

the greater Ft. Worth/Dallas area. As the weeks went by, however, we started to become a cohesive unit, thanks to the overall motivation of the Team members, and a common desire to insure that the AH-1G was introduced into combat as smoothly and professionally as possible.

The concept was first for the NETT to become fully trained on the AH-1G and all of its systems. We were then to be followed by a hand-picked U.S. Army element that was to be assigned as Instructor Pilots and Maintenance Instructors at Hunter Stewart Air Force Base (now called Hunter Army Airfield) near Savannah, Georgia. When the AH-1G NETT deployed to Hunter Stewart, we proofed the Program of Instruction (POI) of the follow-on class, because we were really more experienced with the aircraft than they.

The NETT also conducted gunnery and rocket firing training while at Hunter Stewart. Here is where we were able to demonstrate to Bell Engineers that they should have listened to us on some of our recommendations on the locations of various switches. In one instance, Captain McCarty was ready to commence a rocket run and was at the ready line on the range. When he was cleared to "go hot" (turn on his Master Arm switch) he reached down to flip the switch. Since it was outside of his normal peripheral vision, he inadvertently hit the rocket pod jettison switch. You guessed it. Instead of going hot and making his rocket run, Mac jettisoned two fully loaded, nineteen round rocket pods on the ready line. Thank goodness that rocket warheads are designed to arm only when they are exposed to the firing G forces. This showed dramatically that there is no substitute for combat experience, when it comes to placing switches where they ought to be.

After the intensive training period at Hunter Stewart, the Team started putting the deployment package together for the long flight to Viet Nam. Everything, that Bell and the NETT could anticipate might be required, was crated or boxed up and labeled for later use. The departure airfield, which no longer exists, was called Greater Southwest Airport, and it was just South of what is now Dallas Ft. Worth International Airport. The plan was for the six AH-1G aircraft, that were to deploy to Vietnam with the NETT, to be loaded and flown on C-133 cargo aircraft. This required the removal of one main rotor blade and both fins of the horizontal stabilizer. The C-133 was an aircraft that looked like a huge C-130, and was designed to carry Intercontinental ballistic missiles.

With the exception of Major Paul Anderson and myself, who deployed to Vietnam early for coordination purposes, the rest of the AH-1G NETT, including our civilian Tech Reps, flew to Vietnam aboard a C-141 cargo aircraft. Also on the C-141 was Mike Davis' dog Bozo, which had become the Team's Mascot and which was smuggled aboard -- despite a threat of Courts Martial from Major Anderson and the threat of "severe repercussions" by the C-141's Aircraft Commander. Bozo's illegal presence on the aircraft became symbolic of the unorthodox attitude of the Team, and its tendency to bend the rules, as required to accomplish the mission at hand.

On August 14 at Bien Hoa airbase in Viet Nam, the first of two C-133 aircraft off-loaded the first three of our six AH-1G HueyCobras. Everyone pitched in to offload these aircraft since there was a great sense of excitement, now that our mission was finally about to begin. In about 2 1/2 hours, the first AH-1G was fully assembled, the blades balanced and Nick Stein our Maintenance Officer took it up for the aircraft's first test flight in the Republic of Viet Nam. Needless to say, we cheered long and hard.

The days following our arrival were both hectic and extremely busy. We really had no place to park our aircraft, to conduct our maintenance, or to store the spare parts and components that we brought along with us, nor, did we have proper housing or billeting for the enlisted men and our civilian Tech Reps. Despite the fact that the Team was technically TDY from AVSCOM for a one year period, operational command and control of the Team was given to the 145th Aviation Battalion, with whom most of us had served in our previous tour. With the exception of Majors Anderson and Stein, the majority of the officers were billeted with the 334th Aviation Company, the unit in which most of us had served our previous tour. This arrangement lasted for a short period of time, until a few of our more rowdy AH-1G NETT members became a bit unruly at the bar, and they were "invited" to leave. Since we were a Team, we all elected seek a place to live elsewhere.

