

History of The  
81<sup>st</sup> Transportation Company (Light Hel)  
&  
119<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light)

1 January, 1963 - 31 December, 1963

APO. SAN FRANCISCO 96295

PLEIKU.

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM

**HISTORY OF THE**  
**81ST TRANSPORTATION COMPANY (LIGHT HEL)**  
**&**  
**119TH AVIATION COMPANY (AIR MOBILE LIGHT)**  
**1 JANUARY 1963 - 31 DECEMBER 1963**

**Prepared by**  
**1st Lt Serrell, Howard P Jr**

**Approved By:**

**DONALD A SMITH**  
**Major           CE**  
**Commanding**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Administration	1
Operations	6
Training	7
Transition	18
Appendix	
A	25
B	26
Index	27
	28

## Introduction

The purpose of this history is to provide an accurate and complete narrative of the major activities of the 81st Transportation Company, (Lt Hel) and the 119th Aviation Company, (Air Mobile, Light) during the past year, 1 January 63 through 31 December 63.

The reorganization and redesignation of helicopter companies in Vietnam necessitates combining the unit histories of the two units above. For purposes of continuity the histories will be treated as one, with appropriate mention of the reorganization and redesignation in the proper sequence of events.

To better understand several of the problems that were confronted by the units during the past year, the following information is provided.

After eight years of inactivity, the 81st Transportation Company was reactivated at Fort Riley, Kansas, in September of 1957. The company was equipped with twenty-one CH-21C helicopters.

During the next four years of training at Fort Riley, the 81st participated in many support activities through the midwestern United States. In October of 1961 the company began a westward journey that was to eventually end on the central plateau of South Vietnam. Meanwhile, an interim stop was made in Hawaii where the company was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks.

The various training exercises performed in Hawaii, particularly in the field of Jungle and Guerilla warfare, well

prepared the company for the type of flying they were to encounter in Vietnam.

On 3 August 1962, the unit was alerted for a PCS to South Vietnam. From 31 August 1962 to 15 October 1962, the 81st successfully moved men and equipment to its new home in Pleiku, South Vietnam. Under the command of Major George Aldridge, Jr. the company was fully operational by the 15th of October.

Of interest is the fact that the men of the 81st learned that their tour in Hawaii would count towards the completion of the Vietnam tour on a two month for one month basis. Thus, these officers and men served only a six or seven month tour rather than the normal twelve.

Perhaps the most fitting explanation for the year 1963 is that it was a year of change. The following history will attempt to show that the officers and men of the two companies met the many necessary changes with flexibility, aggressiveness and imagination. There in lies the secret to the success of the 81st Transportation Company and the 119th Aviation Company in the II Corps Tactical zone.

## ADMINISTRATION

The new year of 1963 started like all years in Pleiku, Vietnam, with the wind blowing the powdery red dust into swirls that rose more furiously whenever a CH-21 Helicopter hovered off on a mission. Major George Adridge Jr was in command of the 81st Transportation Company (Light Helicopter) with Captain Paul Anderson serving as his executive Officer. Captain Floyd Tiemann directed the Operations of the Company while 1st Sgt Melvin Staples served as troop commander. Together they presided over a company of 13 Officer, 26 Warrant Officers, 87 Enlisted Men, and 19 CH-21 Helicopters organized into two Platoons.

The mountain vacation-land of Vietnam, as Pleiku is referred to, is a dusty, red, windswept hilltop upon which rested an antiquated French Airstrip and rows of tents mixed in with the rising "hootches of the future." Though such things as showers were a luxury, there were compensations in that free movies were shown on the wind flapped screen and all the fresh air one could want was available. The cool nights, all realized, were a blessing in a tropical country like Vietnam where the heat and humidity can make one wake up thinking he had just taken a hot shower and had forgotten to dry off.

Soon came March, and on the 18th of that month the command of the Company changed hands. At a ceremony which saw green tabs exchanged by the Commanding Officer, the Executive Officer, and the 1st Sergeant, with their successors, Major John W. Martin, Captain Richard F. Beck, and 1st Sgt Melvin Lee were installed. Captain Donald Coggins assumed the position of Operations Officer. The company had grown considerably,

and the new command staff presided over a unit of 32 Officers, 32 Warrant Officers and 118 Enlisted Men.

Transition was on its way in. The first transition was in the climate. The wind gave way to clouds, the clouds to rain, and the dust to mud. What before had been soft dust became a sea of mud. But as the weather changed, so did the landscape. Where there had been tents, there were now wooden barracks and PSP lining the walkways. What had been referred to as Old Pleiku was renamed Camp Holloway on 15 May in honor of CWO Charles E. Holloway who had been killed in action. The outdoor theatre was replaced by an indoor movie house with projection booths named for Floyd Davis who had been killed in an aircraft accident earlier in the year. Sidewalks were planned, and structures began to take shape; a barbershop and laundry, the Wetsu Inn EM Club and the BVG Inn Officers Club. Roads began to be forged.

The greatest transition, however, came in General Order 236, USARYLS, dated 14 June 1963, which inactivated the 61st Transportation Company and activated the 119th Aviation Company. With a change in name came a change in structure and equipment. The CH-21s were crated up and replaced by new UH-1B (Huey) Helicopters. A third platoon was formed to accommodate the new "flying tigers" those UH-1B aircraft armed with the XM-6 Machine Gun Kit and 16 2.75 Rocket Pods. The 676. M03 gave way to 675. and the 545th Transportation Detachment and 70th Signal Detachments also transitioned their equipment and training in order to maintain support for their parent unit. Pilots were re-trained, and mechanics and crew chiefs attended schools conducted by Bell Helicopter representatives to re-train

in their respective jobs. Soon the transition was finished, without losing momentum in our field operations Captain Ceggins, having completed a job well done, turned operations over to Captain Billy Tedlock in July of 1963 to become 3rd Platoon Leader.

