

3511

APTER ACTION REPORT

H TROOP (AIR) 17TH ARMORED CAVALRY SQUADRON

1 NOVEMBER 1972 - 28 JANUARY 1973

VHPA101

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
H TROOP (AIR) 17TH ARMORED CAVALRY SQUADRON  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96318

12 FEBRUARY 1973

SUBJECT: AFTER ACTION REPORT (PRE X DAY)

SECTION 1: Significant Organizational Activities

A. Personnel

During the last three months a critical shortage of personnel was experienced. Although the shortage was felt throughout the Troop, it particularly affected aviators and aircraft maintenance personnel. The weapons (AH1G) platoon and the scout (OH6A) platoon were drastically short of pilots primarily because new aviators arriving in country were not receiving transitions prior to departing CONUS. Many of the unit aviators were required to fly maximum flight hours and had to have medical clearance to continue flying. The shortage of crewchiefs and aircraft maintenance personnel also became critical due to a lack of experienced and trained personnel. Despite the use of many OJT personnel, the Troop was still so short of men that there was not available one crewchief for each aircraft. The shortage of qualified maintenance personnel required that section to work long hours and a 24 hour schedule was initiated in order to keep an adequate number of aircraft mission ready.

The problem with drug usage remained. Urinalysis tests increased over the past three months. These tests, however, were invariably made during times which conflicted with

combat duty requirements and hence were never 100% effective.

#### B. T O & E Equipment

During the period 1 November 72 to 28 January 73, a great deal was done to improve property accountability. A 100% inventory was completed on all hand receipts and discrepancies were corrected to reflect on-hand balances. A total of over \$20,000.00 worth of equipment not previously accounted for was inventory adjusted and added to the unit property book. A major problem area in property accountability has been the requirement for a rated aviator captain to maintain the property book. Accurate and proper accountability requires a full-time, trained property book officer unless efficient and capable supply NCOs are present.

#### C. Intelligence / Security

The need for accurate enemy intelligence is inherent in the mission of the Air Cavalry Troop. During the past three months, H Troop's critical shortage of officers included the loss of an intelligence officer which greatly impaired the effort to assimilate intelligence data from other sources with our own in order to give a clearer picture of enemy activity in the A/O. Added emphasis, therefore, was put on accuracy and completeness of spot reports. Debriefings were started again during which the scout pilot and observer were required to more accurately explain their spot reports. These

debriefings were normally conducted by the Operations Officer and were sometimes conducted by the Group S-2 as well. The debriefings proved extremely helpful and enhanced immeasurably the quality of spot reports. In order to increase the accuracy of the location of the spots an additional pilot in the Cavalry Team, the Chase Slick Aircraft Commander, was required to keep coordinates of spot reports along with the Wing Gunship's copilot. This double-check on accuracy proved helpful especially when new gun pilots who were unfamiliar with the A/O were taking spot reports.

In the area of security, the Troop made an extensive improvement. All classified material was stored in one central location, the commo room, which had an armed guard 24 hours a day. With the help of the Operations and Communications sergeants, all personnel concerned were made aware of the necessity to adhere strictly to security regulations. A security inspection in January conducted by Group showed that H Troop was extremely conscious and that regulations were being strictly enforced.

#### D. Operations

During the past three months, H Troop's Operations Office showed a great improvement due primarily to the introduction of a new Operations NCOIC, supplemented by two very capable clerks. The division of the work load among the clerks and the NCOIC allowed innovative and

efficient systems to be developed. As a result of these refinements, flight records and daily reports were maintained in an accurate and timely manner.

Significant progress has been made in the past three months in bringing those who utilize the Air Cavalry Troop to a fuller appreciation of the Cav's mission and capabilities. The SRAC G-2, for instance, became more aware of the maintenance requirements and flight time limitations of the helicopter. As a result, the daily mission requirements were reduced to four periods and these were never divided between more than two supported units. Consequently, the blade time between supported unit locations was reduced considerably.

The Pleiku area last light VR was continued but instead of an entire team only one aircraft was utilized. The value of that mission, however, has always been questionable. Efforts were made requiring backseaters to increase their familiarity with friendly unit locations in the Pleiku area but this proved futile due to the substantial number of small unit locations throughout the area. The weakness of these flights was demonstrated when on 23 January 73 at 1700 hours Pleiku Airbase sustained a severe rocket attack. The evening VR helicopter was already airborne with the backseater at the onset of the attack. A gun team was launched but due to the congestion of VNAF aircraft at the suspected rocket site, all three helicopters had to remain clear and

return to base without firing a single round. An additional first light VR was initiated in January but it was also thought to be of little value.

During the month of January a problem began to arise between SRAC G-2 and the Troop. G-2 based its Arc Light placements as much as 80% on Cav spot reports. Air Force bombers reported secondary explosions during many of these Arc Lights. ARVN ground forces in the area sometimes reported heavy damage as a result of the Arc Lights. On the other hand Cav Scouts, during bomb damage assessment missions, rarely found any evidence of damage, 90% of the time reporting negative BDAs. Whether the problem was with the accuracy of the original spot report, the quality or accuracy of the Arc Light location or the inaccurate reporting of the Air Force, the ARVN ground forces or the Cav cannot be determined. Nevertheless, a credibility gap appeared and widened until early January when the Troop uncovered a resupply road network extending from the Plei Trap area to enemy positions in the Kontum area. It was felt that this discovery assisted immeasurably in the interdiction of supplies that would have been otherwise valuable in the impending attack on Kontum and prevented enemy exploitation of the already precarious situation there.

