

**THE  
1st AIR CAVALRY DIVISION**



**VIETNAM**

**AUGUST 1965 TO DECEMBER 1969.**

# 1st AIR CAVALRY DIVISION



## Foreword

This volume can be many things to many people—a book of memories, a souvenir, a pictorial essay on air-mobility, or simply a story of gallant men at war. It can be many things, but one thing it is not, nor does it pretend to be—a complete history of the 1st Air Cavalry Division in Vietnam.

The task and burden of history must lie with the objectivity of future generations, far removed from contemporary

pressures and restraints. It is true, of course, that much research for this book has been done from available official records, the ultimate source of written history. But even more has been drawn from the vivid recollections of the Cavalrymen who fought, tasted the brassy bile of fear, shared the fierce exultation of victory or were drenched in the dark despair of death.

This is the story of the small, close

world of fighting men in action, men who even at this writing still are fighting. This volume contains the memoirs of a fighting team—THE FIRST TEAM. It is a memory of combat; no doubt it is imperfect as all memory, but nonetheless real for those who were there, for those who can fill in the inevitable gaps.

It does not presume to be more than that.

# To the 1st Cavalry Division Skytrooper



Phuoc Vinh  
12 February 1970  
Men of the Cav:



This is your story—the story of the FIRST TEAM from its reactivation at Fort Benning through the years of fighting in Vietnam. Those who worked and trained in the days of the test division at Fort Benning before coming to Vietnam will find a memory included here, too. This book is more than a history; more than an illustrated after-action report. It is the story of men, told in words and in pictures, men who have fought valorously and who have carried the banners of the FIRST TEAM proudly on to new and greater honors. It is, in effect, a book of memories.

Since the vivid recollections of a man who served in an infantry battalion differ from one who served in an artillery battalion, and because the outlook at brigade level is substantially more detailed than the view at the top, this book has been organized to give several perspectives. There is a section devoted to each battalion and separate company in the division, a section for each brigade and one for the division as a whole.

I will not attempt to summarize the history contained in this book, but I would be remiss not to pay reverent respect to those fallen Skytroopers who have given their lives in the service of their country. It is to their memory that this book is dedicated. All profits from the sale of this book will go to the Education Foundation of the 1st Cavalry Division Association to provide educational scholarships for the children of our comrades who made the supreme sacrifice in Vietnam and once again paid the price of freedom.

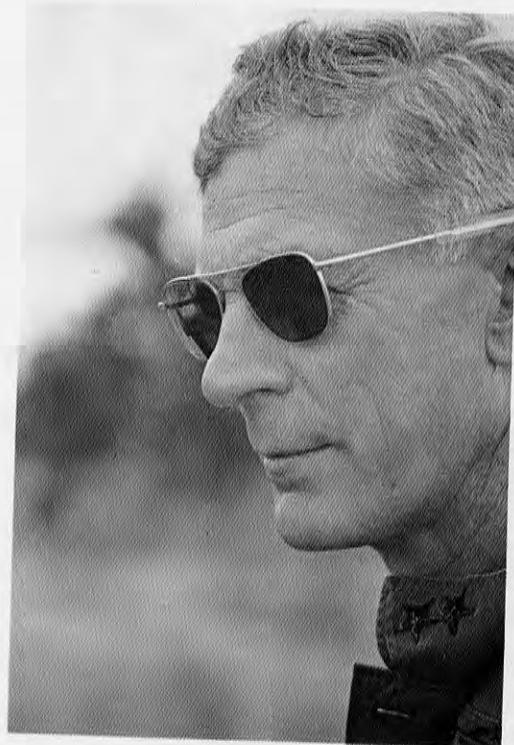
To every Skytrooper who has faithfully served this division, it is my sincere hope that in years to come this book will stimulate reminiscences and will always serve to remind all that in Vietnam, as it was in World War II and Korea, the FIRST TEAM remained—ALWAYS FIRST!

*E. B. Roberts*

E. B. ROBERTS  
MAJOR GENERAL, USA  
Commanding

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# SECOND BATTALION FIFTH CAVALRY

## COMMANDERS

LTC Robert B. Tully.....	July 1965—December 1965
LTC Edward C. Meyer.....	December 1965—July 1966
LTC Reginald T. Lombard .....	July 1966—November 1966
LTC Robert D. Stevenson .....	November 1966—May 1967
LTC Joseph McDonnough .....	May 1967—September 1967
LTC Joseph B. Love .....	September 1967—March 1968
LTC Arthur Leary, Jr. ....	March 1968—July 1968
LTC Raymond Maladowitz .....	July 1968—January 1969
LTC Jerry J. Burcham .....	January 1969—June 1969
LTC Robert L. Drudik .....	June 1969—June 1969
LTC Stephen R. Woods, Jr. ....	June 1969—November 1969
LTC John R. Witherell.....	November 1969—

The main body of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, disembarked the USNS General Simon B. Buckner at Qui Nhon, Republic of Vietnam, on September 13, 1965. It proceeded by air to join the advance party which was constructing the division base at An Khe.