Time seems never to stand still nor does change. The transition over, personnel changes began to take place. New Commanders began to take the helm as the predecessors returned to CONUS Doctor George Ingraham, flight surgeon and Commanding Officer of the 94th Medical Detachment which services the 119th Avn Co, turned over his command to Captain Anthony S Klein. Captain Wainford Cantrell, Commanding Officer of the 70th Signal Avionics Detachment exchanged places with Captain James Weatherman, and as September approached, so did a change of command in the 119th Aviation Company.

On 4 September 1963 before a ceremony witnessed by General Stillwell, Commanding General of USASGV, Major Martin gave his leadership tabs to Major Donald A Smith. Major Smith assumed command of 45 Officers, 9 Warrant Officers, and 123 Enlisted Men. Shortly thereafter, 1st Sgt Lee handed his troop command over to 1st Sgt John H Butcher.

The rainy season started coming to an end, and everyone celebrated at a gigantic party thrown by the 119th Avn Co which attracted Officers from all of II Corps. Entertainment included radio personalities from Saigon and local minstrels of Old Pleiku. Barbecued water buffalo was among the exotic foods served at the feast. Two trailer loads of free beer were devoured by thirsty combat crewmen. But the end of the rainy season was not all the troops were celebrating. The barbershop and laundry were an operating reality as well as cement walks. Roads were near completion



and new hangers and maintenance areas were already in use. A new motor pool was just around the corner, and was completed in December a tennis and basketball court adjoined by a volleyball court. In addition a new PX and a library were on the schedule.

By Christmas 1963 the library, new PX, new Motor pool and roads became a reality. But with all the changes in personnel, commanders, equipment and aircraft, Old Pleiku still maintains some of its old traditions. The ever present wind, dust, or mud.

During the delay, the Viet Cong forces had withdrawn from the Plei Mrong area, leaving behind not only a number of Montagnard casualties, but also a legacy of camp conspiracy that was to come under the close scrutiny of II Corps commanders. Nevertheless, the 81st Trans. Company had reacted to the crisis as rapidly as circumstances permitted, providing much needed relief for the men of Plei Mrong.

Twelve days later, on 15 January, the company found that the Viet Cong do not always withdraw. In a small landing area approximately eight miles southeast of Dak Bot, three ships of the 81st. were hit by a total of eleven rounds. The lead aircraft, piloted by 1/Lt. John D. Lewis., picked up seven of these rounds just prior to and while landing in the area. Later intelligence was to reveal that the ARVN troops landed in the area reported no contact with the Viet Cong.

As if to point out the importance of the attack on Plei Mrong, General Earle Wheeler, Chief of Staff, United States Army, and a party of thirty-one arrived at New Pleiku airfield on 20 January and were flown to Plei Mrong by the 81st. Included in General Wheeler's party were Lt. Gen. Theodore Parker, Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations US Army; Major General Victor Krulak, Chief of Counter Insurgency, US. Marine Corps; and Major General Charles Timmes, Chief, MAAG, Vietnam.

Throughout the month of January the 81st. Trans. Company continued to provide support to the Kontum, Cheo Reo, and Ban Me Thuot on a full time basis supporting the 23rd. Infantry Division. Future events would prove that the Ban Me Thuot area was not only a rugged and dangerous location for pilots, but also was a fine training ground for the inexperienced pilots who were beginning to arrive in the company.

## OPERATIONS

The warning order came at 0315 hours on 3 January, 1963. Plei Mrong, a Special Forces strike force training camp 25 miles north of Pleiku had been attacked and overrun by an estimated battalion of Viet Cong. Treachery and collusion within the camp had allowed the first elements of the attacking force to enter the camp without resistance. Now, in the early hours of the morning, Captain William Grace, Leader of Special Forces team 3/4 at Plei Mrong, was sending out an emergency message requesting heliborne reinforcements in face of the vicious surprise attack.

At Old Pleiku, home of the 81st Transportation Company, Lt Col, Major George Aldridge, commander of the Company, had wakened his men in preparation for a possible troop lift to Plei Mrong. Finally, at 0530 hours confirmation of the impending disaster arrived at the Country Club (1), with an initial request for ten CH 21 helicopters. Details for the first lift into the proposed landing zone were completed and at 0650 hours the first lift of ten CH 21's took off from Country Club. With Major Aldridge and CWO Paul Bertrand in the lead aircraft, the first flight set down in a landing zone approximately one kilometer northeast of Plei Mrong. Plan called for the aircraft to return to a staging area. Flying continued that day until 1630 hours, with a total of 560 troops and 6710 pounds of ammunition being lifted into the immediate Plei Mrong area.

Of interest was the fact that there had apparently been a break down in communications between Captain Grace and the outside world, causing a delay of more than three hours before the troops could be lifted in to reinforce the hamlet.

(1) "Country Club" was the tower call sign until redesignated Holloway on 15 May.

Replacements. Surely there is no dearer word to aviators in Vietnam, and slowly but surely the 81st was getting new blood, new blood to replace the old going home after their six or seven month tour in Vietnam. With the new pilots came the necessity for a training program to quickly adapt them to the rigors of flying in the rugged mountain terrain of II Corps without interfering with normal operations. Since so many of the pilots arriving would be fresh from flight school, special care was taken to insure that each new pilot received a careful check-out before turning him loose with even an experienced hand. Thus, a minimum of ten hours of traffic pattern work, to include loads and slings, was required of every replacement arriving in the 81st. Responsibility for the training program fell on the shoulders of Captain Floyd Tieman, operations officer. It would be this training program that would have to carry the 81st. in the months ahead when the experienced pilots departed for CONUS. January became February, and on the fifth of that month General Charles Timmes arrived from Saigon for an inspection tour. Members of the 81st. flew the General to Chao Reo and points south, where he expressed much interest in the new bridge being constructed south of Chao Reo on the road to Tuy Hoa.

