

History of the 155th AHC

Prepared by: 1LT Joseph Puhl

Approved by: Charles E. Markham

CPT, AR

Commanding

Commanders of the 155th AHC-1970

Major Gerald H. Luisi-1 Jan-15 June

Major Rowland G. Steele-15 June-17 Dec

Captain Charles E. Markham-17 Dec-31 Dec

The mission of the 155th AHC is to provide general air support as directed by the Commanding Officer, 10th CAB in support of airmobile operations designed to search out the insurgent enemy and to extend Government of Vietnam control of the population.

This history is dedicated to all those men who have served and are serving with the 155th and its attached units since its arrival in The Republic of Vietnam, with special tribute to those officers, warrant officers and enlisted men who gave their lives so that the Republic of South Vietnam and the Free World everywhere may look forward to the future with somewhat of a brighter ray of hope. Let us hope that these men did not die in vain.

1 Jan-31 Dec

The year opened relatively quiet with the 155th AHC taking a long needed rest from the tension of heavy combat. The company continued to provide aviation support to the units with normal operations in the Darlac, Quang Duc, and Tuyen Duc Provinces. The required aviation support of the B-50 operations was terminated due to increased enemy activity in the northern part of military Region 2. This mission was transferred to another aviation unit which was more closely based to the new B-50 area of operations.

In the month of Jan, there occurred a shift in the tactical situation in which the 155th was called on to provide support for the 4th Inf Div operating in the Pleiku area. The 4th Inf began receiving the priority of support and the daily commitment ranged from 4 to 12 UH-1H aircraft. The unit supplied assets for a total of 20 combat assaults with totals of 1884 troops and 11 tons of cargo lifted in these operations.

On 6 Feb at 0045 hours, Camp Coryell received 5 rounds of 82mm mortar. There were no personnel injured and only minor damage to one UH-1H. The remainder of the month was free from enemy mortar and rocket attacks.

With the arrival of Feb, the 155th resumed its support of B-50 operations. This mission consisted of providing assets in support or reconnaissance patrols with a normal commitment of 4 to 6 UH-1H aircraft. The Air Force provided the FAC and the gunship assets. As one pilot said, "B-50 is a mission of hours of boredom broken by seconds of extreme terror." From isolated airstrips they would stand by in case a recon patrol developed contact. At this, 4 slick and 2 guns would scramble. All ships would proceed to the sight of contact. The Air Force FAC would be on station to direct lead ship in for the extraction, while the other slicks would orbit.

The 155th continued to support the 4th Inf Div in the Pleiku region as well as its commitments to the units in the Ban Me Thuot area of operation. A total of 27 combat assaults were conducted with a combined hour total of 5838 for the 2 months.

Enemy activity around Camp Coryell remained negligible during this period of time. One very insignificant attack resulted in negative damage to personnel or material.

With the beginning of the second quarter came a build up of enemy activity in the Ban Me Thuot area. The 155th's aviation assets were called upon throughout the period to provide gun support, medevacs and resupply in support of the 23rd ARVN Div and its OPCON units. During this period the unit also continued to provide support of the local area of operation as well as B-50 and the 4th Inf Div in Pleiku Province.

The enemy opened the month of April with a literal "bang." A mortar attack on the 1st of April resulted in 4 WIA from the 219th RAC and 3 structures damaged. The compound withstood 2 more attacks during the month with damage to 3 UH-1C and 5 UH-1H aircraft.

On 20 April, 4 ships were conducting B-50 operations. A reconnaissance patrol came into contact with the enemy and an exfiltration was launched. LT Beaudreault and WO Wylie were piloting the pickup aircraft and as they touched down in the LZ they received intense enemy fire. Just as the aircraft lifted above the trees on take off, it was hit in the tail section by a B-40 rocket and crashed into the heavy canopied jungle. After climbing free of the wreckage, a running battle with the NVA erupted. With gunship cover, they were able to find an LZ and were finally pulled from the jungle. At the time of the pickup they had been on the ground for over 30 minutes. WO Johnson was piloting the rescue aircraft.

At approximately 1900 hours a second aircraft, piloted by WO Marlin Johnson, and WO Darek Richardson, entered the area for extraction of a recon team. As they were about to touch down in the LZ they received a B-40 rocket in the cockpit, killing both pilots instantly. The crew chief and gunner survived the crash and were rescued, but due to enemy fire the bodies of the pilots were not recovered until a later date. This was truly a very dark day in the history of the 155th.

