

1966

68TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER
COMPANY (UH-1)(A)
APO 96227

SUBJECT: Unit History

On 7 March 1960 the unit was constituted in the Regular Army as the 68th Aviation Company and activated 14 April 1960. The company was later inactivated 6 December 1962 at Fort Ord. Being reactivated 15 August 1964 in the Pacific, the unit became the first Utility Tactical Transport Helicopter Company in the history of aviation. The unit was again inactivated on 1 March 1965 and was designated the 197th Aviation Company at Fort Benning, Georgia. On 5 July, the company was activated by verbal order by the Commanding General, Third United States Army as the 68th Aviation Company (Airmobile Light). Confirmed by Army General Order number 200, dated 12 July 1965, the unit was activated under TOE 1-77E and attached to the 10th Aviation Group, Fort Benning, Georgia.

Major Joe D. Ecrette assumed command of the company, 12 July 1965 until the reporting date of all assigned officers at Fort Benning. On 1 September 1965, Major Weldon F. Honeycutt assumed command of the 68th Aviation Company by Unit Order number 11.

Given thirty days to organize, the company gained its enlisted and non-commissioned officer strength and with the exception of several key enlisted men, was ready for overseas movement by 1 October 1965. On 4 November 1965, the main body of the company departed Fort Benning by bus to Atlanta, Georgia. From Atlanta they flew to San Francisco, California, where they boarded the USNS "Geiger" to later arrive at Vung Tau, Republic of Viet Nam on 28 November 1965.

On 4 December 1965, the unit flew its first combat mission with the 118th Aviation Company, and A Company, 501st for the purpose of orientation of the 68th to Viet Nam operations. Becoming Combat Operational on 10 December 1965 the unit was given single and dual direct combat support missions until 16 December 1965 when the company made its first complete unit size combat assault. All aircraft returned safely inspite of three ships being hit. Captian Lawrence N. Sutliff was wounded, making him the second wounded since arriving in country. Captain David L. Starkey was wounded on a mission with A Company, 501st, during an orientation mission prior to the time the unit became operational.

During December the 68th Aviation Company made three combat operations, tallying a total of 14 lifts and 1396 troops moved. The Company also participated in two Battalion size combat missions and numerous direct combat support missions. From 10 December 1965 to 31 December 1965, assigned aviators of the 68th Averaged 56 hours in the air.

JANUARY
COMBAT OPERATIONS

For the first 15 days of January the company had heavy tactical commitments. Units supported during this time were the 1st and 7th Airborne Brigades (ARVN), the 173rd Airborne Brigade (US) and the 10th Infantry Division (ARVN). Routine direct combat support missions were flown daily until 27 January 1966 when the company moved in force to II Corps area to take part in the largest combat operation of the Viet Nam war.

Highlighting the month was participation in "Operation Crimp", a joint allied maneuver in the Plain of Reeds near Duc Hoa, and "Operation Masher" (White Wing), the war's biggest push in the Leo Valley near Bong Son, II Corps. During "Operation Crimp" the 145th Aviation Battalion, with the 68th in lead position, transported 2,000 men of the 1st Airborne Brigade (ARVN) into the V.C. stronghold west of Duc Hoa. An effective surprise caught the V.C. off guard and ARVN troops killed many of the enemy. During the last two lifts, fire was received and later during resupply and Medevac Operations out of Duc Hoa, the 68th helicopters were hit by fire. Fortunately no one was injured and no aircraft were lost.

The company's efforts for 5 days supporting the 2nd Airborne Task Force were rewarded by a letter of appreciation from Colonel Francis E. Naughton, Senior U.S. Advisor, 1st Airborne Brigade in "Operation Masher" (later designated "Operation White Wing"). Phu Cat was the temporary field site of the 68th and is located eight (8) miles North of Qui Nhon and 30 miles South of the operational area.

