

281st AHC 'Intruders' Newsletter

38 Pleasant Street, Wenham, Massachusetts 01984

VOLUME 2 FALL 1987

PRE-FLIGHT

As mentioned in our maiden flight (issue) the Intruders are in formation again. A number of missions have been filed at operations. The mission which will take a couple of issues to coordinate is our 1988 reunion. The highlights of the reunion are discussed in this issue; keep your eyes open on future issues for further status.

Parts of our history and stories are well covered in this our second issue. "The Rotor Blade Ripoff" is just the type of story we are looking for - first hand personal stories that are fun or serious and that we all experienced. We are also "covering" part of our "Unit History." In an effort to recount our official history, we have included the unabridged version.

SUBSCRIBERS

Your donation is required to keep the INTRUDERS newsletter going. In an effort to communicate in a professional format we need your donation. We have a good start, but we need everyones participation. Many thanks to Robert George for his kind donation in memory of Bob Gardner. Special appreciation to Joe Bilitzke, too, for his generous donation and the matching contribution of his company. Please send your donation now to cover our expenses. This will be the last mailing to those who have not yet donated.

The 281st Intruders Newsletter is published by the past members of the 281st from donations made at our first reunion. Anyone interested in obtaining this Newsletter in the future should donate \$10.00 to:

The 281st Intruders Newsletter,
c/o Wesley Schuster, 38 Pleasant St., Wenham, MA 01984.

Material published in the 281st Intruders Newsletter is contributed by past members of the 281st and other interested persons.

The Newsletter does not endorse any organization or person mentioned in this publication.

The 281st Intruders Newsletter welcomes letters to the editor.

REUNION 1988

Joe Bilitske has put together a professional reunion package. The FLIGHT PLAN reads:

E.T.A.: Friday, July 28, 1988
E.T.D.: Sunday, August 1, 1988
LOCATION: San Francisco, California
PLACE: Cathedral Hill Hotel

The Cathedral Hill Hotel is situated in the heart of San Francisco and is near what makes the soul of the city - Fisherman's Wharf, Chinatown and Nob Hill.

Preliminary advance reservations have been made and reasonable rates have been established. A single will be \$60.00 per day and a double will be \$70.00; add \$10.00 for each additional person.

This is a bring your wife, family, friend affair. We have picked a location and facility which should be a great spot to visit and perhaps a good stepping off place for a vacation period as well.

Mark it on your calendar. Be there for the 1988 Reunion. More details will be forthcoming.

LAURALS TO THE 281ST

Robert George, "Wolfpack 38" was good enough to send an excerpt from the book "War Story." The book was written by Special Forces Captain Morris. It is a true story and makes special note of the 281st.

All the choppers were from the 281st Assault Helicopter Company, which for my money was the best chopper outfit in Nam. They were very proud of their association with the Project, wore camouflage fatigues and put their lives on the line continuously. They had a tradition of disregarding any regulation which interfered with the performance of their mission. They were mostly young guys, and almost all of them were warrant officers.

The Marine chopper pilots in I Corps, by way of contrast, went strictly by the book. They were mostly older officers and career people. They also had shitty equipment, while the 281st had the



" Now that we've got all this ammo on board, how the hell do we get it out of the revetment?"

newest and best, so you can't blame the Marines too much. They didn't have much and they had a hard time replacing what they had, so they couldn't afford to abuse it.

The Marines would only carry as much ammunition as they were supposed to. The 281st put so many rockets on their choppers that they would barely lift off. They would lift a little, go forward some and thud against the ground, gaining more momentum from the thud than from the rotors. After two or three repeats of this they would finally limp airborne and gather enough speed to gain altitude.

Brings back memories of overloaded chopper takeoffs! They did not teach those in flight school. In reflection, those takeoffs worked because we worked as a team. The chief kept his ship in top condition, the gunner knew how many extra rounds to throw on board, the guy in the left seat knew how far to rock forward on the skids, and the guy in the right seat called out the power and RPM. That's team work!



DEBRIEFING

Many positive comments were received about the first issue of the "INTRUDERS" newsletter. However, it was quickly pointed out that the chopper on the cover page was from the 1st Cav. (What the hell did they know about our mission?)

Now for the rest of the story. The "INTRUDERS" emblem was sent to our printer. It was only hand sketched, however, and it was not considered suitable for printing. So in a pinch to go to print, a photo of a chopper was inserted. In retrospect, it was a small point, but it proved all you former 20/20's can still pick up a tailboom insignia.

