

SCOPE

On 19 March 1965 Company A received an alert for movement overseas to a "Restricted Area". Preparations began immediately. All F.O.C.E. equipment (less aircraft) was boxed and shipped by rail to San Diego. New UH1-D's from Fort Rucker and Fort Benning were ferried by 3rd Army to San Diego. Equipment and aircraft were loaded aboard the U.S.S. Iwo Jima. All enlisted fillers were recruited from Fort Campbell to bring the Company to full strength. (95% of the men were volunteers) Aviators came from the 11th Air Assault Division (Test) and the 1st Infantry Division to fill vacancies previously created by Vietnam drafts. All leaves were completed by noon on 9 April and the company departed Fort Campbell at 0100 hours, 10 April--by C-130 to carry up with equipment and aircraft aboard the "Iwo". An advanced party was dispatched by MATS to Vietnam in order to coordinate with the 13th Aviation Battalion to effect a smooth reception for the main body. Through the efforts of the "Delta" Battalion Staff, the Commanding Officer 121st Aviation Company (Airmobile Light) called the "Soc Trang Tigers" and the Soc Trang R & U Manager, enough buildings were completed to house the inbound company. The "Iwo" arrived off Vung Tau on 1 May. By 1600 hours all personnel and aircraft had closed at Soc Trang. The aircraft had been assembled at sea and flown off the carrier. The "Warriors", hosted by the "Tigers", immediately began a training program to qualify their aviators and personnel in the UH1-D. Eight of the "D" models were turned over to the Tigers in exchange for eight "B" models to form the "Thunderbirds". The "T-Birds" also began training by spending many hours at range "Alpha" and "Bravo" practicing

gunnery, crowd drill, and formations. The "T-Birds" spent several days with each of the "Delta" Battalion armed platoons to polish off their techniques. DEROS (Rotation dates) exchanges were made throughout "Delta" Battalion by 1 June—the date the "Warriors" were declared Combat Ready (having already participated in one major air assault against the Viet Cong.)

The arrival of the "Winged Warriors" at Soc Trang gave the "Delta" Battalion its fourth airmobile helicopter company. Two companies were based at Soc Trang and the other two at Vinh Long. The units at Vinh Long were the 11th Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light) nicknamed the "Knights", and Company A, 502nd Aviation Battalion, known as the "Outlaws". The first unit at Soc Trang was the 121st Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light) known as the "Tigers". Later in 1965 the 221st Aviation Company (Fixed Wing Light) "Shotguns" and the 134th Aviation Company (Medium Transport) became a part of the "Delta" Battalion. The headquarters element of the 221st and the 1st Platoon of the 134th moved to Soc Trang later in 1965.

With the arrival of the "Warriors", progressively larger-scaled and more detailed and intricate airmobile operations were executed within the Delta.

Mid 1965 through mid 1966 was a period of marked change in the general tactical approach to fighting the Viet Cong in the Delta. Large scale airmobile operations involving all of the aviation companies moved heliborne task forces working in close conjunction with either ground troops mounted on armored personnel carriers, artillery, amphibious assault forces, tactical air forces, or any combination of these elements. This called for more detailed planning, skill, judgement and coordination by the "Warrior" leaders. They measured up with flying colors. All four helicopter companies developed

identical combat SOP's and could work together like the parts of a very fine watch.

During the period of this history, there were no American combat units in the Delta. The "Delta" Battalion and its aviation companies provided support to the Vietnamese IV Corps which is made up of the 7th, 9th and 21st Divisions (ARVN) and several Ranger Battalions and Special Forces units (ARVN). Besides the aviation companies within the "Delta" Battalion, there were no other US Army aviation units in the IV Corps (Delta) area.