

## **MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH WARRIORS AND THUNDERBIRDS**

**It was September 1965 and we are at Camp Alpha in Vietnam. We've been in country about 3 or 4 days and are waiting for a lift to our units. My unit, I am told, is in the Mekong Delta. It's about nine at night and it's hot. Most of us are sitting or laying in cots under great big troop tents, with the sides rolled up, wondering where we were going, when will we get there and what will it be like. I'm thinking about home, the weather in West Philadelphia was great when I left and my friends took me out for a nice send-off. It was hard to imagine not seeing any of them or my family for a whole year.**

**Near our tent was a chain link fence and outside the fence was a big sand-covered open area for as far as you could see. It was dark and quite out there. All of a sudden I heard this racket in the far distance which sounds like a heavy downpour of rain coming. Then I see lights in the sky and noise gets louder and becomes frightening. The ground begins to tremble. It's a whole flight of Hueys landing on that sand field. It's the most exciting sight that I ever saw. Sand blowing, lights flashing, rotors cracking like machine gun noise. What a display! These helicopters with big white diamonds and some with black eagles on their noses looked like they were going to run right over us. You can't imagine the fear that came over me.**

**The men were getting out of their helicopters and started approaching the gate in the fence near where I was. These guys were pretty rugged looking, some of them carrying M60 machine guns, one in each hand - all serious and exhausted looking. You could tell these guys had been in some serious action. One guy was carrying something on his shoulder that**

**to me looked like the biggest rat I've ever seen. As he passed me, this animal kept his eyes focused right on mine. What a scary site! I hope this isn't my unit! As I found out later, these guys were on an operation somewhere in the Iron Triangle and at night they would use Camp Alpha to catch some sleep before returning to their area of operation.**

**A few days passed and we got our lift down to our unit in the Delta. It was dark, but I could see Hueys with big white diamonds on them parked all around us. I guess this was my unit. We reported to the C.O. and got our ships assigned to us, all three of us reporting were replacement Crew Chiefs. When I got to my hooch, the first person I met was Jerry Wofford who has a big rat- looking thing next to him. It turns out that the animal was a pet mongoose that for a time Jerry took everywhere with him. The unit was the Winged Warriors and Thunderbirds of ACo 101st Aviation.**

**My fear ultimately turned into pride and honor to serve with a great unit of the 101st Airborne Division.**

**John Gianvittorio, C.E. Warrior 14, 65/66**