In October the battalion conducted Operation COBRA to clear and secure

the Song Con "Happy Valley" region. November found the battalion taking part in the Plei Me Campaign in the Ia Drang Valley. The highlight of the battalion's operations there was the November 15 blitz, both by air and march, into LZ X-Ray to relieve the embattled 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry. The "Black Knights" were rotated back to An Khe



Waiting for helicopters to extract them from mountainous terrain near Khe Sanh during Operation PEGASUS, these 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, soldiers take some comfort in lumpy rest on rocky ground.



The strain of battle, both mental and physical, is mirrored on the face of this tired Company C, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, trooper.

to close out 1965 securing Camp Radcliff.

The battalion took part in several operations in the beginning of 1966, but did not make significant contact until Bravo Company engaged an NVA battalion on the morning of February 17.

In that action Sergeant Gary B. Gorton, a weapons platoon squad leader, moved his mortar sections forward under heavy fire. Scrambling everywhere to see that the tubes were correctly adjusted and aimed, Gorton was a one-man dynamo as he tried to supervise the 10 men under his command. Disdaining the enemy's concentrated fire toward his positions, he directed a heavy concentration of mortar fire that fell upon the well dug-in enemy force, causing a deadly toll. The mortar ammunition ran out, so Gorton deployed his men as riflemen and maneuvered close enough to use hand grenades against the enemy, knocking out a .51 caliber machinegun.

The sergeant was killed by a sniper before he could return to the company perimeter. Bravo was reinforced by A and C Companies, which air assaulted



Sweat-soaked clothes and steamy jungle do not keep Specialists Four John Codron and Robert E. Wilken of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, from taking this enemy B-40 rocket out of the weapons cache they found during Operation JEB STUART III.



Private First Class Stephen Hanh, an RTO with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, informs his company commander by radio of his platoon's situation during operations northeast of Tay Ninh in III Corps.

to link up with the embattled Skytroopers. By 4 p.m. the contact had been reduced to isolated sniper fire as the overpowered NVA unit scampered northward.

Through the summer of 1966 the elements of the 2nd Bn, 5th Cav, were engaged in securing Camp Radcliff, the new airfield at Kontum and the Pleiku installation. The Black Knights made raids and conducted cordon and search operations along Highway 19. Sporadic encounters with small enemy elements continued through the close of the year.

Until the early part of February 1967, the battalion continued securing Camp Radcliff while at the same time conducting local patrols to insure that any enemy within striking distance of the base would be discovered and routed.

February 11 marked the beginning of Operation PERSHING, an operation designed to search and clear populated areas from the Nui Mieu Mountains to the South China Sea, to control the use of Highways 1 and 505, and to interdict and harass the operations of the 2nd and 3rd NVA Divisions.

On the morning of March 11, Company C moved into a blocking position near the village of Phu Ninh while elements of the 40th ARVN Regiment conducted a sweep of the interior. The sweep had progressed smoothly, and at 10 a.m., Captain Don Markham, the company commander, instructed the third platoon, led by First Lieutenant Dana Gerald, to conduct a local patrol to the south to insure security to the rear. After moving about 1,300 meters from the rest of the company, Staff Sergeant John Kriedler, the platoon sergeant, spotted a man running from them down a trail. He took aim and killed him. The man turned out to be a local hamlet guerrilla armed with several hand grenades.

SGT Kriedler and Specialist Four Jose Garza continued to root around some small huts near the trail when one enemy with an automatic weapon opened up and killed the Americans on the spot. LT Gerald, located about 200 meters away, reacted quickly and brought the remainder of the platoon to the sound of the latest shots.

When he arrived, all seemed clear, but another well-concealed soldier fired and killed Gerald and four other men. The platoon took cover and contacted CPT Markham. He estimated the platoon was pinned down by one squad of VC. He could not have known that the



lieutenant had stumbled into the front door of the 18th NVA Regiment.

The regimental headquarters had occupied the high ground (Hill 82) directly south of Phu Ninh, where the initial contact had been made. About half way down the hilltop was a 600-foot long trench that was the main defense for the hilltop . . . filled with enemy soldiers. There were numerous boulders that served as intermediate cover positions for the enemy troops occupying the hill below the trench.

