" missions, has been equally significant and important.

A pilot of the 193rd Reconnaissance Airplane Company directed air strikes on enemy positions that resulted in 22 VC killed and seven bunkers destroyed while flying two "normal" missions in one day.

First Lieutenant Fred C. Hankinson, on a regular reconnaissance mission, spotted seven VC foxholes in Binh Thuan Province, northwest of Saigon. The foxholes were camouflaged, but movement caught Lieutenant Hankinson's eye. He immediately called in an air strike.

Lieutenant Hankinson marked the enemy positions with marking rockets as the Air Force fighters came in to make their strike.

Bird Dog pilot checks his ship's rocket tubes prior to a mission.

"...hate and fear from charlie..."

Results of the strike were seven VC killed and three enemy bunkers destroyed.

Lieutenant Hankinson's second mission that day placed him flying low ship, with an Air Force Forward Air Control (FAC) ship flying as the high ship over enemy terrain. Flying over a suspected large VC bunker complex, his Bird Dog drew ground fire, taking one round in the left wing flap. Air strikes were immediately called in and stayed on the scene for the next two hours, dropping ordinance on the position.

The next morning, a ground force found a total of 15 VC dead and four large tin-covered cellers completely destroyed.

Most Bird Dog pilots would agree that there is no such thing as a "routine" mission. Charlie is too unpredictable. However, there are occasionally some missions which are a little unusual, even for a reconnaissance pilot.

First Lieutenant Terrance L. Conner, a pilot with the 74th Reconnaissance Airplane Company, was flying a visual reconnaissance mission for the 5th ARVN Division near Ben Cat, when the senior American advisor with the ground element notified him that three ARVN soldiers had been wounded in fierce ground action and were in need of medical treatment.

The pilot attempted to get a "Dust-off" chopper for this mission, but was unable to establish radio contact with any helicopters in the area. Realizing the immediate need for medical treatment for the wounded soldiers, Lieutenant Conner elected to make the med-evac himself, a highly unorthodox mission for a Bird Dog pilot.

Lieutenant Conner notified the senior advisor to move the casualties up to a dirt road immediately behind the advancing infantry. He maneuvered his small plane down through the jungle growth and made a perfect landing on the road. Quickly selecting the most critically injured, the pilot loaded him in the back seat and took off for the 1st U.S. Infantry Division medical facilities at Lai Khe.

Lieutenant Conner then returned to the battle scene and made another approach to the road strip. This time he loaded the other two injured soldiers on board and again flew to Lai Khe where he turned them over to medical personnel. This mission completed, the aviator returned to his more routine mission of providing aerial surveillance for the advancing ARVN soldiers.

These are just a few of many such roles played by Bird Dog pilots throughout Vietnam daily. And such achievements have not gone unrecognized. For his actions, Lieutenant Conner was presented the Distinguished Flying Cross by former 1st Aviation Brigade Commanding General, Major General G. P. Seneff, Jr.

The 220th Reconnaissance Airplane Company was recently awarded the Meritorious Unit Citation for outstanding service during the period July 1965 through April 1966. The award cited the 220th for their outstanding visual reconnaissance and direction of air and artillery strikes on enemy positions which accounted for enemy losses "exceeding two battalions."

The Bird Dog pilot, along with his fellow aviators in other Army aircraft, is surely a personality reminiscent of the World War I Ace. His skill, courage and dedication are an important part of the history of Army aviation today in Vietnam. And they will be an important part of the aviation successes of tomorrow.

Bird Dog spotter plane marks enemy position.

HAWK HONEY

Joyce Mericle

Flight 179:

DUMBO SPECIAL

Cham gets acquainted with Dr. Norwood

Unusual and exacting missions are commonplace for the 179th Assault Support Helicopter Company, based at Pleiku, but a recent Civic Action mission could at least be classed as different.

A 179th CH-47 Chinook was dispatched to Ban Me Thout, where it was met by Mr. Paul Beverly of USAID (United States Agency for International Development), Mrs. H'tlung Lee Kadham, and a baby elephant named Cham. The 4th Infantry Division had purchased the 16-month old elephant from Mrs. Kadham as a gift for the Jarai Montagnard tribesmen in the resettlement village of Edag Enang.

Captain Gary Norwood, 4th Infantry Division veterinarian, who extended his tour two days for the mission, went along on the "Dumbo Flight" to supervise the handling of Cham.

A few encouraging words, a tranquilizer injection from Dr. Norwood, and Cham was ready for his flight. He turned out to be an excellent helicopter passenger, taking the 90-minute flight to his new home in stride.

