

54th Transportation Battalion



54th Transportation Battalion unit crest

World War II

Originally constituted as the 54th Quartermaster Truck Battalion on 28 May 1943 and activated by 7 July 1943 with the transfer of personnel, equipment, and history from the 2638th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Provisional). Before joining the 54th, the 2638th was deployed in Tunisia and operated in conjunction with the 2640th Quartermaster Battalion using 230 2 ½-ton trucks and trailers to move 1,100 tons of ammunition from Tebessa to Tabarka despite difficult road conditions and the strafing runs of German aircraft.

On 3 November 1943 the battalion was redesignated the 54th Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile and reorganized with a Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment. The lettered companies A, B, C, and D were redesignated 3353rd, 3354th, 3355th, and the 3356th Quartermaster Truck Companies and would follow separate lineages. From 9 July 1943 to 17 August 1943 the 54th supported operations in the Sicily Campaign. It continued to support army units on the Italian peninsula up until 9 October 1944 when it was transferred over to the European theater. In Europe, the 54th supported the allied units that landed in Southern France and continued to transport supplies to allied forces through the campaigns of the Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland, and Central Europe. After performing its functions in Europe, the 54th was inactivated on 31 October 1945.

Fort Story and Amphibious Trucks

By 2 September 1949, the 54th was needed again. This time it was activated and redesignated as the 54th Transportation Battalion at Fort Story, Virginia. HHC, 54th Battalion was evidently the senior headquarters on little Army fort at Cape Henry. Consequently, it provided command and administrative control for all the units assigned to Fort Story to include one port company and three truck battalions and the battalion commander acted as the post commander.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 54th Transportation Truck Battalion
105th Transportation Port Company (Type B)

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Transportation Truck Battalion

5th Transportation Heavy Truck Company

10th Transportation Heavy Truck Company

62nd Transportation Heavy Truck Company

640th Transportation Heavy Truck Company

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Transportation Truck Battalion

169th Transportation Amphibious Truck Company

206th Transportation Amphibious Truck Company

458th Transportation Amphibious Truck Company

460th Transportation Amphibious Truck Company

461st Transportation Amphibious Truck Company

489th Transportation Amphibious Truck Company

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 148th Transportation Truck Battalion

165th Transportation Truck Company

721st Transportation Truck Company

3538th Transportation Truck Company

The 9224th TSU-TC Detachment III was activated at Fort Story on 31 October 1951 to provide administrative overhead personnel for the purpose of command all Transportation Corps and Second Army units stationed at Fort Story to include the 54th Battalion. The 54th Transportation Truck Battalion reverted to a cadre training status. Effective 13 May 1952, the recently activated 99th and 285th Port Companies, 605th, 606th, 607th, and 612th TAT Companies were relieved from the command of Headquarters Company 9224th TSU-TC Detachment III and placed under the command of 54th Transportation Truck Battalion. By 1 September 1952, the battalion was redesignated as the 54th Transportation Battalion (Amphibious Truck).

The 54th Battalion participated in Exercise Long Horn at Fort Hood, Texas, on 30 July 1952. In July, the 606th and 607th TAT Companies received their DUKWs and could begin accelerated Military Occupational Skill (MOS) training. The 605th and 612th TAT Companies only received four task vehicles for on-the-job training. The 606th and 607th TAT Companies began their 8-week basic training program for their soldiers on 3 November and 1 December respectively. The 604th conducted bivouac support for the TC School. On 5 December, the 54th Truck Battalion underwent reorganization.

In March 1953, the 612th TAT Company began its 8-week basic training program. On 23 April 1953 due to extreme shortage of personnel and impending operational commitments, the 169th, 461st, 489th and 604th TAT Companies were assigned to the 54th Truck Battalion from the 5th Transportation Battalion. The 5th Battalion was reduced to one officer and one enlisted man and attached to the 54th Battalion. The 54th Battalion participated in a cargo handling problem 1 through 11 December in conjunction with the 117th and 349th Port Companies from Fort Eustis. DUKWs from the 54th Battalion were used for Navy operations training at Little Creek in support of wet embarkation and debarkation with LST and LSD, 9 and 12 December. Evidently no Fort Story units were needed for SUNECS 53.

