STAGECOACH

HISTORY OF THE 155TH AVIATION COMPANY (AML) 1965
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 witnesses 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, recounting 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. Guerin who joined this organization as a member of its advanced party in Dan 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, aircrews - for whom and about whom this is written.

ROBERT L. FARRAS JR.
Major, Infantry
Commanding

DAN 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 air mobile operations and to provide tactical air movement of combat supplies and equipment within the combat zone.

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

- 165th Transportation Detachment (Cargo Helicopter Field Maintenance)
- 8th Medical Detachment
- 208th Signal Detachment (RADIED) (AVIONICS)
- 255th Quartermaster Detachment (POL)
- *52D Quartermaster Detachment (POL)
- *88th Military Police Detachment (K-9)

* Attached for administration and logistics only
II. Regional Analysis

A. Terrain

1. The II Corps Tactical Zone, in which Dan Me Thoat is located and in which the 155th Arm 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 20 miles wide in the North and 342 miles wide in the South. This area is politically divided into the Province of Kontum, Phich Dinh, Pleiku, Thu Bon and Thu Yen in the 22d Division Tactical Area and Binh, Khanh Hon, Quang Due, Tuey Due, Ninh Thuan, Lam Dong and Binh Thuan in the 23d Div. 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 rocky inter 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 Bocum Plateau in the North and the Bocum Plateau to the South. This region has altitudes ranging from 1,000 - 3,000 feet with gently rolling hills and such 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 Dan Me Thoat, Pleiku and Kontum on the plateau. 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 - Dan Me Thoat - Pleiku - Kontum

d. Route #19: Pleiku - Qui Nhon

e. Route #20: Saigon - Dalat

f. Route #21: Dan Me Thoat - 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 Can Ranh Bay is located between Phan Rang and Nha Trang.
D. 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 building on the western slopes of the mountains. This results in a rainy season for the plateau and mountainous areas during the summer months while the coastal provinces have clear skies and good flying weather. The winter monsoon brings a northerly flow with conditions reversed. The coastal provinces of Binh Thuan and Minh Thuan are little affected 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, 67 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 plateau 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. Dan Me Thuot is the traditional capital of these people. The II Corps area is inhabited by 500,000 of these people. The largest tribe in this region is the Rade whose influence extends from Kontum to Dan Me Thuot.
On 18 March 1945, Headquarters, 1st Infantry Division, alerted the 1st Aviation Battalion to prepare the Airborne Company (Company A) for deployment to Okinawa. Company A was to be the major unit of an airborne packet consisting of an airborne company, field maintenance detachments, signal detachments, and combat detachments with total strength to be 161 officers, warrant officers, and enlisted men.

On 18 and 19 March personnel were selected for assignment to the packet from Fort Riley personnel and personnel shortages reported to Third Army Headquarters. For 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 or the selected company commander for Company A, were at Fort Riley at the beginning of the processing.

On 24 March, the movement directive was received confirming a surface rate of equipment from Fort Riley to an unspecified destination. The requirement for ability and equipment to accompany individuals was unknown at this time. This resulted in having to contact all personnel while on leave to send 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 revised by the expressed desire of the Commanding General, Fort Riley, and on 26 March a majority of the personnel on station were notified on leave. Arrangements were made with post units and the air detachment to furnish personnel to assist in completing POK. The property book officers, supply officers, 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 directive to complete items of all supplies and equipment to the packet established as 31 March. The readiness date was later revised to 3 April and then 9 April. Equipment was still being issued to the packet on the afternoon of 9 April, several hours after mail landing 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 personnel were POK checked and immunization and physical requirements completed for many who had not been properly processed at their prior stations. Several personal changes necessitated by unfulfilled POK 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 TWO JMA.

Sunday 11 April was spent by Major De Leach in conference with the division G-3, G-4, and G-5 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.
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, 82d Avn Bn. On board in addition to each unit's 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 (Cap 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. Fleder 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 on rafts, loss crew chiefs, to Dan Me Thuot on C-132 aircraft, closing at approximately 1545 hours 1 May 1965. The unit was not at Dan 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 Dan 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 crew chiefs. 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 Dan 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 Plei Me Thoat 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 grades were also exchanged.

As a result of the DEOS 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 airborne 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. Tracey. 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 conducting 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 "Store 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. DeLonch 067668
Capt. Charles T. Gilnor 04058557
Capt. Leon E. Curry 05306680
Capt. Anthony T. Di Benedetto 02306594
Capt. Leonard L. Doswell 078572
1/Lt Edward T. Pledger 05411943
1/Lt Robert C. Elwell 05017903
CWO William H. Goldman W2207733
CWO Glen W. Mantooth W2206470
CWO William H. Cleary W3150348
CWO James L. Stallard W3150506
CWO Charles W. Millard W3150708
CWO William J. Fields W3151037
CWO Carl T. Sypniewski W3430112

Annex A.
STATISTICS OF QUARTERLY OPERATIONS

1. Number of sorties flown during preceding quarter: 4026
2. Number of Combat sorties flown during preceding quarter: 2624
3. Number of flying hours flown during preceding quarter: 1905 hrs
4. Number of passengers lifted during preceding quarter: 2352
5. Number of tons of cargo lifted during preceding quarter: 54 tons
6. Number of aircraft receiving hits during preceding quarter: 3

Annex C.
STAGECOACH

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

AND

OPERATIONS

PERIOD 1 JULY - 30 SEPTEMBER
GENERAL

This quarter has been characterized by many significant events and operations. On 3 July Company A received its first Security Platoon; 25 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 Huoc Vinh. The Huoc Vinh operation involved elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade being lifted into War Zone "U", 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 coordinated 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 Choo Reo airfield (Coord. 12°23'52") for an operation in support of the ARVN Airborne Brigade. A 173rd Regiment had been located in the mountain pass southwest of Choo 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 Choo 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 173rd Airborne Brigade attempted to gain access to the village by convoy. The convoy was ambushed in a defile four kilometers southwest of Choo 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-10'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 Choo 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 Choo Reo ending the siege. Company A was released and returned to Don Me Tho but several aircraft were left at Choo Reo airfield for support of advisory teams.

