

174TH
AVIATION CO.



1968
ANNUAL
UNIT HISTORY

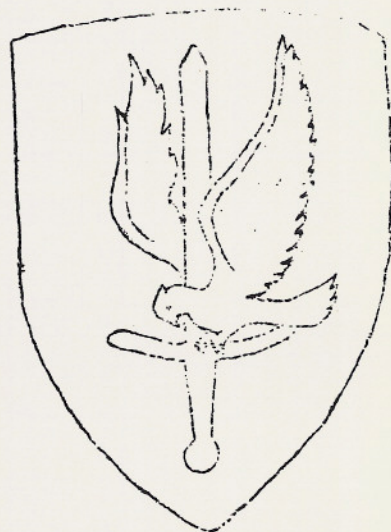


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TET OFFENSIVE - OPERATION NORFOLK VICTORY
- January 1968 to 30 April 1968)

The early part of 1968 will long be remembered in Vietnam. Enemy troops staged their greatest offensive of the long war in the first two months of the new year. One of the hottest and most contested areas in the country was Quang Ngai City, in the Northern portion of the 174th Aviation Company's area of operations.

The Shark (UH-1C) gunships and the Dolphin (UH-1D) slicks of the 174th were repeatedly called upon to put forth their greatest effort to repel Viet Cong and N.V.A. offensives. On 31 January at approximately 0500 hours, the primary Shark gunship team was scrambled to Quang Ngai City. WO Russel Doersam and his pilot WO Michael Magno, found a battalion sized enemy unit was trying to surround the Quang Ngai Airfield on the West side of the city. The enemy troops had already overrun an ARVN training camp, occupied the hospital and seized numerous public buildings.

On its initial run, the lead Shark took several hits from automatic and small arms fire. The second Shark, flown by WO Charles Miller and WO Dan Burton made firing passes at the heaviest concentration of enemy fire on the ground and also took numerous hits. After many passes at the still poorly illuminated enemy targets, it became apparent that more firepower was necessary and the secondary gunship team was scrambled. The second team led by Cpt. Thomas Woods, was briefed by the primary team and the ground commander. The ground commander reported that the Southwest corner of the perimeter was under heavy pressure by a platoon sized V.C. force using mortars and automatic weapons. Cpt. Woods directed his team on passes on the designated area and greatly relieved the pressure there. At this time, the Sharks were diverted to the overrun ARVN training camp, leaving the southwestern perimeter to a set of Air Force fighters.

After the secondary team made one pass on the training camp, WO Doersam arrived with his primary team on station. A fifth Shark had replaced one of the Sharks that had originally been on the primary team, because it was damaged too badly to return immediately. Due to the Shark firepower the ground troops were able to retake the training camp and the Sharks were able to lend support to numerous smaller battles that had broken out throughout the city.

Thanks to a superhuman maintenance effort by the 409th T.C. Detachment, the 174th gunships returned for mission after mission over the beleaguered city. One of the Sharks took 22 hits during the day and another that was grounded early in the fighting later returned only to receive eight more hits.

At sunset the city returned to friendly hands; 367 enemy had been confirmed killed with 238 of them credited to the 174th ships. The five Sharks had flown a total of 34 hours and taken 33 hits. Despite the heavy and accurate enemy fire the 174th suffered no injuries. The Sharks were highly praised by the American advisors, and credited with preventing a complete overrun of the two major strongholds protecting the district headquarters of Quang Ngai Province.

In order to maintain the momentum he had going during the Tet Offensive, the enemy needed to obtain arms and ammunition badly. The 174th was instrumental in helping to stop the flow on this supply on 29 February. At 2230 hours that night the Dolphin flare ship was alerted for a possible scramble mission. A Navy radar aircraft had spotted a communist troller on its radar screen. The troller was located approximately seven miles northeast of Luc Pho. At 0100 hours the flare ship and a Shark gunship team were scrambled to the area. When the 174th ships arrived on the scene, Navy Swiftboats had already taken the enemy vessel under fire. The flare ship immediately started illuminating the area and the Sharks rolled in with mini-guns and 2.75 inch rockets. The enemy troller threw up a wall of 12.7 mm machinegun fire but due to the combined efforts of the Swiftboats and the 174th aircraft, the troller ran aground. The captain of the troller, realizing his hopeless situation, elected to destroy his ship. It was later ascertained that 4000 rifles, 1000 57mm recoilless rifle rounds, and an unestimable amount of other ordnance had been destroyed.