Seriously we tip our hats to Charles Althouse for a professional job. Without his dedication and "Intruder" spirit we would not have gotten off the ground.

281st AHC Committee Chairmen

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Wes Schuster

Vice President Communications
Duane (Tubby) Brudvig

Rollcall/Reunion
Joe Bilitske

Historian
Dean Roesner

Newsletter Printer
Charles Althouse

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281st ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96240

UNIT HISTORY

JANUARY 1968 to DECEMBER 1968

Operation Sultan II completely dominated the month's activities. It commenced on 3 January 1968 from a forward operating base near Phei Djerang. While the majority of our efforts were in support of Project Delta (B-52), the 281st was called upon to infiltrate two LRRP teams belonging to the 4th Division.

While in support of B-52 a total of three Ranger companies were airlifted several times into LZ's in the operational area. These were in support of a total of over 20 LRRP type teams.

On the 25th the 281st commenced supporting "E" company 1/10th LRRP. The area of operations was northwest of Pleiku. Basically the mission was the infiltration of LRRP teams, and to provide their logistical support. The operation continued well into February.

Major Donald R. Ruskauff assumed command of the 281st AHC from Major John W. Mayhew on the 8th of February. Major Mayhew terminated a highly successful command tour and moved on to the 17th Combat Aviation Group.

The company spent the entire month in support of "E" Company (LRRP), 20th Infantry (ABN), 5th Special Forces, and coastal support missions. An aggressive training program was instituted both within and without the unit. Much valuable experience was gained by newly assigned aviators and crews while participating in decondo type training in support of both 5th Special Forces Group and "E" Company, 20th Infantry (ABN). Also instructions were given by 281st personnel to these units in employment of electric aircraft rescue hoists and other specialized equipment.

There were some maintenance problems for the most part caused by the high time mounting up on the aircraft, especially the UH-1D's. However, a positive, aggressive attitude toward maintenance enabled these difficulties to be surmounted.

The month of Caesar's Ides heralded the start of another Delta Operation. On 4 March 1968 Samuri IV began the FOB established at Nue-Phu Bai. On the first day two aircraft conducting aerial reconnaissance flights received 50 caliber fire, but sustained no hits.

The initial insertion proceeded without incident and soon enough information had been gathered to warrant a combat assault by the mobile strike forces. On 6 March 1968 the troops were inserted into the LZ which turned out to be exceedingly hot. Although they were extracted the same day they still managed to destroy and capture quantities of enemy equipment and documents as well as two confirmed enemy KIA's.

The next day an Air Force forward air controller spotted nine enemy trucks on a road in the AO. Quickly a reaction force consisting of the 91st Airborne Ranger Battalion was inserted in two landing zones

utilizing all the 281st resources, six slicks and four guns; aided by one slick from the 1st Air Cavalry Division. The battalion was safely extracted the next day, 8 March 1968, after it had located the vehicles, destroyed three of them, and directed gunships and Tac-air in successful sorties against the other six.

The next significant action occurred on 13 March 1968 when a reconnaissance team made heavy contact only two hours after insertion. While attempting to extract the team, three slicks and two guns sustained hits from intensive small arms and automatic weapons fire. Two pilots were wounded and their ships forced down and destroyed. Only two of the Recon team members were extracted, one of which was killed after he was in the aircraft.

The next morning the three remaining team members were rescued from another LZ to which they had moved during the night. That afternoon an Air Force pilot was rescued using the electric hoist.

On the Ides of March the Ranger Battalion was again put into the AO using the remaining five slicks, one 1st Cavalry slick, and four 281st gunships. Almost immediately the battalion made heavy contact and sustained significant casualties. These were evacuated safely that evening. During the extraction of the battalion the next morning, one UH-1H and one UH-1C were shot down and destroyed and one pilot seriously injured.

March 19th and again March 21st saw two Reconnaissance teams extracted safely on "scramble" missions using "McGuire Rigs".

The Ranger Battalion and Nung Platoon were inserted to follow up reported sightings on 29 March 1968. The lift ship received intensive fire in the LZ. A total of three UH-1H and three CH-46 helicopters were shot down. Miraculously, only one pilot was killed. The remainder of his crew spent the night with the ground troops. The next morning the troops and remaining crew were extracted under cover of Tac-air and gunships.

The operation continued until the 4th of April when the last of the teams was extracted from the AO. Fortunately, the tragic losses of the previous month were not repeated in April.