Working closely with Group S-3 and S-2, efforts were made to improve mission effectiveness and instill in supported units and SRAC G-2 a greater understanding of Cavalry capabilities and limitations. This was achieved

through the use of accurate files and reports of problem areas. An Air Mission Commander Report was initiated and maintained daily. The AMC logged any significant problems of each day. Another report contrasted the blade time expended while actually working a mission with the blade time enroute to the A/O. The latter report was kept in the event supported units requested more "on station" time without appreciating the total time required to fly a VR mission. Other problem areas concerned the size of boxes chosen for VR missions. At the time of standdown, a lengthy report was in the initial stages of preparation which cited these and other problems. It was formulated to deal with the lack of understanding present at that time and to assist the overall completion of the mission. The report was not completed due to standdown.

Since 1 November 1972, H Troop has had no MIAs, no KIAs and 3 WIAs. Of the 169 shot-at reports submitted to Group in the past three months, the Troop has submitted 91 of them or 55.8%. There were 7 aircraft hit, 25% of the Group's total.

#### E. Logistics

During this period logistics problems have increased due to the cutback of support channels and units. The change in control of supply channels from U.S. to Vietnamese authority also greatly increased the difficulty of obtaining required supplies. Although shortages were felt in all areas of supply: clothing, equipment and food, the shortage most

critically effecting the Troop was that of aircraft parts.

Other major problems concerned P A & E support and the hold baggage facility. P A & E support was not adequate in its functions of supply or construction. The shipping of hold baggage for personnel already departed from RVN was a constant problem. After the baggage had been shipped, inquiries were being made concerning when the baggage had been shipped and why either the baggage or a bill of lading had not yet been received.

#### F. Aircraft Maintenance

The primary problem in Maintenance operations over the past three months has been the difficulty of meeting scheduled and unscheduled maintenance requirements. One major cause has been the critical shortage of trained and experienced maintenance personnel. Another cause has been the frequent unscheduled maintenance requirements, including combat damages which, for the most part required airframe work. Civilian sheet metal specialists assisted greatly in this area. The AHIG demanded the greatest maintenance attention. Swash-plates, rotor heads, engines and hydraulic servos required constant replacement. The daily requirement to maintain four AHIGs mission ready was met with great difficulty and necessitated long and demanding work hours. A special AHIG civilian contact team ultimately was used to counteract this problem and within weeks relieved a great deal of pressure. Problems

continued in the area of parts availability. Aircraft frequently remained inoperational for long periods of time while awaiting essential parts. The waiting period was one to four weeks except in cases of back orders to the U.S. which took a minimum of three weeks.

#### **G. Functions and Reporting**

Daily personnel reporting procedures were a constant problem over the past three months. This problem was primarily due to difficulties in coordination with the 518th PSC and inefficient courier service. Personnel orders were frequently not received for weeks. The inaccessibility of the 518th's location and the difficulties in telephone communications compounded the problem. Orders assigning personnel to the unit are necessary for accurate morning report purposes and they were rarely available when needed.

#### **II. Installation Property**

The accurate control of installation property has proven to be a difficult task. Items are frequently moved and with the close proximity of other units, items sometimes moved out of the Troop area. A 100% inventory of all station property conducted in November proved very difficult and accuracy was questionable.

## SECTION II: Commander's Observations and Recommendations

It is apparent that as the mission of the Air Cavalry Troop within the Central Highlands continued that a renewed effort of coordination was needed between the SRAC G-2 Air and the Troop Operations itself. A lack of effective communications between the two organizations often times led to a misutilization of the reconnaissance assets.

This coordination was greatly assisted by the use of the 17th Combat Aviation Group's G-2 Section becoming involved in the intelligence aspect of the reconnaissance mission. Increased use of the briefing and debriefing systems by higher headquarters resulted in more timely and effective use of intelligence data thereby causing a better reaction of ARVN forces to inflict military damage upon the enemy forces within MR II. The use of the SRAC G-2 Air Officer for other requirements often delayed intelligence gathering through his unavailability at briefings and debriefings.

The concept of the Air Cavalry Troop being utilized under operational control of the SRAC G-2 element is very practical and offers the best results for the hours flown. However, it should be taken into consideration that intelligence gathering is a very personal type operation and every effort should be made by all headquarters concerned to maintain a thorough and responsive communications network to insure that all phases of intelligence gathering are coordinated and disseminated to all involved.

It is the opinion of this Commander that the important

lessons learned during this short time is the fact that the Air Cavalry Troop in a reconnaissance role can be the deciding factor in the outcome of armed conflicts such as the one recently engaged in.

<b>Commanding Officer</b>	<b>Maj. Ronald M. Fishburn</b>
<b>Executive Officer</b>	<b>Cpt. John R. Parker III</b>
<b>Operations Officer</b>	<b>Cpt. Allan I. Erb</b>
<b>Scout Plt. Ldr.</b>	<b>1LT Arthur R. Marshall</b>
<b>Weapons Plt. Ldr.</b>	<b>1LT James M. Gower</b>
<b>Slick Plt. Ldr.</b>	<b>Cpt. Randy R. Legg</b>
<b>Maintenance Officer</b>	<b>1LT Robert B. Moulton</b>
<b>Property Book Officer</b>	<b>Cpt. Donald S. Hartley</b>