As the cold Korean winter began to set in the Cavalrymen remained in the Pyongyang area while the front swept forward. During this lull they refitted and mopped up the remaining pockets of resistance. On October 28, however, an I Corps order ordered them forward again. By November 1 the 5th and 8th Cavalry were in position around the town of Unsan, on the Kuryong River.

That night a probing attack was launched with sudden force against elements of the 8th Cavalry. Hardly had this been beaten back when the main Red Chinese offensive, carefully prepared and backed by inexhaustible manpower reserves, began in a barrage of rockets and mortar shells.

Blowing bugles, hoards of Red soldiers appeared out of the night, climbing over piles of their own dead. The 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, was surrounded and only a few Cavalrymen were able to escape from the pocket. Other units retreated to avoid the same fate. The division took up a temporary defense line to the south along the Chongchon River.

On November 22, after the expected Chinese follow-up attack failed to materialize, the 1st Cav went into Eighth Army reserve. On the 26th its units were moved to the Taedong River, and renewed contact began on the 28th. The II ROK Corps, hit hard, was forced to withdraw, and the Cav moved to plug the gap. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, defeated an estimated reinforced regiment after crossing the river.

During the month of December, four planned withdrawals were carried out. While supplies and reinforcements were massed in the rear, a fluid, yielding United Nations line screened major movements, inflicted casualties, and prevented an actual breakthrough. Space was traded for time. The 1st Cav crossed the 38th Parallel on December 11 and 12, and began to construct a defense in depth along the Han River in the vicinity of Seoul.

One New Year's Eve the forward units at the 38th Parallel were hit by the Chinese juggernaut. Crossing the frozen Imjin and ignoring fearsome losses, the Communist troops clawed fanatically through minefields and barbed wire. The United Nations forces fell back to their second line of defense on the Han, abandoning Seoul. The city was evacuated on January 3, and more than a million refugees began the freezing
trek south. The enemy drive began to lose momentum when it crossed the Han. After the fall of Seoul a lull fell over the front in January 1951.

Eighth Army, wondering what the enemy's intentions were, began probing northward in late January. The 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, rebounding from its losses at Unsan, was included in Task Force Johnson, which conducted a reconnaissance on January 22 and encountered few Communist soldiers. The entire division was ordered to probe northward through the snow toward the Han, reaching a series of phase lines; for two weeks gains were slow but steady.

On February 14 the 7th Cavalry seized Hill 578 in spite of heavy resistance. Phase line objectives had been reached. The division prepared to go back in reserve, but at that moment the long-delayed Red blow fell on X Corps, surrounding the 23rd Infantry Regiment and an attached French battalion at Chipyong-ni. The 5th Cavalry organized Task Force Crombez, painting its tanks like tigers to give the rescue dash maximum psychological effect.

The 1st Cav then took up positions north of Chipyong-ni, moving through a snowstorm on February 18 and occupying Line Yellow. It was assigned line-objective attacks in support of an offensive by two Corps: X circling west and IX east in a double envelopment. However, torrential rains and floods in late February blunted the thrust. At this point Major General Charles D. Palmer took command of the FIRST TEAM.

On March 14 the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, crossed the Hangchon River under fire. Enemy resistance had begun to melt away, and north of the Hangchon the tracks and boots of the Cavallrymen crossed one target line after another. Seoul fell in the middle of March. The Communists pulled their lines back across the whole front, abandoning the plains and trying to reorganize in the mountains.

The offensive began on April 22. The 1st Cav troopers, who had taken a well-deserved rest in the I Corps reserve, halted the threat by committing the 5th Cavalry Regimental combat team in support of the 6th ROK Division.

During the first half of the month the Reds slackened their pressure; licking their wounds, they prepared for a "Fifth Phase" offensive which was initiated on May 18 and 19. It smashed head-on into prepared defenses, multiple gun emplacements, and a seemingly inexhaustible barrier of lead. Brute numbers could not prevail against that kind of firepower. The assaulting masses were thrown into confusion and routed; troopers pursued them down the steep mountainsides.

On the 19th the division, without pausing, swung into the attack and advanced to Line Topeka, six miles ahead. On the 25th a three-day drive was begun to Line Kansas, seizing commanding ground from which the Allies could overlook the lowlands of central Korea. By the 28th, the 1st Cav first harassed the railway network of the "Iron Triangle" formed by the cities of Chorwon, Kumwha and Pyongyang, and then advanced nine miles to Line Wyoming. The successful defense of Seoul had demonstrated the value of a prepared defense line.

On July 18, one year after the 1st Cavalry Division entered the war at Pohang-dong, it assumed a reserve status.

