**Blackhorse Hoofbeats**

**Echoes from the Regiment’s Service in Vietnam 1966 – 1972**

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**Blackhorse Chaplains**

In 1912, Father George Waring, the Regimental Chaplain for the 11th Cavalry, published a guide for Army chaplains. His opening lines, written in 1912, were equally valid for his successors more than 50 years later. “No chaplain who confines himself to the limitations of Army Regulations concerning his duties can hope to be a success. For while Army Regulations provide for certain fixed duties, they intentionally leave much to his common sense and good judgment.” Chaplain Waring went on to say that his primary function in the Army was to “look after the spiritual, moral, and intellectual interests of the soldiers”.    He stressed the need for chaplains to spend as much time as possible amongst his Troopers, visiting them where they lived rather than just waiting for them to come to him in a church.

      In garrison, some military chaplains accomplish their spiritual and military mission from an office in the chapel. The chaplains who were assigned to the Blackhorse Regiment fifty-plus years after Chaplain Waring published his advice didn’t sit in the chapel and wait for the Troopers to come to them.  They went to where the Troopers were.

      Third Squadron’s chaplain, Captain John Schumacher, understood that, like Father Waring, they would be breaking new ground. Years later he wrote: “No one had written the book on how a chaplain can operate most effectively in that kind of environment [counterinsurgency] and we had to work it out for ourselves. Many had ideas on how it should be done, but the guy on the ground had to find his own way.”

      Chaplain Dalton Barnes was another one of the “guys on the ground” who went to war with the Blackhorse Regiment in 1966. He understood Chaplain Waring’s philosophy very well. A former sergeant in the Air Force during the Korean War, he watched countless numbers of soldiers go off to war. This experience convinced him that there was “a tremendous need and possibilities to do work of a religious nature with military people.” He chose the Army to be “able to work more closely with people, sort of person-to-person.”  He arrived at Ft. Meade in 1965 after a tour in Germany. Recognizing that macho soldiers might be reluctant to seek out the chaplain on their own, he tried to just ‘be there’ in case someone needed to talk. As the Regimental Chaplain, he was there in the snow on the PT fields, rifle ranges, and overnight bivouacs at Ft. Meade as the raw recruits evolved into Blackhorse Troopers. He was there at Camps AP Hill and Pickett as the Troopers trained and formed into cohesive platoons and troops. And he was there aboard the USNS *Sultan* as the Blackhorse Troopers steamed ever closer to war.

      After serving 20 years in the Army, Dalton Barnes became the first chaplain in the Oklahoma City Police Department. In 1983, he told a reporter that “he gained a new understanding of what it means to survive, both mentally and physically, during mortar patrols and reconnaissance missions with the U.S. Army 11thArmored Cavalry Regiment.” Of his tour in combat with the Blackhorse, Dalton Barnes said it was “the most rewarding experience of my life. The soldiers were very receptive and attendance [at religious services] was great in a combat zone.”

      Five years later, Chaplain Bill Karabinos was the 2nd Squadron padre in the waning days of the Regiment’s combat service in Southeast Asia. He describes how he made himself available to the Battle Squadron Troopers. “I tried to make the acquaintance of all the troopers, both on the ground and in the air. During my visits, I stayed with the guys on line, even taking my turn on night watch when a crew was short a man or two. I played Pinochle with the NCOs, shared an eating space with troops in the shade of an ACAV or with our feet in the muddy waters of [Fire Base] Andrews, learned to change torsion bars under the belly of those ugly green machines, and played basketball with the guys behind the mess hall at the west end of Phu Loi. I learned to respect and love those guys in the field and it was an honor to serve with them.”

      Obviously, being a chaplain in the only armored cavalry regiment in Vietnam set the chaplains apart from their peers in other units. But it wasn’t just membership in this exclusive fraternity that accounted for this uniqueness. Take for example Chaplain Bob Hawn, the Regimental Chaplain in 1968-69. A WWII and Korean War veteran, he already had 23 years of service when he joined the Blackhorse. By April 1969, Chaplain Hawn (described as a “gnarled, battle-scarred former armor officer”) had been in the 11th Cav for over 10 months, so he was well familiar with what the Troopers did on a daily basis. He and his chaplain’s assistant were operating out of Dau Tieng on Operation Montana Raider. By the time Sunday services were over at the field location, the temperature was climbing well into the 90s, so Bob Hawn was looking forward to the ride in his open jeep back to the base camp. His sermon that day centered on the biblical verse ‘seek and ye shall find.’ He didn’t realize it at the time, but he could not have chosen a more prophetic theme.

