

Scouting at 52° Below

An Introduction to the Arctic Cavalry

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With the downsizing of the U.S. military, it is interesting to note the activation of a truly unique — perhaps the most unique — American cavalry unit.

On 16 June 1994, A Troop, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry (recently re-flagged as E Troop, 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry), was activated at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, as the cavalry troop for the newly formed 1st Brigade, 6th Infantry Division (Light).

Echo Troop, “Arctic Recon,” enjoys the distinction of being the only separate light cavalry troop and the only Arctic-trained and equipped cavalry unit in the U.S. Army. Because E Troop is the first ground cavalry to operate at Fort Wainwright in many years, the armor and cavalry communities have little familiarity with the type of environment and organization.

The deactivation of the 6th Infantry Division (Light) and its accompanying 4-9 Reconnaissance Squadron created a need for a new cavalry unit in Alaska. The 1st Brigade, 6th ID (Light), despite its misleading name, is a separate infantry brigade (SIB), aligned administratively under the 10th Mountain Division. Headquartered at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, the brigade actually falls under the control of the United States Army, Alaska (USARAK) and the United States Army, Pacific (USARPAC). It is a completely self-sufficient, rapid deployment force of three light infantry battalions, (one of which is airborne), one field artillery

battalion, and a support battalion. The 1st Brigade is the largest SIB in the U.S. Army, and has its own military intelligence company, engineer company, signal company (MSE), long-range surveillance detachment (LRSD), headquarters and headquarters company (HHC), and of course, its own ground cavalry troop. (Fig. 1)



Until its deactivation in June 1994, the 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry was the divisional cavalry (reconnaissance) squadron for the 6th Infantry Division (Light) and consisted of a headquarters and headquarters troop (HHT) and two air cavalry troops equipped with OH-58 and AH-1 helicopters. The ground cavalry troop, which the squadron was authorized, was a round-out unit from the Army Reserves, stationed in Madison, Wisconsin. With the announcement of the deactivation of the 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry, an immediate need arose for an active duty ground troop to be organized at Fort Wainwright to support the SIB.

Troop Organization and Equipment

The current Modified Table of Organization (MTOE) for the arctic cavalry is based on the ground troop of the reconnaissance squadron with additional support sections, to include mess, medical, fuel, cargo and maintenance assets. The troop's authorized strength is six officers and 93 enlisted, including an Arctic MTOE authorization of three mechanics for Arctic vehicles and equipment.

The troop's platoon organization (Fig. 2) is significantly different from the scout platoons outlined in FM 17-98, *The Scout Platoon*. Because E Troop is based on the light infantry division's reconnaissance squadron ground troop, there are some interesting characteristics not found in other cavalry troops. One difference is the use of six High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV) instead of ten in each scout platoon. Organizationally and, to a lesser extent, tactically, the Arctic cavalry platoons most closely resemble the six-vehicle Cavalry Fighting Vehicle platoon. Other characteristics include the absence of mortars at the troop level, the presence of an eight-HMMWV cargo section, and the Arctic MTOE authorization of 14 Small Unit Support Vehicles (SUSVs).

There are two platoons of six hard-topped HMMWVs each. The scouts come equipped with M1025 HMMWVs armed with MK19 grenade launchers, M60 machine guns, and .50 caliber