In June 1954, one officer and 27 enlisted men from the 612th TAT Company formed a Barge Amphibious Resupply Cargo (BARC) platoon to train in BARC operations for participation in Off Shore Discharge Exercise (ODEX)-54 along the coast of Northern France in November. This resupply training exercise resulted from the fear that the Soviet Union, which had recently acquired the nuclear bomb, might to deny the NATO countries use of the fixed deep water ports by bombing them. Beginning with ODEX-54, the US Army rehearsed a Normandy style resupply operation. The BARC latter known as Lighter Amphibious Resupply Cargo-60 ton (LARC-LX) was an experimental craft received in 1953. The companies of the 54th Battalion underwent joint OCT and Second Army inspection designed to inquire into the individual knowledge and training of their soldiers, conditions and availability of equipment, from 3 to 6 May. They earned an overall excellent rating. On 15 September, HHC, 5th Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 54th Battalion and the following companies were attached to it: 169th, 206th, 489th, 606th and 607th TAT Companies. The 5th Battalion with the 169th, 206th and 604th TAT Companies and 870th Port Company conducted US Army Reserve unit training from 18 July to 29 August. The 54th Battalion with the 870th Port Company and 604th and 612th TAT Companies supported ROTC training at Fort Story from 19 to 31 July. On 2 October the 5th and 54th Battalions were reorganized with the following companies: 5th Battalion received the 169th, 206th, 489th, 606th and 607th TAT and 565th Terminal Service Companies. The 54th Battalion received the 461st, 604th, 605th and 612th TAT and 870th Terminal Service Companies. The 5th and 54th Battalions conducted LOTS 4 at Fort Story in November.

The 605th TAT Company was relieved of responsibility for RSI training on 1 March 1955 and the responsibility was given to the 461st TAT Company. 5th Battalion with the 605th TAT and 565th Terminal Service Companies (approximately 276 men) conducted a LOTS exercise, 11-16 April, for participation in SUNEK. Crews from the companies would link up with prepositioned equipment to conduct the LOTS operation. HHC, 5th and 54th Transportation Battalions were inactivated on 27 June, and HHD, 10th and 376th Transportation Battalions were activated and assigned to the 5th Terminal Command. The companies formerly under the 5th Battalion were assigned to the 10th Battalion and the companies of the 54th were assigned to the 376th Battalion.

Helicopter

It was quickly reactivated as the 27 August 1955 at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and redesignated as the 54th Transportation Battalion (Helicopter) (Army) for shipment to Bremerhaven, Germany as a transport aircraft unit using the H-34 helicopter. It was then inactivated again on 21 October 1963.

Viet Nam

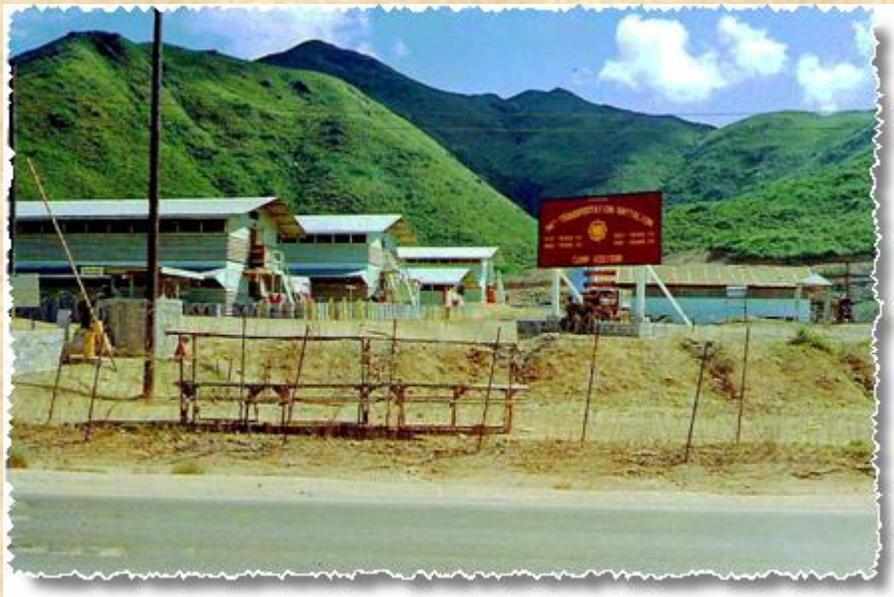
On 1 June 1966, the 54th Battalion was reactivated at Fort Lewis, Washington, for service in Vietnam. It arrived at Qui Nhon, Vietnam as part of the 8th Transportation Group on 23 October 1966. The battalion established its headquarters at Camp Addison in Cha Rang