Markham moved the remainder of the company to the vicinity of the hamlet, but repeated attempts to relieve his platoon failed because of the enemy's superior fortifications and firepower. Aerial rocket artillery (ARA) was called in to determine the enemy's strength and location in relation to the beleaguered platoon and to neutralize their more vulnerable positions. The view from above gave CPT Markham a more conclusive picture of the enemy situation. Gunship cover allowed a seven man rescue force to crawl up to assist the pinned Skytroopers.



Descending to a small clearing below where they will begin operations, 2nd of the 5th Cav Skytroopers (upper left) watch the thick jungle below, knowing the enemy may be waiting in ambush.

Another of the battalion's troopers jumps from the lift ship that has dropped him into a small section of Vietnam jungle real estate. The doorgunner leans forward to check tail rotor clearance.

Grinding his belly into the ground to get low, this soldier watches to his front. His platoon is moving into a suspected enemy bunker location.



While the rescue effort was in progress, Company D, commanded by Captain Richard N. McInerney, was airlifted to assist Charlie Company by establishing a blocking position to the east of their location. The plan was to effect the rescue of the platoon and then force the enemy off the hill by employing air strikes and artillery fire.

The rescue force succeeded in drawing close enough to the men in the platoon to place effective fire on the enemy positions, while each man individually crawled to safety beneath the thick underbrush.

Both of the companies pulled back slightly and fanned out to complete their blocking positions. Then Air Force fighters came on station to drop their ordnance on the hill. The action literally cast a stone in a hornet's nest—the enemy soldiers swarmed off the mountain into the hands of the two companies.

Sporadic clashes with the furious and frightened enemy erupted throughout the night.

By the following morning, the enemy units had left the battlefield, carrying their dead and wounded with them. Later, 36 bodies were found and 145 NVA were captured. A subsequent analysis of documents taken from an NVA political officer identified the unit as the 7th and what remained of the 9th Battalions of the 18th NVA Regiment. The detainees revealed that the unit was nearly wiped out.

After a period of pulling security operations, Operation LEJEUNE commenced on April 7. The battalion spearheaded a brigade task force that, at the end of only 12 days, killed 177 enemy soldiers and established two fully-operational hardtop airstrips, two major roads, plus one of the 10 busiest seaports in all of Vietnam. This operation was the first conducted with the Marines in I Corps.

Cache finds and minor incidents continued through the summer. On June 21 Alpha and Bravo Companies wiped out an enemy company which had been acting as an advance party for the 18th NVA Regiment. They had been moving into the Nui Mien Mountains.

In August Company A began working in the rockpile area in what became known as "Pratt's Corner." The area was named for Captain Clayton A. Pratt, who commanded Alpha Company in a two-week offensive, which destroyed the effectiveness of the 8th Battalion, 18th NVA Regiment. The campaign netted



**Sniper fire sends this Skytrooper rushing to aid a wounded friend. The action occurred shortly after the platoon of Company A, 2nd Battalion of the 5th Cavalry, had combat assaulted into the location near An Loc in III Corps.**

a total of 35 killed, 45 detained and 16 wounded, with 70 weapons captured.

For the remainder of 1967 the Black Knights interspersed security operations with a variety of patrols, making frequent light contacts. Intelligence gained during this period helped provide early warning of the enemy's greatest drive of the war, the 1968 Tet Offensive.

As 1968 began, the 2nd Bn, 5th Cav, continued combat operations in the vicinity of the Bong Son coastal plain. The area was large and presented the battalion with quickly changing tacti-

cal situations, but through continuous operations and full utilization of the air-mobility concept, the enemy threat in the AO was greatly reduced. The enemy had dwindled in force from fortified regiments to small, ill-equipped, poorly motivated bands wandering about in search of survival. A few enemy soldiers were killed and several rallied to the Skytroopers.

It was a different story when in mid-February the battalion moved north to Camp Evans, just 21 kilometers from

(Continued on P. 286)

## 2nd of the 5th

(Continued From P. 65)

the Demilitarized Zone. Despite defeats suffered during the first two weeks of Tet, the enemy soldiers appeared to be high in morale and they were well-equipped and supplied.

The first blow struck in the battalion's effort to choke off the enemy's supply traffic and freedom of movement was made by Company B, conducting a cordon and search operation around and in the village of Pho Trach in Phong Dien District.

