

HAWK

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RAPID FLIGHT

New Method of Airmobile Operation



The wake of the converted LST churned a murky swath through the waters of the mighty Mekong. Alongside the single-ship helipad, soldiers of the 9th Infantry Division crouched and waited for the word to prepare to board. A new method of airmobile operation, dubbed 'Rapid Flight', was under way.

The distant sound of UH-1H slicks drew nearer and the first ship lowered itself to a hover just above the gray landing pad and eased to a rest. Immediately seven "Old Reliables" raced for the chopper and climbed aboard.

The aircraft commander pulled pitch, cleared the pad and started the days mission—a combat assault against the elusive Viet Cong in the Delta.

Ten times this act was repeated, ten times successfully. All within ten minutes. Twenty seconds per aircraft to land, load and depart. Forty seconds between aircraft to prevent stacking up. As one chopper departs another drops to take its place.

Before rapid flight was initiated it took more than an hour for the troops to be moved to the contact area. The troops are ready reaction forces of the 9th Infantry Division acting on intelligence reports or used as reinforcements when an element makes contact. Due to the immediate nature of their mission every minute counts highly.

The 214th Combat Aviation Battalion, commanded by LTC Wallace R. Dietderich, was called on to cut down the time from notification to insertion. In conjunction with Major Robert Wright, commander of the 162d Assault Helicopter Company, LTC Dietderich came up with the rapid flight concept. The mission will work only if the helicopter company involved is an experienced and able one acting under a well coordinated plan.

The coordination is done on



Aerial view of the USS Benewah, floating helipad.

Troops of the Old Reliables run to board a slick of the 214th during a Rapid Flight mission.



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board the USS Benewah, a modified LST with a one-ship helipad, by the 214th Combat Aviation Battalion air liaison officer, Major John Jones, and the ground commanders of the elements that are to be lifted. Upon notification of a rapid flight mission the ground commanders ready their troops and the assault helicopter company is alerted to the mission.

The precision of the movement is a testament to the coordination, planning and initiative of the 214th Combat Aviation Battalion, located at 9th Infantry Division Headquarters at Dong Tam. They fly the ships. They also provide gunship cover for the loading operation and cover for the insertion when the combat assault is launched.

The USS Benewah, mobile helipad for the operation, is the flagship for the Mobile Riverine Force. Its mobility in the myriad of waterways in South Vietnam's vast Mekong Delta region conserves time and enables the division to operate much further from its base camp than under ordinary circumstances.

Ninth Division operations have long since been recognized for their employment of the MRF resources and their tactical airmobility. This in an area where for much of the year, roads are virtually nonexistent and many likely landing zones are flooded by the monsoon-swollen wrath of the Mekong and its tributaries.

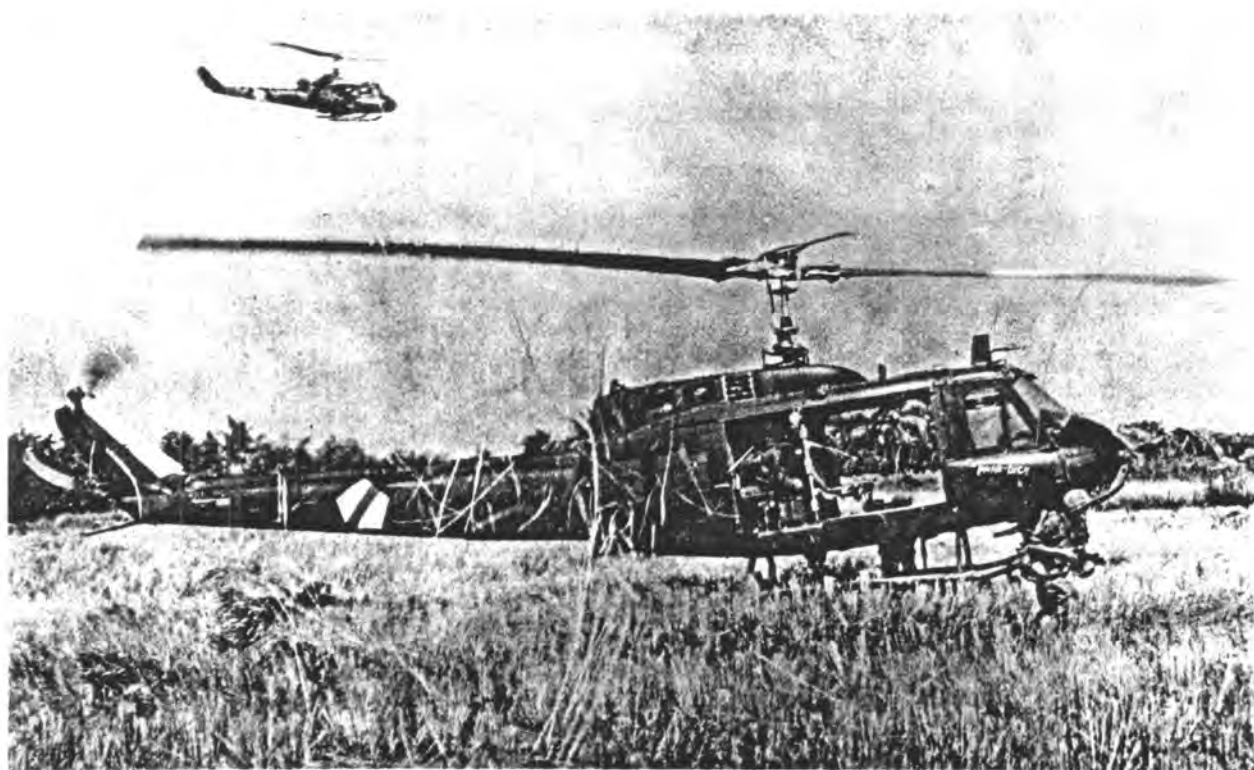
But for the Vietcong, mobility in

the rice-rich Delta is as simple as the nearest sampan, and avenues may be found on any canal, water terrace or rain-filled creek.

Additional speed and a longer arm were needed to suppress the enemy. Observers of the swift loading operation feel that rapid flight will go far in hampering enemy efforts.

The Benewah provides billets for members of the division's "ready reaction force." Through the use of the swift loading operation, they can be deployed almost instantaneously to any trouble spot in the Delta.

The joint effort has done much to up the ante for terrorist and military enemy activities however he chooses to strike.



Moments after lift-off the troop carrying ship disgorges its load at the LZ.