A company of the 2nd Airborne Task Force, critically low on ammunition and supplies were attacked by Viet Cong and successfully repelled them but had insufficient ammunition to fend off another attack. Major Weldon F. Honeycutt, Commanding Officer of the 68th was advised of the dangerous enemy situation by the US Advisor, Major Frank Lambrozzi. A small graveyard held on one (1) side by V.C., the other by ARVNS was the only landing zone available. Prompted by the ARVN predicament, Major Honeycutt elected to land the badly needed supplies despite the hazards. In the L.Z. he directed his ships into the area one by one while occasional automatic weapons fire raked the L.Z. Gun ships circled the area, suppressing the enemy fire to protect the slicks. Four of five gun ships were hit; all the others completed the operation unscratched.

Shortly thereafter the ground unit was attacked again by the communists. Major Lambrozzi wrote later that had it not been for the 68th's daring re-supply, his unit would have expended its ammunition and been over-run.

Maintenance

Notting 4,129 combat sorties and 1,730.8 flying hours for January the aircraft were showing very slight signs of strain at a heavy flying schedule. Aircraft availability dropped from 89 per cent in December to 82 per cent in January.

Miscellaneous

Despite a heavy flying schedule the men of the 68th made improvements on their living conditions in Vung Tau. What had once been little more than a sand pile had become a neat and attractive military installation.

A newly constructed villa in downtown Vung Tau became the new home of the Tigers on 26 January 1966. Named Tiger Towers, the new residence housed the Gray Tigers of the 57th Aviation Company as well as the Tigers of the 68th.

A civic action program was initiated and the company adopted, on a limited scale, the villages of Ben Soi and Tapary Robon in Tay Ninh province. Assistance to the An Phong welfare organization in Vung Tau was also given.

FEBRUARY
COMBAT OPERATIONS

A rapid reaction call was answered by the 68th at 1600 hours on 11 February 1966. A unit of the 25th Infantry Division (ARVN) had landed by river barge South of Tan Tru in the Me Kong River Delta and were pinned down by enemy fire. The first reinforcements lifted from Tan Tru met with no resistance. The flight met with heavy enemy fire on approach to the peninsula tip, landing several meters from Dug-In enemy positions. An additional four aircraft were hit by small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire. Major George W. Owens and CWO Michael G. Lindell were among others who returned to Med-Evac badly wounded ARVNS. Owens and Lindell, in the thick of the fire sustained considerable damage to their aircraft. Thirty-two (32) holes were inflicted, some by mortar shrapnel but no personnel were injured. Actions of the 68th enabled the 25th Division to regain its footing and strike the telling blow to an estimated battalion of Viet Cong.

The company took part in several other operations this month including "Operation Mastiff" in which the entire U.S. 1st Division was used.

ADMINISTRATION

Personnel changes in key company positions were made to alleviate an imbalance in the rank structure and to begin a system of staggered rotation dates. On 15 February Major Horace A. Bond was reassigned as Commanding Officer of the 391st Transportation Detachment. Captain Neal E. Early moved from aviator to command the service platoon, previously commanded by Major Bond. Original 391st Commander, Captain Miles C. Clark was moved to pilot's section and later transferred to another unit the battalion.

Captain David L. Starkey took command of the armed helicopter platoon filling the slot vacated by Major Jerry L. Shelby who transferred. Captain Edwin A. Harris assumed Captain Starkey's former role as section commander in the gun platoon.

Major Jack L. Hammond transferred on 22 February leaving his slot as section commander, 2nd Airlift Platoon to Captain Albert F. Guttman.

The next day Gerald Burroughs moved to Saigon and Captain Barry F. Balint took over his post as commander of the 2nd Airlift Platoon.

Captain Robert J. Rodgers took over 2nd Platoon Leadership when Major Larry N. Sutliff moved to Battalion Headquarters.

"Tigers" was the nickname adopted by the 68th on 1 September 1965. Objections from older tiger units in Viet Nam necessitated a change in the month of February to the new nickname of "Top Tigers".

COMBAT LOSSES AND INJURIES

Three members of the unit were wounded in action during February. On 3 February 1st Lt Jotte W. Filion suffered slight shrapnel wounds while flying a gun ship in action near Vo Xu. SP5 Robert D. Minton was shot through the heel while serving as a crew chief on a flight South West of Duc Hoa on 10 February and was soon evacuated from Viet Nam. PFC John T. Hughes suffered a slight wound when an enemy bullet exploded the fire extinguisher aboard the aircraft he was in during operation Mastiff on the 21st, South of Dau Tieng.