Valley and assumed control of the light truck companies at Phu Tai and Cha Rang to include:

- 57th Transportation Company (Light Truck)
- 512th Transportation Company (Light Truck)
- 523rd Transportation Company (Light Truck)
- 666th Transportation Company (Light Truck)
- 669th Transportation Company (Light Truck)



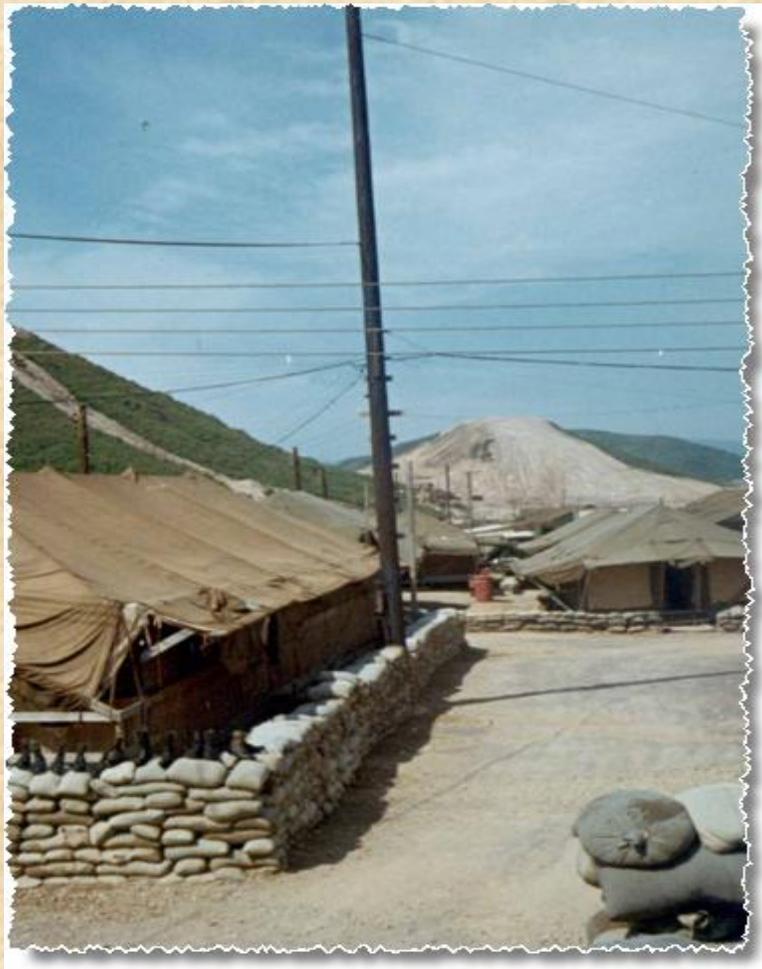
Camp Addison aerial view



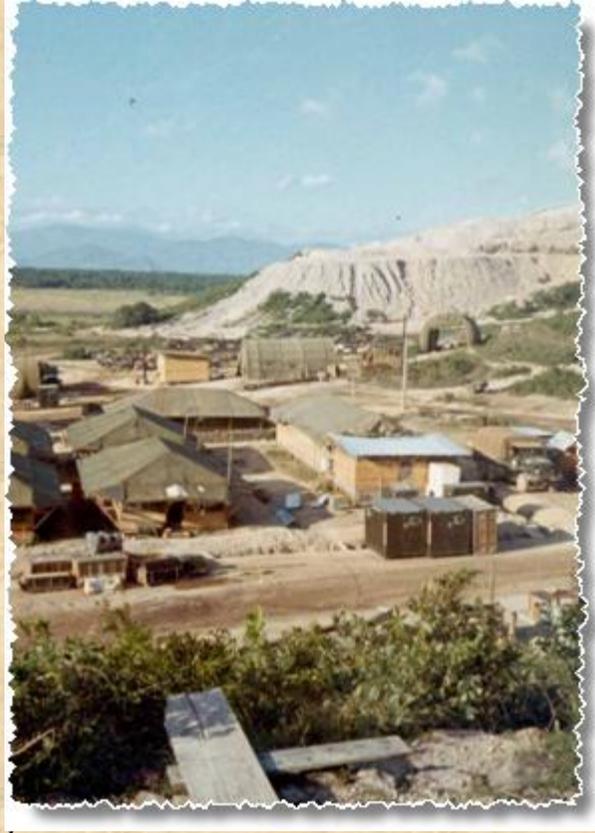
Camp Addison view from road



666th TC Compound 1967



54th Bn and POL, Oct 67 – Photo- JD Calhoun



666th Trans Co Mess Hall Oct 67: photo- JD Calhoun



Ralph Fuller, in Cha Rang Valley, Platoon Leader 523rd TC/54th Bn



M123 10-ton HET (Joaquin 'Marty' Martinez)

http://www.transchool.lee.army.mil/historian/Viet_interviews/Martinez.pdf
read Marty's story here.

The trucks of the battalion hauled supplies daily from the port over 110 miles through the Central Highlands to Pleiku or up the coastal highway (Route 1) to Bong Son or down to Tuy Hoa. Over 200 trucks made the trip each day supplying soldiers in the Central Highlands with JP4, ammunition, food and other commodities. Route 19 snaked its way up two treacherous passes at Mang Yang and Ah Khe.

Up until 2 September 1967, guerilla ambushes mostly took out individual trucks. On that day, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) changed their tactics. Realizing that the helicopters were entirely dependent upon trucks for fuel, the NVA attacked the supply line.

A convoy of 37 vehicles under the control of the 54th Battalion was returning from Pleiku under the protection of only two jeeps armed with M60 machineguns. Because of mechanical problems a 5,000-gallon tanker split the convoy in two as it approached the treacherous An Khe Pass. At that time the jungle grew right up to the road, so close that the driver could reach out and touch the branches. At 6:55 in the evening, an NVA company struck the lead gun jeep with a 57mm recoilless rifle round killing one man and wounding two others. Simultaneously, the enemy sprung a secondary ambush on the other half of the convoy setting the tanker