

D Troop 17th U.S. Cavalry
The Shield of Deterrence
1972-1973

Unit History

On 4 May 1972, D Troop emerged from 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry to D Troop, 17th Cavalry under the operational control of the 196th Infantry Brigade. On 5 June 1972, the troop was placed under the command of the 11th Combat Aviation Group, 1st Aviation Brigade.

CPT James W. Bryant was the first Commander of D Troop, 17th Cavalry. The Executive Officer was CPT Lester W. Gray and the Operations Officer CPT Edwardo Yates.

D Troop, 17th Cavalry established its Headquarters at Marble Mountain Army Airfield and flew its first missions into Quang Nam Province. The missions were performed with the heavy Air Cavalry Team configuration which consisted of: 2 AH-1G (Cobra gunships), 1 UH-1H (command and control aircraft) and 2 OH-6A (Scout helicopters). LZ Ross and the Que Son valley received the majority of the troop's efforts. A second area of operation existed from Danang south to the Song Hoi River. This area was the most sensitive due to its large population of Vietnamese Nationals. The most important area was a 30 kilometer circumference surrounding Danang Air Force Base. The 17th Cavalry was charged with the responsibility to aid in deterring the enemy from launching attacks by fire on the Air Base with Soviet 122mm rockets and 82mm mortars. To supplement the regular Air Cavalry Teams working the "rocket belt", a "Pink Team" was utilized to aid in the search and destruction of the 515th and 577th NVA Rocket Battalions. The "Pink Team" consisted of 1 UH-1H, 1 AH-1G, and 1 OH-6A helicopters. Their aerial surveillance took place during the first two hours of daylight and the last two hours of daylight. However, since the attacks were usually launched during the hours of darkness, a means of snatching the black cloak of darkness from the enemy had to be devised. Thus the dawning of "Night Hawk", the bird of prey whose dauntless efforts have brought death and destruction to those who have dared to venture out during the night. The team consisted of 2 UH-1H helicopters. The low bird, which flew at tree top level searching like a hawk for the enemy, was armed with a 7.62 mini-gun and a ZEON searchlight. The light would probe the tree lines and the rice paddies, when the enemy was spotted the mini-gun would engage targets spewing out lead at 4,000 rounds per minute. A .50 caliber heavy machine gun and a M-60 light machine gun were also employed on the aircraft. The high bird was responsible for dispersing the Mark-II flares, which would light up the sky and destroy the enemies cover and concealment. To aid "Night Hawk" in its nightly search is a giant pterodactyl called "Stinger". Armed with four 7.62 mini-guns and two 20mm Vulcan Cannons, it presents a worthy guardian compliments of the United States Air Force.

On 15 June 1972, MAJ Robert S. Fairweather Jr. took command of D Troop. CPT Lester Gray remained the Executive Officer and the Operations Officers were as follows: from 15 June 1972 to 20 June 1972, CPT Edwardo Yates; from 20 June 1972 to 23 July 1972, CPT Thomas F. O'Hara; from 23 July 1972 to 14 August 1972, CPT Michael J. Keenan; and from 15 August 1972 to 23 December 1972, CPT Thomas C. Pugh.

During MAJ Fairweather's tenure, the area of operations was shifted to the northern portion of Military Region I. D Troop, 17th Cavalry was given the mission to aid RVN ground troops in holding the northern citadel of Hue from enemy hands and to liberate the city of Quang Tri from the North Vietnamese. D Troop supported the 4th ARVN Ranger Battalion, the 1st ARVN Marine Division, the 1st ARVN Infantry Division and the ARVN Ranger Division in Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces. The heavy Air Cavalry Teams staged out of Phu Bai, Hue, Camp Eagle, LZ Sally and Huong Dien. The Air Cavalry Teams flew within five kilometers of A Shau to the west and the Cua Viet River to the north, screening well ahead of friendly ground troops in an effort to gain valuable intelligence, as well as to inflict casualties on the enemy. During the period D Troop supported the northern area of operations, the unit flew 4,284 hours, transported 3,742 personnel, was credited with 231 enemy KBA (Kills By Air), destroyed 528 structures (to include bunkers, hootches, etc.), destroyed and damaged 93 sampans carrying enemy supplies. Regretfully, two casualties were sustained by the unit.

