

Jul-Dec 1965

HISTORY OF THE
227th AVIATION BATTALION

1 July 1965 - 31 December 1965

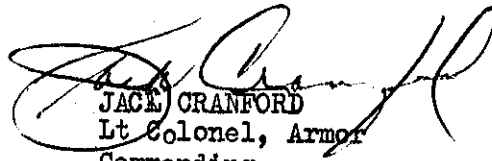
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VAPA14

F O R E W O R D

Early in 1963, in the sandy hills of Fort Benning, Georgia, a new concept was formally introduced to the United States Army. This idea was conceived in the minds of mobility-minded military leaders many years ago. Its birth was celebrated in the rice paddies and jungles of the Republic of South Vietnam early in that conflict. The concept matured into adolescence with the advent of new and better machines and it became the duty of the new 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion to prove to the world that airmobility was ready to take its place among the tried and proven tactical concepts available to our Army.

The 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion was constituted in the Regular Army on 1 February 1963 and assigned to the 11th Air Assault Division. This was the first battalion of its kind in the world and as it built into a full strength unit in the next several months, it stood ready to meet the challenge of providing a third dimension to the United States Army's tactics.

On 11 February 1963 the 31st Transportation Company (Light Helicopter) was redesignated and activated as Company B, 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion, and brought to the battalion its twenty-two CH-34 helicopters.

*personnel
change
only*

On 15 February 1963 Company A, 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion was activated as the second of the battalion's units. Company A was designated the aerial weapons armed escort company;

their first UH-1B's and armanent systems arriving in late April 1963.

On 18 July 1963 Headquarters Company, Company C and Company D, 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion was activated and in August 1963, the battalion became operational. Company C received its first UH-1D's in August, the first issued to a TOE unit for field use. In December Company A and Company D exchanged designations, making Company D the assault escort company.

The battalion then embarked on a long trail of sweat and tears that was the two and a half years of testing the airmobile concept.

The concept was proved and the ground work laid for the forthcoming airmobile division.

The 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion was reorganized and redesignated 1 July 1965 as the 227th Aviation Battalion (Assault Helicopter); concurrently relieved from assignment to the 11th Air Assault Division and assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). The battalion had provided the "Air Assault" to it's former division and now set out to put the "Airmobile" in the 1st Cavalry Division.

The battalion had given up a great number of her personnel in the preceding few months as replacements to Vietnam and, as preparation for combat began, replacements in all grades and skills began to arrive from throughout the Army. The task of training these new

personnel and providing a combat ready assault helicopter battalion within a few weeks seemed insurmountable. The old timers turned to with a real "Pouvoir" attitude and things began to develop. All the new personnel were soon indoctrinated and became mission oriented and began to hear an occasional "Attaboy" from the Commanding Officer, Lt. Colonel Jack Cranford. There was no time for mistakes or the retracing of steps. Intense effort from everyone in the battalion and help from wherever it could be had, paid off. When the President of the United States announced that he was ordering "My Airmobile ²/₀ Division" to South Vietnam, the 227th was ready. Aviators were qualified in the UH-1D, everyone was POM and POR qualified and all the battalion's equipment had been brought up to the peak of maintenance readiness; all while the battalion was still accomplishing its training missions with the infantry battalions.

The President's announcement, though no surprise, started a new burst of activity within the battalion. There were so many things to be done and so little time available that again, the requirements seemed impossible. To further complicate matters, filler personnel were still arriving at that late date and they had to be trained and prepared for the move. When the dust cleared and shipment dates arrived, however, everything was packed in the proper place, families had been provided for, the helicopters had been prepared and taken to the port, inspection had been conducted, preparation had been made for further training enroute, more inspections, and finally the "Pouvoir" Battalion was ready to go to war.

While the main body was enroute, broken down among four aircraft carriers and four troop transports, eighteen officers and eight enlisted men comprising the battalion's advance party proceeded by air. Lt Colonel Cranford and thirteen of the other officers were sent to units throughout South Vietnam as "combat Observers" while the remaining four officers and eight enlisted men made up the quartering party. The observers flew over seven hundred hours during their three weeks with the aviation units in II, III, and IV ARVN Corps sectors. Their experience there was carefully evaluated and compared to the operational concepts gained during the two and a half years of air assault testing to assure the utilization of the soundest of airmobile tactics.

On 9 September 1965, the aircraft carrier USS Boxer anchored in Qui Nhon Harbor and the first of the 227th helicopter and personnel began to arrive. The quartering party had begun preparation of the battalion's new home just outside the small mountain village of An Khe, RVN and the battalion moved in and began the long hard process of making a contonment area and heliport out of a piece of jungle.