On the nights of September 21-22, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 7th Cavalry were attacked by waves of Communist soldiers who were driven back only after hand-to-hand fighting. But this was just a warmup for the kind of effort that would be required by the 1st Cav during Operation Commando, part of a general Eighth Army offensive designed to drive the Chinese from their well-prepared winter line of defense. The division was given the task of rooting almost an entire Chinese Army from elaborate trench lines, caves and reinforced bunkers carved into steep hills.

The Chinese defensive line was redesignated Line Jamestown. On October 3 the division moved out from Line Wyoming. Immediately it came under fire, and for the first two days hardly any progress was registered. When a hill was taken counterattacks often recaptured it. Nonetheless, by the third day the enemy line in front of the 7th Cavalry showed signs of cracking. On October 5 the 8th Cavalry took Hill 418, one of the
flanking hill masses upon which the line was anchored. The Chinese flank began to be rolled up from north to south.

The southern portion of the line proved a tougher nut to crack. B-26 bombers dropped their heaviest ordnance upon the bunkers and tunnels. This did not prevent the enemy from counterattacking against the 7th Cavalry on October 10 and 11, but it did lead to the capture of Hill 272, the central pivot of the line, by the 8th Cavalry on October 13.

Gradually the night raids diminished in strength. Indeed, the Cavalrymen who had stormed "Old Baldy," a sheer hill mass in Line Jamestown, had seen the 1st Cavalry Division's last major combat in Korea. Artillery harassed the Reds as they tried to build a new line, but most of the sector was quiet as reconnaissance parties from the 3rd Infantry Division visited the area to prepare for a change-over. On December 16 the division was relieved.

The battle-hardened troopers took over the defense of Hokkaido, Japan, after adding another chapter to an illustrious combat record that saw its beginning with the sabre-swinging horse soldiers of the Indian Wars. Six members of the division had received the nation's highest award for heroism, the Medal of Honor.

By late January 1952 all units of the 1st Cavalry had arrived at Hokkaido, and after settling into its new quarters the division began a program of winter training. The climate and terrain of Hokkaido were ideally suited to instruction in Arctic survival techniques.

In war the business of an army is combat, and in time of peace its business and duty is preparedness. So it was that the 1st Cavalry Division spent the years between winter 1952 and summer 1957 in almost constant training with a series of regimental and division size maneuvers. Despite the work of new training and review, the years were a well deserved rest from the hard grind of the Korean War.

Commanding the division, from June 1953 through April 1959, were MG Armistead D. Mead, BG Orlando Troxel, MG Edward J. McGaw, MG Edwin H. J. Carns, MG Ralph W. Zwicker, MG George E. Bush and MG Charles E. Beauchamp.

On August 20, 1957, the division was reduced to zero strength and transferred

The Cav, as the northernmost unit in Korea after the end of hostilities, maintained diligent watch over the Korean DMZ, known as the Frontier of Freedom.

minus equipment to Korea where, on September 23, the 24th Infantry Division was redesignated the 1st Cavalry Division. Assuming a defensive posture along the Demilitarized Zone—known as "Freedom's Frontier"—the 1st Cavalry remained poised to counter any aggressive moves by Communist forces. Between 1957 and the beginning of the Vietnam War, the 1st Cavalry Division was the only division in the Army which faced an armed and ready enemy.

The years at Hokkaido and the subsequent return to duty in familiar Korea were not years of war and trial for the division, but they were years of learning and cautious defense.

The year 1965 would mark the beginning of another long chapter of war for the division, a yet unfinished chapter in Vietnam that would reflect Douglas MacArthur's tribute to the 1st Cavalry following the Pacific Campaign of World War II:

"No greater record has emerged from the war than that of the 1st Cavalry Division—swift and sure in attack, tenacious and durable in defense, and loyal and cheerful under hardship. It has written its own noble history."
AIRMOBILE ANTECEDEENTS

"...freed forever from the tyranny of terrain."

The 1st Air Cavalry Division possesses a uniqueness among Regular Army Divisions—apart from some rather obvious differences—with a duality of antecedents. Woven into the rich fabric of traditional Cavalry history is the bright and bold thread of the airmobile concept.

Thus it is that while the 1st Cavalry Division’s historical background can be traced in a conventional manner, the background of the airmobile portion of the division title relates directly to another division, the organizational parent of the 1st Air Cav—the 11th Air Assault Division. Intellectual parentage of the Air Cav, is, however, considerably more difficult to pin down.

The origins of dreams of airmobile operations are obscured in the past. The pre-history of air assault certainly must take cognizance of pre-World War I thinkers who suggested that military aviation was properly a function of the cavalry arm. Instead it grew up through the Signal Corps, became a separate combat arm and eventually an independent service. Note too must be taken of the innovative ideas of air pioneers like Colonel Billy Mitchell, who actually began detailed planning in late 1918 for an infantry division combat parachute assault behind German positions.

More recent pre-history involved the visions and thinking of officers who came out of World War II convinced that something had to be done to overcome the weight of firepower and the dependence of mechanized armies on ponderous, ground-bound trains. In the latter days of the Korean conflict the helicopter became ubiquitous. There were tentative and primitive tests of sky cavalry and aerial artillery concepts in the years immediately following the Korean War.

By the 1960’s the drive and enthusiasm of countless officers, some of them rated pilots but more who were not, began to exert an influence on Army thinking. Much of the thinking was crystallized in the writings of Generals James M. Gavin and Hamilton H. Howze. In a few hectic and hard-working months the “Howze board” established the rationale and requirements for an air assault division.

In late 1962 Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara ordered the Army to conduct a series of field tests to seek out the advantages and limitations of the air mobility concept. On January 8, 1963, Brigadier General Harry W. O. Kinnard, the assistant division commander of the 101st Airborne Division, walked out of the office of the chief of staff of the U.S. Army, General Earl K. Wheeler. His head was buzzing with ideas. He had just been told to create an air assault division and test it to “see how far the Army can go—and ought to go—with the airmobile concept.”

The stage was set for the beginning of recorded airmobile history. And the one main thread holding the pattern together for the first 38 months was the dynamic and inspired leadership of one man. This part of the airmobile story is also the story of this man, Harry William Osborne Kinnard. Never before had one man been able to fashion an operational reality from a vision and a dream and then command it in combat. Not even in the heyday of the birth and development of the airborne divisions of World War II did one individual accomplish a similar feat. The men who dreamed the dreams of airborne assault tactics did not get to test them in combat as division commanders.

The vehicle chosen for the air mobility test was the 11th Airborne Division. It was recalled to active duty February 15, 1963, and redesignated as the 11th Air Assault Division (Test). MG Kinnard was the first Skysoldier on the division’s rolls. His chief of staff, Colonel E. B.
The division’s beginnings were humble and the first units were small. Men and equipment were levied from all over the active Army to start a single battalion at first. That battalion was the 3rd Battalion of the 187th Infantry, and it was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Hennessey, the man who had commanded the battle group that had worked with the Howze Board at Fort Bragg.

Aircraft and pilots came from Fort Bragg and Fort Lewis. The aviation battalion of the 4th Division provided enough aircraft and pilots to form A and B Companies of the 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion, the fledgling division’s first lift battalion.

Preceded by individual and small unit training and by two division-controlled problems named EAGLE STRIKE and EAGLE CLAW, the division took to the field for its first test, AIR ASSAULT I. This took place in the vicinity of Fort Stewart, Ga., during late September and early October of 1963 and involved almost 4,000 Sky Soldiers and about 175 aircraft.

While AIR ASSAULT I was in progress, the division continued its buildup to a brigade-size force. Two infantry battalions, the 1st of the 188th and the 1st of the 511th, were added along with a corresponding increase in combat support and combat service support units. On October 1, 1963, the 187th Infantry, Company A of the 127th Engineers and Battery B of the 6th Battalion, 81st Artillery, were officially designated as airborne units, thereby giving the air assault division a limited airborne capability.

Very early in the game MG Kinnard realized that these initial moves were but a step in the right direction. Recognizing the need for fresh, new ideas, he established the Division Idea Center in January 1964, thereby creating an intellectual climate in the division that was receptive to bold thoughts and startling techniques. Of these innovations, unusual as they may have seemed then, many are now accepted, combat-tried methods and techniques in the Air Cav Division.

The Grover E. Bell Award, given annually for research and experimentation in the field of helicopter development, was awarded to the 11th Air Assault Division on January 21, 1964. At the Honors Banquet of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the 11th Air Assault Division was cited for its pioneering work in application of the rapid mobility and firepower provided by the helicopter to extend the Army’s ground combat capabilities.

The tests went on. There was HAWK ASSAULT I, followed by HAWK ASSAULT II, and then HAWK STAR I. All were observed closely by hundreds of distinguished military and civilian visitors. The frequency of the visits and the intense scrutiny to which the division was subjected led MG Kinnard to quip: “Never have so few been observed so often by so many.”

On July 2, 1964, three infantry battalions, two artillery battalions and a brigade headquarters from the 2nd Infantry Division were formally attached to the 11th Air Assault Division—the wedding of two fine units which was, one year later, to produce a strapping offspring known as the airmobile division.

Through this testing period, the division, brigade and battalion staffs pitched into write tactics and techniques handbooks and SOPs. It was an exhilarating feeling in those days to know that a new textbook was being written and each individual had a part in the writing.