In May, a new offensive was launched against the enemy in the western regions of Military Region 2 and the Cambodian border areas. A major portion of the 155th's assets would be committed to this offensive over a period of 3 months. The first of such operations was conducted on 20 May, west of Duc Lap. The 155th provided the bulk of the assets and a major portion of the planning. Maj Gerald Luisi was the Air Mission Commander for the operation, controlling 24

lift aircraft, 12 heavy lift aircraft and 8 gunships. The operation extended for a period of 2 weeks and was highly successful with ground forces finding numerous caches of arms, medical supplies, food and vehicles.

The enemy continued his mortar attacks on the compound with 2 attacks during May. The compound took a total of 18 rounds, resulting in minor damage og 4 UH-1H aircraft and negative casualties to personnel.

During the month of June the 155th was called to provide assets for 2 more assaults on the Cambodian border regions.

The month of June also witnessed the innovation of the 2/1st Cav into the Ban Me Thuot area. With the 155 committed to supporting its local AO, B-50 and areas of Pleiku, the 2/1st was responsible for "Hunter/Killer" tactics in the Ban Me Thuot provinces.

With the 155th in the Vanguard, the 10th Aviation Battlion airlifted the 23rd ARVN Div across the Cambodian border. The 8th Cav Div drove up from the south on an overland march. Contact was light, however large caches of enemy supplies and arms were captured.

These two operations smashed Charlie's chances of a substantial offensive in the Darlac Province.

Time passed with the 155 accomplishing the missions in its local AO. Happy Valley SE of Ban Me Thuot and VC Mountain to the SW still posed a threat to the security of Darlac Province.

On 9 June, Camp Coryell once again came under mortar attack. A total of 9 mortar rounds impacted in the corral area resulting in minor damage to 2 UH-1H and 2 UH-1C aircraft.

On 11 June, Maj gerald H. Luisi relinquished command of the unit to Maj Rowland C. Steele.

The period of 1 July to 30 Sept reflected a change in tactical operations for the 155th. there was a general reduction in large scale operations and in turn an increase in smaller company or platoon size operations. This was also accompanied by a shift of support from the northern Pleiku regions to support of operations in the Tuyen Duc and Lam Dong provinces in the south. Aside from the normal assets in support of the 23rd ARVN Div, B-53 5th SFG, B-50 and units of the Ban Me Thuot- Duc Lap area, the 155th sent aviation assets in support of the 44th ARVN Regiment (Song Mea), 53rd ARVN Regiment (Di Linh), Division light CP (Dalat) and Dalat MACV. There were also sporatic missions in support of Phan Rang MACV, Phu Bon Province, 129th AHC (Qui Nhon), Duc My Rangers, 25th Intel Team and G-2 Sniffer. During this period the 155th earned a very definite membership in " Vagabonds of the Sky."

The enemy continued to harass Camp Coryell with mortar attacks during this period of operation. The first attack, and only attack for July occurred on 18 July and consisted of 7 82mm mortar rounds resulting in 3 damaged UH-1C aircraft.

On 25 July, while supporting 4 slicks on a B-23 troop movement, a pair of 155 gunships expended , killing 5 enemy soldiers.

The month of Aug 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.

There was a total of 9 combat assaults conducted in the month of Aug, but only one took on any aspect of a major assault. On 17 Aug the 155th assisted by the 281st AHC and the 243rd ASHC provided aviation assets for a 23 ARVN Div assault on "Happy Valley", a long time stronghold of local VC and NVA. The operation was conducted on a much smaller scale with normally a platoon size aviation unit in support. The weather held and by the end of the day 14 LZ's had been inserted with negative damage to any of the aviators.

The second attack for the quarter occurred on 1 Aug. The compound received approximately 4 to 5 rounds with negative damage.

Along with the very diversified and far reaching "ash and trash" missions, the small scale assaults became the majority of the 155th support for the month of Sept. A total of 19 combat assaults were conducted in support of the 44th, 45th and 53rd ARVN Regiments, B-23 5th SFG and 8th Cav. Of these assaults only 2 could be considered major. The first one took place on the 3rd of the month. This operation was in support of the 45th ARVN Regiment working in the "VC Mountain" region located southeast of Duc Lap. Weather on this particular day created a problem and delayed the take-off. When the assets were finally launched the weather was still somewhat marginal. All things went well until the lift platoon touched down in LZ# 4, where they received intense semi-automatic fire. The Falcon gunships immediately suppressed the fire but in the process a door gunner took a round in the leg. He was immediately evacuated to Ban Me Thuot and then to Cam Ranh Bay, where he recovered.

