

## THE FIRST AVIATION BRIGADE

AVBARI

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The U.S. Army's 1st Aviation Brigade, headquartered 25 miles north-east of Saigon at Long Binh, is the Army's largest aviation command, nearly equal in size to two divisions.

Organized on 11 March 1966 as the U.S. Army Aviation Brigade (Provisional), the Brigade joined the ranks of the Army's official force structure on 25 May 1966. Lieutenant General Jean E. Engler, Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Army Vietnam, formally presented the 1st Aviation Brigade colors to then Brigadier General George P. Seneff Jr., the first Brigade Commander.

The mission of the 1st Aviation Brigade is to provide command (less operational control) of its organic units; to provide command for those other units that may be attached or assigned by CG USARV; and to provide aviation support, as directed, to Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) for the conduct of tactical operations throughout the Republic of Vietnam. This statement understates the complexity of the Brigade's mission, for over fifty percent of the Army's aircraft in Vietnam are in the Aviation Brigade's widely scattered units.

The more than 100 aviation units which make up the 1st Aviation Brigade are organized into three Combat Aviation Groups, one separate Combat Aviation Battalion and one Aviation Group. The 12th Combat Aviation Group, headquartered at Long Binh and under the operational control of II Field Force Vietnam, commands six battalions and one Air Cavalry Squadron, providing helicopter and fixed wing support within the ARVN III Corps Tactical Zone. The 17th Combat Aviation Group, headquartered at Nha Trang and under the operational control of I Field Force Vietnam, commands four battalions, one Air Cavalry Squadron and the 201st Corps Aviation Company, supporting operations within the ARVN II Corps Tactical Zone. The 164th Combat Aviation Group, headquartered at Can Tho and under the operational control of the Senior Advisor, IV ARVN Corps, commands two battalions and one Air Cavalry Squadron, supporting combined operations in the Mekong Delta Region. The 212th Combat Aviation Battalion, at Da Nang, is under the operational control of Headquarters, III Marine Amphibious Force, supporting operations in the ARVN I Corps Tactical Zone. The 165th Aviation Group, headquartered at Long Binh, provides the Army flight following system, terminal air traffic control and tactical air traffic control throughout Vietnam.

The story of the 1st Aviation Brigade is the story of more than 25,000 officers and men who fly and maintain the more than 2,000 aircraft that make up the Army's non-divisional aviation fleet in Vietnam, and who perform the myriad administrative and logistical tasks that go hand in hand with the operational mission. Aircraft of the 1st Brigade are in the skies over Vietnam 24 hours a day, providing troop lift, aerial weapons support, tactical fixed wing transportation, surveillance, reconnaissance and administrative and liaison support for the ground forces.

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A glance at a month's operational statistics for the Brigade's units provides an insight to the many tasks the Army's Air Wing performs. The Aviation Brigade's ability can be shown by using a typical month in which the following passenger figures were recorded: Fixed wing transported 16,505 and rotary wing transported 538,775, for a total of 605,260 passengers transported. This same month saw movement of 490 tons of cargo by fixed wing craft and 117,545 in rotary wing craft for a total of 153,002 hours of flying during a typical month. Many passengers were troops on combat assaults. To provide this transportation and fire support some of the Brigade's units participated in major battles throughout Vietnam. Again looking at a typical month the Brigade's units accounted for 2,814 Viet Cong killed by air action, 1,353 damaged and 2,352 destroyed structures and 579 damaged and 1,669 destroyed sampans.

For the three month period August through October 1960, awards processed by the Brigade HQ Awards section for the entire Brigade reflect the truly outstanding job done by the officers and men of the Brigade: Legion of Merit, 58; Silver Star, 96; Distinguished Flying Cross, 673; Bronze Star, 986; Bronze Star "V", 93; Air Medal, 24,998; Air Medal "V", 537; Army Commendation Medal, 1052; Army Commendation Medal "V", 309 --- a total of 28,802!

The history of non-divisional Army Aviation in Vietnam began in October 1961 with the arrival of the 18th Aviation Detachment and in December 1961 with the arrival of the 8th and 57th Transportation Companies, equipped with the CH-21 "Flying Bananas". After intensive periods of training, both companies flew their first mission in late December. The 8th and 57th Transportation companies, later redesignated as the 117th and 120th Aviation Companies (airmobile light), are the oldest active company-size units within the Brigade. With the coming of 1962, the 8th Transportation Company began receiving its first armed UH-1 helicopters.