on fire. Drivers were taken by surprise. Many did not know what to expect. They saw the impact of rifle and machinegun fire on the vehicles in front of them but did not know the lethality of the ambush until the trucks came to a halt. The kill zone spread over 700 meters. Drivers climbed out of their vehicles and put up a fight while NVA swarmed over the trucks killing others. In ten minutes the enemy had destroyed or damaged 30 vehicles, killed seven men and wounded 17.



Buffalo/elephant grass growing right up to edge of road – note height of grass – tall enough to hide a water buffalo or elephant (or a company of Viet Cong waiting in ambush)

The response by Colonel Joe Bellino, commander of 8th Group, was immediate. Since the local infantry and tactical units would not escort his convoys, he authorized the companies to build gun trucks. Initially, the units fielded quad .50 gun trucks but they required a crew of six to drive the truck, man and reload the guns. The best solution was to put steel planking on the bed of a 5-ton cargo truck and arm the “box” with machineguns. The first gun trucks were painted olive green like the rest of the trucks in the convoys so they blended in.



COL Joe Bellino, 8th Trans Group Commander

<http://www.transchool.lee.army.mil/historian/documents/bellino.pdf>



Gun trucks painted to blend in with rest of convoy -- no special art work (yet)

Initially, the units fielded Quad .50 gun trucks but they required a crew of six to drive the truck, man and reload the guns. The best solution was to put steel planking on the bed of a 5-ton cargo truck and arm the “box” with machineguns. By the next major ambush in December, the gun trucks were ready. The guerrillas were unable to destroy as many trucks as before and paid a high price in return. In time the gun trucks received pedestal mounted machineguns and were painted black with distinctive names painted on the sides. Each company had two gun trucks. By September 1968, the gun trucks combined with helicopter escorts made large scale ambushes a rarity. The gun trucks had gained a reputation.



