

36th Transportation Battalion



*36th Transportation Battalion Unit Crest
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World War II

The parent unit of the 36th Transportation Battalion (Truck) was the 1st Battalion of the 21st Quartermaster Regiment (Truck-Corps). It was constituted in the Regular Army on 1 May 1936 and redesignated on 8 January 1940 as the 21st Quartermaster Regiment (Truck).

The 1st Battalion of the 21st Quartermaster Regiment (Truck) was activated at Fort Benning, Georgia on 15 January 1942. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions were activated on 16 April 1942 and the Medical Detachment, under the command of Captain Thomas A. Futch, became active on 20 July. The entire regiment remained at Fort Benning for the remainder of 1942, engaging in unit training in preparation for overseas shipment.

On 5 January 1943, the 21st Quartermaster Regiment departed Fort Benning from the Fort Benning Embarkation Point via ocean transport bound for the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theatre of War. They arrived on 5 March 1943.

The regiment's operations centered around the Ledo (or Burma) Road, a main supply artery from Southern Asia into China and a target for constant enemy bombing. This campaign, under the command of General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stillwell, was one of the bloodiest of the war. The mission of the 21st Quartermaster Regiment was supply to the forward areas.

On its arrival into the CBI Theater, the regiment was broken into three geographical areas with the 1st Battalion operating in the Ledo Sector. On 1 December 1943 the regiment was redesignated as the 21st Quartermaster Group, under the command of Lt. Col. E. C. McCallum, and the Battalions, Mobile respectively. Companies "A" through "M" were redesignated as the 3301st through 3312th Quartermaster Truck Companies and followed separate lineages. The defunct regiment's headquarters and medical detachments provided personnel for the formation of a Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment and Medical Detachment for each of the battalions.

The 36th Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile remained in the CBI Theatre until August of 1945, a total of 29 months, most of which was spent in the jungles of Central Burma, especially around Myitkyina on the Tirap River. In that time, it had under its command for various periods, the 3301st, 3302nd, 3303rd, 3304th, 3312th, 3502nd, 4390th, and 373rd Quartermaster Truck Companies; the 4276th Service Company; the 4294th Railhead Company; and the two detachments. It was temporarily attached to the 45th Quartermaster Group from November 1944 to March 1945 and to the 468th Quartermaster Group from 9 April to 11 June 1945.

The specific duties of the 36th Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile were varied a great deal during the war. They included POL delivery to the Front, general cargo delivery to the Front, air-freight hauling, road repair, malaria control, evacuation of wounded combat from combat zones, setting up and maintaining of forward air-drop zones for supplies, distribution of supplies in forward areas to American, British, and Chinese forces, and special emergency jobs as the units called for them. At the time that the India-China Wing of the Air Transport Command received a Presidential Citation for airlifting supplies over the "Hump" and loading the planes at Missanini and Dinjan.

During "Operation River" the unit assisted in the removal of more than 500 wounded from the Burma combat zone and were commended for the work by J. E. Baldwin, Commander of the Third Tactical Air Force in Southeast Asia.

Although the units only occasionally came into direct contact with enemy forces, they had to contend with other enemies: malaria, the weather and the jungles, in order to get the supplies through. In a typical month, (December 1944) they dispatched 1,222 vehicles that covered 249,000 miles in delivering a gross tonnage of 4,277 tons of cargo.

For their work in the Burma Campaign and China Campaign, the 36th was awarded the China-Burma-India and Central Burma Campaign Streamers. In addition, personnel of Hq & Hq Detachment were authorized to wear the Bronze Star in their Theatre Service Ribbons. One document stated "the battalion ... participated in hauling supplies continuously to the Combat Front in the Central Burma Campaign and also actively engaged as complete units in hauling supplies direct into the China Theatre."

CONUS and reorganization

In September 1945, the Battalion, under the command of Major William C. Plowden, Jr., returned to the United States and was inactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on 7 November 1945. On 1 August 1946, the unit was converted and redesignated as the 36th Transportation Corps Truck Battalion. It was again redesignated on 11 June 1954 with the Hq & Hq Detachment becoming a Headquarters and Headquarters Company.

