

Larry "Ted" Ballard summary of interview by Richard Killblane at Pigeon Forge, TN, 6 August 2008

Ted Ballard worked for CMH and presented a paper at the last conference on gun trucks.

Ted was assigned to the 523rd TC in May 1966 while it was being formed at Fort Campbell, KY. His mother had a heart attack and Ted was pending a compassionate reassignment so he did not deploy with the 523rd to Vietnam in September 1966. However, his compassionate reassignment was disapproved in November and he was given a 45-day leave then flew on a TWA aircraft to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam in January 1967. He stayed there for two to three days until his name was called to fly on a C130 to Qui Nhon to join his company. A jeep from Camp Addison picked him up at the airfield.

The 523rd made normal runs along QL1 to Bong Son, along QL19 to An Khe and Pleiku and every now and then they went south to Song Kau, a Korean 105mm camp. Late in 1967, the Koreans were nearly out of ammunition. When Ballard's convoy arrived, the Koreans fired off their last few rounds, the trucks pulled right up to the guns and everyone unloaded ammo boxes, broke open the bands and loaded the rounds in the tubes.

Ballard was on duty in the guard tower on 2 September 1967 when the first large scale convoy ambush took place. After that the 523rd began building gun trucks. The first gun truck was a Quad .50 mounted on a 2 ½-ton truck. There were at least two other 2 ½-ton gun trucks in the company with steel plates and portals to shoot out of. Ballard remained a driver of a 5-ton.

In September 1967 most of the 523rd veterans rotated back home. Ted did not remember the company having its members shuffled to prevent all the veterans rotating out at one time.

Ballard was assigned to ride shotgun with a replacement on a convoy to Pleiku on 24 November 1967. He rode with his M14 between his knees. Up ahead he heard what he thought was the sound of artillery then saw big clouds of smoke from behind a little rise of ground. He had never seen black smoke in that area before which raised his suspicions. Then the trucks ahead of his began to stop and the drivers jumped out on the right side of the road. Ballard realized he was in an ambush and jumped out on the right side. His driver jumped out on the left side and Ballard never saw him again.

Ballard then heard small arms fire. The side of the road had been cleared of all vegetation to include grass by engineer bulldozers but the dirt and brush was dozed into small piles that offered cover for the enemy. Ballard saw what he thought were ARVN soldiers just walking toward the convoy, and then the other drivers started firing at them. When the Vietnamese returned fire, Ballard started firing at them and emptied two magazines. He carried 200 rounds, all tracers. The Vietnamese then ran into the convoy. The gun truck was up ahead and killed most of the enemy. When the ambush was over, Ballard's driver never returned, so he climbed in another truck. When they drove down the road, he saw

about a half a dozen dead enemy by the side of the road where the gun truck had been. Further down, he saw that the black smoke was from burning tires.

Ballard left Vietnam on 13 December 1967.

He related a story by another veteran in his company named "Mousy." During the ambush, "Mousy" got out of his truck but the gas plug on his M14 blew off so he threw it down. He saw a Vietnamese kid running at him with an M16, which he must have picked up from a previous battle as not all soldiers had M16s. Without a weapon, "Mousy" ran and hid under a bush.