

155TH IN VIETNAM 1969 - THE COMPANY

1 APRIL - 30 JUNE

The 155, during the second quarter of 1969, did much work aimed at improving living and working conditions for its assigned personnel at Camp Coryell. Some of the more significant improvements were:

The COC (Combat Operations Center) was renovated and further protected with a chain link fence.

All the structures on post were completely repainted.

Flare pots were installed to light the runway at night.

All the revetments were topped with SSP.

The defensive perimeter was strengthened with additional wire barriers and the introduction of a .50 Caliber machine gun on top of the Air Force observation tower.

Many new bunkers were constructed so that there is sufficient bunker space for all personnel during attacks.

The revetment area and many areas of the cantonment area were resurfaced with penoprime.

A gas chamber was constructed for gas mask tests.

A 25 meter small arms test firing range was instituted.

A new dayroom was built and stocked with recreational equipment and books.

The company swimming pool, inactive for the past year, was relined, refilled, and the area around it was repaved.

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.

The above improvements plus additional internal improvements in operations, administration, and the service platoon, helped to increase the

pride of the individual in his unit and further mission accomplishment.

On 25 June 1969, Major Bobby L Moore relinquished command of the 155th Aviation Company (Aslt Hel) to Major Dean M Owen, formerly assigned to IFFV headquarters. 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), Colonel Nelson Malone, Commanding Officer of 17th Aviation Group (Combat), and LTC Davie L Stanley, 10th Aviation Battalion (Combat) Commander. Major Moore was presented the Bronze Star for Service and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

155TH IN VIETNAM 1969 - THE ENEMY

1 JULY - 30 SEPTEMBER

After a period of seven weeks without an enemy attack on Camp Coryell, the longest period of respite the 155 had seen in two years, the night quiet was again broken by incoming rounds. On 23 July at 2333 hours, five B-40 rockets and ten 82mm mortars struck the compound. Due to increased bunker facilities, and the overdue nature of the attack, the rounds inflicted negative damage to personnel or equipment.

Again, there was a long period without enemy attack on Camp Coryell in July and August. Finally, the compound was attacked on 12 August. Early in the morning, a total of 37 rounds struck the compound, landing not only in the Corral and Mustbowl but in the billeting areas as well. Ten B-40 rockets and 27 82mm mortars impacted, causing damage to four UH-1H's, and one UH-1C, ten structures, and four vehicles. Eleven personnel were wounded during the attack. Falcon gunships and a flareship were launched, but because of difficulty encountered in getting clearance to fire, returned with negative results.

The 155 was not subject to enemy attack during the entire month of September.

In late August and early September of 1968, the 155-supported areas of Bu Prang and Duc Lap were the targets of a long, hard-hitting offensive by the enemy. Duc Lap in particular was the focal point of enemy activity in the 155th's area of operations during that year.

All sources of information gathered thus far in 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 monsoon 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, toward 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.

155TH IN VIETNAM 1969 - THE MISSION

1 JULY - 30 SEPTEMBER

An enemy buildup quite similar to that which occurred just before the battle of Duc Lap in 1968 had been evidenced by intelligence reports received from the Duc Lap - Bu Prang area.

To increase our information concerning enemy activities in the areas around Bu Prang and Duc Lap, the 155 conducted numerous sniffer missions in those areas in support of the 23rd ARVN Division and B-23 (Special Forces). Much valuable intelligence was gathered and many significant sightings were made. Several ground operations were conducted by the supported units as a result of these sniffer findings, with good results.

As a result of information gathered regarding a probable enemy offensive in the Duc Lap area, the 155 was becoming increasingly committed in an attempt to provide adequate support to the units in the Ban Me Thuot support zone. Due to increased mission requirements, the 155 was given operational control of as many as twenty additional aircraft during this period. This more than doubled the mission capabilities of the 155, but put the 155 operations under a severe strain as a result.

July also marked the return of the company's support to B-50 operations. In addition a commitment to 2nd, 3rd, and 5th MSF (Mike Strike Force) was added at this time.

