

HISTORY OF
COMPANY "A", 501ST AVIATION BATTALION
1 July 1965 - 31 July 1965

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HEADQUARTERS
145TH AVIATION BATTALION
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96307

VHPA 214

COMPANY "A"
501ST AVIATION BATTALION
APO SAN FRANCISCO, 96227

AVT-TY

31 July 1965

SUBJECT: Monthly History for Company "A", 501st Aviation Battalion,
1 through 31 July 1965

TO: Commanding Officer
145th Aviation Battalion
ATTN: Battalion Historian
APO San Francisco, 96307

1. Mission and Resources.

a. The mission of Company "A", 501st Aviation Battalion is to augment the aviation capabilities of III Corps and the Republic of South Viet Nam by providing support for the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam in combat operations and provide direct tactical and administrative air mobility to combat units in the III Corps area.

b. Organization.

(1) Company "A", 501st Aviation Battalion was organized under TOE 1-77E, dated 15 July 1963. The unit consists of a Company Headquarters, two (2) lift platoons, one (1) armed platoon, and one (1) service platoon.

(2) Personnel assigned to Company "A", 501st Aviation Battalion consists of 15 officers, 32 warrant officers, and 127 enlisted men.

(3) The company equipment consists of 8 UH-1D's, 17 UH-1B's, 27 motor vehicles, and other equipment peculiar to an aviation company.

(4) The company has the following attached units:

(a) One, twenty six (26) man platoon from the 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry that provides gunners for all aircraft.

(b) The 94th Signal Detachment which provides avionics repair.

(c) The 151st Transportation Detachment which provides 3d echelon maintenance for the company.

(d) An 18 man counter mortar platoon from the 25th Division.

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c. The unit is capable of providing continuous (day and night) operations during visual weather conditions and limited operations under non visual weather in support of the forces in the Republic of Viet Nam. It can provide in a single lift, airlift for 144 combat equipped ARVN's or 88 combat equipped Americans.

2. Operations and Training.

a. Operations

- (1) Time flown for the month - 1946
- (2) Sorties - 5711
- (3) Troops carried - 6685
- (4) Cargo hauled - 44.3 tons
- (5) Passenger miles - 3,961,000
- (6) Cargo miles 2,686,000
- (7) Aircraft hits - 4
- (8) Wounded in Action - 2
- (9) Killed in Action - 0
- (10) Total air land assaults - 10
- (11) Unit size operations - 4

(a) During the afternoon of 1 July 1965, "A" Company repositioned troops and dependents. The troop movement was a rund robin affair between Bo La, Dong Xoai, Duc Phng, and Ben Cat. The movement was started at 1430 and completed by 1805. There was no enemy fire received throughout the afternoon. The "Rattlers" returned to Bien Hoa at 1930 having flown an aggregate of 49.6 hours.

(b) On 2 July 1965, Firebird 97's fire team was supporting Tenth Division. A VC force was holed up north of the village of Phouc An. The fire team was deployed to make a strike on the area. As the aircraft, flown by Lt Jefferies and Lt Carlson, broke from their firing pass, an automatic weapon cut loose. The door gunner of the wing ship, PFC Charles Godwin, was struck in the upper left leg, bursting a artery. Another round went through the main rotor blade. WO "AJ" Brown and WO "Jim" Prendeville broke off from the flight to get their wounded gunner medical attention. Godwin was taken to 3d Army Field Hospital in Saigon for immediate treatment. He was later medevacuated to the states where he is expected to fully recover.

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(c) The 173d Airborne Brigade initiated a five day sweep of a portion of "D" Zone on the morning of 7 July. The 173d commanded two of their battalions, one battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, and one battalion of the ARVN paratroopers. The 145th Aviation Battalion plus attachments of the 117th Aviation Company, "A" of the 1st Aviation Battalion, and "A" of the 101st Aviation Battalion provided the lift force.

The first day of the operation, the "Rattlers" were the second of six elements. Three landing zones had been selected for troop deployment. "A" Company placed 338 Americans in the first two LZ's and 153 Australians in the third landing zone.

Heavy artillery preparations pounded the area for twenty minutes followed by a strike by VNAF Skyraiders. American B-52's had been pounding the area with large 1000 pound bombs. The final close-in support was provided by organic company armed ships. The large preparation did not prevent the flight from receiving fire. Automatic weapons fired at the flight on the departure route. WO Harry Davis's aircraft received a .50 caliber round through the tip of the main rotor blade. His aircraft was the only one hit.

The slicks and armed ships suppressed each time fire was received. The large expenditure of ammo was well spent since the VC suffered heavy casualties. "A" Company successfully completed the lift without receiving casualties.

(d) Low ceilings and reduced visibility were reported by Air Force weather for the area between Bien Hoa and Xuan Loc. The 3/43 was badly needed at Bien Hoa to be used as a blocking force in the "D" Zone operation. At 080300 July 65, Captain Schwem and Captain Watson took off in the lead ship, followed by ten slicks and escorted by six gun ships. As the flight turned away from the lights of Saigon, the sky became total blackness. Intermittant weather hampered both lifts but the operation was completed without incident. The last of the 170 troops landed at Bien Hoa at 0300 hours.

At 0655 hours, the 170 troops were airlifted across the Song Dong Nai River. They were placed in a large rice field north of the town of Xa Thai Hung. The mission of the ARVN's was to prevent the Viet Cong from coming out of "D" Zone into the town. Both lifts were flown at low level due to poor weather conditions. The flight did not receive hostile fire.

