

1968

UNIT HISTORY

359th Transportation Company

(Medium Truck Petroleum)

124th Transportation Battalion

8th Transportation Group

1 January 1968 - 31 December 1968

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Introduction

The 359th Transportation Company (Medium Truck Petroleum) was assigned to the 240th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum) and stationed at Camp Radcliff in An Khe, Republic of Vietnam. The 359th Transportation Company was further attached to HHC, 34th Sup & Svc Bn (DS) for rations and quarters. In July the unit moved to Fleiku and was further attached to the 45th General Support Group for rations and security. The 359th Transportation Company had billets and company area at Camp Schmidt and operations, motor pool, and maintenance on the 1st Logistical Compound.

Mission and Resources

The 359th Transportation Company (Medium Truck Petroleum) had the mission of line hauling petroleum products to support combat and logistical operations throughout the Central Highlands. When the unit was moved to Pleiku, the mission was altered to include local hauling and the unit replaced the other extant companies with petroleum hauling capabilities. The Medium Truck Petroleum Company is rated by TO&E to haul 900,000 gallons local haul daily of 450,000 gallons line haul daily. This capability is modified in Vietnam to either 450,000 gallons local or 225,000 gallons line haul daily. Convoy procedures, loading and unloading facilities, enemy activity, distance for line hauling, and the amount of fuel in the different tank farms account for this decrease in capability.

The unit was organized under TO&E 55F and later modified in June 1968 to TO&E 55G. The organization consists of a company headquarters with one officer and 18 enlisted men, three truck platoon headquarters with three officers and nine enlisted men, six truck squads of 126 enlisted men and a maintenance section with one warrant officer and 25 enlisted men. Each truck squad is equipped with ten truck, tractor 5 ton 6x6 M52A1 and ten 5000 gallon semi-trailers.

Personnel and equipment figures have varied greatly during 1968. In January the unit operated with TO&E equipment and 145 assigned personnel. The Tet Offensive caused both figures to increase as the demand for petroleum products rose considerably. February and March found over 185 persons assigned and over 80-5 ton tractors and 70-5000 gallon trailers in operation. April strength was 165 and the number slowly tapered down to 145 in May and remained fairly constant for the rest of the year.

Key personnel in 1968 were Kenneth B Woodbury, CPT, TC, Commanding Officer from January until July; Lonnie L Holmes, first sergeant from January until March; William H Sanders first sergeant, March until December; Lee D Meadows, 1LT, TC, Commanding Officer from July until September; and Robert J Yankow, 1LT, TC, Commanding Officer from September until December.

In An Khe, the unit had a motor pool maintenance area and trailer park within easy walking distance of the company area. The company area consisted of an orderly room, ten troop billets, a mess hall, a club and an indoor movie theater. When the unit moved to Pleiku, the facilities were somewhat less. The motor pool, operations, trailer park, and maintenance area were located two miles away from the company area. An unused road was supplimented with PSP and made into a motor pool and maintenance area. Trailers were forced to be parked on two adjacent roads thus causing major traffic problems as both roads were well traveled and connected with the ammunition Supply Point and Trailer Transfer Point. The company area, two miles away, was composed of an orderly room and three troop billets. Separate mess facilities were not available and the unit was forced to mess with the 188th Ordnance Company.

Operations

Several weeks prior to the Tet Offensive in January the "hardened" vehicle concept had been revised due to the imminent possibility of enemy contact. The armored $2\frac{1}{2}$ and $3\frac{1}{4}$ ton vehicles were refurbished and rearmed with 50 and 7.62 caliber machine guns. These "gun" trucks were utilized to provide maximum return fire during initial enemy contact and to protect the convoy until road security elements could maneuver armor and air support to attack the ambush. The long hours of hard work paid dividends on 15 January. An armored gun truck, leading a large convoy of 5 ton tractors/5000 gallon trailers from An Khe to Pleiku caught three NVA Regulars in the open, killed all three and prematurely set off an ambush involving 150 NVA Regulars. The quick reaction and heavy volume of fire placed on the enemy positions by the gun trucks was credited with keeping the convoy from being overrun and completely annihilated.

The Tet Offensive increased the demand for petroleum products and the mission was modified slightly by the addition of line haul responsibility to Kon Tum and Dak To, two towns in the Central Highlands that were receiving constant enemy action. When the road to Dak To was closed, the 5000 gallon tankers stranded there were utilized to unload fuel bags brought in by C-130 aircraft and to distribute the fuel to the different storage areas. Detachments were sent from An Khe to Pleiku and Dak To to control the movement of the tankers and the distribution of the product.

Enemy action continued throughout March with numerous small ambushes and sniping incidents. On 15 March the tanker convoy came under enemy fire from planned ambushes no less than four times during a 55 mile trip from An Khe to Pleiku.

Operational requirements warranted a move in early July. The pipeline from An Khe to Pleiku had been finished and was being water tested. One platoon was left in An Khe until the end of August to continue the line haul on that end. In two days the unit moved, settled in its new location, and again running convoys and assuming responsibility for a portion of the local haul commitments in the Pleiku area.

After continued weeks of virtually no enemy activity, the tanker convoy returning from An Khe was ambushed in a coordinated attack on the convoy, LZ Action, and Pump Station sight. Again armored vehicles reacted immediately and no personnel were injured although several vehicles were damaged.

September marked the opening of the pipeline from An Khe to Pleiku and petroleum products were pumped over 100 miles from Qui Son to the storage tanks in the Pleiku Task Farm. The success of the pipeline lessened the necessity to line haul to An Khe, and as a result of this, the unit sent special convoys to Ban Me Thout in support of the 4th Infantry Division. Line and local haul were additionally increased with commitments to resupply Duc Co, Oasis and Plei Djureng.

From October until December the workload of the unit was dependent upon the amount of fuel stored in Fleiku and the condition of the pipeline. Enemy harassment and sabotage on the vulnerable pipeline would cease pumping operations and once again the Central Highlands would depend on the tanker convoys to haul the needed fuel.

Accomplishments

The 359th Transportation Company set a new Qui Nhon Support Command mileage record between 9 January and 12 February when the drivers amassed 101,271 accident free miles over QL 14 and QL 19. This is a particularly significant accomplishment considering the enemy activity during the period. In addition all drivers were required to pull guard duty and sleep in bunkers on the perimeter at night.

In March another record was established. In the 15 months prior to March the company had moved over 58 million gallons of petroleum products over two million miles.

In September the unit was again recognized by Qui Nhon Support Command. In ceremonies at Qui Nhon the unit was awarded a certificate and a trophy for accumulating over 500,000 accident free miles from 18 May until 2 September. Making the presentation to 1LT Lee D Meadows was BG Richards, CG, US Army Support Command, Qui Nhon.

As 1968 drew to a close the "Professionals" of the 359th Transportation Company had run over 1000 convoys, logged over 1,450,000 miles and hauled over 70,000,000 gallons of petroleum products in support of other 1st Logistical units, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), 4th Infantry Division, 1st Field Forces Vietnam, and 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Special Events

The 359th Transportation Company (medium truck Petroleum) was inspected by the Annual Inspector General Inspection team in February. As a result of neglect in the areas of supply and administration, the unit failed to receive a satisfactory rating. A reinspection in May by the same team resulted in a satisfactory rating.

The Command Management Maintenance Inspection in June also resulted in an unsatisfactory score. The reinspection in August resulted in one of the highest scores ever given by the 1st Logistical Command CMMI Team.