On 29 Sept it was back to "Happy Valley" for the second major assault of the month. This operation was conducted entirely by the 155th and consisted of inserting 445 troops on a search and clear mission. The assault was completed without incident to aviation assets, and with relative success for the ground forces.

During the month of Sept Camp Coryell received 3 B-40 rockets on the 9th and light automatic and semi-automatic fire on the 27th resulting in negative damage or casualties.

In Sept the 155 was again given the commitment to support B-50 operations. 4 slicks and 4 guns were provided each day for the entire month for this mission.

As in July and August, Sept 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 the 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.

The final quarter was characterized by a general reduction in operations for the 155th AHC. The unit continued to provide support for units operating in and around the Ban Me Thuot, Duc Lap, and Ghia Nghia area with additional support to the Dalat, Di Linh, Bao Loc, Song Mea regions in the south and the Plieku regions to the north.

The month of Oct was one of relative inactivity. The unit continued to conduct the normal "ash and trash" and direct combat support missions in its widely dispersed AO. In addition, the company conducted only 4 combat assaults during the month and all of these were platoon to section size aviation operations in support of the 53rd Regiment, 45th Regiment, 8th Cav, and B-23 5th SFG.

Although the company's operations decreased in size and number, the enemy attacks against Camp Coryell increased somewhat in intensity. The first attack consisted of 11 mortar rounds fired into the compound. neither of these attacks was effective, causing negative damage or casualties.

During the month, the officers and enlisted men of the 155th cemented the bottom of the pool. The pool previously had a polyvinyl chloride liner and due to rips in the liner, the pool had been closed for several months.

Nov opened with the future of the unit very much a question mark in the minds of all concerned. Rumor control was working overtime and had the company moving to all quadrants of the compass. Although the unit showed signs of apprehension towards its final destiny, it continued to provide support to units of its local and far reaching AO. The Stagecoach-Falcon team also began to frequent the Pleidjereng and Pleiku regions with increasing regularity, usually to provide support for the 42nd and 47th ARVN Regiments.

The combat assaults for the month of Nov totaled 4 in number and continued on the smaller unit concept. One of these assaults, however, was a combined effort with the 52nd CAB in support of the 42nd Regiment. The assault was a renewed offensive to rid the western border areas of the Pleiku region of a substantial enemy threat. The operation consisted of 12 lift aircraft, 4 heavy lift aircraft and 6 gunships in support of a ground element of approximately 450-500 troops. The ground operation lasted for over a month and was considered highly successful.

During the month of Nov, the compound remained free of enemy activity until the 30th when 5 sappers tried to breach the camp perimeter. The attack was repelled with possible enemy casualties, however these were unconfirmed by a gunship reconnaissance of the area.

With the close of Nov came the long awaited and disheartening word that the 155th AHC was going to deactivate and return to the states.

With the onset of Dec, the Stagecoach-Falcon team entered its final 14 days of operation. Although these were the last days of operations, they were far from the least active. The unit continued to support its normal missions, in addition to a daily commitment to the Pleiku area. During the final 14 day period a total of 1049 hours were flown, logging 2835 sorties and 32 tons of cargo lifted. The majority of these statistics were in support of the 9 assaults conducted in the Pleiku, Cheo Reo and "Happy Valley" areas. The greater portion of these operations were in support of units involved in saturation patrol tactics with a commitment of 7 UH-1H and 2 UH-1C aircraft.

Enemy activity during the month of Dec consisted of 2 mortar attacks on the 2nd and the 19th of the month. On 2 Dec the compound received 4 60mm rounds. There were no casualties among the personnel and only light damage to 3 aircraft. The attack on the 19th consisted of 4 rounds which over shot the compound and impacted in residential sections adjacent to the perimeter,

resulting in several civilian casualties.

On 14 Dec, 1970 at 2400 hours, the 155th Assault helicopter Company ceased operations and began the massive task of deactivation. After a final company party the unit set to work on the Keystone turn-in with the same zealous and mission oriented attitude which had won its name and reputation over the past 5 1/2 years of operations.

On 17 Dec, Maj Rowland C. Steele relinquished his command of the company to CPT Charles E. Markham who would lead the company through deactivation.

The 155th AHC has spent a total of 5 1/2 years in the wild west of Vietnam. During these times they have earned their name in blood. All of those who served did not return home. These men did not die in vain.