Besides these two major actions, the 174th was instrumental in combating enemy actions during the Tet offensive in the Southern I Corps. The Dolphins and Sharks participated in 22 combat assaults and four extractions during the 30 day period. The 174th also ran 134 resupply missions and 18 medical evacuations, while suffering only three personnel wounded. The 174th dealt the enemy a harsh blow by killing 315 N.V.A. and V.C. troops.

Duc Pho was not forgotten by "Charlie" during the Tet Rush. At 0130 hours on 1 February, the 174th area received 35 to 40, 60mm mortar rounds, most of which landed on or near the flight line. Knowing the 174th aircraft are a vital instrument to the US effort in Southern I Corps, the local VC launched another barrage at Dolphin park on 13 February, this time using 82mm mortars. The VC destroyed one ship and damaged two in the five minute attack. After both attacks the Dolphin flare ship and two Sharks were scrambled but returned with unknown results.

In the midst of the heavy fighting, the command of the 174th changed hands. On 1 February Major Glen D. Gibson replaced Major Thomas V. Wheat as commanding officer of the 174th. The 174th was hampered during the early part of the year by nonavailability of aircraft. At one time the company was down to 19 of the authorized 23 slicks and five of the eight gunships. This did not however prevent the 174th from performing its mission of supporting the Americal Division's 11th Light Infantry Brigade.

On 7 March, in support of Operation Show How, eight slicks of the 174th carried 344 troops of the ARVN's 4th Regiment from their base camp to an area about ten miles southwest of Quang Ngai. Later that day, nine Dolphins transported 238 11th Brigade soldiers northwest of Quang Ngai, in support of Task Force Barker.

On 8 April, 225 troops of the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry were lifted from LZ Dragon to an area ten miles northwest to kick off operation Norfolk Victory.

The problem of aircraft shortage was greatly relieved early in the Spring with the arrival of new "H" model slicks. The "H" models, with the more powerful L-13 engine, increased the 174th's effectiveness on all missions. The new ships could carry more cargo and troops in one trip and thus cut down the sorties necessary to complete resupply and assault missions.

OPERATIONS SUPPORTING THE 11th BRIGADE AT DUC PHO (1 April 1968 to 31 July 1968)

During this period, the 174th continued to work hand and hand with the "Jungle Warriors" of the 11th LIB while also lending support to the Americal Divisions 198th LIB and the Civilian Irregular Defense Group.

Keeping constant pressure on enemy troop concentrations west of Quang Ngai, the 174th inserted 200 troops of the 3rd Battalion 1st Infantry, 11th LIB into the area on 18 June to begin operation Chatehooche Swamp. When Kham Duc Special Forces Camp came under enemy attack in the 198th's AO, numerous Dolphin slicks were called to the scene to carry out emergency resupply operations and the eventual evacuation of the camp. WO John Donahue received the Distinguished Flying Cross when he twice landed to evacuate Kham Duc personnel while his ship was taking heavy automatic weapons fire and being hit by shrapnel from exploding enemy mortar rounds.

On 31 May, Shark gunships of the 174th were scrambled at 0030 hours to an area five miles Northeast of Quang Ngai. Sampans loaded with much needed VC supplies were spotted on the Cho Mai River. The Shark team, lead by WOs' Daniel Burton and Richard Baker, rolled in on the enemy boats and immediately came under fire. The gunships countered with rockets and mini-guns and sank 35 enemy sampans.

