

MAY 1965

On 1 May 1965, at first light, the first helicopters of the company flew off the port elevators of the ship which was approximately 30 miles off the coast of Vietnam. They landed on the airfield at Vung Tau, Republic of Vietnam. While the aircraft were refueled the crews talked to those gathered by about their experiences on the trip. Then the helicopters flew directly to Soc Trang, followed by Air Force C-123 aircraft which lifted in the remainder of the troops and their accompanying cargo.

One month was allotted to the "Winged Warriors" of Soc Trang to pool together the knowledge of all and make the unit combat ready. Training, practice, instructions and briefings were conducted.

On 17 May 1965, sixteen days after arrival in country, the company participated on it's first airmobile operation. This took place about 12 miles East of Soc Trang. Body counts showed that 265 Viet Cong had felt the presence of the new aviation company. The action indicated that the "Winged Warriors" were ready to take their place in supporting the Army of Vietnam in their struggle against Communist aggression. With a high esprit de corps and professional knowledge of the men, along with the know-how and leadership of Major Wayne Dutton, Company "A", 101st Aviation Battalion continued to gain experience. Well within their scheduled training time emerged a dedicated and well trained aviation company that was ready to serve our friends of the Republic of Vietnam.

The Delta became a familiar location to various aviators and crews. New terms, slang and phrases were learned and accepted into the everyday language of the troops. "RF", "slick", "dust off", "Ca and L", and "serry 'bout that" were phrases repeatedly heard. "RF" although known by other

terms of endearment to the aviators, was now the magic word meaning war and machine guns and close formations. Troops of the Regional Forces were going to be airlifted into a landing zone to participate in combat. The helicopters supporting on "RF" are classified by the job they do.

These were the "Slicks", the "Gun ships", the "Dust Off", and Command and Control also known as C&C. The "Slicks" were troop carrying helicopters armed with an M-60 machine gun at each rear door. The "gun ship" was armed with an electro-pneumatic flex kit at each side, supplemented with two rocket firing devices just beneath the flex kit. The "gun ship's" primary mission was to escort and protect the "slicks" during the airborne assault.

The "Dust Off" was one whose mission was to evacuate the wounded from the field of battle to a nearby hospital. The aircraft was not armed.

Flak vests and chest protectors were new items of equipment that were issued. With imagination and ingenuity, the user would find other ways in which these protectors could provide cover for other areas of their anatomy.