

A History Of The 150th Transportation Detachment (CHFM) Roadrunners! The First Year August 1964-September 1965

The 150th Transportation Detachment (CHFM)* was born on August 8, 1964 in Fort Eustis, Virginia. During August and September 1964, the Detachment's full complement of 77 men was activated for deployment to the Republic of Vietnam. (*Cargo Helicopter, Field Maintenance)

Captain **Frederick R. (Tim) Bisch** was assigned as the Commanding Officer while CWO **John C. "Jack" Moodt** was selected as the Maintenance Officer. The balance of the organization was comprised of 75 highly skilled NCO's and enlisted men who held a variety of job skills. Although the intended destination was considered "classified", convention wisdom, even among the local civilian population, indicated that Southeast Asia – Vietnam – would be the new home for the unit. CWO Moodt was designated as the advance party representative and left 10 days prior to the unit.

After assembling and preparing for overseas movement, the unit departed Fort Eustis on September 26, 1964 aboard USAF aircraft. Scenic stops were made along the way in such garden spots as Guam and Wake Island and the unit finally arrived in Vinh Long on September 30th.

Upon arrival in Vietnam, the 150th became part of the US Army Support Command, under USARYIS and USARPAC. It was further assigned to the 13th (Delta) Aviation battalion in Can Tho and then further attached to the 62d Aviation Company in Vinh Long. The 62d, also recently arrived in-country, was commanded by Major Thomas E. Anderson, Infantry.

The Vinh Long airfield compound was located just 60 miles southwest of Saigon, only two miles from the sprawling city of Vinh Long, in the heart of the Mekong Delta. The compound featured such amenities as an EM club, NCO, Club, Officers Club, a PX, a theater/chapel, tennis court, volleyball court, basketball court, tape recording van and, in the rainy season, a natural swimming area. The airfield was situated on the banks of the beautiful Mekong river. Vinh Long city itself was in a predominantly rice farming area with a population of approximately 40,000.

"Five-star" living accommodations (for Vietnam field conditions) awaited the men of the 150th. These were well suited to the climate of "HOT" and "HOTTER" that prevailed throughout much of the year, with a year-round humidity of about 85%. Living quarters were of open-bay construction, cement floors, screened exterior side-walls and wired for

electricity. “Gourmet” food was available in the mess hall with the exception of milk. Vinh Long had no dairies, no cows and no milk!

Soon after arriving in Vinh Long, members of the 150th began being treated to scenic tours of the rice fields and jungles by UH-1B helicopters of the 62d Aviation Company. CWO Moodt, who conducted many of these “tours”, described his aerobatic maneuvers as “showing-people-a-good-time”. However, these were often interpreted by the passengers as “scaring-the-hell-out-of-us” tours.

The primary responsibility of the 150th Transportation Detachment was to provide aircraft maintenance to the helicopters of the 62d Aviation Company, known as the “Outlaws”, which included the armed helicopters of the “Maverick” platoon

Partial receipt of equipment, shipped from Fort Eustis, VA, arrived on October 7, 1964. This first shipment consisted of two (2) mechanics tool boxes!

Desperate for tools, but determined to begin performing their mission, the men of the 150th set out to find ways to do their jobs. Between October 6-8, twelve (12) UH-1B helicopters were issued to the 62d from Saigon. On October 9-11, four more UH-1Bs were assigned from units in Bien Hoa and three more from other units in the Saigon area. Eight additional aircraft were assigned between October 15-20 bringing the unit up to full strength in aircraft. Each aircraft required an inspection and maintenance flight prior to delivery to the unit at Vinh Long.

Mechanics, armed with a minimum of tools, many on loan from the 114th Aviation Company, also stationed in Vinh Long, began their mission. Combined with the always-present Tech Inspectors, manuals in hand, the aircraft were made ready for flight to Vinh Long by Captain Bisch and CWO Moodt, the unit’s only rated aviators.

Technical Inspectors **Fred Jacobs, Norman Jennings and “Skip” Frontera** were individually and collectively responsible for Quality Assurance. Their job performance was critical in insuring a safe and airworthy aircraft was put back into service. Upon arrival in Vinh Long, all aircraft required additional maintenance prior to being declared operational ready. By October 21, the 150th had provided a fully operational complement of helicopters to the 62d.