It was on 6 Feb. the Company received word of an RB 26 aircraft that had crashed somewhere north of Pleiku. For the next two days helicopters were diverted from the normal missions to search for the downed aircraft. On the afternoon of the sixth of February, aircraft from the 81st located the wreckage of the B 26 25 miles northeast of Pleiku and immediately ferried ARVN Rangers into the area to secure the aircraft. Accompanying the ground party on their way into the wreckage was Sgt E-5 Kenneth Martin of the 70th Signal Detachment. Thanks to Sgt Martin's

efforts, communications were established between the crash site and the search aircraft from the 81st. Once he had reached the site, Sgt. Martin relayed the message that only one body was to be found, making it apparent that the American navigator and the Vietnamese observer had parachuted to safety. While Sgt. Martin remained on the ground to disconnect and remove the weapons from the B 26, and intensive air search began for the two survivors.

After two days of constant searching, Lt. John D. Lewis spotted the lone American survivor, 1/Lt James Johnson of Winterhaven, Florida. Despite the fact that Johnson was located in an extremely confined area amidst the jungle Lt. Lewis decided to attempt a pick up. A vertical approach was required to make the landing, and a vertical ascent needed to take off.

Shortly after the rescue of the American, an aircraft piloted by CWO Raymond O' Cain and Captain Emmett Faulk of the 81st picked up the Vietnamese observer. It was learned that the two survivors had indeed parachuted to safety while the pilot rode the aircraft down to his death.

Meanwhile, on this same eight of February, at the coastal city of Quang Ngai helicopters from the 81st were combining with aircraft from the 8th Transportation Company at Qui Nhon for an assault mission against the 50th Viet Cong Battalion. Not one of the twenty helicopters involved were struck by ground fire. A possible explanation for this success came from Captain Paul Anderson, Executive Officer of the 81st, who reported in his after-mission report that:

Support rendered by the two RB 26's was outstanding. Pre-strikes as planned were executed with precision and in all instances as requested by the control aircraft. (2)

(2) From a combat after-mission report dated 8 Feb 63.

In contrast to the mission on 8 Feb., was the assault mission of 20 Feb. Again combining with the 8th Trans. Company, the 81st. sent three ships to Quang Ngai in the pre-assault briefing. Pilots were instructed not to lay down suppressive fire unless they were fired upon. Consequently, of the three ships sent by the 81st. two were struck by Communist ground fire while landing. From this time on, the 81st. Trans. Company adopted a policy of free firing while landing in an assault area.

During the month of February, two of the Company CH 21's crashed and were declared total losses. On the sixth of the month, 56-2 037 piloted by Mr. Bertrand and Lt. Sam Harrison suffered a control failure on downwind leg in the traffic pattern while on a training mission. Eyewitnesses to this crash claim that the helicopter fell like a leaf until it hit ground going backwards. There were no injuries.

On 11 Feb, 893, flown by GWO Michael Martin and 1/Lt William Zensen crashed while attempting a pinnacle approach northeast of Dak To. A high density altitude and the 5000 foot pinnacle were the factors causing this crash. Both pilots and the two crew members escaped without injuries.

24 Feb. was a day that brought grief to Old Pleiku and members of the 81st, for on this day the Company incurred its second combat loss. PFC Charles McCarey was shot and killed while serving as a gunner on board a CH 21C that was stationed at Ban Me Thuot. McCarey's aircraft was orbiting at 1500 feet while on a mercy medical evacuation mission in the vicinity of Phan Thiet, III Corps. The fatal wound, believed to have been fired from a cal. 30 automatic weapon, struck PFC McCarey in the back. Of interest are the actions of the other aircraft on this mission. The two CH 21's had been ordered to perform the medical evacuation in a

relatively insecure areas. Red panels and red smoke would be used by the ground party to indicate a secure landing zone. While one aircraft orbited (the one in which McCarey was flying), the second helicopter, piloted by 1/Lt Robert Seiler, started an approach to a properly designated landing area marked by red panels and red smoke when a man in a red hat appeared giving hand signals. When the aircraft had descended to an altitude of fifty feet and was preparing to touch down, enemy ground fire suddenly broke out on all sides. Lt Seiler immediately aborted the landing and began a go-around. Fire from the ground shot away one of the hanger bearings in the aircraft, and a forced landing was made only a few hundred yards from the enemy ground forces. Fortunately, the selected touchdown area was the site of an ARVN artillery unit. This bold attempt by the Viet Cong to lure an American helicopter into close firing range strongly reemphasized the necessity for closely checking and rechecking all insecure landing zones.

By March, the 51st, Trans. Company had instituted the transition program for new replacements without sacrificing operational readiness. However, it was the opinion of many of the officers that the Company should have set aside a certain number of aircraft each day for transition alone. It was their contention that a few weeks of concentrated training in place of one or two Administrative flights per day, would better prepare the newer pilots for the day when they would become aircraft commanders. Because of the large influx of pilots during the month of February, and because normal missions had to be carried out, many of the new pilots did not have a chance to complete his transition into the CH-21. However, at no time was a man sent into the air until he was considered fully capable by the unit standardization pilot.

General James Collins, Commander US Army, Pacific, arrived at Old Pleiku on 13 March for an inspection tour of the airfield and its facilities. During his stay, General Collins presented several airmedals to the members of the 81st Trans. Company.

Major George Aldridge flew his last combat assault mission in Vietnam on 15 March before being replaced by Major John W Martin. Significant on that day was the arrival of the Utility Tactical Transport Company from Saigon to support the combined mission of the 81st and 8th Trans. Companies. This marked this first time that either of the two helicopter companies in II Corps had used the armed UH1B helicopters for support. Staging out of An Khe airfield, the 81st and the 8th assaulted a steep ridgeline to the South-west of An Khe, making three lifts into two different drop zones. Original plans called for the use of three drop zone, but inclement weather in and around the second area forbid its use. While trying to land on the sharply inclined ridgeline, many of the CH 21's encountered difficulty, not only because of the slope, but also because of the high elephant grass and severe turbulence, resulting in a number of overspeeds and overboosts. During the after mission de-briefing the problems found in the landing areas were closely analyzed, with the resulting conclusion that a proper low level reconnaissance of the area had not been made. It was decided that future pre-mission recons would include a careful low level drag over the area if it was at all feasible.

