

## **231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion**



*231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion unit crest*

### **Militia and National Guard**

The 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion began as an African-American independent militia company in Baltimore, Maryland on 20 February 1879. These city militia companies were patriotic social clubs that competed in military drill. During that time, African-Americans were segregated into their own units. The other African-American clubs were the “Baltimore Rifles,” and another in the Hagerstown area. These were all African-American military clubs made up of African-American officers and enlisted men. They called themselves “The Monumental City Guards.”

On 20 February 1882, the Adjutant General of Maryland and his staff examined the three African-American military clubs and accepted them as infantry companies into the Maryland National Guard. In 1896, the Monumental City Guards was redesignated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Company. All three of these African American companies were carried as Infantry Companies. Somehow, the “Baltimore Rifles” and the club from the Hagerstown area did not make it in the Maryland National Guard; only “The Monumental City Guard” survived, and remained as a “Separate Company.”

When the “Spanish American War” broke out, 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Company was ordered to active duty; however, they did not follow the Maryland National Guard into the war, rather they were retained in Pimlico, and relegated to do interior guard duty until the war ended and they were reinstated into the Maryland National Guard.

### **World War I**

When World War I broke out, 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Company was again ordered to active duty on 5 August 1917. The company was redesignated as Company I and assigned to the 372<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division, one of two designated “Colored divisions in the American Army during the war. Both divisions deployed to war in France. They not assigned duty with the American Expeditionary Force, but were attached to the French Army. Notwithstanding the outstanding performance of African-Americans in the US

Army in all wars since the Civil War, there were those in leadership who still doubted the ability of African-Americans to fight in “civilized” warfare. The one advantage of attaching the 92<sup>nd</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> Divisions to the French was that they held no prejudice and had a long tradition of employing colonial troops including Africa. The 92<sup>nd</sup> Division fought with distinction in the Meuse-Argonne, Alsace and Lorraine Campaigns. The company was demobilized at Camp Sherman, Ohio on 6 March 1919.

On 7 June 1922, the African-American company was reorganized and federally recognized as Company A of the 140<sup>th</sup> Auxiliary Engineer Battalion in the Maryland National Guard. On 26 June the next year, the company was again redesignated and reorganized as the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Company, Infantry.

## **World War II**

With the preparations for the war in Europe and Pacific, the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Company was reorganized and redesignated as Service Company, 372<sup>nd</sup> Infantry on 2 August 1940. This was the unit’s initiation into the combat service support. On 10 March the next year, the 372<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was called into Federal service and sent to Fort Dix on 17 March. The United States declared war on Japan the day after their attack on Pearl Harbor on 6 December. The 372<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was then sent to New York, New York on 17 December and assigned to the Eastern Defense Command on 1 May 1942. The Regiment spent the majority of the war performing interior guard duty in the New York City area until near the end of the war. There it was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Service Command on 21 January 1944. Finally, it received orders to deploy overseas. On 11 November it fell under the Fourth Army then staged at Fort Lawton, Washington on 24 April 1945. It departed the Seattle Port of Embarkation on 29 April and arrived in Hawaii on 9 May where it was assigned to the Central Pacific Command on 15 May. It did not see any action and was inactivated on 31 January 1946 after the war in the Pacific ended.

## **231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion**

On 1 August 1946 the Quartermaster Corps transferred the functions and responsibilities of truck units to the Transportation Corps. The old Monumental City Guards was reorganized and federally recognized as the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Corps Truck Battalion in Baltimore again under the Maryland National Guard. It continued as an African-American unit. Lieutenant Colonel Vernon F. Green assumed command in 1947 and was the first African-American to command the 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Truck Battalion. The battalion had responsibility for three truck companies: the 147<sup>th</sup> Transportation Truck Company, the 165<sup>th</sup> Transportation Truck Company and the 726<sup>th</sup> Transportation Truck Company. The battalion was not permitted to train in the huge Fifth Regiment Armory, rather they had to train at the old Fourth Regiment Armory just a couple of blocks away. Because it was above a market on Linden Avenue it was called “The Richmond Market Armory.” Truck battalion headquarters were reorganized on 1 April 1950 and the detachment became the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Truck Battalion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Diggs, [http://www.louisdiggs.com/forgotten\\_roads/center\\_frame.html](http://www.louisdiggs.com/forgotten_roads/center_frame.html) .