The resupply, sniffer, B-50, and command and control requirements placed on the 155 at this time precluded supporting any great number of combat assaults. A total of 27 were conducted within the July-September quarter. Some of the highlights of this period:

On 18 July, after being inserted by 155 aircraft south of Ban Me Thuot, two LRRP teams came into contact with an enemy force. One Stagescoach and two Falcons were dispatched to the area. One gunship received damage from

ground fire but the Falcon team was credited with 13 enemy killed by air during the action.

On 25 July, while supporting four slicks on a B-23 troop movement, a pair of 155 gunships expended, killing five enemy soldiers. GARDNER + I

The month of August was marked by the intensive increase of sniffer operations conducted for intelligence gathering purposes. Two sets of sniffer missions were run daily in and around Darlac and Quang Duc Provinces. These missions were given high priorities due to the need for gathering as much intelligence as possible on enemy movements and activities. Although hampered by deteriorating weather conditions, the results of these missions proved later to be of great assistance in planning for the coming enemy offensive.

In September the 155 was again given the commitment to support B-50 operations. Four slicks and four guns were provided each day for the entire month for this mission.

As in July and August, September was characterized by the presence of a great number of aircraft from throughout II Corps operating in the Ban Me Thuot area. This was due to the need to provide increased tactical and logistical aviation support to units operating in the Bu Prang - Gia Nghia - Duc Lap triangle. Consequently, as many as 35 aircraft from other units were working in the Ban Me Thuot area, with 155 operations acting as controlling agency, placing an additional workload on the 155 for operational and maintenance support.

155TH IN VIETNAM 1969 - THE COMPANY

1 JULY - 30 SEPTEMBER

The 155th continued in its efforts to improve facilities and conditions for its personnel during this quarter. Some of the notable improvements:

Old and inadequate bunkers were torn down and replaced with new and larger structures.

Concrete pavement was poured to connect all living areas with a paved surface.

A new above surface miniport area was constructed to replace the old underground system. A single line system with seven UH-1 and one CH-47 refueling stations was put in use. The miniport now has a 20,000 gallon capacity.

Renovation of the dog kennels in anticipation of the return of a K-9 security detachment.

Construction of guard bunkers along the south perimeter fence.

Installation of a minefield inside the northeast perimeter.

An interior guard tower was equipped with a 50 caliber machine gun and a xenon light.

Rewiring of all billets.

Morale during this third quarter decreased to a certain degree. This was caused by several factors. The NCO-EM club was closed in early August due to management difficulties, leaving the enlisted personnel without facilities for recreation during off-duty hours.

Additionally, many ships and crews from other units were staying with the 155 on an indefinite "RON" basis. The presence of these "OPCON" crews created a certain amount of friction between the men. Most of these problems were quickly resolved by introducing additional billeting facilities.

Although perhaps a contradiction in terms, the absence of the always expected enemy attacks on Camp Coryell made for an uneasy time of waiting. However, as external enemy activity increased, so did morale and spirit, with the men of the 155 anticipating participation in the tactical defense of the Ban Me Thuot - Duc Lap area.

During this period, a new set of requirements was devised for the awarding of AC (Aircraft Commander) orders. Since the unit is safety minded, and a direct parallel to aviation safety and pilot proficiency can be made, the requirements for becoming an aircraft commander were broadened to:

- 300 Hours In-Country

- Five Hours Minimum Night Time

- Five Hours Of Hood Time

- A Minimum Of Two Maintenance Test Flights

- A Grade of 90% Or Better on Each Of Two/Dash-Ten Tests.

- An Aircraft Commander Checkride With Company Instructor Pilot

- Two Mission Checkrides with Instructor Pilots

This program proved to be a basis for similar programs instituted in many other aviation units.

The 155th continued in its tradition of maximum support and highest aircraft availability within the 10th Aviation Battalion. Average UH-1H availability July-September was 97.1%. Average UH-1C availability for the period was 96.5%.

In addition to the unique requirements and increased pressure placed on it by the tactical situation, the 155th prepared for and passed with a satisfactory rating, the annual AGI (Annual General Inspection) which was conducted on 3 September.

In view of the increasing workload of the company in the area of tactical mission support, the passing of the AGI at this time was a tribute

to the general state of preparedness of the unit.

