

**Introduction**  
**Vietnam Airdrop History**  
**US Army Quartermaster Units**

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The US Army Rigger's history in Vietnam starts with the French at Dien Bien in 1954. The 8081st Quartermaster Company Riggers trained the French Quartermaster at their location in Japan. The 8081st also furnished a steady stream of parachutes from Japan to Vietnam for the French to use during the Siege of Dien Bien Phu, an unsuccessful siege that ended in the French's defeat and surrender.

In 1965 men were taken from the 109th Quartermaster Company (Air Delivery) to form the nucleus of the newly established 383rd Quartermaster Detachment (Aerial Supply). One month later the first group of Quartermaster Riggers, to be officially recognized in Vietnam, was sent to Qui Nhon (Quin Nhom) South Vietnam. They lived a primitive life in tents next to the dirt airfield.

After the 383rd left Fort Lee for Vietnam the 109th Quartermaster Company was sent to Fort Campbell Kentucky. They were under the operation administration of the 101st Airborne Battalion. The 109th started a enduring training schedule focusing on LAPES (Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System). In 1966 the 109th received its orders for Vietnam. The company was located on the northern most end of Cam Ranh Bay Peninsula.

The 383rd was ordered to join it's sister unit, the 109th, and soon both units were operating from the same location and under the 109th command at Cam Ranh Bay. General Westmoreland added the 623rd QM CO for air items repairs and supply and he now had a fully functional air delivery organization centrally located in Vietnam with a huge supply depot to supply the emergency supplies. The units were under the operational orders of the 1st Logistical Command in Saigon.

The Quartermaster Riggers had many notable missions. First being Operation Junction City in which the units set a new 24-hour airdrop tonnage record of over 500 short tons. While Operation Junction City was a disappointing effort to surround and kill the enemy it provided many lessons learned for the riggers and US Air Force pilots and crews.

There were many small missions to classified outposts since airdrops were their only way to receive supplies. In 1968 the 109th was ordered to help the 5th Special Forces riggers to help supply the 5th Special Forces outposts.

In September of 1967 the 109th, 383rd, and 623rd were ordered to supply the US Navy Seabees at Khe Sanh whom were rebuilding the airstrip. A platoon made up of both the 109th and 383rd men were ordered to Da Nang under the command of the 109th Quartermaster Company commander Major Al Lanier. Again a new airdrop tonnage record was set in the month of September. LAPES were considered experiential at this

time in their development, but a necessary component to deliver the construction supplies.

On October 15, 1967 tragedy struck. Airborne Ranger trained rigger Spec. 4 Charles Lynn Baney, of the 109th, was killed in a C-130 crash at Khe Sanh. Late 1967 also registered the death of Charles, two Marine riggers that fell to their deaths at Khe Sanh while attempting to parachute in to recover some AD items. I have also seen notice of one other US Army rigger killed, of which his death was mentioned at Westmoreland's staff meeting. The year and date for this rigger's death is unknown at this time. I will post the information if I find it. I seem to have lost the document.

In December of 1967 the 1st Logistical command in Saigon moved the 383rd to Bien Hoa to set up another Provisional Air Delivery unit. All the Quartermaster Rigger units were being readied for an offensive to be launched into A Shau Valley. Before the offensive was implemented the North Vietnamese Regular's Army (NVA) attack Khe Sanh and had surrounded the firebase in massive numbers. Khe Sanh was cut off from the world and an airlift was the only way to supply Khe Sanh. Air Delivery, used as a last resort, soon became a critical element of the supply line to Khe Sanh. Nine days later the NVA TET 68 Offensive started and air delivery units were embroiled in emergency missions.

In May 1968 the offensive into A Shau Valley was launched and the airdrops were no less intense or dangerous, than Khe Sanh, especially for the brave US Air Force C-130 Hercules pilots.

The riggers in late 1968 started rigging the famous "Daisy Cutter Bombs", to clear landing zones in the jungle.

On November 2, 1999 I received documentation, which clearly documents the 109th, not only rigged "necessary supplies, equipment, and mail" for inside Cambodia during the Cambodian Invasion, but also extracted captured enemy supplies out of Cambodia. The documentation also refers to "members of our unit (109th) in Cambodia" in May and June 1970.

The 549th Quartermaster Company (AS) was never stationed in Vietnam but many of its men took part in the Khe Sanh airdrops while being attached to the 383rd QM Detachment. In 1972 after the Quartermaster Rigger units had been deactivated the Siege of An Loc started. A dangerous mission for the C-130 pilots and crews who flew those missions since the area was flat and the NVA gunners had more time to zero their aim on the approaching C-130s. In May, 1972, a 549th platoon was sent to Tan San Nhut Air Base near Saigon to perform high altitude drops for ARVN troops and American advisors during the siege at An Loc . The 549th saved the day with perfecting the HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) to the point that the drops were successful enough to sustain the sieged location and soon the NVA surrounding An Loc were defeated. Other riggers of

the 549th were stationed in Thailand where they rigged loads for CIA missions in Vietnam and Laos.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www103.pair.com/adsd/riggers/airdrop.html>