

FORWARD

Serving in direct support of the Free World Forces and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the 155th Aviation Company is similar to the many other aviation units of the same size and structure. Formed originally as Co A, 1st Aviation Battalion, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, the unit arrived at Vung Tau, Vietnam on 1 May 1965. Moving directly to Ban Me Thuot, with an aircraft complement of 24 UH-1D's the advance party was welcomed by LTC Delbert Townsend, Former Commander of the 52nd Aviation Battalion. After much preparation and many training hours through which the men of Co A became proficient in the new and demanding techniques of flying in a combat zone, the company was declared operational on 1 June 1965. On 20 November 1965 Company A was redesignated as the 155th Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light).

From the first, the 155th's airlift platoons were known as "Stage Coach" while the Armed Platoon was called the "Falcons". Flying from Saigon in the south to Dak Peh in the north, from the coastal plains, to the Cambodian border, the Stagecoach-Falcon team has spread their reputation for accomplishing their mission while maintaining the highest of safety standards and aircraft availability throughout Vietnam.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND OPERATIONS

PERIOD 1 January - 31 December 1966

The beginning of January 1966 found the 155th engaged in operations in the Saigon area. They took part in a combat assault followed by supplying eight airlift helicopters and four armed escorts, to South Vietnam Premier, Nguyen Cao Ky and his party. It was then north to Phu Cat for operation Masher/White Wing. These missions were typical of those pulled by the young Company. One misfortune marred the fine combat record. Two members of the gun platoon departed their aircraft after landing near Bu Prang on 29 March 1965 and accidentally wandered into an old French minefield. Warrant Officer Raymon L. Ford and Warrant Officer Philip C. Smith became casualties when they detonated anti-personnel mines.

Initial days of April were spent in normal mission flights around the various supported sectors, but later missions took the company farther away from home base. The 1st Air Cavalry Division initiated Operations Paul Rovere in mid-April to search out and destroy the elusive enemy in the hazardous Chu Pong mountain range.

Tragdy struck the company on 27 May 66 during a troop lift south of Pleiku. WO Eugene W. Coswell was killed when his aircraft failed to clear tall trees in a take off from a confined area and crashed. Crewchief PFC Robert C. Luce and gunner, PFC Richard E Dabney Jr., were severly burned. PFC Dabney subsequently died on 3 June while enroute to an Army hospital in San Antonio, Texas.

July 4, 1966 was passed at home base with Vietnamese representatives from the local Darlac Province gathering to celebrate the Declaration of Independence Day with the American servicemen at the aviation compound. Province Finance chief Tri presented gifts to the command in behalf of his people for the continuing U.S. effort in opposing Viet Cong aggression in their area.

Successful 155 participation in the close ground combat of the 23rd from 6 to 10 July prompted Brig Gen. Nguyen Van Manh, to present Vietnamese honors to three men of the company on 1 August. Major Parlas received the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with the silver star. Captain Frost received the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for suppressive armed air support which resulted in killing forty (40) Viet Cong.

Events proved to be pleasant on Thanksgiving and Christmas for the men of the 155th. Both days were holidays for the troops and both were enjoyed fittingly. On 24 November the compound swimming pool was officially opened by 17th Group Commander, Col John W. Murr, Inf, and 52nd Battalion Commander, LTC Foy Rice, in a ribbon cutting ceremony. On 14 December the new Battalion Commander LTC Paul C Smithey, TC, assisted in dedicating the Crossbow Inn NCO club which contributed to the recreational offerings of the aviation compound at Ban Me Thuot.

On 30 October, a UH1D commanded by WO Michael F. Coryell and piloted by WO Wilmer J. Willingham was shot down while on a resupply mission for an element of the 25th Infantry near Plei Dyereng. Crashing to the ground in flames, there were no survivors. Camp Coryell the home of the 155 was named in his honor.

1 Jan - 31 Dec 67

The 3rd of January brought a new scene to the 155th. The company moved its flight elements and representatives from maintenance, avionics, and administration to a field headquarters at Camp Holloway Airfield in Pleiku.

From Pleiku, elements of the 155th alternated in Kontum working with special forces.

The company moved back to Ban Me Thuot on the 23rd of February only to be recalled to Pleiku. These moves were typical missions for the 155. It was always on the move.

On 16 March while participating in a combat assault west of Pleiku, a flight element of the 155th came under intense enemy fire. Two aircraft were seriously damaged by hostile rounds and one other was shot down and burned upon impact. The Company suffered two KIA and two WIA during the fierce engagement with the enemy. "I saw the ship going down with flames billowing from the engine compartment. Then it hit the trees and fell through the canopy. We noticed a small clearing about 200 meters from the crash and set our ship down in it. The crewchief and I jumped from our ship, he with his M-60 machine and I with my M-16" This was the way 1LT Richard Sperling described the action after the 155th Huey crashed after being hit by ground fire during operation Sam Houston on that eventful day. LT Sperling and SP5 Michael Baucom unhesitatingly went to their rescue with complete disregard for the enemy mortars that were trying desperately to destroy the downed crew.

On the 27 August, 6 lift helicopters and 4 gun ships extracted 180 CIDG Special Forces Troops from Duc Lap in Duc Lac Province. As the transport flight lifted out of the Duc Lap landing zone on the first lift, hostile fire was received. Two of the company aircraft were hit and one returned immediately to the airfield. The other aircraft, commanded by Warrant Officer Steve Owens, was forced down into a clearing in the jungle when it lost oil pressure. The aircraft was receiving fire when it touched down in the clearing from an enemy force in the tree line. One passenger was wounded by the fire. The remainder of the flight followed WO Owens into the clearing and their passengers secured the area within ten minutes. Two hours later the damaged aircraft was removed, but the CIDG Commander decided to take the opportunity to stalk the enemy and remained on the target which had been inadvertently offered him. WO Owens said of the action, "It was close, but how many times can you get shot down and have your own line company follow you in? We were receiving heavy fire on the ground. Had it not been for the quick reaction of those CIDG my crew would not be alive today"

On the 6th of November a second change of command was held for the 155th. The guidon was passed from Major Charlie P. Fleming to Major Billy R. Goodall.

The year closed with elements of the unit in Pleiku. The 155 Aviation Company (AMC) was the epitome of Air mobility at work. The year had seen them working in Hue Phu Bai area in the north. Their call signs had been heard as far south as Saigon. They were truly part of the Vagabonds of Vietnam.