

S T A G E C O A C H

HISTORY OF THE 155TH AVIATION COMPANY (AML)

PREFACE

This is the history of the 155th Avn Co (AML), a unit which is a compound product of modern aeronautical technology and the traditions of the United States Army. The company originated, at greatly reduced strength, at Fort Riley, Kansas, upon the reorganization of the 1st Infantry Division under the ROAD concept. The Company was then A Company, 1st Aviation Battalion, 1st Infantry Division. As such it took part in the US Air Force INDIAN RIVER Exercises and in the US Strike Command Operation GOLDFIRE I. And as such, it prepared for and moved to the Republic of Viet Nam. It is during the preparation for this movement that this history begins.

This history is a contemporary account of events in the 155th Avn Co. It has been prepared from operations orders, after action reports, daily activity reports, eye witness accounts and informal personal interviews, all regarding this company. The recording of events is being done by calendar quarters to facilitate compilation and distribution to members of the company during their tour in Viet Nam. The recounting of events is as objective as possible with the observing, recording and chronicling all being done by those who also are responsible for accomplishing the assigned missions. This history was organized and initiated by Captain John A. Geurin who joined this organization as a member of its advanced party in Ban Me Thuot.

It is my privilege to command this diverse organization of some three hundred officers and men, at the heart of which is the 155th Avn Co, at the time this is written. I salute those men - mechanics, cooks, clerks, security guards, communications, medics, aircrewmen - for whom and about whom this is written.

Joseph L. Parla, Jr.
JOSEPH L. PARLA JR.
Major, Infantry
Commanding

BAN ME THUOT, RVN
24 Feb 66

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MISSION: The mission of the 155th Avn Co is to provide tactical air movement of combat troops in airmobile operations and to provide tactical air movement of combat supplies and equipment within the combat zone.

ORGANIZATION: The 155th Avn Co is organized under TCO 1-77E and has the following units attached:

165th Transportation Detachment (Cargo Helicopter Field Maintenance)

8th Medical Detachment

208th Signal Detachment (RADRED) (AVIOMICS)

255th Quartermaster Detachment (POL)

*52D Quartermaster Detachment (POL)

*88th Military Police Detachment (K-9)

* Attached for administration and logistics only

II. Regional Analysis

4. Terrain

1. The II Corps Tactical Zone, in which Ban Me Thuot is located and in which the 155th ARVN renders the majority of its support, covers an area of 32,725 square miles or 49% of the land area of South Vietnam. Its western border is 342 miles long and in common with Laos, in the northern portion of Kontum Province, Cambodia and III Corps Tactical Zone. The eastern border is approximately 400 miles of coastline with the South China Sea. The area is 40 miles wide in the North and 342 miles wide in the South. This area is politically divided into the Provinces of Kontum, Binh Dinh, Pleiku, Phu Bon and Phu Yen in the 22d Division Tactical Area and Darlac, Khanh Hoa, Quang Duc, Tuyen Duc, Ninh Thuan, Lam Dong and Binh Thuan in the 23d DTA. Geographically, this area may be divided into three major areas.

a. The coastal plain is a narrow strip of long, flat, often marshy terrain not more than twenty miles wide from the sea inland. This area is formed by a series of numerous river deltas interrupted by rocky ridge lines running steeply to the sea. This area is almost entirely under cultivation with four rice crops yearly.

b. The mountain region extends from north to south almost the entire length of the II Corps Tactical Zone. Elevations range from 3,000 to 8,000 feet with the eastern slopes quite steep and the western, more gradual. Rain forests cover three quarters of this area with most of the remainder covered with open deciduous growth. Cultivation is limited to small cleared areas on relatively flat land. Flying in this area is very hazardous with forced landing areas practically non-existent, ceilings frequently very low and winds unpredictable.

c. The plateau region is located west of the mountains and is comprised of the Kontum Plateau in the North and the Darlac Plateau to the South. This region has altitudes ranging from 1,000 - 3,000 feet with gently rolling hills and much open area. Where the soil is not under cultivation, a thick growth of grass to a height of eight to ten feet covers the ground. Where adequate drainage is provided, this area will support four vegetable crops yearly.

2. The principal cities of this area are Phan Thiet, Phan Rang, Nha Trang and Qui Nhon on the coastal plain; Dalat in the mountains and Ban Me Thuot, Pleiku and Kontum on the plateaus. The major routes of this area are:

- a. Route #1: Saigon - Danang (Coastal Route throughout this area)
- b. Route #11: Dalat - Phan Rang
- c. Route #14: Saigon - Ban Me Thuot - Pleiku - Kontum
- d. Route #19: Pleiku - Qui Nhon
- e. Route #20: Saigon - Dalat
- f. Route #21: Ban Me Thuot - Nha Trang

The republic's major rail line parallels Route #1 along its entire length with one spur line from Phan Rang to Dalat. The emerging logistical and communications complex of Cam Ranh Bay is located between Phan Rang and Nha Trang.

