

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 severely 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. Maer, Inf, and 52nd Battalion Commander, LTC Foy Rice, in a ribbon cutting ceremony. On 14 December the new Battalion Commander LTC Paul C. Smitley, 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 M. 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 Dar 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 (AML) 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.

JAN - DEC 1968

The new year started off with a bang for Camp Coryell and the men of the 155 Aviation Company. At 0245 on the 4th of January 1968, Camp Coryell was under attack from 82mm mortars, and B40 rockets. Fortunately no casualties were suffered, but some 46 rounds destroyed two UH1H helicopters and damaged ten others. Additionally two transient Dustoff ships incurred damage. This set back was only temporary and the 155th was fully operational within 24 hours.

After a 26 round mortar attack on the 17th January, in which five UH1H received damage, the stagecoach-falcon team was again put to the test. This occurred on the 30th of January. The intensive attack on Ban Me Thuot and the adjacent airfield began at 0150 hours. At this time both flare and gunships were ordered airborne in support of various check points and outposts under attack. At 0200 hours the 155th went to 100% alert, and at 0250 hours approximately 20 rounds of hostile mortar fire fell on the city airfield complex. Small arms fire was encountered throughout the night. Eight aircraft were damaged by hostile fire. The Falcon gunships not yet committed were ordered aloft at 0300 hours. They were later credited with destroying two enemy 82mm mortar positions. Flare and gunships flew throughout the night.

At 0815 hours a Falcon aircraft piloted by WO1 Ian Tindsey and WO1 Lawrence Hanner was downed by hostile fire two miles south of Ban Me Thuot. A 165th recovery aircraft along with Dustoff were dispatched to the scene, and several ships already in the air were diverted to the location to help the downed crew. At 0830 hours, while taking off to direct recovery operations, Major Goodall was wounded when his aircraft encountered intense automatic weapons fire.

The months of April and May saw Camp Coryell under sporadic mortar attacks. Aircrafts were destroyed and personnel injured however the Company marched on.

On the 1st of June the 155th received a warm welcome from the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion. This change of Battalion had little effect on the company and they continued missions as before. There presents was still felt in I corps to the north and II Corp to the south.

JAN - DEC 1969

As the year before, Camp Coryell was again subject to constant attacks from the local VC and the NVA. During the entire year of 1968, Camp Coryell came under attack 28 times. During the quarter 1 January to 31 March 69 there were 12 enemy attacks directed at Camp Coryell, a 40% quarterly increase.

On the 3rd of January a Stagecoach aircraft crashed into a mountain between Ban Me Thuot and Dalat, after going IFR in low clouds. The pilot died in the crash and the aircraft commander, crewchief and gunner were seriously injured.

Renovation of the compound was also in the works. The refueling area, south of the active was causing a problem with dust. This was solved with penepirim. The perimeter was also beefed up with solid bunker construction. This time also saw the 155th engaged in extra flight training. There was an initiation of night flights to increase each individuals' night proficiency and provide increased overall mission readiness capability.

The downed gunship crew was finally extracted at 0930 in the morning. Intense hostile activity precluded any attempt to recover the aircraft, and necessitated its destruction later in the day. While returning from the crash scene the 165th Recovery aircraft was credited with 15 KIA's when its door gunners engaged a VC force caught in the open.

At 1300 hours another UH1C was damaged and crew chief wounded by enemy anti-aircraft fire. The aircraft completed its fire mission and then returned to home station. While landing at city field at 1830 hours, WO Teaford received facial wounds when his UH1H aircraft was hit by automatic weapons fire.

From 2300 hours 30 January to 0400 hours on the 31, the Falcons gave continual support. During this time these two UH1C's sustained 32 hits from hostile fire. They were credited with silencing two enemy machine guns.

On the 4th of March, Camp Coryell took a total of 86 rounds. These were followed by a NVA satchel charge team infiltrating through the R&U yard, killing a Korean P&E employee. They were repelled by the reaction force before they could accomplish their mission.

With all this, the Stagecoach-Falcon team bounced back. They flew almost daily combat assaults.

