

# A Short History of the 11<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry

*Submitted by:*

*Ollie Pickral, (K Troop, 3/11, 1968 1969)  
(Author Unknown)*

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The 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry was activated on 2 February 1901 at Fort Myer, Virginia. In December of that year, the Regiment was deployed to the jungles of the Philippines. Its mission was to help neutralize the insurrectionist forces that were trying to seize power in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. The Regiment served under the first civil governor of the Philippines, William Howard Taft, who would later become President of the United States. The troopers were issued "bolo" knives (machetes) to slash through the thick jungle vegetation of the Philippine Islands. A pair of crossed bolo knives later became a part of the Blackhorse crest symbolizing the "first blood" or "battle action" of the Regiment.

First Squadron, while posted on the island of Samar, earned the Regiment its first battle streamer entitled "Samar 1902". The Regiment's first casualty occurred in an ambush on 4 March 1902, when insurrectionist forces killed Private Clarence L. Gibbs. In 1904, after returning from the Philippines, the Regiment was stationed at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. The 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was then ordered to Cuba on 16 October 1906. From their base at Camp Columbia, Cuba, the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, less first Squadron, conducted small mounted patrols as a display of the power for the United States. When order had been restored, the Regiment deployed back to America.

Upon arriving back in the continental United States in February 1909, the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was ordered to mount up for the inaugural parade of incoming President William Howard Taft in Washington, DC. In March 1909, the Regiment was then stationed at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia with a mission of preparedness for military contingencies. In early 1911, the Blackhorse was ordered to Fort Sam Houston, Texas to begin mounted desert training as concerns about Mexican stability increased. In May of 1914, "The Ludlow Massacre" touched off an armed riot among miners in Colorado. The 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was deployed to the towns of Trinidad and Ludlow, Colorado, to stop the bloodshed by a show of force that would allow both sides time to negotiate.

On 9 March 1916, the Mexican revolutionary "Pancho" Villa raided the town of Columbus, New Mexico. After killing fifteen Americans and several visiting Mexicans, he left the town in ruins. President Woodrow Wilson ordered Brigadier General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing to lead a Punitive Expedition into Mexico to destroy Villa's rebel army. On 12 March 1916, the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry joined the expedition into Mexico to capture Villa and neutralize his army. While in Mexico, on 5 May 1916, the Second Squadron (Provisional), commanded by Major Robert L. Howze, led the last mounted cavalry charge in U.S. military history. After the action, Howze's men reported forty-two enemy dead while suffering no friendly casualties or loss of mounts. The 5th of May was later established as the Regiment's official organization day, in honor of Howze's charge.

On 9 July 1919, the Regiment moved to its new posting at the Presidio of Monterey, California. The Institute of Heraldry provided the Regiment with its own Grant of Arms on 25 August 1921. The "Allons" crest officially established the Regiment as distinctive from other mounted units. On 14 September 1924, "the Great Monterey Oil Fire" erupted when lightning struck an oil storage tank. The fire raged for five days. The 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry participated in the fire fighting effort and twenty-six Blackhorse troopers were killed. John Phillip Sousa had written the tune "The Black Horse Trooper" and the 9th Colonel of the Regiment, Herbert J. Brees, received permission to adopt it as the Regiment's tune.

In 1937, the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry appeared in the film "Sergeant Murphy" starring Ronald Reagan. On 1 June of that year, it also participated in the opening ceremony of the Golden Gate Bridge. By the late

1930's, the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was ordered to start experimenting with scout cars, the first mechanized cavalry vehicles. In the summer of 1942, the tide of mechanization finally swept away the last of the horse-mounted cavalry. In a very emotional farewell, the mounts that had symbolized the true cavalry trooper were turned in for vehicles. From horse to horsepower, this marked the end to an area.

On 15 July 1942, the 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry was inactivated at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Headquarters and Headquarters Troop was re-designated on 19 April 1943, as the HHT, 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Group Mechanized. The former squadrons of the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry were sent to fight with the 10th Armored Division and the 90th Infantry Division overseas. HHT, 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Group Mechanized drew new squadrons, the 36th and 44th Reconnaissance Squadrons, and received an Assault Gun Troop (a howitzer battery). On 1 June 1944, the Group moved to Camp Gordon, Georgia, to begin training for overseas deployment. Declared ready for combat soon after, the Regiment departed from New York bound for the United Kingdom on 29 September 1944 and entered France on 23 November 1944. The first unit of the Blackhorse to cross the English Channel was B Troop, commanded by 1Lt Leonard B. Holder, who would later become the Regiment's 37<sup>th</sup> Colonel in Vietnam. After the war, the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Group Mechanized was re-designated as the 11<sup>th</sup> Constabulary Regiment to maintain order in war torn Germany. It was a grand time for the Regiment as they received horses again to patrol the devastated villages and towns of post-war Germany. The "CIRCLE 'C', COWBOYS" rode from May 1946 November 1948.

In November of 1948, the Blackhorse was re-designated as the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment and inactivated. On 1 April 1951, at the height of the Korean War, the Blackhorse was brought back on active status as the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment at Camp Carson, Colorado. In 1954, the Regiment transferred to Fort Knox, Kentucky to receive its training in armored tactics. In May 1954, the Regiment deployed to the Desert Warfare Training Center at Camp Irwin, CA, (little did the Regiment know it would not be the last time). In mid-March 1957, the entire Regiment rotated to southern Germany to relieve the 6<sup>th</sup> ACR patrolling the Germany-Czechoslovakia border.