Operation Samuri V in support of 5th SFG was conducted, again in the Hue-Phu Bai area. It lasted from the 18th until the 30th of the month. During that time not a single loss of life or ships was sustained.

Concomitantly, the 281st contributed resources to five other combat assault missions. On the 16th of April five UH-1H and two UH-1C's were involved in a ROK combat assault near Ninh Hoa. Near Qui Nhon on the 24th of April a third ROK combat assault took place.

On the 26th of the month four lift ships journeyed to Ban Me Thout to support combat operations carried out by two Special Forces "A" teams, (A-235 and A-236).

Operation Samuri V continued until the 19th of May. For the most part the operation went very well. The men of the 281st gained incalculable experience over the preceding two months. The only loss incurred was the inexplicable explosion in mid air of a UH-1C gunship on 30 April. All four crew members were lost.

General William Westmoreland and a group of Korean VIP's were carried by eight 281st slicks on a tour of the Ninh Hoa area on the 21st of the month.

Again on the 26th day of May the 281st returned to the Ninh Hoa basin enmasse. Eleven UH-1H and two UH-1C aircraft conducted a massive combat assault airlifting nearly 900 White Horse ROK Infantrymen into various LZ's in the mountain northwest of the valley.

The company was at an especially low ebb as far as experienced aviators was concerned. Only 14 pilots were qualified "slick" aircraft commanders. This situation would not improve materially for at least two months.

The 30 days of June were occupied by supporting the MACV Recondo School, Detachment B-52, various combat assaults and direct combat support along the coast.

On the 1st and again on the 6th, lift and gun elements participated in combat assaults for the White Horse ROK Infantry Division near Ninh Hoa. The 9th of the month saw action with the 44th ARVN Division near Song Mau. The next day we went north to Tuy Hoa again for a combat assault. The MACV Recondo School used five slicks and two guns in support of their training on the 15th, 17th, and 18th of the month. On the 18th we sent five and two to Bao Loc in support of elements of a 3rd Battalion, 506th Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade combat assault. On the 19th of June, four slicks began a three day commitment aiding the 192nd Assault Helicopter Company in a combat assault near Bao Loc.

Ban Me Thout was the scene of the next combat assault on the 24th of June. Three slicks and three guns flew in support of Detachment B-23, 5th SFG. These same ships journeyed to Phu Yen Province for a DSA II Corps action on the following day.

The "Wolf Pack" gunships had two days of glory in June. On the 7th, a heavy fire team flew for the Phan Rang sector and had a highly successful day, destroying or damaging 24 structures and killing at least 16 enemy. A similar number of ships working in the same area on the 18th accounted for 9 enemy dead and 19 structures.

July followed the same pattern as June. From the 1st to the 4th the MACV Recondo School was supported with five slicks and two guns. On the 4th of July we supported an ARVN Unit, 3/506th in the Phan Thiet area for two days.

The White Horse ROK Infantry Division made use of four slicks and two gunships for combat resupply in the Phan Rang area. These ships again worked for WHRID, however, this time in the Ninh Hoa area.

On both the 12th and 19th day of the month, six slicks and two guns worked for Detachment B-23 near Ban Me Thout. On the 21st we worked for the Nha Trang area installation Defense Command in a combat assault made in the local area.

The last action of note took place fittingly enough on the 31st of the month. Five slicks and two guns journeyed to Tuy Hoa for a grueling combat assault, each aircraft logging an average of over 15 hours.

One other event of note in July was the rescue of an Air Force pilot in the mountains southwest of Nha Trang. He had been forced to bail out of his disabled F-4 and was rescued by a 281st UH-1H that was operating in the area.

August started out with a ROK combat assault again near Ninh Hoa on the third. The 4th of the month was an entirely different and novel operation. We supported Nha Trang IDC in a mission to recover 44 Prisoners of the Viet Cong. A similar mission was flown on the 10th with CBS-TV coverage. In all, a total of 165 people were liberated in the two days. Some of them had been held captive for as long as eight years.

From the fifth through the eighth, Recondo School was held. Combat assaults were conducted on the 6th, 22nd ARVN Division at Cheo Reo; and the 8th, the 30th ROK Regiment near Dong Ba Thin. On the 12th and 13th, a commitment of six slicks and two guns supported the 22nd ARVN Division in combat assaults at Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa respectively. The 14th and 16th IDC mounted combat assaults near Nha Trang. On the 15th we flew a combat assault for the Deputy Senior Advisor II Corps near Tuy Hoa.