On 15 August 1972, while on an aerial reconnaissance 15 nautical miles north of LZ Sally, CW2 Lawrence Dean, flying an AH-1G, was mortally wounded. His co-pilot, WO1 Cunnare was medically evacuated to the United States.

On 29 August 1972, D Troop was relocated from Marble Mountain Army Airfield to Danang Air Base. Shortly thereafter, on 4 September 1972, MAJ Wilbert W. Sorenson took command of the Troop. CPT Lester Gray was the Executive Officer until 5 November 1972 when CPT Charles A. Lester became the Executive Officer. MAJ Sorenson's first step was to reorganize and consolidate the troop elements for better command and control purposes. He then set out to reorganize the Air Cavalry's area of operations and responsibilities in Military Region I. After many hours of debate with higher Headquarters, he accomplished the mission. F Troop, 4th Cavalry was responsible for the area from the Hai Van pass to Quang Tri, D Troop, 17th Cavalry was responsible for the area from the Hai Van pass to Chu Lai and F Troop, 8th Cavalry was responsible for the area from Chu Lai to Binh Dinh Province in Military Region II. D Troop supported the 3rd ARVN Division along with taking sole responsibility of the "rocket belt". To aid D Troop in its mission the Ant-Tank Platoon, which was attached to D Troop in August 1972, was now augmenting D Troop's Cavalry Teams. Prior to this date, they augmented 48th Assault Helicopter Company staging out of Marble Mountain. Armed with the SS-11 wire-guided missile, the UH-1M gun ships were an asset to the Air Cavalry Team. They destroyed bunkers and vehicles, which could not be penetrated by AH-1G fire.

MAJ Sorenson introduced two significant changes in the tactical employment of our air assets. The first and last light teams were changed from the standard "Pink Team" to the

"White Team", which consisted of 2 OH-6A Scouts. He also dropped the UH-1H aircraft from the heavy cavalry team and replaced it with an OH-6A, keeping in step with the "Economy of Force" precept.

D Troop substantially aided in the recovery of Tien Phuoc from enemy hands. Supporting the 3rd ARVN Division in their drive to defeat the North Vietnamese forces in that area, 17th Cavalrymen flew combat assaults, aerial rocket artillery, as well as reconnaissance in force missions. On 7 October 1972, the troop directly supported RFPF forces in Quang Nam Province for the first time. Inserting ground troops 8 nautical miles south of Hoi An, the troop was responsible for 8 enemy KBA, 3 crew serve weapons captured and 32 civilian abductees freed.

On 24 October 1972, F Troop, 8th Cavalry was redeployed to Saigon. D Troop's area of operation increased considerably. One hundred and eleven kilometers running from north to south and approximately eighty kilometers wide. This presented a tremendous area to cover, therefore exposing the troop to additional enemy contacts. On 26 October 1972, while on low level reconnaissance north of Quang Ngai, 1LT Dexter Florence and SGT Keven Goodno were brought down by a command detonated mine. Both men were killed. On 5 November 1972, WO1 Joseph DeNardo and SGT Steven Taylor were killed by a treetop claymore mine, which was command detonated. On that same day, several miles south of Danang, CW2 William Miller gave his life while flying as a gunner in an AH-1G Cobra. These men gave the ultimate sacrifice to man and country.

From May 1972 to November 1972, D Troop, 17th Cavalry has flown 8,200 hours in support of combat operations, 13,988 sorties, transported 7,638 personnel, been credited with 357 KBAs, 1,367 structures damaged or destroyed and 203 sampans destroyed. Each and every mission was accomplished in a professional manner, regardless of the high risk involved. This is keeping with the highest tradition of both the United States Army and cavalrymen everywhere.

END

(Unit stood down February 1973.)