

My Viet Nam Tour of Duty

Gerald Feldman, Captain USAR

November 1, 1967 -December 1, 1968

I joined the 61st Assault Helicopter Company in Fort Campbell, Ky after flight school and remained with the 2nd Platoon (Ducks) of the 61st until the end of my Viet Nam tour. My call sign was luckystar 22

Feel free to interrupt audio at any time.

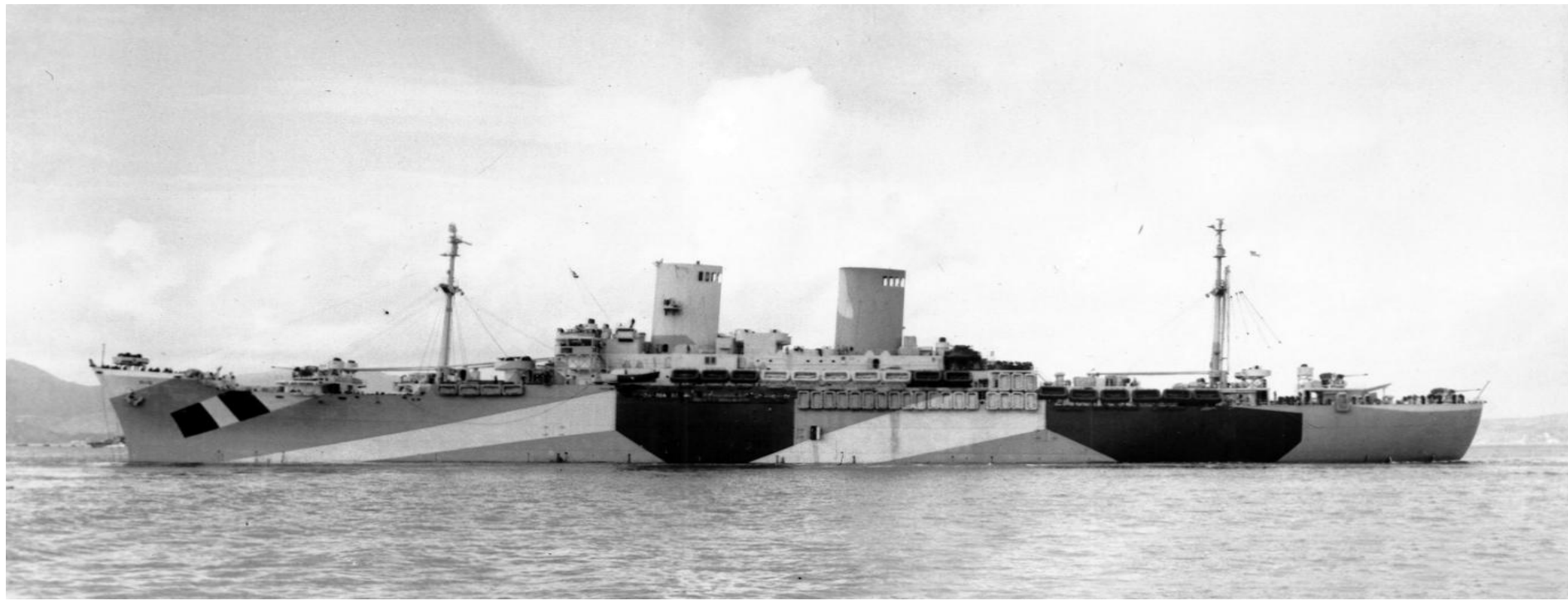
Definitions

- Assault Helicopter Company - 2 “slick” platoons 1 gunship platoon, 1 Maintenance platoon.
- Platoon - each platoon has 6 hueys.
 - Slick platoons had H model Hueys, gunships were C model Hueys.
 - A slick ship has an aircraft commander, Pilot, Crew chief and gunner.
 - Can carry 6 combat loaded US soldiers.
 - Has 2 M60 machine guns operated by the crew chief and gunner
 - Pilots have armored chairs.
 - A gunship may have rockets, grenades or minigun (small caliber gatling gun)
- LZ - Landing Zone. Can be a single ship jungle clearing or a brigade size installation, like LZ English.

