

HISTORY OF THE 2D SQUADRON (AMEL), 17TH CAVALRY (1968)

The beginning of 1968 found the 2nd Squadron in Bien Hoa, Republic of Vietnam following their deployment to same. The airborne cavalrymen continued their in-country training and acclimatization in preparation for their first combat mission. On the 2nd of January the squadron, in its entirety, departed Bien Hoa enroute to Song Be City, Phouc Long Province, near the Cambodian border. Its mission was the securing of an area for the division CP to set up in. Upon arrival the first priority was to set up an adequate base of operations. This required the clearing of several acres of thick underbrush and woodlines. The new base began to take shape on 10 January, while the combat troopers of "B" troop and the aero-rifle platoon patrolled the local area to insure that the base area was not interfered with by the Viet Cong.

Then, on 15 January, the 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry saw its first action. The aero-rifle platoon was on patrol when one squad was suddenly taken under fire by hostile forces. The hostile force had made a great error, however, as the rest of the platoon was very near to the action and began sweeping the enemy's flank. As a result, the enemy lost at least 7 KIA by actual body count. The platoon then withdrew, calling in artillery behind it, and a sweep of the area the next day revealed many blood trails, indicating even greater casualties had been inflicted on the enemy. This small battle was to set the stage for the cavalrymen for the rest of the year.

Throughout the rest of January there was relatively little contact in the area of the cavalry. In the meantime, the squadron acquired 7 armored personnel carriers, M-113's, which were fitted with the ACAV kits and assigned to "B" Troop. On the morning of 31 January, the day of the now infamous Tet offensive, the cavalrymen received an urgent call to go to the aid of Phouc Binh village which was just South of their perimeter. The armored platoon moved out and, in an afternoon of bitter fighting with VC/NVA forces, killed 56 of the enemy while suffering only light casualties themselves. It was another case of the squadron doing themselves proud in contact with hostile forces.

Then came the month of February and with it, two very significant events; the return of "A" troop to squadron control and the battle of Song Be City. On the 4th of February CPT Raymond C. Hartjen, CO of "A" troop, 2d Squadron, which had been with the 1st brigade since June 1965, reported to LTC Julius W. Pecton, the Squadron Commander, that his troop was returning to the squadron and was at present, off loading at the Song Be airfield. This marked the reunion of many old friends and the start of a new history for the squadron. They were now, with the exception of "C" troop, working as a whole, and this small, not quite, battalion sized unit was to do the work of many larger units in its combat endeavors.

On the 10th of February the squadron received word that the mission of the division was to be changed, in view of developments from the Tet offensive. The squadron began planning for a move back to Bien Hoa, knowing that their next destination was the I Corps area, near the DMZ, which had been hit so heavy during the Tet attacks. On 17 February, however, the squadron suddenly received an urgent call from the city of Song Be stating that they were under heavy attack and needed assistance. The squadron alerted "B" troop and one platoon of

"A" troop and the battle of t, an infantry company from the 1/506 was added to the squadron strength to aid in the relief of the city. "B" troop, under the command of CPT Joseph Rozelle, deployed along the road leading into the city and began to sweep North. The platoon of "A" troop and the infantry company moved on to the limits of the town where they came under heavy hostile fire. At this time gunship teams from the 101st Avn. Bn were requested and the Black Angels swung into action. This entire operation was under the command of the Squadron Commander, LTC Julius W. Pecton, who was orbiting overhead in a command and control ship throughout the entire operation. During the ensuing three day battle the NVA regiment was routed from the city of Song Be, but they left behind 243 of their dead. The squadron had again met the enemy head on and had emerged victorious. When the troops arrived at Song Be they were a new unit to combat but when they departed, a scant two months later, they were seasoned combat veterans, with the beginning of an outstanding combat record which they were to continue in the future.

As soon as the battle was ended the squadron received the movement order to return to Bien Hoa. Again the squadron loaded onto C-130's and made the short flight to Bien Hoa. The stay at Bien Hoa proved to be a very short one as plans were immediately made to send the squadron North. Their equipment was to be sent by sea and all personnel by air. The point where they would link up would be Da Nang, RVN. This linkup was accomplished on 15 March 1968 and the squadron began the trip by road to Hue/Phu Bai and Camp Eagle. They arrived on 17 March after an all day trip and linked up with the forward elements.

The squadron began to set up for operations but again their stay was a short one. On 20 March the squadron was moved to LZ Pinky, some 5 KM North of Hue and the administrative elements moved to LZ Sally with the 2nd Brigade Headquarters, another 3 KM North of LZ Pinky. LZ Pinky had been a staging area for the VC/NVA during the Tet offensive and was full of bunkers, trenches, etc. However, contact was very minimal during the squadron's stay there and after ten days they again received word to move out. This time it was to Camp Evans, located approximately 15 KM North of Hue and 15 KM South of Cuang Tri. The squadron area of operation was to be along the infamous "Street of Joy". This is the QL 1 highway which runs through the area North of Hue, bordering on the Gulf of Tonkin, which was immortalized by Bernard Falls documentary of the same name.

The squadron immediately began combat operations in this AO. The first few days proved fruitless but there were definite signs of the enemy in the area. On the 20th of April, in a little village called Cao Rang, the squadron finally found a portion of the enemy. When the battle was over the VC/NVA had left behind 33 dead and the squadron had captured 7 POW's. This was the first of several contacts in that area which the cavalrymen soon came to detest.

