

History of the
282nd ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY
212th COMBAT SUPPORT AVIATION BATTALION
Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam
APO SF 96337

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The second full year of operation for the 282nd Assault Helicopter Company saw many challenges for the men and machines of the company. Given the mission of supporting I Corps Headquarters, the I Corps Advisory effort and operations of the 1st and 2nd ARVN Divisions, the 282nd must be able to respond to the variations requested of it. Within the capabilities of the "Blackcats", supported by the armed "Alleycats", are combat assaults, medical evacuations, resupply, visual reconnaissance, command and control, firefly, armed escort, suppressive fire, close support or any other mission requested of them.

The Hue Section began 21 January with a resupply and medevac request from the Regional Headquarters at Houng Hoa which had sustained a ground attack the night before. A single ship was dispatched and picked up supplies and observer at La Vang airfield near Quang Tri enroute. On short final into the single- ship pad outside the Houng Hoa compound, the Crewchief, Maurice Seghetti, was hit by ground fire from the LZ. While CWO Tom Pullen and WO Richard Gilmore took evasive action, Col. Joseph Seymoe, Senior Advisor for Quang Tri Province, administered first aid to Seghetti. While Pullen was enroute to the aid station at Quang Tri, Lt Bob Ford attempted to get the medevacs out of Houng Hoa but was also repulsed by heavy ground fire. Col Seymoe called for more ships from Da Nang, and a combat assault was quickly arranged from volunteers.

WO Gerald L. Mc Kinsey, Jr(Mac to his friends) had returned to Da Nang to DEROS. He flew aircraft #036, Joe Sumner the crewchief, to Houng Hoa and then to Dong Ha for assistance from the Marine helicopter unit. For some reason, possibly other commitments they were unable to do so. WO Mc Kinsey waited there for the rest of the company to join them. After dropping off Seghetti and borrowing a young Marine to serve as door gunner CWO Pullen joined them.

Mr. Mc Kinsey was familiar with the area so he changed seats with Maj. Rex putting Cap. Tom Stiner and Mr. Mc Kinsey flying the lead ship in a flight of seven. Five ships carried Ruff-Puffs and two carried ammo and other supplies. Alleycats flew gun support. Intense ground fire around Houng Hoa forced them to divert south to an old French fort on a mountain top near Khe Sanh. As the flight landed, NVA regulars emerged from their hiding places and began firing at point blank range. Lead ship was hit on the right side, burst into flames (even the rotor blades were burning) and rolled over the embankment, landing on it's side. Two ships landed and crewmembers tried to help the crew of chalk one. Danny Williams exited his ship and went to help rescue Col Seymoe from the burning ship. Ground fire hit the butt of crewchief Heidi Atanian's M-16 rifle and shot the microphone off his helmet so he got back in the aircraft. Gunner Jerry Elliott never returned to the ship. David Howington, crewchief of aircraft #027 which had crashed managed to get aboard before they took off due to intense enemy ground fire which hit one of the pilots. After receiving many hits the rescue ships were forced to leave the area. Severely damaged ships escaped the LZ and made emergency landings at Khe Sanh, Quang Tri and medevaced wounded to Dong Ha.

WO Mc KINSEY survived the crash but was killed on the ground while providing covering fire for the rescue attempt. Col. Seymoe was killed in the crash. Sgt Billy D. Hill, gunner of #027 and PFC Jerry W. Elliott, gunner are listed MIA. Cpt. Tom Stiner and Sgt Danny Williams escaped from the area, evaded the NVA ground forces and walked to Khe Sanh where they were picked up the next day by a Hue Detachment ship.