Another Recondo class started on the 18th and lasted through the 22nd of the month. From the 25th through the 28th elements of the 281st supported Task Force Spoiler in both combat assault and DOS capacities near Ban Me Thout. This four day operation netted a total of 20KBA credited to the 281st. An additional 5 UH-1H models supported WHRID on a CA near Phan Rang.

On the 15th of August Lieutenant Colonel Donald R. Ruskauff relinquished command of the 281st Assault Helicopter Company to Major Andrew J. Miller, Jr., at ceremonies held at the SFOB. Colonel Ruskauff was reassigned to CONUS.

September 6 - 7 we again worked for WHRID at Phan Rang and Ninh Hoa. It was back to Ban Me Thout on the 8th thru 10th supporting Task Force Spoiler on three CA's in as many days. Back to Ninh Hoa and WHRID on the 14th.

On the next day we had a little variety. Six UH-1H's went on a combat assault, but this time we were working for the Capitol ROK Infantry Division near An Son (Lane Army Airfield).

We had the honor of flying a VIP mission for the President of RVN and his party on the 17th. We carried him to numerous hamlets in the Nha Trang, Ninh Hoa and Tuy Hoa areas.

On the 21st we supported the 192nd in an operation for Task Force South around Bao Loc. On the 22nd two slicks returned to An Son to work for CRID. Also on that day and the following day slicks were in Ban Me Thout assisting Task Force Spoiler. One of these was shot down by enemy ground fire, but later recovered.

The 27th of the month was spent conducting a CA for the MACV Recondo School near Nha Trang.

During the entire month of September, aircraft, primarily gunships, were present in the Ban Me Thout area with Task Force Spoiler. The infantry commander of the unit supported on the ninth of the month gave the "Wolf Pack" confirmed credit for 23 KBA's in that days action alone.

The month of October 1968 began with a three day commitment to the MACV Recondo School performing our usual mission in support of their activities. The first day is spent training their people in the use of McGuire Rigs, ladders, and rappeling. Days 2 and 3 are utilized to insert and extract LRRP teams under a training situation.

On five separate occasions the 281st ships flew two slicks and two guns on people sniffer missions in the Nha Trang area. The dates of these missions were the 4th, 6th, 8th, 12th, and 13th of the month.

On the 3rd, 4th, 7th, and 10th, elements of the unit, both slicks and guns went to Ban Me Thout to work for Task Force Spoiler. In addition, several slicks worked for the 2nd Mobile Strike Force and Company "E" LRRP's in A.O. Green on the 5th, 10th, 11th, and 12th. Sandwiched between these obligations was a one day commitment to Special Forces Detachment A-502.

From the 13th of October through the 17th, we again handled the training of the MACV Recondo School personnel and their practice exercises in the Nha Trang area. On the 24th of the month there was a WHRID combat assault and a combat resupply mission.

The 281st again went to work for and with Detachment B-52 on a projected 30 day operation in I Corps. Operating from a forward operations base at An Hoa, the unit made area reconnaissance flights for the first several days and inserted the first reconnaissance teams around the end of the month. The ships that remained in Nha Trang again handled a Recondo School class during the period 27 October until the 31st. They were assisted by two gunships OPCON from the 33rd Assault Helicopter Company at Phu Hiep.

An event of note in the month was the award of a Naval Unit Commendation Medal to the 281st Assault Helicopter Company and all personnel involved in the support of Detachment B-52 for the period of 17 April to 17 June 1967. The citation reads "For exceptionally meritorious service in action against enemy Viet Cong and NVA in action in the I Corps tactical zone Republic of Viet Nam".

Operation Warbonnet which had begun on the 26th of October continued until the 15th day of November. In general, the operation went quite well. The 281st only suffered two casualties, one of which was due to refueling fire. The other was one of the aircraft commanders in on an extraction of one of the reconnaissance teams on the 11th of November. The team had been successfully located and picked up. The ship was lifting out of the PZ when a burst of enemy automatic weapons fire caught it. One round hit the left windshield and lodged in the wiper motor. The aircraft commander sustained facial cuts from the flying plexiglass; a very close call indeed!

Another action of note took place on the 3rd of November. Several

teams were scheduled for insertion, but were cancelled when an emergency call came in to extract a team in contact. The team's position had been compromised and they were in an exposed position near an old highway.

