

VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION



TURNER PUBLISHING COMPANY
Paducah, Kentucky

skids. Other gunships had arrived and were screaming at us to get away from the intense ground fire. When we finally got clear we found that we had only taken a couple of hits, but we were lucky I guess.

One evening we surprised a VC cadre meeting on a sampan and hovered in, lights blazing and guns firing. We sank the sampan and exchanged fire with more enemy in the treeline, before flicking off the lights and disappearing into the darkness. In the morning, 15 bodies were counted in the treeline.

Tiger Surprise's luck ran out during a night scramble mission in May 1970, with aircraft commander Ed Skuza at the helm. Reacting to a report of enemy movement, the aircraft was enroute at low level along the road to Soc Trang when a Viet Cong B-40 rocket scored a direct hit. The helicopter crashed and exploded, killing the crew chief and door gunner. Skuza and his co-pilot were badly injured. During its tenure, Tiger Surprise was credited with a thousand enemy KIAs and with saving at least 30 outposts that might otherwise have fallen. It

In Vietnam, the altitude for helicopters to use to avoid ground fire was initially 1,500 feet AGL (above ground level). In certain areas, it was raised to 2,500 feet. At this latter altitude, there is relative safety. However, the best flight technique to avoid ground fire was to be flat on the deck because the enemy did not have time to accurately bring his weapons to bear on you.

Army Aviation March 1969

Cheyenne's pilot can focus devastating firepower where he looks. With armament slaved to the movement of his head, he can accurately direct a veritable hail of fire.

Lockheed Aircraft Corporation Advertisement, January 1969

claimed to be more effective per hour than any other gunship in the Mekong Delta.

RED HELICOPTERS

Although American dominance in the air prevented large scale use of air transport and helicopter forces by the Communists, they did use them where possible, chiefly in Laos. The use of air transports to supply Pathet Lao forces dated back at least to 1960. Contrary to their American counterparts, they generally managed to keep their air efforts low-profile and well-hidden. By 1968 the North Vietnamese had 66 fixed-wing aircraft and 36 rotary-wing aircraft, mostly Mil-4 and Mil-6s. There were many sightings of these helicopters in Laos, particularly after the occupation of the Plain of Jars in 1969. In May 1969, a U.S. Air Force AC-130A gunship crew reported destroying an enemy helicopter while it was on the ground in a jungle clearing. A few weeks later a U.S. airstrike pounded an LZ where two enemy helicopters had been sighted on the ground. In 1970 an Allied observer near Saravane watched 20 enemy troops disembark from a darkened helicopter, having been guided by persons on the ground into a regularly used landing zone.

Enemy troops were also flown into Cambodia. An NVA soldier captured in South Vietnam confirmed that he had made the six hour trip from North Vietnam to Cambodia by air in early 1969 and that his entire 600-man infiltration group had been briefed to move by air. Covert flights into South Vietnam via Cambodia were often reported by Special Forces outposts, despite American radar surveillance and interception capabilities designed to prevent such events. An Army helicopter crew spotted a Mil-6 helicopter in Pleiku Province in April. In Thailand, villagers and tribesmen described helicopter landings at sites marked by bonfires or signal lights. Although some of these latter flights were undoubtedly due to drug trafficking, some were believed to be supporting Communist insurgents.

DEATH ON CALL

Death On Call was the motto of the gunship platoon (Wolfpack) of the 281st Assault Helicopter Company, the Intruders. Its two slick platoons were Ratpack and Bandits. The company, boasting the motto *Hell from Above* arrived in RVN in June 1966 and would depart in December 1970. In the summer of 1969 the company was part of the 10th Aviation Battalion (Combat), 17th Aviation Group, 1st Aviation Brigade. The 281st had a classified and dangerous mission to provide aviation support to the 5th Special Forces Group, in particular its cross-border infiltration campaign known as Project Delta. The project was run by Special Forces Detachment B-52, based at Nha Trang and its missions included locating enemy units, intelligence gathering, special purpose raids, harassment and deception, artillery and air strike co-ordination, hunter-killer missions, and bomb damage assessment. It was organized into a dozen reconnaissance teams, six (later twelve) CIDG Roadrunner teams, one Nung camp security company, and the five companies of the 91st South Vietnamese Airborne Ranger Battalion.