The many successful actions against the enemy did not come without a heavy price however. At 0130 hours on 31 May, the Duc Pho base camp came under enemy attack by VC forces using 82mm mortars. More than half of the 100 rounds landed landed in the 174th's area and along the flight line. Specialist Fifth Class Carl T. McCoy was killed instantly by a direct hit on his living quarters. The billets of the flight platoons were damaged extensively and five aircraft received light to moderate damage. Sixteen men were injured and treated by the 756th Medical Detachment. WO Henry Tews was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" for his actions during the attack. WO Tews ran through the incoming rounds to administer first aid to the wounded. On 13 June, tragedy again struck the 174th. An Air Force O-2, with its pilots killed or severely wounded by enemy fire, dived uncontrollably into a command and control helicopter of the 174th. WOs' James Carter and Jerry Johnson and Specialist Four Alan Leimer and Stanley Milton died in the crash along with LTC Barker, Commanding Officer of the 4th Battalion 3rd Infantry and his S-2 and artillery liaison officer.

During this three month period the Dolphins and sharks flew 6388 hours. This high figure coupled with the shortage of aviators, posed a serious problem. Because of increased mission requirements, aviators of the 174th were daily approaching and exceeding the 30 day, 140 hours limitation. This problem was relieved however when the 174th was assigned more aviators.

There were several personnel changes throughout the 174th and its detachments. Major Richard K. Zimmerman arrived to replace Captain George Boswell as Executive Officer, First Lieutenant Leonard Kauffman took command of the 22nd Signal Detachment and 1st Lieutenant Steve R. Kennedy took over duties as Intelligence Officer. Captain Lanny J. McGarry assumed the duties of Operations Officer.

DEFENSE OF HA THAN, TASK FORCE GALLOWAY (1 August 1968 to 31 October 1968)

Keeping steady pressure on the enemy and steadily pushing him West, the 174th concentrated its efforts on the mountains West of Quang Ngai City. Due to U.S. forces constantly operating West of Quang Ngai City the enemy was forced to evacuate the lowlands and occupy the area around the Ha Than Special Forces Camp. On 4 September, the Dolphins inserted 311 troops of the 11th Brigade on to a ridgeline four miles West of Ha Than, to begin Task Force Galloway. The ridgeline became known as LZ Chevy. The 174th supported the operation by running almost unending resupply and command and control missions into the mountains forward locations.

On 5 September WO Edward Gill received wounds as his aircraft took numerous hits while attempting a med-evac mission two miles east of Chevy. CW 2 Jack Hathaway came to his aid and evacuated him and ground troops to the medical aid station in Chu Lai. This area became infamous to the aviators of the 174th as the "Horseshoe" West of Quang Ngai City, the Tra Houe River meanders into a large "U" shape and has been a center of hard core VC activity. During operations in this area, shark gunships of the 174th have been credited with many enemy killed.

The 174th's dedication to the mission was more than apparent on the night of 6 September. A recon element came under intense enemy fire near the "Horseshoe" and radio contact was lost. Aircraft of the 174th were called upon to extract the troops. Without any visual contact and only partial radio contact, two Dolphin slicks were "talked" into the area by the ground element. When the ships touched down, an enemy 50 caliber opened up on them less than 30 meters away. WO James Rawlings was wounded in both legs but continued the mission along with the ship commander WO Thomas Dena. The recon platoon was safely extracted thanks to the tenacity the 174th is known for.

Task Force Galloway came to an end when intelligence reports indicated the 2nd N.V.A Regiment had moved into the Song Voa Valley. On 25 October, 745 men were inserted into LZ Bulldog by the 174th Dolphins and 176th Minutemen.

The Duc Pho base camp in general and the 174th helicopters in particular, were a constant target for the local VC forces. On 20 August the Duc Pho base camp came under enemy mortar attack and it proved to be a costly error for the VC forces. The enemy made the mistake of starting the attack while a shark gunship team and flare ship were in the air. The ships were immediately called to the scene and CWO Robert Fielding spotted the enemy muzzle flashes and led his gunship team in on them. The team was credited with seven enemy killed and captured a 82mm mortar tub. It now sits in the 174th Officers Club.

On September 10, command of the 174th again changed hands. Major Richard A. Brown took over as Company Commander, but he was no stranger to the 174th. Major Brown was part of the 174th when it was originally formed at Fort Benning, Georgia in 1965, and made his first trip to Vietnam with the 174th.

On 1 October the tactical situation permitted personnel of the 174th and its various detachments to take a brief respite from the war to celebrate "Organization Day". Observing the second anniversary of the 174th, a brief ceremony was held and was followed by a company sized combat and football game between the officers and enlisted men.