B. Weather

1. Weather throughout this area can be divided into the summer monsoon, June through September, and the winter monsoon, November through April, with the months of May and October as periods of transition. During the summer monsoon the wind is southwesterly causing cloud buildups on the western slopes of the mountains. This results in a rainy season for the plateaus and mountainous areas during the summer months while the coastal provinces have clear skies and good flying weather. The winter monsoon brings a northeasterly flow with conditions reversed. The coastal provinces of Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan are little effected by either monsoon and have generally clear weather the year around.

2. Average rainfall in the mountain and plateau areas is 90 inches and on the coastal plain, 87 inches. The temperatures on the coastal plain range from the mid-70s to the high 80s during the rainy season and low 80s to high 90s during the dry season. The mountains and plateaus experience temperatures from the mid-60s to the low 80s during the dry season and high 60s to mid-80s during the wet season. Winds are normally gusty at 10-15 knots with velocity increasing with altitude. Surface winds up to 25 knots are frequently encountered.

c. Indigenous Population

1. The II CTZ has a population of approximately 2.5 million people or just over 20% of the population of the Republic of Viet Nam. The majority of this population is located along the coastal plain in the vicinity of the coastal cities. The majority of these people are Vietnamese of Chinese extraction.

2. The mountain and plateau regions are inhabited chiefly by Montagnard tribesmen who are, ethnically, the only native Vietnamese. There are thirty-nine major tribes and some 150 subordinate tribal groups of these people living in the highlands of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Ban Me Thuot is the traditional capitol of these people. The II Corps area is inhabited by 500,000 of these people. The largest tribe in this region is the Tade whose influence extends from Kontum to Ban Me Thuot.

PREPARATION FOR MOVEMENT

On 18 March 1965, Headquarters, 1st Infantry Division, alerted the 1st Aviation Battalion to prepare the Airmobile Company (Company A) for deployment to USMAC. Company A was to be the major unit of an airmobile packet consisting of an airmobile company, field maintenance detachment, signal detachment, and medical detachment with total strength to be 261 officers, Warrant Officers, and enlisted men.

On 18 and 19 March personnel were selected for assignment to the packet from Fort Riley resources and personnel shortage reported to Fifth Army Headquarters. POF processing began for personnel at Fort Riley on 19 March and continued through 21 March. None of the officers selected to command any of the detachments nor the selected company commander for Company A, were at Fort Riley at the beginning of the POF processing.

On 24 March, the movement directive was received confirming a surface move of equipment from Fort Riley to an unspecified destination. The requirement for clothing and equipment to accompany individuals was unknown at this time. This resulted in having to contact all personnel while on leave to amend personal equipment and uniform requirements.

The movement directive specified that all personnel involved in the move would receive 15 days leave prior to departure. This directive was reinforced by the expressed desires of the Commanding General, Fort Riley, and on 26 March a majority of the personnel on station were released on leave. Arrangements were made with post units and the 1st Aviation Battalion to furnish personnel to assist in completing POF. The property book officer, supply sergeant, and several key personnel of the packet were retained at Fort Riley to supervise this preparation and consequently received no leave.

By 26 March the equipment readiness date had been established as 3 April and a deadline to complete issue of all supplies and equipment to the packet established as 31 March. The readiness date was later revised to 2 April and then 3 April. Equipment was still being issued to the packet on the afternoon of 3 April, several hours after rail loading was to have been completed. As a result, supplementary shipment was prepared which departed Fort Riley on 5 April.

By midnight on 8 April all newly assigned personnel and personnel on leave were at Fort Riley. Arrangements had been made for transportation, billeting and messing of all personnel until departure. On 9 and 10 April new personnel were POF checked and immunization and physical requirements completed for many who had not been properly processed at their prior stations. Several personnel changes necessitated by unfulfilled POF requirements were made on 9 and 10 April resulting in the establishment of a rear detachment.

By 9 April transportation arrangements were firm and manifests were prepared. The packet departed by air in three groups from Kansas City and Manhattan airports early on the morning of 11 April, arriving at San Diego Naval Air Station on the same day. Personnel were transported directly from the aircraft to the USS IWO JIMA.

Sunday 11 April was spent by Major De Loach in conference with the ships' crew on administrative matters and coordinating manifests of personnel and equipment. At this time it was discovered that several errors had been made in shipping and much of the equipment previously designated to accompany the troops had been shipped to Oakland Army Terminal. Included in this equipment was most of the special theater clothing and equipment issued to the unit.

MOVEMENT

At 0900 hours Monday, 12 April, the USS IWO JIMA sailed with 254 Officers and men from Fort Riley, along with two other packets of similar size from Fort Bragg and Fort Campbell. These units were A Company, 101st Avn Bn and A Company, 321 Avn Bn. On board in addition to each units equipment were 77 unassigned UH-1D helicopters, and 9 conex containers with replacement parts.

On 17 April 1965 the USS IWO JIMA docked at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii for four hours and took aboard a liaison officer from US Army Support Command, Vietnam. Pearl Harbor was the last land seen until the ships arrival at Vung Tau (Cape St. Jacques), RVN, on 1 May 1965. During transit, orientations were held for personnel and unit commanders were informed of their ultimate destinations. Plans for debarkation and movement to destinations were disseminated and subsequently changed because of crowded port conditions necessitating early movement to destinations.