## **Korean War**

The North Korean People's Army attacked south of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel on 25 June 1950 thus beginning the Korean War. The 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Truck Battalion with its four truck companies were conducting their annual summer camp training at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts.

When the unit returned to Baltimore in the middle of the summer, it was discovered that the entire battalion was alerted for active duty to support the Korean War. A first lieutenant at the time, George Brooks had just finished college and was preparing to enter the workforce in the fall. He remembered, "We returned home on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. The next Saturday, the 29<sup>th</sup>, the officers of the battalion got telegrams to report to the adjutant general's office for a special meeting. He pulled out this envelope that was stamped 'Top Secret,' and started reading. We were preparing for active duty." <sup>2</sup>

On 19 August 1950, the battalion, with two of its three assigned truck companies was shipped off to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. The 165<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company remained in Baltimore until later during the summer of 1950. During mobilization training they learned they were deploying to Korea. "On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, we were getting into the cars to go home to Baltimore," he said. "Just then the executive officer came running up the road towards the car, and said that there was a meeting tonight at seven o'clock. We started looking at each other. I said [to a friend] 'We're going to Korea.'" The 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Truck Battalion with its three assigned truck companies were the only Maryland National Guard unit ordered to active duty to support the Korean War.<sup>3</sup>

Although many other National Guard units were called to active duty on account of the war, Brooks suspected that his battalion would deploy since as the logistics officer, he was instructed to put in requisition orders for 100 percent of the unit's equipment. He said, "The only time you need 100 percent of your equipment is when you are going overseas." After a very brief period of training in Massachusetts, the battalion headquarters was separated from some of its companies. The Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Truck Battalion was ordered with the 726<sup>th</sup> Transportation Truck Company to deploy to Korea.<sup>4</sup>

The 726<sup>th</sup> Transportation Truck Company arrived in Pusan, Korea on December 31, 1950. Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Truck Battalion disembarked in Pusan, Korea the very next day, New Years Day 1951. One of its truck companies, the 726<sup>th</sup>, had landed the day before. These two units were separated during their entire stay in Korea. The 147<sup>th</sup> Truck Company remained in the United

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality," *National Guard*, September 2000, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3731/is\\_200009/ai\\_n8921517](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3731/is_200009/ai_n8921517)

<sup>3</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality."

<sup>4</sup> Louis S. Diggs email to Richard Killblane, Subj: 231<sup>st</sup> Trans Bn, October 2, 2006 3:13 pm.

States providing support service for about a year when it deployed to Germany. The 231<sup>st</sup> Truck Battalion was the first National Guard unit to arrive in Korea.<sup>5</sup>

The unit arrived between two massive Communist Chinese offensives and almost immediately began to transport supplies and soldiers between rear areas and the front lines. The truck drivers also drove ambulances. The 231<sup>st</sup> Battalion provided forward truck support for I Corps. On 7 June 1951, the battalion relocated to Seoul, then to Uijongbu on 29 September. There it hauled cargo and troops for I and IX Corps to the end of war plus moved ammunition to the ammunition supply points.

In 1948, President Truman had issued an order to finally integrate the Army. The Korean War expedited this process. With high losses and replacements pouring in at a fast rate, it would have been too difficult for the GIs and SIs to identify and assign men by race. Brooks remembered, "We integrated on active duty, late 1951: one night we went to bed, and during the night some men transferred out, and others came in," he said. "When we woke up the next morning, we had a partially integrated armory. That's when it really started. And of course, there were all these replacements coming in—they were put wherever there was a vacancy. The troops were put where they were needed." Brooks said that the unit did not have any conflicts with the integration. "We already had our base, and then whites came in," he said. "So it wasn't a big problem."<sup>6</sup>

"We were so damn busy we didn't have time to think," Brooks said. "When we started, there were no roads, just old cart paths. But in the spring offensive, we were advancing so fast we had 24-hour-a-day operations moving troops and supplies. We'd haul across corps areas, only six of the ten tires would be on the ground. We eventually ended up supporting two corps, which kept us really busy because we normally only supported one."<sup>7</sup>

Even during supply runs in the war, the battalion was involved in training replacements and organized its own school to do so. While in Korea, the unit also built a place where men of all creeds could worship. It became known as the "Trucker's Chapel."<sup>8</sup>

After the 1953 cease-fire, from August through September, the battalion participated in Operation Big Switch, the exchange of 75, 823 Communist and 12,773 United Nations prisoners of war and wounded.