Two enlisted men of the 174th distinguished themselves by graduating first in their class at the U.S. Army Aviation School at Vung Tau, R.V.N. Specialist Fourth Class Joseph Blumberg received the highest marks in his course on Turbine Engines, and Specialist Fourth Class Joseph Lumley was the top man in his course on Aircraft Engines. There were numerous personnel changes in the Fall of 1968.

Walter Leonard Kauffman was assigned as Operations Officer and CW2 Albert Fairweather was assigned as commander of the 452nd Signal Detachment. CW2 Rowe C. Eppert took over as Supply Officer replacing CW2 Jean Pate. Doctor (Captain) Charles T. Longford took over the post as the 756th Medical Detachment Commander from Doctor (Captain) Byron Schofield.

OPERATION VERNON LAKE II (1 November 1968 to 31 December 1968)

The last two months of the year were two of the most demanding and challenging in the history of the 174th. Operation Vernon Lake II was originated in the mountainous region Northwest of Hue Pho. Initially, the 174th inserted the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry onto a hilltop approximately 10 miles South of Hu Thon Special Forces Camp. This hilltop became LZ Cork. At the same time the 174th put the 4th Battalion 21st Infantry on a 2500 foot peak five miles West of Minh Long Special Forces Camp. This support base, LZ Amy, became a center of 174th activity.

November third was a preview of things to come. While flying a command and control mission, WO John O'Sullivan spotted concrete reinforced bunkers, freshly dug trenches and barbed wire, all a part of an N.V.A. base camp. In following weeks, the 174th aided ground units in locating, reconing, and destroying more than 80 enemy base camps, training sites and headquarters.

On 15 November, WO Walter Seger was instrumental in uncovering one of the largest base camps. Troops of the 4th Battalion 21st Infantry being directed by WO Seger's command and control ship, found an enemy strategic headquarters eight miles west of LZ Amy. The complex had an assembly center capable of seating 200 people and two and three story buildings. The camp had been so recently used that the troopers found still burning fires and laundry put out to dry, plus hastily hidden enemy documents.

On 18 November while reconing an area where a Marine F-4 had been shot down and the pilots still missing, Dolphin 428 came under enemy fire. The ship took more than 15 hits. Although critically wounded Specialist Fifth Class Wayne Tice, crewchief on 428, returned fire until the ship was out of the area. Specialist Tice, was medevaced to Chu Lai but later died of wounds. In recognition of his gallantry he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, posthumously.

The 174th came under a new policy regarding aircraft flying time on 13 November. Because of excessive utilization of aircraft by ground commanders, aircraft were constantly grounded for maintenance because of excessive hours they had flown. The new system allotted each battalion 12 hours each day to be divided between its utility and command and control ship. This system led to better use of the aircraft, less maintenance time, and also cut down on the number of aviators who were exceeding the 140 hour monthly limitation.

Captain Albert J. Schmitt arrived at the 174th on 8 November and resumed the duties as Executive Officer. 1st Lieutenant Harry Schindehette took over as operations officer and 1st Lieutenant Ronald Hobbes replaced Captain Grant Cayton as commander of the 409th T.C. Detachment.

On 1 December the 174th, along with the rest of the 14th Combat Aviation Battalion was reassigned from the 1st Aviation Brigade and became part of the Americal Division. The switch from the "Hawk" to the "Southern Cross" went smoothly and involved few changes. The 409th T.C. Detachment, the 452nd Signal Detachment were infused into the 174th itself. Maintenance came under control of the service platoon with Captain Thomas Larkin in charge.

During the year many improvements were made in the company area. All living quarters were bunkerized, an Officers' Mess, and club were built. The office space in the Orderly Room was nearly doubled with a mail room and library being added. The supply room was expanded and a new mess room built.

1968 was an eventful year in the short but proud history of the 174th. It was also a busy one. The Dolphins transported nearly 200,000 passengers and flew more than 25,000 hours. It was a big job but the 174th was equal to the task. The new year will present new challenges but the Dolphins and Sharks will show, as they have in the past, that there is "NOTHING IMPOSSIBLE".