Walter Medley, 523rd TC with "Superior Driver Award"



the "Vietnam Superior Driver Award"

The next ambush was on a 27th Battalion convoy but was small in size and only damaged one of the last vehicles. It drove out under its own power. It took the enemy time to plan and rehearse large scale ambushes. The NVA launched its next large scale ambush on a 54th Battalion convoy on 24 November. The convoy consisted of 43 5-ton cargo trucks, 15 2 ½-ton trucks and a maintenance truck under the protection of six gun trucks and three gun jeeps. The fired on the lead gun truck and detonated a mine under the lead 5-ton cargo truck. The truck rolled to the side of the road and the other trucks tried to run through the ambush, but only one truck was successful. The remaining trucks were stopped by mines and small arms fire. One truck loaded with ammunition in the next serial exploded destroying the gun truck next to it. Enemy fire hit the gun truck in the third serial and damaged it and a grenade damaged the gun truck in the fourth serial. The enemy damaged 14 trucks to include four gun trucks, killed two drivers and wounded 17 at a loss of 41 of their own killed and four captured wounded. The price of ambushing convoys had gone up.



***Lead Gun Truck: PVT Harry Cummings – KIA, driver
NCO SGT Dennis Belcastro, Machine gunner Frank Giroux, Machine Gunner Joe
Foster, all WIA, 4 Dec 67***

Another eastbound convoy under the control of the 54th Battalion was ambushed by Viet Cong guerrillas at 8:15 in the morning on 4 December. This convoy of 58 5-ton trucks, 11 2 ½-ton trucks was escorted by six gun trucks and four gun jeeps. The lead gun truck stopped when the crew noticed a board with three mines pulled across the road in front of it. The gun truck then received small arms and recoilless rocket fire killing the driver. The lead jeep, with 1LT Todd, behind the gun truck was also stopped by small arms fire. Both vehicles immediately returned fire. Four cargo trucks received flat tires but the drivers returned fire. The remaining five gun trucks drove into the 3,000 meter long kill zone to render assistance. One was disabled by a rocket wounding three gunners. The helicopter gun ships arrived at 8:27, 12 minutes after the call, “ambush, ambush, ambush” went out and the reaction force arrived at 8:30. By that time the gun trucks had broken up the enemy ambush, killing 13 enemy and capturing one wounded at a loss of

only one killed and six wounded. The loss of vehicles was one gun truck destroyed and one jeep and four trucks slightly damaged.



aftermath of an attack on a vehicle in a convoy

It became clear from the prisoners that the enemy wanted to completely destroy a convoy as the Viet Minh had annihilated French Mobile Group 100 on 15 Apr 54 near Mang Yang Pass. The Americans were determined to keep the supply line open.

It was learned that the enemy liked to take out the lead vehicles with mines and small arms fire. The order came down that the gun trucks should not lead the convoys but vary their position throughout the convoy on a daily basis so the enemy would not be able to anticipate where the gun truck was. Quad .50 gun trucks required too many crew members and could not depress their guns to shoot down hill or fire through the cab of the truck. They were slowly discontinued in use as more box style gun truck were built. In time the gun trucks received pedestal mounted machineguns and were painted black with distinctive names painted on the sides. Each company had two gun trucks. After the December ambush the convoys started having fixed wing aircraft or helicopter gun ships escort them. They would fly so low that the drivers could reach up and touch the skids.