Perhaps the worst tragedy in the history of the company occurred on 19 April when two UH1H helicopters collided in mid-air while flying formation during a combat assault. All personnel aboard both aircraft were killed. Among the dead were 18 Vietnamese military passengers.

After several attacks in April, Camp Coryell again came under a sapper attack. On 22 May at 0115 hours 56 rounds of 60 and 82mm mortars, B40 and B41 rockets, and 75mm recoilless struck the compound. A sapper team entered the compound in the P&E area, and were able to destroy eight structures and nine vehicles. Two aircraft received major damage and two received minor damage. One civilian guard was slightly wounded.

During this time the 155th was engaged in B50. This was an operation with 5th Special Forces, Airforce, and the 155th Aviation Company. These operation included 4 slicks and four guns. The airforce at first supplied the armed helicopter support but due to heavy losses, the hard fighting Falcons took on the task. The job consisted of inserting and extracting Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols. This was often accomplished in the face of intense enemy fire.

During the night, the flare ships with their gun cover were called again and again to repulse the enemy from the local area.

Because of intense night flying, flare pots were installed to light the runway at night. While the lighted runway lifted their spirits they also felt depressed with the construction of a gas chamber. This was used to keep all personnel current and also served as a testing area for the newly issued gas masks.

The company swimming pool, inactive for the past year, was relined, filled and the adjacent area repaired. It was officially reopened the last week in May, with 155 Commander Major Bobby L. Moore, being the first to take the plunge. To his regret, he forgot to get his clothes off in time.

On 25 June 1969, Major Bobby L. Moore relinquished command of the 155th Aviation Company to Maj. Dean M. Owen formerly assigned to IFFV. The change of command ceremony was held at Camp Coryell and was attended by dignitaries of the 23rd ARVN Division, Darlac Sector, Detachment B-23 (5th Special Forces Group), Col. Nelson Malone, Commanding Officer of 17th Aviation Group, and LTC Davie L. Stanley, 10th Aviation Battalion Commander.

Major Moore was presented the Bronze Star for service and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

In late August and early September of 1968 the 155 supported areas of Bu Prang and Duc Lap were targets of a long, hard-hitting offensive by the enemy. Duc Lap in particular was the local point of enemy activity. All sources of information up to June of 1969 indicated that the enemy was planning a 1969 offensive aimed once again at Duc Lap.

The end of the summer monsoon and the beginning of the winter brought about a great increase in enemy activity in large parts of the 155's area of operation. Although the rainy weather precluded any large scale enemy activity during July and August, towards the end of September the lessening rainfall afforded the enemy greater ease of mobility, as was indicated by large troop buildups in the border areas west and southwest of Duc Lap.

During these times the company was engaged in sniffer for G-2 of the 23rd ARVN Division. An increase of B-50 activities helped account for the majority of missions during this period. Day after day the Falcons were returning with ever increasing KBA's credited to their hard hitting tactics.

The question of the intentions of the enemy were answered on 22 October when it became clear that the enemy was on the move. Large size units moved across from Cambodia into positions south of Bu Prang and south of Duc Lap. Large units were still massing along the Cambodian border posing a substantial artillery and standoff attack threat to the outposts of Bu Prang and Duc Lap.

On 25 October the enemy began his offensive.

Over night with the help of the 155, 5/22 Artillery set up fire bases strung from east of Duc Lap to west of Bu Prang. "B" Troop of the 7/17 Cavalry was assigned the mission of conducting "Hunter-Killer" operations in the Bu Prang-Gia Nghia area.

As the offense took shape, fire support base Helen was the first to bend under the onslaught of a multibattalion size unit. It fell on the 29 of October with the remaining personnel being extracted by the 155 under heavy enemy fire.

As the enemy applied pressure, fire support base Annie and Kate were relocated to Duc Lap. The enemy had 50 caliber and 37mm Antiaircraft position around each fire base. As aircraft made their approaches to these bases they would sustain numerous hits. The aircraft kept returning again and again for medical evacuation and finally for the extraction.

Fighting went on. Heroic deeds became part of the every day mission as the 155 earned its name under intense enemy fire.