MAINTENANCE

The deadline rate during February nearly doubled dropping the aircraft availability to 75 per cent. Stopped-up maintenance allowed for an increase in flying time from January for a total of 2,019 hours and 4,866 combat sorties even though part availability was at a new low.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Decorations were awarded to 77 members of the 68th by Lt Col Horst K. Joost, in his first official visit after assuming command of the 145th Aviation Battalion. One Army Commendation Medal, one Purple Heart and 121 Air Medals were awarded for actions during the month of December.

CIVIC ACTIONS

The An Phong Welfare Organization in Yung Tau was given 1 ton of captured rice. On the 28th, 150 refugees were heli-lifted from the New Life Village of Vo Xu which had been overrun by Viet Cong the previous night. Many refugees had been wounded.

MARCH COMBAT OPERATIONS

During March the company participated in combat assaults or extractions on the average of every other day. Operation "Silver City" was the largest of the month. A search and destroy mission, it was staged North West of Tan Uyen and involved the 1st Infantry Division, 173rd Brigade, Royal Australian Rangers, 5th Division (ARVN), and 10th Division (ARVN). Troop carriers tallied 596 sorties flown, 1,973 personnel carried during 219.35 hours of flight.

Saturday, 12 March 1966 at 2115, ten rounds of 81mm were dropped on the Wung Tau Airfield, but fortunately the Tiger area was not damaged. Gunships in search of the enemy mortar positions took a barge under fire. Later an ARVN patrol located three mortars set up and aimed at the airfield.

On 28 March 1966 the company undertook a raid operation, the purpose of which was to capture or kill as many V.C. as possible and totally destroy the villages, livestock, and food supplies. Tallies for the operation were as follows:

454 troops airlifted, 229 sorties flown, 27 buildings destroyed, 25 damaged and 2 sampans damaged. Three raids were conducted, all of which were begun by Mustang (gun platoon of the 68th) pre-strike. The operation was termed a complete success by the Senior Advisor of Detachment 32 at Tay Ninh.

Maintenance

Total time for the month amounted to 2,171.8 hours, with 5230 sorties, 9,740 passengers and 93.4 tons of cargo were lifted.

Maintenance played the biggest part in keeping aircraft combat ready. With many of the aircraft nearing 400 hours and Top Tiger 800 flying 162.45 hours during March, the overall availability rate was up to 84.4 per cent.

APRIL COMBAT OPERATIONS

When Viet Cong attacked a small outpost located (1) kilometer North of Dat Doa, a light fire team was dispatched and within minutes was at the area of operations. Withdrawing, the V.C., moved through the jungle surrounding the outpost. The fire team, doing a low level visual recon of the area, spotted the V.C. after receiving automatic weapons fire. While raking the Viet Cong with machine gun and 40mm fire, one aircraft took three hits but continued to attack until its ammunition was expended. Ten V.C. were dead by body count with evidence that twenty to thirty more suspected wounded. The Top Tigers again proved true to its motto "Every Man a Tiger".

"B" Company, 25th Aviation Company sent 14 pilots to be trained in the 68th. After participating in 5 combat assaults, B Company's Commanding Officer stated, "If we can take this training back to our own division and maintain the standards of the 68th, then we will have done our job well."

Civil Affairs

Gifts were received from Captain Donald L. Gore's home town which included soap, tooth paste, tooth brushes, clothes, toilet articles and school supplies. All were distributed to the fishing village of Can Gio. Promises of gifts came from other hometowns. Two soldiers volunteered to help teach school in the evenings during their off-duty time.

Administration

The 68th was forced to give up five (5) officers after receiving six (6) from the 1st Air Cavalry Division as a part of the infusion program. The following personnel left the company: Captain Albert F. Gutman, Captain Richard M. Winn, Captain William A. Jugel Jr., Captain Robert J. Rodgers, and CWO James E. McCurley.

Major (then Captain) Barry T. Ealint received the Purple Heart for a wound he received on 1 April at Cu Chi, while supporting the 25th Infantry Division (US).