The 36th Transportation Battalion was reactivated on 25 June 1954 at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. There, it performed normal peacetime Army transportation activities until it was inactivated on 20 February 1956.

On 23 December 1957, the Battalion, under the command of Major Charles F. Barrie, was activated at Fort Polk, Louisiana where it was attached to the 2nd Logistical Command. It became operational on 3 February 1958, the present Unit Organizational Day. The 670th Transportation Company (Truck) was attached to the battalion on 7 March 1958. On 7 November the same year, the 149th Ordnance (HM), 74th Ordnance (Supply) Companies and the 661st Ordnance (Mag) Platoon were also attached. In addition to these units, the 28th Transportation (AAM), the 8th Transportation (Light Helicopter) and the 149th Transportation (CH FM) Detachments were attached for "Exercise Strongarm" in April of 1958. During its stay at Fort Polk, the battalion performed a wide variety of missions including "Operation Rollaway" which involved the evacuation of vehicles from Fort Polk to other Army installations. All attached units were relieved from the Battalion on 15 April 1959.

The Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 36th Transportation Battalion (Truck), with Major Charles F. Barrie in command departed Fort Polk on 21 April 1959 for Fort Bragg, North Carolina. There it was redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment on June 25th 1959 and was attached to XVIII Airborne Corps. Four companies: the 25th Transportation (AAM), 538th Transportation (Medium Truck) (Petroleum), 541st Transportation (Light Truck) and 547th Transportation (Light Truck) Companies were attached to it. The 36th Transportation Battalion served in direct support of tactical units of the XVIII Airborne Corps including the 82nd Airborne Division.

Germany and other places

On 13 November 1959 the 547th Transportation Company (Light Truck) was detached from the Battalion and departed from Fort Bragg enroute to Boeblingen, Germany. At the same time the 379th Transportation Company (Light Truck) left Germany and became attached to the Battalion at Fort Bragg.

On 10 March 1960 the 379th Transportation Company (Light Truck) and a portion of the 538th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) supported the 1st Logistics Command on Operation Puerto Pine/Big Slam. Through the spring, summer, and fall these and other companies of the Battalion participated in Operations Quick Strike, Towers Moon, Bright Star, Southwind, and Dark Cloud.

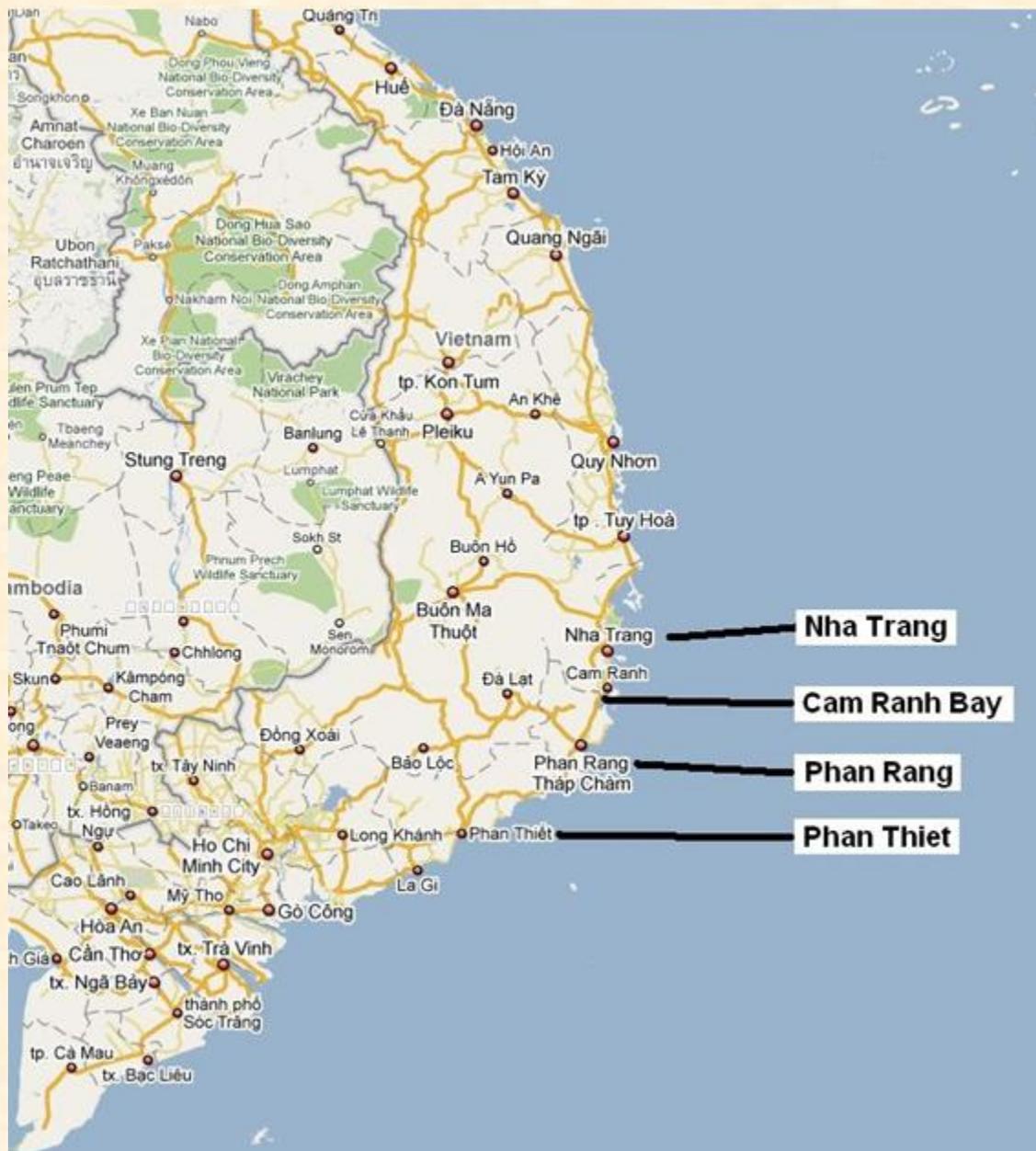
15 March 1961 the 25th Transportation Company (Direct Support) participated in a DA Troop Test of a new TO/E 55-457D.