SIB TASK ORGANIZATION

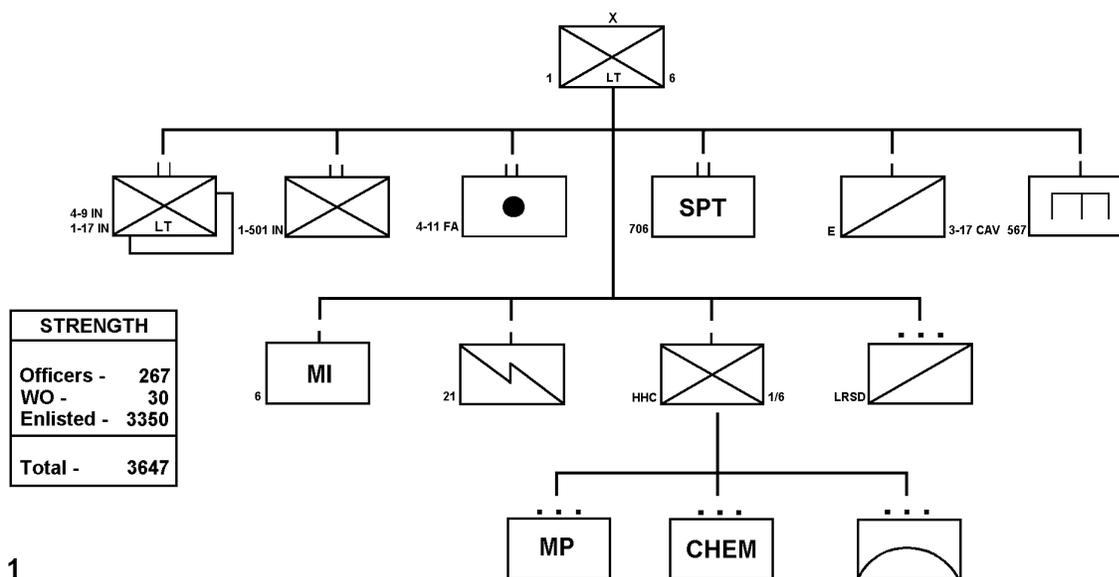


Fig. 1

Graphics by SGT Sean Daugherty

machine guns. Each vehicle carries a crew of three soldiers (driver, gunner, and TC), as well as M-16A2s, night vision devices, GPS, NBC equipment, and dual-net secure radios. The platoons normally operate in two sections of three vehicles each under the control of the platoon leader or platoon sergeant (Fig. 3).

The two antitank platoons provide overwatch for the scout platoons. These TOW platoons consist of four M966 hard-topped HMMWVs each and are armed with the M220A2 TOW missile system. Each M966 carries a crew of three soldiers (driver, gunner, and TC), as well as two M-16A2s, a 9mm, night vision devices, GPS, NBC equipment and dual-net secure radios. Both TOW platoons also have four M998 cargo HMMWVs to transport soldiers' gear, Arctic equipment, and ammunition.

The terrain in Alaska is often not suited to operation of the TOW missile. Trees and close terrain limits the system's utility. By removing the Missile Guidance System (MGS) tray and adding the proper mount, the TOW vehicles can mount the MK19, M2 .50 cal, or M60 machine guns. This is also quite handy for contingencies where the threat may not have a significant armored vehicle capability. In these situations, the TOW systems are stored in the cargo HMMWVs for availability in case the threat or terrain changes (Fig. 4).