The Ban Me Thuot area once again reared up and dealt the 81st. a sad blow . On 21 March, PFC Floyd Davis, an eighteen year gunner, was fatally injured when the H 21 on which he was crewing lost power and altitude simultaneously while taking off out of a steep valley. Both pilots, CWO O'Cain and WO Bobby L.



Hollis sustained broken arms and minor internal injuries. The death of Davis brought the company's total of fatalities in Vietnam to three, including that of CWO Charles Holloway in December of 1962, and the previously mentioned McCarey.

By the end of March the 81st. was in the process of completing an almost one hundred percent changeover in personnel. Many of the personnel concerned were leaving the 81st for the first time after joining the company when it was reactivated in 1957. The many years of working together was the primary cause for the unit's success upon arriving in Vietnam. During the period 15 October 1962 through 18 March 1963, the 81st Trans. Company and its attached unit, the 545 Transportation Detachment (CHFM), 94th Medical Detachment and the 70th Signal Detachment performed in such a manner as to earn a recommendation for the Aviation Meritorious Unit Commendation from Colonel Hal McGowan, Senior Advisor, II Corps. While engaged in combat support of II Corps during the aforementioned period, the 81st flew 4,262 hours of combat support time, hauled 922,637 pounds of cargo, 161,69 passengers, and flew 26 assault missions.

The strength of the unit would now be tested to see whether or not inexperienced pilots could carry on the tradition of efficiency so firmly started. Further, the training received by aviators at Fort Wolters and Fort Rucker was to be soundly tested.

The 52nd Aviation Battalion, whose advance party had been in Old Pleiku since the middle of March, officially assumed command of the 81st. Transportation Company on 1 April 1963. Commanded by Lt. Col. William C. Seibert, the Battalion Headquarters promised more support for the companies, not only operationally but also administratively. One of the largest heliborne assaults in the history of Vietnam took

planes on the third of April. Nick-named operation "LinDoi", the assault saw helicopters from the 81st. Trans. Co., the 8th. Trans. Co., and the 33rd. Trans. Co, from Bien Hoa supported by the UTH helicopter Co, land in a large sloping field Northeast of Ban Me Thuot. Despite the large number of aircraft, the operation went off extremely smoothly thanks to the effective ground control party commanded by Lt. Harold Huff of the 81st.

Two supply missions in the month of April are noteworthy in that they brought important items to previously isolated areas. On the 12th of the month a CH-21 piloted by CWO Rhonda Schuman and Lt. Howard Searell landed on top of a 4722 foot mountain ten kilometers north of Pleiku, bringing a vital cargo of fuel and food for the new Signal relay site. Henceforth, the mountain was called Signal Mountain.

One day later, another CH 21 piloted by Lt. Wayne Hanson and Lt. Roland Davis ferried the first generator into the Special Forces team at Mang Buk, thus bringing light and power to this remote camp for the first time.

Redistributing and resettling the refugee Mountagnard peoples was and will continue to be an important concept in the war in Vietnam. On the twelfth of April, General Paul Harkins Commander MACV arrived at New Pleiku airfield and was transported by the 81st to inspect a new strategic hamlet at Dak Bot. The General and his party received a warm welcome from these people who were later to learn that their location was not as idial as it seemed.

In the early hours of the morning on 27 April 1963, the Viet Cong successfully attacked and overran an ARVN artillery unit at the village of Vic Klum to the north and east of Plateau Gi. The 81st was alerted on the morning of the 27th and immediately scrambled all available aircraft for a troop lift

into Vic Kham. Five aircraft departed Country Club for the staging area at Kontum airfield where they were joined by two other CH 21's from the 81st that had been diverted from another mission and two VNAF H-34's, for a total of nine aircraft. The mission of the 81st was to haul reinforcements into the besieged area and to haul the many wounded out. On the first lift only seven out of nine helicopters were able to land in the drop zone because of the intense enemy fire. A MAAG advisor on the ground later reported that the Viet Cong had apparently surrounded the entire landing site and were firing at all aircraft as they landed. Aircraft number 56 2 039, piloted by CWO Andrew Pullen and Lt. Jewett Fowler escaped near disaster when a mortar round exploded directly in front of their aircraft on take off, sending fragments through the glass bubble. Because of the extended ground time needed to load the casualties into the helicopters, the Viet Cong had time to zero in on the waiting aircraft.

The 27th of April was the first taste of combat for many of the pilots in the 81st, as well as for the new gunnery platoon from the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. Commanded by Lt. George Hartford, this platoon was expected to provide skilled firepower from the gunners position on the CH 21. During the next three months this platoon was to prove its worth time and time again.

Normal resupply missions at Ban Me Thout and Kontum were carried out by the company throughout April, keeping ARVN well stocked with rice, fish, pigs, and many generous portions of Nuoc Nam.

As April turned into May, the company received word of a three day mission in the Quang Nhai area. Combining again with helicopters from the 8th Trans. Company at Chi Nhon, the 81st departed for Quang Nhai on

the third of May with 13 CH 21's, where it joined with the helicopters from Qui Nhon, from there the two companies moved north to Tam Ky, where they were joined by the armed UH1B helicopters from the UTT. Tam Ky, a small and extremely dusty air strip along the South China Sea was to be home for the next three days. Men came equipped with field gear and the barest necessities needed to keep their aircraft flying for the duration of the mission.

On the day of the first assault, both companies made total of eleven lifts into an extremely poor landing zone to the southwest of another small and dusty airfield called Tra Ky. Almost 1600 troops were set down amidst large boulders in the middle of a river, an LZ that sorely taxed both aircraft and pilots. The briefing prior to take off had assured the pilots that they would be landing on soft sandbars, and would encounter little difficulty. Shortly after first lift two phrases were coined that will live forever in the minds of the pilots who flew that day; "The Valley of Death," and "Texas sand Bars."