Louis Diggs enlisted in the 726<sup>th</sup> Transportation Truck Company on June 20, 1950, and had the honor of serving in Korea with them. He left the 726<sup>th</sup> Transportation Truck Company during the winter of 1951 when we were serving in North Korea and joined the Regular Army where he remained for a little over twenty years. Brooks left the battalion in 1952, but the unit stayed until May 1954. On 1 April 1954, the battalion headquarters was reorganized and redesignated as the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 231<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality," and Diggs email.

<sup>6</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality."

<sup>7</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality."

<sup>8</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality."

Transportation Battalion and returned to National Guard control on 21 February 1955. Colonel Green still commanded the Battalion in Korea until the colors of the battalion were returned to Maryland National Guard control.

### **Cold War and Integration**

When the colors of the 231st Battalion returned to Maryland National Guard control, there was lots of controversy over how the battalion would be organized. Brooks remembered, "The [Maryland] adjutant general called us in and asked us if we'd reestablish the unit. We said yes; however, only if it was an open unit. He said, 'What do you mean?' We said, 'Open to join regardless of race, creed, or color.'" The State Adjutant General wanted them to revert to a segregated organization. The officers rebelled. They petitioned the Governor. They went to African-American paper, the Urban League, and also and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who took up their cause.<sup>9</sup>

During the time of the petitions, the Adjutant General promoted a high ranking enlisted man from the battalion to the grade of Captain with instructions to re-organize the Battalion in the Maryland National Guard as an all African American battalion. He did this by promoting several other enlisted men to the grade of Lieutenants. The Battalion went on for a year or so as a segregated unit until the unit was integrated and Lieutenant Colonel Vernon F. Green re-took over the command of the Battalion.<sup>10</sup>

In November 1955, the Second Army notified the Adjutant General that unless the state of Maryland integrated its National Guard, federal funds would be revoked. After much support from the public, the Governor of Maryland, Governor Theodore R. McKeldin, directed the integration of the Maryland National Guard and the Adjutant General issued an order on 8 December that anyone regardless of race, color or creed could join the 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion.<sup>11</sup>

### **Loss of Transportation Corp Identity**

On 1 March 1959, the 231<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion was assigned to the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the battalion was reorganized and redesignated as the 229<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. At that time the US Army was reorganizing the divisions as PENTOMIC divisions with all transportation to include armored personnel carriers in the transportation battalion. It did not take the Army long to realize that the battle group concept of the PENTOMIC division did not work. On 1 March 1963, with the restructuring of the divisions, the 229<sup>th</sup> Battalion reorganized and redesignated the 229<sup>th</sup> Supply and Transport Battalion.

On 21 January 1968, the 229<sup>th</sup> Supply and Transport Battalion consolidated with Company B, 121<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion and the resulting organization reorganized and

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<sup>9</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality," and Diggs email.

<sup>10</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality," and Diggs email.

<sup>11</sup> Maddaloni, "Fighting for Equality," and Diggs email.

redesignated as Company C, 103<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion. On 1 April 1975, the company reorganized and redesignated as 243<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Company, an element of the 58<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. On 1 July 1986, it again reorganized and redesignated as the Headquarters and Supply Company, 229<sup>th</sup> Supply and Transport Battalion of the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division with organic companies pulled from new and existing units. On 1 April 1992, the battalion reorganized and redesignated and the 229<sup>th</sup> Support Battalion and its headquarters moved to Reistertown.

#### Campaigns

##### WWI

Meuse-Argonne

Alsace 1918

Lorraine 1918

##### WWII

Asiatic-Pacific Theater, Streamer without Inscription

##### Korean War

CCF Intervention

Free UN Counteroffensive

CCF Spring Offensive

UN Summer-Fall Offensive

Second Korean Winter

Korea, Summer-Fall 1952

Third Korean Winter

Korea, Summer 1953

##### Decorations

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered Korea 1951

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered Korea 1952

French Croix de Guerre with Palm, WWI, Streamer embroidered Meuse-Argonne

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, Streamer embroidered Korea 1951-1952

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Shelby L. Stanton, *Order of Battle US Army World War II*, Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_, notes on unpublished manuscript *US Army Korean War Order of Battle* at Center of Military History 2 April 2003.

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