The village itself was less than a mile from Camp Evans. The enemy had placed command-detonated mines along the trail leading to the village, and when Company B's point element was into the kill zone, the enemy kicked off an ambush by detonating the mines and engaging the infantrymen with small arms and machinegun fire. Company B reacted immediately, returning fire with its own small arms, machineguns and 90 mm recoilless rifles, while the commander, Captain Robert Carroll, called for gunship support. Having suffered only one casualty, Company B moved on line against the ambushers, but the enemy broke contact, taking their dead and wounded with them.

The end of February found Alpha and Bravo Companies closing in on

Churchville, a river bank hamlet seven miles northeast of Camp Evans. The village was dominated by a towering cathedral, its militant congregation consisting of an enemy regimental commander, his staff and a large security force. There was an ammo dump in the basement, machinegunners in the vestibule and forward observers in the belfry.

On the morning of March 4, both companies combat assaulted into the vicinity of the church with the plan of establishing a cordon around the remaining enemy force. The previous night some 1,000 rounds had been fired into the area, but nonetheless the Cavalrymen began to receive fire almost as soon as they touched down. Snipers were everywhere and it took almost two hours to maneuver the various infantry units into place.

Additionally, the Cavalrymen were subjected to a nightmare of crossfire. Two enemy soldiers were in the trees to their left, placing effective AK-47 fire on them. One alert Skytrooper spotted them, killing both instantly with his M-79 grenade launcher. With the crossfire eliminated the situation improved, but the tide really turned shortly after, announced by the unmistakable drone of a Cobra, accompanied by a Huey gunship, both loaded with rockets.

The gunships expended their rockets directly into the church and surrounding



bunkers, setting off several secondary explosions. After the first run, enemy fire subsided sufficiently for the Huey gunships to land and take out most of the wounded men. After three more passes by the Cobra, the church was a lifeless gutted shell and more than 20 enemy were dead.

On April 3, the 2nd Bn, 5th Cav, left LZ Jane and moved further north to join other elements of the division in relieving the Marines at Khe Sanh (Operation PEGASUS).

In November the battalion moved to its new III Corps home at Phuoc Vinh, 52 miles north of Saigon. The remainder of the year was spent helping to clear and secure the new division headquarters basecamp.

The battalion was committed to Operation NAVAJO WARHORSE in February 1969. Company B was on a night ambush patrol on March 9 when an enemy battalion paraded into its kill zone. Bravo took them on, killing 36.

On June 22 a routine patrol of Echo Company's recon platoon was pinned down 18 miles northwest of Tay Ninh. As the intensity of the contact increased the platoon began to head toward an old bomb crater, Sergeant Jesus S. "Poncho" Duran providing cover all the way with his machinegun.

Tactical air strikes were called in, forcing the enemy to flee, leaving an estimated squad-size element to cover their retreat.

"We were pinned down pretty tight and we needed a Medevac bird pretty badly," said Lieutenant Danny G. McGrew, the platoon leader. "On top of that we were getting ready to be extracted."

As the Skytroopers prepared for extraction an enemy machinegunner



While a buddy lays down covering fire, the Skytrooper (picture top right) unlimbers a strong right arm and a frag during a firefight near LZ Baldy in Quang Tin Province. During the same firefight, in which more than 100 NVA died, a radio operator trades communications for instant firepower from an M-16.



attempted to sneak up on their position. His efforts were frustrated when Poncho jumped from the bunker and, firing his M-60 machinegun from the hip, cut the enemy gunner down.

"I knew he was up there so I let him have it," Poncho said later. "That's when I saw the muzzle flashes from the squad that had us pinned down." Running toward the enemy positions, a virtual one-man assault, he fired his remaining ammunition while other members of the unit supported him. The onslaught was too much for the enemy, as they broke contact and sought asylum in the thick jungle surrounding the bunker complex.

The recon platoon was inserted into the same area a week later to check some cooking pots that a pilot said he thought he had seen. As they approached the area where the pots and pans had been discovered, Cavalrymen found a large bunker complex, complete with mess halls, classrooms and drinking wells.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Staff Sergeant Michael DeHart, the platoon sergeant. "The mess hall was big, and it had about three feet of overhead cover. There were benches in there, a large cooking area with a hearth in the middle of it, and rice was still cooking on the stove when we busted in on them." They also discovered many bunkers equipped with hammocks, slits for their weapons and ammunition and shelves for their personal possessions.

"And everywhere we went," said DeHart, "we found NVA rucksacks. Some were filled with AK-47 ammo, others with extra fatigues and even spare Ho Chi Minh sandals."

Suddenly, while pushing through the enemy complex, they encountered intense small arms and rocket propelled grenade (RPG) fire.

"We opened up on them," said LT McGrew, "but they were hitting us from three sides. I immediately called for air strikes, and attack helicopters were on station all the time. If it hadn't been for their rocket fire holding the enemy back, our luck might have run out."

Soon after the contact began, the force began seeking cover in preparation for the air strikes.

"When the Air Force got there, they provided close air support which sent the enemy running," said SSG DeHart.

A sweep through the area revealed six dead NVA. Bunkers and fighting positions were destroyed.

An NVA battalion assaulted LZ Ike

on June 18, defended by A and E Companies. When they had cut the wire and at least 10 of the enemy were inside the first barrier, the Cavalrymen began receiving small arms fire and hand grenades from the determined enemy. By detonating their claymores and returning a heavy volume of fire toward the enemy, the Skytroopers drove the enemy back from the wire. One NVA soldier was detained and 13 bodies were found in the wires.

During October and beyond, the Black Knights sponsored the 11th Battalion of the ARVN Airborne Division, conducting a series of missions designed to acquaint the Vietnamese unit with airmobile concepts. The continued success of these combined activities prompted the battalion to take greater part in the program to increase the Vietnamese ability to take over the war.

## 15th Admin

(Continued From P. 179)

base, naturally enough, moved too. And with it came the ever increasing slice of the 15th Administration Company.

Then the division moved south to III Corps, and again, the forward elements of the 15th Admin moved, except by this time, few could tell what was forward and what was rear.

During late 1968 and early 1969, the permanent rear of the division remained at Camp Radcliff. But in April 1969, as the 101st Airborne began to vacate Bien Hoa Army Base, the division ripped out the records kind of roots and brought its administrative tail back into the general neighborhood of the fighting body.

Despite all the organization, reorganizations, moves and shifts, the individuals within the company continued to provide the division with the administrative support required to accomplish the mission. Skytroopers were processed in and out; were promoted, sent on leave and R & R; paid; entertained by Special Services; had legal services rendered; had their image polished; and, perhaps, even had a chance to voice a complaint or two.



During FIRST TEAM operations in III Corps, weapons and rice caches were being turned up daily. The best kind for the soldiers, were the semi-automatic and bolt action rifles which made great war trophies.

## Medevac

(Continued From P. 175)

As the chopper passed over the crash site for the fourth time, a thick cloud of white smoke erupted from the bamboo below, and there was a bright red flash from to ground.

"Hey, man, our ship just blew up!" the wounded doorgunner shouted. He turned to the medic with his eyes wide and fearful. The medic talked into his radio mouthpiece, listened, and then looked up at his patient.

"He's all right. The Blues got him out. He's okay."

The helicopter circled down to land in a yellow meadow close to the crashed and burning chopper. The rescued doorgunner looked past the medic. A big smile shot across his face as he flashed the "V" sign at the freed pilot, now sprinting toward the ship.

"You're the greatest. You're the greatest," the rescued pilot cried to the Medevac crew as he climbed aboard. Then he turned and lunged at his own two crew members who caught him in a wild embrace.

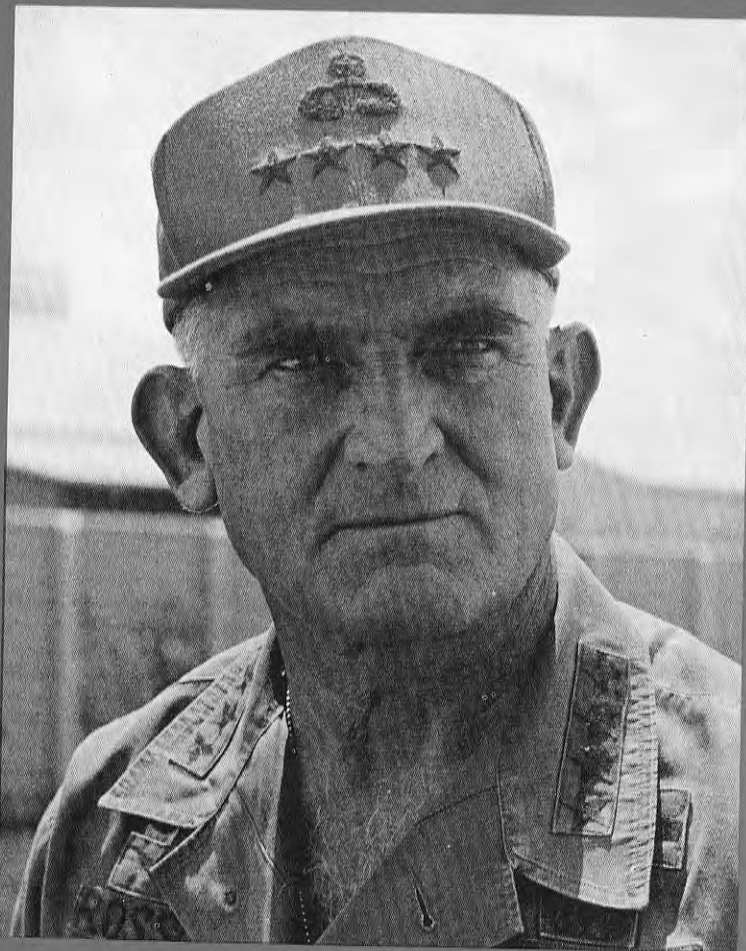


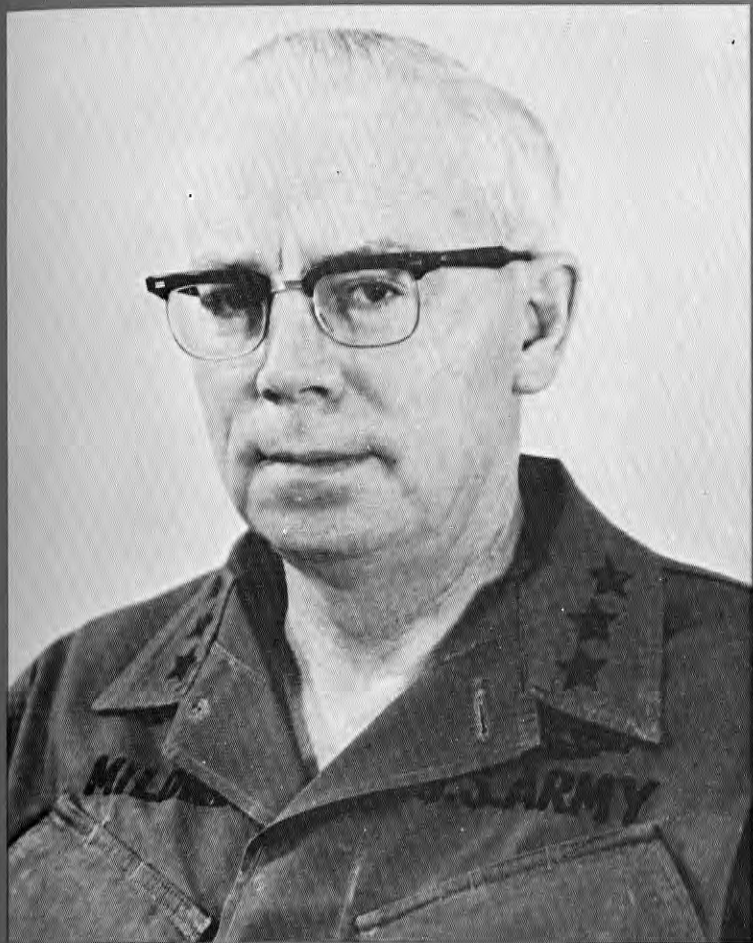


GENERAL  
CREIGHTON W. ABRAMS  
COMUSMACV



GENERAL  
WILLIAM B. ROSSON  
DEPUTY COMUSMACV





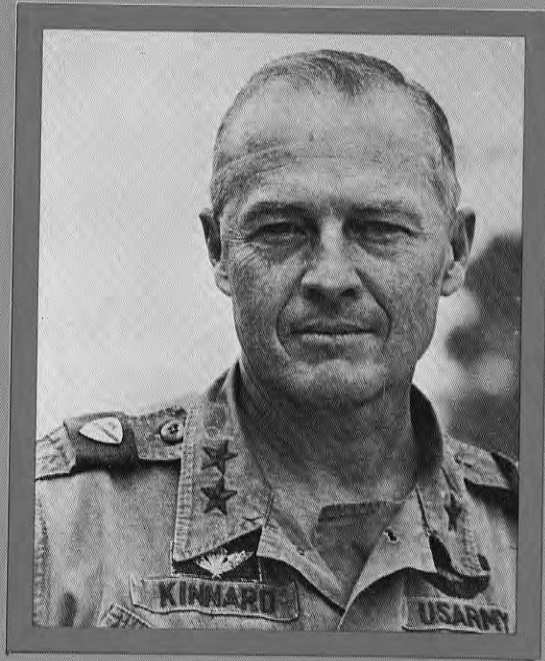
LIEUTENANT GENERAL  
THOMAS MILDREN  
COMMANDING GENERAL USARV



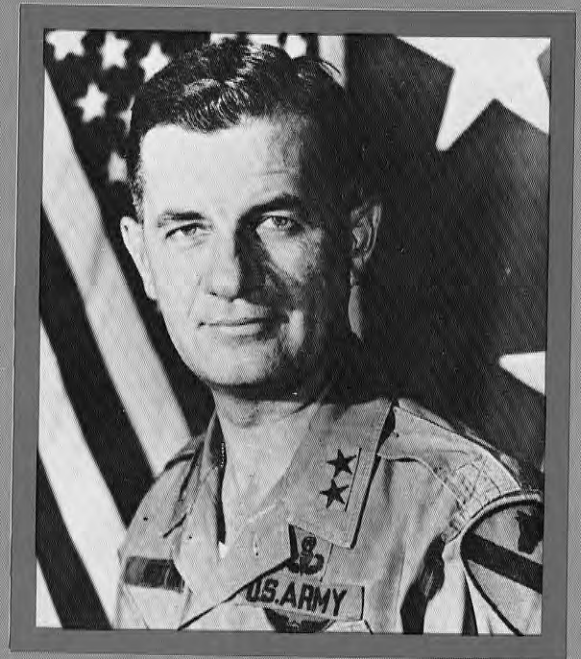