The remaining two days were uneventful as the helicopters resupplied the assault troops with sling loads. Upon concluding the requirements of the mission, the 81st returned with the 8th to Qui Nhon to pull last minute maintenance before returning to Pleiku.

A major project for the rest of the month was to obtain a respectable degree of flyability so that the normal missions could be carried out. The bulk of May flying took place at Ban Me Thuot where a crew of six was stationed with three aircraft. Because of the maintenance difficulties now being experienced by the company, the long range activities carried on by the Ban Me Thuot aircraft proved to be a burden on the 81st Maintenance section, and on the 545 (CHFM) Det.

It was therefore decided by MACV, that support of the Ban Me Thuot area would be by the 45th battalion since it was in III Corps area.

One of the more spectacular displays of flying skill of the year occurred during May between Ban Me Thuot and Dalat. Lt Philip Kimak, flying aircraft number 51-896 suffered a complete engine failure while over the high, uneven terrain that exists south of Ban Me Thuot. In order to set his helicopter down without damage, Lt Kimak had to complete a 390 degree autorotation to a small clearing at an altitude of 4700 feet, which, by coincidence, was the only flat area within ten miles.

One of the more important events in the history of the past year was the renaming of the Old Pleiku complex. Lt Col. Sibert Commanding Officer of the 52d Aviation Battalion put into writing the proclamation that the field would no longer be called the Country Club, but would be renamed in honor of CWO Charles Holloway who was killed in December 1962. The official designation of the airfield became Holloway Army Airfield, and the camp was unofficially called Camp Holloway.

The persistent rumor that the 81st would be the first H 21 Company in Vietnam to reorganize under the ROAD concept and receive brand new UH1B turbine powered helicopters, became a fact early in June. At this point all H 21 transition for the new pilots reporting into Holloway stopped,

and those pilots who had at one time been inexperienced but who had been baptized at Tan Ky shouldered the load with the flyable aircraft available.

At An Khe airfield, these pilots proved that their success at Tan Ky had been no fluke when they successfully navigated the perils of area Whiskey, an assault landing area northeast of the airfield. Finally, then, the training program, the long hours of practice on slow time aircraft had paid off, earning the respect of the veteran pilots of the 8th, as well as a personal respect for the CH 21.

Perhaps more than any other month, June was the month of change. Each day seemingly produced worse weather than the day before, and gradually the dust that had coated both men and machine was replaced by an ever deepening sea of mud.

The normal resupply runs to Mang Suk, Plateau Gi, and remote Special Forces Camps became battles between the pilot, the aircraft and the weather. Impatient MAAG advisors on the ground - could not readily understand why the pilots would abort missions because of turbulence or bad weather, and as a result both aviator and advisor grew short of temper.

However, on 27 June the first of the new "Thuesys" arrived in Saigon, and crews consisting mainly of new pilots who had been assigned to the 81st because of their UH1B flying experience, went to Saigon to ferry the aircraft to Nha Trang where the transition program would take place.

Meanwhile, effective 14 June 1963, the 81st. Transportation Company, Lt. Hel. was redesignated the 119th Aviation Company, (Air Mobile Light) per General Order #236. Reorganization of the Company would have to wait until the full complement of twenty-five UH1B's arrived in Pleiku.

In order to instigate a transition program that would not seriously hamper support operations in the Corps area, Major Martin decided to leave half the

company in Pleiku to fly the CH 21 while the other half went to sunny Nha Trang to under go training in the UH1B during the first three weeks of July. Once enough pilots had been trained in the new helicopter, they would fly eight of the new ships back to Camp Holloway where they would take up supporting II Corps while the other half of the company transitioned.

Training at Nha Trang consisted of the following items: Actual flight transition was made of ten hours of instruction. For those pilots who would become a part of the new armed platoon there was an additional three hour block of instruction on the weapons system, to include practice firing runs with machine gun and rocket kits. In addition to the flying, an eleven hour ground school was taught by the Mobile training team from Fort Rucker, Alabama, in accordance with Department of Army Regulations.

CH 21 Flights in the month of July were confined to the resupply of Mang Buk, Plateau Gi, and a remote outpost near the Laotian border, Poi Jar. Take offs almost every day were delayed until almost noon because of the highly inclement weather. On 20 July, the Advisory Team at Kontum asked if two CH 21's from the 119th could participate in a fly by in memory of SGT. Freeman, the only American killed when the Viet Cong overran the outpost at Uic Klum. This mission was accomplished in conjunction with the 73rd Aviation Company.

Finally, one afternoon in the middle of July, the first Hueys belonging to the 119th Aviation made their appearance over Camp Holloway. It was shortly after their arrival that the UH1B's began to show their merit, and on 27 July the Company achieved an Army Aviation first in Vietnam. On that date, an assault mission was flown into a landing zone at an altitude of 4,700 feet the highest yet flown against the Viet Cong. A total of 88 troops were lifted

into the landing area by seven transport UH1B's, escorted by three of the company's own armed "Tiger" Huey's. Of primary importance is the fact that this landing zone would have been nearly inaccessible to the CH 21. From this date on, the nature of landing areas could be radically altered; greater height and more confinement could be easily accommodated by the Huey.

It was in the month of August, after the second half of the Company had returned from Nha Trang, that the high percent of aircraft availability began to pay off. From 9 Aug 63, through 22 Aug 63 six major assault type missions were flown against the Viet Cong forces in II Corps. Ranging far and wide, from the Laotian and Cambodian borders to the eastern coastal regions, the Huey's were able to rapidly move troops into position against the Viet Cong, with little or no worry about unexpected maintenance difficulties. Over 800 troops were lifted into seven different sites on 345 combat sorties on the six missions.