In the absence of any instructions from the receiving command, the senior officer directed that the 77 aircraft be assigned to the three packets by tail number in order to facilitate control. It was believed at the time the aircraft would be flown off the ship, inspected for safety of flight at Vung Tau, and proceed to destination. On 28 April processing began on the 77 aircraft, and by 1800 hours on 30 April all aircraft except two had been released for flight. Messages were exchanged between the ship and US Army Support Command, Vietnam confirming arrival date and time and procedures for flying aircraft off the ship.

At 0620 hours 1 May 1965 the first aircraft was launched from the USS IWO JIMA from about 25 miles at sea. The aircraft was piloted by 1st Lt Edward T. Pledger and co-pilot by WO William Crothers, both of Company A, 1st Aviation Battalion. Thereafter ships were launched periodically until approximately 1100 hours when the last aircraft, including the two requiring further maintenance, had been launched.

Upon arriving at Vung Tau the packet commanders received instructions as to movement of their units to final destinations. Company A, 1st Aviation Battalion moved en masse, less crewchiefs, to Ban Me Thuot on C-123 aircraft, closing at approximately 1545 hours 1 May 1965. The unit was met at Ban Me Thuot by Lt Col Delbert Townsend, Commanding Officer, 52d Aviation Battalion, and the units' advanced party which had been in country approximately 10 days. Rations, tents, and other minimum essentials were on hand at Ban Me Thuot to sustain the unit for the first several days. There were, however, no medical supplies and no supply of potable water.

On 3 May aviators returned to Vung Tau to pick up the unit's aircraft, and crewchiefs. One aircraft had been reassigned by US Army Support Command as a maintenance float, leaving the unit with 24 UH-1D's.

Vehicles and equipment were due to be shipped to Nha Trang by LST and then moved overland to Ban Me Thuot. The first equipment, four conex containers, arrived on 10 May 1965 with the first 10 vehicles on 15 May. By 26 May all the units equipment had arrived except two 2½ ton trucks and several trailers. Vehicles were moved in three groups by Vietnamese drivers.

The remainder of May was spent preparing the unit for an operational readiness date of 1 June. Weapon kits were installed on 9 UH-1D aircraft (previously exchanged for 8 UH-1D's); and protective armament kits were installed on 16 UH-1D aircraft.

On 7 May aviators from the 52nd Airlift Platoon, the 117th Avn Company and the 119th Avn Co arrived at Ban Me Thuot for a personnel exchange with Company A to stagger dates of rotation. Of the officers and Warrant Officers arriving in the original packet, only 14 remained with the company after the exchange. The exchange was made on a man for man basis with the various units of the Battalion. Enlisted personnel of all 4 grades were also exchanged.

As a result of the DEROs exchange, an intense training program was established by the Company in an effort to qualify the new aviators in the UH-1D helicopter. Platoon and company training in formation flying, eagle flights and company sized airmobile assaults were greatly emphasized.

20 May saw the arrival of Company A's first "shot gun" (Door Gunner) platoon commanded by 1st Lt William J. Tracz. The platoon was made up of volunteers from units of the 25th Inf Div. The unit was TDY to Company A for a period of 3 months. Their duty was that of helicopter door gunners while augmenting the company's security force.

The unit was declared operationally ready on 1 June and began operations on that day. In its first month of operation Company A conducted six company size operations in support of the 23d Division.

During the last week of May the company received its designation of "Stage Coach" with "Falcon" for the armed platoon. During the next year, these call signs were to become familiar in all four corps areas of Vietnam.

OFFICERS REMAINING WITH COMPANY A

Major William W. DeLoach	067668
Capt. Charles T. Gilmer	04058567
Capt. Leon E. Curry	05306680
Capt. Anthony P. Di Benedetto	02306594
Capt. Leonard L. Boswell	078572
1/Lt Edward T. Pledger	05411943
1/Lt Robert C. Elwell	05017983
CWO William H. Goldman	W2207733
CWO Glen W. Mantomoth	W2206470
CWO William H. Cleary	W3150348
CWO James B. Stallard	W3150506
CWO Charles W. Millard	W3150788
CWO William J. Fields	W3151037
CWO Carl T. Sypniewski	W3430112

Annex A.

ADVANCED PARTY OF COMPANY A

1. Capt. Leonard L. Boswell	Company A
2. 1/Lt William J. Gavin Jr.	25th Inf Div
3. 1/Lt John A. Gourin	119th Avn Co
4. 1/Lt Paul B. Hinds	117th Avn Co
5. 1/Lt Jimmy Wilkie	119th Avn Co
6. SFC John E. Stanton	Company A

Annex B.

STATISTICS OF QUARTERLY OPERATIONS

1. Number of Sorties flown during preceding quarter: 4026
2. Number of Combat sorties flown during preceding quarter: 2634
3. Number of flying hours flown during preceding quarter: 1905 hrs
4. Number of passengers lifted during preceding quarter: 2332
5. Number of tons of cargo lifted during preceding quarter: 54 tons
6. Number of aircraft receiving hits during preceding quarter: 3

Annex C.

S T A G E C O A C H

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

AND

OPERATIONS

PERIOD 1 JULY - 30 SEPT

GENERAL

This quarter has been characterized by many significant events and operations. On 3 July Company A received its first Security Platoon; 28 August Major Deloach left the company, and the 5th of September brought about the rotation of the shot gun platoon.