Statistics for 155 support for the July - September period:

Hours	7,033
Sorties	19,191
Passengers	29,307
Cargo (Tons)	321
Emergency Medevac	14
Enemy Killed By Air	20
Structures Destroyed	8

155 in Vietnam

The Enemy at Home

October - December

The last quarter of 1969 left Camp Coryell only slightly damaged by the enemy in relation to the first nine months.

Although attacked five times during the period the compound suffered comparatively little damage.

On 25 October, in the early morning hours, 15 rounds of 82mm mortars, fired from unknown positions, struck the compound. The result was two UH-1H's and one UH-1C gunship, two buildings and two vehicles damaged. Five personnel were injured, two of whom required medical evacuation.

On 10 November, the 155 was again attacked. Eight B-40 rockets and 17 82mm mortars struck the compound, damaging one UH-1H, five structures and one vehicle, and wounding six personnel.

The compound was attacked three more times during the quarter, on 16, 25, and 30 November. All three attacks resulted in negative damage, although a total of 37 mortar rounds impacted in the 155 area.

THE BUILDUP AND THE BATTLE-AVIATION SUPPORT AT ITS BEST

OCTOBER-DECEMBER

Due to the tremendous increase in enemy activity during the first part of October, and due to the buildup of resources and the strengthening of the defensive posture of friendly units, it is impossible at this time to divide the mission performed from the enemy situation.

Following is a background of friendly efforts to meet the coming offensive, included to offer a complete picture in order that the reader may fully understand the gigantic proportions of the preparations made. It must be remembered that the 155, being the local unit and main provider of aviation support in the Duc Lap-Bu Prang area, played a significant role in the building of a successful defense against the soon-to-come enemy onslaught.

The weather has been the most significant natural factor relating to the buildup of enemy forces. The summer monsoon, and the rain it brings, continued through August and September, hindering any large scale enemy activity. October brought with it good weather and a tremendous upsurge in enemy activity throughout the area of operations, and especially in the areas around Bu Prang and Duc Lap.

Intelligence reports indicated massive buildups of enemy forces along the western boundary of Quang Duc sector between Bu Prang and Nhon Co. Large size enemy units were reported in Cambodia north of Bu Prang and west of Duc Lap.

Great emphasis was put on gathering further information in these areas. This was accomplished by conducting two separate daily sniffer missions around Duc Lap, Bu Prang, and areas south in an extension of II Corps known as the "Death Valley of Bu Gia Map". Intelligence gathering by the 155

continued in an attempt to fix locations and sizes of individual enemy units.