LIEUTENANT GENERAL  
JULIAN EWELL  
COMMANDING GENERAL  
II FIELD FORCE



# 1ST AIR CAVALRY DIVISION COMMANDERS



MAJOR GENERAL  
HARRY W. O. KINNARD



MAJOR GENERAL  
JOHN NORTON



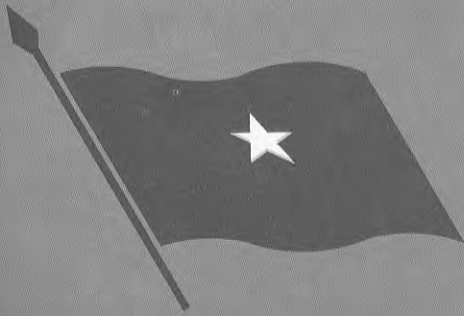
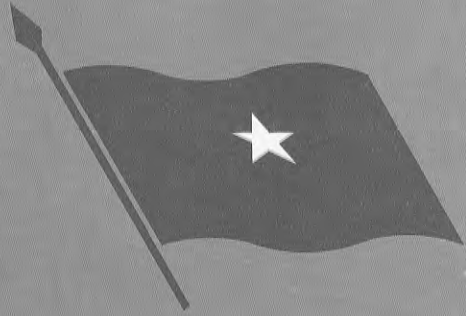
MAJOR GENERAL  
JOHN J. TOLSON