Dr. Norwood administers a sedative

With a helping hand from Mrs. Kadham Cham steps aboard.

Cham Doesn't quite know what to think about the CH-47

None the worse for wear, the elephant is home

"...if we flew that way every day..."

OPERATION BENTON

The heavily forrested, enemy-infested area in the central highlands 11 miles west of Tam Ky was known as "virgin territory" until the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division and the 196th Light Infantry Division swept in during Operation Benton recently.

The 19-day operation, which has rocked the Viet Cong hardest thus far in Task Force Oregon, dramatically illustrated the effectiveness of a well-coordinated team of aviation and ground forces. From the opening day the sweep produced rich and rapid results. Sixty-eight enemy were killed and two dozen weapons captured during the first 48 hours of the multi-battalion combat assault.

Massive airmobile assaults planned and staged by the 14th Combat Aviation Battalion's five assault helicopter companies contributed over 60 aircraft during the first day of Benton. That day 637 hours were flown in lifting nearly 1,600 combat troops and 259 tons of cargo.

Attached in support of Task Force Oregon since April 18, the 14th Battalion participated in the most complex of TF Oregon's operations yet.

14th Battalion "slick" unloads combat troops

Major Derald Smith, Assistant S-3 of the 14th, called it "by far the most complicated assault operation we've run. This battalion has never been so heavily committed nor had such a lengthy turn-around time (one hour, 30 minutes from pick-up to drop-off) and still been able to meet the time schedule as well."

"It was a darn near fantastic effort by every man in the battalion," Major Smith summarized, "and if we flew that way every day it would put us over 20,000 hours a month."

Final figures showed the 14th Battalion aircraft had achieved-in support of Benton alone, besides aviation support of other TF Oregon operations as well—the lifting of 12,256 troops and 2,046 tons of cargo, 2,804 hours flown and medical evacuation of 48 infantry casualties.

In addition, the battalion's gunships had been credited with 49 Viet Cong confirmed KBAs (killed by air) and 125 VC structures destroyed.

It was a well-coordinated and extremely complex operation the 14th Battalion started. Benton's combat troops continued it on the ground.

On D-day when the initial fleet of heliborne troops touched down in the landing zones, pilots and crews were wary. Intelligence sources had re-

"...it would put us over 20,000 hours a month"

ported the area to be "heavily saturated with anti-aircraft positions and .50 caliber automatic weapons.

Another factor which concerned the flight leaders was the extreme care that had prevented aerial reconnaissance of the LZs by aviation commanders. Only spotter-type airplanes had flown the operational area the day before so as not to arouse enemy suspicion of a helicopter assault.

All LZs were picked by map reconnaissance and verified by infantry commanders and mission aviation leaders riding in the same chopper on the day of the assault.

All areas later proved satisfactory and the 50 Huey slicks, 10 Chinooks and accompanying 13 gunships assaulted with troops of the 101st from one enemy area to another in the first phase of the combat assault.

Once on approach to the selected LZs, conditions proved to less than desirable. With a lead command and control helicopter marking all LZs for the wave of helicopters to land behind him, fierce sniper and automatic weapons fire opened up from tree lines around the initial landing locations.

Later LZs were found to be mined—one even had anti-helicopter devices—another was filled with punji stakes, and hostile fire was reported from most of the villages in the well populated area.

Ground fire hit nine troop-carrying helicopters in the first lift. Three were forced to land, including one commander's C & C aircraft. It flew safely to an LZ and was later evacuated by a CH-47 Chinook on a flight back without delaying artillery lifts to that LZ.

But conditions were to become much worse for the ground forces.

Two command posts came under immediate fire, which continued and became even more intense during the night. Emergency resupply and med-evac missions were supported by Army gunships and flareship teams.

A C-47 "Spooky" even put in an appearance to rain its terror on the enemy surrounding the embattled LZ.

Ground commanders later said that the Army gunships had drastically cut friendly casualties. "Scorpion" and "Musket" gunships from the 161st and 176th Assault Helicopter companies made repeated runs in support of 101st operations.

Ground troops in a morning sweep of the perimeter credited the gunships with 30 of the 44 VC confirmed killed—a record for the 14th Battalion in a 24-hour period.

The next day ground elements in two of the LZs required extraction to more secure areas. Helicopters of the 14th took care of this mission as other 101st infantry joined with the arriving 196th Brigade soldiers in continuing search and destroy operations of Benton.

Sweeping operations had only started. 14th Battalion air support during the next 18 days played a big part in the successful conclusion of Operation Benton.