On 10 October 1961 the 538th Transportation Company under the command of Captain Francis C. Moretti, was detached from the battalion and moved overseas to US Army Europe for further assignment to Germersheim, Germany.

Viet Nam

On 31 July 1966 the 36th Transportation Battalion arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. The 36th, 39th and 57th Truck Battalions, all of which arrived in 1966, fell under the

command of the 500th Transportation Group (Motor Transport), which also arrived in October 1966. All logistics units fell under the control of the Cam Ranh Bay Support Command.



A broad map showing location of Cam Ranh Bay in relation to Vietnam.

During the time the Battalion assumed command of the 442nd Medium Truck, which had arrived in 1966, the 566th Light Truck, which had arrived in 1965. The 529th Light Truck and 670th Medium Truck arrived in 1967. All the medium companies operated the M52 series tractors and a platoon of the 670th Company had refrigerator trucks. The 36th Battalion's main responsibility was to conduct direct haul to the base camps in the First

Field Force in the II Corps Tactical Zone. The other truck battalion, the 24th, only conducted port clearance to the nearby supply depot. Its trucks ran day and night while the 36th Battalion trucks only drove during the day.

Short haul routes were one-day round trips from Cam Ranh Bay to locations along Highway 1 such as north to Nha Trang and Ninh Hoa and south to Phan Rang. Long hauls went north and turned west on Highway 21 to Ban Me Thout, or straight west from Cam Ranh Bay along Highway 11 to Da Lat and Bao Loc. On a long haul, the convoy would drive up one day and return the next. The battalion route later included a long haul south along the coastal highway to Phan Thiet. As many as 90 to 180 vehicles of all types – cargo, tanker, and reefers – lined up for a convoy each morning in serials of 25 to 40 vehicles. The drivers put in long days. The trucks began lining up for convoys at about three o'clock every morning and would go through inspection before they left the gate. Depending on where the convoy was going, the truck driver's day would not end till well into the night. Running on an average of four hours sleep a night caused a few drivers to fall asleep and drive off the side of the road. Accidents were relatively low compared to the number of miles being driven, but with the large number of trucks on the road at any day, the number of accidents seemed high.