While still mourning the loss of their friends, they were hit again. Shortly after 0300hours on the 31st of January, several regiments of NVA overran the city of Hue and surrounded the MACV compound. While defending the perimeter in the Aussie bunker, WO Dwight A. Dedrick, WO Mark J. Skulborstad, WO John R. Aye, WO Richard Gilmore and CWO Thomas R. Pullen were severely wounded, leaving Lt Bob Ford the only operational pilot in the detachment. Desi F. Ford, an Australian Advisor, provided covering fire with a machine gun while the pilots were being evacuated and the bunker was reinforced with MACV troops. His devastatingly accurate fire prevented the enemy from entering the compound and saved many lives that morning. Sp4 Lowell Truscott radioed other aviators and talked them into flying into the LCM Ramp north of Hue University to medevac the wounded Blackcat pilots. Truscott, along with James Payne, Robert Brown, and Bob Gray then made three trips through the NVA held city to transport the wounded pilots to the LCM Ramp. WO Dedrick, the "Dangerous Duck", died later that day in Phu Bai from the wounds he received at Hue. The other Hue aviators were evaced to CONUS.

assigned the task of keeping supplies flowing into the city. Communist Forces had ringed the city closing off all supply routes except the Perfume River, which extends past Hue and empties into the South China Sea. All supplies and medical evacuations had to be transported over this river route by Navy LCU's or be heli-lifted to the Hue hospital pad. The Alleycats were assigned the primary mission of providing aerial escort for the LCU's on the river and a secondary mission of providing close air support when a lull occurred in the primary mission. The weather during this period was below normal minimums for helicopter operations with ceilings of 500 feet or less and visibility of ½ to 1 mile with rain and fog. The Alleycats continued to cover the boats on the river and the Blackcats continued to airlift supplies and med evac wounded despite the horrible weather and constant intense enemy ground fire attempting to cut the last supply route into Hue. 282nd helicopters engaged automatic anti-aircraft emplacements and rocket launchers in an attempt to break the NVA stranglehold on Hue. At times the ground fire was so intense that ships were forced into the clouds for concealment.

When the TET Offensive ended, ships of the 282nd had flown more than 1200 hours in the defense of Hue, lifted more than 235,000 pounds of cargo, 247 medevacs and over 5,500 troops into the hospital pad. As a result of the 282nd heroic action during this period, one Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, sixteen Distinguished Flying Cross, three Bronze Stars, 31 Air Medals with "V" for Valor and 15 Purple Hearts were awarded to members of the company.

Once again tragedy struck, when Sp4 Lewis Nelson Langford was killed on the 25th of February.

On 6 March while as crewmembers on a UH-1B armed helicopter Sp5 Lyle T. Travis and Sp4 Steven D. Ables provided cover for a combat assault under minimal weather conditions. When a call for a medevac was monitored, they volunteered for the mission. As the aircraft went into two different landing zones to pick up wounded men at each location, it was hit by intense enemy fire. They suppressed the enemy fire until the ship landed then left the aircraft, exposing themselves to the enemy fire, to load the wounded aboard. They covered the ship until it was clear of the area and rendered first aid until medical help was reached. For their actions Sp4 Ables received the Air Medal with "V" device (second Oak Leaf Cluster) and Sp5 Travis received the Air Medal with "V" device (twenty-eighth Oak Leaf Cluster).

On March 27th, while on a visual reconnaissance mission, a light fire team supporting ARVN units east of Hue spotted a large enemy force in the open. Using 2.75 inch rockets and machine guns the ship killed 63 North Vietnamese soldiers.

On 18 April, combined forces of Army, Navy, Marine Corps and ARVN units took part in a combat assault west of Da Nang. The assault was led by 282nd ships inserting more than 900 ARVN troopers.

On 10 May, WO Joseph A. Reichlin, Jr. was killed while engaging the enemy near Thun Duc southwest of Marble Mountain. Out of ammo, the gunship was making a final run with door guns when Reichlin was struck by a single bullet. When the ship returned to Marble Mountain, Sp5 Jeff Perez threatened the press with bodily harm if they took pictures of the body. No photos were taken. The crew drank a toast to Mr. Reichlin at the aid station.

On 13 May a change of command ceremony was held with Major Ralph Moffett taking command of the 282nd from Maj. Ronald Rex.

Alleycats were called on July 11, in support of the 1st of the 51st ARVN Regiment in operation Hung Quang when they spotted 100 enemy soldiers in the area. Attacks with rockets and machine guns forced the enemy to flee and a sweep of the area confirmed enemy killed.

