

**HISTORY OF THE  
170th ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY  
APO SAN FRANCISCO, 96318  
1 January 1966 - 31 December 1966**

Prepared by

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Approved by

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Major Infantry  
Commanding

52nd Aviation Battalion  
17th Aviation Group

Stenciled by  
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## **FOREWORD**

This history is respectfully dedicated to those officers of the 170th Assault Helicopter Company who have made the supreme sacrifice in the defense of freedom.

1966

Major Don W. Chabot	15 March	California
Captain Martin D. Reilly	17 May	New York

## **PREFACE**

The purpose of this unit history is to outline the events which occurred in the 170th Assault Helicopter Company during the calendar year 1966. It is intended to give an accurate portrayal of the Company, its personnel and equipment, as well as a concise picture of the combat operations in which the unit has participated. The information contained in this history has been gathered from Tactical Operations Reports, Quarterly Command Reports, newspaper accounts and personal interviews.

## I INTRODUCTION

The 170th Assault Helicopter Company of the 52nd Aviation Battalion is located at Camp Holloway, near the town of Pleiku, Republic of Vietnam. Pleiku is situated in the center of the rugged Central Highlands of Vietnam and is the site of the ARVN Second Corps Headquarters.

Camp Holloway, the base of the 52nd Aviation Battalion and the 170th Assault Helicopter Company, is one of the oldest helicopter bases in Vietnam. It was first opened in August 1962 by the 81st Transit Company, (CH-21). Camp Holloway also has the distinction of being the highest permanent helicopter base in the country with a field elevation of 2460 feet MSL\*.

The 170th Assault Helicopter Company arrived in the Republic of Vietnam on 22 December 1965, landing at Qui Nhon, and was assigned to the 10th Aviation Battalion, 12th Aviation Group. On 10 January 1966 the Company relieved of its assignment and reassigned to the 52nd Aviation Battalion, 17th Aviation Group.

The 170th has participated in Operations Paul Revere I, II, III and IV, Operation Attelboro; and Operation Thayer, to name only a few, and has performed every conceivable type of mission from combat assault to resupply and from medical evacuation and unit extraction to Command and Control.

## II MISSION AND ORGANIZATION

### **Mission**

The mission of the 170th Assault Helicopter Company, upon being assigned to the 52nd Aviation Battalion, is to provide tactical air support of combat troops, supplies and equipment within the combat zone.

### **Organization**

The 170th Assault Helicopter Company was activated 1 September 1965 under TOE 1-77E (Augmented) by General Order 264, Headquarters, Third US Army, dated 25 August

\*See Glossary, Appendix

1965. The company consists of a Company Headquarters, two Airlift Platoons, one Armed Platoon, a Service Platoon and a Gunner Platoon. The following units are attached

405th Transportation Detachment

448th Signal Detachment

755th Medical Detachment

The company owns, operates and maintains a total of 20 UH-1D troop carrying helicopters and 8 UH-1C armed helicopters.

### **III** **COMMAND**

The 170th Assault Helicopter Company, originally the 170th Aviation Company (Airmobile Light), was commanded by Major Seamon J. Molkenbuhr Jr. (now Lt. Col.) from the time of its activation on 1 September 1965, at Fort Benning, Georgia, until 20 June 1966, when he moved to the position of S-3 of the 52nd Aviation Battalion Headquarters. During Major Molkenbuhr's command, the 170th was deployed to the Central Highlands Region of the Republic of Vietnam and was subsequently assigned to the 52d Aviation Battalion and based at Camp Holloway. As the commander of a new unit, Major Molkenbuhr was faced with the enormous task of organizing and training group of officers and enlisted non with varied experience, into a combat ready team. In addition, he had to supervise the preparation, processing and overseas movement of the entire company and attached units.

On 20 June 1966, Major Molkenbuhr was replaced as Company Commander by Major George S. Murry, who came to the 170th after completing Command and General Staff at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. During Major Murry's command 170th developed into an experienced Assault Helicopter Company and set several records for total number of hours flown by helicopter companies in the Republic of Vietnam. Major Murry particularly stressed that aircraft maintenance be kept up to the highest standards. Faced with a shortage of personnel, Major Murry strive to insure the maximum utilization was derived from each aviator and each aircraft, but always with safety, morale and the health of his men foremost in his mind.