The team was located and the pick up ship went in, but it drew intensive ground fire and withdrew. After the area had been suppressed by Tac-air and gunships, a second ship was successful in making the pick up despite continuing enemy fire.

Back at Nha Trang, we were supporting the MACV Recondo School from the 10th until the 15th of the month. Also, an Air Force FAC pilot was located and rescued with an electric hoist after a two day search on the 12th and 13th. He had been downed west of the city by enemy ground fire. From the 14th through the 17th, two UH-1C's were involved in an operation in the Ban Me Thout area working for 5th SFG (ABN) Detachment C-5 (SOG).

We also sent four slicks to Trang Phue in support of the Special Forces "A" team at that location on the 15th. On the 24th, we again were in support of the MACV Recondo School in a combat assault west of Nha Trang. The 26th and 28th saw 281st aircraft journeying north to fly WHRID combat assaults in the Ninh Hoa and Tuy Hoa areas.

We participated in three operations on the last day of the month. Four slicks and two guns flew two CA's for the Special Forces "A" Detachments at Bu Prang and An Loc. The same number and type aircraft flew another A for 5th SFG A-502 located at Trung Dung near Nha Trang.

During the month of December, the 281st had a static commitment of four slicks OPCON to the 268th Combat Aviation Battalion at Phu Hiep. They flew a variety of missions, primarily in direct combat support roles.

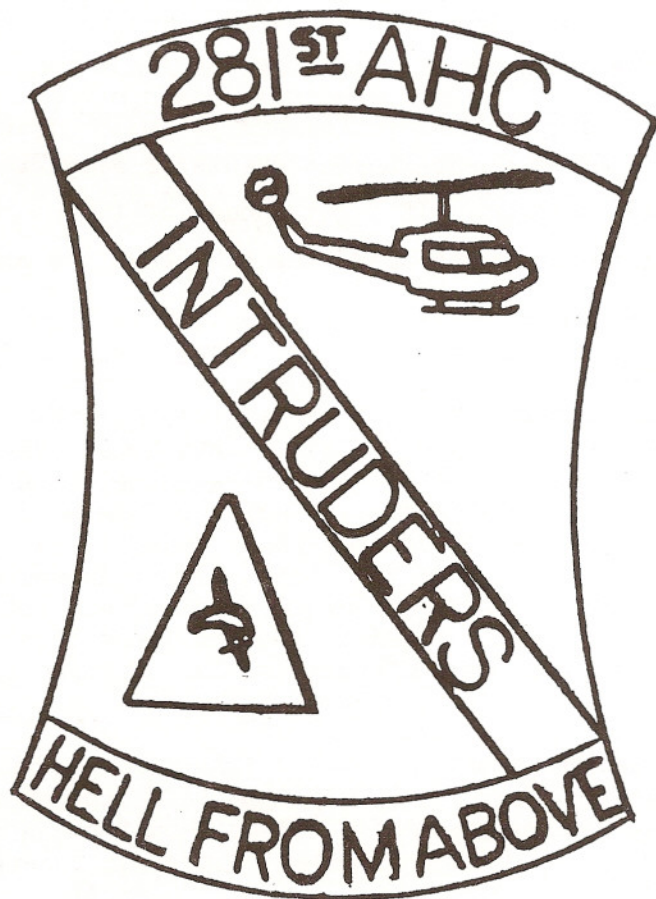
The remainder of the company remained at Nha Trang. There were combat assaults for the 22nd ARVN Regiment on the 1st and the 14th. As usual, we worked with the MACV Recondo School on several occasions during the month. The dates of Recondo flights were the 3rd, 8th, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th, and again on the 21st and 23rd.

From the 6th through the 10th a contingent of four slicks and two guns supported the Duc My Ranger School in practicing for, and giving a demonstration of various facets of air mobility. The exercise was designed to dramatize the versatility inherent to helicopter operations to a group of American and Vietnamese dignitaries. The demonstration was a coordinated effort of the Duc My Rangers, VNAF, and the 281st Assault Helicopter Company.

On 9 December the 281st AHC area was nortered, inflicting wounds to two enlisted personnel and slightly damaging four aircraft and ten trailers. A UH-1H crashed near Da Lat on the 17th of the month, totally destroying the aircraft and injuring all the crew.