Maintenance

Total aircraft availability for the month was 72.5%. During the month the 68th racked up 1873.8 hours consisting of 4763 sorties while transporting 7,531 passengers and 140.6 tons of cargo.

MAY COMBAT OPERATIONS

On 6 May 1966 Major Weldon F. Honeycutt, Commander of the 68th Aviation Company, was wounded while leading a flight of "slicks" during an extraction of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The incident occurred twenty (20) kilometers North of Bien Hoa. Major Honeycutt was evacuated to the United States and Major James H. Cook took command. Leading every company size operation, until wounded, Major Honeycutt (The Tiger) was certainly missed.

Various combat assaults, extractions, resupply and Eagle Flights were conducted throughout the month...primarily in support of the 25th Divisions, ARVN and US. Several training flights were given to the Royal Australian Regiment on the 15th and 17th of the month.

Awards and Decorations

Since arriving in country, the company has received over 800 decorations which further reflects the high spirit of the unit and again brings to mind the motto "Every Man a Tiger."

Civil Affairs

SP5 Gibbs began English classes in the Vung Tau Cultural Center with a class of 35. Weekly sick call was begun by Dr. Quackbush in the village of Can Gio. During one of his weekly visits the doctor treated 20 patients.

Maintenance

During May, total flight time was 1,738.3 hours consisting of 4,579 sorties, 8,579 passengers and 279 tons of cargo. Total aircraft availability was 80.3%.

JUNE
COMBAT OPERATIONS

During the month of June, the 68th conducted several search and destroy missions in support of the 25th ARVN Division. Light to heavy small arms fire was received but no injuries were sustained. Other missions for the month were primarily troop repositionings with the exception of four (4) night combat assaults in support of the 173 Airborne Brigade.

Maintenance

Aircraft availability dropped slightly to 78.0% due to an increase in equipment deadlined for parts. Flying time totaled 2,129 hours with a total of 6,092 sorties.

Civic Action

Donations of soap, toothpaste, tooth brushes, clothing and many other needed items were given to the villagers of Can Gio. All the items had been received by members of the 68th from relatives, friends and social organizations in the United States. In addition, 700 pounds of captured Viet Cong rice was donated to a Vung Tau orphanage. Dr. Quackenbush continued his sickcall at Can Gio, treating over 175 patients during a two week period.

Administration

During the month the name of the unit was changed from the 68th Aviation Company to the 68th Assault Helicopter Company.

JULY
COMBAT OPERATIONS

On 20 July, the 68th conducted an airmobile assault with the 30th Avn Ranger Company from Saigon Racetrack to a landing zone, 15 kilometers Southwest, a thirty minute artillery preparation on a suspected Viet Cong Company location prior to the assault. Mustangs reconned the LZ, Received no enemy fire and "marked" with smoke. On the final approach to the LZ both armed helicopters and troop carriers received heavy and intense automatic weapons fire from dikes and canal lines scattered throughout the area. Shot down by enemy fire, one gunship crashed and exploded on impact, instantly killing three of the crew members. The fourth crew member died a short time later. Three troop carriers also sustained hits by automatic weapons fire. Killed in action that day were pilots WO Daniel A. Lambdin, WO Ronald J. Kinkeade and crew members SP4 Walter R. Tate Jr. and David A. Dillon.

Maintenance

Aircraft availability rose sharply to an average of 90.3 per cent for the month. Hours in the air totaled 1,845 with 4,766 sorties flown.

Miscellaneous

The company completed movement from Vung Tau to its new home at Bien Hoa. No loss of flight time from assigned missions resulted from the move.

Awards and Decorations

During the month of July the members of the unit received 1 Distinguished Flying Cross and 135 Air Medals.

AUGUST COMBAT OPERATIONS

On 1 August, in support of the 25th Division, a battalion size mission was flown into an area known to have a regimental size force of Viet Cong. B-52's pounded the area, not including the landing zone prior to the assault. No pre-strike was conducted, with the exception of a 5 minute preparation by an armed helicopter light fire team.