Major George S. Murry relinquished command of the company to become S-3 of the 52nd

Aviation Battalion. Assuming command of the company was Major Loyce E. Mabrey, who had served with the 170th as Executive Officer from 4 October 1966 until 26 December 1966. Major Mabrey closed the year of 1966 as Commanding Officer with the future goal of, " developing within each aircraft crew a professional-team, capable of providing maximum support to ground elements, with minimum risk of personnel and equipment.

\*\*Personal interview with Major Loyce E. Mabrey, 13 February 1966

#### **IV** **WEATHER**

The tropical climate and topography of South Vietnam produce only two basic seasons, the dry season and the monsoon. In the central highlands around Pleiku, the monsoon season starts in May and lasts through September. During the monsoon the winds are generally out of the southwest and the humidity is high. Although there are periods of sunshine and scattered clouds, the weather is usually overcast and rainy. Flying is restricted in the early morning and late afternoon and frequently flying is prohibited all day.

During the dry season, the winds are out of the northeast and good flying weather prevails. The temperature at Pleiku is always moderate due to its elevation of 2460 feet MSL\*. During the coolest of nights the temperature may drop to 50 degrees F, while the maximum on a hot afternoon is usually around 95 degrees F.

#### **V** **OPERATIONS**

The 170th Assault Helicopter Company arrived in Vietnam shortly before the end of calendar year 1965 and its first few months of operation involved becoming familiar with operating the Company in a new environment and under combat conditions. As the personnel of the company became experienced, the 170th was to take its place in the daily operation of the 52nd Aviation Battalion.

## **JANUARY:**

After the company arrived at Camp Holloway and setup operation the remaining two week of January were spent training in precession formation flying and orienting personnel of the 3rd Brigade in the concept of Airmobile Operations. Classes were conducted to enable every trooper in the brigade to load and unload from a helicopter. The company conducted practice lifts with the troops so they would know what to expect in the air movement. During this period the gun platoon was being outfitted with rocket pods at Depot Maintenance in Saigon.

## **FEBRUARY:**

February started with the 170th's first combat assault mission in support of the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, North of Pleiku. 4 February was devoted to maintenance, in preparation for the operation scheduled the following day, however weather delayed the operation until 6 February.

Operation Taylor began the 6th of February with 12 "slicks"\* and 6 "gunships"\* in support. The company moved 767 troops along with sling loads of additional equipment.

8 February brought an unexpected mission change for the 3rd Brigade, requiring a troop withdrawal. With minimum planning time, the 170th committed 12 "slicks"\* and 5 "gunships"\* and a total of 113 men and four tons of equipment were extracted in seven hours. In three days the company flew 1037 sorties, lifted 1870 troops, transported 29 tons of supplies. After completing a combat assault in the vicinity of Plei Bou Ho on 10 February, the company small respite to prepare for Operation Taylor near Tuy Hoa. This operation was conducted 17-20 February-y the company logging 110 hours, 411 sorties, and carrying 473 troops and 75 tons of cargo.

## **MARCH**

Returning to Pleiku, the unit moved to the Boun Brieng airstrip near Ban Me Thout to support Operation Garfield on 25 February. On 28 February, 1. 6, and 9 March the company accomplished four combat assaults and lifted a large number of troops and supplies.

\*See Glossary, Appendix

15 March dawned uneventfully, but soon turned into one of the most furious days of engagement for the 170th. While on a combat assault to reinforce elements under attack by enemy units, three ships and three- men were hit by ground fire. Major Don W. Chabot, the third platoon leader was killed in action and CWO James F. Cronin and PFC. Rudy E. Lindholm were wounded.

On 16 March, after returning from Operation Garfield, the third platoon, under the command of Clarence W. Brooker, was sent to Ban Me Thuot to remain under the operational control of the 155th Avn Co. This was a test to see whether one armed platoon could support three; instead of two slick platoons under normal operating conditions. The results were quite successful and a favorable report was sent forward.

(During the month of March) the remainder of the company conducted normal operations including a combat assault on 30 March with ARVN\* troops in which three armed helicopters and three slicks were hit, one of which sustained major damage. There were no casualties.