We solved that by occupying (without anyone's permission) the upper floor of an abandoned building in the Cong Ly Compound, in downtown Bien Hoa. This compound was where officers from several aviation units, including the 334th and the 12 Aviation Group, were housed. At first, we were resentful of having been "uninvited" from the 334th. After all, it was our former combat unit. However, we soon decided that we would turn our second floor billeting situation into a first class facility, to include well painted and decorated rooms and a superbly designed "German

Ratskeller" type bar. Bob Matlick, the finest artist I have ever personally known, designed each of our rooms and the bar, which was constructed of exotic hard woods and brick, and included a number of heraldic shields on the walls. Each room emulated the architecture of a different nation, including a Mexican hacienda and a Swiss chalet. He also created a separate, formal meeting room with a grand round table, which was!

made from half of a monstrous cable drum. Like King Arthur's court, this was intended for the "Knights of the AH-1 NETT." In a short period of time, the AH-1 NETT Club became the "in place" to go. To keep out the "riff-raff" and, in particular the guys who had "uninvited" us from the 334th, we instituted a system whereby one had to pass through a heavy, leather padded door, with brass studs, after being studied through a "peek hole." We also had a rule that only allowed members of the club to buy drinks, which were purchased with poker chips placed in the member's personal jar. Unless someone from the NETT invited a guest, and was prepared to buy their drinks, no "outsider" was allowed to drink with us.

To the disappointment of most of the Team members, it became apparent that introducing the AH-1G into combat was more a function of training combat pilots and maintenance personnel to fly and maintain the aircraft, than actually participating in planned combat operations. This vexing fact of life was soon remedied by requesting and receiving approval for a "free strike zone" as our gunnery practice area". War Zone D was a huge, enemy infested area just Northeast of Bien Hoa. All of the NETT pilots who had been in the UTT had become "intimately familiar" with War Zone D during their first combat tours and were quite pleased when it was designated as our gunnery area and free strike zone. Thus, we were able (under the guise of "routine" gunnery instruction) to fly and shoot in an area that was known to be heavily infested with the enemy. We didn't lack for targets of opportunity. In fact, we discovered what was later estimated to be the enemy division, which almost overran Bien !

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Air Base and Long Binh during the Tet Offensive of '68.

The AH-1G NETT was not in country very long before we were deluged with requests for check-out flights for senior Aviation Officers. In fact, our first student was Major General Phillip Seneff, who commanded the First Aviation Brigade. General Seneff was a very flamboyant officer and a superb pilot who led by example. As such, he spent more of his check-out time linking up with Huey gunship Fire Teams and engaging in firefights than he did in practice

approaches and other requisite check-out maneuvers.

When Major General Robert R. Williams replaced him, General Williams came down to our flight line and informed me that he heard that senior officers were pressuring us for check-out flights. He said he was going to set an example by not getting checked out in the AH-1G. A few days later he came down and retracted his promise. It seems that he was briefing General Westmoreland about how the Cobras could support the Huey troop transports from farther back than was the custom with Huey gunships and thus, minimize their exposure to hostile enemy ground fire. Supposedly, General Westmoreland said, " Bob, how do you know? You are not checked out in the Cobra".

By this time, which was late October, 1967, Major Anderson had been promoted to LTC., and had been reassigned to the S-4 Section of the 1st Aviation Brigade. As the new Commander of the AH-1G NETT, it became my task to deal with General Williams and other senior officers who were making our lives somewhat complicated by seeking check-outs.

When General Williams told me that he wanted a check out, I foolishly asked if he wanted a real check-out, or did he want a "General Officer Special". The memory of General Seneff's unorthodox check-out was still fresh in my mind, and I was still angry at how he had refused to buckle down and learn to fly the aircraft properly.