The headquarters platoon (Fig. 5) provides complete organizational level

E/3-17 CAV TASK ORGANIZATION

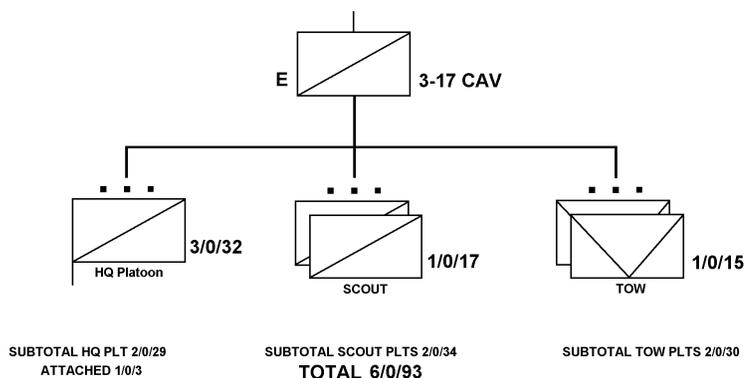


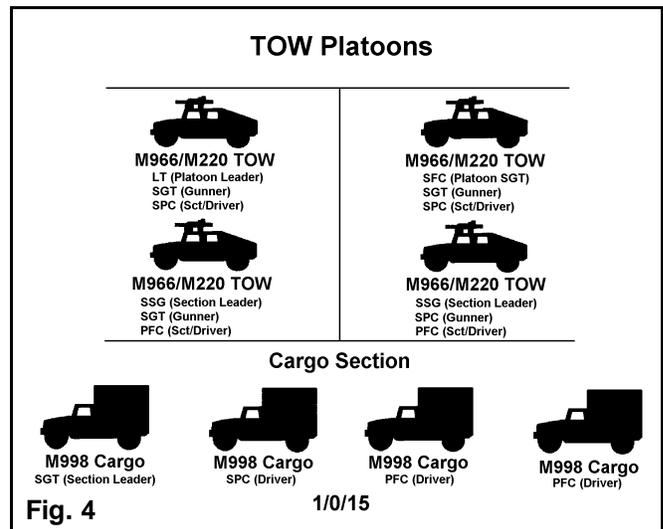
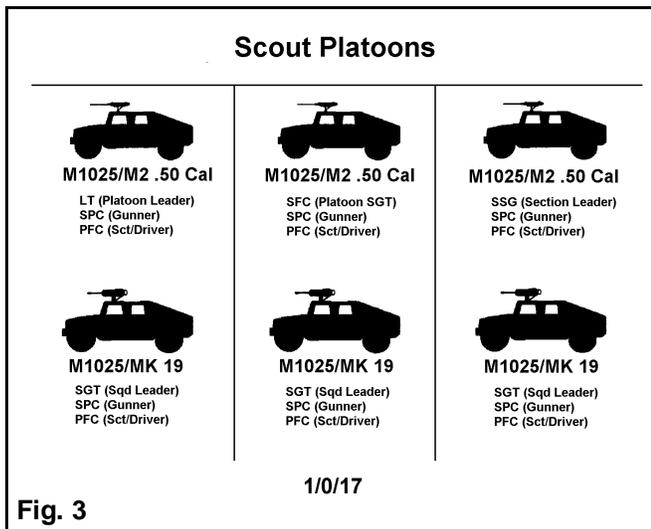
Fig. 2

support of the troop in the field. The headquarters platoon consists of medic, mess, maintenance, fuel, cargo, and headquarters sections. The medic section consists of two M996 HMMWV ambulances and five soldiers, two E5s and three E1-4s, one of whom is a combat medic.

The mess section is two M35A2 trucks and an MKT field kitchen, along with four soldiers, (one E6, one E5, and two E1-4 cooks). The maintenance section consists of seven mechanics and a one-man fuel section. The troop is authorized one E7 motor sergeant, one E5 light wheeled vehicle mechanic, one E5 equipment records clerk, one E4 signal specialist, one E4

recovery vehicle operator, one E3 petroleum handler, and two E3 light wheeled vehicle mechanics. Additionally, the Arctic MTOE authorizes one E5, one E4 and one E3 light wheeled vehicle mechanic.

Some reconnaissance squadrons cross-level TOW systems and scouts to make four mixed platoons of five vehicles each. It was decided to retain the MTOE platoon construction to facilitate training on the TOW and MK19s with the option of cross-leveling vehicles and crews after the initial equipment train-up. Retaining the basic organization was necessary due to the general lack of operator familiarization with the weapons systems.



Instead of mortars, the reconnaissance squadron support comes from the gunships of the air cavalry troops. Today, in the separate cavalry troop, indirect fire support is picked up by the troop's MK19s and by field artillery supporting the brigade. This means that the troop requires greater priorities of fire than might otherwise be necessary. The troop is also supported by a fire support team (FIST) of four soldiers mounted in an M966 HMMWV.

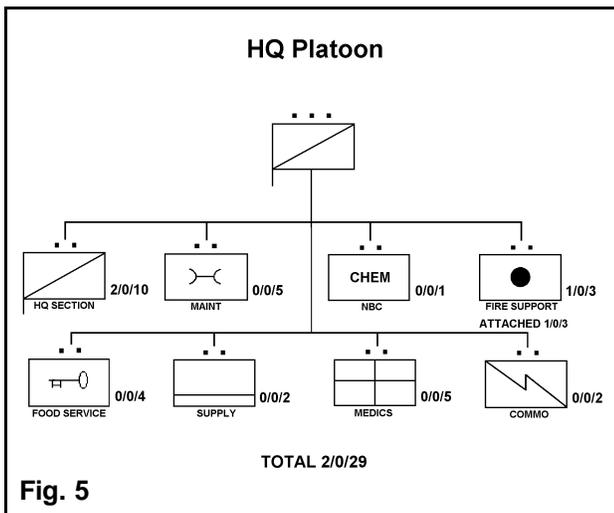
What makes the troop particularly unique is its second set of tactical vehicles, 14 Swedish manufactured Small