Low flying Huey escort

At approximately 6:15 on the morning of 21 January 1968, a convoy under the control of the 54th Battalion consisting of four gun trucks, four gun jeeps and 60 task vehicles departed Qui Nhon for Pleiku. The convoy was halted at check point 96 east for 30 minutes while the road was cleared. At 10:00 approximately 500 yards east of check point 102, the lead element of the convoy came upon a 5-ton tractor which was attempting to hook up to a POL trailer. Because this operation was blocking the flow of traffic, the convoy commander moved to the front and directed the clearance of the road. He then directed his convoy to continue. At this time, a large volume of automatic and small arms fire was received from the south side of the road. Convoy security personnel immediately returned fire in the direction of the hostile fire. The convoy continued to move through the area. Within five to ten minutes APCs from the road security element at check point 102 arrived and engaged the hostile element followed by tanks from CP 98 within ten minutes. Rear elements of the convoy approaching the area received approximately 40 to 50 rounds of automatic fire. Both APCs and tanks at the site of the incident fired in the direction of the hostile fire. Number of enemy involved were unknown.

At 6:00 in the morning of 25 January, another 54th Battalion convoy consisting of 95 task vehicles for Pleiku and 23 for An Khe, departed the unit marshalling area located at Cha Rang Valley on Route 19. The 95 vehicles bound for Pleiku consisted of 65 5-ton cargo trucks, 19 2 ½-ton trucks, 5 armored 2 ½-ton trucks, 4 radio jeeps and 2 5-ton maintenance trucks. At approximately 10:15, the convoy received automatic and small

arms fire from both sides of the road. The gun trucks and convoy personnel returned fire and within ten minutes elements of 2/1 Cavalry were on the site with APCs and tanks. After all firing stopped the convoy proceeded west for approximately 500 yards when enemy fire was again received from both sides of the road. The NVA opened fire on the second and third vehicles in the convoy. The enemy fire consisted of rockets, heavy machine guns, grenades and small arms. A machine gun position was later discovered approximately 25 yards on the right side of the road. The reaction force arrived on the scene from the previous ambush site immediately. The ground distance covered by the ambush was approximately 1,000 meters. Approximately 60 convoy personnel were involved in the ambush. Plus the reaction force. The number of enemy involved was unknown. Two drivers were killed and one wounded. One 2 ½-ton gun truck and one 2 1/-ton cargo truck were damaged, with minor damage to the cargo. One civilian tractor from Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE) was destroyed. Three armed helicopters arrived at approximately 10:45 and two medevacs arrived ten minutes after the request. Two officers, members of the engineer team, were wounded, one fatally, while clearing explosive ordnance from the site.



convoy line up at Ponderosa

On 30 January, a convoy under the control of the 54th Battalion departed for Pleiku at approximately 6:00 that morning. The convoy consisted of 80 task vehicles, 7 gun trucks, 8 gun jeeps and 3 Quad .50s. Upon arrival in An Khe, the convoy was joined by 3 PACs and one tank from the security force of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The additional security element was dispersed toward the front of the convoy. Since the convoy was about to pass out of the area of operation of the 173rd, the additional security element pulled out of the convoy and stopped at CP 102. Approximately one mile west of CP

102, the convoy came under fire initially by mortars and followed by small arms and automatic fire from a platoon size enemy. The convoy personnel immediately returned heavy fire. In addition, the 173rd security element advanced from CP 102 and an element for the 4th ID security element moved west to engage the enemy. F111As, F104s and gun ships made air strikes. Two US personnel were slightly injured, one 5-ton tractor and reefer were damaged. No enemy dead or wounded were found.

On 7 February, a convoy under the control of the 54th Battalion departed for Pleiku at approximately 6:30. The convoy consisted of 67 task vehicles, one maintenance truck, six gun trucks and four gun jeeps. At approximately 10:10, after passing CP 92 West, the convoy came under fire from small arms and automatic fire of an estimated 50 to 60 NVA from the tree line south of the road. In addition, two rockets were fired at the convoy from a mound halfway between the road and the tree line. Convoy security personnel immediately opened fire killing two NVA at the rocket position. The enemy force began to move forward from the tree line but were driven back by the fire power of the convoy personnel. Gun trucks which cleared the kill zone, which was estimated at 200 meters, returned to fire upon the enemy positions. Within 15 minutes, 6 to 8 APCs and two to three tanks arrived at the scene and began to engage the enemy. Four US personnel were slightly wounded. Six dead and one enemy wounded were discovered. A 5-ton cargo hauling class V was hit by a rocket and destroyed. A gas tank of another 5-ton cargo was damaged. Also several other vehicles, including two gun trucks, received flat tires from enemy fire. The gun ships arrived within 15 to 20 minutes of request.