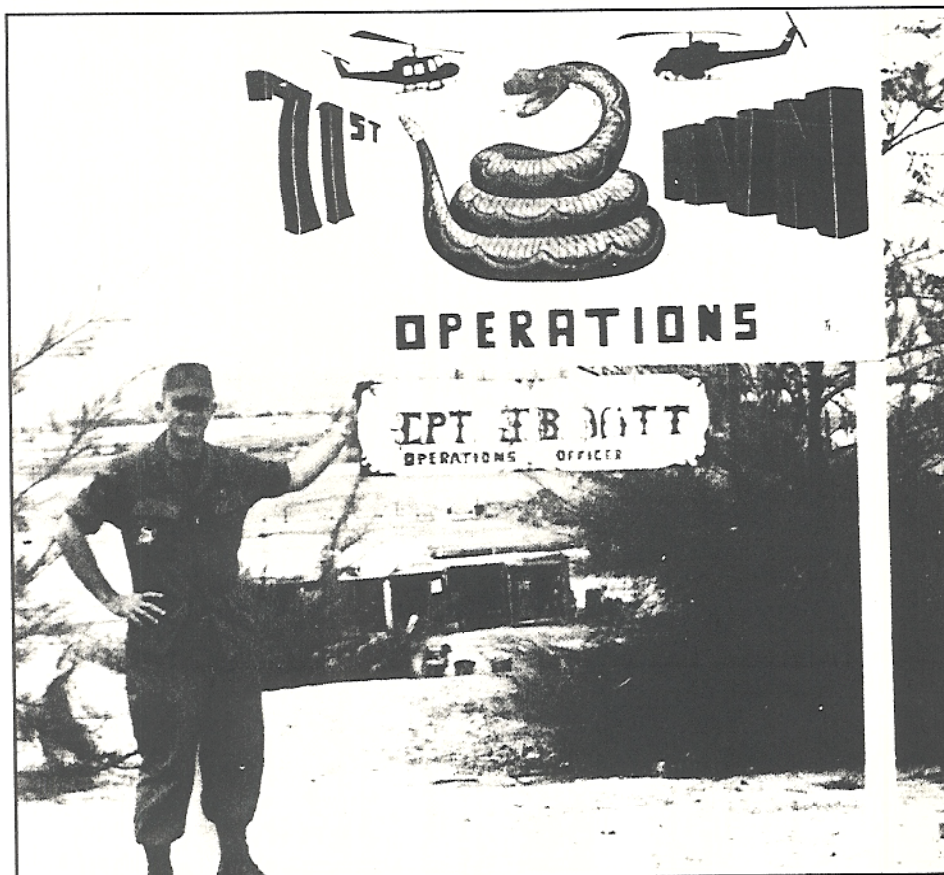
Occasionally, Project Delta recon teams found themselves in trouble and the 281st had the job of "putting out the fire." Often, the helicopter crews paid a high price for their dedication. In *The Helicopter War*, door gunner Duane Brudvig recounted one of the Wolfpack's missions:

On Thanksgiving Day we were sent on a special mission into a dangerous area near Cambodia. The crews were hand-picked for the job and as we left we were getting reports in of fast movers (jets) being shot up by 0.50-caliber AA [anti-aircraft] cross fire. We flew to the area near Duc Lap and got our orders at a fire support base. The area we were to help out was an outpost on top of a small, dead volcano that was getting hit by Charley's mortars. They started getting hit about 1400 hours, so they scrambled us to help out. They were waiting for us though, and as we flew over a heavy position we got hit by AK-47s. All hell was breaking loose on my ship. Bullet holes were appearing in the floor between my crew chief's feet and I had to turn away because small bits of metal were hitting me in the face! I fired up the area on the other side of the ship and imagined the worst while we took fire.