good vehicle to avoid getting stuck.) It is almost impossible to get a SUSV stuck. The SUSV, like the basic HMMWV, lacks armor protection, so these vehicles are used in a "battle taxi" manner, delivering scouts to a concealed position from which they can begin their dismounted reconnaissance or unload weapons for ground mounting.

The SUSV is not equipped with mounts for firing weapons off the vehicle. All weapons must, therefore, be dismounted onto tripods and fired from the ground.

The troop's unique organization, supported unit, and area of operations require the troop to perform some operations which might not be common to most cavalry units. These include air mobile and air load operations, cordon and search, convoy security, and escort tasks under the general heading of operations other than war. The majority of the Arctic cavalry's tasks, however, are typical cavalry tasks with only minor modification for over-snow movement and operation out of SUSVs in the winter.

Because of the inability to fire the TOW, MK19, .50 Cal, or M60 machine gun from the SUSV, it is necessary to dismount TOW/MK19 crews in over-watch positions and to set weapons systems up using tripods. This is complicated by the fact that the Alaskan interior averages over 70 inches of snow every year. All dismounted movement must be conducted on snowshoes or cross-country skis. Heavy loads are transported on vehicles or towed into position on Akio sleds, which are pulled by three soldiers wearing snowshoes. The TOW launchers and other crew-served weapons must be dug into the snow so that they do not sink further upon firing. The MK19 and .50 cal. machine guns can be fired off of the tripod mounted on the Akio Sleds. The M60 machine gun can be fired off of an Akio sled or a snowshoe.



Unit Support Vehicles (SUSV). The SUSV provides excellent over-snow mobility in extreme conditions. These snow tractors can move through deep snow, mud, and muskeg with little difficulty. (Muskeg is a phenomenon where water accumulates above the layers of permafrost in the soil. This creates an uneven almost bog-like surface which requires experience and a

Arctic Operations

Stealth, firepower, and mobility are the three key capabilities that the separate cavalry troop provides the SIB (L). By being part of a rapid deployment brigade, E Troop must be prepared to deploy to and fight in any environment, not only the Arctic. The brigade's participation in many training exercises throughout the Pacific region offers the troop diverse training opportunities outside of Alaska.

The brigade regularly participates in exercises Cobra Gold (Thailand), Balikatan (Philippines), and Tandem Thrust (conducted throughout the Pacific Theater), as well as rotations to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and the National Training Center (NTC).

Mobility in the Arctic is challenging at best. During the winter months, mounted movement is restricted to SUSVs. In the long summer days, off-road mobility is complicated by muskeg. Wheeled vehicular traffic is confined to roads and trails. The SUSVs are also brought to the field during the spring and summer exercises to help recover mired vehicles.

