

1st Armoured Personnel Carrier Squadron

The 1st Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) Squadron was raised at Puckapunyal, Victoria, on 1 July 1965. By the end of the year the unit was comprised of the squadron headquarters, an administrative troop, two APC troops, and elements of a support company with support troops. Each troop consisted of 13 carriers, all M113A1s, which was enough to “lift” an infantry company. While in Vietnam, in October 1969, a third troop was formed by reducing the number of carriers in each troop to 11 vehicles and using the men and vehicles from the support troop. The 1st APC Squadron had been raised, in part, to relieve the overworked 1st APC Troop serving in Vietnam.

The members of 1st APC Troop had been in South Vietnam since June 1965, supporting the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), as part of the battalion group. A small unit, initially consisting of only eight carriers, 1st APC Troop mainly came from No. 1 Troop, A Squadron, 4th/19th Prince of Wales’s Light Horse (PWLH), under the command of Lieutenant (later captain) R.K. “Bob” Hill. In September the troop was increased to 13 carriers and two mortar carriers, and in March 1966 the unit’s title was changed from 1st Troop, 4th/19th PWLH, to 1st APC Troop.

Based with 1RAR and the 173rd United States Airborne Brigade (Separate) at Bien Hoa, a large American base north of Saigon, the troop worked closely with the infantry and paratroopers. The APCs carried personnel, evacuated wound, and moved equipment, such as field guns. The carriers were also used as light tanks in operations against the enemy. The troop supported the Americans in clearing the Viet Cong (VC) from Nui Dat, Hoa Long, and Long Phuoc.

1st APC Squadron, meanwhile, had been training at Puckapunyal and, at the end of May 1966, moved to Vietnam to relieve 1st APC Troop. The squadron arrived at Nui Dat on 9 June, at which time the vehicles and some personnel from 1st APC Troop became 1st APC Squadron’s No. 3 Troop.

The squadron worked with the 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (5RAR), to establish Nui Dat as the base for the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) by erecting defences and clearing the area. Later in June one of the squadron’s troops supported the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), for Operation Enoggera, a search-and-destroy mission in Long Phuoc village. This was the first of many such missions carried out by the squadron.

As 1ATF did not yet have tanks, the squadron provided armoured support for the infantry and carried out a number of cavalry tasks, in addition to its work as carriers. The squadron inserted, redeployed, and extracted troops, including patrols conducted by the Special Air Service; acted as an armoured ambulance for medical evacuations; served as a ready deployment force; was used as mobile machine-gun and mortar platforms; protected convoys and escorts; conducted reconnaissance; supported cordon-and-search operations; and served as armoured command vehicles. The squadron also patrolled with troops from the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN).

The squadron's best known action was on 18 August 1966, when No. 3 Troop carried A Company, 6RAR, into battle to relieve D Company, besieged in the rubber plantation north-west of Long Tan. D Company had engaged a much larger enemy force that afternoon. At 5.45 pm seven APCs from No. 3 Troop "scrambled" to pick up A Company and carry it from Nui Dat to D Company's position.

The troop travelled cross-country, forded the flooded Suoi Da Bang creek, and moved in an assault formation astride the plantation road towards D Company. It was dark and raining heavily. After fighting its way through groups of enemy, the carriers reached D Company at about 7 pm. Advancing in a sweeping arc, in a north-westerly then easterly direction, the carriers moved past D Company and through where the enemy was forming up for another attack. By 7.10 am the APCs had returned to D Company's position. The VC had been attacking from the north-east but soon broke off after the return of the carriers. The troopers and infantry anticipated an enemy counter attack but enemy figures instead stood up and withdrew along the front into the rubber plantation. The firing stopped – the battle was over. The timely arrival of the carriers had played a decisive part in breaking up the VC attack and the Australian success.

The squadron went on to support 6RAR and 5RAR, patrolling the Long Tan area. One troop carried out a cavalry role in a combined infantry and armour sweep on either side of Route 2, as part of Operation Crows Nest. The squadron carried out similar work for the rest of year, carrying troops and providing mobile fire support when necessary.

In Australia the numbering of Royal Australian Armoured Corps's units was reorganised and in January 1967, 1st APC Squadron, became A Squadron of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment. Although its personnel were rotated back to Australia, a squadron from the regiment remained in Vietnam until November 1972, and No. 1 Troop remained even longer, until March 1972.

Glossary

Punkapunya

Battle Honours

- nil

Commanding Officers

- Hagerty, Robert Edmund

Decorations

- 1 DCM
- 1 MID



APCs carry members of an SAS patrol through the scrub. The SAS men will disembark at a 'drop point' for a walk in' patrol in the Long Hai Hills Vietnam



An M113A1 APC moving through dense forest in the southern part of Phuoc Tuy Province Vietnam.



In 1966 the **1st Armoured Personnel Squadron** worked with the 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (5RAR) and 105 Battery, Royal Australian Artillery in establishing the Task Force base at Nui Dat. Shortly afterwards, though not for the first time, they proved their worth in a perilous situation. At Long Tan APCs were one among several elements that swung the course of the battle in the Australian's favour. While artillery had a devastating effect on the enemy and the infantry, pinned down and under heavy fire, withstood assault after assault, it was the arrival of the APCs from 3 Troop 3rd Cavalry regiment, spitting fire from their .50 calibre machine guns into an enemy force massing for yet another attack, that forced them to disperse and withdraw. The members of 1st APC Troop had been in South Vietnam since June 1965, supporting the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), as part of the battalion group. A small unit, initially consisting of only eight carriers, 1st APC Troop mainly came from No. 1 Troop, A Squadron, 4th/19th Prince of Wales's Light Horse (PWLH), under the command of Lieutenant (later captain) R.K. "Bob" Hill. In September the troop was increased to 13 carriers and two mortar carriers, and in March 1966 the unit's title was changed from 1st Troop, 4th/19th PWLH, to 1st APC Troop.

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