This as a rear of a convoy to give an idea on how long these convoys were you can see the dust kicking up from the trucks ahead as far as you see down. (photo by Wayne Patrick)

Just like the men, the trucks also had very little rest. Convoys ran daily so the only time the trucks could be worked on was at night. The M52s were driven well past their life expectancy.



Soldiers hanging out on a Gun Truck. (photo by Dale Brown)

On 2 September 1967, a company of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) launched an ambush in the Qui Nhon area that destroyed 27 trucks and killed or wounded most of the drivers. Up until that time, enemy ambushes had only fired on single trucks in a convoy. 8th Group in Qui Nhon began to convert 5-ton

trucks into gun platforms with armor plating to escort the convoys. As the company sized ambushes spread into the Cam Ranh Bay area, trucks of the 500th Group likewise built guntrucks. The hardened convoy and helicopters flying support increased the cost to the enemy thereby reducing the frequency of ambushes.



A closer view of Cam Ranh Bay and where pier locations were and different transportation companies

In response to the Tet Offensive, which began on 31 January 1968, the US Army began to send more units to Vietnam. The 172nd Medium Truck Company was a Reserve unit activated from Omaha, Nebraska, activated for service in Vietnam. It arrived 11 October 1968. Because the men had worked together for years, the company had high morale and the best maintenance shop in the battalion. After the previous company commander rotated back to the United States, First Lieutenant Thomas Bruner, assumed command. He went on to make brigadier general in the US Army Reserves.

In late April 1969, a convoy from the 36th Battalion was bound for the 2/1 Cavalry base camp at Phan Rang south along the coastal highway (QL1). This was a short run that only took half a day to reach the destination and then return by the end of the day. The convoys ran with 70 to 80 trucks with three to five gun trucks. They usually had an MP gun jeep or V-100 armored car in the lead and gun trucks spaced evenly throughout the convoy with one in the trail party. The line up consisted of the MP gun jeep, the convoy commander's gun jeep, Rick "Snuffy" Smith's gun jeep, then the cargo trucks.¹



This is the mechanics area, across from Cam Rahn Village. The road to the far left on the other side was the 566th Trans company area. (photo by Dale Brown)

Route 1 or QL 1 ran north and south along the flat coastal plane. The "Coconut Grove," was about halfway between Cam Ranh Bay and Phan Rang to the south. The "Coconut Grove" was a rubber plantation on the west side of the road and open field on the east with elephant grass. Smith claimed that a million monkeys must have lived in the grove and swarmed the trucks whenever they passed. That is why

they called it the "Coconut Grove." The coastal highway was a heavily trafficked highway by both military and civilian traffic. For this reason, no one ever expected to get hit along this route. The drivers did not even wear their flak vests.²

When the convoy reached the "Coconut Grove," the enemy initiated the ambush with small arms fire on the lead and middle vehicles creating two kill zones. The APC gun truck, "USA," and one gun jeep were caught off guard. There was one gun truck and one

¹ Rick Smith telephone interview by Richard Killblane, 22 August 2005.

² Ronald Smith and Rick Smith interviews.

gun jeep for every 30 vehicles. The vehicles were typically bunched up with no more than 20 feet between vehicles. The lead kill zone caught 16-20 vehicles. Gun trucks did their normal routine. Rick Smith fired his M79 grenade launcher from the hip as fast as could. The enemy fired a few mortars but missed. They overshot. The fire fight lasted about 15 minutes.³

No one in the convoy was killed or wounded but a number of vehicles were shot up. Most of them had flat tires. All were able to drive to their destination. The thing that Rick Smith learned was to never take his eyes off Coconut Grove again.⁴

In July 1969, LTC Edward Honor assumed command of the 36th Battalion from LTC Paul Reese. LTC Reese told LTC Honor that “Whatever you do, don’t run our convoys out there without air support.” If a convoy was ambushed, the gun trucks would provide enough fire support until the reaction force showed up to drive back the attacking force. The only convoy ambushed left without air support on a return trip since air cover prevented helicopters from flying. One driver was killed when his fuel truck was hit by a rocket.