The latter part of the month was devoted to less war-oriented pursuits. Everyone looked forward to Christmas, packages from home, cards, good food and drinks, and a few days of relaxation. We had a very important mission on the 25th. Our assignment was to transport an

oddly dressed, bearded, individual from a classified location to the ramp near our revetment area. There he distributed gifts and good cheer to a group of children from the surrounding area. The operation was an unqualified success and aided in closing out an eventful and successful year for the 281st Assault Helicopter Company.



REQUEST FOR INFO

The following is the official history of the 281st AHC for 1968. What I would like for our reunion unit history is some fill-in information and personalization of the official record. When you read this, if anything comes to mind that is missing or can be expanded on, please take a few minutes to write it down and send it to me. I have received only a small amount of info from members since our reunion and need more. There are two ways this can be done: One is to write a story of an event as best you remember; and the other is just one or two line recollections of miscellaneous events or remembrances, in other words "trivia flashes". If I get enough of these, they will make a good section representing the character of the unit's members.

Thank you,

Dean Roesner, Unit Historian
494 Woodcliff Drive
Redding, CA 96003

THE ROTOR BLADE RIPOFF

By Dean Roesner

In the late Spring of 1969, part of the Rat Pack went on temporary duty at a base to the North. While there, an aircraft suffered a blade strike so both main rotor blades were changed. However, one of the blades was still in excellent condition, but could not be used since they were installed as pairs. The Officers of Rat Pack immediately claimed it as their own. They dug a hole and erected it upright as a sort of mock shrine. Several barbecues and beer busts were held around it by both officers and enlisted men alike. When it came time to go back to Nha Trang, the blade was loaded crosswise in a chopper and with ends sticking out each side was flown back to our main base.

At Nha Trang it was again erected next to the officer's barracks. Since this bordered the flight line where our choppers were parked, it became a natural source of kidding between flight crews and pilots as to who really owned it. Things were pushed along even further when all current Rat Pack's pilot's names were painted on it. At that point several crew members began joking that if crew members' names were not added, the blade might disappear.

I was very short at this time and was acting as Rat Pack Platoon Sergeant while waiting for a replacement, so one evening I called a platoon meeting and told everyone to get into civies (civilian clothes). About 1/3 of the guys carried shovels, and in groups of 2 and 3 we headed for the officer's barracks at 1900 hours. It was very obvious what our intention was, but since there was an officer's meeting with the CO in attendance at 1900 hours, no one was around to stop us. The few straggler pilots could only holler over their shoulders a warning not to take their rotor blade as they hurried off. We dug up the blade and carried it back to the enlisted barracks area. There we dug a shallow trench between the barracks about two buildings down from ours and buried the blade out of sight. The whole operation took probably only 20 minutes, and we were all very pleased with ourselves to say the least.

We left the blade buried for about two weeks until I rounded up some cement and then we installed it in front of the Rat Pack barracks. During all this time the standard question pilots asked crew members was where the rotor blade was. Of course, we would just look at them blankly and ask "what rotor blade, Sir?" After it was in front of our barracks safely concreted into the ground, someone took a picture of it and with our standard reply penciled on the bottom, hung it in the officer's barracks.

Needless to say I painted out all the pilot's names but never did get around to putting ours on it. At the reunion I talked to a couple of people who left Nam in early 1970 and they said it was still standing. I'm curious if it was still there when the Company left Nam, Does anyone know?

UNIT AWARDS OF THE 281st AHC

Valorous Unit Award, Streamer embroidered HUE-PHU BAI

Meritorious Unit Commendation, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1966-1967

Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1966-1967

Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1967-1968

Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1968-1969

Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1965-1970

Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1970

Navy Cross

Definitions:

The Valorous Unit Award is awarded by the U.S. Army to units of the armed forces of the United States for extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy. It requires a lesser degree of gallantry, determination and esprit de corps than that required for the Presidential Unit Citation. The degree of heroism required is the same as that which would warrant award of the Silver Star to an individual.

The Meritorious Unit Commendation is awarded to units for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services for at least six continuous months during the period of military operations against an armed enemy. The degree of achievement required is the same as that which would warrant award of the Legion of Merit to an individual.

The Navy Cross, with the Air Force Cross and Distinguished Service Cross, is the nation's second highest award for bravery. It is awarded for extraordinary heroism, not justifying the award of a Medal of Honor, while engaged in an action against the enemy.

The Unit citation of the Gallantry Cross was awarded by the Republic of Vietnam for valorous combat achievement. It has four degrees with the Palm being the highest and in decreasing rank from Gold Star to Silver Star to Bronze Star.

**The 281st Intruders Newsletter
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STAMP
HERE

TO: