The 12th Cavalry Regiment was constituted on February 2, 1901, in the Regular Army and organized on February 8, 1901, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, after a Congressional Act provided for an increase in the branch. The 12th was the second of five regiments provided for.

In World War II the regiment participated in the New Guinea, Bismarck Archipelago, Leyte (with arrowhead), and Luzon. The 1st Battalion also earned credit for the Tunisia, Naples-Foggia, Anzio-Rome-Arno, North Apennines and Po Valley Campaigns.

The cactus is officially described as a cactus vert. The regiment was organized at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in 1901, and spent its first two years at that post. The cactus shows the birthplace of the regiment as well as its service on the Mexican border. “Semper Paratus” (Always Ready), the regimental motto, indicates the unit’s willingness to perform any task assigned.

The regiment’s decorations include the Presidential Unit Citation (Headquarters and Headquarters Troop cited), streamer embroidered ORMOC VALLEY, LEYTE; the PUC (1st Squadron reinforced cited), streamer embroidered CENTRAL RANGE, LEYTE; and the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for October 17, 1944, to July 4, 1945. Additionally the 1st Battalion colors carry the French Croix de Guerre with Palm for World War II (81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron cited), streamer embroidered CENTRAL ITALY.

In Vietnam the 1st Battalion has been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for actions on the 2nd and 3rd of October, 1966. The battalion’s Company C won the Valorous Unit Award for heroism during the period May 31 to June 1, 1967, at An Qui.

Troopers of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, rest after discovering a series of rice hooches just east of the An Lao Valley during Operation WHITE WING in February 1966. The rice cache was one of the largest found in the war at that date.
On July 28, 1965, the President of the United States, in a message to the nation, alerted and ordered the 1st Air Cavalry Division to duty in the Republic of Vietnam. On the 20th of September the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 12th Cavalry, was disembarking from the USNS Geiger at the harbor of Qui Nhon.

The heaviest battle the battalion fought that year was on October 12 when Companies A and B engaged a VC battalion in the Suoi La Tinh River valley. It was in this critical setting that two men, in particular, personified the spirit of the “Chargers.”

The chaplain, Captain Billy Lord, heedless of his own safety, ministered to the wounded, took charge of their evacuation, and carried many of them to safety.

Major Joseph Bellochi, the battalion XO, saw that Medevac helicopters were having difficulty evacuating casualties. He repeatedly flew his own helicopter through intensive small arms and automatic weapons fire helping fly out the wounded. He brought out eight wounded in five trips in his OH-13, a one-passenger helicopter.

The major and the chaplain were subsequently awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Silver Star respectively for their heroism under fire.

The battle lasted until dark. Then the decimated enemy withdrew.

On October 27, 1965, the battalion began Operation ALL THE WAY, the 1st Brigade portion of the Pleiku Campaign. After being airlifted to Pleiku, it air assaulted into several landing zones near the Cambodian border to conduct search and destroy operations. The battalion stayed on the operation 18 days, clearing the area between Plei Me and the border.

November and December were spent operating in and around An Khe, while the New Year found the Chargers operating in search and destroy missions in western Pleiku Province and southern Kontum Province. The battalion participated in Operation MASHNER in February and early March in the northeast section of Binh Dinh Province. In late March the battalion was committed to Operation LINCOLN.

On the night of March 30, 1966, the fifth day of LINCOLN, Alpha Company was deployed to assist a scout platoon that had made contact with a large enemy unit in western Pleiku Province near the Cambodian border.

As Alpha Company’s Skystroopers leaped from their assault helicopters they immediately came under fire from all sides.

With the company commander wounded and the company’s XO killed, Second Lieutenant Daniel Kapico found himself in command of his company. LT Kapico got the battalion S-3 on the radio and asked for artillery. Night was falling, and with the approach of darkness the enemy would certainly mount a heavy attack.

The enemy kept Alpha Company under constant fire, and the Skystroopers returned the barrage. As the night wore on, the fire from Alpha Company apparently convinced the enemy that he was not going to overpower LT Kapico’s command. The enemy withdrew, leaving behind 197 dead.
During May and June the battalion worked around LZ Hereford in Operation CRAZY HORSE, north of An Khe and Highway 19.

On May 21, 1966, Charlie Company was airlifted to LZ Hereford in the Vinh Thanh Valley. The heavily-burdened troopers of the weapons platoon quickly set up their single mortar in support of the rest of the company hacking through the dense jungle.

Charlie Company swept through the heavily forested area unaware that the enemy had let it pass unmolested in order to attack the mortar platoon on LZ Hereford.

Specialist Four Paul J. Harrison and Specialist Four Charles W. Stuckey, the first members of the platoon to spot the enemy, opened fire on the camouflaged figures moving through the brush and tall grass.

Meanwhile, Captain Don F. Warren spurred Charlie Company on an uphill dash toward the LZ. When they arrived it was too late. With the exception of a handful of wounded survivors, the weapons platoon had been wiped out. LOOK Magazine war correspondent Sam Castan died with them, becoming the only casualty of hundreds of newsmen who have visited the Cav. The enemy, carrying their own dead, had meanwhile vanished into the surrounding jungle.

August found the 1st Bn, 12th Cav, operating once again in Pleiku Province in Operation PAUL REVERE II near the Cambodian border.

Operation IRVING was less than six hours old on the morning of October 2, 1966, when advance scout teams...
The “Chargers” of the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, quickly move across open ground after receiving sniper fire while on an operation in the Bong Son Plain during Operation PERSHING. Armored tanks (background) provide a buffer force for the advancing Skytroopers. The tanks are of Company D, 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry.

reported that two helicopters had been shot down near the village of Hoa Hoi. Immediately Company B was air assaulted to the beach east of the village. Moments after insertion, the company began receiving fire from the village. Company A was rushed into the area southwest of the village as soon as helicopters were available.

After Companies A and B had established initial contact with the enemy, they withheld their fire while psychological operations helicopter circled the village with loudspeakers, directing civilians to move out of the area and imploring enemy soldiers to lay down their arms. During this moratorium, numerous civilians and soldiers did as they were directed by the loudspeaker. When it became evident an hour later that no one else was coming out, The Chargers began moving in.

A and B Companies continued to press the attack from the south while Charlie Company assaulted into the northern outskirts of Hoa Hoi and began moving down to meet them. The battalion command post, with Delta Company in reserve, moved to LZ Irene, a short distance from the village.

At daybreak October 3 Alpha and Bravo braced themselves in blocking positions around the southern half of the village while Company C began to sweep through the enemy positions. The bunkers and an extensive trench system favored the North Vietnamese in their defensive posture and made the Chargers’ advance extremely difficult.

Several times Charlie Company was temporarily stopped, but each time the Skytroopers rallied and drove on through the village. By noon that day, after Bravo and Charlie Companies completed their final sweep of the village and began screening the area south of Hoa Hoi, the Chargers had left in their wake 141 enemy dead.

The Chargers detained 35 NVA soldiers and 15 Viet Cong suspects.

The battalion aggressively carried the battle to the enemy, with uncounted incidents of individual gallantry. Friendly casualties were light in comparison with the near total destruction of the entrapped enemy force. For their efforts during the two-day battle, the men of the 1st Bn, 12th Cav, were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

On the night of December 26, 1966, the 22nd NVA Regiment, taking advantage of the Christmas cease-fire to mass its troops north of the Kim Son Valley, moved in under the cover of darkness and rain to surround LZ Bird where C Company was defending two artillery batteries.

At 1:05 a.m. the enemy kicked off a savage mortar and ground attack against the 84 defenders at LZ Bird. First Lieutenant Jerald Wallace moved to the point bunker and directed that position’s desperate stand against the Communist human wave until he was mortally wounded. The acting company commander, First Lieutenant John Rieke, was seriously wounded early in the battle, leaving First Lieutenant Charles Campanella, the company’s forward artillery observer, as the only functioning officer in Charlie Company.

As the defenders were swarmed by the enemy regiment, Staff Sergeant Delbert O. Jennings sprang to his bunker and slowed the enemy wave with machinegun fire, killing at least 12 NVA.

Rejoining his men, Jennings destroyed an enemy demolition crew about to blow up a nearby howitzer and killed three more enemy soldiers. Ordering his men back into a secondary position, he covered their withdrawal, killing one NVA with the butt of his weapon. Observing that some of his comrades were unaware of an enemy force to their rear, he raced through the fireswept area to warn them.

After helping to repulse the final enemy assaults, he led a group of volunteers through sniper fire and booby traps, recovering eight seriously injured men.
SSG Jennings' heroism and leadership saved the lives of many of his comrades and contributed greatly to Charlie Company's defeat of the numerically superior enemy force. For his action SSG Jennings was later awarded the Medal of Honor.

The 1st Bn, 12th Cav, distinguished itself once again when Charlie Company engaged a battalion-sized force in the village of An Qui. Entering the village with a platoon of tanks on May 31, 1967, the unit immediately received furious raking fire from a heavily-armed enemy force. The Sky troopers and tanks withdrew after killing 25 enemy soldiers. An artillery barrage pounded the village the rest of the morning.

Shortly after noon the Chargers assaulted again. The fighting was at such close quarters that the tanks fired at an average range of 25 yards. The infantrymen attacked individual bunkers and trench systems with grenades and small arms fire.

On the morning of June 1 Charlie Company silenced all remaining enemy fire. An intensive search revealed 96 Communist dead, and a battalion of the 22nd North Vietnamese Army Regiment ceased to exist as an effective fighting force.

Eight members of the company were awarded the Silver Star for their actions during the battle, and Company C was later awarded the Valorous Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism.

The battalion spent the month of June engaged in cordon and search missions of the plains around Binh Di village.

Operation PERSHING lasted from August through November. The Chargers conducted cordon and search operations on the Bong Son Plain and search and clear operations in the An Lao Valley during Operation PERSHING and on through January 1968.

February found the battalion working around Quang Tri City and in the Ba Long Valley. Heavy contact was made throughout the month, during which the Chargers killed more than 100 enemy soldiers.

During the month of April, the 1st Bn, 12th Cav, operated southwest of Khe Sanh then moved to the A Shau Valley.

The Chargers spent the month of June 1968, operating in the Huong Dien, Hai Lang, and Phong Dien Districts. July and August were spent in operations JEB STUART III and COMANCHE FALLS, along the coastal plains northeast of Quang Tri. They continued search and clear operations there through September and October.

The battalion moved to Bien Hoa in February 1969, to thwart enemy movement towards the population centers of South Vietnam's III Corps.

Staff Sergeant Martin A. Manglona, a platoon sergeant in Alpha Company, distinguished himself in a battle on February 10 while defending a forward operations base (FOB) in Bien Hoa Province.

Company A had set up its FOB, sent out ambushes, and settled down for the night. At 3:30 a.m., the stillness of the night was broken by the sudden blasts of enemy mortar rounds. Sky troopers scrambled into their bunkers and waited for the enemy to appear.

"Quite a few men were wounded by the mortars," said First Lieutenant George F. Dove, platoon leader. "Among them were myself and Manglona."

While helping to repulse the ground attack, the platoon sergeant was blinded by shrapnel from a B-40 rocket. Unable to see, SSG Manglona ordered his men to place him in a firing position with his weapon pointed at the NVA. He kept firing at the enemy until all the wounded were evacuated.

"Even after he received reinforcements from the first platoon, he refused to be evacuated until all of his men were safe," said LT Dove.

SSG Manglona was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

In April the Chargers moved to an area south of the "Fishhook" and operated out of Quan Loi. They continued operations there throughout April and into May.

In May the battalion moved to Phuoc Vinh, where it conducted night ambush operations around the village.

On June 13 the 1st Bn, 12th Cav, moved to LZ Grant, 12 miles northeast of Tay Ninh City. The battalion operated in the area, checking Communist infiltration through December.

(Continued on P. 260)
SECOND BATTALION
TWELFTH CAVALRY

COMMANDERS

LTC Earl Ingram .................................. July 1965—February 1966
LTC Otis C. Lynn .................................. February 1966—October 1966
LTC Jay A. Hatch .................................. October 1966—February 1967
LTC William Buchanan ................................. February 1967—July 1967
LTC Marion C. Ross .................................. July 1967—November 1967
LTC Bob L. Gregory .................................. November 1967—January 1968
LTC Richard S. Sweet .................................. January 1968—June 1968
LTC Eugene M. Johnson ................................. June 1968—July 1968
LTC James W. Dingeman ................................. July 1968—February 1969
LTC Peter L. Gorvad .................................. February 1969—March 1969
LTC Ivan G. Boon .................................. March 1969—September 1969
LTC Harold E. Iverson .................................. September 1969—

Men of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, hug the ground behind handy stone walls as they fight their way toward the embattled imperial city of Hue. The battle for Hue saw some of the fiercest fighting of the war.

Major General Harry W.O. Kinnard, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) commander, met the men of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, as they left the troop ship USNS Buckner on September 14, 1965, and landed at Qui Nhon, Republic of Vietnam.

From Qui Nhon the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, flew to the 1st Air Cav’s basecamp at An Khe, beginning immediately the job of base defense, and receiving the first taste of combat as snipers harassed perimeter patrols and observation posts.

In late October the FIRST TEAM was given the task of reinforcing ARVN forces in Pleiku Province. The division cranked up Task Force Ingram, the muscle for which was the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, to secure the provincial capital of Pleiku and to react to developments growing out of the attack on Plei Me CIDG Camp.

On November 1, 1965, came the first important action of the campaign. A rifle platoon of the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, came under heavy enemy fire along the Tac River. Two companies of the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, relieved the embattled forces. The battalion com-
mander, Lieutenant Colonel Earl Ingram, took charge of the fight on the ground and, in the words of MG Kinnard, “After stopping the last NVA attack cold, he regained the offensive, swept the battle area and established solid positions for the night.” A North Vietnamese battalion had been defeated.

On November 11 the battalion moved back to An Khe. For the rest of 1965 it alternated between base and road defense and search and destroy missions. Though contact was generally light, the battalion made significant discoveries of enemy supplies and documents.

January 29, 1966, the battalion assaulted in the sandy hills north of Bong Son as part of operation MASHER. This was to be the first of many operations in the Binh Dinh coastal area. It had quick results. By February 191 dead enemy and 10 detainees were accounted for. Operation WHITE WING followed. The 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, located and destroyed enemy ammunition and equipment, hundreds of bunkers, 68 tons of rice, and five tons of salt in the hills north of Bong Son.

In March and April base and highway security took most of the battalion’s time. In May it participated in Operation LEWIS and CLARK. On May 17, 1966, Operation CRAZY HORSE began in the Vinh Thanh Valley, where the enemy was numerous and well-entrenched. The operation was one of distinction for the fighting battalion. The FIRST TEAM’s second Medal of Honor in Vietnam was awarded posthumously to Staff Sergeant Jimmy G. Stewart for his gallantry during the action.

SSG Stewart was a squad leader with Company B. Operating in an area of heavily fortified machinegun bunkers, five men in the squad were wounded, leaving only Stewart unscathed. He refused to abandon his men. Stewart stayed in his position for four hours and fought off three assaults by a Viet Cong platoon, killing at least eight and possibly 23 before he was cut down.

According to the citation, Stewart “fought like a man possessed, emptying magazine after magazine at the determined enemy, and retrieving and throwing back hand grenades.” Because of his sacrifice the wounded were safely evacuated. Three years later his son was given the first $1,500 scholarship to be awarded by the newly created Education Foundation of the 1st Cavalry Division Association.

Throughout 1966 the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, demonstrated the meaning of air mobility. It switched rapidly from base and highway defense duties in An Khe to search and destroy operations near Cambodia in the Ia Drang Valley and Kontum, back to An Khe, then to the coastal Bong Son hills, then to An Khe, Dam Tra-O Lake, and the Suoi Tern Valley. Soon the battalion had seen nearly every trouble spot in II Corps.

