Four years ago, on 25 June 1963, General Order 236, Headquarters, United States Army, Pacific, activated the 118th Assault Helicopter Company as one of the two helicopter units comprising the 145th Aviation Battalion.

Rising like a phoenix from the recently deactivated 33rd Transportation Company (Light Helicopter), which had arrived in Vietnam during the autumn of 1962, the 118th "Thunderbirds" immediately began to be typified by their motto—"It Shall Be Done."

Becoming fully operational as an assault helicopter company in July 1963, the Thunderbirds chalked up an impressive record of combat assaults during their first month of operation, without the benefit of an armed helicopter platoon. Flying dual rotor CH-21 helicopters, the pilots and crews had to resort to the use of personal sidearms when assaulting a hostile landing zone. One of the Thunderbirds' first confirmed Viet Cong kills was reported when a doorgunner shot one of the guerrillas from the aircraft's landing gear with his pistol.

With the Thunderbirds' adoption of the UH-1 helicopter in September 1963, the "Bandits" armed helicopter platoon was created. During November 1963 the Bandits were credited with more than 150 enemy kills, a record that was not surpassed until the large buildup of American troops in 1965.

Organized for heliborne operations over the myriad terrain features of the III Corps Area, the 118th Assault Helicopter Company was the model of assault helicopter companies that would follow it to Vietnam in another two years. The Thunderbirds were so highly regarded by the commanders of other helicopter units that the 118th was constantly training members of the new units as they arrived in Vietnam.

Known as "The First of The Assault Helicopter Companies," the 118th has actively participated in every major battle and operation in the III Corps, distinguishing itself in the Battle of Dong Xoai, Operations Attleboro, Cedar Falls, and Junction City.

The measure of a helicopter unit, like the measure of any group, is in the measure of its men. Among the Thunderbirds' greatest claims to its reputation as a unit that is the first to arrive and the last to leave are the men who have done just that:

The Pilot who took his aircraft down into a hostile landing zone, from which he was drawing intense enemy fire, to evacuate a wounded American Advisor. On touchdown the pilot was killed by an enemy round, the copilot waited in the landing zone while rounds peppered the ground around his aircraft until the wounded man was loaded aboard his helicopter and then flew him to safety through a withering hail of enemy fire.

And the entire crews of two helicopters who stayed on the ground in a hostile landing zone during an enemy assault to administer first aid to the wounded after their aircraft were shot down, crossing a known minefield to pull the wounded infantry soldiers to safety. When two helicopters landed in the hot landing zone to take the crews out they were loaded with wounded personnel.

And the two helicopters that snatched a company of Vietnamese CIDG's from an encircling battalion of Viet Cong. With no gunship cover each aircraft made six landings within 50 meters of the enemy, hovering down to their landing points through bamboo and small trees.

And the pilot who flew his entire crew to Saigon for medical attention after a mortar round exploded near the aircraft and seriously wounded the copilot, crew chief and doorgunner. After the damaged aircraft was landed it was discovered that the pilot, a 20-year-old Warrant Officer, was also seriously wounded in the face and arms.

And the officers and men of the 118th who daily know that they may be called upon to do the same, and agree to themselves that they will. "It Shall be Done."

This is the measure of a unit.