One of the most significant actions took place on 17 November when the Falcons gunships expended five times on enemy locations near Bu Prang. As a result of Falcon gunships and Tac Air Support, 72 enemy were killed. More than half of which were credited to the Falcons.

The activity on the Volcano south of Duc Lap had now reached the point that the StageCoach slicks performing resupply to the troops on the rim would always receive ground fire. Launching out of LZ Mike Smith these resupply helicopters had to alter their routes and landing patterns every time they ran a mission. There were confirmed .50 caliber positions around three sides of the Volcano with small arms and troop concentrations on the fourth side.

In addition there was only one small spot on the rim suitable for landing and this pad was constantly wracked with direct mortar, rocket, and artillery. An aircraft landing on the volcano had to be fast. If cargo couldn't be kicked off or the wounded loaded within 27 to 28 seconds they would have to wait for the next lift, because 29 to 30 seconds after touchdown, a mortar round would strike the pad. This resupply and medevac mission put the crews under great strain. Going into the volcano as many as four, five, or six times in one day put the crews under so much pressure that the US ground commander insisted that the crews be changed daily so as not to overtax the same people day after day.

On 27 November, a gunship covering a volcano resupply was shot down. They crash landed in enemy territory and were safely extracted by another gunship.

It must be remembered that the battle of Bu Prang-DucLap was a full scale effort by the enemy. Although not mentioned in this history the events and circumstances surrounding all operations 28 October - 28 December required aviators and crew to daily risk their lives in an effort to provide support to the besieged firebase and outposts.

1970
..Jan - Dec

The year opened relatively quiet with the 155 taking a long needed rest from the tension of heavy combat. On the 6th of January, at 0045 hours, Camp Coryell received five rounds of 82mm mortar. There was minor damage to UH-1H.

The rest of the month was free from mortar attack.

This month also saw a rapid change in the tactical situation. It was now off to Plieku in support of the 4th Infantry Division. The average commitment ranged from four to twelve UH-1H and two to four UH-1C. This area had felt the on slut of the "Stage Coach-Falcon" team only one year earlier.

With February, the 155 resumed its duties in the support of B-50. This mission was one of low hours but by no means easy. As one pilot once said, "B-50 is a mission with hours of boredom broken by seconds of extreme terror". From isolated airstrips they would stand by in case a recon patrol developed contact. At this four slick and two guns would scramble. All ships would proceed to the sight of contact. An airforce FAC would already be on station to direct lead ship in for the extraction, while the other slicks would orbit.

On the 20th of April the 155 was engaged in B-50. A team was in contact. Lt Peaudreault and WO Whyllie were on the pick up ship. As they touched down in the LZ they received intense enemy fire. Just as they cleared the trees on take off they were hit by a B40 in their tail. They crashed into the thick canopy. After climbing free of the wreckage a running battle with the NVA erupted. With gunship cover they made a clearing. At the time of the pickup they had been on the ground for over 30 minutes. WO Johnson was piloting the rescue aircraft.

Around 1900 hours WO Marlin Johnson with WO Darek Richardson as his copilot again entered the area for an extraction of a recon patrol. As they were about to touch down in the LZ they received a B40 in the Cocpit. They were both killed instantly. The crewchief and gunner survived. They were immediately picked up but due to intense enemy fire the bodies weren't recovered until a later date. This was a truly dark day for the 155th.

As June rolled around Maj Gerard H. Luisi relinquished command of the 155th Aviation Company to Maj Rowland G. Steele on the 11th.

With the 155 in the Vanguard, the 10th Avn Bn airlifted the 23rd ARVN Division across the border. The 8th Cav drove up from the south on an overland march. Contact was sporadic however large caches of supplies and arms were captured.

With the middle of June it was again into Cambodia. The area this time was 30 to 50 miles north of Duc Lap. With the 155 again in the Vanguard of the 10th Avn Bn the VC and NVA were caught with their pants down. Here as before, contact was sporadic however the rewards were large. Weapons, from single shot to AK 47's, from R40's to 72mm recoilless rifles were captured.

