

**173d
AIRBORNE
BRIGADE
THE FIFTH YEAR
MAR. 1969-FEB. 1970**

TACTICAL OPERATIONS



E TROOP, 17th CAVALRY

The 17th Cavalry originated at Fort Bliss, Texas in 1916, as a horse cavalry regiment armed with sabres, pistols and carbines. It did not see combat in either World War, however. In 1951, the Headquarters Troop was combined with the 17th Armored Group and redesignated as Headquarters Troop, 17th Armored Cavalry Group. The 17th Armored group had fought with distinction during World War II in northern France and Central Europe.

The remaining troops of the regiment were disbanded when Headquarters troops was combined, but E Troop was reconstituted in May of 1959. It joined the 173d Airborne Brigade on Okinawa in 1963, as the only separate airborne cavalry troop in the Army.

The troop originally used jeeps mounted with .50 cal. machine guns and 106 mm recoilless rifles. In late October, 1969, the troop acquired the tracks and men of the 173d Provisional Tank Co (originally Company D, 16th Armor) when that unit was deactivated. The 173d Provisional Tank Company fought in such operations as Junction City, Sioux City, and Operation



MacArthur. At Tuy Hoa North the tankers killed 137 NVA during a day long battle in March, 1968.

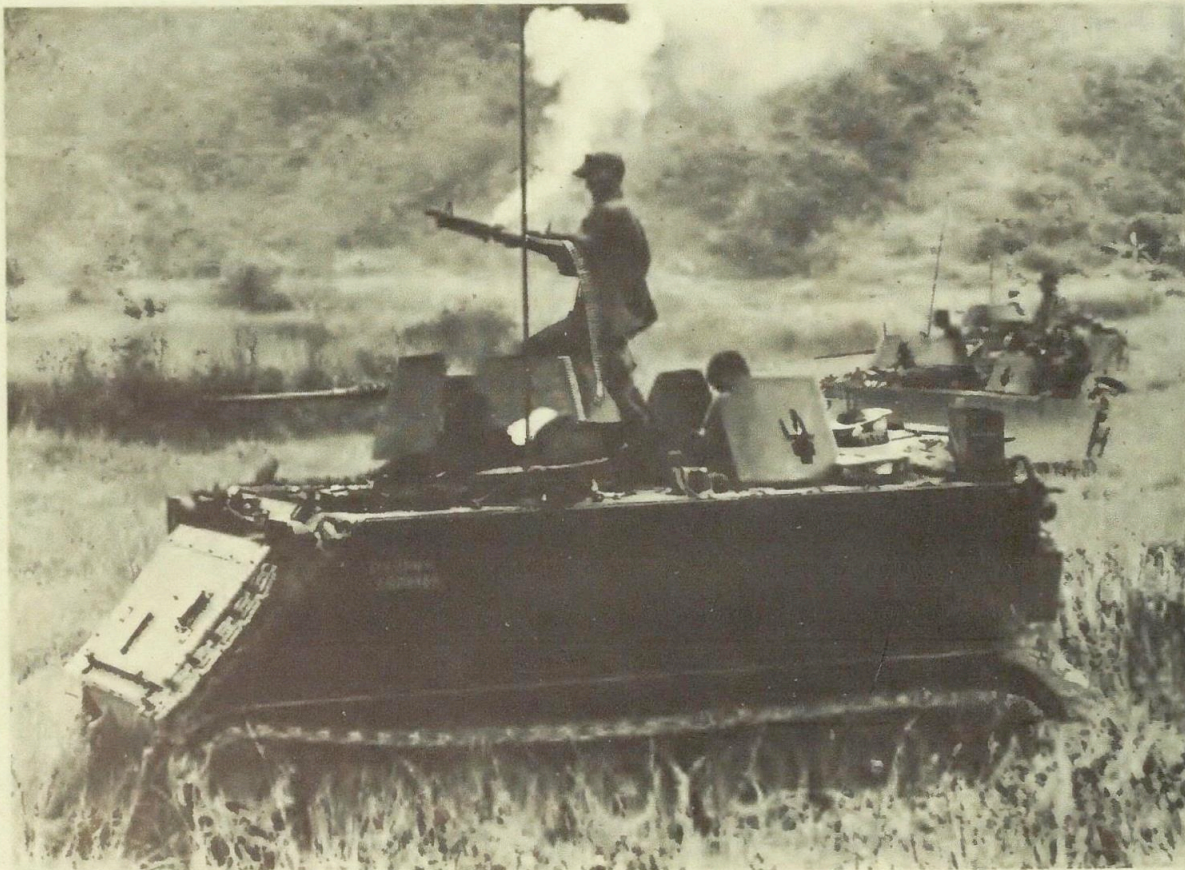
The 17th Cavalry plays an important role in the brigade's pacification program.