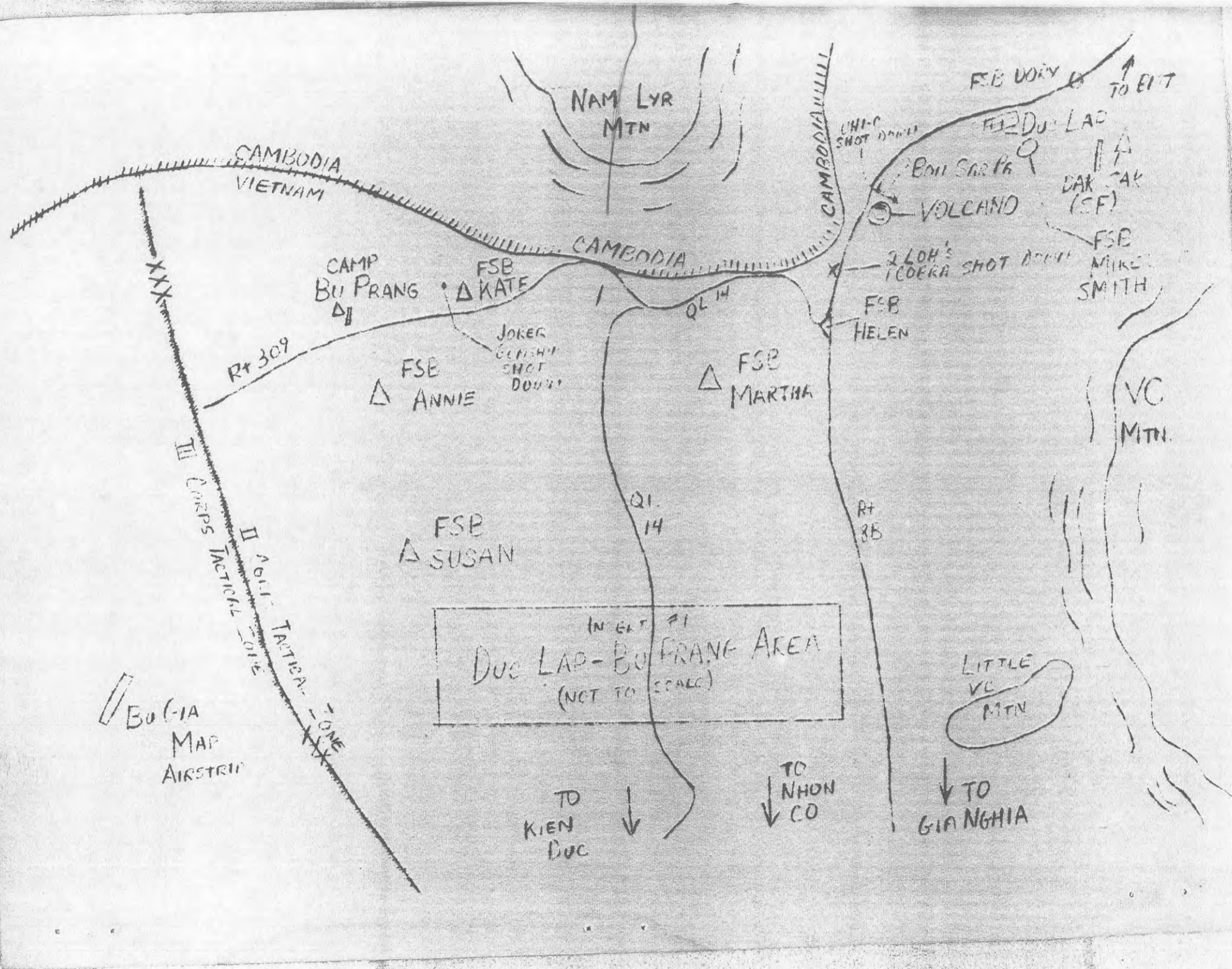
The questions of the intentions of the enemy were answered on 22 October when it became clear that the enemy was on the move. Large size units moved across from Cambodia into positions south of Bu Prang and south of Duc Lap. Large units were still massing along the Cambodian border posing a substantial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

On 25 October the enemy began his offensive. The entire sequence of events follows:

One of the 155-supported units in the area, 5/22 Artillery, in preparation for the offensive, built six firebases in the Duc Lap-Bu Prang-Gia Nghia triangle. Their positions can be determined from the insert. These fire support bases were named: Fire support bases Dory, Helen, Susan, Annie, Kate and Martha. These firebases provided support for Bu Prang and Duc Lap.

Work on these firebases began in early September and continued throughout October. Initial work was hampered by marginal weather and the difficulty of providing continuous Chinook support to transport loads and equipment.

Annie and Kate were set up within six kilometers each of Bu Prang. While these firebases could provide artillery support for Bu Prang, it became clear that they would be vulnerable to any determined enemy attack. In addition everything depended on resupply by air because the roads were not secure enough for transport. Security for these firebases was provided by CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) and elements of the Mike Strike Forces. All units in the area of operations were under the control of the 23rd ARVN Division and a divisional Light Command Post was set up at Gia Nghia. B-troop, 7/17 Cavalry was assigned the mission of conducting "Hunter-Killer" operations in the Bu Prang-Gia Nghia area. Thus the stage



was set for what developed during the last part of October.

The 155 and several other units in the 10th and 52nd Aviation Battalions were now responsible for inserting, exchanging and supporting the troops at these new firebases.

On 25 October, the enemy began his offensive. Helen (the firebases came to be known by the prefix LZ for landing zone) came under attack by a multibattalion sized unit which had begun crossing the border on 22 October. Personnel and equipment were extracted in total from LZ Helen on 29 October by the 155 and OPCON units. During the extraction a large size enemy force again attacked the LZ inflicting heavy casualties. The extraction was completed on the 29th and that afternoon a regimental size enemy element moved into Helen and claimed it as theirs.