These two operations smashed Charlie's chances of a substantial offensive in the Darloc Province.

Time passed with the 155 accomplishing the missions in its local AO. Happy Valley SE of Ban Me Thuot and VC Mountain to the SW still posed a threat to the security of Darloc Province.

The first significant combat assault for August occurred on the 17th. The 155th aided by the 281st and 243rd assaulted Happy Valley, the long time strong hold of the Viet-Cong and NVA Forces. The weather held and by the end of the day, fourteen landing zones had been inserted with negative damage to any of the aviators.

During this time Camp Coryell was relatively free from mortar attacks.

The 3rd of September found the 155th involved in another major combat assault. This time the target was "VC Mountain" and the surrounding area. The weather played a factor and caused a late take off. As the lift platoon touched down in the 4th LZ they received intense semi-automatic fire. The gunships immediately suppressed the fire but in the process a door gunner took a round in the leg. He was immediately evacuated to Ban Me Thuot and then on to Cam Ranh Bay, where he recovered.

With October came a project to redo the floor of our pool. It had been closed for several months due to a ripped liner. With aching backs and blistering hands the officers and men of the 155 cemented the bottom of the pool.

At present the company is waiting to receive the final word on its future. At first it was to go to Tuy Hoa and then to Da Nang. No one knew for sure. Now the word is back home. Only time will tell.

The 155th Aviation Company has spent a total of 5 1/2 years in the wild west of Vietnam. During these times they have earned their name with blood. All those who served did not return home. These men did not die in vain.

1965

1LT Harold A. Preisenderfer	21 Oct 65
WO1 Joseph S. Huyler	21 Oct 65
SP5 William J. Johnson	21 Oct 65
PFC Michael E. Davis	21 Oct 65

1966

WO1 Eugene W. Caswell	27 May 66
WO1 Michael N. Coryell	30 Nov 66
PFC Richard E. Dabney	27 May 66
WO1 Raymond L. Ford	29 Mar 66
PFC Gregory L. Miller	20 Dec 66
WO1 Phillips C. Smith	29 Mar 66
PFC James Walker	30 Nov 66
WO1 Wilmer J. Willingham	30 Nov 66
SP4 John W. Wood	30 Nov 66

1967

SCT Keith D. Griffin	16 Mar 67
WO1 Terrance Nelson	23 May 67
SP5 James G. Patterson	16 Mar 67

1968

WO1 Willis W. Smith	19 Apr 68
1LT Dennis E. Painter	19 Apr 68
SP5 James Miculus	19 Apr 68
SP4 Frank L. Freedle	19 Apr 68
WO1 Paul N. Larson	19 Apr 68
WO1 Herbert Hayashida	19 Apr 68
SP4 John R. Brooks	19 Apr 68
SP4 Oran B. McCardol	19 Apr 68
1LT Fred O. Pratt	26 Aug 68
WO1 William P. Harwood	8 Sep 68
WO1 Redlich S. Koppel	8 Sep 68
SP4 James D. Budahazy	24 Jan 68
SP5 William Eister	6 Feb 68
SP4 Edward Milan	4 Mar 68
SP4 James Swann	4 Mar 68
SSG Robert Pinkston	13 Mar 68

1969

WO1 Ronald McGary	3 Jan 69
SP4 Richard See	8 Jan 69
WO1 Terry L. Crawford	27 Feb 69
SP5 Armando Ramirez	23 May 69
PFC Santiago Quinitana	23 May 69
SP5 Rich R. Medaris	5 Nov 69
SP5 John A. Payne	5 Nov 69
SP4 Richard G. Bauer	5 Nov 69

1970

WO1 Marlin Johnson	20 Apr 70
WO1 Darek Richardson	20 Apr 70
1LT Jacob L. Kinser	8 Mar 70
SP4 Wim Goeree	8 Mar 70
WO1 David K. Erenstoft	8 Mar 70
SP5 William R. Rogne	8 Mar 70
WO1 Paul E. Dolik	23 Feb 70
SP5 David Nachtigall	23 Feb 70
SP4 Calvin Serian	23 Feb 70