Besides securing Highways 3-A and QL-1, the Cav. troopers train villagers of the Hoai An District in keeping hamlet security. Explaining various tactics and ambush procedures, they also instruct the villagers' self-defense groups in the use of various weapons.

When the Cav. is attached to another unit in the brigade, its mobility and firepower helps it serve as a security, blocking or reconnaissance and surveillance force. Operating separately, the troop runs road-clearing operations, escorts convoys and conducts mounted and dismounted reconnaissance missions.

The troop is also used extensively as the brigade's reactionary force. Capable of heliborne assaults, the unit occasionally conducts missions as a separate infantry force for reconnaissance-in-force, raid, or ambush.

Living up to their motto, "Ahead of the Best," E Troop has spearheaded new operations and preceded the brigade to new areas of operation. The troop was awarded the Valorous Unit Citation for actions during Operation Cedar Falls in January, 1967.



Brigadier General H.S. Cunningham, a former assistant division commander of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam, assumed command of the 173d on August 9. The 49-year-old former Screaming Eagle arrived when significant changes were beginning to occur in the enemy situation, tactical application of the pacification concept, and brigade organization. But one fact did not change: The brigade remained committed to pacification.

In early September, the 3d of the 503d Infantry rejoined the brigade from Task Force South, and the 1st of the 50th Infantry left the brigade and joined Task Force South at Phan Thiet. Initially, the 3/503d took over the 1/50th's pacification mission in Phu My District. Later, the battalion was freed for combat operations in the Crow's Foot area in the southwestern corner of the AO.

By late summer the enemy had begun making moves from the mountains to the west indicating he might try to disrupt pacification in the lowland hamlets and try

to regain his support. In response to a growing enemy threat, the 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry from the 4th Division came under the brigade's operational control late in September for operations in the An Lao Valley. In October, the rest of the 4th Division's 2d Brigade joined the 1/12th.

On the last day of October, the 173d Provisional Tank Company was deactivated. As the only airborne armor unit in the U.S. Army, the company had also been known as Company D, 16th Armor and the Tuy Hoa Provisional Tank Company, while compiling a distinguished combat record with the brigade.

E Troop, 17th Cavalry salvaged its gun jeeps, nicknamed after television's Rat Patrol, and took over the tank company's armored personnel carriers. In addition, the Cav received new Sheridan Airborne Armored Assault Vehicles.

In December, the 101st Division's 3d Battalion, 506th Infantry joined the 173d to help prevent an enemy buildup in the Crow's Foot area from disrupting the pacifi-

cation work of the rest of the brigade in the populated areas.

Brigade and Vietnamese forces made progress together, at first moving quickly, then during the late summer and early fall, slowing down. 173d engineers continued work improving the roads and bridges in the AO. Highway 3A was extended, linking Hoai Nhon's coastal fishing communities with inland agricultural hamlets. The 2d Battalion helped bring Lo Dieu hamlet, on an isolated stretch of beach with the Tiger Mountains towering above the hamlet on three other sides, under government control. The tranquil Lo Dieu beach became a one-day R & R site for weary paratroopers.

Deserted An Quang hamlet near the coast in Phu My became a thriving community of more than 157 families in October when the 3/503d Infantry and local Vietnamese forces provided security and helped villagers move back to their homes from temporary dwellings on beach sand dunes. Constant fighting between VC and Allied forces had driven An Quang residents to



the open beach.

Prosperous Phu Thu fishing hamlet represented another government gain in the pacification program. The VC wanted the hamlet because it was located near the base of the Tiger Mountains with easy access to mountain hideouts. An integrated Vietnamese-paratrooper security element moved into Phu Thu to stay in October. By the end of the year, hamlet residents were cooperating with the security force against the VC. Before the Allied team entered the hamlet, helicopters flying over it were often shot at.