Of secondary importance during this time was the fact that the Company was still, in theory, testing the UH1B. Different techniques and different loads were tested under actual combat conditions. It was found that eight troops were the maximum that could be safely transported on an assault mission in II Corps. Farther, it was learned that the addition of a thirty-seven pound weight in the tail boom helped to counteract the shift of the center of gravity when fully loaded. The Tiger Platoon also experimented with various patterns of escort and attack until the most economical systems could be obtained. Between the combat assaults and the resupply missions, the Company's flight time for the month of August exceeded 1350 hours, which was considerably more than the H 21's had managed during their last months in Pleiku.



Into September flew the Dragons of Camp Holloway, a name inspired by the new Company patch which replaced the 81st grasshopper. Flights originating at Camp Holloway could end up almost anywhere in I, II, or III Corps. Under the command of Major Donald A Smith who had replaced Major Martin in early September, the company also flew numerous assault missions in which the drop zones were once again steep ridge lines or small clearings in the jungles, proving to ground advisors that helicopters could place troops into combat under almost any given condition.

With speakers blaring and leaflets falling, a new type of helicopter could be found flying over II Corps terrain during September, the Psychological Warfare ship. Flying alone over hostile terrain, the mission of this ship was to spread information to both the friendly and enemy forces. Consequently it was not an uncommon event for the "Psy War" ship to return home with a bullet hole to show for its work.

Highlight of the month was, of course, the visit of Mr. McNamara Secretary of Defense, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Taylor Maxwell to view for themselves the war in Vietnam, in particular, the effect of the Buddhist uprisings on the national war effort. To accommodate the large number of visitors and reporters who were traveling with the Secretary of Defense, the Company was divided into two flights, one for the VIP's and one for the reporters, called "Flashbulb Flight". The lead ship was flown by Lt. Col Sibert and Capt. Robert Jones. Capt Floyd Tieman was the leader of "Flashbulb Flight," with Lt Michael Christain serving as his co-pilot.

The Itinerary for the first day 26 September called for the Company to pick up Mr McNamara at Quang Ngai airfield and transport him to a rehabilitation center southeast of the city, and return.

On the 27th of September, the 119th picked Mr. McNamara and General Taylor up at the II Corps Headquarters for an inspection tour of the Plei Mrong camp. From Plei Mrong, the party journeyed to Kontum to meet their waiting aircraft. For his cooperation with the press accompanying Mr. McNamara and General Taylor, Captain Tiesan received a letter of commendation from the Secretary of Defense's press secretary.

Certainly one of the major accomplishments of this past year, or any year for that matter, was the attainment of the ten-thousand hour flying mark in Vietnam on 5 September 1963. It is important to remember that the 81st. with its CH 21's put most of the time on this record, but that the 119th with the UH1B helicopters enabled the company to reach this mark in less than one year, counting time from 18 September 1962. Reflected in this record is the great ability of the maintenance sections of 81st and 119th helicopter companies, working closely with the 545th (CHPM) Det. and the 70th Signal Det. For without their fine support the finest pilots in the world could not get the aircraft into the air.

In direct contrast with the delayed reaction for the Plei Mrong mission on 3 January, was the company reaction to a Viet Cong attack on Dak Bot on 1 October. Six o'clock in the morning found Major Smith running through the compound waking his pilots in preparation for the troop lift to Dak Bot. Less than one hour later, Assistant Operations Officer Lt. Anthony Vialers reported that the ships were returning to Holloway for the second lift.

A quick look at the terrain between Plateau 01 and Mang Bok would be enough to discourage only the most dedicated of men from attempting to build a road between these two camps. Ragged valleys and thick jungle cover almost every square foot of land. No where is there anything more than a solitary

but to point out civilization to the human eye. However, thanks to the efforts of the 119th Aviation Company, during the month of October a group of American and ARVN engineers were able to construct a road connecting these two outposts. And in doing so they were able to move two heavy bulldozers to Mang Bui to speed the construction of an airfield. Day after day pilots of the 119th found themselves slingloading fuel and rations into the tightest of pads to keep the construction moving. Small luxuries such as mail and beer were often loaded out to the Americans who were advising the ARVN engineers. It is safe to say that without helicopter support, time needed to construct the road would have easily doubled.

During the month of October the Company began to mature and form into a group capable of performing any mission required of them. Formations seemed to get tighter, coordination became smoother, and pride a little bit higher. No longer were the pilots of the 119th the inexperienced hands, and it was time for others to watch and take advice.

Reports of a Viet Cong Battalion moving eastward from the Laotian border toward the vicinity of Mang Bui provided the impetus for a series of assault missions run during the month of November. On the 16th, 18th, and the 29th of the month, the 119th Aviation Company staged out of Kontum for missions running to the north and east against this Battalion.

Immediately after the successful coup in Saigon which brought General Minh into power, the Viet Cong attempted to capitalize upon the confusion that existed in the minds of the people. The number of harassing, attacking and ambushing incidents in II Corps greatly increased as a result of the coup, particularly in and around strategic hamlets where the Viet Cong tried to convince the people that the new rulers in Saigon were actually members of the Viet Cong. To counter this threat, the "Pay War" ship flew overtime,

broadcasting the results of the soup via tape and dropping thousands of leaflets on the hamlets.

The 119th Aviation Company suffered its first major crash with a UH1B helicopter when on 18 November, 2022 of the armed platoon crashed between Camp Holloway and New Pleiku airfield. Despite the extensive damage to the aircraft, all crew members escaped with their lives. Lt William Head, and a gunner from the 25th Infantry Division were evacuated to Nha Trang's Eight Field Hospital for further care; Head with a broken back, and the gunner with a skull fracture.