Major operations during the quarter in which Company A were involved included Duc Co, Quang Ni and Phuoc Vinh. The Phuoc Vinh operation involved elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade being lifted into War Zone "D", an area north of Saigon which had long been a notorious Viet Cong stronghold.

EVENTS AND OPERATIONS

3 July saw the arrival of the 52nd Security Platoon. This platoon, one of the largest in the US Army, is headquartered at Pleiku and has elements attached to each airmobile company in the battalion for local security. With this platoon, every available means of defense is co-ordinated including bunkers, observation posts, roving patrols, mortars, ground surveillance infrared searchlights, and sentry dogs.

A highlight of 1965 for Company A came in July when the Company was called upon to fly the Secretary of Defense and his party on an inspection visit to the Republic.

On July 1st, Company A was alerted for movement to Cheo Reo airfield (Coor. DQ235825) for an operation in support of the ARVN Airborne Brigade. A PAVN Regiment had been located in the mountain pass southwest of Cheo Reo. The mission involved supporting the ARVN Airborne Brigade with airlift of supplies and personnel. A second mission was given Company A, that of evacuating a district headquarters near Cheo Reo which had been under attack by the Viet Cong for several days.

Because of the enemy situation, supplies and ammunition had not been sent to the village for several days. Prior to decision to evacuate the headquarters, a battalion of the ARVN airborne brigade attempted to gain access to the village by convoy. The convoy was ambushed in a defile four kilometers southwest of Cheo Reo with heavy casualties reported. Vehicles and artillery were burned while the unit was pinned down for 20 hours.

The evacuation was planned for 1500 hours the following day, and would be made by Company A, the 119th Avn Co, and the 52nd Airlift Platoon. Air Force A-1E's and F-100's executed napalm and 20mm strikes around the village clearing the way for the helicopters. Company A lead the flight into the area, followed by the 119th Avn Co and 52nd Airlift Platoon. As Company A lifted off the LZ the Viet Cong began mortaring the district headquarters and the landing zone. The 119th was unable to land in the area because of the intense mortar and ground fire in and around the LZ. The mission was aborted and all units returned to Cheo Reo airfield. Company A was able to extract nearly one hundred and sixty people from the village on the lift. Aircraft carried the maximum possible load with as many as fifteen passengers on some helicopters.

The ARVN Brigade again attempted a convoy to the headquarters after several days and nights of constant bombing by the Air Force. The convoy was successful and the headquarters was evacuated by road. The Viet Cong regiment, after days of intense bombing by the Air Force, withdrew into the mountains southwest of Cheo Reo ending the siege. Company A was released and returned to Ban Me Thuot but several aircraft were left at Cheo Reo airfield for support of advisory team. During the night the Viet Cong mortared the airfield damaging several of the aircraft. One UH-1D was flown away during the attack by 1/Lt Edward T. Fledger. Upon landing at Qui Nhon the crew counted eighty-four fragment holes in the aircraft.

On 2 August Company A was alerted for movement to Pleiku. The United States Special Forces Camp of Duc Co had been under siege for several weeks, when on 3 August operation Ban Thang 5 was conducted by the 52nd Avn Bn. The operation was in support of the 3rd and 8th Battalions, 1st ARVN Airborne Brigade. Elements of the 117th Avn Co, Company A, 119th Avn Co and the 52nd Lift Platoon staged from Camp Holloway Army Airfield and lifted 1150 troops in six lifts to the landing zone at the Duc Co Airfield. Small arms and automatic weapons fire were received in the vicinity of the landing zone, resulting in one UH-1D and one UH-1E (A) being damaged with no casualties.

On 10 August, the units performed an airlanded assault mission in support of the 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion. The aircraft staged from Holloway Army Airfield and lifted 450 troops in three lifts to the same landing zone at Duc Co Airfield. During the last lift, casualties were extracted and 4000 lbs of supplies were carried to the ARVN Marine Task Force which had previously been lifted to the Duc Co Airfield. Close air support was provided by eight USAF F-100's, four of which were utilized in the prestrike, while the remaining four were used provide air cover. Small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fire were received in the landing zone. Two UH-1D's received hits and one US door gunner of the 119th Avn Co was wounded.

During the Duc Co operation Company A provided aircraft each day to the 52nd Avn Bn for purpose of resupply, medical evacuation, and small troop placements throughout the operational area. The siege was finally broken on 15 August with the withdrawal of the Viet Cong regiment into Cambodia. Company A was released and returned to Ban Me Thuot.

On 24 August elements of A Company, the 121st Avn Co, and the 501st Avn Co from Bien Hoa, performed an airlanded assault in support of the 23rd Inf Div for the purpose of clearing highway 21 from Ban Me Thuot to Nha Trang. Aircraft staged from Ban Me Thuot (East) Airfield, and lifted 1257 troops of the Marine Task Force (ARVN) in five lifts to a landing zone coord DQ120165. During the last lift into the LZ, one UH-1D (A) of Company A experienced a low side governor failure and crashed into the trees in the vicinity of the LZ. The crew was evacuated by UH-1D back to Ban Me Thuot. The aircraft was piloted by WO Phillip D. Pettit who was medically evacuated to the United States because of injuries. The aircraft sustained major damage.

