



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

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.

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 siege 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 CPCOM 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.

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 Stagescoach 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.

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

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

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

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.

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. He was later returned to COMUS.

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.

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.

In separate actions on the 17th, two Falcon gunships received damage from enemy fire.

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.

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

155 in Vietnam 1969
The Company fulfills 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

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.

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 (AI) to Maj Gerard M 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.