By June 1962, Army Aviation strength in Vietnam had grown to one Battalion (the 145th Transportation Battalion, later redesignated the 145th Aviation Battalion) and four companies. The 18th Aviation Company (U-1A) continues to be the oldest company still possessing its original designation. On 1 June 1962 the US Army Support Group, Vietnam (USASG-V, which was to become the United States Army Vietnam (USARV)), was activated to provide administrative and logistical support to the aviation units and to the few other Army organizations then located in the Republic of Vietnam.

With the exception of MACV advisors and Special Forces Teams, the bulk of the US Army's effort in Vietnam from 1962 through 1964 was centered on Army aviation. This was the testing ground for the helicopter, as well as the Army's surveillance aircraft, the turbojet OV-1 "Mohawk" and the old but faithful observation aircraft, the O-1 "Bird-dog".

By late 1964 the CH-21's had been replaced by the famous UH-1 "Hueys". This turbojet powered helicopter, an omnipresent sight in the skies over Vietnam, probably symbolizes more than any other item of equipment, vehicle or aircraft, the war in Vietnam. As a troop-carrying aircraft,

as a "gunship" or as a command and control aircraft, the Huey is the workhorse of Army Aviation, and the 32 Assault Helicopter Companies form the backbone of the 1st Avn Bde.

The first of the Brigade's many "Chinook" (OH-47) companies arrived in Vietnam in November 1965. These Assault Support Helicopter Companies are the prime movers of the 105mm howitzers, giving artillery units the same mobility as the infantry units they support. They also provide an ever ready means for distributing heavy priority items of supplies and equipment to tactical units. When the tactical situation dictates, they are also employed to provide troop lift and medical evacuation. In June 1967, a OH-54 "Skycrane" Detachment was assigned to the 147th ASHC, the first Army Cranes in RVN.

Introduction of the AH-1G "Cobra" gunships in August 1967 has enhanced the effectiveness of the Brigade's armed helicopters. This aircraft is the first helicopter designed primarily for armed assault rather than troop lift operations.

Brigade capabilities were again broadened with the arrival of the first of three Air Cavalry Squadrons starting in October 1967. The Aviation Groups to which these units were assigned are able to provide a "hard hitting" airmobile combined arms reconnaissance element for the field commanders. These units introduced the OH-6A "Cayuse" observation helicopter to the Vietnam battlefield. This highly maneuverable aircraft was designed to eventually perform all Army Aviation observation and reconnaissance missions.

In recognition of its exemplary accomplishments since activation the 1st Aviation Brigade was selected as the Army Aviation Association of America's Outstanding Aviation Unit of 1967. On 21 May 1967, General Cao Van Vien, then Minister of Defense, Republic of South Vietnam, presented the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm to the 1st Aviation Brigade and an individual award to the Brigade Commander, Major (then Brigadier) General George P. Senoff Jr., for outstanding service during the period 1 March 1966 to 26 May 1967. United States Army General Order Number 22, 24 May 1968, confirmed the award.

During May 1968 the government of the Republic of South Vietnam awarded a second Cross of Gallantry to the Brigade and an individual award to the Brigade Commander, Major General Robert R. Williams. Confirmation by Department of the Army of the Brigade award has not at present been secured.

On 20 March 1969, Brigadier General Allen M. Bardett, Jr., assumed command of the 1st Aviation Brigade, replacing Major General Robert R. Williams. A graduate of West Point, the command and General Staff College, the Army War College, and the Armed Forces Staff College, General Bardett also holds a Master of Arts Degree from George Washington University.

With the anticipated arrival of the AH-56A "Cheyene" and the OH-58A "Kiowa", the future holds even greater promise for the 1st Aviation Brigade. Its capabilities and accomplishments will continue to expand as the U.S. Army perfects and improves the techniques and tactics of air mobility. Since escalation of the US effort in Vietnam in 1965, the success of the free world forces has been vitally linked to the presence of Army Aviation; that presence is typified by the units of the 1st Aviation Brigade and by the Officers and men who wear the patch of the 1st Aviation Brigade.