

1st Cavalry Division Reactivates Division Cavalry Squadron

by LTC Jennifer J. Bocanegra

In support of modernizing and reorganizing U.S. Army forces to support large-scale combat operations (LSCO) and meet emerging threats, 1st Cavalry Division was selected to conduct the Headquarters Department of the Army Reconnaissance and Security Pilot to shape how divisions fight in 2030.

The 1st Cav Division leaders assessed multiple courses of action based on the availability of existing units and selected the storied 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, also known as “Garryowen,” to lead the pilot program and serve as the division’s Cavalry squadron. Prior to modularity in the mid-2000s, the squadron served as the division Cavalry, so this is a return to the squadron’s traditional role within the division.

LTC Brennan Speakes, the division Cavalry squadron commander, assesses that “the [division Cavalry] formation will change doctrine for how the division fights by enabling the capability to act across all domains more rapidly than an adversary and aid in informing command decisions to shape battlefield conditions.”

“Reactivating the division Cavalry squadron gives the division commander a purpose-built, all-weather formation to shape the battlefield,” Speakes said. “Right now, the division has surveillance assets it can use to observe the battlefield, but these assets don’t really shape the battlefield and set conditions for successful operations the same way an armored-Cavalry squadron can, which is the fundamental purpose for Cavalry.”

The 1-7 Cav can affect multiple domains to either stimulate the environment or determine atmospherics regarding the threat, terrain or civilian populace. This is due in large part to the new equipment and personnel the squadron is incorporating into the formation, including next-generation robotic combat vehicles and unmanned aerial systems.

“What we do for the division commander is to provide decision space and look to answer any questions about the battlefield before the commanding general has to commit a brigade combat team or other maneuver assets,” Speakes said. “This enables him to gain the initiative on the battlefield.”



Figure 1. A 1-7 Cav trooper tests an unmanned aerial system at NTC. (U.S. Army photo)

Many studies and exercises have proven a unit is able to fight better if it has a reconnaissance and security element in front of it. These exercises also proved that the more capable the reconnaissance and security force is, the higher likelihood of success for the main body.

GEN Mark Milley, the 20th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while previously serving as Chief of Staff of the Army, cautioned in the wake of America's large-scale ground campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan that "the level of uncertainty, the velocity of instability and potential for significant interstate conflict is higher than it has been since the end of the Cold War."

Given this volatility, which is intensifying in regions such as the Middle East, Europe and East Asia, where air / ground Cavalry teams proved their utility in past wars, divisions must prepare to fight for information as subordinate maneuver elements or as independent joint task forces. This imperative includes organizing to conduct forceful reconnaissance and security operations against a variety of near-peer, non-state and hybrid adversaries.

"Over the past 18 months, 1st Cavalry Division continues to modernize our equipment and adapt how we fight, which will enable us to respond to emerging threats as the Army's principal tactical warfighting formation in [LSCO]," said MG John Richardson, 1st Cavalry Division's commanding general. "This modernization process not only involves fielding cutting-edge equipment, but also restructuring the formation with the addition of a division Cavalry squadron and armored-Cavalry troops at the brigade level, which will provide more reconnaissance and security capabilities enabling the division and brigade commanders to maintain the advantage over any potential adversary."

Since the pilot program kicked off, Garryowen troops have been working in an initial-operating-capability phase, where they were afforded the opportunity to test the division-Cavalry capability to serve as the eyes and ears of the division commander during several command-post training exercises.

Last fall, the Garryowen team was selected to participate in the Army Futures Command's Project Convergence 2022, the largest experiment of its kind since the Louisiana Maneuvers of the 1940s. During the experiment, 1-7 Cav troops fought across the Central Corridor at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, for 60 days while testing the latest warfighting technology, including robots, radios, unmanned aerial systems and targeting systems.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and we took advantage of the repetitions to fight Blackhorse on their own terrain," Speakes said. "It's not surprising that we learned people make all the difference in how we'll fight in the future. Our troopers developed innovative ways to employ their assigned technology, and we saw phenomenal results as we put all the pieces together."

This summer 1-7 Cav will return to NTC to further develop the division-Cavalry squadron concept. Throughout the pilot program, Garryowen troops and leaders have continued to provide feedback to U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command to help shape future division-Cavalry squadrons across the Army.

"It's part of 1-7 Cav's DNA to be at the forefront of experiments," Speakes said. "I think often of [LTG] Hal Moore, former commander for 1-7 Cav during Vietnam, learning about helicopters and how to employ airmobile forces in the jungles of Vietnam. Now, we have 1-7 Cav troopers figuring out how far out do we have our robots and what payloads do we want on them."

As the nation's premier armored force, 1st Cavalry Division has consistently adapted to the current warfighting environment. Standing up the division-Cavalry squadron is just one of the ways the First Team is adapting to the Army's shift in focus from brigade-centric counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations to large-scale operations with divisions serving as the decisive tactical echelon of war.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

LSCO – large-scale combat operations

NTC – National Training Center