

FIRST TEAM

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BLUE MAX



Crawford

By SFC Tom Crawford

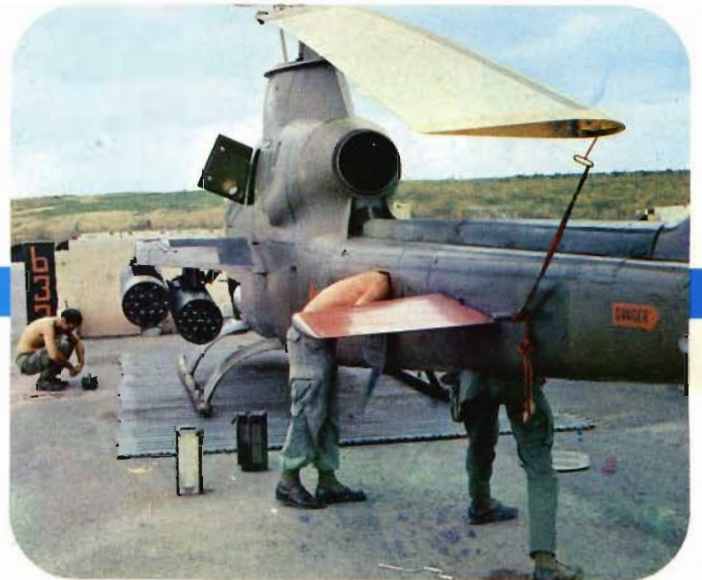
Army aviation has many unusual roles, but few as respected, by friend and foe, as close tactical air support from AH-1 Cobra gunships, provided by the Cav's "Blue Max". Blue Max is F Battery, 79th Aerial Field Artillery, an organic part of the 3rd Brigade (Separate), 1st Cavalry Division, and a part of the 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion. It is the only unit of its kind remaining in Vietnam and operates throughout Military Region 3.

The Cobra is a truly formidable weapon, but F Battery has built its reputation on response. The combat soldier knows that Blue Max is always just minutes away. When a recon patrol

or Ranger team makes contact, Max is there. He keeps the enemy troops pinned down while the small teams are extracted. For the rifle company, he pounds bunker complexes that otherwise grunts would be forced to enter, quite likely taking heavy casualties. When a helicopter goes down, Max is there to provide cover for the extraction of the crew and aircraft.

Gunships respond immediately to each call and more are on the way before their ammunition is expended. Continuous firepower is possible for hours if necessary and F Battery will still have Cobras ready for another emergency.

When Max bounces to help a company in contact, to escort a chopper on a combat assault, Medevac or resupply mission, or to scout out a section of Cav



real estate for enemy activity, it may be armed with any combination of 10- and 17-pound rockets, 40mm belt-fed cannons and 7.62mm miniguns. A gunship carries two pilots, one in front of the other. Normally, the pilot in front fires the minigun and 40mm cannon while the other fires the rockets. All weapons, however, can be fired from either position.

Blue Max pilots are among the world's most combat-experienced. Most have more than one tour in Vietnam and some have seen most of the war. But the story of Blue Max is much more than a story of fine machines and pilots. Blue Max is a unit of men -- many men, many jobs, one mission. Max is setting records. Max consistently has 92 or 93 per cent of the aircraft ready. From the lowest-ranking enlisted man to the commander, MAJ Lawrence McKay, the mission is foremost in their minds.

Upon hearing of the unit's outstanding maintenance record, one first looks for some trick, management innovation or other reason for success. The only obvious reason for it is that each man in the unit wants Max to be the best in every respect.

There are several indications of this attitude. Many of the mechanics are



already on their first or second six-month extension. Their reason for extending? As one said, "I have a job to do here, and I want to stay until it's done."

When a bird is due for maintenance, the work continues day and night. One crew relieves another and each man is proud of the effort he contributes. On a periodic maintenance check, the question is not, "Will this part work?" but rather, "Am I sure this part will function until the next 100-hour inspection?" The attitude pays off as the Cobras are always ready, giving the pilots and crew chiefs time to do the extra things that build unit pride such as painting names and pictures on their aircraft.

The pilots and ground crews are always ready for that blast of the siren which signals a fire mission. When the siren wails, a mad scramble ensues as pilots race to the Cobras and are airborne within two minutes. They receive instructions as they leave the ground and write the essential data on the windshield as they swing their angry looking birds toward the fight. Meanwhile, more birds are moved into position as other pilots gather around the radio to get the details of the mission. They have a careful ear tuned for the words which will send them into the fight - "Fire Mission!"