Eleven company aircraft received automatic weapons fire. One was shot down, six crew members were wounded and one crew member was killed, Pvt Richard C. Kitner. All companies involved received an exceedingly high number of hits. The 68th took a total of twenty six of the eleven aircraft hit.

Administration

The company's Commanding Officer, James H. Cook left the company to assume a new position in the 145th Aviation Battalion Staff. His successor, Major Edward B. Covington III assumed command of the 68th Assault Helicopter Company 5 August 1966.

Awards and Decorations

Five Air Medals with "V" devices were awarded during the month as well as 150 Air Medals, one Purple Heart and the Distinguished Flying Cross to CWO Michael Lindell.

Maintenance

Aircraft availability was reported as 80.7 per cent for the month. The "Top Tigers" flew 2,188 hours while making 6,310 sorties.

Miscellaneous

Spare time during the company's 1st month at Bien Hoa was spent improving the BOQ and laying concrete for the beginning of the new Officer's club.

SEPTEMBER COMBAT OPERATIONS

Only four days of company size operations were flown during September. Numerous combat sorties were flown in support of the 25th Infantry Division. On the 23rd of September the flight encountered heavy automatic weapons fire while entering a landing zone several kilometers Southeast of Ben Tre. Four aircraft were hit in the LZ in which the mustangs had killed five Viet Cong earlier that day.

The "Top Tigers" were called upon to supply a platoon and a heavy fire team to support a classified operation. During the operation, four men were lost when they were caught in a severe thunderstorm. Missing in action are 1LT Charles S. Abel, WO Edwin R. Higgins, SFA Kenneth R. Bertsch, and a Navy personnel, training as a gunner with the 68th.

Awards and Decorations

One Distinguished Flying Cross, two Purple Hearts, and seventy-five Air Medals were awarded members of the unit during September.

Civic Action

The "Top Tigers" accepted sponsorship of the Binh Co hamlet during the month. A warm reception was given by the villagers and donations of soap, clothing and other necessities were given on the first visit. Donations given by the company made "Viet Namese Children's Day," a national Holiday, a reality.

Maintenance

Aircraft availability was reported as 76.2 per cent for the month. Total sorties were 5,380 with 1,811 hours flown.

OCTOBER
COMBAT OPERATIONS

On 2 October the unit supported Detachment B, 56th Special Forces Group with 42 combat sorties. The remainder of the company size operations for the month were in support of various units of the 25th Infantry Division. No combat damage was sustained during the operation. Although many enemy rounds were fired, they failed to hit their mark.

Again the unit was requested to participate in the before mentioned classified mission. During SIGMA operations the company maintained its outstanding record of professionalism and reflected in its ability to adapt to new and different situations. The fact that the 68th was specifically asked to do the job, reaffirms the high regard for the company's professional abilities.

Awards and Decorations

During the month of October the following awards were received by members of the unit: Five Bronze Star Medals for Valor, Two Bronze Star Medals for Meritorious Service, Two Air Medals for Valor, Ten Army Commendation Medals, four Purple Hearts, and twenty Five Air Medals.

Civil Affairs

Villagers of the Binh Co hamlet became increasingly friendly and appreciative of the company's help. Over 325 patients were treated by the MEDCAP team; soap, soup, clothes and other necessities continue on their way to the village from members of the company.

Maintenance

On the increase, aircraft availability was up to 87.4 per cent for the month. Sorties flown amounted to 6,053 with a total of 2,135 flying hours.

Miscellaneous

After many hours of hard work by all the officers of the company, the new club was ready for work. The old club in the BOJ was dismantled and salvageable items were moved to its new location.

The enlisted club continued to have good business in the rear of the mess hall. New furniture was added, giving the "Tiger's Den" a new and relaxing atmosphere.

NOVEMBER
COMBAT OPERATIONS

"Sigma" was again supported by the "Top Tigers". The lifts spent nearly two weeks each on the operation, switching places mid month. For the Tigers remaining at Bien Hoa, direct combat support missions were on the schedule.

