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Airmobile problems encountered and method of solution employed during Operation APACHE SNOW

a. Reconnaissance. For every combat assault, provisions must be made to permit the AMC and his key personnel to make visual reconnaissance of prepared LZ's and routes. Similarly the AMC and AMTF CO, with designated assistants, must make a joint reconnaissance of LZ's to ensure mutual understanding and agreement as to their exact location and use.

b. Coordination. Final coordination between AMC and AMTF CO is also required, preferably at the AMC's final briefing. This is the only way to eliminate anticipated difficulties pertaining to PZ control, number of lifts, ACL, etc.

c. Pick-up Zone Control. (1) Pick-up Zone activities caused the only difficulties for the 158th AHB Operation APACHE SNOW. Poor performance started before the first aircraft arrived at PZ Cannon. On the night of 9 May, at the 3rd Brigade briefing, the Pathfinder representative presented the plan for use of PZ Cannon, including internal arrangements for parking and loading. Although presented in the context of having been accomplished, it was in fact a plan only, on which execution would not begin until daylight on the 10th. As a result, FF personnel, apparently confused by the near simultaneous arrival at the PZ of C/158 and a unit of the 101st AHB, mis-directed C/158, causing the unit aircraft to depart the PZ and return, and thus use more fuel than planned. This also resulted in 5 aircraft of C/158 being separated from the main body by the river that runs through the PZ. An eventual 30 minute delay resulted, with troops having to wade across the river to load on their aircraft. On return from the first lift of 3/187 Inf, each unit landed at the PZ, loaded, and prepared to make the final lift of that battalion. Prior to departure, it was discovered that the infantry battalion S3, who, it was understood was controlling the PZ, had departed with an earlier flight. The PZ troops were now without control, and despite PF efforts, some 7 aircraft total in B/158 and C/158 were not loaded. Pathfinders could find no troops to load. With indications that the PZ was "clean", each flight departed on schedule with the troops on board. Empty aircraft remained in the PZ to rejoin their original flights on the latter's return. As A/158 (which had been fully loaded) passed the PZ on return, enroute to FB Birmingham to refuel, CO, 160th Avn Gp notified CO, 158th AHB that there were about 50 3/187 Inf troops remaining on the PZ who had to be lifted to LZ #2. CO, 158th AHB directed A/158 to refuel and, without regard for previous plans and schedules, proceed immediately to PZ, load the 3/187 Inf troops and deliver them to LZ #2. This caused A/158, scheduled to lead each succeeding assault, to return late for subsequent missions and perform its lifts separately from the remainder of the battalion.

(2) It is mandatory that the AMTF CO organize a PZ control party to

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(2) Mortar fire: It has been observed that 60mm mortar fire does appear to be as accurate as 82mm mortar fire. Mortar fire was encountered five (5) times, resulting in four (4) US/KIA and six (6) US/WIA. All casualties were caused by 82mm fire.

(3) Small arms fire: This battalion was engaged seventeen (17) times by small arms fire, resulting in two (2) US/KIA and fourteen (14) US/WIA. The figures include friendly aircraft engaged by small arms fire in the 2-506th AC

(4) BBT's: The most common type BBT (booby trap) encountered was CHICOM claymore. On nine separate occasions, units encountered claymore type booby traps or ambushes. These actions resulted in one (1) US/KIA and 23 US/WIA. It may be noted that the NVA preparation claymores as a defensive measure. On some encounters, claymores were found unfused, however, they were camouflaged and in useable condition.

6. (C) INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS: During the operation the following activities were employed:

a. VR Mission: 15

b. Personnel Detector: 5

c. Anti-intrusion devices: AN/PSR 1 employed on FSB Airborne-5

d. Scout dogs: two (2) teams for three (3) days each from the 58th Scout Dog Plat.

