



## Ash and Trash Missions

Not all the missions that were flown by the Vultures in Vietnam were ever associated with any type of combat. These were called Ash & Trash missions. Among these were the job of delivering "*The Stars and Stripes*" newspaper, delivering the mail to all of those little outposts where the U.S. A. soldiers were the military advisers to the ARVN forces, and two of my favorites which were 1) taking the Chaplain around to some of the bases in the delta to conduct religious services and 2) delivering a holiday meal, like Thanksgiving Dinner, to U. S. troops in field.

One of the good things about flying Ash & Trash Missions were that they gave the aircraft commander an excellent chance to teach the peter pilot the little tricks and tips to flying in the delta. It also allowed the peter pilot to try his hand at plotting and charting the navigation for the missions, doing the radio communications with Delta Center - the flight planning and artillery plotter for IV Corps -, and to learn how to use the SOI (Signal Operating Instructions) which had all the frequencies for each of the bases in the delta.

One of my favorite tricks to pull on the peter pilot on Ash & Trash Missions was while doing the pre-flight check on the aircraft was to poke my head inside the nose compartment of the UH-1H, then push the little button in the back of the oil or fuel pressure gage until the gage read "*water*". Then after we had taken off on the mission, cover up all the gages and quiz him on his cross check and ask him what was his water pressure reading. The peter pilots never knew the correct answer and would always tell you the reading after you uncovered the gages. Now I had him, because then I would ask him how the water system in the UH-1H worked; there is no water system on the UH-1H. You should have heard some of the explanations given by some of the peter pilots until they realized the joke was on them and we both had a good laugh!



Delivering “*The Star and Stripes*” newspaper always reminded me of being a paper boy back in Philadelphia when I was in high school. Now here I was after going to college, doing the exact same thing I did before I went to college only now I was using a million dollar aircraft instead of the ten dollar wagon to transport the newspapers. I guess my early paper boy career prepared me for my army delivery days because to me there was no difference in the two jobs. You had so many newspapers to deliver at each stop and you couldn’t miss anyone!

The mail delivery was always a very gratifying mission because the U.S. Soldiers would always come out to the aircraft to greet you with a smile on their faces because you had some mail for them and it was their only contact with the “*real*” world. I know that we made their day whenever we stopped by their compound and they had some great deal on buying a SKS Rifle or other war souvenir for a decent price not like some of the prices being asked back at the bases where the U.S. soldier population was in substantial numbers. Offering the deals was their way of showing some of their gratitude besides just moving the merchandise.

Flying the chaplain from base to base was a nice mission to get because for some reason he was always scheduled to be at My Tho for the services at 1100 hrs and then he was also always scheduled to have a sit down lunch after the services; I guess the food must have been pretty good at My Tho but the next leg of the mission wasn’t scheduled to start until 1300 hrs. That always gave us a chance to drop the chaplain off at My Tho and then make a dash out of IV Corps into III Corps to make a run on the big and always well stocked PX located in Vung Tau which was an in-country resort town.

Over the course of the year I bought a Seiko alarm watch, a Minolta 35 mm camera, and a Sony cassette tape recorder (that I used to send tapes home to my girlfriend) from making the PX run to Vung Tau. Very often we would take orders from other members of our company, enlisted or officer, for some of the nice merchandise that was for sale in the PX.

You had to fly over Ganh Rai Bay in order to get to Vung Tau by the fastest route. That gave the peter pilot practice at flying over water or “feet wet”. I always taught the peter pilots to climb up to 3000 or 4000 feet so in case there was an engine failure you had a chance to auto-rotate to or near the nearest land mass and not to fly too straight a direct route but to cheat a little bit by flying a circular course near the land masses.

The last type of Ash & Trash mission was the delivery of holiday meals. The Thanksgiving Day meals that I delivered were prepared by the mess people back the main base in Ca Mau and then put into what looked like these giant lunch boxes. Each “lunch box” look like it could feed a whole squad of soldiers. The entire mission was well organized because there was one of these containers for every one of those little outposts where the U.S. soldiers were stationed and acting as the advisers to the ARVN forces. After delivering a full load we would fly back to Ca Mau and fill the Huey up again. The containers had stackable compartments with each compartment containing a different portion of the meal. One would contain the turkey; another would contain the stuffing, and so on.

We would land near the little base and the U.S. forces would rush out to meet the aircraft as happy as a lark because the higher ups had remembered them with a good traditional American holiday meal. I know this mission raised their morale and made them feel great just for a little while with a little taste of home.

Yes the 162<sup>nd</sup> AHC flew combat missions all the time while I served with the unit in the delta, however the 162<sup>nd</sup> AHC also flew some missions that helped make the tour of duty a little more bearable to a lot of G.I.s whom we will never know their names and we will just remember the smiles on their faces.

Eric Bray  
Can Tho  
12/69 – 12/70