#### APRIL

The 52nd, Aviation Battalion underwent a major officer DEROS\* adjustment on 15 April in which approximately 1/2 of the pilots from the company were replaced with new pilots, some of whom were experienced. The majority of the pilots, however-were new in Vietnam. 16 April the 170th supported a large ARVN\* Operation near Phu Cat. In the operation 298 ARVN troops were air landed-in the morning and extracted that afternoon. Six aircraft received hits, two were moderately damaged and four received light damage. Captain David Larcomb and SP5 William R. Brumfield were wounded and returned to duty after treatment. SP4 Franklin D. Towson was gravely wounded and was taken to the 85th Evac Hospital in Qui Nhon, from where, after some weeks of treatment he-was returned to CONUS\*.

20 April signaled the start of Operation Longfellow, to clear route 14 from Dak To to Dak Pek. During this operation, which was conducted by the 3rd Bde, 25th Inf. Div., the 170th made nine combat assaults and lost one aircraft due to a bamboo strike. Sgt. Charlie F. Jones was slightly injured but returned to duty after treatment. The operation, which was staged out of Tan

\*See Glossary, Appendix



Canh airfield, (ZB045224) east of Dak To, concluded on May 1 and the company returned to Camp Holloway.

## MAY

Several Eagle flights\* were conducted during the period 2-10 May to counter act threats against the home base.

On 10 May Operation Paul Revere began southwest of Pleiku in the area of the Chu Pong Mountains, Duo Co, Plei Me and the Ia Drang Valley. It eventually spread further to the south in the vicinity of the Ia Hleo River and north and west towards Polei Djreing, which was heavily attacked during this period, around 1 June. During this period the company staged out of the Oasis, approximately 25 miles southwest of Pleiku and on rotation basis with the 119th and the 155th, each one week at a time.

The company conducted numerous combat assault from 10 thru 16 May. After completing a combat assault on the 16th of May and finishing up it's resupply the following day, the company was called upon to extract an infantry platoon 10 miles south of Duc Co. This action resulted in a fatal helicopter accident in which Captain Martin D. Reilly was killed when the rotor blades of the helicopter contacted a large tea tree on take-off. In the same accident SP4 William R. Reed was slightly injured and returned to duty. SP4 Ronald B. Warran was injured and treated at the 542nd Field Hospital, from which he subsequently returned to duty.

The company conducted combat assaults on 18, 19, 20, 23, and 24 May the main bulk of operations during this period consisted of resupply miscellaneous activities in support of Special Forces and II Corps.

## JUNE:

On 13 June the company supported the 3rd Bde in a major battle 8 miles south of Polei Djereing in LZ\* 10A. Although none of the ships received hits, the entire assault was effected while under enemy ground fire.

\*See Glossary, Appendix

On 25 June the original Commander of the 170th, Major Seamon J. Molkenbuhr Jr, left the company to become S-3 of the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion, and command and of the company was assumed by Major George Murry. When the change of command ceremony was completed the unit deployed to a new staging area, Waikiki Beach, 2 miles northeast of Plei Me, where the company flew 1036 sorties, carried 1286 troops and 110 tons of cargo during the final three days of the month.

### JULY:

During the month of July the company engaged, almost exclusively, in supporting the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division in the conduct of Operation Paul Revere, which included moving the supported unit's base camp from Waikiki Beach to Catecka Tea Plantation Strip. This move consisted of a minimum combat assaults, however, a night combat assault was staged at LZ 27V on 1 July

### AUGUST:

On August 1966 the Company, in support of the 1/35 and 2/35, staged a combat assault from Catecka, landing at ZA085206 and YA978055. The 170th committed 13 slicks and 5 gunships to the assault and was aided by 6 slicks from the 129th Aviation Company. During the assault a total of 979 troops and 49.9 tons of cargo were airlifted into the two landing zones. The assault was supported by a ten minute prestrike by the Buccaneer\* gunships, which also provided air cover for the operation. No enemy contact was reported.

On 19 August 12 slicks and 5 gunships were used to effect a combat assault in support of the 1/14th Infantry. The operation was staged out of Du Co into landing zones 18G and 18H, with a total of 468 troops lifted. Each landing zone was given 15 minutes of artillery preparation, Buccaneer gunship providing air cover. Both artillery preparation and air cover were described as excellent and the operation was completed without incident.