Close air support during the operation was provided by four USAF AIE's. No hostile fire was received. The Marine Task Force was convoyed out of the operational area at the completion of the operation. During the entire operation, medical evacuation and resupply aircraft were provided by Company A.

The 26th of August marked the re-assignment of Company A's Commanding Officer as Executive Officer of the 52nd Avn Bn. In a brief change of command ceremony at Ban Me Thuot, Major Fred T. Yamagata took command of Company A. Major Yamagata had been the Executive Officer of the 52nd Avn Bn for the past six months.

On 5 September the first door gunner platoon completed its ninety day assignment and returned to the 25th Inf Div. They were relieved by 1st Lt Arthur J. Ryan and his shotgun platoon. The new platoon consisted of 3 NCO's and 24 EM, all were volunteers from troops A, B and C, 3rd Sqdn, 4th Cav, 25th Inf Div. The platoon was assigned TDY to Company A for a period of 3 months.

The 10th of September marked the beginning of a period of Company A's history in which the unit would be involved in major operations in all four Corps areas of Viet Nam, in one thirty day period.

On 8 September, the unit was alerted for movement to Quang Ngai. Combined with elements of the 119th Avn Co, Company A performed an air-landed assault and extraction mission in support of the 5th US Special Forces Group. Fifty USSF advisory personnel and 210 ARVN Airborne Rangers were lifted from the stagefield at Quang Ngai to the landing zone at coord 17137003 in one lift and later extracted in one lift from the same LZ. No hostile fire was received. Close air support was provided by eight USAF A-10's utilized for prestrike, and eight USAF B-57's were used for air cover. The mission was completed and Company A returned to Ban Me Thuot.

12 September found Company A preparing for movement to Saigon to work with the 145th Avn Dn. The operation involved lifting elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade and the Royal Australian Regiment into an area 5 kilometers North of Ben Cat. Six air mobile companies plus Air Force elements were involved in the operation. The operation consisted of making five lifts from Bien Hoa to an LZ North of Ben Cat. This area was known as "D" Zone and had long been a sanctuary for the Viet Cong.

After the first days operation, Company A returned to Saigon for the night with instructions to return to Phuoc Vinh by 150700 prepared to stay in the field the remainder of the operation in direct support of the ARVN Airborne Brigade. The Company remained at Phuoc Vinh through the 22nd of September when it was directed to return to Saigon. Although the Company was in direct support of the ARVN Airborne Brigade it was frequently recalled to III Corps control to participate in air-landed assaults and extractions with the 145th Avn Dn. The Company also provided the 173rd Airborne Brigade with aircraft for resupply, medical evacuation, and small troop placements. The majority of Company A's aircraft were flying an average of 4 to 8 hours a day flying time during this period. On 28 September the Company was released to return to Ban Me Thuot. This had proved to be a long three day mission.

Prior to this operation no friendly troops had been in the area for over fifteen years. During the operation a 200 bed hospital and supplies were found along with an ammunition factory and tons of ammunition. Heavily fortified bunkers and miles of tunnels were also found in the area along with many tons of rice which was recovered or destroyed. This became the first in a series of major operations throughout this area involving US troops. A Company was to return to this area many times.

STATISTICS OF QUARTERLY OPERATIONS

1. Number of Sorties flown during preceeding quarter: 7972
2. Number of Combat sorties flown during preceeding quarter: 7522
3. Number of flying hours flown during preceeding quarter: 4993
4. Number of passengers lifted during preceeding quarter: 6559
5. Number of tons of cargo lifted during preceeding quarter: 204
6. Number of aircraft struck by ground fire during preceeding quarter: 87

Annex A.

S T A G E C O A C H

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

AND

OPERATIONS

PERIOD 1 OCT - 31 DEC

PERIOD 1 OCT - 31 DEC 65

This quarter has been highlighted by the number of major operations in which Company A took part. During this quarter the company continued to operate not only in the II Corps area but also in the III and IV Corps areas. These operations were milestones in the struggle against the Viet Cong. Such operations were the "Iron Triangle" operation, the Plei Me Operation, the Tuy Hoa rice harvest operation, and, finally "Operation Bushwacker" involving elements of the 1st Division and the 101st Airborne Brigade in the area around the Michelin rubber plantation northwest of Saigon.

Other events during this period were the reassignment of two ~~company commanders~~, the rotation of our last "Shotgun" platoon, and the redesignation of Company A, as the 155th Aviation Company (Airmobile light).

EVENTS AND OPERATIONS

On 6 October Company A was alerted for movement to Saigon, to be attached to the 145th Avn Battalion. The operation involved lifting elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade by means of five airmobile companies into two landing zones, in the infamous "Iron Triangle" thirty kilometers north of Saigon. The Iron Triangle had, for more than 15 years, been a well known communist sanctuary. The initial operation was conducted by making a troop lift into a secured landing zone to act as a blocking force for the mobile elements which were landed, in four lifts, in an LZ twelve kilometers to the west. The area had been prestruck by Air Force B-52's six hours prior to the assault and F-100's along with artillery of the 173rd Brigade were used to prestrike the landing zone.