Pacific Voyage

On 1 November 1967, the General John Pope again departed Oakland Army Base with elements of the **61st Assault Helicopter Company**, the 92nd Assault Helicopter Company, the 134th Assault Helicopter Company, the third packet of the 221st Signal Company (Pictorial) and the 45th Military Intelligence Detachment, arriving in Okinawa on 17 November 1967 for a 24-hour layover. Departing Okinawa the following day into a typhoon. We arrived at Qui Nhon, South Vietnam on 21 November 1967 and disembarked the 61st Assault Helicopter Company

- The voyage included playing hearts and eating good meals in the officers mess.
- It was a great place to meet new friends from the 92nd and 134th.



Nov 1, 1967 USNS General John Pope

Okinawa November 17th

Fellow officers and I went to the officers club. My promotion date from 2nd Lt or 1st Lt should have been on November 7th.

After a while, we were asked to leave the club.

Then a few of us then went to a local bar.

We left Okinawa and went through Typhoon.



Qui Nhon Nov. 21st



Our commander had us line up with duffel bags waiting for landing craft. Instead we pulled into a modern port. As we debarked, my former TAC officer from Fort Eustis, was unloading the adjacent container ship.

Viet Nam

Life was a Bummer
in Vietnam



The UH1 (Iroquois) more commonly The Huey

Me



Our Aircraft

We flew H model UH-1 (Huey) helicopters. We had a crew of 4, Aircraft Commander, pilot, crew chief, and gunner. We could carry 6 combat loaded troops. This is an actual aircraft I flew.



How a Helicopter Works

5 controls all work together to confound the pilot. The HUEY is a 2 bladed rotor, called semi rigid.

- Cyclic - This is the stick that controls the yaw axis (tilts the copter right, left, nose down, nose up). Pilot uses right hand.
- Collective - raises the helicopter by collectively increasing or decreasing the angles of attack of the rotor blades. This is referred to as “pulling pitch”.
- Anti torque rotors - These are pedals controlling the tail rotor. This counteracts the torque of the rotor blades.
- Throttle - This is a motorcycle like twist handle on the end of the collective. When you pull pitch you increase the throttle, and at the same time adjust the tail rotor. You need to keep your rotor RPM in range.

Change any of the above controls, that affects the other controls. This is a full feedback loop 🤔

Differences from a fixed wing aircraft

- The spinning rotor behaves as a gyroscope. If a downward pressure is placed at one point, that effect is felt 90° later in the plane of rotation (counter clockwise in a Huey). So if I push forward on the cyclic, it will insert a downward pressure on the right side causing the nose to dip down.
- Retreating blade stall! 😞 When a helicopter is in forward flight, the blades on the right are going forward and the blades on the left are going backwards. In an airfoil, when the air over the airfoil is not strong enough the airfoil loses lift and stalls. Fixed wing pilots train for this, because it is a result of going too slow. But in a helicopter it is the result of going too fast.
- Supersonic compression. The loud machine gun sound made by the rotor tips are a result of supersonic compression.

Helicopter Modes of flight.

- Hover in ground effect. Helicopter hovers about 3 or 4 feet above the ground. Ground effect where your rotor creates a cushion of air.
- Hover out of ground effect. This is more difficult, because you usually don't have much visual assistance and no cushion, but you don't do this often.
- Translational lift. When a helicopter takes off from a hover, as it gains forward airspeed, there is a point where the dynamics of the rotor blades start behaving more like a fixed wing aircraft.

Ban Me Thuot

After debarking, we all got onto busses and drove to Lane AAF. Lane was protected by the Tiger ROK division. This was the Republic of Korea's premier combat unit.

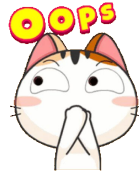
The next day we flew to Ban Me Thuot for in country orientation with the 155th AHC. Ban Me Thuot is about 250 miles Southwest of Quy Nhon. stayed there for a week and we all got our in country flight certifications. We also had a thanksgiving dinner in their mess hall served by cute VietNameese ladies.

Mostly we flew with a flight instructor, John Grow, who I reconnected with at a [Viet Nam Helicopter Pilots Association](#) convention in Orlando, Fl.

Vung Tao

After we returned from Ban Me Thuot, several of us flew to Vung Tao to pick up our aircraft that had come over on a carrier.

