



MY SHADOW OF VIETNAM

By Carl Shepley
Written by William E. Dietzel

During the Vietnam War and in its legacy, perhaps no group of men has created more interest or exhibited more heroism than the U.S. Air Force, 20th Special Operations squadron. Operating in secrecy and far from the support of the vast military machine, the squadron was the eyes, ears and the tip of the sword. It conducted highly classified, "BLACK" psychological and special operations in North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The 20th Special Operations squadron, working out of Ban-Me-Thout, flew in the UH-1F and UH-1N, which had a call sign of "Green Hornet." Like the comic book character, behind their masked identity, these top-secret Green Hornets, the Special Operations Group's Cambodia unit, worked clandestinely for good. In fact, it was the only USAF combat unit flying Hueys in Southeast Asia.

The 20th SOS was SOG's only U.S. helicopter unit whose crews lived with the SOG men they supported. Although officially based in Cam

Ranh Bay, the Green Hornets birds and crews rotated every 10 days to CCS camp at Ban-Me-Thuot, which did a lot for developing rapport. There probably was not another unit in Vietnam whose helicopter crews became friends of the men they inserted and extracted. The 20th SOS flew the F-Model Huey, which, as Carl Shepley said, "wasn't made for combat. It was made for hauling toilet paper and military policemen to missile silos in North Dakota."

Though the F-Model's turbine was fragile and a maintenance nightmare, it also generated considerably more power than the Army's Hueys, which meant it more quickly escaped hot landing zones and carried more people, features well-suited to recon operations and, unlike Army Hueys, which typically were piloted by 19- and 20-year-olds, Air Force Hueys were flown by career majors and lieutenant colonels in their 30s and 40s, many on final assignment before retirement.

Half the Green Hornet Hueys were configured as gunships with rocket pods and unique hand-controlled miniguns; the latter proved extremely effective. "Best damned gun system over there," Shepley said, because the pilot could focus on flying his aircraft while the gunners turned their 6,000-round-a-minute guns on the target. They fired during approach, while passing the target and even pivoted the guns to shoot backward after passing. When a Cobra gunship's miniguns jammed, the Cobra went home for repair. If a Green Hornet's miniguns jammed, the gunner put on an asbestos glove, spun the barrels to clear it and then resumed firing, all in less than 10 seconds. The



20th Special Operations Squadron
Carl Shepley
Green Hornets
Vietnam 1970-1971
Ban-Me-Thuot
Nick Name: Snake
Helicopter Crew Chief / Gunner

following is only one of uncountable missions Staff Sgt. Carl Shepley completed.

Sgt. Carl Lynn Shepley, gunner and crew chief, completed the pre-flight on his Huey UH-1N named Wizard of Oz. Capt. James Wagner, pilot, and Lt. George Gibson, co-pilot, flew the UH-1N (Huey gunship) on

this mission for the 20th Special Operations squadron. The Huey was armed with 2.75 rocket pods on both sides, the minigun producing 6,000 rounds a minute and an M-60 machine gun mounted on a swivel.

Carl says, "I seldom knew what and where the mission was going until we reached the LZ, and there was no difference this morning on this mission as the flight of five (three gunship and two slicks) lifted into the sky. We flew out in formation across the mountain range and over the canopy of the dark-green jungle in the direction of Cambodia.

"A Sky master Cessna O-2 pilot alerted the Green Hornet by radio that a recon team of Special Forces was trapped by the NVA near the river. The Army was surrounded on three sides against the river. The team of Hueys made the run up the river and, as





we reached the LZ, you could see the recon team was taking a helluva beating. We no sooner got over the LZ when the other two gunships took hits and had to land in a clearing. They were immediately rescued by one of our Slicks. We were the only remaining gunship at the LZ, and we made a pass over the NVA, firing the minigun as the pilot fired off both the pods of rockets on one pass, and then we climbed to a higher altitude. The pilot hovered over the LZ and started a 360-degree pedal turn as I opened up, shooting straight down with the miniguns on the NVA and laying a circular wall of fire around the recon team. The Slick made a run from the riverside to pick up the six-member recon team that was busy shooting for its life as it made it

to the Huey. The next voice over the headset was the Slick pilot saying, "They're aboard. We got 'em. Let's get the hell out of here."

Capt. Wagner dropped the nose of the Huey, picked up speed, meeting up with the other Huey and pulled up next to the Slick. The U.S. Army Special Forces gave us the thumbs up, and the Green Hornets, 20th Special Operations Squadron, had completed another mission.