

228-08.5(4)

1st Battalion (AMBL), 502nd Infantry
1972 History

On 4 February 1972, orders were cut directing that the 1/502d Airmobile Infantry, commanded by LTC John G. Pappageorge, relocate from RVN to Ft Campbell, Ky. The 1/502 would not, however, deploy as a unit: instead only one officer, one warrant officer, and ten enlisted men would bring the 1/502d colors back to Ft Campbell. The rest of the "First Strike" troopers would either be reassigned in country, or receive PCS orders (on an individual basis) to various Stateside units. The color bearing detachment was headed by Captain James M. Davis, former S5 of the battalion, and departed Da Nang, RVN, on 9 February 1972. Captain Davis and his men reported in to Ft Campbell on 10 February.

Since only twelve "original" members of the 1/502d returned to Ft Campbell from RVN, the spring and summer months were devoted to putting the "O Deuce" back on its feet. Officers and men came in slowly during these months, and it was not uncommon to see a company's total strength as ten troops. The personnel who were assigned, however, had a mountain of work to do. The Unit of Choice Program was emphasized to the maximum extent possible. Selected 1/502d troopers were sent in all directions with the mission of getting the word out about the First Strike Battalion and the 101st Airborne Division. Assigned to various regions throughout the United States, they spoke to businessmen of all trades, along with high school and college students. The effectiveness of their efforts are reflected in the fact that today, well over 90% of the 1/502d troopers are volunteers, and this figure increases with every passing month.

Operation Homecoming also received a good amount of emphasis within the unit. Conceived to officially welcome the 101st Airborne Division back to Ft Campbell, displays reflecting the history and traditions of the 1/502d were set up, and the

unit participated in the Pass-In-Review ceremonies in behalf of Vice President Agnew, the Guest of Honor.

Numerous other commitments kept the small element of 1/502d troopers busy. TO&E equipment had to be ordered, and as more and more personnel were assigned, the battalion was required to move several times in search of more spacious quarters and offices. As spring faded into summer, the 1/502d began to make preparations for the first complement of Advanced Individual Training (AIT) students it knew it would receive in the latter part of September. Primary and assistant instructors went through special training of their own, and then utilized their teaching skills ahead of time by assisting the 1/506th Infantry in their AIT schooling. Despite its small assigned strength, the 1/502d also sent a contingent of men to the United States Military Academy at West Point to help support USMA's summer training program.

On 25 September the first group of AIT students—all assigned to Alpha Company—commenced their AIT training. Bravo Company began its first AIT cycle on 9 October, with Charlie Company following on the 23rd of the same month. Altogether, 342 new troops were received, the first tangible results of the Unit of Choice Program. The AIT training program included such areas as weapons instruction, field sanitation, intelligence, CBR, first aid and land navigation. In addition, the 4th AIT cycle graduated on 16 March with 50 more "First Strike" troopers ready to receive their new MOSs.

In summary, 1972 was a building year for the battalion. Going from an initial force of twelve personnel to a strength of over seven hundred, the 1/502d—under the command of LTC Clarence A. Patnode, Jr.—looks forward to attaining a full readiness status by mid-year 1973.