After a Thanksgiving dinner shared with Vietnamese orphans from the town of Pleiku, the Company prepared to greet the month of December and its lonely holidays away from home. Viet Cong activity had showed considerable, yet during the first week of the month the company ran two assault missions, one to the north of Pleiku, and one to the south. To the north, the mission run along the Laotian border was conducted for the purpose of blocking Viet Cong forces who used the border as refuge. A little more than a week later, in the same landing zone, Henry Kojas, a crew chief on board 2013, was shot and wounded in the head by a Communist sniper. Kojas was evacuated to Nha Trang, though his condition was not serious.

The mission to the south was staged out of Cheo Reo, lifting a Montagnard Strike Force into a landing area southeast of Dak Bot. Accompanying the Strike Force was Det. A of the 114th Special Forces. This team was moving with the Montagnards for the purpose of securing a camp near Plei Da Nang LE from where the An Khe - Cheo Reo road could be closely observed and eventually secured. A secondary but important reason for the troop lift was the fact that this area south of Dak Bot had in recent months become infested with Viet Cong. On

several occasions the VC had moved into Mountagnard willages and forced the people to act as slaves, transporting equipment. Special Forces hoped to eliminate these acts of terrorism.

Those pilots of the 119th who had been stationed at Ban Me Thuot during the past year were saddened to learn of the death of Captain Neura, USAF advisor to the Vietnamese running Pyramid Control, the control radar site. Transports and armed ships from the company helped to search for the downed Otter in which Neura was a passenger.

As the end of the year approached, members of the 119th could look back on a year full of change and challenge. For some it was not yet a full year, for others who had been here longer and had seen the growth of the company all the way through the 81st, it had been a satisfying year. Though Pleiku has little to offer in the way of recreation and relaxation, time has passed surprisingly well. Though the men of Camp Holloway cannot decide which is worse, the rain or the dust, both have been endured and flying techniques developed to make the best of either. Though the changes have often times seemed large and needless, the men of the 81st and the 119th have in most cases reacted with a rather unique flexibility; a flexibility marked with a dedication and a enthusiasm

**APPENDIX**

UNITED STATES ARMY  
MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP, VIETNAM  
II VN CORPS DETACHMENT  
Pleiku, Vietnam

MAATN-110

15 January 1964

SUBJECT: Aviation Meritorious Unit Commendation

THRU: Channels

TO: Chief  
Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam  
APO 143  
U.S. Forces

1. Reference: 81st Transportation Company (Lt Helicopter), APO 95, U.S. Forces, 545 Transportation Det., 94th Med Det., 70th Signal Det., 5th QM Det.
2. During the period 15 October 1962 through 18 March 1963, the 81st Transportation Company (Lt Hel), and its attached units, the 545th Transportation Detachment (Cargo Helicopter Field Maintenance), 94th Medical Detachment, 70th Signal Detachment and the 5th QM Detachment, distinguished themselves through outstanding performance of duty while engaged in combat support of Republic of Vietnam II Corps Operations.
3. During this period, 4,262 hours of combat support time was flown. In these missions, 922,637 pounds of cargo and 16,169 passengers were carried and 26 assault missions were flown. On many of these assaults, enemy troops were present in the landing zone and attempted to repulse the landings by fire. Coordination involved in heliborne operations was continually conducted in an exceptional manner.
4. Operating continually in mountainous terrain and at the maximum capability of the aircraft the company consistently exceeded expectations. This performance was, in a large measure, attributed to the skill of army aviators; the efficiency of maintenance; and the superior teamwork of the company and its detachments.

#### PROPOSED CITATION

Under the provision of WD Circular 345, dated 1944 and pursuant to the approval of the Commanding General, Military Assistance Command Vietnam, the following unit is cited as follows:

The 81st Transportation Company (Lt Helicopter), and its attached units, the 545th Transportation Detachment (Cargo Helicopter Field Maintenance), 94th Medical Detachment, 70th Signal Detachment and the 5th QM Detachment, is cited for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy between 15 September 1962 and 18 March 1963.

During this period the 81st Transportation Company distinguished itself through an outstanding performance of duty in the combat support of Republic of Vietnam Army in the II Corps Tactical Zone. A total of 4,262 hours of Combat Support time was flown, lifting 922,637 pounds of cargo and 16,169 passengers. Performing twenty six (26) large helicopter assault missions, the 81st Transportation Company received ground fire from enemy troops on the landing zones. A total of 46 automatic and small weapons rounds were received by 14 aircraft on nine separate missions, resulting in the death of 1 aviator and 1 crew member, and the wounding of one crew member.

Despite continuous operations under enemy fire, difficult terrain, and maximum load requirements the 81st Transportation Company continuously accomplished the assigned mission. This is in a large measure, attributed to the skill of the pilots, the efficiency of the maintenance, and the superior team work of the company and its detachments.



HEADQUARTERS  
45TH TRANSPORTATION BATTALION (TRANS ACFT)  
APO 143, US Forces

AST-TA

30 March 1963

SUBJECT: Letter of Appreciation

TO: Commanding Officer  
81st Trans Co (Lt Hel)  
APO 95, US Forces

I invite your attention to Inclosure 1, letter of appreciation from Brig General Rollen Anthis, USAF.

It is always gratifying to me to receive such reports from a sister service. I congratulate all officers and men involved in the rescue operation referred to by Gen Anthis. Their actions are a source of pride to all officers and men of this battalion.

I enjoin commanders concerned to officially recognize any individual act of bravery or achievement which may merit an award. Recommendations, if appropriate, should be submitted to this headquarters promptly.

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY

1 Incl  
as

ROBERT L. HOFFMAN  
Lt Col, TC  
Commanding

200R

Letter of Appreciation

Brigadier General Joseph W. Stilwell  
Commanding General  
US Army Support Group, Viet Nam

Dear Joe,

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the commendable efforts displayed by the personnel of your command during the recent search and recovery of the survivors of the B-26 accident in the Pleiku area.