\*See Glossary, Appendix

## SEPTEMBER:

On 2 September the company supported the 1/14th Infantry, utilizing 9 slicks from the 170th and 4 attached slicks from the 119th. The combat assault was staged from Catecka with the troops being picked up from the Oasis, and airlifted into the landing zone at YA795059. During the assault a total of 302 troops were lifted into the landing zone without incident. Prestrike of the landing zone was provided by Air Force F-102's and Buccaneer gunships were on station during the entire operation.

On 23 September the 170th used 12 slicks and 5 gunships in support of 3/25, 1/14, and 1/35 on a combat assault staged from Catecka into landing zone YA828371. The assault was accomplished in two lifts with a total of 109 troops being lifted. There was no contact reported and none of the aircraft encountered enemy fire.

## OCTOBER:

On 1 October the company participated in a combat assault in support of SIBN 1/35 Inf. Bn. The operation which was staged out of Duc Co, utilized 13 slicks and 4 gunship. During the operation 244 troops were lifted into landing zones YA672351 and YA733535. Prestrikes of the landing zones was provided by 3 Air Force F-100's and air cover was provided by gunships. During the assault phase light enemy ground fire was encountered and one slick ship was hit. No injuries were reported.

On 13 October a single lift combat assault was staged out of New Pleiku, the company provided 8 troop ships and 2 gunships and lifted 26 ARVN\* troops and 10 Air Force personnel. During the assault air cover was provided by gunships and no contact was reported.

The company participated in a major combat assault on 20 October, in support of 2/35 Inf. Bn. The 170th provided 12 troop ships and 4 gunships for the operation. The aircraft preceded to the pickup zone from there moved a total of 650 troops into landing zone YA682594. Prestrike of the landing zone was accomplished by 2 Air Force F-100's and air cover was provided by Buccaneer gunships. No enemy fire was received and the assault was effected without incident.

\*See Glossary, Appendix

## NOVEMBER:

On 9 November 13 slicks and 5 gunships staged a combat assault in support of CIDG troops. The landing zones were AR718844, ZA905735 and ZA775307. During the assault a total of 687 troops were lifted into the three landing zones. Prestrike of the landing zone was provided by 2 A-1E, utilizing 500 pound bombs and 40 mm weapons. Enemy fire was received during the assault, but no ships were hit and no injuries were sustained.

From the 10th through the 20th of November the 170th participated in Operation Pearl City which was staged out of Tay Ninh. During the operation the company committed a total of 10 troop ships and 4 gunships. The operation resulted in the movement of 2142 troops and 127.5 tons of cargo without the loss of a single aircraft.

## DECEMBER:

During the month of December, the 170th participated in numerous extraction missions which brought many soldiers of the support units back to their base camp for a more secure and enjoyable Christmas.

On 4 December a total of 9 slicks and 4 gunships extracted elements of 2/4 from YA603646 and YA614602 and airlifted them to their base camp at 3G. During the extraction a total of 262 troops were moved without incident.

On 16 December the company moved 205 troops from pickup zone 511A to a landing zone ZA935585. Twenty-four troop ships and six gunships were used in the assault. Prestrike was a twenty minute artillery preparation followed by an airstrike by three Air Force A-1E and three F-4C's. During the assault phase aircover was provided by organic aircraft. The assault was accomplished without incident.

As 1966 drew to a close the 170th Assault Helicopter Company had aircraft committed in operations Shining Brass and Omega, and had assisted in the closing of Paul Revere IV, the longest continuous operation in Vietnam.

## **VI** **MAINTENANCE**

1966 was a year of challenges for the 170th Assault Helicopter Company, perhaps more so in the field of maintenance than in another area. With arrival of the company at Camp Holloway, it became necessary to set up a complete maintenance facility and to provide continuous support to the aircraft which were already engaged in daily missions. During the move from the 10th Aviation Battalion at Qui Nhon to the 52nd Aviation Battalion at Camp Holloway, maintenance elements consisting of the Service Platoon, the 405th Transportation Detachment and the 448th Signal Detachment, were able to maintain an availability rate of 92 percent

One major problem faced by maintenance during the year 1966 was the DEROS adjustment of enlisted personnel around the middle of the year. This resulted in the loss of many highly trained men and made more difficult the task of providing the fine quality of maintenance which the company had come to expect. Through a rigorous training program, the newly assigned personnel soon became familiar with the operation of the maintenance section of a combat helicopter company and once again the maintenance returned to its normal excellence.

As proof of their desire to make the 170th Assault Helicopter Company the most flyable company the maintenance section closed out the year with a 93 percent availability rate, for the month of December.