During this time LZ Annie and LZ Kate were being threatened by another regimental size unit. 155 Staggercoach aircraft continued to make medevacs under heavy fire at these firebases. On the 30th, LZ Martha was to be removed to reinforce Duc Lap and because it was under constant small arms attack. On the evening of the 30th Martha was relocated to Duc Lap by aircraft of the 155 and OPCON units under heavy mortar fire. Every time a ship came in to remove troops the LZ was pounded with enemy mortars. The troops were moved into LZ Mike Smith, a new FSB located in Duc Lap.

LZ Kate then became the major target of the enemy. Enemy .50 caliber and 37mm antiaircraft positions were active all around the firebase, and they took their toll of aircraft. At 0930 hours on 30 October Kate came under sustained enemy ground attack by at least 500 NVA (North Vietnamese Army regulars).

Two Joker gunships from the 48th Aviation Company were diverted to LZ Kate. One Joker was shot down, crashed and was destroyed. There were no survivors. During that same day, three additional gunships and 1 CH-47 were hit by enemy ground fire in the vicinity of Kate. MY FIRST HITS

The situation deteriorated rapidly and on the 31st Kate was low on food and ammunition.

Aircraft were not able to get into Kate due to heavy ground fire and mortars. One CH-47 was hit by heavy ground fire and had to abort its emergency resupply, dropping its load in the jungle short of Kate.

Thus the stage was set for an emergency night resupply into Kate. At 0200 in the morning of 1 November, five slicks and four gunships from the 155th Aviation Company departed Ban Me Thuot for LZ Kate. Each slick carried 1,000 pounds of the much needed resupply. ME-LEAD, COSMOS, FENLON, COONCE

Under cover of darkness and heavy repressive fire by the gunships, the slicks made the resupply without incident. The month of October ended with LZ's Annie and Kate still under seige and the camps at Bu Prang and Duc Lap under eminent danger of attack.

On 1 November, LZ Kate began receiving continuous artillery fire from Cambodia. In addition, the enemy was conducting massive ground and mortar attacks. On the afternoon of the first, after all of Kate's big guns were damaged or destroyed by enemy artillery, the FSB was declared no longer capable of operation. The decision was made to evacuate Kate.

The 155 airlifted two companies of the 5th MSF into an area one kilometer northwest of Kate on the night of the first. The troops at Kate successfully walked out and united with these units. Immediately after the evacuation of Kate, 155 and OPCON units extracted LZ's Annie and Susan, also while under continuous fire.

On 2 November, while 155 aircraft were providing suppressive fire for a convoy that had been ambushed just northeast of LZ Dory, an emergency call went out to all aviation support in the Duc Lap area.

While on a "Hunter-Killer" reconnaissance mission north of LZ Helen, two observation helicopters (Loachs) and one Cobra of the 7/17th Cavalry had been shot down within minutes of each other. All aircraft in the area responded. Cavalry ground troops were inserted and one pilot was extracted.

One pilot died in the crash, and two pilots and two observers were captured by the enemy. (One pilot and one observer were released some time later.)

Later on 2 November, four slicks and two guns from the 155 conducted an emergency resupply of 4,000 pounds of food and ammunition into LZ Dory, which was under attack and unable to be supplied by road.
ME + COONCE

The main offensive now shifted to Duc Lap, where LZ Mike Smith (set up from the extraction of Martha and Helen), began receiving 122mm rockets. At the same time Dak Sak (Duc Lap Special Forces Compound) received incoming rounds and recoilless rifle fire.

Late in the morning of the 6th, friendly units set up a defensive perimeter on the rim of the volcano overlooking Bon Sar Pa, south of Duc Lap.

On November 9th while flying a hot resupply into the volcano, two 155 aircraft were hit by .50 caliber fire and B-40 rocket fragments, resulting in one pilot wounded. **AHEARN** He was later returned to CONUS.

On 11 November another aircraft was hit by 12.7 mm anti-aircraft fire southeast of Bu Prang, wounding one crewman. Later that morning one passenger was killed and two wounded when their aircraft took hits from 37mm anti-aircraft fire near Bu Prang. **170th Slick**

One of the more significant actions took place on 17 November when 155 Falcon gunships expended five times on enemy locations near Bu Prang. As a result of Falcon gunship and Tac Air Support, 72 enemy were killed, more than half of which were credited to the Falcons.
ME + COSMOS

In separate actions on the 17th, two Falcon gunships received damage from enemy fire. **Maddox** hit with me.