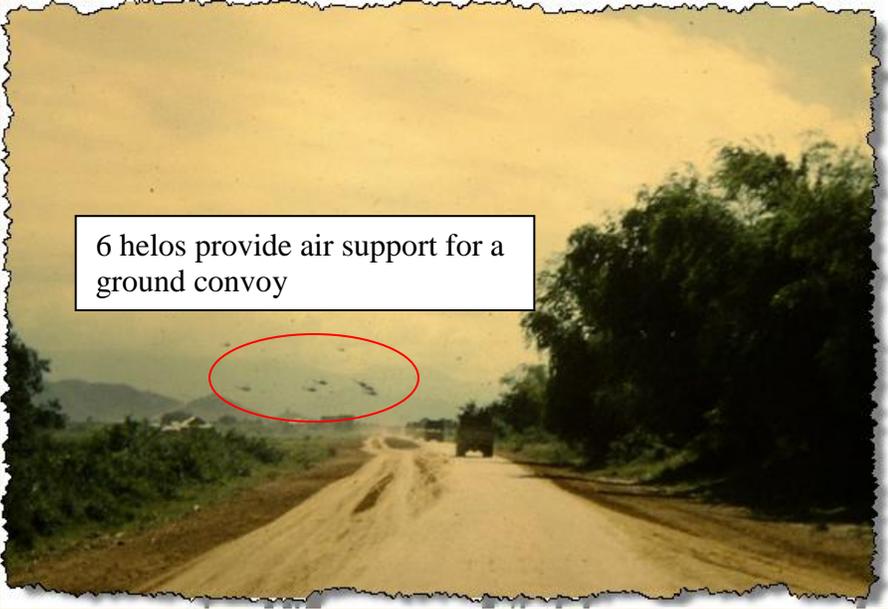
LTC Edward Honor (center) in a headquarters, here they would discuss convoy operations. LTC Honor would command both 36th in July 1969 and then the 24th in December of 1969.

In October of 1969, the 500th Transportation Group, commanded by Colonel Gus Wolman, was inactivated and the 36th Transportation Battalion fell under the 124th Transportation Command, commanded by Colonel Henry Del Mar. Since Colonel Del Mar and Lieutenant Colonel Honor had worked together before, Honor had the confidence to ask his commander for permission to let trucks shut down every third day for maintenance. There was always more cargo needed to be delivered than trucks to haul it. This was a risky venture, but as it turned out, the maintenance improved and Honor was able to put more trucks on the road. Similarly, the extra rest reduced the number of accidents.

³ Ronald Smith and Ronald Smith interviews.

⁴ Rick Smith Interview.

In spite of the losses incurred in the Central Highlands by 8th Group convoys, the 500th Group had not lost anyone to an ambush until late 1969, almost two years after the ambushes began along Route 19. The threat level was not nearly as dangerous as it was on Route 19 though enemy attacks on convoys in the southern II Corps Zone began to increase in the summer and fall of 1969. In response, the 36th Battalion began constructing gun trucks. At first they built double wall gun boxes out of lumber with the air gap filled with sandbags. These turned out to be too heavy resulting in poor handling, excessive wear on the tires and continuous brake failures and resulted in the death of one driver. These were replaced with 5/8-inch steel walls.⁵



A convoy in route to Ban Me Thout with air support above, air support was very important in discouraging enemy ambushes. (photo by Wayne Patrick)



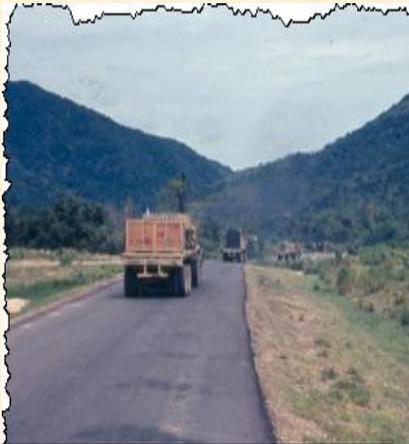
The 566th Company area overlooking the motor pool, on the left are latrine barrels. (photo by Dale Brown)

Ban Me Thout was a routine destination for the 36th Battalion. The terrain between Nha Trang and Ban Me Thout was mountainous jungle with some open areas where the jungle had been cleared or defoliated. The road was so narrow that trucks could not pass. The run to Ban Me Thout took most of the day so the convoys had to

⁵ MAJ Thomas P. Storey, "Operational Report – Lessons Learned, Headquarters, 36th Transportation Battalion, Period Ending 17 January 1970." Headquarters, 36th Transportation Battalion (Truck) APO 96312, 17 January 1970.