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Awards received by members of the 68th for November were as follows:

One Silver Star Medal for Valor, three Soldiers Medals for Heroism, two Bronze Star Medals for Valor, nine Bronze Star Medals for Meritorious Service, twenty-three Army Commendation Medals for Meritorious Service, two Purple Heart Medals for Wounds Received in Action, five Vietnamese Crosses of Gallantry, sixty-one Basic Air Medals, sixty-three Oak Leaf Clusters for the Air Medal.

CIVIC ACTIONS

On 2 November, a trip to Binh Co was postponed due to an enemy attack of the village prior to the company representatives arrival. The V.C., apparently unhappy with the 68th success with winning friends among the villagers, warned the villagers not to see Americans or accept anything offered by them. On 8 November, representatives of the company arrived to be greeted by only half the villagers expected. As gifts were given out the crowd increased and soon all the clothing and candy had been given out. The Med Cap Team also were able to treat 20 of the ailing villagers.

MAINTENANCE

Dropping nearly 10 per cent from the previous month, aircraft availability was reported as 78.46 per cent. The ships flew 4,507 sorties during 1,476 flying hours.

DECEMBER
COMBAT OPERATIONS

On 9 December, the 68th supported the 2nd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division by conducting resupply of the 1/5 Mech and by conducting three combat assaults and three extractions of the 1/27 Infantry Battalion. Working out of the 1/27 Infantry Command Post area, ten kilometers North East of Co Dau Ha, the company flew ten landings some five kilometers South West of Ben Suc. During three lifts into the area, small arms and automatic weapons fire were received from all quadrants, even from within fifty meters of the friendly mechanized unit. Landing the second time, two first lift helicopters detonated Viet Cong land mines which caused severe damage to each aircraft. Crews were soon evacuated shaken but having only light injuries among them. After completion of the third lift it was determined that six of the nine troop carriers had sustained combat damage. This fact initiated the placement of the 71st Assault Helicopter Company under operational control of the 68th.

During pick up and rigging of the two downed Hueys, the UH-1B at the 56th Transportation Detachment detonated another mine and also had to be evacuated by OH-47. Two other aircraft were given temporary repairs for a one time flight to Bien Hoa.

ADMINISTRATION

When Major Edward B. Covington III moved up to a position with the 145th Aviation Battalion, Major William T. Kaser left his position as Commanding Officer of the 391st Transportation Detachment to become the Company's new Commanding Officer.

DECORATIONS AND AWARDS

The following decorations were received by members of the company during December:

Two Soldiers Medals for Heroism, two Bronze Stars Medals for Meritorious Service, forty-six Air Medals for Sustained Operations and two Army Commendation Medals for Meritorious Service.

CIVIC ACTIONS

On 24 December 1966, the company held a Christmas Party for the people of Binh Co village (12 miles North of Tan Uyen). Children received candy, adults were presented with hats and clothing. The Red Cap Team,

led by Captain White treated 87 of the villagers. The project was coordinated by Major Kaser (Commanding Officer), Captain Kramer (Project Officer), WO1 George Lapan (Assistant Project Officer), Major Miller (Chaplain), and Dr White (Medical Officer). In all, two hundred children were present, sixty-five needy families were helped, 550 toys were distributed with fifty pounds of clothing and 200 hats.

AVAILABILITY

Availability was reported at 67.4 per cent while aircraft tallied 11,055 sorties in 1,843 hours.

SUMMARY

The 60th Assault Helicopter Company has progressed in one year from a young, inexperienced unit to a seasoned assault helicopter company, comprised of members who take great pride in their unit and its history. Loss and injury of comrades are not taken lightly, they only increase the will to work just that much harder to accomplish the mission in the most professional manner. A standard was set from the start by Commanding Officer, Major Heldon F. Honeycutt, who assumed his position 1 September 1965. Major Honeycutt set a standard through his outstanding performance in Viet Nam, leading every company size operation during his tour and on occasion, endangering his own life to accomplish the mission. Unsurprisingly, similar qualities have reflected in his own men and all who have followed to date.

In beginning "Sigma", in September 1966, the company tackled the job, only to be "hit back" with four of its men missing in action. Missions such as Sigma afforded the company an opportunity to prove its ability to rebound readily and to adjust to a completely new flying situation. Taking the job in professional stride, the "Top Tigers" have been asked again and again to return to DO THE JOB.