Of special mention is the outstanding individual contribution made by Sgt E-5 Kenneth L. Martin, 70th Signal Detachment, who voluntarily disregarded his personal safety in order to accompany the ARVN Rangers on the rugged jungle climb to the crash site on 6 February 1963. Sgt Martin was the only American with the ARVN Rangers on 6-7 February 1963 and it was through his efforts that the vital communications were established and maintained with the crash site. Sgt Martin personally directed the removal of the guns from the wreckage and the recovery of Major O'Neill's body. This was accomplished only with great difficulty and without regard to personal safety while the smoldering wreckage still contained a large amount of live ordnance. He again accompanied the USAF investigation team and ARVN demolition team on their visit to the crash 10 Feb 1963.

Others deserving special mention are the helicopter aircrews of the 81st Transportation Company, who without regard to personal safety participated willingly in all phases of the search and rescue operations, including actual aerial search, transportation of ARVN Rangers and US personnel to and from the vicinity of the crash and pickup of survivors. A particularly outstanding demonstration of flying skill and professionalism was demonstrated by 1st Lieutenant John D. Lewis and his crew in the successful recovery of the USAF Navigator. This was accomplished in a minimum of time under the most difficult and hazardous condition.

Please convey my personal thanks for a job well done to each of the participating members of your command. It was only through their disregard for personal safety and outstanding skill in maneuvering their aircraft under the most difficult conditions that made possible this successful rescue operation.

ROLLEN E. ANTHIS  
BRIGADIER GENERAL USAF  
Commander

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY

FRANCIS J. LOPES  
Capt, TC  
Adjutant

Index of Names and Places

A

Aldridge, George, Jr. Maj. 11,1,5,11  
 Anderson, Paul, Capt. 1,9  
 An Khe, 11, 17, 24

B

Ban Me Thout, 6, 13, 16  
 Beck, Richard, Capt, 1  
 Bertrand, Paul, CWO, 5,9  
 Butcher, John, Sgt, 3

C

Cambodia, 20  
 Cantrell, Wainford, Capt., 3  
 Cheo Rheo, 6, 7, 24  
 Christain, Michael, 1/Lt, 21  
 Coggins, Donald, Capt, 2  
 Collins, James, General, 11

D

Dak Bot, 6,14,22,24  
 Dak To, 9  
 Davis, Floyd, PFC, 2, 12  
 Davis, Roland, 1/Lt, 14

E

Faulk, Emmett, Capt, 8  
 Fowler, Jewett, 1/Lt, 14

G

Grace, William, Capt, 5

H

Hanson, Wayne, 1/Lt, 13  
 Harkins, Paul, General, 14  
 Harrison, Sammie, 1/Lt, 9  
 Hartford, George, 1/Lt, 15  
 Head, William, 1/Lt, 24  
 Hollis, Bobby, WO, 12  
 Holloway, Charles, CWO, 2, 12, 17  
 Huff, Harold, 1/Lt, 13

I

Ingraham, George, Capt, 3

J

Johnson, James, 1/Lt, 8  
 Jones, Robert, Capt, 21

K

Kimak, Phillip, 2/Lt, 17  
 Klein, Anthony, Capt, 3  
 Kojia, Henry, SP/4, 24  
 Kontum, 5, 6, 18, 21, 23  
 Krulak, Victor, Jam. General, 6

L

Laos, 19, 20, 23, 24  
 Lewis, John, 1/Lt, 6, 8

M

Mang Buk, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23  
 Martin, John, Maj, 1, 3, 11, 16, 18  
 Martin, Kenneth, Sgt, 8  
 Martin, Michael, CWO, 9  
 McNamerar, Robert 21, 22  
 McCarey, Charles, PFC, 9, 10  
 McGowen, Hal, Col, 12

N

Nha Trang, 18, 20, 24  
 Neura, Capt, USAF, 25

Q

Qui Nhon, 8, 15, 16  
 Quang Nhai, 8, 9, 15, 21

P

Parker, Theodore, Lt. General, 6  
 Phan Thiet, 10  
 Plateau G1, 18, 19, 22  
 Pleide Nang 14, 24  
 Plei Mrong, 5, 6, 21  
 Polai Jar, 19  
 Pullen, Andrew, CWO, 14

S

Schuman, Rhonda, CWO, 13  
 Seiler, Robert, 1/Lt, 10  
 Serrell, Howard, 1/Lt, 13  
 Sibert, William, Lt, Col, 13, 17, 21  
 Smith, Donald, Maj, 3, 21, 22  
 Stilwell, Joseph, Brig. General, 3

T

Tam Ky, 15, 17  
 Taylor, Maxwell, General, 21, 22  
 Tedlock, Maxwell, General, 21, 22  
 Tieman, Floyd, Capt, 1, 7, 21, 22  
 Timmes, Charles, Maj. General, 6, 7  
 Tra My, 15  
 Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division, 1, 15, 24

U

Utility Tactical Transport Company, 11

V

Vickers, Anthony, 1/Lt 22  
 Vic Klum, 14

W

Weatherman, James, Capt, 3

Z

Zensen, William, 1/Lt, 9

### HIGHEST ASSAULT MISSION FLOWN

On 27 July 1963, the 119th Aviation Company (Air Mobile, Lt), commanded by Major John W. Martin, accomplished an Army Aviation first. On that date an assault mission was flown into a landing zone at an altitude of 4700 feet MSL. This is the highest heliborne assault mission against Viet Cong forces that has ever been flown.

The mission was also the first large scale operation by the unit since it was re-organized as the 119th Aviation Company (Air Mobile, Lt) and equipped with the UH-1B (Iroquois) helicopter. Involved in the operation were seven troop carrying UH-1Bs and three Armed UH-1Bs. A TO-1D (Bird Dog) was used as the lead and control aircraft.

The mission consisted of moving an ARVN Ranger Company from Kontum to a landing zone in the rugged mountainous terrain near Mang Buk. A pre-strike was flown by a VNAF B-26, then the armed UH-1Bs were utilized to neutralize the landing zone. The troop carrying UH-1Bs followed and made two lifts into the area. The mission was accomplished without incident and the objective was seized.

1-04 file 1