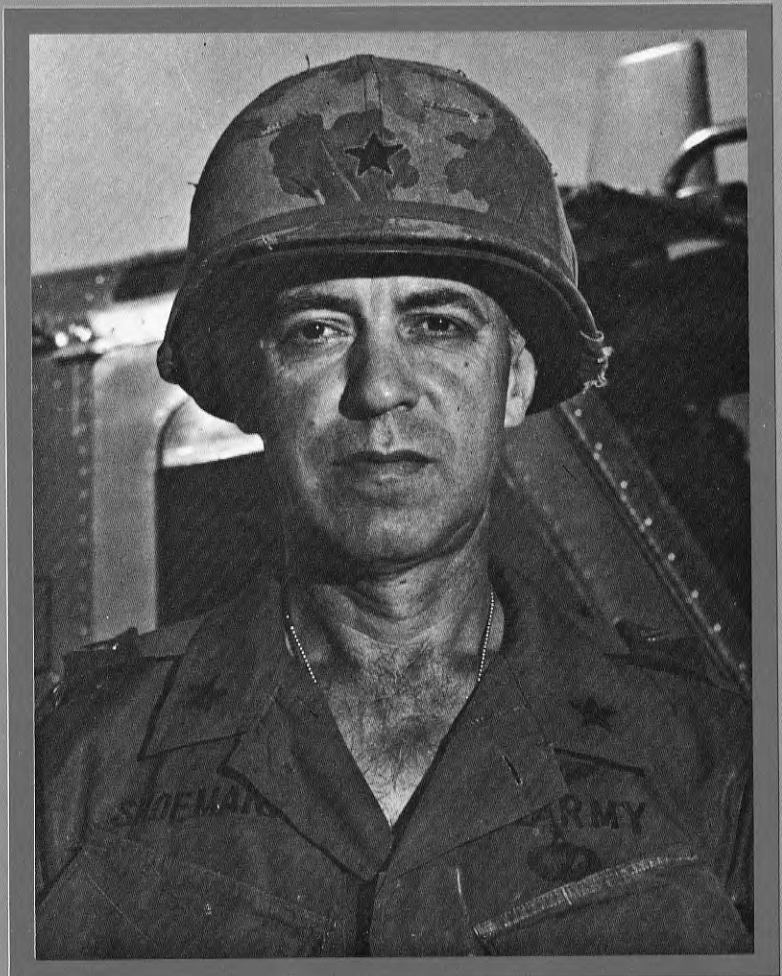
MAJOR GENERAL  
GEORGE I. FORSYTHE



BRIGADIER GENERAL  
GEORGE W. CASEY  
ASSISTANT DIVISION COMMANDER-A



BRIGADIER GENERAL  
ROBERT M. SHOEMAKER  
ASSISTANT DIVISION COMMANDER-B



# ASSISTANT DIVISION COMMANDERS

MAJOR GENERAL  
RICHARD T. KNOWLES

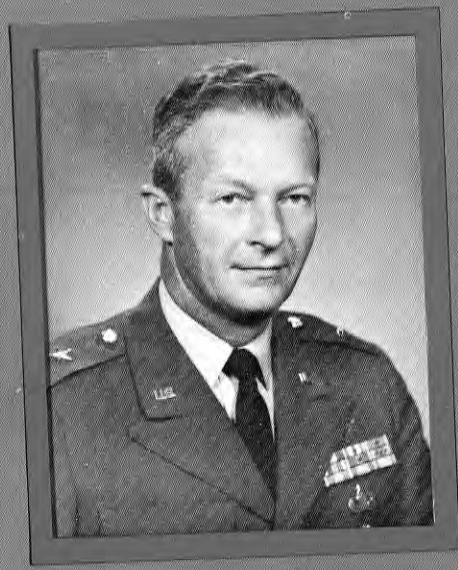


MAJOR GENERAL  
JOHN M. WRIGHT, JR.



MAJOR GENERAL  
WILLIAM A. BECKER

BRIGADIER GENERAL  
GEORGE B. BLANCHARD



LATE BRIGADIER GENERAL  
ALFRED J. F. MOODY



BRIGADIER GENERAL  
EDWARD H. DESAUSSURE, JR.



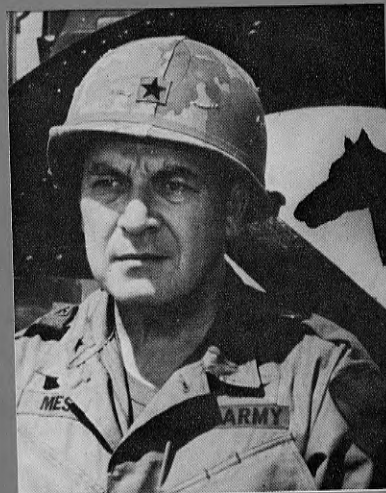
BRIGADIER GENERAL  
RICHARD L. IRBY



BRIGADIER GENERAL  
OSCAR E. DAVIS



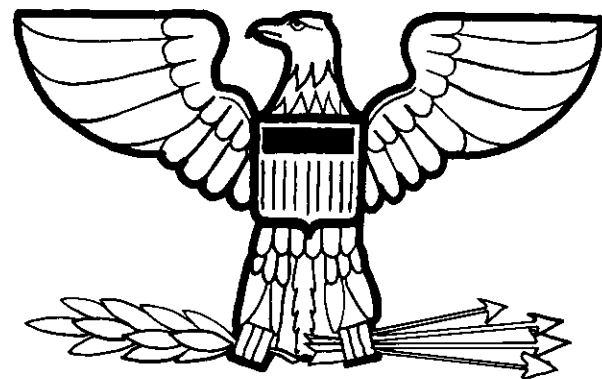
BRIGADIER GENERAL  
WILLIAM E. SHEDD, III



BRIGADIER GENERAL  
FRANK MESZAR

## **DIVISION CHIEFS OF STAFF**

Colonel George S. Beatty  
Colonel Herbert E. Wolf  
Colonel George W. Casey  
Colonel George W. Putnam, Jr.  
Colonel Conrad L. Stansberry  
Colonel Robert N. MacKinnon  
Colonel Robert M. Shoemaker  
Colonel Joseph P. Kingston



## **DIVISION COMMAND SERGEANTS MAJOR**

Command Sergeant Major Chester R. Westervelt  
Command Sergeant Major Kenneth W. Cooper  
Command Sergeant Major W. O. Marshall  
Command Sergeant Major Jack Moore  
Command Sergeant Major Vern O. Peters  
Command Sergeant Major Lawrence E. Kennedy