On 21 February, a convoy under the control of the 27th Battalion departed at approximately 7:15 for Pleiku. The convoy consisted of 54 task vehicles, four gun trucks, four gun jeeps and a Quad .50. At approximately 9:50 the convoy came under fire from automatic and small arms fire and B40 rockets between CP 89 and CP 96. The convoy personnel returned fire in the direction of an estimated 10 to 12 NVA south of the highway. The Quad .50 move into the kill zone, which was estimated at approximately 300 meters, and was credited with one NVA killed. APCs from the 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in approximately five to ten minutes and engaged the enemy force. Artillery was also called in by the tactical force. Three vehicles including a task vehicle and the Quad .50 were damaged and three personnel were wounded. One killed and one wounded enemy were recovered along with numerous foxholes.

On 4 March, a convoy under the control of the 54th Battalion departed for Pleiku at approximately 6:00. The convoy consisted of 104 task vehicles, 8 gun trucks and 4 gun jeeps. At approximately 9:00 the convoy was held up at CP 89 by the tactical security force due to enemy activity in Mang Yang Pass. The convoy was allowed to proceed at approximately 11:30 with the escort of one tank and two APCs from the 173rd Airborne Brigade. At approximately 11:45, the convoy came under fire from mortars and heavy small arms and automatic fire. Convoy security immediately opened fire in the direction of the enemy which was well entrenched in the tree line on the north side of the road. The convoy also received sporadic fire from the south side of the road. The enemy force was estimated at about 50 personnel. Two Quad .50s from the 4/60th Artillery, which were traveling with the convoy, and one from the 27th Transportation Battalion convoy,

which was behind the 54th convoy, fired upon the enemy positions throughout the kill zone, estimated to be between 500 and a 1,000 meters long. A reaction force of one tank, four APCs and four gun ships arrived within five minutes. There were eight convoy personnel wounded, two from the artillery unit. One wounded died on 6 March, from wounds received in the battle. Five of the vehicles and two trailers were damaged. The convoy remained in place on the highway until 2:30, at which time they turned around under the escort of MPs and returned to An Khe.

On 8 March, another 54th Battalion convoy had departed for Pleiku at approximately 6:00. The convoy consisted of 79 task vehicles, four gun jeeps and five gun trucks. At approximately 8:30 the third gun truck of the first serial was hit with a claymore mine damaging the front tires. The explosion was followed by heavy small arms and automatic fire from both sides of the road. Three Quad .50s from the 4/60th Artillery travelling with the convoy joined by a company of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which was in the area, encasing the enemy. The company commander of the 173rd was killed in the engagement. The enemy force attempted to repel the flanking action of the tactical security force but was driven back after 15 minutes of heavy contact. One gun truck and one task vehicle were damaged. Two US personnel were wounded and one killed. One of the wounded was a driver and the other two were in the 173rd. The convoy was allowed to proceed after a twenty minute delay. At approximately 9:15, two kilometers west of CP102, a task vehicle in the first serial hit a mine then small arms fire hit the cab of the disabled vehicle wounding the driver. B40 rockets then ignited the JP4 that the truck hauled. Small arms and automatic fire and rocket fire opened up on the convoy. The convoy security element fired in the direction of the enemy positions as the convoy maneuvered around the burning vehicle. Tactical security forces from the 173rd and the 4th ID arrived within five minutes and engaged the enemy. The enemy force of undetermined size established a kill zone of approximately 300-500 meters. Only one soldier was wounded with one truck damaged and another destroyed. No enemy dead or wounded were recovered.

