

THE 281st ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

Story and Photos by SP4 A.P. Honegger

Deep over Viet Cong infested jungle, a yellow smoke grenade marks the landing zone as a UH-1D helicopter hovers down on the clearing. Clad in black and green "tiger" suits, their faces streaked with camouflage paint, the members of a long range reconnaissance patrol appear from the bamboo thickets. One by one they dash towards the waiting "Huey" while supporting gunships

lace the surrounding jungle with rockets and machine-gun fire. Infiltrated five days earlier under cover of dusk by the same helicopter, the reconnaissance team was extracted after heavy contact with the enemy. Flying the team into hostile territory is a ship of the 281st Assault Helicopter Company.

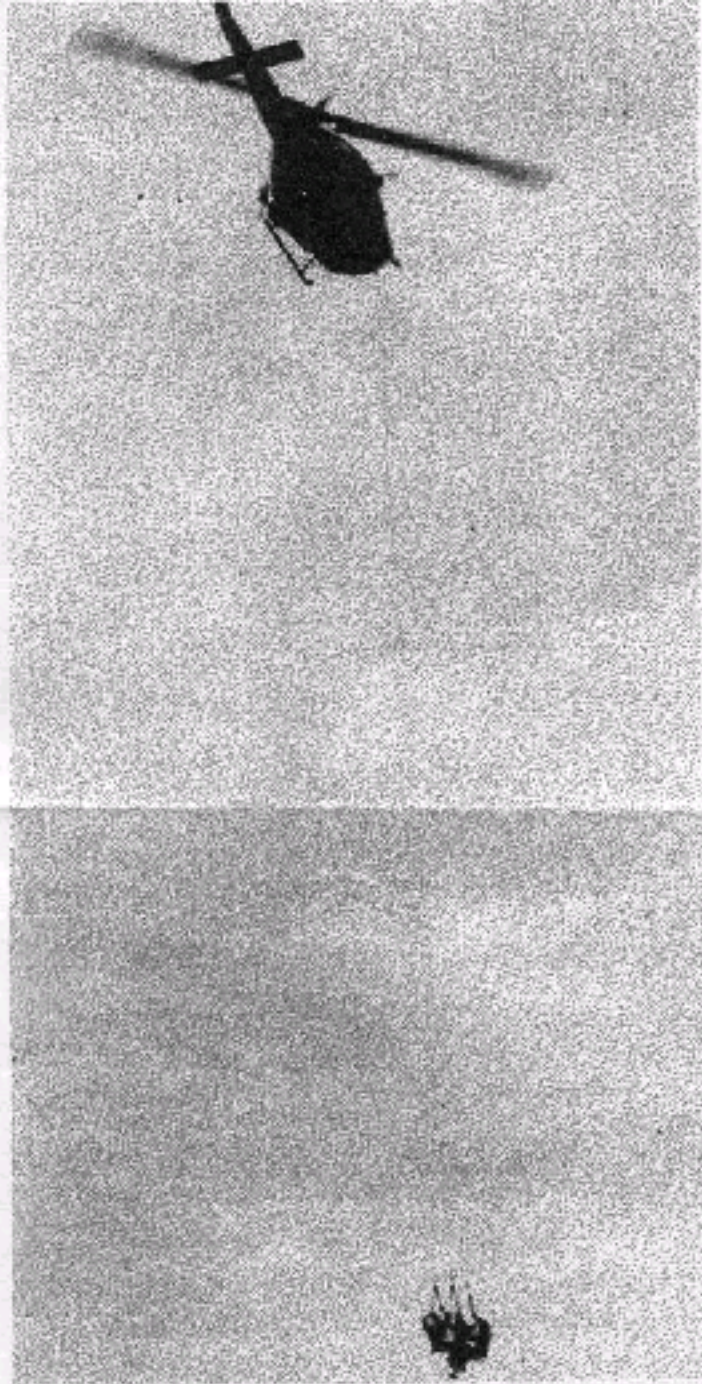
The 281st was activated at Ft. Benning, Ga., on October 7, 1965, under the name of 281st Aviation Company.

The unit arrived in Vietnam on June 9, 1966, as part of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion, to increase I Field Force Vietnam's air mobility by performing various missions ranging from command and control flights to regular courier runs. Without delay the Nha Trang based unit set about its given task and by August 1966 had flown 1,777 sorties totaling 1,057 hours.

The missions flown daily in support of the 5th Special Forces Group are charted by the Operations Section, headed by Major Robert J. Moberg of Centralia, Mo., and serves

Three members of the MACV Recondo School in Nha Trang, get acquainted with the techniques of the "McGuire rig" extraction. This method of exfiltration is used in extreme emergency only. The patrol members are often flown over miles of enemy territory dangling from the ropes.

SP4 Donald D. Creed of Willow Beach, Ariz., a crew chief, prepares some 200 rounds of grenades to be loaded on a gunship. In addition to a 40-millimeter grenade launcher, the "Frog-hog" carries 36 rockets and two M-60 machine-guns.





THE MORNING SUN silhouettes a machine-gun mounted on the side of a helicopter while two other aircraft fly in close formation. The machine-guns used on the helicopters are regular M-60s, such as the Infantry uses, adapted with a sight and special trigger mechanism.

as a life line for the Special Forces "A" camps scattered throughout the II Corps Tactical Zone, air-lifting much needed supplies and evacuating personnel.

In its largest operation to date, the 281st provided aerial support for a Special Forces detachment operating from Khe Sanh, a few miles south of the Demilitarized Zone in support of the 3d Marine Amphibious Force.

In addition to their combat missions, the "Intruders" furnish aircraft in support of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam Recon School in Nha Trang, implementing the tactics of reconnaissance patrolling with the techniques of rappelling, rope ladder infiltrations and extractions.

The company, organized into four platoons of more than 280 pilots and enlisted men, is commanded by Major James W. Mayhew, Renick, W. Va. Two airlift and one gun platoons are tasked with the tactical missions while a service platoon is responsible for the organizational maintenance. Headed by Major Donald R. Ruskauff of Madison, Wisc., the main-

tenance section is supported by the 483d Maintenance Detachment and the 499th Avionics Detachment, which provide the necessary technical personnel to keep the aircraft in a readiness posture.

Unique in its type of mission, the 281st Assault Helicopter Company takes its place among the finest aviation units in Vietnam in the midst of a new type of airmobile warfare.



SERGEANT James R. Jarrett of Tulsa, Okla., uses a rope ladder as he is extracted from the landing zone. When emergencies arise and terrain does not permit a landing, the patrol, under the direction of a recovery sergeant, uses 20-foot ladders to board the craft.

A formation of "slick" troop carriers, hover in a clearing while a Vietnamese Ranger company jumps from the craft to secure the landing zone. Depending on the landing zone, one of the eight "slicks" can touch down simultaneously while the "Wolfpack" gunships provide the necessary defense in case of attack.