February 1966, found the 2nd of the 12th fighting near the South China Sea coast in Operation MASHER. When not fighting, the Cavalrymen were searching out enemy caches, some of them even built confidently above ground, as is the case of the one this soldier is checking out.

In January 1968 the battalion’s Cavalrymen demonstrated American ingenuity. Staff Sergeant John E. Darnell gave this account: “We were sent into the Que Son Valley near Hill 146 to police up five enemy bodies when we ran into a company of North Vietnamese Army regulars.

“They opened fire on us and had us pinned down pretty well. We had some of them trapped in a cave and we were tossing grenades in at them but they started throwing them back.

“Finally we got together and started tossing in five grenades at a time. We had one man pull all the pins and we’d toss in a handful. We wanted to see how fast the enemy was,” Darnell smiled,
“and we found out that he wasn’t fast at all.”

Later in January the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, was in the vanguard of the units that moved from II Corps to I Corps to dislodge the North Vietnamese Army from the ancient imperial capital of Hue.

On January 17 the battalion arrived at LZ El Paso five miles south of Hue. January 27 they moved to Camp Evans northeast of Hue, and on February 2 the battalion airlifted to the headquarters of the 3rd Regiment, 1st ARVN Division.

The battalion’s mission: “Move toward Hue, make contact with the enemy, fix his location, and destroy him.”

Accordingly, at first light February 3 the battalion moved southeast toward Hue on a route south of paralleling Highway 1. At 10 a.m. the battalion reached the first settled, vegetated area before Hue. Moving through it, large numbers of NVA were seen getting in fighting positions 200 meters to the south.

The enemy positions were hit with artillery, ARA and gunships, then the battalion attacked the well-entrenched, fiercely resisting enemy, who put out a withering fire of mortars, small arms and machineguns. The battalion penetrated the enemy positions and pushed the NVA clear of the northern edge of the area, where the battalion established its perimeter for the night. The battalion had damaged an estimated NVA battalion and was now astride one of the major enemy routes to Hue. The next morning an enemy regiment made an all-out effort to eliminate this blockade. They failed.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard L. Sweet, the battalion commander, described the action this way: “By noon we were completely cut off and encircled. We had over 200 mortar rounds land in the perimeter, and the perimeter was only about 150 meters by 200 meters. During the night they had gotten behind us.”

As darkness fell, “Instead of pulling out to the rear like we were expected to do, we decided to pull out, make a feint, and go deeper behind the enemy lines... We were sure it would work, although we discovered after the battle that nobody else was.”

It did work. The entire battalion moved out. Some of the soldiers had concealed their wounds to stay with their buddies and fight. They turned up along the route, a limp here and there revealing a bullet or fragmentation wound, but the only sound the entire night came when an NVA snapped his bolt shut. The Skytroopers were undetected. The next morning the enemy awoke to find their supply and communications route cut. LTC Sweet was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for the action.

Said the colonel, “For my money, the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, is getting this award. As far as I’m concerned that’s what the award is for: the men.”

To the men, it was hard-earned. “We went without food and water for a long time,” said Specialist Four Frank J. O’Reilly, an RTO in Company A. “We had no water, no water purification tablets, and the rivers were too muddy. The men were eating sugar cane, bananas, and onions. One cigarette might be smoked by 20 people.”

Before the unit moved out that night in the ankle-deep water of the rice paddies, said O’Reilly, “the word had gone out just before we left that there would be no smoking. That we didn’t have to worry about, because no one had any cigarettes.” When the 10-hour night march was completed, “the luckiest men had gotten six hours sleep in the past 48 hours.”

From its new position the unit so dominated the area that it successfully interdicted all daylight enemy movement. By February 25 the sweep to Hue was complete. The battalion continued operations in the Hue and Quang Tri area through March.