## **VII** **SAFETY**

In the field of aviation safety, the 170th Assault Helicopter Company has again shown itself to be among the best. During the calendar year 1966, the company sustained 13 aircraft accidents, an excellent record considering the adverse operating condition to which the personnel and equipment were exposed. The record becomes even more impressive when one considers that the company flew nearly 22,000 combat hours throughout the year. This total includes the -

month of July with over 2,500 hours, much of which was flown in tight formation, over rugged jungle and mountainous terrain.

Due to the extremely high density altitude and the nearly inaccessible landing zones in the Central Highlands, the "Safe-side" loading concept was initiated. This concept provided for the inclusion of the pilot's discretion in the final decision on the amount of cargo or the number of troops his aircraft could carry. The "Safe-side" loading concept enabled pilot of weaker ships to determine what portion of the proposed "Aircraft Load", as prescribed for the mission, they would carry. The introduction of "Safe-side" loading is thought to have been a contributing factor in the reduction of accidents. This concept has been so successful that it is being carried into safety procedures

## **VIII**

### **APPENDIX**

#### **LINEAGE AND HONORS**

Constituted 16 July 1965 as the 170th Aviation Company

Activated 1 September 1965

DECORATION: None

#### **COMMANDING OFFICERS 170TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY 1966**

Major Seamon J. Molkenbuhr Jr (now LT. Col.)	1 September 65 - 20 June 66
Major George S. Murry	20 June 66 - 26 December 66
Major Loyce E. Mabrey	26 December 66 - 31 December 66

**170TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY**

**Roster of Key Personnel 31 Dec 66**

**HEADQUARTERS:**

Mabrey, Loyce E.	Major	01936333	Commanding Officer
Blewster, James C.	Major	073610	Executive Officer
Bowen Frank S. III	Captain	083131	Operations Officer
DeYoung, Robert J.	1 Lt.	05023634	Intelligence Officer
Dodson, Billy J.	SFC	RA25692021	Co. 1st SGT.

**1st AIRLIFT PLATOON**

Woodmansee, Harry T.	Major	02282736	Platoon Commander
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**2nd AIRLIFT PLATOON**

Meadows, Thomas R.	Major	069202	Platoon Commander
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**3rd PLATOON (ARMED)**

Little, Milton L.	Major	05502235	Platoon Commander
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**SERVICE PLATOON**

Woodward, Vernon R	Major	05202929	Platoon Commander
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**405th TRANSPORTATION DET.**

Sander, James R.	Major	04011073	Detachment Commander
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**STATISTICS**

**170 Assault Helicopter Company**

**1966**

COMBAT HOURS FLOWN	21,572
COMBAT SORTIES	64,986
TOTAL PASSENGERS	202,896
TOTAL CARGO	6989 Tons
NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT HIT BY GROUND FIRE	16
NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS	13

**Hours Flown and Availability Rate During 1966**

Month	UH-1D		UH-1C	
	Hours	Availability	Hours	Availability
Jan 66	563	92%	232	79%
Feb 66	659	83%	346	66%
Mar 66	1363	87%	515	71%
Apr 66	1134	78%	385	69%
May 66	1129	60%	342	59%
Jun 66	1144	70%	292	74%
Jul 66	1614	78%	354	79%
Aug 66	1758	87%	340	85%
Sep 66	2096	82%	441	84%
Oct 66	1986	82%	452	68%
Nov 66	1836	85%	494	80%
Dec 66	1655	93%	452	80%
Totals	16,937		4,645	
Average		81.4%		74.5%



## GLOSSARY

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
AVN -	Aviation
BN -	Battalion
BUCCANEER	Nickname of 170th Armed Helicopter Platoon
CIDG -	Civil Irregular Defense Group
CONUS-	Continental United States
CO/C.O.	Company/Commanding Officer
DEROS	Date Eligible Return from Overseas
DIV -	Division
DS -	Direct Support
EAGLE FLIGHT	Combat assault utilizing a small amount of aircraft to infiltrate troops over a long range.
GUNSHIP-	armed UH-1C helicopter used as an escort aircraft
KIA -	Killed in action
LZ -	Landing Zone I
MSL -	Mean Sea Level
SLICK-	Standard UH-1D helicopter used as a troop or cargo carrier
V.C./NVA	Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army