Ideas were tested, accepted, revised or rejected. With each innovation often came changes in organizational structure. One of the crucial aspects of the airmobile concept was that it had to be more than merely providing infantry troops with helicopters for simple lifts to and from a combat area. Ground personnel began thinking in terms of air vehicles; commanders and staff substituted space and distance measurements with time intervals. Aviators became familiar with problems faced daily by ground troops. New concepts in supply and evacuation were developed; techniques in communications and control of widely dispersed units were perfected.

One of the innovations was in the marking of aircraft. It was felt by division thinkers that if aircraft could be readily identifiable by ground troops, it would not only speed up combined operations, but develop a closeness and rapport otherwise unobtainable. So markings for each air unit were devised, and these markings, by and large, still exist today in the 1st Air Cav. The familiar box, triangle and circle originated during this period. Markings were carried on to even a more finite degree. Platoons within lift companies were given color codes and each aircraft in the platoon was assigned numbers. These colors and numbers were proclaimed by a color plate affixed to both sides of the aircraft.

An air assault infantryman, watching a bird come in with a blue colored circle and with a white color plate...
bearing the numeral one, would know immediately that this was the lead aircraft (probably the platoon leader) of the second platoon of Charlie Company, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion.

Lift units developed personalities and ground troops identified with aviation elements. A key factor in developing air assault espirit was the Air Assault Badge. Worn by all members of the division who met certain prerequisites, the badge symbolized the excitement of the bold experiment.

For the 2nd Division soldiers joining the air assault ranks for the first time, the badge was a source of amusement—at first—then as the Indianhead troops became involved in the training intrac-

A sergeant involved in test exercise SKY SOLDIER I in 1965 loads a 2.75 inch rocket into the weapons system mounted on an earlier model Huey, the UH-1B.

The 11th, even with the augmentation from the 2nd Division, still had only six maneuver battalions that operated for the most part under the 1st and 2nd Brigades, although the 3rd Brigade, working with a planning headquarters staff but no troops, was allocated two maneuver battalions for an operation late in the exercise.

By November 15, the tests were over and the division had returned to Fort Benning to await results of the tests. Umpires, test directors and commanders put in long hours threshing the results about and came up with some solid conclusions about the airmobile division. The tests showed conclusively that the division's elements could seek out an enemy over a very wide area, find him, and then rapidly bring together the necessary firepower and troops to destroy him. In a low intensity war, the division would be ideally suited for controlling large sectors; in a high intensity war, it could serve superbly as a screening force or as a mobile reserve.

It was one of the paradoxes of this development of airmobility that the main thrust of the tests was within the parameters of a medium or high intensity combat environment and not in a counterinsurgency situation. The division's early TOE reflected this thinking. For example, at one time the division artillery boasted a Little John rocket battalion in addition to three 105 mm artillery battalions and an aerial rocket artillery battalion.

The organization of the lift units was influenced by the need to maintain tac-

(Continued on P. 259)
The birth of the 1st Air Cavalry Division (above) was also the end of the 11th Air Assault Division (left). The "changing of the colors" ceremony took place at Fort Benning's Doughboy Stadium on July 3, 1965. As the colors of the 11th Air Assault Division (left) were cased, inactivating the division, the colors of the 1st Cavalry were brought onto the field. The "airmobile concept" had become reality. Major General Harry W. O. Kinnard, first commanding general of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, troops the line of review (below) during the ceremony at Fort Benning upon his departure for Vietnam.
THE FIRST AIR CAVALRY DIVISION IN VIETNAM

Somewhere in the annals of military organizations there may have been outfits activated, organized and moved 12,000 miles to combat all within the space of 90 days, but none comes immediately to mind.

That the 1st Cavalry Division (Air-mobile) successfully did just that, not only is a remarkable achievement, but a tribute to men of the division who devoted an unbelievable amount of time and effort to accomplish their missions.

The story began on June 16th, 1965, when the secretary of defense announced to the nation that the Department of Army had been granted authority to organize an airmobile division at Fort Benning. At the same news conference, he made the sobering declaration that the division would be "combat-ready" in eight weeks.

He also named Major General Harry W. O. Kinnard to command the division. It was an obvious choice. MG Kinnard had, of course, commanded the 11th Air Assault Division, the bulk of whose assets would go into the 1st Air Cavalry Division structure.

Subsequent orders to the division gave it less time than eight weeks. Concurrent with reorganization from resources of the 11th and the 2nd Infantry Division it was told on July 1 to achieve REDCON-1—Readiness Condition of highest combat priority—by July 28. The problems involved seemed insurmountable. As of reorganization date, the division was short substantial numbers of officers, warrant officers and enlisted men. Other complication factors included a major increase in the number of airborne spaces (the entire 1st Brigade was to be airborne qualified) and the high number of division members who were nondeployable under announced criteria. Because of the sensitivity of the mission, guidance concerning criteria for deployment was sketchy.