General Williams locked my heels together and informed me that when he checked-out in an aircraft, it was a complete and thorough check-out. Being cocky and unafraid (in those days), I somewhat arrogantly informed General Williams that if that were the case, his first flight would be at 0800 the following day, that his Instructor Pilot would be CW-3 John Thompson, and that he was expected to know the pre-flight and run-up check lists before that flight. I didn't realize at the time that General Williams was " the most experienced" Army Aviator on active duty, and that he already had accumulated almost 15,000 flight hours in every type of aircraft that was in the Army's inventory. The next morning General Williams showed up at our flight line, went through the pre-flight and run-up check lists flawlessly and gave John Thompson one of the best rides John had ever administered to a new AH-1G pilot. As it turned out, General Williams became one of our best students, as well as our "Patron", and was very instrumental in helping the AH-1G accomplish its mission. In fact, he once bailed me out of a jam

where I was accused of destroying a Buddhist Temple full of women and children, killing 12 national Policemen and wounding an American War Correspondent. Ah, but I'm getting ahead of myself and that is another story.

As AH-1G pilots and maintenance personnel rotated through the in-country training program provided by the NETT, the aircraft began to enjoy a growing popularity. In fact, we were often requested to provide demonstration flights for VIP's to include the II Field Force Commander and Nuyen Co Ky, the Chief of the Vietnamese Air Force (later the President of the country). Somehow, we sandwiched in all of these demo flights, while maintaining our schedule of training new pilots and ground maintenance personnel.

Although the NETT members were a bit disenchanted at not being assigned "normal" combat missions, the targets of opportunity in War Zone D, our free strike zone, kept most of the young "hot bloods" from rebelling against their training duties. And then one day, it happened! On 31 January 1968, U.S. Forces and installations throughout the length and breadth of Viet Nam, were attacked by dedicated and highly motivated North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong Regulars.

I am pleased to say that this was the day the AH-1G NETT really went to war, showed its capabilities and earned its spurs. As soon as the first sounds of fighting were heard, we rushed to the Bien Hoa Airbase and awaited instructions from the Commanders of the 145th Aviation Battalion and 12th Aviation Group. Almost immediately we were asked to fly to Saigon, where enemy forces had launched a full-scale attack and had established a foot-hold in hotels, residential areas, and in the vicinity of the Phu Tho race-track near the center of town. It was an incredible experience, even for the battle-hardened members of the AH-1G NETT. The targets of opportunity were plentiful and we found ourselves shooting (and being shot at by) enemy soldiers who were in the upper floors of hotels, and virtually everywhere in the downtown Saigon area. Early in the battle, Jerry Childers took a hit in the cockpit, which resulted in a flesh wound. He also lost tail rotor control of his aircraft. Unsh! aken, Jerry made a beautiful no-tail rotor running landing at Bien Hoa and ran over to the dispensary for treatment. Thinking that Jerry was out of the battle, Jim Lee stepped in to replace him. When Jerry returned in a few minutes with his wound bandaged, he told Lee to get the hell out of his seat and proceeded to continue flying missions throughout the Tet

Offensive, until the enemy was finally routed. Lee had to be content to fly another aircraft.

One of the most inspirational things about the Tet Offensive was how it brought out a sense of teamwork among the members of the NETT. Prior to Tet, the fastest that we had fully refueled and reloaded the weapons on an AH-1G was 21 minutes. With our civilian Tech Reps pitching in (and with some disregard for "normal" safety procedures), we were turning aircraft around after being refueled and rearmed in only 11 minutes. We were on top of the world when the battle eventually tapered off, and were ready to go to Hanoi, if asked to do so.

The Tet offensive of 1968 was the real launch pad for the AH-1G's reputation in Viet Nam. The Playboy Platoon of the 334th (my old platoon), Commanded by Captain Ken Ruben, was the first unit that we checked out by the AH-1G NETT. The Playboys distinguished themselves magnificently during the Tet Offensive, particularly in a place called the Widow's Village, an action for which Captain Ruben was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. The AH-1G NETT didn't do so badly either. We were credited with destroying 64 structures, and accrued a body count of over 260 enemy personnel. In fact, I was called shortly thereafter, by LTC. Chuck Franklin, a senior staff officer at 1st Brigade Headquarters. LTC Franklin informed me that General Williams thought we had done an outstanding job during Tet, and wanted to present awards to the various members of the AH-1G NETT. LTC Franklin said that the way he saw it, I should be written up for a Silver Star, and the other members of the Team for the Distinguished Flying Cross.