As the 173rd swept through the Iron Triangle they encountered few Viet Cong but found large stores of supplies, including enough rice to feed a VC regiment for four months. They also uncovered fresh evidence of the Communist's long famed trenching arts: tunnels up to 40 feet deep and several hundred yards long, with angled corridors and galleries to reduce blast effects, air vents and emergency exits. Weapons of all makes and calibres were found along with an abundance of ammunition, mines and grenades. Sufficient medical supplies to establish a field hospital were found and recovered by the ground troops.

Upon release from support of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the company moved even farther south to join with the 13th Avn Bn. At 1200 hours the 9th of October, Company A closed at Soc Trang, home of the 121st Avn Co and Company A of the 501st Avn Bn. This operation on the Delta involved lifting elements of the 9th and 27th ARVN Division from Vi Thanh (Coord WR550830) into two landing zones. A total of three lifts were made into the areas lifting approximately 1200 troops. Moderate ground fire was received in both LZ's, but no aircraft were damaged. At 1200 hours 10 October the Company was released, and returned to Ban Me Thuot.

After arriving at Ban Me Thuot the Company settled down for a well earned rest. This period of rest was short lived however for at 2200 hours the evening of the 10th the company was alerted for movement to Tuy Hoa to support a rice harvest operation. With thirteen troop carriers and six armed helicopters, the company departed Ban Me Thuot and closed at Tuy Hoa at 1540 hours. Preparations were made for a three day stay at the Tuy Hoa North Airfield. The operation to secure the fall rice harvest in the Tuy Hoa valley involved a four lift movement of a maneuver force of the 47th Regiment (ARVN) in the morning and a two lift movement of a blocking force in the afternoon. During the morning lift one armed helicopter experienced a premature rocket explosion causing extensive structural damage to the aircraft and badly wounding PFC William Ables who was evacuated to Nha Trang and the United States.

At 1130 hours this same day a "MADAY" call was received from an A-1E which had been flying air cover for the operation. The AIE had suffered elevator control failure on a strafing run and the pilot was forced to bail out at sea. A stagecoach UH-1D crewed by Captain Leonard L. Boswell and CWO Charles Gibson rescued the pilot from an extremely rough sea.

The following morning Company A performed two more lifts with the 47th Regiment and was released to return to Ban Me Thuot.

On 20 October Company A departed Ban Me Thuot enroute to Phu Cat for a ten day operation. Because of bad weather the company diverted to Pleiku for the night. Upon arrival the company was told to off load all field gear and stand by for a possible lift into the Special Forces Camp at Plei Me. This marked the beginning of the largest attack ever launched by the Viet Cong and one of the most difficult support missions any airmobile company ever completed. For the first five days, A Company was the only airmobile company available for support.

The camp had been attacked by an estimated Viet Cong regiment during the night. Shortly after day break, it appeared that the V.C. had broken contact and retired. Two medical evacuation helicopters of the 498th Medical Company with two armed escorts from the 119th Avn Co were launched to recover the dead and wounded from the camp. During the mission the aircraft received heavy automatic weapons fire up to calibre .50 size. One of the escort gunships was hit and crashed in flames just outside the southwest perimeter of the camp.

On the morning of 21 Oct, Company A was called on to lift 240 ARVN Airborne Rangers from Camp Holloway to an LZ four kilometers north of the besieged camp. During the reconnaissance of the LZ one UH-1D (armed) of Company A suffered mechanical failure which resulted in separation of the main rotor from the aircraft at 2000 feet absolute altitude. The helicopter crashed and exploded on impact. The aircraft was commanded by 1/Lt Harold A. Proisendefor and piloted by WO Joseph S. Huwyler, crewchief and gunner were SP5 William J. Johnson and PFC Michael E. Davis. This crew was the first lost by Company A in the Republic of Vietnam.

About mid-morning on the 22nd of October, four UH-1D's (armed) of Company A were dispatched to escort a VMF CH-34 in a rescue attempt for a downed AIE pilot. The CH-34 did not attempt the pilot pickup, because of the ground fire in the area. 1/Lt Edward T. Fledger of Company A salvaged the rockets from the armed helicopter he was flying and accomplished the pick-up.

Later in the day a second rescue attempt was made for another downed Air Force pilot in the vicinity of Plei Me. This rescue attempt had to be aborted due to heavy automatic weapons ground fire and darkness. The rescue was effected the next morning when four UH-1D's (armed) of Company A escorted an Air Force CH-34 into the crash site.

On 24 October the 52d Avn Bn was given the mission of deploying 400 ARVN soldiers of the 22nd Ranger Battalion along the route of an Armed Task Force enroute to relieve the besieged camp. The troops were to secure likely ambush sites along the intended route of the Task Force. During the lift one helicopter struck stumps in the LZ and was destroyed with no injuries.

Monday, the 25th, found Company A and the 119th Avn Co, assisting the 1st Bde, 1st Air Cav Div, in a troop placement from Camp Holloway to areas around the Plei Me Special Forces Camp.

On the 28th, elements of Company A and the 119th extracted the 42nd Airborne Ranger Company (ARVN) from Plei Me to the New Plei Me Airfield marking the end of one of the bloodiest battles of the war in Vietnam. Post operation intelligence indicates that Plei Me was staged by the Viet Cong with a primary purpose of killing aircraft.