Another herculean task was the requirement to locate nearly 7,500 families of division members. Advance planning was, of course, done in secret, but in the final stages, the job was accomplished by the Infantry Center's Army Community Service Agency, working in conjunction with the division's own family assistance groups.

During the early days of July, despite the obviousness of preparations, there had been no official word from Washington. There were rumors, of course, but most in the division simply did not believe it really ready for deployment to combat. In fact, there was the story told of a captain who had been waiting for nearly a year for on-post housing to open up. Early in July, when an apartment came open, he assured his family that the division would not possibly be delayed before fall and moved from comfortable off-post housing. Needless to say, he moved again—in four weeks.

The official word came on the date the division was to achieve REDCON-1, July 28. President Lyndon B. Johnson, in a nation-wide address, told the world, "I am today ordering the airmobile division to Vietnam."

Stepping foot on foreign soil (below) created a mixture of emotions. For some there was exhilaration, for others uncertainty, or maybe fear. But those landing knew one thing. The trek across the ocean was behind them. As the Cav patches walked onto solid ground, there was relief. And there was an evident confidence. The "Cav" had come to fight.
MG Kinnard told newsmen who swarmed to the division’s Harmony Church headquarters following the announcement: “I have no misgivings whatever about the ability of this division to perform superbly in Vietnam in any way that may be required. I believe we will make the Army and the country proud of us.”

Now that the cat was out of the bag, work began in earnest. While POR/POM processing was handled at a central location using the county-fair system of stations to handle 850 persons daily in the big field house at Harmony Church, the vast training requirement for the entire division was accomplished by means of centralized direction and decentralized execution.

The major training task was to qualify the entire division on the M16E1 rifle which replaced the M14 as the main individual arm. In addition to the general infantry training, the division, because of its peculiar composition, had to conduct or arrange for certain specialized training. The Airborne School at Fort Benning conducted a special 10-day intensified airborne qualification course which graduated 659 new paratroopers. The Aviation School at Fort Rucker, Alabama, conducted two special classes—a UH-1 transition class for 89 aviators and a UH-1 aerial weapons firing course for 120.

Operational planning was conducted apart from normal division functions, and ultimately five operational plans were developed. The division was fortunate in this area in that, since January, its G-2 and G-3 sections had been war-gaming with studies based on the very area of Vietnam into which it was scheduled to be deployed. This six-month lead time permitted an orderly buildup of intelligence files, preparation of Order of Battle studies and compilation of weather, enemy and terrain information.

Decisions were made daily that were to have long-reaching effects on both the division and the Army. Most were in the fields of tactics and doctrine, but some were not. The men of the division, accustomed to the requirements of garrison life, sported blazing yellow Cav patches and white name tapes. Under shorts, T-shirts and handkerchiefs were position-revealing white. Many of the fatigue uniforms were faded to a near grey. No jungle fatigues were available for issue; the division would deploy with what it had on its back. So a decision was made to dye all fatigues and white underclothing. The color chosen was a dark green. Much of the burden was assumed by the quartermaster laundry at Benning, but many Skystroopers found it convenient to buy the dye and do it themselves...at home or in laundromats.

Every packet of green and black dye in Georgia was snapped up. The sewage effluent at Columbus, Ga., and Phenix City, Ala., was said to have turned green and stayed that way for weeks. But the division’s uniforms toned down. White name tapes were further dulled by magic marker pens. The yellow patches turned into a green and black patch. And from this color combination was born a further idea: the manufacture of OD and black patches and rank and branch insignia. MG Kinnard ordered some special patches made by a Japanese firm and after the 1st Cav arrived in Vietnam, the trend swept the division like wildfire. Of course, it eventually spread to other units in Vietnam, and, ultimately, the entire Army.

Late in July the division began to curtail training to pack its equipment and supplies. General cargo and aircraft departed from eastern and gulf coast ports in late July and early August, and equipment that was to accompany troops left Benning about one week prior to the movement of the troops.

At the end of these hurried weeks commanders tried to give every man a few days leave before actual departure; a few days to spend with their families before the long, hard year ahead. For the troopers and families both, leave provided a tremendous morale boost before the men were to leave their country, their loved ones, their families, for at least a year—and for some of them, forever.

Movement of personnel was accomplished in three increments. An advance liaison planning detachment of 32 key officers and men, led by Brigadier General John S. Wright, the assistant division commander, departed on August 2 by commercial air. An advance party of 1,030 officers and men and 152 tons of cargo was deployed by the Military Airlift Command from Robbins Air Force Base during a six-day period beginning August 14th. The advance party landed at Cam Ranh Bay and then flew to An Khe where work was begun on the division base.