On the 21st, Falcon guns expended three times on enemy locations, receiving credit for 23 enemy killed by air. During this action three gunships were hit by ground fire. **MARVIN + COONCE**

On 22 November, two Falcon gunships on standby at Gia Nghia were called to Duc Lap where they engaged enemy targets. Both ships took damage from

ground fire and the pilot of one ship was wounded in the leg, causing his return to CONUS. **SIMPSON with ME**

On 25 November, another 155 ship took hits from ground fire while resupplying the volcano, wounding the pilot. **BROWN**

The activity at the volcano had now reached the point where the Stage Coach slick performing resupply to the troops on the rim would always receive ground fire, either enroute to or from the volcano, or from within the center of the volcano itself. 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 heavy 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 hits. An aircraft landing on the volcano had to be fast. If the cargo couldn't be kicked off or the wounded loaded within 27-28 seconds, they would have to wait for the next trip, because within 29-30 seconds after touchdown, a mortar round would strike the pad. Many a Stage Coach aircraft got an added boost on take-off from the concussion of a mortar round directly behind it.

This resupply and medevac mission put the crews under a great strain. Going into the volcano as many as four, five or six times in one day under these not-so-friendly conditions 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 mission received heavy ground fire and was forced to make an emergency landing in enemy territory. The crew destroyed the radios and cipher equipment before being

KEN MILLER 2812

safely extracted by another gunship. The gunship was destroyed in place.

On 28 November, another pilot from the 155 was wounded when his ship received fire on the volcano.

On 4 December, while extracting a wounded ARVN from the volcano, the resupply command and control helicopter drew heavy ground fire, wounding a pilot.

It must be remembered that the battle of Bu Prang - Duc Lap 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 crews to daily risk their lives in an effort to provide support to the besieged firebases and outposts.

Many more medevacs than are recorded were actually flown. Many more enemy were killed than the Falcons were given credit for. This is a result of the fluid maneuvering of both friendly and enemy units.

The constant enemy activity, the fact that if asked to pull a medevac a Stage Coach aircraft would go into an area that had been the target of over 200 enemy artillery rounds that day, the fact that though enemy mortars were sure to follow a resupply by seconds, all confirm that under the most severe of conditions the 155 Stage Coach-Falcon team can and will provide optimum support, without reservation and without delay to the units which it serves.

155 in Vietnam 1969
The Company Pulls the Mission

The last and by far the busiest quarter of 1969 left in its wake a great sense of accomplishment, and a feeling of relief that the ordeal of two months was over. Although acting as controlling agency in conjunction with Vagabond Forward, the 155th operations had handled as many as fifty additional aircraft daily during November and December. This put quite a strain on 155 operations.

In addition, the company flew more hours than any other company in the 10th Aviation Battalion for long periods, still maintaining an extremely high aircraft availability record.

Although 28 aircraft from the 155 received damage from ground fire the knowledge of the enemy and terrain proved to be a major factor in minimizing damage to aircraft. Aircraft from other units, in trying to support the 155, proved that anything less than a complete knowledge of terrain and tactics creates a dangerous situation. Hour for hour, the 155 took less damage from ground fire than outside units unfamiliar with the area of operation.

Statistics for 155 support October - December

Hours	7,503
Sorties	19,156
Passengers	35,465
Cargo (tons)	424
Emergency Medevac	79
Enemy KIA	75
Structures destroyed	19

Aircraft availability was maintained through the quarter

October - December average UH-1H availability.....97.5%

Average UH-1C availability for the period was.....96.2%

On 26 December 1969 Maj Dean H Owen relinquished command of the 155 Aviation Company (AH) to Maj Gerard H Luisi, formerly assigned as Assistant Division Aviation Officer of the 25th Infantry Division.

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 (Special Forces), COL Bill J. Wright, 17th Aviation Group (Combat) Commander, and LTC Samuel W. Patellos, Commanding Officer, 10th Aviation Battalion. Major Owen was presented the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry by Colonel Khanh of the 23rd ARVN Division.