(e) The 173d accomplished their clearing operation and were now ready for Phase III; to extract all troops for return to Bien Hoa. The 145th Aviation Battalion started extracting on the afternoon of 9 July 1965.

Elements to be extracted were the 173d Airborne Brigade, the RAR, and the 3/43 ARVN's. The troops were lined up in three landing zones. "A" Company extracted 450 of the 2500 troop task force. Seven lifts were required. Negative fire was received until the company started extracting troops from the last landing zone. The Firebirds received light automatic weapons fire from the tree line along the north edge of the landing zone. The Firebirds returned fire, inflicting light

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casualties on the Viet Cong. The "Rattlers" terminated at the "Snakepit" at 1645 hours. They had flown an aggregate of 32.5 hours without injuries.

(f) A convoy of trucks were enroute from Long Thanh to Phu My when an unknown number of Viet Cong ambushed them. An A/82d aircraft witnessed the attack, but was helpless to give assistance. The pilot notified 145th Battalion who in turn relayed the information to III Corps.

Aircraft flying normal missions were recalled by Saigon Center for assembly at Bien Hoa. At 1300, "A" Company picked up ninety troops of the 1/43d at Tan Uyen. The troops were dropped into a pasture in front of the Phu My compound. Both lifts were flown without incident.

(g) On the afternoon of 14 July 1965, "A" Company was alerted for a ten to fifteen day trip to an unknown destination. At 1700 hours that same day, Battalion headquarters ordered the "Rattlers" to An Khe in II Corps.

At 0630, 15 July 1965, Captain Marvin Schwem led the "Esquires" to Qui Nhon for rendezvous with other aircraft from the 145th Aviation Battalion. Captain Clifford Ohlenburger followed with the armed platoon, his first mission as Firebird platoon leader. Major Lewis J. Henderson flew with the gun ships to command the flight element. The flight closed at Qui Nhon at 1330 hours. At 1530, the "Rattlers" left Qui Nhon to continue to An Khe.

A full briefing was given at An Khe by the 52d Aviation Battalion, S3. The operation was not impressive from the stand point of aviation, but the ground troops size and role made the exercise the largest ever staged in Viet Nam. Route 19 is the only inland route connecting the coast to the highlands. Without it, the mountain people have to rely on supplies flown in. During the rainy season in the mountains, flying is drastically reduced.

Viet Cong had blown the main bridges on Highway 19 making the road inaccessible. A division size task force was given the mission of rebuilding the bridges along the forty mile stretch from Pleiku to Qui Nhon. The highway was divided into three areas of operation: (1) the area between Pleiku to Mang Yang Pass, (2) Mang Yang Pass to An Khe Pass, and (3) An Khe Pass to Qui Nhon.

"A" Company worked from Mang Yang Pass to An Khe Pass. On the morning of the 16th, "A" Company lifted 130 troops of the ARVN 2d Airborne Brigade into an LZ 5000 meters northwest of An Khe. The "Rattlers" were the third element so they were not allowed free suppression. All three lifts went without incident.

For the next three days, the "Rattlers" performed several resupply missions. The Firebirds flew overhead cover for two convoy movements and made airfield recons the first night at the strip. At 1030 hours of the 19th, "A" Company was released for return to Bien Hoa. The last aircraft touched down at Bien Hoa at 1730 hours. The highway had been opened, bridges repaired, and resupply convoys had successfully made the trip from Pleiku to Qui Nhon.

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(h) ARVN troops of the 1/43d were repositioned from Xuan Loc to Baria on the morning of 27 July. "A" Company landed at Xuan Loc at 0715 for the first load. Capt Jesse James led the thirteen ship flight. Enroute to Baria it was necessary to take the flight through a break in the clouds to fly on top. The ceiling was only 800.' Three lifts were flown to move the 317 troops. The aircraft refueled at Vung Tau then proceeded to home station. The remainder of the day was spent flying normal Third Corps missions.

(i) The last day of the month, 2d Brigade executed a dual training and clearing operation southwest of Bien Hoa. The "Rattlers" furnished four bravos, four deltas, and three armed ships. The lift aircraft carried forty-four troops of the 2/42d into an LZ as a diversionary action then proceeded to the actual landing zone. Suppressive fire was used at each LZ, but no enemy casualties were reported. This operation terminated the month for "A" Company, 501st Aviation Battalion. No aircraft or crewmembers were lost during the month.

b. Training.

(1) Decca Navigation.

(2) Aviation Standardization.

(3) UH-1B and UH-1D helicopter transition.

3. Maintenance and Supply.

a. During the period 1 through 31 July 1965, the units aircraft availability was:

(1) Bravos - 95%

(2) Deltas - 89%

b. During the month of July, the 151st Transportation Detachment and "A" Company, 501st Service platoon provided constant maintenance support to the company at Bien Hoa and outlying areas. The following recovery operation were performed during July.

(1) 15 July - While supporting II Corps at An Khe, aircraft 922's irreserviceable valve malfunctioned. Capt Young's crew rebuilt the valve. The same day, aircraft 924 had an engine surge which required inspection. The inspection was performed at An Khe.

(2) 16 July 1965 - Aircraft 563 developed a fuel leak in the fuel control unit. The seal was replaced at An Khe.

(3) While at An Khe, the service platoon repaired two aircraft from "A" Company, 82d Aviation Battalion. Both aircraft had fuel leaks.

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b. Supply - During the month of July, necessary supplies
that "A" Company had ordered still had not arrived.

4. Miscellaneous.

a. Commander's time - 62.0

b. High aviator - 119.0

c. Low aviator - 16.7

d. Average aviator 72.3

e. No awards were presented during the month of July.