It was at this time that the base got its name “Golf Course.” BG Wright assembled his men shortly after their arrival and told them they were going to create a base and that it was going to be done without the use of bulldozers or power equipment. This was, he said, because earth moving equipment stripped the land of its protective grasses and bushes and, with 435 helicopters soon to arrive, the base would quickly become a vast dust bowl or a gigantic mud pie, depending on the season. BG Wright then picked up a machete, tied a cloth about his forehead and, to the horror and chagrin of the assemblage, led the way into the scrub jungle to carve out a helipad that would be as he put it, “as clean as a golf course.”

For several months afterwards, veterans of that advance party, colonels and privates alike, could be distinguished by the callouses on their palms.

An aerial view of the 1st Air Cav’s newly established basecamp at An Khe in 1 Corps shows typical Army orderliness, even when located in a combat zone. This picture is of the rear section area of the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry.
A CH-47 Chinook of the 228th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion off-loads Skytroopers of the 3rd Brigade into an already secured landing zone during Operation Masher in early 1966.

The bulk of the division moved by Military Sea Transport Service troop ships. The first ship, with the 2nd Brigade, two infantry battalions and one artillery battalion, left on August 15th. A total of six troop carriers, four aircraft carriers and seven cargo vessels were employed in the over-water movement. The 1st Brigade loaded out on the USNS Geiger, the 2nd Brigade on the Buckner, the 3rd Brigade on the Rose. The remainder of the division loaded on the Darby, Patch and Upshur. More than 470 of the division's aircraft were crowded on the carriers USNS Kula Gulf, Croatan and Card. The USS Boxer had more than 220 aircraft, including the four CH-54 Flying Cranes from the attached 478th Aviation Company. Four weeks at sea provided little idle time. Additional training and preparation for jungle warfare filled the hours. Physical fitness was emphasized through daily PT sessions on the hatch covers, and open decks. Skull practice in counter-guerrilla tactics, patrolling, jungle navigation and other pertinent subjects kept skills sharp. Weapons testing and familiarization was carried out from the after decks of the troop carriers. On the Buckner, for example, the chief engineer rigged out a floating target that demonstrated amazing stability despite the turbulence of the ship's wake.

The division celebrated its 44th anniversary September 13th, on the high seas. But the following day, USNS Buckner with the 2nd Brigade, dropped anchor in Qui Nhon harbor. Two days earlier the Boyer had arrived and Cav birds already were flying to shore.

Combat elements of the division closed on the An Khe base on September 14th and the Viet Cong wasted little time in probing the base defenses. While the valley and the route into the base was secured by the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, the responsibility for defense remained with the division.

Although the division supported the 101st's brigade with air and ground combat elements on September 19th in Operation Gibraltar, just east of An Khe, the official date for the 1st Air Cavalry Division assuming complete responsibility for defense of the An Khe area and the division's tactical area of responsibility was September 28.

This was 104 days from the date Secretary McNamara announced the formation of the 1st Air Cavalry Division and just 90 days after the general orders activated the unit on July 1st, 1965.

Meanwhile, the 17th Aviation Company, detached from the 10th Aviation Brigade at Fort Benning, was winging its way around the world. The 18 twin engine CV-2 Caribou aircraft worked out of Camp Holloway at Pleiku and provided the Cav the continuous, responsive fixed-wing lift support it needed in those vital early days.

Just west of An Khe on Highway 19, in 1954, the most mobile unit in the French forces, Mobile Group 100, was ambushed and destroyed by a Viet Minh Regiment. One of the first missions of the Cav was to open and secure Highway 19 from Deo Mang pass on the east to Mang Yang pass on the west. In clearing brush from the sides of the road, Skytroopers discovered a memorial obelisk commemorating the brave French and Vietnamese soldiers who had bled and died on that spot 11 years earlier. It was a sober reminder of the worth of the enemy and the fact that others had tried before and failed.

On October 10th, the 3rd Brigade kicked off the first self-contained combat operation in the war for the FIRST TEAM. Dubbed Operation SHINY TEAM, the five-day thrust into the Suoi Ca Valley east of An Khe gave Skytroopers their first taste of a combat assault under fire. Quipped some veterans of Air Assault Division tests: "We call it AIR ASSAULT III...with bullets."

It was a good shake-down for the three battalions involved. Other battalions began to flex their muscles in early October, moving into the Vinh Thanh valley and spreading the Cav's oil slick in the valley around the An Khe base.

The number of "firsts" racked up by the Cav in those early days was staggering. The first full division in Vietnam, the first air mobile division, the first unit to deploy CH-47 Chinook helicopters into combat, the first unit to use CH-54 Flying Crane choppers, and so on, ad infinitum.