The pacification mission had produced new problems for an airborne unit that had been used to fighting in dense jungles, rugged mountains and mired rice paddies, constantly on the move, constantly bone weary. First, the paratroopers got bored. Platoons and companies remained in fixed locations for weeks. The job of training local forces and patrolling the same ground day after day soon became monotonous. Second, they had to fight complacency bred by monotonous routine to prevent the enemy from gaining offensive initiative.

In one way though, what seemed as monotonous routine often worked to an advantage. Because the combined security forces remained in or near the hamlets for extended periods, the people came to know and trust the soldiers. Cooperation and rapport soon developed between soldiers and villagers. The VC, who once controlled the hamlets by extortion and terror, found themselves on the outside.

But there were setbacks too. VC assassi-

nation and kidnap teams sometimes evaded the security net and killed or captured key local officials or committed other acts of terrorism. Paratroopers and Vietnamese soldiers found booby traps and mines the painful, deadly way, even after pacification progress in the hamlets. The Viet Cong infrastructure suffered, but it wasn't completely destroyed in 1969. Although brigade troops weren't preoccupied with chasing and killing the enemy, they still engaged VC and NVA troops in small unit combat, suffering casualties as well as inflicting them.

In December, General Cunningham observed, "Enemy attention to our activities is itself a strong indication of our success. Eight months ago the VC and NVA operated primarily with their logistics elements, drawing subsistence for their forces. The enemy was not concerned with sustaining a large military effort in this area because he had effective control of the rice production."

"Only a fraction of the 2d VC Regiment and the 18th NVA Regiment was active in the area. Since that time his attention to our activities has grown in direct proportion to our success."

The commanding general explained that 22d NVA Regiment began operating in the An Lao Valley, threatening pacification efforts in Hoai Nhon and Tam Quan districts. Local guerrillas continued to operate in the populated areas, but RF, PF and brigade security forces have reduced the local enemy's effectiveness.

"Our intelligence indicates that the

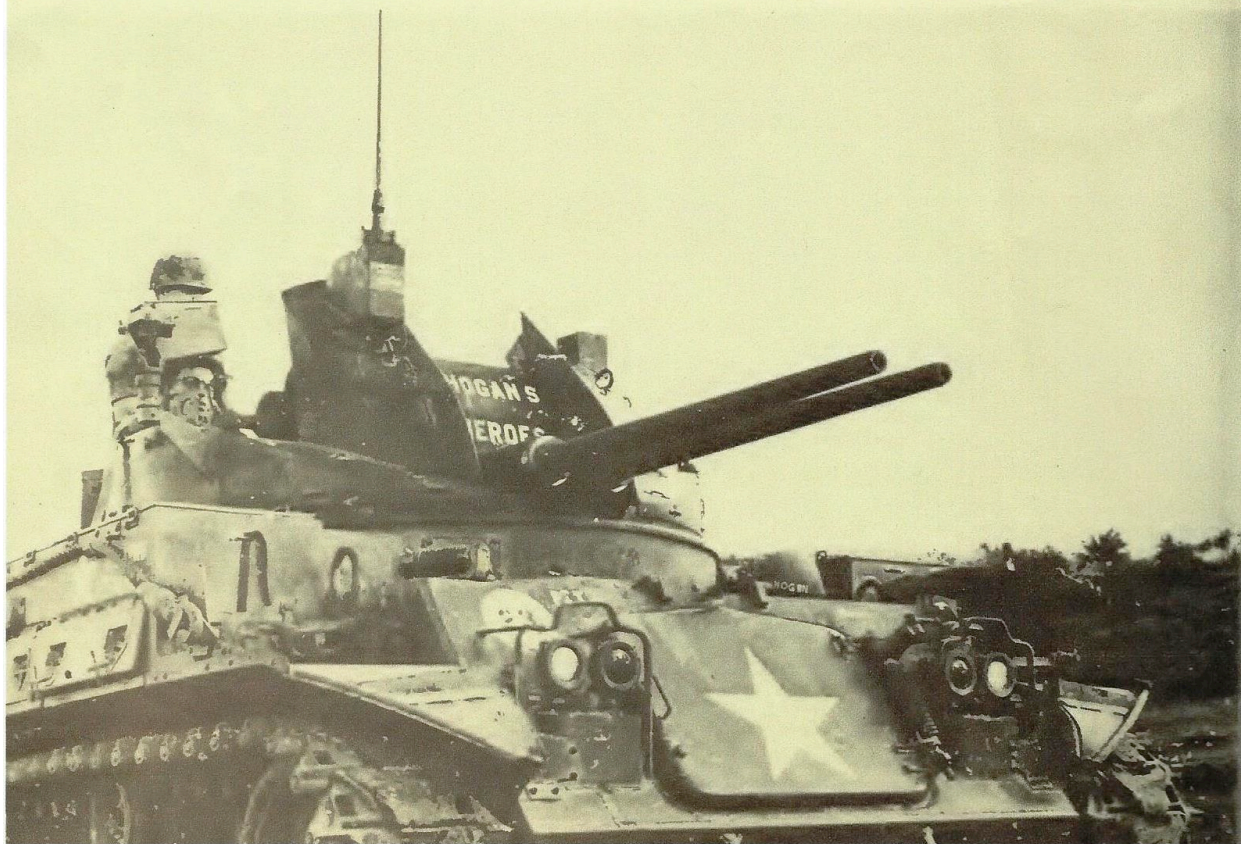
VC-NVA continue to build up their forces and are doing their utmost to mount significant operations against us," continued Cunningham. "We are effectively denying the enemy the support he needs to wage offensive operations."