I explained to him that we really didn't need any more awards or decorations, that we were too busy to drop everything and write up awards and that we were pleased and honored to have been able to join in the combat that the Tet Offensive provided. I pointed out that I could not, and would not, accept a Silver Star, since I already had one, and because I had done nothing more or less than any of the other members of the NETT during the fighting. Furthermore, were I to do so, they would have been warranted in beating the hell out of me for accepting an award for doing the same things they had done.

LTC Franklin informed me that this was not a request, that we "would" write up awards for our actions and that I could consider it an order. I told him that we would comply, but that we would only submit one "John Doe" type narrative for a Distinguished

Flying Cross, which would read the same for every member who had flown in the Tet Offensive. That way, we would only have to come up with one narrative, instead of 11. When General Williams came down to present the Distinguished Flying Cross to the awardees, a staff officer began to read the narratives of the actions for which the awards were being presented. After hearing the same narrative about three times, General Williams asked if they were all going to be the same. I replied yes, and he said the hell with it. We stopped reading narratives and he quickly pinned the DFC's on the recipients and thanked us all for our efforts.

After the Tet offensive of 1968, there were other battles in and around the Saigon/Bien Hoa area where elements of the NETT were involved. One was a battle that took place in Cholon, the predominately Chinese section of Saigon. In this particular battle, our Cobras were able to destroy a key bridge that impeded the escape of enemy forces. It also resulted in an investigation of the undersigned for allegedly destroying a Buddhist Temple (full of women and kids, of course), killing 12 National Police and wounding an American War Correspondent. The good news is that after an extensive investigation, where General Williams intervened on my behalf, it was determined that no women, kids or National Police had been killed and that the war correspondent, who was foolishly too close to the action, had been struck in the buttocks by one of my 7.62 Mini-gun rounds. And now you know the rest of the story.

As the AH-1 NETT continued its mission throughout the spring and early summer of 1968, we recommended over 1000 product improvement changes to the aircraft. While the AH-1G was a significant improvement over armed UH-1 B, and C models, it did have several serious design flaws. It had no ventilation ports in the tail boom, causing radios to burn up after only several hours of operation, the oil cooler fan was a poor design which caused Bell to have to send replacements as fast as they could be produced. It had a blue Plexiglas canopy, which had the same effect on night flying as wearing sunglasses. Moreover, some engineer had designed the static port location adjacent to the front of the M-18 fixed machine gun pod. Because of the blast effect, this caused the altimeter to fluctuate up to 500 feet when the fixed, inboard machine gun pods were being fired.

Perhaps the most dangerous flaw in the AH-1G, however, was its poorly designed attitude indicator. These indicators were 3" instruments, instead of the 5" instruments found on the Huey. They "fit very nicely" into the Cobra's small instrument panels, but

they were notorious for failing and rolling over, after about 30 minutes of flight operations. When you coupled the blue glass of the canopy, the 500-foot fluctuation in the altimeter, and the totally useless attitude indicator, night combat operations in the AH-1G over the jungle with no visible horizon were pretty sporty propositions. Despite our complaints and warnings to everyone we could talk to about these problems, our pleas seemed to fall on deaf ears. It was only when the President of Bell, Mr. Ducayet, visited the AH-1G NETT that we were able to get somebody's attention and eventually get a replacement attitude indicator.

However, the Gods who look out for Army Aviators and fools were apparently not totally on our side in those days. Jerry Childers, then my Executive Officer and an aerospace engineer in his own right, had flown back to Ft. Worth to test a new attitude indicator after he had insisted that it be vibrated for at least 30 minutes on a vibration stand (the magic time period where they normally failed). Jerry called me from the States and said that we had a replacement indicator that he believed could do the job, and that he was going to carry the first one back with him in his hand baggage. We met Jerry when he arrived in Bien Hoa Airport and were delighted that at last, the problem seemed to be solved. John Thompson, who by then had replaced Nick Stein as the Maintenance Officer, wanted to install and test fly it that evening. However, I told him to hold off until the following day, since it looked like it was going to be a dark moonless night and our test flight area was generally!