Following the siege of Plei Me the US First Cavalry Division relentlessly pursued the Viet Cong until in Ia Drang valley "Charlie" stopped to do pitched battle. About this battle, Newsweek Magazine said, "In its bloodiest week to date, the fighting in Vietnam reached a pitch of savage intensity that US troops had not experienced since Korea. Among other honors of war, Communist troops impaled captured South Vietnamese soldiers on stakes. Wounded US troops were shot down, their comrades, enraged, shot some north Vietnamese prisoners out of hand. The bitterest battle was in the shell scarred Ia Drang valley, near the Cambodian border, where US troops reported that they killed perhaps 1,500 communists during the entire engagement. In the same area, a battalion of the US First Cavalry Division, was ambushed, and one company virtually annihilated. Total estimated US killed in the Ia Drang fighting was 175."

"At Plei Me and Ia Drang, the US Forces no longer fought Viet Cong Guerrillas in their black pajamas but rather faced the People Army of Vietnam in steel helmets and full battle gear."

On 18 November the 52d Avn Bn again joined forces with the 1st Air Cav Div, in operations in the Ia Drang valley. The largest single operation of the year. The 119th Avn Co, Company A, and elements of the 1st Air Cav Div transported 2500 II Corps (ARVN) troops from Duc Co Airfield into the valley as a blocking force. The ARVN unit was lifted into an area which was located between the retreating Viet Cong and the Cambodian border. This final assault on 18 November was the last operation in which Company A was involved in the Plei Me, Ia Drang area. The Viet Cong retreated piece-meal across the Cambodian border the battle ended.

In Saigon, General William C. Westmoreland proclaimed the Ia Drang action an unprecedented victory. US casualties were "heavier than in any previous engagement, but small by comparison with the enemy."

On 1-2 November, between major missions in the Plei Me, Ia Drang operation the 52nd Avn Bn supported operation Quyet Thang 172 at Tuy-Hoa, Company A, the 119th Avn Co and the Marine Helicopter Company from Qui Nhon conducted an operation in support of the 22nd Inf Div (ARVN) in an operation to again secure the rice rich Tuy Hoa valley. A total of 720 troops were moved in three lifts, under low ceilings and with poor visibility. The USAF provided a forty five minute prestrike on the landing zone. One UH-1D (Armed) was struck by ground fire but recovered to the stage field with no further incident.

On 7 November a second air landed assault was conducted. The operation involved air landed two battalions of the 47th Inf regt, and two battalions of the Airborne Task Force. This was a four lift operation delayed for more than an hour between the second and third lifts because of weather. From Tuy Hoa, the 52nd Avn Bn moved to Duc My in support of the ARVN artillery school in a combined arms demonstration. Company A provided thirteen UH-1D's and six UH-1D's (Armed). The 119th provided twelve UH-1D's (transport helicopters) and six UH-1D's (armed) for the demonstration. All air movements, Air Force and artillery fires were preplanned and coordinated by the Duc My Training Center Advisory Team. As part of the demonstration, a total of 546 troops were lifted on an air landed assault into multiple LZs. The demonstration ran smoothly and was a great success. Attending the demonstration were two hundred high ranking observes headed by General William C. Westmoreland.

On 15 November, Major Fred T. Yamagata was evacuated to the United States because of illness. Captain James Napier who had been Company Executive Officer, assumed command of Company A.

Thanksgiving Day found Company A in Dan Me Thuot, celebrating the holiday with an airlanded assault and a large turkey dinner. Three hundred and forty CIDG troops were air lifted from Buon Ea Yang Special Forces Camp to an LZ five kilometers to the west. Following the assault, the company hosted 12 members of the local missionary group at a turkey dinner.

On 28 November Company A received official notice that it was being redesignated, Headquarters USARV, General Order No. 1677, dated 20 November, directed that Company A would become the 155th Aviation Company (AMC) and that Company A 1st Aviation Battalion would return to the 1st Inf Div which had recently arrived in the Republic of Vietnam. The former 155th Avn Co. was assigned to the 1st Inf Div as Company A, 1st Avn Bn upon arrival from Korea.

The 30th of November saw the departure of 1/Lt Arthur Ryan and six members of the shot gun platoon. The unit had been notified earlier in the month that it would be the last unit to be assigned on a TDY basis. Nineteen members of the platoon chose to remain as members of the 155th Aviation Company (AMC) when they were given the option of extending their 90 day TDY to a full year assignment.

On 29 November the 155th was placed on a four hour alert for movement with twelve troop carriers and five armed helicopters to Bien Hoa to report to the 118th Avn Co for approximately ten days. Because of bad weather between Dan Me Thuot and Bien Hoa the Company was unable to depart until 1100 hours on the 30th.