SUSV ORDER OF BATTLE

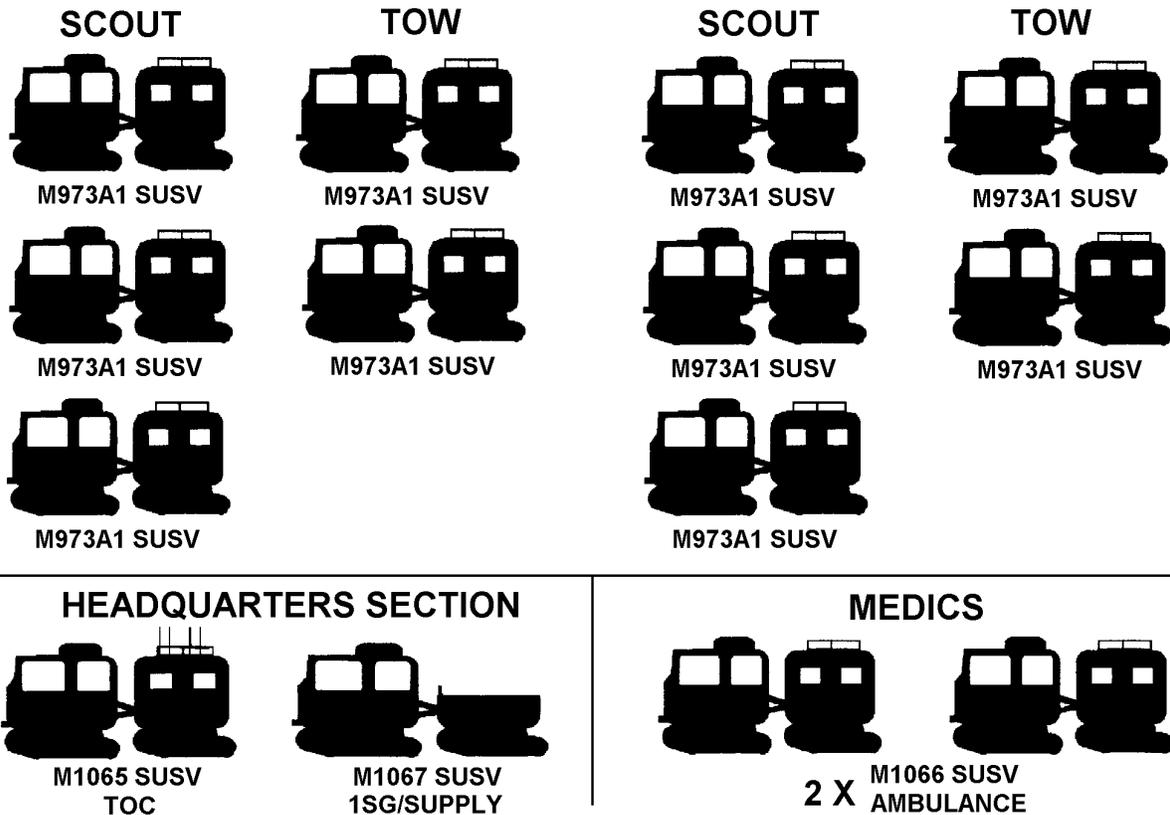


Fig. 6

Arctic Light Training

Fort Wainwright, including the adjoining Yukon Training Area, offers the largest Arctic training area in the world, with 916,000 acres. An additional 670,000 acres for firing, testing, and training are available 100 miles southeast, a short drive by Alaskan standards, at Fort Greely. These areas offer a variety of training environments, from open tundra, to high mountains, rivers, glaciers, hills, and thick forests.

Because of the extreme conditions under which units in the Alaskan interior must operate, training must be, and is, tough and realistic. Winter lasts generally from October to March while temperatures around Fort Wainwright hover near -20 degrees Fahrenheit for most of the winter and can dip down to -50 degrees Fahrenheit. These figures do not include wind chill. These are the weather conditions in which the Arctic cavalry specializes. The rationale is

that if the enemy is preoccupied with trying to stay warm, he will be less intent on his local security. Lowered security, of course, makes it easier to conduct reconnaissance or close with and destroy the enemy.

Training and proper equipment make operation in the Arctic possible and the soldiers have the equipment, vehicles, and clothing necessary to survive and operate in this harsh environment. Military vehicles are equipped with Arctic heaters which augment the standard heaters. Winterization kits are also necessary to keep engines and batteries from freezing in the extreme conditions. For the individual soldier, the Army's Extended Cold Weather Clothing System (ECWCS) combines state of the art fabrics, Gore-tex and polypropylene, into a clothing system that insulates and repels the elements even in the harshest conditions.

Activation of the troop created a training and experience gap, with only a few members experienced in extreme

cold weather conditions. After activation, it became necessary to develop a rigorous training program to prepare for the onslaught of winter. The Air Force Arctic Survival Training School, taught at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, helped provide some of the troop's leadership with winter survival skills. The Army's Northern Warfare Training Center provided the most valuable training. The entire troop attended the three-week Infantry Company Course during November and December of 1994, learning the basics of oversnow movement (snowshoe, ski-joring, Akio sled pulling, downhill and cross country skiing), and Arctic survival skills (snow cave shelters, tent and stove drills, fire building, and other field-craft). This course is taught at Fort Greely, Alaska, by some of the Army's top cold weather instructors and culminates in a three-day tactical field problem under extreme Arctic conditions. Temperatures during the course reached a low of -52 degrees Fahrenheit. The troop became the first



Above, troops engage enemy dismounts in a training exercise.