      The chaplain and his driver had not driven far when he shouted: “Stop the jeep!”  The *Blackhorse*[newspaper] picks up the story from here: “The chaplain moved to the center of the road and marked a pressure detonated anti-tank mine. ‘We were driving along when I happened to glance at the road [Chaplain Hawn said]. I looked at one patch of ground and I knew that the mine was there. Don’t ask me how I knew that mine was there. It’s just a feeling that you get after being around armor and enemy mines a lot.’ Within minutes 919th Combat Engineers arrived and detonated the mine.”

      Among the chaplains’ primary duties, taking care of the troops ranked the highest. But the Chaplains’ School at Fort Monmouth generally had the spiritual health of the soldiers in mind when they taught this to novice military chaplains. Once in the combat zone, however, taking care of the troops took on a broader meaning. Tet of 1968 was one example. Chaplain John Borley was visiting with the Vietnamese priest whose congregation included the residents of Widow’s Village.  The Vietnamese priest passed on to the Blackhorse Chaplain what members of his congregation had been telling him: “Long Binh – Bien Hoa is to be attacked [by the Viet Cong] the night of 17-18 Feb.” When he reported the conversation to the Regimental intelligence officer, it provided the needed confirmation received earlier in the day from a South Vietnamese citizen who had told a similar story of impending attack.

High alert was ordered across the Regiment, and, sure enough, the VC did indeed launch an attack on Long Binh and Bien Hoa during the hours of darkness on 17 to 18 February.

      Chaplain Larry Haworth – who had the “fastest Corvette in Van Nuys” before joining the Air National Guard – was on his second tour in Vietnam when he joined 2nd Squadron in 1969. He thought he was already a ‘veteran’, but two weeks with the Blackhorse convinced him that he was just learning about being there. Maybe it was the Quan Loi mud that convinced him; the mud that turned the vehicles, your jungle fatigues, your hair, and your sweat red. After his initial introduction, he said to himself: “I can’t live like this … What have I gotten myself into?”  It wasn’t too long before Larry found out that he *could* live like that. “And what I had gotten myself into was real life on the edge and real opportunity to be a chaplain and minister where it counted.”

Collectively, the Blackhorse chaplains were affectionately known as the ‘God Squad’. When the situation permitted, they would gather together on Sundays and fly via helicopter to the squadron fire bases and troop/company night defensive positions, dropping a chaplain off and then leapfrogging to the next. Over the course of the day, each unit would have the opportunity to hear services. Although the chaplain wasn’t always from their own denomination, the Troopers didn’t seem to mind.  As Chaplain Jim Cooke noted, “the closer troopers are to combat, the higher attendance at services.”

      Bill Trobaugh was the Regimental Chaplain in 1970. Bill had served a hitch in the Navy during WWII, so he had seen the elephant before. He had a reputation for being where the action was; he sought it out, and it sought him out. The rumor was that units seemed to get hit whenever he came around. Was he an NVA magnet, or did he just have bad/good luck? These were questions the Golf Troop Commander had to consider when Trobaugh came around on the third day of the Cambodia operation. He’d heard that Frank Cambria had been badly wounded in action during the border fight, leaving his 3rd Platoon without an officer. Bill Trobaugh had already spoken with the Squadron Commander, and it was alright with him if it was alright with Captain Sewall Menzel. Bill Trobaugh, lieutenant colonel and chaplain, was volunteering to take over as a recon platoon leader in the middle of the biggest operation the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment had ever conducted. Platoon Sergeant Elijah Brown, was an experienced man, so he would still be running the platoon. Menzel made it clear that even though he was two ranks his senior, he would be the one giving the orders to Brevet Lieutenant Trobaugh. The chaplain readily agreed.

     For the next several days, Trobaugh led the 3rd Platoon with distinction, including being up front during the assault on the rubber plantation airfield outside of Snuol. Menzel described him as “the epitome of the Army’s fighting chaplain tradition, going back to those Indian-fighting days of the wild west … This was a guy who could not only praise the Lord, but also pass the ammunition – Blackhorse style!”  Donn Starry considered him “one of the greatest .50 cal guys I ever met.” He earned his nickname “The marauding Methodist” honestly.

      Chaplain Trobaugh, however, placed all of the credit into the hands of the Blackhorse Troopers. In his farewell column in the *Blackhorse* Newspaper, he wrote: “Because of your bravery and devotion to duty, I can always speak with pride of my association with the 11th Cav.”