Just eight days after the arrival of the first helicopter, with over half the battalion's aircraft and personnel still at sea, the 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion flew its first combat assault. A unit of the 101st Airborne Division had been surrounded by a superior Viet Cong force and elements of the battalion spent the following two days resupplying ammunition, lifting reinforcements, carrying wounded 101st troopers to a field hospital and extracting units from the battle area. On the 21st September, that operation was terminated with another extraction and the 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion

had come through its first combat operation, its baptism of fire, and had acquitted itself in the same fine manner it had displayed in the past whenever confronted with a requirement. The battalion sustained no losses and two of its members were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and one the Bronze Star Medal as a result of their heroic actions on 17 September.

During the next two weeks, the battalion concentrated on small combat actions in close proximity to the base camp. These operations were utilized as training vehicles for both the aviation units and the supported infantrymen. The effect of this brief training became immediately apparent. Formations tightened and settled down to a steady, professional standard. The aircrews began to work as teams, and to mold into platoons and companies, with each continually improving as skill and proficiency increased. The Delta Company aerial weapons crews became familiar with their guns and rockets and as they worked with the lift units a mutual confidence and respect developed which enhanced the evolution of the battalion into a tight, well-rounded team.

While the aircrews were out plying their trade, things began to take on a new look back at An Khe. This huge base camp, that was to become the world's largest heliport, had been named the "Golf Course" by the advance party because of the care taken to retain the sod and topsoil, while removing by hand all trees and other obstructions.

Personnel bunkers having been completed, the necessities of everyday living were beginning to appear; slowly at first, and then in rapid tempo as materials became more readily available. By the end of September, all the companies had built combination showers and latrines and mess facilities. Then concrete floors began to appear in some of the GP tents, then screen siding on some and even a few corrugated tin roofed "hooches" sprung up. The members of the battalion were able to improve their living condition to a great extent without the benefit of outside help in either labor or the procurement of materials.

On 10 October 1965 operation "Shiny Bayonet" began. The battalion lifted the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry on a combat assault of their objective early on 10 October. This was their first large combat lift of a 1st Cavalry Division unit and was made without difficulty. This lift was Vietnam's introduction to altitude flexibility, which has since proved so valuable in avoiding enemy automatic weapons. On 14 October, the 227th extracted the 1st Battalion, 12 Cavalry, which was in contact with the enemy. Viet Cong automatic weapons and small arms fire was intense and the pick-up area was attacked during the loading of the last unit, but the members of the "Pouvoir" battalion completed their mission like veterans. Lt Colonel Cranford was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his display of heroism during that extraction, which included rescuing the crew of one of the battalion's helicopters which had been shot down. Nearly half the aircraft involved in that lift were hit by Viet Cong fire, but there was never a hesitation every ship except the one that was actually shot down completed the mission.

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After the battalion had been back at the Golf Course for a couple of weeks, the Viet Cong attacked the special forces camp at Plei Me in force and the long and costly Plei Me - Ia Drang Valley Campaign was under way. The morning after the attack, 23 October 1965, Company "C" was ordered to Fleiku to support the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry. Within a few days the entire battalion was committed in support of the 1st Brigade, whose mission was to seek out and destroy the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces in the Plei Me area. This support was continued routinely with each of the lift companies supporting an infantry battalion daily until late in October. When the large North Vietnamese Army were located near Ia Drang Valley, the 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion began lifting the 1st Brigade units in assaults on the enemy positions. On 3 November 1965 the 227th and the 1st Brigade units were relieved by other units of the Division and returned to the Golf Course for a well deserved rest.

On 10 December Company A moved to Fleiku to support the 2d Battalion 8th Cavalry in search and destroy operations reaching from Fleiku to Kontum and West to the Cambodian border. As the year came to a close Company A was still in Fleiku supporting units of the 1st Brigade and the remainder of the battalion supporting the Division's units at An Khe and preparing for the next large combat operation.

The 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion's first half year with the 1st Air Cavalry Division was highly successful. Their accomplishments exceeded all expectations and have helped remove all doubt about

the application of the air mobility concept to limited warfare in Southeast Asia. The battalion has continually emphasized further training and the development of new ideas and equipment. Ever looking to the future, the keynotes have been flexibility, mission orientation and "Pouvoir".

KEY PERSONNEL

COMMANDING OFFICER

Lieutenant Colonel Jack Cranford

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Major Otrie B. Barrett

COMMANDING OFFICER HEADQUARTERS AND HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

Major John S. Bond
Major Eugene T. Boyd

COMMANDING OFFICER COMPANY "A"

Major Floyd R. Wirthlin

COMMANDING OFFICER COMPANY "C"

Major Thomas I. McMurray

COMMANDING OFFICER COMPANY "B"

Major Donald G. Gurry
Major Fred C. Headley

COMMANDING OFFICER COMPANY "D"

Major Jack Kincaid

S - 1

Major Robert C. Burgess

S - 2

Major William J. Gorman

S - 3

Major David L. Johnson

S - 4

Major Jack D. Joiner