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r War Zone D.

That night, we were rocketed by 122 MM rockets. Only one rocket fell anywhere near us, only one piece of shrapnel struck a Cobra aircraft, yet that one single piece of shrapnel punched out the one and only new attitude indicator in the entire Republic of Viet Nam and, probably, in all of South East Asia. We were convinced that the Lord was angry with us, since it was to be several weeks before the next batch of attitude indicators arrived.

Another recommendation made by the AH-1G NETT, was to equip the aircraft with a 20 mm cannon. The 7.62 mm miniguns that were mounted on the aircraft were limited to about 750 meters range. This was because, particularly at night, you cannot be absolutely sure where your rounds are impacting, unless you can observe tracer ricochet. When we took the recommendation to General Williams, he eventually lent his support, but only after he had reminded me that we had been able to shoot enemy soldiers in hotel

windows with rockets. I countered with the fact that all of us, on the NETT, were highly experienced rocket shooters, but that the average pilot who would fly the Cobras might not be as proficient. It was not long thereafter, that the Army adopted the M-35, 20 mm system. Another recommendation which did not receive General Williams' initial support was that the AH-1G be equipped with some sort of Environmental Control Unit (ECU -- which is "military-speak" for air conditioner). C!

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pilots were occasionally losing as much as 5 to 7 lbs. of liquid during one flight inside that closed canopy, because the poorly designed ventilation system was usually pumping hot air at the altitudes where the Cobras normally operated. General Williams, who never broke a sweat in his life (not even when he was wearing a Chicken Plate in a Cobra cockpit), was not sold on the idea of an air conditioner in the Cobra.

To get him to change his mind, John Thompson decided to try something that, had it not worked, might have gotten him reduced to at least two grades below a Bugler. While flying with the General at one of our practice fields, John had the General initiate a 180-degree side autorotation. Normally, General Williams would have performed this maneuver easily. However, on this day, he was a bit behind the aircraft and when he got ready to flair, a drop of sweat ran into his eye. The General asked John to take the controls, but John just ignored him and they "encountered the ground" fairly hard. When the General asked John why he didn't take the controls when he (the General) had sweat in his eye, John calmly retorted by saying, "General, lots of people get sweat in their eyes when they fly this aircraft. It just so happens that this is the first time you have experienced it." Shortly thereafter, an INSURE (Immediate, Non-Standard, Urgent Request for Equipment) message was sent out ! from ACTIV (Army Concept Team In Vietnam). The rest is already aviation history

In reporting the various activities of the AH-1G NETT, it is important to note that, unlike the training system used in all military flight schools, particularly the AH-1G NETT's "student/instructor assignment" system was uniquely different. In the flight schools, students are assigned to one Instructor Pilot, with whom they remain for the duration that phase of their training,. All of the members of the NETT, beyond being highly proficient Army Aviators and Instructor Pilots, were experts in one or more specific aspects of helicopter employment. To benefit the "well-rounded knowledge and combat survivability" of all our

students, we decided to rotate each student through all 12 operational pilots. Bob Matlick, for example, was one of the Army's leading experts on helicopter gunnery, John Thompson was the absolute master of autorotations, Harold Simpson was exceptionally good at emergency procedures. Others, particularly Davis, Hunt and Lee, were highly knowledgeable in tacti!

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or the armed helicopter Wing-Man, etc. Consequently, when a pilot was graduated from the AH-1G NETT course of instruction, he had been exposed to "the best from the best." This, however, required a level of standardization among the various members of the Team that has probably never been matched. We each literally had to "talk the talk" and "walk the walk" exactly like the other guys on the Team, or our students would have become hopelessly confused.