Gunships of the 14th were credited with 49 KBA during the first 48 hours of Benton.

MOS Spotlight:

FLIGHT ENGINEER

The man getting ready to lift the hook to be attached to the underside of the CH-47 Chinook probably isn't aware of much except the tremendous blast of wind as the big ship lowers to be hooked to the sling load. But if he lifts his eyes from the grasping hook and peers into the cargo chute above him, he can see a helmeted head protruding over the edge of the chute, watching the sling load of cargo closely and speaking into his microphone helmet frequently.

The man in the helmet is the ship's flight engineer. His job is seeing that the cargo is picked up safely and effecient-ly, watching the sling during the flight to its destination, and giving the pilot placement directions to assure that the load is released as smoothly and as accurately as possible.

"But that's only part of my job," Specialist Leeward Richard, a flight engineer with the 200th Assault Support Helicopter Company "Pachyderms" explains. "The most important part of my job is on the ground. The flight engineer is in charge of the crew—the crew chief and gunner—it's my responsibility to make sure that all maintenance is performed on the ship and that all records and forms are kept up to date. In other words, it's my ship, at least while it's on the ground, and I'm responsible for it."

It's a big responsibility. The Chinook and its big sister, the CH-54 Flying Crane, are the mainstay of heavy-lift resupply for most Army combat units in Vietnam. Many outlying infantry and artillery units are almost completely dependent on the big choppers for resupply of equipment, ammunition, food and mail.

These ships are sometimes called upon to move an entire unit and its equipment, or a Vietnamese village, with belongings, to a new location. They are utilized to "med-evac" downed UH-1 Hueys, or lift 105mm Howitzers to an artillery site. And they are frequently used to lift ground troops into an LZ on a combat assault. All of these operations require peak performance from the aircraft, and it is the flight engineer's job to see that his ship is capable of performing accordingly.

As a result, the flight engineer keeps busy. He and the crew work long hours performing maintenance to keep the ship flyable. Specialist 5 Darryl Sharp, also with the 200th, states it numerically; "For every hour of flying time, there are eight hours of maintenance performed. But it's interesting and I like flying, so I don't mind the hours."

The aviation-oriented soldier takes his first step toward becoming a flight engineer at the aircraft maintenance school at Ft. Eustis, Va. The course is the same as that for the crew chief, and is concerned with teaching the basic principles of the operation of aircraft and engine components, and their maintenance and repair.

But his training only starts at the School. It continues when he gets on the job. Specialist 5 Jim Thalacker, another Pachyderm flight engineer, says, "The course at Eustis is good and through, but in the short time you have it, it can only be a familiarization course. You really start learning when you get on the job and start doing it for yourself..."

After graduation from Eustis, the flight engineer is usually initially a crew chief, and as he gains experience and skill, he works his way up, until he has his own ship.

The flight engineer likes his work, and it shows it in the pride he takes in his ship. He and his ship are making an invaluable contribution to the ever-growing and increasingly significant Army aviation effort in Vietnam.

334th Armed Helicopter Company:

"WE LEAD THE WAY"

In a war where new records are set almost daily and units are achieving new heights of combat effectiveness unsurpassed in previous conflicts, one unit stands out with an impressive list of "firsts": the 334th Armed Helicopter Company.

The 334th motto, "We Lead the Way", is no idle boast. The 334th was the first aviation unit in Vietnam. It is the first--and--only--armed helicopter company in Vietnam. It was the first unit since Korea to receive the Presidential Unit Citation. And it has developed combat flying techniques and equipment used by Army aviation units throughout the world.

The 334th Armed Helicopter Company was born on 22 September 1966, but its history goes back much further--back to America's first steps to aid The Republic of Vietnam in its bid for freedom. It is the outgrowth of constant research and experimentation in an effort to build a mobile, effective, hard-hitting aviation element to provide fire support to the man on the ground.

The 334th seed was sown with the activation of the Utility Tactical Transport Helicopter Company (UTT) in July of 1961. Completing its training in Okinawa, the new unit was assigned to Thailand to participate in large scale SEATO exercises. It passed its first test with flying colors, and was sent to the Republic of Vietnam to meet the growing threat of Communist insurgency here. Advance elements of the unit arrived at Tan Son Nhut on July 25, 1962, and the unit flew its first combat mission nine days later.

Gunship of the 334th strike fear into Charlie

The armed helicopter company was a totally new concept, and in its first year of combat the UTT developed tactics and techniques now used Army-wide. In 1963 the UTT received the Huges Tool Company's Army Aviation Unit of the Year Award in recognition of its trailblazing role.

