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One Look at the Hats Tells You It's F Troop

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BIEN HOA, Vietnam —
Soon after the 1st Cav. Div.
was organized in 1921, one
of its horse soldiers' most
important jobs was patrol-

ling the Mexican border to
prevent smuggling of nar-
cotics and liquor as well as
cattle rustling and gun running.

The modus operandi of the
Cav. has changed. Horses were
replaced by jeeps in 1943, and

today the 3rd Brigade—the last
remaining 1st Cav. Div. element
in Vietnam—relies mainly on
gunship and reconnaissance heli-
copters to help its infantrymen
defend U.S. installations and
men in the Saigon area. Pershing
rifles and sabres have given
way to rockets, grenades and
minigun fire.

But F Troop, 9th Cav., 1st
Cav. Div. (airmobile) retains
one important link with the past.

Its enlisted men and officers
wear a black stetson hat with
their duty uniforms or civilian
clothes. It's a badge they're
proud of.

"It's like back in the states,"
1st Lt. Dwight L. Jobe said.
"You don't mess with a guy's
car or his woman. Well, you just
don't mess with a man's Cav
hat. If you want to get into a
fight, that's probably one of the
quickest ways to do it."

F Troop, a "scout" company
which flies light observation
helicopters ("Loaches") ex-
clusively, is the only outfit in the
3rd Brigade authorized to wear
the hats. Most of the men don't
take off their hats until they go
to sleep, troop officials say.

"I was at the 90th replace-
ment in Long Binh last month
and some sergeant told me to
take off my Cav hat," said Troop
First Sergeant Franklin East.
"He said it wasn't authorized. I
said the commanding general
has authorized the hat to be
worn in Vietnam, I'm still in
Vietnam and I'm gonna keep it
on until I leave.

"The hat is a great morale-
builder for us," he said. "I've
been in the army 22 years, and
I've never seen a unit with more
pride and more esprit de corps
than this one."

The hats are ordered from a
firm in St. Louis and delivery
sometimes takes as long as
three months. Most men order
three or four to make sure they
get at least one, Jobe said.

Once the hat arrives, it be-
comes a prized possession.

One officer had his hat on the
empty front observer seat of his
"Loach" and two Communist
small arms rounds went through
it, Jobe said.

"He just kept wearing the rag-
gedly thing. He wouldn't get a
new one.

"Another man we had was
killed and his family wrote sev-
eral letters to us asking that we
send his hat as something they
could remember him by. We
couldn't. It burned when the
man's bird went down."

The only difference in the hats
are the rank insignia on them
and the color of the braid. Offi-
cers wear gold braid, warrant
officers wear silver and enlisted
men wear yellow braid. Each
hat bears crossed sabres, and
each man wears his hat differ-
ently, Jobe said.

"The way he wears it becomes
a trademark of the individual.
Some turn the front up like a pi-
rate hat, some turn the sides up
like a cowboy, some just leave
the brim straight. No matter
how we wear them, we just want
to let everybody else know that
we're the meanest SOBs in the
valley."

The closeness of the unit
members comes mainly from
the fact that each is a volunteer
who specifically requested duty
in a cavalry scout unit. That
closeness —and the hats — has
sparked some criticism from
outsiders.



First Sgt. Franklin East in his Cav hat. "I'm still in Vietnam,
and I'm gonna keep it on until I leave." (S&S)