

# Airmobility 1961-1971.pdf/32



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Nang Air Base. This unique delivery was accomplished without serious incident even though ceilings were down to 100 feet over the ocean. These three aviation companies experienced seemingly insurmountable difficulties because of a critical shortage of engines and deterioration of rotor blades and aviation equipment due to high humidity. Nevertheless, they continually overflowed their programmed flying hours and exceeded aircraft availability normal rates.

To some extent the support gap was bridged upon arrival from Fort Riley, Kansas, in January 1962 of the 18th Aviation Company (U-1A Otter). These aircraft were spread throughout the four corps areas to provide a utility supply net throughout the length of the country. Most of their missions involved delivery of aircraft parts and supplies to rotary wing aviation units that were widely separated from their support elements.

The first Marine helicopter squadron arrived in country in April 1962 and was established at the old French base at Soc Trang in the Mekong Delta. In June and July of that year the Marines swapped bases with the 93d Transportation Company at Da Nang because of the greater capability of the Marine H-34 helicopters to operate in the higher elevations of the northern region.

To provide better command and control of the Army's growing fleet, the 45th Transportation Battalion was deployed to Vietnam in early 1962 from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and assumed command of the three Army helicopter companies and the fixed-wing Otter company. Shortly thereafter two more light helicopter companies, the 33d and the 81st, were deployed and also came under the command of the 45th Transportation Battalion.

The first of "a long line of Hueys" arrived in Vietnam as part of the 57th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance) in early 1962. They were shortly followed by the 23d Special Warfare Aviation Detachment equipped with OV-1 Mohawks to provide reconnaissance and photographic coverage in support of ARVN forces.

Much of this early effort was classified. As a result, many Army aviators felt a bit frustrated that they were being kept "under wraps" at the same time they read of Marine exploits around Da Nang in the daily newspapers. Nevertheless, their operations were receiving official attention at the highest levels.

### *The Events Leading to the Howze Board*

While the first Army aviation units were deploying to Vietnam, settling in-country and making their first tentative tests in combat,



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