Being first had become a habit. But there was no "first" of more significance than being the first division in the Vietnam conflict to earn a Presidential Unit Citation (PUC).

The story of the PUC is more than a story of valor, although that is an indispensible element for the award. There have been many combat actions in Vietnam since then in which many units—in and out of the Cav—have exhibited a high degree of courage.
But the Pleiku Campaign—the name given to the 35 days of airmobile operations that swept across the plateau country west and south of Pleiku—was precursory.

The Pleiku Campaign was the first real combat test of the FIRST TEAM as a full division and for the fledgling airmobile concept. But the campaign was more than just the triumph of a concept. It marked the first major confrontation between a U.S. Army division and a North Vietnamese division. Again, however this “first” by itself was not overly significant.

This was the Cav’s opening scene in the drama that was to ensue. A battalion task force, including airmobile artillery, was flown from the Cav’s base at An Khe to Pleiku and given a reinforcement mission. As the ARVN armored column moved down the road to Plei Me, Cav artillery leapfrogged in a series of air moves to keep the column under cover of the 105 millimeter howitzers.

The battle at Plei Me was not a haphazard engagement generated by local enemy forces. It was the outgrowth of a master plan by the enemy—a campaign to secure and dominate a major portion of the Republic of Vietnam. The plan envisaged the commitment of three NVA divisions in the northern and central portion of the Republic.

One such division was to conduct the Tay Nguyen (Western Plateau) Campaign and to attempt to seize Kontum, Pleiku, Binh Dinh and Phu Bon Provinces. The lure and the ambush at Plei Me was the opening gun in the struggle for the vital highlands.

On the 23rd of October, when the ARVN relief column smashed through the ambush and relieved Plei Me, the two NVA regiments broke contact and began moving toward sanctuaries along the Cambodian border.

At this point a significant and historic decision was made. General William C. Westmoreland, the COMUSMACV, along with Lieutenant General Stanley Larsen, the commander of I Field Force, visited the Ist Brigade command post at LZ Homecoming. Present at the meeting were key members of the division staff, and, of course, MG Kinnard.

Realizing that only bold and decisive action would keep the enemy from retaining the initiative, GEN Westmoreland gave the Cav its head. He ordered the division to pursue, seek out and destroy the enemy.

The Cav’s mission was then changed from one of reinforcement and reaction to that of unlimited offense; its area of operation was changed from a tiny, constricted zone to a vast arena, con-
Cavalrymen from Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, move toward a thatched Vietnamese home to search for contraband items that might be stored there. The men were on a search and destroy mission near the division's basecamp at An Khe in I Corps, late 1965.

On the morning of the 14th of November, the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, air assaulted into a landing zone code-named "X-Ray." There it met the 66th Regiment head-on.

For the next three days, LZ X-Ray became the scene of some of the most violent combat ever experienced by Cavalrymen in any war. The 66th and remnants of the 33rd Regiment tried again and again to overrun the tiny perimeter.

The combination of conspicuous gallantry and massive firepower of the FIRST TEAM inflicted hideous casualties on the enemy. But more was yet to come.

On the 17th of November, the decision was made to maneuver away from the Chu Pong hill mass to permit a close-in B-52 air strike—the first time in history that strategic bombers were used in support of the ground scheme of maneuver.

The 1st of the 7th was airlifted to Pleiku. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, moved overland to an LZ named Columbus, where two artillery batteries were located. And the third battalion that had fought on LZ X-Ray, the 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry, began moving toward a map location known as Albany. A battalion of the 66th Regiment also was on the move to nearly the same location.

The two battalions collided.

Mere words never can convey the agony that was Albany that afternoon, where two well-armed, determined and aggressive forces fell upon each other in a dense jungle; where friend and foe were intermingled; where it was rifier-man against rifier-man.

Then came another lull, and again, a change in brigades. This time the 2nd Brigade was brought in. But the NVA had had enough, and the 2nd Brigade chased the remnants of the 33rd and 66th Regiments back into their Cambodian sanctuaries. At this point the ARVN Airborne Brigade had been brought into the battle, and it remained for it to drive from the Ia Drang the survivors of the 32nd, the last regiment of the NVA division that had opened the Tay Nguyen Campaign so confidently 35 days earlier.

In those 35 days, the 1st Air Cav killed 3,561 North Vietnamese soldiers and detained 157 others, literally annihilating two of the three regiments of the NVA division. The Cav captured 900 individual weapons and 126 crew served weapons and enough munitions to completely arm an NVA battalion.

Above all else, history will record that there were two things achieved in the Pleiku Campaign. North Vietnamese regulars sustained their first major defeat ever, forever disrupting a well-conceived plan of conquest, and the 1st Air Cav...
Division engineered the triumph of a concept. When Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reviewed the results of the campaign, he called it an “unparalleled achievement.” He declared: “Unique in its valor and courage, the Air Cavalry Division has established a record which will stand for a long time for other divisions to match.”