A marked increase in communist activity occurred in November as VC and NVA harassed or probed brigade defenses. During early morning attacks November 3 on artillery Fire Support Bases Mahoney and Stinger, 3d Battalion, 319th Artillerymen and 4/503d Infantrymen killed 30 enemy and captured numerous weapons and equipment. Sappers hit Mahoney just after midnight, and an hour and a half later Fire Base Stinger, about seven miles southwest of Mahoney, was probed.

On November 8, helicopter pilots of C Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry, attached to the brigade, spotted four Vietnamese flee into a cave south of Bong Son. The Cav's aero rifle platoon and a platoon from the 3/503d's Company B were inserted in the area and found a sizeable cache of weapons, ammunition and food. Further search yielded 30 VC suspects, 27 of whom were later classified as VC. Two armed VC were engaged outside the cave complex; one was killed and his AK-47 rifle captured.

A few days after that engagement, one of the 27 VC captives led a platoon of the 3d Battalion's Company D to another large weapons cache.

On November 11, enemy gunners shelled the brigade headquarters camp at LZ English with 40 rounds of mortar and



recoilless rifle fire, the most significant attack on that camp in months.

Early November 19th alert paratroopers of Company A, 4/503d Infantry killed or captured all of an enemy force that attacked their company command post near An Qui hamlet. The company suffered no casualties as it killed 10 NVA and captured another

during the brief attack that came at 3:30 a.m. The captured sapper confirmed that the attacking force numbered 11 men.

Company commander, Captain Richard F. Timmons, McLean, Virginia, attributed his company's success to the alertness of roving guards within the company perimeter. "They reacted immediately and

decisively to the attack."

During a last-light reconnaissance on the final day of November, the brigade's aviation platoon killed nine of an estimated enemy platoon hiding in tunnels two miles west of LZ English.

Christmas saw 3/503d paratroopers conducting search and clear missions in the



Crow's Foot area with 3/503th Screaming Eagles. Other brigade elements continued pacification during December. In January, the 4th Division's 2d Brigade left the An Lao Valley, returning to division headquarters for redeployment. The 3/503d and the 3/503th moved north into the An Lao to take up the slack.

At the beginning of 1970, pacification continued to make progress in the four districts of northern Binh Dinh Province. Dispensaries and schools were opening and increasing numbers of people were using these facilities. Brigade engineers continued work on roads and bridges. The 173d Military Police opened a combined station in Bong Son with Vietnamese MP's. The 1st Battalion was operating in Phu My District; the 2d Battalion in Hoai Nhon district; the 4th Battalion in Tam Quan district; and the 3d Battalion was conducting operations in the An Lao Valley with the 3/506th.