It is quite fitting to direct attention to the capabilities of the enlisted and civilian Tech Rep members of the Team. They were equally superb in every way. Not only were they resourceful (some times overly so) and creative, they were regularly able to keep five out of six Cobras airworthy and flyable at all times. The only exception was on Fridays, when First Sergeant Spear respectfully requested that we drop down to four out of six operational aircraft, to allow for extended maintenance. I didn't know it at the time, but First Sergeant Spear had struck a deal with the NCO who ran the General Officer's Mess at Long Binh.

Every Friday at 3:00 PM we would fly a Cobra to a place where the General Officer's ration breakdown sergeant would get in the front seat of the aircraft, which, in turn, would fly out to War Zone D. Whomever was flying the mission, and it was normally one of our Warrant Officers, would allow this young sergeant to shoot all of the machine gun ammunition and rockets on the helicopter. Upon return to the hot spot at the ration breakdown point, the sergeant would disembark and would then load our Team's Support Huey with steaks and lobster that had been destined for the General Officer's Mess. It was no wonder that our Friday night Barbeques at Bien Hoa became legendary. First Sergeant Spear also bartered Cobra rides for R&R quotas, but that's another story.

Another area where First Sergeant Spear excelled was in repairing air conditioners and diesel generators. It seems that when he was a young soldier, the U.S. Army sent him to air conditioner and diesel generator repair school. Spear never forgot his lessons. His technique was to go to some unit and offer to repair some of their broken air conditioners--if they would let him have some spare parts from those beyond repair. What they didn't know was

that Spear could repair virtually any air conditioner, irrespective of its condition. As a consequence, before the AH-1 G NETT had completed its mission, every officer and enlisted man on the Team had air-conditioning in his hooch.

Sergeant Spear's generator repair exploits were equally spectacular. After the Team's pilots had been forced to move their quarters onto the Bien Hoa Airbase, following the 1968 Tet Offensive, we regularly experienced severe "brown outs", caused by the Air Force cutting back on the power they supplied to our organization. First Sergeant Spear finally had enough of this and one day, while I was working on something in the orderly room, I heard a bunch of shouting and instructions being given nearby. When I looked out the door, I saw something about as big as a railroad car. I also saw three oriental guys who didn't look Vietnamese. I asked First Sergeant Spear what this was all about and what was that 'monstrous thing' outside the orderly room. Sergeant Spear looked down his nose at me and said " Sir, haven't you ever seen a 100 Kilowatt Generator?" Astounded, I persisted in my questioning and asked him about the three Orientals who were accompanying the generator. Spear replied,

" Sir, with a generator this large, you need a three-man crew to keep it operating 24 hours a day. These three Koreans will each work an 8-hour shift." I didn't bother to ask him how they would be paid, fed or housed. I really didn't want to know.

It would take many pages to adequately describe the adventures and accomplishments of the AH-1G NETT. Suffice it to say that, even though the U.S. Army was engaged at that time in an Advanced Attack Helicopter Program selection process (where the AH-64 was ultimately selected), the exploits of the HueyCobras and the men who flew and maintained them were such that over 2,040 of various models have been manufactured to date. We have come a long way since Lyle McCarty hit the wrong switch and jettisoned his rocket pods, and since General Williams almost had an accident because of sweat in his eye.

When I was working for Bell, and we were trying to find a name for Bell's latest advanced attack helicopter, I threw out the name King Cobra. To date, this name has stuck. With its rich legacy, this new aircraft will have to really be something to measure up.

Richard S. Jarrett
Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.)

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AH-1G HueyCobra New Equipment Training Team's (Initially Assigned)
Personnel:

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Davis, Michael J.	CW2	W3151943
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Lee, James M.	CW2	W3152002
Simpson, Harold	CW2	W3151861
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Pratt, James	Cpt	OF101187
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Nicholson, William H.	SFC	RA17378710
Beamer, William R.	SSG	RA13562702
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Thessen, Andrew G.	SSG	RA51253177
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Bullock, Mercer, Jr.	SP5	RA12608132
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Shaffer, Edward M.	SP5	RA55688458
Timberlake, Buster R.	SP5	RA15650244
White, Thomas E.	SP5	RA16509716
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