In 1964, the Blackhorse returned to the United States and was stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland for two years, until it received orders in March 1966 to deploy to Vietnam. In early 1966, the Regiment began redesigning its equipment for a new type of warfare based on recommendations from American advisors based in Vietnam. Additional armor and two more 30-cal. machine guns were added to the Regiment's M113s, transforming them into what became known as Armored Cavalry Assault Vehicles or ACAVs. The new design of armored gun shields provided a measure of protection for the crew and track commander. The result was a rapid all terrain fighting vehicle which could deliver devastating firepower. The Blackhorse troops arrived in South Vietnam on September 7, 1966, (the Air Troop arrived in December), and quickly engaged the enemy with M-48 tanks, ACAV's, artillery and helicopters. The Regiment established the justification to receive its own patch on 1 May 1967 from the Department of Heraldry and was the first of five Armored Cavalry Regiments to receive a distinctive shoulder sleeve insignia.

The main operational areas for the Blackhorse squadrons were the provinces around Saigon and up to the Cambodian border. The unit clearly demonstrated its rapid mobility when Saigon came under siege during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The unit raced over 100 kilometers in eight hours to the defense of the city and fought street by street to overcome the attacking Viet Cong. History now points out that the Viet Cong were virtually annihilated during these battles. From that time forward North Vietnamese Army units, well supplied and equipped by the communist superpowers, would fight a war of attrition against the United States. Rarely however, would they risk a head-to-head confrontation with their most feared adversary, the 11<sup>th</sup> ACR. In July of 1968, the 39th Colonel of the Regiment, George S. Patton Jr., assumed command and soon applied his expertise in armored combat tactics. The Regiment moved the armor off the roads and into the jungles in search of the enemy, a concept previously thought not feasible. This action was so successful that the enemy could no longer move freely and was forced to seek sanctuary inside neutral Cambodia. Colonel Patton coined the phrase, "FIND THE BASTARDS, THEN PILE ON", which remains today as the Regiment's battle cry. From well-established bases inside Cambodia, the communists would strike out into South Vietnam and then return across the border to re-supply and regroup.

On 1 May 1970, the 11<sup>th</sup> ACR spearheaded a historic attack across the Cambodian border into an area called the Fish Hook to deny the enemy of these safe havens. Commanded by the 41st Colonel

of the Regiment, Donn A. Starry, the Blackhorse penetrated for more than 60 kilometers to capture the town of Snoul. The Cambodian Incursion was the last unrestrained offensive use of U.S. ground forces in the war. The capture and destruction of tons of enemy weapons and supplies left the enemy devastated and demoralized. The result was a smoother transition of responsibility to the South Vietnamese military as the American combat forces continued to withdraw. Countless American and allied lives were saved by the operation that left the North Vietnamese Army crippled and unable to mount an effective offensive for some time. In February of 1971, First and Third Squadron redeployed to the U.S. and were inactivated. On 6 April 1972, after almost six years of continuous combat the Blackhorse Regiment's Air Troop and Second Squadron departed Vietnam having never lost a battle. One year later, on 29 March 1973, the last American combat troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. Within two years, on 30 April 1975, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese. In all, 768 Blackhorse troopers made the ultimate sacrifice by helping to protect and defend the people of South Vietnam from their north communist aggressors. The Regiment's wounded totaled 5,761. Three 11<sup>th</sup> ACR troopers were awarded the Medal of Honor, two of which were posthumous. In its best performance, the gallant troopers of the Blackhorse Regiment earned fourteen battle streamers for bravery and forever secured a place in American military history and legend.

On 17 May 1972, the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment was re-designated as the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fulda, Germany. The Blackhorse Regiment became the first line of defense on the "THE FRONTIER OF FREEDOM" protecting the Fulda Gap. In the event that hostilities broke out, the 11<sup>th</sup> ACR had the mission of holding off tying down a Soviet Army ten times its size in order to give the divisions behind it time to react. They were more than up to the challenge, standing ready and vigilant against the Warsaw Pact forces and contributing to the West's ultimate victory in the Cold War. On 9 November 1989, the East-West German wall fell. The Regiment's 17-year vigil along the Iron Curtain was over. In August of 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, E Troop, 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron went to war with 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR. On 10 April 1991, the Regiment deployed an aviation task force to support the U.S. Kurdish relief efforts in Turkey and Northern Iraq (Operation Provide Comfort). On 16 May 1991, the Regiment deployed to Kuwait for Operation Positive Force to secure Kuwait as it struggled to rebuild from the war. By October, Task Force Thunderhorse's mission in Turkey was over, and its remaining troopers returned to Fulda. As the need for U.S. forces in Europe decreased, the Blackhorse Regiment was inactivated in a very emotional ceremony on 15 March 1994.

The 11<sup>th</sup> ACR was reactivated on 26 October 1994, at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. The Blackhorse continues the tradition of "finding the bastards, then piling on" while serving as the Army's premier training unit, the NTC's Opposing Force (OPFOR). The Blackhorse now sets the standard for training the world's greatest Army, while remaining ready to respond to any contingency.

ALLONS - Blackhorse forever!