In the squadron AO was a vital supply link, the AM 10 bridge which spanned the Song Be river and carried the traffic of highway 1, which consisted of numerous supply convoys moving North and South along the important highway. On the evenings of the 24th and 25th of April the squadron experienced light mortar attacks and responded with artillery fire, which accounted for 12 enemy dead. On the 27th of April a large enemy force was contacted in Cao Rang, just

North of the bridge, and both "A" and "B" troops moved in to develop the contact. Again, ITC Rector was overhead directing the squadron, evacuating wounded, reconning by fire and pinpointing enemy locations for his ground troops. He was assisted by Maj Fred Crump, then squadron S-3, and there were many nights that these and the other cavalry leaders went without sleep to expedite the mission. This new contact netted the squadron 44 enemy dead and 2 POW's.

During the period 1 and 2 May, "A" and "B" troops found and destroyed 25 VC/NVA in the vicinity of Cao Pang. This was the third encounter in this area and the entire area was levelled by bull dozers and roan plows to preclude further concentrations in the bunker complexes. Thus ended the confrontations at Cao Pang.

On 5 May the squadron received an urgent call to proceed to Ia Chu, located just West of LZ Pinky. It developed into a battle that lasted all night long and when dawn came the enemy had lost 51 more men, by body count, to the airborne cavalrymen. The squadron, after this encounter, moved its base of operations to Camp Eagle and the troops moved out to the coastal plains South of Hue. The line troops set up an LZ which was to become known as LZ Forward. The squadron TOC moved to the district headquarters at Phu Thu, located just South of Hue. It was a new area of operations for all concerned and it did not take long to find out that the enemy was there too. The first contact came on 28 May near the village of Le Xa Dong, located near the bay of water which runs along the coast in this area. "A" Troop found the enemy and a cordon was quickly thrown around the area with the help of the ARVN's, a sister infantry company, some Navy PEP's and Marine tanks and AMTRACS. The results of this encounter were phenomenal as it ended with a body count of 163 VC/NVA for the entire task force. The cavalrymen were responsible for the operation and on 31 May the cordon was terminated as a very successful mission. On the 2d of June, "A" Troop, during a sweep operation, again contacted an estimated enemy battalion and another cordon was prepared. During the ensuing 12 days 107 more of the enemy fell, near the village of Vinh Phu, in the cavalrymen's cordon. These two highly successful operations, it was later found out from intelligence sources, decimated the V-4 and V-10 enemy battalions and the 803rd NVA regimental headquarters. As they had in the past, the airborne cavalrymen performed their mission to the utmost of their ability and carried out their motto of "Forward".

On the 25th of June, the cavalrymen bid farewell to their commander, ITC Rector, and welcomed the new Squadron Commander, ITC Ebert B. Clark, III, to the squadron. This proved not only to be a change of commanders, but a change of mission also. There had been many rumors about the 101st becoming an airmobile division, thereby making the squadron an air cavalry squadron with responsibilities throughout the division area of operation. In order to begin the transition the squadron, which had been utilized much as an infantry battalion during the preceding months, moved into the division base camp at Camp Eagle and prepared to receive the air cavalry troop they had so long awaited. The line troops still continued their patrolling and ambushing in the vicinity of Camp Eagle but enemy contact dropped considerably during this period. The cavalrymen had a bit job to do in preparing their area to receive this new troop and many long hours went into the preparation of it. At last on 12 July the advance

party of "D" Troop, 1st Sqdn, 1st Cav, arrived at Camp Eagle. They were followed on 24 July by the main body. On 25 July "D" troop began its in-country training with the 101st Air Assault Helicopter Battalion and remained in that status until the 14th of August. The aero-rifle platoon of "D", 1/1 began their week of in-country training at Camp Evans and upon completion began combat operations using Camp Eagle as their base of operations. During this period contact was almost nil and therefore the squadron's body count tapered off considerably and would continue to do so for the next three months. On 20 August "D" troop, terminating their in-country training, was now combat ready. From 14 August until 30 September the squadron flew 32 combat assaults, 20 snatch missions, 87 light fire team missions and 256 aero-recon missions. Even though the squadron aggressively endeavored to find the hostile forces, contact was slight and the body count for the entire period was only 58 VC/NVA. During the following month (October) the squadron flew 185 aero-recon missions, 11 snatch missions, 62 light and heavy fire team missions and 14 combat assaults with almost no contact within the squadron's area of operation. The numerous heliborne missions coupled with extensive company and platoon size operations only netted 24 VC/NVA within the division's area of operation. On October 19 the squadron received nine new Huey "Cobras" which replaced the "Charlie" models as gunships for the squadron.

Even though the squadron persisted in its efforts to find and engage the enemy the months of November and December saw only 12 minor contacts which resulted in 59 VC/NVA killed and 6 taken prisoner. However, as a result of its efforts to find the enemy, the squadron uncovered and confiscated many caches of rice and weapons. In addition, many bunkers and other sanctuaries used by the enemy were destroyed or damaged. The squadron also flew 1,193 aero-recon sorties, 52 snatch sorties, 1,168 fire team sorties and 774 combat assault sorties.

The arrival of December also brought the arrival of a new Squadron Commander. LTC William W. DeLoach relieved LTC Clark on 3 December and the squadron looks forward to greater achievements under his leadership in 1969.