

# YEAR OF THE HORSE: VIETNAM

## 1st Air Cavalry in the Highlands

### 1965-1967

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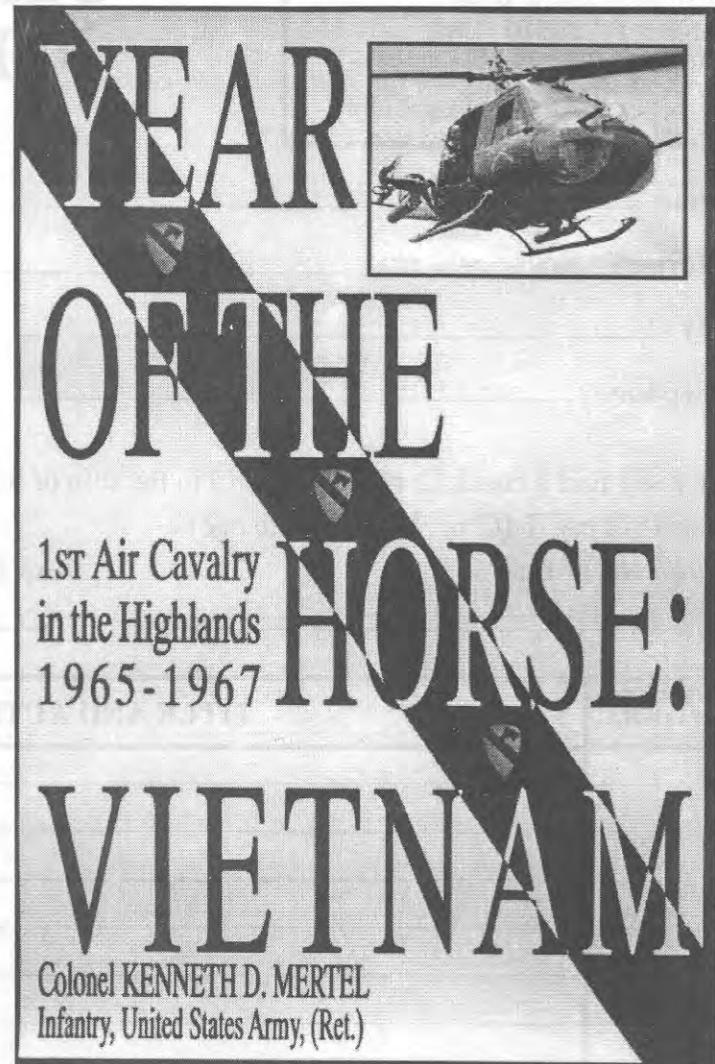
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**Summary:** "Swooping down onto the Vietnamese side of the Ton Le San River which forms the border with Cambodia," wrote *Time* magazine, "went four sizable units of the 1st Air Cavalry Division . . . and the 'First Team' rode in on their choppers. In some places the brush was too thick and high for proper landings, so that the troops leaped fifteen feet to the snake-infested grounds . . . 1st Air Cav Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Mertel took his helicopter down the middle of the narrow stream, hoping to draw fire . . . now that the U.S. had penetrated right to the threshold of what had long been the enemy's privileged domain, chances were it would come soon enough." Come it did. Colonel Mertel, commander of one of the units that made the historic jump, describes the action of his gallant men. They are the Jumping Mustangs — 1st Battalion, Airborne, 8th Cavalry, of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. This book is their day-by-day story, written by the man who knows them best. On 1 July 1965, at Fort Benning, Georgia, the 1st Air Cavalry Division was activated to employ newly developed techniques and tactics, providing the utmost in combat effectiveness and flexibility. After telling of the excitement at Benning over the formation of this revolutionary airmobile division, Colonel Mertel gives a vivid picture of the building of his own Jumping Mustang Battalion, the rigorous training of officers and men and, finally, the long voyage across the Pacific to Vietnam. Now the test. Would the new concept of airmobility, so painstakingly worked out stateside, produce the hoped-for results? The answer came quickly and dramatically in a rapid succession of search and destroy operations. Ia Drang . . . An Khe South . . . Plei Mei . . . the Cambodian border . . . Bong Son . . . Tarzan . . . In precipitous mountains, dense jungles, mud and water-filled rice paddies and expanses of view-obstructing elephant grass, the Jumping Mustangs sought out the enemy, engaging him in combat and stopping him in his tracks. Airmobility more than passed the test. Colonel Mertel pays tribute to the many acts of heroism of his men, who lived, worked and fought together in some of the world's most inhospitable conditions. He also writes movingly of those who never came back. In 1967 the President, at a White House ceremony, recognized the Division's success and valor by awarding it the Presidential Unit Citation for the action at Plei Mei. According to the Chinese calendar, 1966 was the "Year of the Horse." It was the "Year of the Horse" for the Jumping Mustangs in Vietnam.

**About the author:** COLONEL KENNETH D. MERTEL was born in Bennett, Colorado, on June 8, 1924. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942, and saw service in World War II. During 1945 he attended the Infantry Officers Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, graduating as a 2nd Lieutenant, Infantry, Army of the U.S. He was integrated into the Regular Army in 1946. He served in the Philippines and Europe and during the Korean conflict, and in 1963 commanded a combat aviation battalion in support of the South Vietnamese Army. Returning to the United States, he was assigned to the 11th Air Assault Division, engaged in testing of the



revolutionary tactical concepts of airmobile warfare. In July 1965 he again volunteered for duty in Vietnam and became commander of the Jumping Mustang Battalion. Colonel Mertel is the author of numerous articles that have appeared in military journals and has been a frequent speaker on airmobility before civic and military groups.

**Audience:** military, aviation, U.S. Army, Vietnam historians; veterans groups, unit reunions.

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