Probably the most exciting day for the 282nd since the TET Offensive was July 25th. Supporting 1st ARVN Division troops on operation Lam San 241 north of Hue, Blackcats were to transport 560 troops into one landing zone. The lift was broken down into two elements of four ships each. After artillery prep from 1700 on July 24, to 1300 July 25 and numerous air strikes, the first lift went into the LZ and encountered heavy fire, but the second lift was already committed. The first ship of the second lift took 18 hits with no crew injuries and was flown back to LZ Stud where it was deemed unsafe to fly. The ships then lifted the remaining troops to alternate LZ's and completed their mission. While five of the eight ships took 33 hits, miraculously no crew members were injured. After covering the combat assault the gunships were diverted to support troops in the Hoi An area south of Da Nang. Enemy targets were engaged throughout the afternoon and as night fell the firefly ship was called to illuminate targets in the area. Four structures and 30 sampans were destroyed and one .50 caliber machine gun was silenced.

Friends and fellow aviators held a memorial service for Sp4 Sam Jones on September 15th.

Early on the morning of 17 September, Alleycats were scrambled to an area four miles west of Hoi An. Elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment reported heavy contact and were receiving casualties from an unknown mortar position and automatic weapons fire. The gunships flew forty sorties throughout the day and were responsible for the destruction of the 82mm mortar and two automatic weapons as well as forty enemy killed by air.

On 6 October, the 282nd air lifted troops of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 51st ARVN Regiment into landing zones twenty miles

surrounded Special Forces Camp there. Eight slicks, escorted by five gunships, inserted more than nine hundred troops into the valley with no friendly casualties.

A team of Alleycats was called to the Dong Ha area on 24 October, to support troops of the 2nd ARVN Division. Enemy soldiers were observed infiltrating across the Ben Hai River from the DMZ and were engaged with rockets and machine guns killing more than thirty before they fled. Although both aircraft received battle damage, there were no crew casualties.

On 10 November Major Valentino Panzitta took command of the 282nd from Major Ralph Moffet and was faced with the task of implementing a new TO&E which was to become effective 1 January 1969.

On 12 November the Alleycats reached a milestone in their history. A light fire team on a medevac was informed of enemy troops in a village about twenty miles southeast of Da Nang. The team attacked the target area and later thirteen enemy killed were confirmed. This put the total enemy killed by air since the inception of the platoon in April of 1967 at over two thousand.

What began as a normal firefly mission on the 17th of November heralded the start of a battle in which the men of the 282nd were to greatly distinguish themselves. About 0400 a Blackcat Firefly Team, escorted by two Alleycats was called to the village of Dien Ban, ten miles southeast of Da Nang. An estimated NVA Battalion and a VC company had attacked the town and adjacent compound. As the battle lines were drawn and daylight dawned, team after team of Alleycats attacked targets and Blackcats landed amid the battle for medevac and resupply missions. Again the night of the 17th and the morning of the 18th enemy troops massed and attacked, but were repulsed with the help of the Firefly Team. Total results from two days of flying were the destruction of one 75 mm recoilless rifle, one .51cal anti-aircraft gun, one 62 mm mortar, one flame thrower, a large radio and over one hundred enemy killed by air.

About 0500 of the morning of 23 December a light fire team of two Alleycats was called to support troops of the 1st ARVN Rangers in an operation near An Hoa 20 miles southwest of Da Nang. The ground troops reported heavy casualties from a .50 cal. machine gun and mortar position. While trying to locate the positions a Black Cat Command and Control Ship was hit and forced to return to An Hoa where it was grounded. As the positions were attacked and destroyed throughout the day the Black Cat Command and Control ship and Alleycats worked in support of troops in the area. At the days end, two slicks had been grounded and a third damaged by ground fire. Both the Alleycat ships also received battle damage and one was forced to return to Da Nang where a replacement was obtained. The end result was one .50 cal. machine gun and one mortar destroyed and over fifty enemy killed by air.

These few accounts are but a part of the every day tasks performed by the 282nd in their fulfillment of their missions, but they are indicative of the professional attitude of the unit. The 282nd has proven by it's past performance that it is willing and capable of fulfilling the tasks asked of it and looks forward to the new challenges of the future.