27 helicopters and 5 light (O-1) observation aircraft were part of the 62d aircraft authorization. Additionally, one UH-1B was assigned to the 150th for use in delivery of aircraft parts, transporting maintenance people to field locations for emergency repairs, recovery of downed aircraft, etc. Because of it’s mission, the nickname “Roadrunner” was adopted for the 150th aircraft and the men of the unit quickly took the name to describe themselves – Roadrunners!

The Roadrunner flight crew normally consisted of **Pat Theriot, Chester Voisin and Rossie Harris** (fondly referred to as the three Cajuns), who flew in the Roadrunner aircraft to any location necessary to perform the mission of the 150th.

The unit was highly skilled, thorough and ready, with two shifts, seven days a week, to satisfy a full-time maintenance requirement. The day shift worked from 0700 until 1730 and the night shift from 1700 to 0130. Unexpected maintenance requirements many times required the skills of all members to begin at “can” and end at “can’t”.

Precluded from submitting requisitions for repair parts until October 15th, and with no authorization to have brought spare parts to Vietnam from the states, the unit resorted to cannibalization of aircraft, an unsatisfactory practice, to serve as a temporary, stopgap measure until the supply lines were filled. **Jack Konopka** was instrumental in obtaining (read “scrounging”) untold needed parts and was rewarded with his first helicopter flight experience in the Delta with Tim Bisch at the stick.

Sheet metal repair was a critical area of maintenance. **Leon Osterland**, who fortunately for the unit, dumped the Air Force for the Army, was a god-send specialist in this field. Many of his friends, at his insistence, volunteered to enter the hot tail boom to buck rivets for him. **Jackie Lane and Cary Gilbert** appeared to be his favored choices but none escaped the power of Osterland’s persuasion. Other exhibits of his work were prominently displayed throughout the company and, although they were called “refreshment bins” they were commonly referred to as “beer coolers”.

John Doyle was responsible for designing a traversing stop inside the UH-1 that prevented the door-mounted machine gun from spraying the inside of the helicopter with bullets during combat runs. His “invention” became known as the “Doyle pole” and was adopted by units throughout Vietnam because of its effectiveness. This invention also dramatically reduced the volume of sheet metal work otherwise generated by crew chiefs and door gunners in flight.

Components outside the area of “authorized” maintenance was always a target of repair by **Virgil Hoff**. Believing that no better maintenance was available anywhere else, and with his curiosity unbridled, he continually experimented. Virg, by example, inspired many members of the 150th to become better at what they did.

SFC James Proctor, the NCOIC, was the consummate professional, on whose judgement and experience everyone in the 150th relied, was responsible for all administrative matters. He was deliberate in his thought, careful with words, loyal to the cause and dedicated to excellence.

Life at Vinh Long, with the 150th, was not all work and no play. **Ike Beger, Harold Filo and Mike Schillaci** were always ready to provide entertainment at any parties, and there were many. Well-deserved promotions set the tone for these informal get togethers. Their rendition of “I’ve Got A Tiger By The Tail” is forever engraved in the memory of many members of the Roadrunners.

Jack Moodt was likely to break out in song at any time with his version of “In The Shade Of The Old Apple Tree”. Mike Schillaci went on to become the drummer for the Mickey

Gilley Band while Jack Moodt's singing career was placed on hold in favor of a military one.

The 150th performed with outstanding success throughout that first year in Vietnam. Unfortunately, on June 16, 1965, the commander, Captain Tim Bisch sustained critical injuries in a helicopter crash that resulted in his medical evacuation back to the states. This was a day full of sadness as the men of the 150th said goodbye to their leader. Captain Bisch was succeeded by Captain Arthur J. Pool who continued the outstanding tradition of service and support.

As members of the 150th gather every two years for a reunion, most, if not all, have commented that "the 150th Trans Detachment was the best experience of my Army career". These thoughts are testament to the professional leadership shown by Captain Tim Bisch and CWO Jack Moodt.

These outstanding men of the 150th were "ordinary people" from various social and economic backgrounds, with an inner steel, the soul's ally, forged in the refinery of adversity. They offered some of their life's most vital years in the service of our country, and may have sacrificed their ambitions so others may not have to sacrifice theirs.

They were Soldiers! They were a group of extraordinary people who served beneath the flag, who saluted the flag and whose coffins are draped by the flag.

I am honored to have served amongst them.

Edited from the original, written by:

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