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AGAM P (M) (17 Jan 68) FOR OT RD 670731

22 January 1968

SUBJECT: Extract from Operational Report - Lessons Learned, Headquarters,
269th Combat Aviation Battalion, Period Ending 31 July 1967

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Kenneth G. Wickham
KENNETH G. WICKHAM
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E X T R A C T

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, 269th COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION
APO 96353

AVGC-SC

31 August 1967

SUBJECT: Operational Report - Lessons Learned, For Quarterly Period Ending
31 July 1967 (RCS CSFOR-65)

SECTION II PART I

Special Topic--Smoke Ship UH-1C

1. The 269th Combat Aviation Battalion, in the conduct of airmobile operations, realized a need for the screening effect offered by an aircraft converted to dispense smoke. Initially, smoke ships were requested from the 25th Aviation Battalion and adjacent units in the III CTZ. The employment of a smoke ship proved beneficial to such an extent that recently the Battalion converted one UH-1C helicopter for smoke missions in support of airmobile operations. A recent venture, this unit has not yet had time to fully exploit the use of this machine. However, thus far, in the two weeks of its operation, this unit has made substantially sound observations.

2. The smoke ship was initially programmed to be used as a screening device in the assault phase of an airmobile assault. On several early operations in conjunction with assault helicopter companies, the smoke emitted by the smoke ship served as a visual barrier between the suspected enemy locations and the approaching helicopter force. It is extremely difficult to determine the benefit derived from the employment of this ship in such a role. The best indication of success, of course, is the lack of hostile fire received by the incoming helicopters.

3. In the employment of the aircraft it has been found that close coordination between the smoke ship and the supporting gunships is imperative. A visual reconnaissance of the planned landing zone, though not of absolute necessity, is of much benefit prior to a smoke run. In this unit's operations, when possible, the smoke ship will reconnoiter the area with the gunships and under the scrutiny of the command and control ship. This method or system best lends itself to the insurance that maximum coordination and understanding of the assault plan has been attained.

4. The smoke ship, having been briefed on the LZ location, the direction of flight of the airmobile force, the suspected enemy location, and the area the ground commander and the air mission commander desire to be smoked, returns to the RP and orbits, awaiting the arrival of the troop carrier aircraft. The smoke ship will then position itself abeam the lead ship on the approach to the LZ. Coordinating with the gunship leader, the smoke ship will at this time descend to ground level in position for the smoke run. Timed just ahead of the airmobile assault force and just behind the leading gunship escort, the smoke ship will emit the smoke screen.

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5. Having used the smoke ship in four operations in an area where this Battalion had habitually drawn heavy fire, it is reported that not one time did the airmobile force receive fire. In one operation, however, while supporting another unit, due to a lack of intelligence and unsatisfactory wind conditions, smoke was not utilized as effective as it might have been. In this instance fire was drawn from the unscreened side of the landing zone. It is felt, due to the width of the LZ, that the smoke ship could have sealed both sides of the landing area by reversing the course of the smoke ship and coming back on the opposite side of the landing zone. This was realized too late, however, but will be given serious consideration in all future operations.

6. The smoke ship was further used by the ground commander as a diversionary effort. Supporting the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, the smoke ship could not be practically utilized in the assault phase of the airmobile plan. To insure full use of available resources, the ground commander requested that the smoke aircraft be used in a diversionary role by sealing the periphery of a town on the approach course of the inbound airmobile force. The primary intent was to divert the attention of the enemy, thus creating the question of the exact location of the landing zone. Additionally, by hampering the vision of the enemy forces positioned along tree lines surrounding a hamlet on the approach course, the smoke ship afforded added security to the entire flight.

7. Again, on an operation supporting the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, the smoke ship, in conjunction with the gun teams from the 116th Assault Helicopter Company, was used most effectively in the support of ground troops in the WESTERN zone of the 1st Brigade's Area of Operations.

a. A Battalion from the 1st Brigade was air landed parallel to a NORTH-SOUTH tree line through which the infantry was to advance to the EAST to conduct a search and destroy operation. The heavily wooded area extended 1500 meters to the EAST, after which another clear area, rectangular in shape, running NORTH and SOUTH, and approximately 900 meters wide, was located. The infantry moved to the EAST edge of the wooded area and halted.

b. At this time the 116th Assault Helicopter Company gunships made a suppression run from NORTH to SOUTH down the centerline of the open area. The smoke ship made a second run, again from NORTH to SOUTH, but this time on the WESTERN edge of the tree line. Sealed by a solid layer of white smoke, the infantry reached the next wood line, never once affording the Viet Cong the luxury of a point target.

8. To date, this unit's experience with the smoke ship is still limited. It is certain, however, that during the next quarter, sufficient data will be compiled to give a much more thorough study of the employment of this aircraft.

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