Hue was clear of the NVA, but on the
other side of I Corps the Marines were still under siege in the Khe Sanh Valley by elements of the NVA 304th and 325th Divisions. The 1st Cav was called upon to break the land blockade that had forced all resupply since January to be by air. On April 1, Operation PEGASUS began as the 1st Air Cav moved into the area. On April 3 the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, airlifted into LZ Stud, then moved out to air assault LZ Wharton where the NVA greeted the landing with artillery fire. That evening the landing zone received some 20 rounds of 130 mm artillery fire. On April 4 the battalion began search and destroy operations around the LZ.

By April 6 the battalion airlifted to Hill 471 to relieve Marines at that position. Two companies remained on the hill while two initiated an attack to the south toward Khe Sanh hamlet. Through April 11 operations were continued in the area as the unit located enemy crew-served weapons and ammunition. Only sporadic contact was made, for the bulk of the enemy forces would rather flee than fight a pitched battle with the FIRST TEAM. The battalion was released from the operation and by April 12 had returned to the division's base, Camp Evans.

After a brief respite at Camp Evans, the unit resumed operations in the Quang Tri area near the Demilitarized Zone. In May the battalion participated in Operation JEB STUART III, air assaulting into LZs Merideth and Mooney, making the first deep penetration into Base Area 114 and paving the way for more intensive Allied activity in the area. Throughout the summer they carried out cordon and search operations, ambushes and patrolled extensively generally with light contact.

Light contact—an easy phrase signifying only small actions—but to those involved the phrase can mean hard moments. In one such action Specialist Four Donald Corbin, a squad leader with A Company, was moving to a night ambush position 21 miles south of Quang Tri. The Cavalryman had just propped his rifle in the crotch of a tree when he heard something hit the side of his foot. "It was dark so I didn't know what it was until I reached down and picked it up."

When he looked closely, Corbin recognized a live Red Chinese grenade. "I dropped it and moved out as fast as I could," recalled Corbin. "I was really scared." Fortunately, the grenade failed to explode.

A few minutes later an NVA ambush struck the company. Shortly after contact A Company pulled back while aerial rocket artillery and machineguns blasted the enemy positions. Related Corbin, "The next morning we returned to the same area and I found the Chicom grenade that hit me."

In November of 1968 the division moved south to the III Corps area along the Cambodian border with the mission to block major Communist infiltration routes to Saigon.

The battalion began its III Corps operations near division headquarters at Phuoc Vinh. By the end of November elements of the battalion were airlifted into an area 35 miles northeast of Quan Loi. As the troops moved out through the hilly area, they came upon a complex of 106 bunkers, three huts and four caves. A short distance away the Skytroopers discovered 22 enemy bodies.

The men of the 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, were also meeting live enemy. In one firefight 30 miles northwest of Phuoc Vinh Sergeant Charles Dickerson of Alpha Company sought cover in a hole. Said SGT Dickerson, "I discovered I wasn't alone. Two legs were sticking from under a tree limb that had fallen in the other end. At first I thought the guy must be dead, but just in case, I pointed my M-16 in that direction."

Suddenly the "dead" man jumped up with a Chicom grenade in his hand. SGT Dickerson was about to fire and leap for safety, but the NVA quickly laid the grenade on the ground when he spotted the M-16 leveled at him. "Even so," said Dickerson, "next time I'll look before I leap."

The battalion was operating in the Tay Ninh area at the beginning of 1969. In three days of fighting from January 31 to February 2 the battalion discovered more than 100 tons of rice and numerous bunkers.

The battalion also moved its command post to LZ Grant. LZ Grant would be the site of triumph and tragedy for the unit. Thirty-nine NVA died in the first assault on the base. It was but a token of things to come.

At 12:30 a.m. March 8 the LZ received a heavy rocket and mortar barrage. A 122 mm rocket with a delayed fuse tore through three layers of sandbags atop the battalion tactical operations center (TOC), instantly killing the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gorvad. Major Billy Brown, the battalion S-3, described the scene as he entered the TOC:

"The colonel was lying just about where I left him, sitting in a chair in front

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GRUNTS’ WORLD
CAVALRY