After the night the Viet Cong mortared the airfield damaging several aircraft. One UH-1D was flown away during the attack by 1/Lt. Major. Upon landing at Qui Nhon the crew counted eighty-five rounds hit 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 Dan Thang 5 was conducted by the 52nd Avn Bn. The operation was in support of the 3rd and 5th Battalions, 1st AIVN Airborne Brigade. Elements of the 117th Avn Co, Company A, 119th Avn Co and the 52nd Airlift 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-1D (A) being damaged with no casualties.

On 10 August, the units performed an airdropped assault mission in support of the 5th AIVN 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 AIVN 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 to 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 Dan No Thuan.

On 24 August elements of A Company, the 121st Avn Co, and the 501st Avn Co from Bien Hoa, performed an airdropped assault in support of the 23rd Inf Div for the purpose of clearing highway 21 from Dan No Thuan to Nha Trang. Aircraft staged from Dan No Thuan (East) Airfield, and lifted 1257 troops of the Marine Task Force (AIVN) in five lifts to a landing zone code 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 Dan No Thuan. The aircraft was piloted by WO Phillip D. Petti 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 A-10'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 Dan No Thuan, 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 NON'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 9th US Special Forces Group. Fifty USAF advisory personnel and 210 AVN Airborne Rangers were lifted from the staging area at Quang Ngai to the landing zone at coord 15137003 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 AH-64's utilized for pre-strike, and eight USAF D-57's were used for air cover. The mission was completed and Company A returned to Dan Mo Thuat.

12 September found Company A preparing for movement to Saigon to work with the 145th Avn Bn. The operation involved lifting elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade and the Royal Australian Regiment into an area 5 kilometers North of Bien Cat. Six air mobile companies plus Air Force elements were involved in the operation. The operation consisted of making five lifts from Dien Doc to an LZ North of Bien 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 150000 prepared to stay in the field the remainder of the operation in direct support of the LNVN 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 LNVN Airborne Brigade it was frequently recalled to III Corps control to participate in air-landed assaults and extractions with the 145th Avn Bn. 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 Dan Mo Thuat. 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 removed 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 preceding quarter: 7978
2. Number of Combat sorties flown during preceding quarter: 7522
3. Number of flying hours flown during preceding quarter: 4993
4. Number of passengers lifted during preceding quarter: 8559
5. Number of tons of cargo lifted during preceding quarter: 204
6. Number of aircraft struck by ground fire during preceding quarter: 87

Annex A.
STAGE COACH

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

AND

OPERATIONS

PERIOD: 1 OCT - 31 DEC
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 Flei Mo 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 Michelle 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 prestripped by Air Force F-52's six hours prior to the assault and F-100's along with artillery of the 173rd Brigade were used to pres trike 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 calibers 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 LAVN Division from Vn Thanh (Coord 0650130) 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 Dan Mo Thuat.

After arriving at Dan Mo Thuat 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 Dan Mo Thuat and closed at Tuy Hoa at 0540 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 (LAVN) 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 TFG William Ables who was evacuated to Nha Trang and the United States.
At 1130 hours this same day a "MAYDAY" call was received from an A-1E which had been flying air cover for the operation. The A-1E 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 Dan Me Thuot.

On 20 October Company A departed Dan Me Thuot on route 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 airborne company ever completed. For the first five days, A Company was the only airborne 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. Plossendefer and piloted by WO Joseph S. Haulyer, crewchief and gunner were SP/5 William J. Johnson and FPC 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 VNLF 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. Fodder 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 affected 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 Dn 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 Dde, 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 Pleiku 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 In 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 In 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 In Drang fighting was 175."

"At Plei Me and In Drang, the US Forces no longer fought Viet Cong Guerillas 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 Dn again joined forces with the 1st Air Cav Div, in operations in the In 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, In Drang area. The Viet Cong retreated piecemeal across the Cambodian border the battle ended.

In Saigon, General William C. Westmoreland proclaimed the In 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, In Drang operation the 52nd Avn Dn supported operation Gyet 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 rich rice 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 landing 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 Dn moved to Duc Ky in support of the ARVN artillery school in a combined arms demonstration. Company A provided thirteen UH-1D's and six UH-1B's (Armed). The 119th provided twelve UH-1D's (transport helicopters) and six UH-1B's (armed) for the demonstration. All air movements, Air Force and artillery fires were preplanned and coordinated by the Duc My Training Center Adviser Team. As part of the demonstration, a total of 546 troops were lifted on an air landed assault into multiple LZ's. The demonstration ran smoothly and was a great success. Attending the demonstration were two hundred high ranking observers 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 Thuct, celebrating the holiday with an airlanded assault and a large turkey dinner. Three hundred and forty CIDG troops were air lifted from Dong Ha 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 (AML) 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 1/1t 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 (AML) 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 Dien Hoa to report to the 118th Avn Co. to assume control of the 1st Avn Co. Its mission was 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 AD 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 Minh.

"There was fighting in plenty, around the huge abandoned Michelin Rubber Plantation near Dou 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 En 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 En 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 En at 1730 hours and returned to Phu Loi where it was released by the 1st Avn En. The company closed at Dan Me Thuot on 17 December for a brief respite.

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

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 Dan 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 CITC troops from Buon Ma Yung USSF 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.