RON at the camp and return the next day. The convoys ran with anywhere from 80 to 150 vehicles divided into serials of 20 30 vehicles with a 5 to 10 minute gap between them. An MP with a V-100 armored car usually led each serial followed by a lieutenant or NCO in a gun jeep with radio communications and an M-60 mounted on a pedestal. Each serial had a Gun Truck with an NCO, radio and one 50 Caliber machine gun and two M-60. The Trail Party made up the last serial and included a gun jeep, wrecker, Medic Ambulance, tire truck, 10 to 20 bob tails and gun truck. The number of extra bob

tails depended on the size of the convoy. Because of the rapid promotion from second lieutenant to captain in two years, LTC Edward Honor, the 36th Battalion Commander, had a policy that captains had to be the convoy commanders.⁶



Driving on paved roads was luxury that was short lived most of the time. (photo by Wayne Patrick)

Around October or November 1969, CPT Wayne Patrick, was the convoy commander. On a return trip from Ban Me Thout, the convoy was delayed on account of the poor weather conditions and low clouds prevented helicopters from flying. Normally

the convoys departed between 0700 to 0800 hours depending on mechanical problems. After line-up for the return trip they waited around an hour or more for the weather to improve. LTC Honor also had a policy that no convoy would run without air cover. It would have been normal procedure to radio Battalion headquarters and inform them of the situation and get approval. Air cover would normally have joined them before they had gone far outside Ban Me Thout. CPT Patrick made the decision to depart without air cover since road security in the mountain pass was considered adequate.⁷



A convoy waiting for clearance lined up ready to roll. In the rear would be the bobtail which in the event a truck broke down, the bobtail would just hook them up on the back and carry them for the remainder of the trip, there were always several bobtails bring up the rear. (photo by Wayne Patrick)

The 101st Airborne Division and ROK Army provided security in the area. The Koreans had a base at the top of the Pass and the ARVN had a training base at the bottom. CPT Patrick had radio contact with security operations when entering the area of operation and there had been no reports of any significant enemy activity. It was not unusual to receive

⁶ Wayne Patrick email to Richard Killblane, August 29, 2005. LTG Edward Honor remembered that the gap between serials was 10-15 minutes. Edward Honor email to Richard Killblane, August 31, 2005. Wayne Patrick remembered that the gap was 4-6 minutes, Wayne Patrick Email to Richard Killblane, September 1, 2005.

⁷ Patrick email.

sporadic small arms fire from time to time but no convoy had been ambushed on this route before. Another factor in making the decision to depart was to return to Cam Ranh Bay before dark. It was not unusual to delay departure for various reasons but it was unusual to cancel a return trip.⁸

An MP V-100 armored car and a gun jeep lead the convoy. The convoy had between 80 and 100 vehicles divided into serials. CPT Patrick kept a gun truck at the rear of the first serial and another in the trail party and the others space evenly through the middle of the convoy. He often rode either in the rear of the first serial or the middle of the convoy. This day he rode in the middle. This allowed him to drive up and down the convoy to respond better to problems. It also kept him in radio range with the lead and rear of his convoy. As the convoy commander, CPT Patrick's jeep had three radios to coordinate with air, ground and artillery support.⁹

About two hours after departure, the convoy was halfway down the mountain pass in the area secured by the 101st Airborne Division. The mountain rose above them on the north side of the road, to their left, and leveled out into a flat cleared zone to the south (their right) with a tree line around 100 yards away. That section of paved road had multiple curves that caused the trucks to slow down. CPT Patrick heard a boom up ahead followed by the report of contact on the radio.¹⁰

The enemy in the wood line fired three to five B40 rockets (RPGs) at one of the gun trucks in the middle of the convoy and hit the top corner of the passenger side of gun box. The blast wounded three crew members and cut Don Matthews in half. The lead part of the convoy continued while the trucks behind stopped. Another gun truck pulled security on the disabled gun truck. The fight lasted five minutes.¹¹