MG Kinnard noted that remark when he wrote: “The only higher accolade possible is the award of the Presidential Unit Citation.”

In the Rose Garden of the White House in October 1966, a full year after the opening gun of that fateful campaign, a grateful government concurred.

But, of course, the Cav did not rest on its laurels, either present or projected. There were other areas that needed the immediate services of a tested airmobile division. Attention was directed to the east of An Khe, first to provide security for the establishment of the Republic of Korea Capitols Division’s basecamp at Binh Khe, and then into an area that was becoming quite familiar to Sky troopers—the Soui Ca Valley. Operation CLEAN HOUSE was conducted from the 17th to the 30th of December and was marked by short but fierce engagements in which the enemy attempted to break contact immediately after it was made.

1966

Operation MATADOR was the next show for the division, and involved opening Highway 19 to Pleiku as well as conducting spoiling attacks along the Cambodian border in both Pleiku and Kontum Provinces.

It was on January 25th, 1966, that the division launched its longest and largest operation to that date. Operation MASH/WHITE WING, also known as the Bong Son Campaign, lasted for 41 consecutive days as the division moved into the northeast and eastern portions of Binh Dinh Province. Reliable intelligence built up over several months said that this portion of Binh Dinh contained another NVA division, the Sao Yang (Yellow Star) or 3rd Division. As the operation developed it became apparent that there were three regiments subordinate to the 3rd Division—the 18th, the 22nd and the 2nd VC. These units were to be the Cav’s main adversaries for most of 1966. They were primarily concentrated in the central-coastal plain north of Bong Son and in the mountains north, west and southeast of Bong Son.

MASH/WHITE WING was conducted in five phases in which each one of the division’s brigades participated in one or more. For the first time, the FIRST TEAM worked in conjunction with other Free World Forces. Additional support came from the III Marine Amphibious Force, the 22nd ARVN Division reinforced by an airborne brigade, and the ROK Capitol Division.

The first phase began as a 3rd Brigade operation and lasted only three days. It was geared at deceiving the enemy as to the true intent of the Cav in Bong Son as well as increasing the security on Highway 1 between Qui Nhon and Bong Son. The bulk of the activity was south of Bong Son itself.

Phase II kicked off with a bang when the 3rd Brigade conducted air assaults into the lowlands north of Bong Son. The ARVN Airborne Brigade was to the east along the coast while 3rd Brigade battalions attacked north to the west of Highway 1. Two enemy battalions of the 22nd NVA Regiment were located, fixed, hit and finally flushed. The division quickly combat assaulted blocking forces to the west and north of the contact.
Heavy fighting took place for two days, and when Phase II terminated on February 3 the NVA had paid dearly for their exposure to the Cav—556 killed and 215 captured.

Phase III had the 2nd Brigade moving into the An Lao Valley, long a VC stronghold. The plan also called for elements of the III MAF, the 9th Marines in particular, to assault down the valley from the north. The Marines, working without the support of Naval gunfire, found themselves under the shield of Cav artillery and gunships plus, for the first time in history, the support of airlifted 155 millimeter howitzers.

Bad weather forced a two-day delay on D-Day and the enemy seized the opportunity to escape. As a result, the attack into An Lao was disappointing and met with only slight resistance. During the operation, the division's psychological operations people were busy broadcasting and dropping leaflets to inform the people of the valley that the Cav could not remain and that if they chose to leave the valley the opportunity was present. Approximately 4,500 of a total population of 8,000 elected to leave and most were flown to freedom by Cav Chinooks.

The fourth phase of the operation was initiated to exploit intelligence reports of an enemy buildup in the Kim Son Valley, dubbed the “Eagle’s Claw” or “Crow’s Foot” because of the configuration of tributary valleys.

In this phase the division perfected a new technique for finding, fixing and destroying the enemy. The 3rd Brigade combat assaulted elements of three battalions onto the outer limits of each of the tributary valleys, placing ambush positions at key terrain features along exfiltration routes out of the valley. Simultaneously the remainder of the brigade assaulted into the center of the valley along its floor and began sweeping outward toward the ambuses. These “beater” forces flushed the enemy into the kill zones of the ambush positions. For more than three days ambuses were sprung and the enemy casualties mounted.

The capture of a battalion commander of the 22nd NVA Regiment led to a major battle in a strong NVA defensive position south of Bong Son, dubbed the “Iron Triangle.” The 2nd Brigade was

Carrying a pair of souvenir sandals picked up during Operation WALLOWA, a 3rd Brigade soldier and his platoon move to a new location.