7. (C) The following LZ's were prepared and utilized during the operation:

a. YD348062: 1 Ship

b. YD339072: 1 Ship

c. YD349068: 1 Ship

d. YD348065: 1 Ship

e. YD358097: 1 Ship

f. YD315044: 1 Ship

g. YD341077: 1 Ship

h. YD355065: 1 Ship

i. YD382082: 1 Ship

j. YD362063: 1 Ship

k. YD355072: 1 Ship

l. YD373055: 1 Ship

ensure troops are divided into ACL groups for each aircraft, for each lift, and that all troops to be loaded on aircraft are in fact present and ready to load. It is the responsibility of the AMTF PZ Control Officer to tell the AMTF CO and the AMC, or his representative, when the PZ is clear of all troops to be loaded.

d. Downed Aircraft Procedures. Although no aircraft were forced down during the operation, review and evaluation of the published downed aircraft procedure leads to the conclusion it probably would not have contributed to the safety of personnel and efficiency of extraction. Considering the terrain over which flights are habitually made, it does not seem likely that the location of a downed aircraft can be accurately identified and marked unless another aircraft in the area goes immediately to the scene and guides security forces in. Otherwise, it appears extremely doubtful that even a "Blue Team" on immediate stand-by could get to the scene in time to determine just where the aircraft and crew are located in the jungle. Accordingly, the following procedures to mark, secure, and extract downed aircraft are recommended: (1) The wing aircraft or the one immediately behind the aircraft in distress follows it down (no touch-down) unless exigencies dictate) and pin-points the location, determines status of aircraft and condition of crew. (2) Aircraft commander of chase aircraft notifies AMC, who should call air cavalry "Blue Team", medevac aircraft, and put chase ship in direct contact with both. (3) The AMC then calls for unit maintenance aircraft and, through aviation channels, requests extraction ship to be placed on stand-by 160th Aviation Group. (4) On arrival of "Blue Team" at the downed aircraft location, chase aircraft turns control of operation over to air cavalry leader, reports to AMC, and rejoins flight as directed by AMC.

e. Authority for armed helicopters to fire. In the escort roll, armed helicopters have no difficulty protecting lift ships in the LZ or the immediate area. Enroute protection has proved to be more difficult. At any time the flight is over an AO not belonging to the AMTF CO, it has proven practically impossible to secure permission for the armed aircraft to return fire against ground targets. This is true primarily because the gunships are not provided, in advance, call signs and frequencies of AO commanders through whose areas they fly. Going through brigade TOC's has proved so inaccurate and time consuming as to be worthless. Recommend brigades provide, in advance of each operation, permission to fire in specific areas along the flight route, as well as the call signs and frequencies of all who control all areas along the route to permit immediate updating of information and permission.

f. Improvement of LZ's. The continuous difficulty airlift aircraft experience getting into hastily prepared LZ's could be immeasurably lessened if ground units were constantly to improve the condition of the LZ while the lift is in progress. Cutting down high grass and trees, pulling stumps out, and efforts made to level and make specific landing sites better would go far towards eliminating hazards to personnel and aircraft and preclude accidents. Recommend LZ's be continuously

## Extract from 158 AHB After Action Report

improved at all sites until each helicopter can land to a cleared area, 100 feet in diameter.

4. Commander's Summary. The operation was the first major undertaking of the 158th Aviation Battalion (AH) since arrival in RVN. In the 3-day period concerned, the battalion lifted 1774 troops into combat in 295 sorties without difficulty and almost without incident. Highlights of the operation included professional display of flight and communications discipline; the execution of emergency procedures by the crews of 2 damaged aircraft; the flexibility shown when "A" Co was unexpectedly committed to a third lift of the 3/187, requiring a complete change in the lift sequence for the remaining assaults scheduled; and, perhaps above all, the outstanding results of the teamwork of the aerial combined arms team involved: air cavalry, aerial rocket artillery, and the assault helicopter elements. The mutual support and great cooperation displayed by all three were of significant import, ably demonstrating the results which can be habitually achieved in such operations. The procedures developed and used in this operation are recommended for standardization.

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