Suddenly everything stopped and all I could hear was the sound of wind rushing by and nothing else. The radios were shot out and I could smell hydraulic fluid. We were just floating through the air, gliding towards the ground. It was very strange sitting in a ship that was losing power, but at the same time it was kind of peaceful! I was calm and so were the others. Now we were turning and dropping, the pilot flared the ship, pulling as much pitch as he could to bring the ship down as best he could. It touched the ground perfectly, so now it was show time!

I jumped up, but didn't go anywhere, because my monkey strap held on to me! Captain Jim Brown, the platoon leader and co-pilot, was already out and shooting with his 9-mm Swedish K. Warrant Officer Ken Miller, the pilot, was already out and shooting his .38 pistol. My crew chief, Daryl Evalgelho, was out the other side of the ship firing his M-60. I was on the other side, out away from the ship, firing my M-60 at an area that was being marked with smoke rockets by the Forward Air Controller in his 0-1 Bird Dog. I ran out of ammo fast, so had to go back for more. I checked Captain Brown out, he was covering the tail end of the ship. Seeing he was OK, I took off my chicken plate protection, grabbed a handful of rounds, and headed for my machine gun.

All of a sudden Captain Brown comes running over to my position and tells me it was a little too hot where he was. Rounds were hitting between his feet, so he decided to move! The next time I ran out of



CPT. Hitt, OPS Officer, Chu Lai, 71st AVN Co. (Courtesy of Johnnie B. Hitt.)

Corps. Song Tra Bong River. (Courtesy of Steve Kerchenfaut.)



GENERAL ORDERS NO. 79 AWARD OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

Specialist Four Gary G. Wetzel, RA 16860289 (then Private First Class), United States Army, 173d Assault Helicopter Company, who distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his own life, above and beyond the call of duty, near Ap Dong An in the Republic of Vietnam. On 8 January 1968, Specialist Wetzel was serving as door gunner aboard a helicopter which was part of an insertion force trapped in a landing zone by intense and deadly hostile fires. Specialist Wetzel was going to the aid of his aircraft commander when he was blown into a rice paddy and critically wounded by two enemy rockets that exploded just inches from his location. Although bleeding profusely due to the loss of his left arm and severe wounds in his right arm, chest, and left leg, Specialist Wetzel staggered back to his original position in his gun-well and took the enemy forces under fire. His machine gun was the only weapon placing effective fire on the enemy at that time. Through a resolve that overcame the shock and intolerable pain of his injuries, Specialist Wetzel remained at his position until he had eliminated the automatic weapons emplacement that had been inflicting heavy casualties on the American troops and preventing them from moving against this strong enemy force. Refusing to attend to his own extensive wounds, he attempted to return to the aid of his aircraft commander but passed out from loss of blood. Regaining consciousness, he persisted in his efforts to drag himself to the aid of his fellow crewman. After an agonizing effort, he came to the side of the crew chief who was attempting to drag the wounded aircraft commander to the safety of a nearby dike. Unswerving in his devotion to his fellow man, Specialist Wetzel assisted his crew chief even though he lost consciousness once again during this action. Specialist Wetzel displayed extraordinary heroism and intrepidity at the risk of his own life, above and beyond the call of duty, in his efforts to aid his fellow crewmen. His gallant actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the armed forces of his country.

Army Aviation January 1969

ammo Captain Brown went and got some, then he took over the gun for a while. That was when he got the guy that was shooting at him before!

It was getting to be too long on the ground with the enemy so close. We were down about 30 minutes and we were in big trouble. Mister Miller started destroying the scrambler, the radio equipment that was top secret because it scrambled radio messages. Then he threw a grenade over to us. I caught it and just looked at it, wondering what I should use it on. I don't think I would have thrown it!