In 1964 the UTT retired into the pages of history as the company was redesignated the 68th Aviation Company. The 68th carried on the tradition of the UTT and its men fought in large-scale stand-and-fight battles at Binh Gia, Duc Hoa, Song Be, Dong Xoai and Bu Dop.

A year later, in March of 1965, another redesignation occurred as the 68th became the 197th Aviation Company. Under this name the unit was to have its finest hours. It was honored for its efforts in action at Duc Hoa, 1-3 April 1965, with the first Presidential Unit Citation to be awarded since the Korean Conflict. In August, 1966, the 197th received the Meritorious Unit Commendation for actions from May to November 1965.

A move from Tan Son Nhut to Bien Hoa was soon followed by another relocation as the 197th moved to Ft. Benning, Ga., to

334th Gunship makes a running takeoff from Bien Hoa

join the 107th Light Infantry Brigade. But its officers and men, helicopters and reputation remained in Vietnam as the new 334th Aviation Company. The sabers, Playboys, Raiders and Gangbusters continued their outstanding support of counter-insurgency operations in the III Corps area and elsewhere when called.

The names and numbers might have changed since the first helicopters pulled pitch in August of 1962 for their maiden combat operation, but the skill, pride and fighting spirit of her men remain. Today, ships of the 334th are in the air 24 hours a day, providing support to ground troops in both day and night operations.

Always looking for ways to improve their effectiveness, the men of the 334th have improvised and adapted equipment for aviation use. One such innovation is the "Firefly", in which Charlie is robbed of the protective cover of darkness by a unique system combining night illumination and firepower, including an ingeniously mounted .50 caliber machine gun. The combination has proved devastating for Charlie. In the first three days of June 1967, ships of the 334th destroyed 76 enemy sampans.

The 334th continues to record other firsts, testing and evalusting new equipment. Among the new developements it has been the first to test under combat conditions have been the Starlight Scope, the "Peole Sniffer," the XM-21 Mini-gun weapons system, and low-level television for scouting out Charlie.

The 334th Armed Helicopter Company is a fairly new designation for the oldest aviation unit in Vietnam, but its roots are deep in the history of the Vietnam Conflict. The job they have done in the past, they will continue to do in the future. The 334th will continue to step ahead, setting standards for others to follow. Its motto has remained unchanged throughout its moves and redesignations, and still holds as true today as it did in 1962: "WE LEAD THE WAY".

A firefly ship, developed by the 334th

"Dear Tony..."

"I hope someday you will see what kind of girl I am."

Now don't jump to conclusions. This was a statement made in a letter by a student in the fourth grade at Manchester Elementary School in Manchester, Vt. Specialist Four Tony Waldeier, who works in the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion's personnel section at Dong Ba Thin, received more than 30 such letters in one day.

It seems that Waldeier's fiancee, Miss Carol Applin, the fourth grade teacher, asked her students to write a letter to him in Vietnam and ask a few simple questions about the country and what he does here.

Miss Applin's suggestion was received with overwhelming enthusiasm.

The elementary students asked everything from what color the leaves were to when Waldeier was going to win the war. The letters contained information about the students themselves as well as some interesting--and often amusing--questions about the serviceman's duties and the people of Vietnam.

A typical example of one of these letters follows:

Dear Tony,

My name is Cathy Ann Casey. I know yours already because my teacher Miss Applin told me. I hope it's alright to call you tony.

I weigh about 67 pounds, I have brown eyes, and I have black hair, and I do not know how tall I am.

I hope you will get out of the Viet Nam.

Just this morning when I was on my way to school I saw a young man standding near the Grand Union, he was dressed in some kind of uniform, and I think he was waiting for a bus.

How is the war going anyway?

My cat had a distemper disease. Now we have only one cat. At the beginning we had two cat, and they had kittens, and one had five of them and the other had three of them. Then we got rid of three of them. Then we got rid of the rest. Before we got rid of the rest we had four more, and we got rid of them too, so I guess that means we had lots of cats.

Now I guess I will ask you some more questions.

Where are you in the Viet Nam? Are you winning the war? What color hair do you have? My mother just had a baby Sept. 12th 1967. She went to the hospital at 4 in the morning.

Love Cathy Casey

Not bad for a fourth grader. Excluding a few grammar and spelling errors, she does get her point across. It just goes to show that even the fourth graders want to do their part by supporting the "lighter" side of the war effort.

The "Red Baron" is Alive... in Long Binh