CPT Patrick was a quarter to a half a mile behind it and raced up to the rear of the disabled gun truck. He reached the scene a few minutes later. He was on the radio with the 101st. A couple of 101st troops were nearby and were firing on the tree line for another 15 to 20 minutes. In just a few minutes there was a call on his radio from a Cobra Gun Ship, with the call sign "Undertaker." He reported his position and three Cobras came in and worked the area over for about ten minutes. During that time, a Huey from the 101st Airborne Division came in and extracted the wounded. The rest of the convoy continued. The trail party recovered the disabled gun truck.¹²

The rest of the convoy moved up while the area was secure and the trail party secured the disabled gun truck. The rear half of the convoy regrouped with the lead half at the normal rest stop in a safe area. The convoy returned to Cam Ranh Bay without further

⁸ Patrick interview, 12 July 2002 and 17 June 2005 and email August 29, 2005.

⁹ Patrick interview, 12 July 2002 and 17 June 2005.

¹⁰ Patrick email, August 29, 2005.

¹¹ Patrick interview, 12 July 2002 and 17 June 2005.

¹² Patrick interview, 12 July 2002 and 17 June 2005 and email, August 29, 2005.

incident. This was the only driver of the 36th Battalion killed in action during LTC Honor's command.¹³

Due to the race riots at Cam Ranh Bay, the commander of Cam Ranh Bay Support Command was relieved in October 1969 and Hank Del Mar took his place. Del Mar was the kind of commander who would turn an organization upside down to improve it. Del Mar wanted to convert the personnel billets of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 36th Transportation Battalion to create a property disposal unit. In December 1969, he offered Honor command of the 24th Truck Battalion and gave all the trucks of the 36th to the 24th Battalion. Honor assumed command of a terminal battalion headquarters to manage nine truck companies. Honor went on to become the first black Transportation Corps general officer retiring as a lieutenant general. The 36th Transportation Battalion remained on paper until its inactivation on 13 August 1970.



Soldiers at a bar perhaps celebrating a fellow soldier leaving. (photo by Dale Brown)

The 36th Transportation Battalion had earned two Meritorious Unit Commendations for 1 August 1966 to 31 March 1967 and 1 April 1969 to 30 September 1969, two Vietnamese Crosses of Gallantry Phase II for 1 July 1966 to 31 May 1967 and Phase III for 1 June 1967 to 29 January 1968, and the TCC for 30 January 1968 to 1 April 1969.

¹³ Patrick email, August 29, 2005.

In 1982, the Chief of Staff of the Army approved the use of TOE designations for training units in order to retain the designations of organizations not being retained under the US Army Regimental System. The USARS only applied to combat arms units, but once they were given to combat arms units, it was a matter of time before the same was done for non-combat arms TRADOC units as well. In 1986, the Army decided to create a greater emphasis on Regimental affiliation and the Transportation Corps Regiment was activated in July 1986. Likewise several training battalions prepared to trade in their colors for Transportation Battalions with long distinguished histories.

BRAC

On 11 July 1986, the 36th Transportation Battalion was reactivated at Fort Dix, New Jersey, to assume the advanced individual training (AIT) missions, of the inactivated 2nd Battalion, 5th Training Brigade, which supervised the truck driver training for the Army Transportation School. The Regimental System was created to foster a spirit of pride, unity, camaraderie, cohesion and cooperation among Transportation Corps soldiers.

Following the success in the First Gulf War, the United States decided to reduce the Army as it had after every war. The Armed Forces conducted the first of a series of Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC) and Fort Dix was identified for closure. The Army wanted to consolidate all truck driver training on one military post, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Consequently, the 36th Transportation Battalion was inactivated at Fort Dix, NJ on 6 August 1992. Ironically, since Fort Leonard Wood could not handle the increasing demand for more truck drivers, the Army created a temporary truck driver school to train Reservist and Guardsmen at Fort Bliss, Texas. When the Second Gulf War began in 2003, the demand for truck drivers kept the temporary drivers school at Fort Bliss busy, but the third round of BRAC announced on 13 May 2005, required the consolidation of similar branch centers and schools to single posts for better efficiency in training. The truck driver school at Fort Bliss would consolidate to Fort Leonard Wood in 2008.