Upon arrival at Bien Hoa, Captain Napier was informed that the 155th would be working under the operational control of the 1st Avn Bn. After refueling, a troop lift of three hundred and sixty men was made by the company from Bien Hoa to Tay Ninh. Upon completion of the troop lift, the company recovered to Bien Hoa, and was directed by III Corps, through the 1st Avn Bn, to move to Phu Loi where the 1st Avn Bn was to provide mess and billeting facilities. Through 16 December, working on a day to day basis, Stagecoach supported, variously, the 10th Inf Div (ARVN), Special Forces Camps, 1st Inf Div, 101st AB Brigade and III Corps Headquarters. The majority of effort expended during this period was in support of operations Bushwacker I and II, in the same area in which the company had operated two months earlier.

These current operations were partially as a result of elements of the 7th Inf Regt (ARVN) being overrun near the abandoned Michelin Rubber Plantation near Tuy Ninh.

"There was fighting in plenty, around the huge abandoned Michelin Rubber Plantation near Dau Tieng, some 40 miles northwest of Saigon, when two battalions hit all four sides of a government encampment on Date Palm Hill, the South Vietnamese defenders hurled them back in vicious hand to hand combat, taking a heavy toll in communist lives.

"But the Viet Cong were hardly crushed. When the men of South Vietnam's 7th Regiment lined up abreast for a sweep through the plantation, the reds attacked through the trees in human waves. "We're folding up" radioed the senior US Advisor as the communists engulfed his position. Soon he was dead, along with much of the rest of the regiment in the most savage communist attack of the war. But the South Vietnamese had fought to the last bullet", is how the Time Magazine described the initial contact.

On 15 December, the 155th was directed by S-3, 1st Avn Bn to move to Dien Tre. The unit closed at Dien Tre with ten troop carriers, and four armed helicopters. This unit operated with the 13th Avn Bn in support of the 7th Inf Div (ARVN) lifting two battalions in a combat assault. Two additional battalions were then moved on a troop placement mission and the original two battalions were extracted to their staging areas in a busy day which saw the equivalent of six battalions moved. The unit was released by the 13th Avn Bn at 1730 hours and returned to Phu Loi where it was released by the 1st Avn Bn. The company closed at Ban Me Thuot on 17 December for a brief respite.

While at Phu Loi, Major Joseph L. Parlas Jr. became commanding officer of the 155th Avn Co. Major Parlas had just completed eighteen months ground duty with the 1st Cav Div. Major James W. Napier III became S-4, 52nd Avn Bn.

Between 17 and 31 December the 155th reverted to its role in support of the 23rd Inf Div (ARVN). During this period seven combat assault missions were flown in support of the 23rd Inf Div and local CIDG units.

Christmas Day found the 155th taking a well deserved rest at Ban Me Thuot. The good old fashioned Christmas spirit was interrupted for only a brief period on Christmas Eve when a sighting on the perimeter fence sent all personnel scrambling for their bunkers.

To round out the year, elements of the 155th and the 119th Avn Co's utilized 21 troop carriers and twelve armed helicopters, to airlift 465 CMIC troops from Buon Ea Yang USSR Camp, in an effort to destroy a VC Training Camp. The operation was conducted in three lifts and enemy ground fire was received. Three were no hits or casualties in either unit during the operation.

The end of the year brought to a close a period of time for which members of the 155th and attachments can be proud. A period during which all four corps areas of Vietnam were supported by the Stagecoach in a highly professional manner.

TROOP D (AIR)
1ST SQUADRON 4TH CAVALRY
Fort Riley, Kansas

COPPERHEAD Flight

Flight Leader - Capt Gilmer

<u>FLIGHT NO</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>A/C NO</u>	<u>PILOT</u>	<u>Crew Chief</u>
Leader	UH-1B	22083	Gilmer, Charles T. Capt, 04058567	Paulsen, Axel S Jr SP5, RA28144650
			Co-Pilot Bendleman, Ronald M. 2Lt, 05414427 (Asst Billeting)	
2	OH-23G	12787	Lyssy, Fred W. 1Lt, 02303939	Wetherington, Clay W. Pfc, RA19781440
3	OH-23G	12788	Terry, William L. WO-1, W3151808	Hissom, Donald M. SP5, RA15645120
4	OH-23G	12789	Mortz, Herbert C. WO-1, W3151187	Smith, Thomas Jr SP5, RA16663559
5	OH-23G	12791	Staubach, William S. WO-1, W2215336	Bowles, Norman T. Pfc, US56368943
6	OH-23G	12792	Sones, Richard A. 1Lt, 099125 (Mess)	Bullock, Dean W. SP4, RA17648810
7	OH-23G	12793	White, Jerry E. WO-1, W3152185 (Asst Security)	Frankovich, Franky V. SP4, RA18677936
8	OH-23G	12794	Seaman, Richard A. 1Lt, 05217854	Wilson, Randal Jr Pfc, US55781440
9	OH-23G	12790	Gilman, Jay E WO-1, W3152160	Hauschild, John C. SP5, RA17549450

() Indicates additional duty enroute.

OH-23 Avirt

POB: 2152020 55-1003 P2000-26 S14-040 C/A 2060.212 CN 5306

Maint: 2152020 55-1003 P2000-25,26 S14-040 C/A 2060.362 CN 5306

UH-1B Avirt

POB: 2152020 55-1003 P2000-26 S14-040 C/A 2060.224 CN 5306

Maint: 2152020 55-1003 P2000-25,26 S14-040 C/A 2060.371 CN 5306