While we were on the ground, the other gunship was circling over us, covering us and burning up fuel and ammo. They were nervous because they could see the situation was desperate. Warrant Officer Robert George, the aircraft commander, decided to come in and get us. His crew and co-pilot were anxious and ready to go. Co-pilot Jackie Keele, crew chief Larry Elam and gunner 'Red' Vandervene had been going crazy covering us, thinking we weren't going to make it!

The heat was on and time was running out on us. Suddenly, someone was hitting me in the back of the head, so I turned just in time to see the other ship coming into land. Mister Miller was trying to get my attention to run for the recovery ship, but once I saw it land I was gone! I dove in, followed my crew chief, then we sat there seeing something strange. The two pilots were standing in front of the damaged ship talking. Then they broke and ran for the recovery ship, dove in and we were off again.

Now we had a problem, because we are in a gunship that can't carry more than its crew and ammo. Now there are four more people, and during the time they had been covering us they took more hits, making our take-off very shaky. The enemy were directly in front of us, shooting as we picked up to take-off. Moving forward and heading down a small slope we were on our way. I looked at the gauges to see how bad the engine was doing. I didn't see the guys in front until we were almost on top of them. They were smiling like they knew they had us, but we went right over them, hitting one with the skid!

The Army's first career development course for warrant officers began in early July at Fort Rucker. MG Delk M. Oden predicted that warrant officer grades would be extended to W-5 and W-6. It took the Army more than 20 years to make the general's prediction half right.

The rank of warrant officer was initiated in the U.S. Navy by a Congressional Act of 1794. It was incorporated into the U.S. Army in 1918 with the establishment of the Army Mine Planter Service. Army warrant officers were authorized to be addressed as "Mister" in 1921 and in 1926 the insignia of an eagle standing on a bundle of arrows was authorized for all Army warrant officers.

OUTSTANDING AVIATION UNIT AWARD 1969

101st Airborne Division, RVN

YOU AIN'T DYING
WE AIN'T FLYING



"DUSTOFF 13"

LIVING - DEATH

CW 2 JOE K DAWSON

FUNY, MICHIGAN



45TH MED. CO. (AA)
LONG BINH

APO 96491
SOUTH VIETNAM

(Courtesy of Joe Dawson.)

Mister George took his ship out and up, away from the mess below. He knew just how much power his ship had and he used it all. We were on our way to safety. Captain Brown looked at me and told me he hadn't been a strong believer in God before, but he sure was now! We landed near another base in the area and I jumped down and looked back at the ship. We had taken about 20 rounds and had made a bouncy landing. We were lucky to be alive.

THE OLD MAN AND THE HUEY

In 1969, CWO Michael J. Novosel, a Dust Off pilot with the 82nd Medical Detachment, 45th Medical Company, 68th Medical Group, was on his second tour of duty in Vietnam. He was 48 years old and had flown B-29 bombers during World War II. In 1964, he quit his job with Southern Airways and forfeited his rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force Reserve to become an Army Aviator in Vietnam.

During the night of 1 October, Special Forces Detachment B-41 and three Mobile Strike (or Mike) Force companies left their base at Moc Hoa to investigate reports of NVA troops moving from Cambodia across the Cai Co canal into the Delta province of Kien Tuong. by the time the Mike Force troops arrived and began their advance at 0645 hours on the morning of 2 October, the enemy units had already crossed the border and settled into prepared positions.

Just after 0800 hours, the right flank of the Mike Force was hit by fire from a tree line, 75 meters distant. Nine Mike Force soldiers were killed by the outburst. The survivors scrambled for cover. Two UH-1C gunships from the 62nd Assault Helicopter Company at Vinh Long were soon on station, but one went down quickly with an enemy round in its transmission. The Special Forces adviser on the