At left, a scout HMMWV on patrol.

Below, a SUSV loads aboard a C-130 during Northern Edge '95.



non-infantry unit to complete the demanding three-week course. Working closely with light infantry and other assets in the brigade requires an emphasis on light fighter skills. The troop conducts regular and extensive dismounted patrolling, quarterly 20km tactical ruck marches, aerial insertions, and sling-load training. In addition, there is a strenuous PT program that involves stretching and calisthenics outdoors in winter temperatures down to 30 degrees below zero, as well as snowshoe marches and cross-country skiing to keep physical training exciting.

Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

Because the SIB possesses its own LRSD, ground cavalry troop, military police, chemical reconnaissance, ground surveillance radar, and battalion scout platoons it is equipped with a

wide range of reconnaissance and security assets. This allows the brigade to select the organization which best meets the needs of the mission.

The cavalry is an excellent choice for screen operations requiring quick, lateral (moving flank screens) or extended movements against enemy operating dismounted or using light armor vehicles. The troop's scout platoons can screen an area from three to five kilometers wide, depending on the terrain. In conjunction with the LRSD, battalion scouts, GSR, and ground cavalry, the brigade can create an excellent security zone possessing depth, firepower, and covering both mounted and dismounted avenues of advance. The LRSD, cavalry scouts, and TOW platoons operating out of hide positions can create a hunter-killer team offering stealth and punch.

Because of the firepower of the separate light cavalry troop, it can be used to bring overwhelming force quickly to bear on the enemy. It makes an excellent counterattack, reserve, or reaction force against a lightly armored threat where vehicular mobility is not a constraint.

The cavalry also provides firepower and mobility for convoy escort missions and quick reaction forces covering the movement of friendly convoys or patrols.

Other possible uses for the cavalry troop include airmobile operations which drop the cavalry behind enemy lines, with or without vehicles, to conduct deep reconnaissance of multiple locations and raids against rear support areas. Cavalry platoons can operate attached to infantry battalions or as part of the troop. Platoons can secure PZs, LZs, and key road intersections to support battalion or brigade movements.

Conclusion

E Troop, 3-17 Cavalry is a unique unit with a unique mission. The troop gives the separate infantry brigade (L) an organization capable of stealth, mo-

bility, and firepower under the harshest of conditions. The troop can fight and win in the most inhospitable area of the world. The troop also gives cavalry scouts and armor (cavalry) officers interested in a once-in-a-life time challenge a new test with the "Arctic Recon!"

Captain Keith A. Sharples is a 1985 Distinguished Military Graduate of Indiana University, where he received his Armor commission and a BS in Business. He served with C Company, 1-35 Armor, FRG, as an M60A3 tank platoon leader and an M1A1 tank company XO; as a doctrinal writer, U.S. Army Armor School, Ft. Knox; with the Special Forces Center training Egyptian Armor Crews in Cairo on the M1A1 during Operation Desert Shield; and as commander, D Trp, 5-15 Cavalry, and later as the squadron S3. He organized, activated, and commanded A Troop, 4-9 Cavalry (Arctic Recon) at Ft. Wainwright. He currently serves as the Armor Liaison to the 2d Bde, 38th ID, Indiana National Guard. He holds a Masters of Public Administration Degree from Western Kentucky University. His military schooling includes the Armor Basic and Advanced Courses, Cavalry Leader, Scout Commander Certification, Junior Maintenance Officer, Airborne, Air Assault, Arctic Light Individual Training, and the Air Force Arctic Survival Courses.

First Lieutenant Ken Dobert is a former TOW platoon leader and is currently assigned as XO of E Troop, 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry. He is a graduate of the Armor Officers Basic Course, Scout Platoon Leader Course, BNCOC, and the Basic Russian Course. He served as squad leader, cryptanalysis section leader, platoon sergeant, and instructor at the Ministry of Defense and Aviation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.