I, as a 2nd Lt was flight lead since the aircraft was from our platoon. My copilot was 1st Lt Dick Easterwood, our operations officer. Major Klippel flew trail. Due to the Northeast monsoon, we had to fly low, so I decided to fly along the coast to avoid any small arms fire since we were not armed. Our refueling destination was Dong Ba Thin, our battalion HQ, west of Cam Rahn. Flying up Cam Rahn Bay, we had to climb to avoid the masts of ships. We then got an emergency call from Cam Rahn AFB control tower, “flight of 16 hueys, come up on guard”. The AFB was not on our maps! 



I immediately executed a left turn to Dong Ba Thin. While refueling, my company commander radioed me that he received my overdue promotion orders. We arrived at Lane without incident.

Dong Ba Thin

I spent the next 2 weeks in Dong Ba Thin as an assistant S3 scheduling all our battalion's flights. At New Years reception, I asked my company commander to when I could return to Lane. While this was pretty boring, I did hear that one of our company's aircraft had flown into a mountain at An Khe pass. I later became familiar with An Khe pass as we flew through it regularly. This was a mountain pass on highway 19 that was somewhat treacherous because of the Northeast Monsoon with a 1,000 ft cloud deck.

I returned to Lane early in January in time for Tet, the Vietnamese Lunar New Year.

Tet 1968

My first mission that morning was to carry the Viet Nameese Army commander of LZ Chrystal. I flew him and his family to several fire bases in the area. Later on I picked up a US Brigadier General at Ba Gi (close to Lane) and proceed to fly around Qui Nhon mountain. This was the first time I was fired upon, but was out of range, but the short timer general had enough and I dropped him off at Ba Gi and his Sgt Major took over.

I observed Major Wade, our gunship commander putting a rocket into the Cal Tex gas station.



Our Missions

We flew 3 different types of missions.

- Combat Assault. This is where we would carry troops into or out of an LZ. we alternated with 1st platoon where we would fly CAs every other day.
- Command and Control. Usually single ship where we would carry a unit commander during an operation.
- Ash and trash. This was assorted stuff. Sometimes resupplying a fire base, Transporting some VIP. I once carried General Abrams, and another the whole Vietnamese staff (9). My favorite mission was people sniffer where we would fly low with a device that could detect if humans were in an area.
- Night flare missions. A night we would fly above a perimeter and drop flares. At LZ Uplift, we had one 2nd platoon aircraft crash and explode. I had flown with that crew many times.

My specific Jobs

Most of the time in combat assaults I flew trail. This required monitoring our VHF radio used by our group and the FM radio where I used to check artillery to make sure we did not get hit by our Artillery. My friend Ernie Richard served on the Destroyer USS Perkins DD877. I routinely accuse Ernie of trying to shoot me down. He still hunts wild turkeys.

People sniffer. This job requires flying low and slow while and operator has a device that is able to detect human sweat.

Tet 1968

In late January, 1968 we had an attachment operating in An Khe. On Tet, Jan. 30th, I flew from An Khe to LZ Chrystal, and picked up the Vietnamese Colonel and his family. Spent part of the morning flying him and his family to some vietnamese army installations. I later returned to Lane and then to Bagi, to pick up a general. That was the first time I was shot at. I spent all day circling Quy Nhon mountain. I dropped the general off at Bagi, and picked up his sergeant major. There was a Caltex gas station in Quy Nhon, and I had a great view of one of our C model gunships taking it out with a big bang.



KA-BOOM!!!!

LZ English

In February we moved to LZ English to support the Cav who was planning on moving out. One thing the cav was effective, was to have the helicopters supply them in the morning, and remove food and backpacks so they could travel light. We would then resupply them at night. I spent the rest of my tour at English, but we kept our hootches at Lane.

LZ English



Nha Trang and Passover

I was ordered to take all the jewish guys in our unit to Nha Trang for Passover. We hitch hiked to and from Nha Trang. There were always helicopters coming and going. In Nha Trang, I ran into Cpt. Danly, my TAC officer from ROTC. He told me that my friend, Gerald Pelzman, from ROTC flight school had been killed. He had become an infantry officer.

As we walked into the mess hall being used for passover, and the guy who was running the passover, was my frat brother, Fred Dirringer. Later, Fred married a girl from Atlanta who knew my future wife.

Rest of tour

I've got plenty of little epithets I can talk about. I extended one month so I would get my promotion to Captain before I left. My last flight in Viet Nam was on a de Havilland Beaver.