On 23 March, a night shuttle convoy from the port of Qui Nhon was proceeding west on Highway 1 toward loading sites in Cha Rang Valley. At approximately 12:15, the convoy consisting of five task vehicles, one gun truck and one gun jeep, approached the bridge guarded by the Koreans. The convoy commander, 1LT Paul J. Stegmayer, observed a pipe line fire in the vicinity of Tuy Phovc. After reporting the same, 1LT Stegmayer proceeded with his column. As the convoy reached the site of the fire, an explosion occurred on the north side of the road near 1LT Stegmayer's jeep, followed by heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire. Although both 1LT Stegmayer and his driver received wounds from flying glass and shrapnel, they were able to cross over the bridge at the site of the pipe line fire. Due to the intense enemy fire, only the jeep and one task vehicle were able to clear the kill zone. Despite great personal danger, 1LT Stegmayer, braving a withering hail of bullets, crossed back over to bridge on foot to take control of the drivers and insure that they could clear the scene. Moving from vehicle to vehicle, Stegmayer assured himself that all drivers were out of their vehicles and had taken up positions to engage the enemy. He crossed back to his jeep to radio reports to Battalion and adjust illuminating artillery rounds. With arrival of a reaction force of

three gun trucks, one gun jeep and a Quad .50, 1LT Stegmayer again crossed over the bridge to direct flanking fire into the suspected enemy positions. The enemy force estimated at 15 broke contact and fled the area. All six vehicles in the convoy received small arms and automatic weapons fire. Four personnel were wounded. Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy's mission was to destroy the dual bridges (railroad and highway) at the site of the pipe line fire thus cutting a vital link on the only main highway between Qui Nhon and major tactical forces to the north and west. With the arrival of the shuttle convoy, the enemy, for reasons unknown, fired on the column. It has been recommended that the enemy may have mistaken the convoy as a reaction force investigating the pipe line fire. The action by 1LT Stegmayer and his men contributed to the failure of the enemy to accomplish their mission of interdiction of lines of communication to the north and west.

At 10:00 on 12 May, two 8th Group convoys were involved in convoy ambushes on Highway 1. A southbound convoy consisting of 14 task vehicles plus security, under the supervision of the 27th Battalion, received enemy fire 200 meters south of Bridge 329. A north bound convoy consisting of 31 task vehicles plus security, under the supervision of the 54th Battalion, was approaching the same location when an enemy force, estimated at a reinforced squad, opened fire with automatic weapons and M-79 fire. The primary force was in a tree-line 150 to 200 meters from the west side of the road. The kill zone was estimated to be about 200 meters long. In this action, the 240th Quartermaster Battalion sustained one wounded POL driver. Several vehicles were damaged by enemy fire. Both convoys increased speed and moved through the kill zone. A 54th Battalion driver was killed and his 2 ½-ton cargo truck ran off of the road onto a small bank. A gun jeep and two gun trucks rendered immediate assistance while directing the convoy through the kill zone. The casualties were evacuated and the convoy continued north without further incident.

The 27th Battalion convoy cleared the kill zone with only minor damage to vehicles and continued south. As the convoy reached the vicinity of Bridge 376, at approximately 10:10, enemy fire was again encountered, this time from the east side of the road, from a distance of 200 meters. An estimated platoon size enemy force fired M-79 rounds and automatic weapons. Upon receiving enemy fire, the lead gun truck pulled over and engaged the enemy while allowing the convoy to pass through the kill zone. One driver was wounded. Four 27th Battalion vehicles were lightly damaged as a result of both encounters.

At approximately 12:15, 14 August, a convoy under the control of 54th Battalion departed Qui Nhon on Route 19 for a line haul trip to Pleiku. The convoy consisted of 68 task vehicles, 7 gun trucks, five gun jeeps armed with M-60 machine guns, and one Quad .50 gun truck. At 3:45, as the first serial of the convoy proceeded west past an area approximately two miles west of Bridge 34, an enemy force dressed in ARVN Marine uniforms attacked the convoy with small arms and B-40 rocket fire. The enemy force was estimated at between a platoon and a company. Four gun trucks, one Quad .50 gun truck and one gun jeep immediately returned fire within the estimated 3000 yard kill zone. A reaction force of six APCs and three helicopter gun ships arrived within five

minutes after contact. All task vehicles made it out of the kill zone. However, five of those vehicles suffered damage; and one of the five was heavily damaged. The convoy had four men wounded and one soldier from the 1/69th Armored Battalion was killed. The convoy commander reported 12 enemy troops hit by return fire. After the security forces swept the area of contact, they discovered four enemy dead. The five wounded US soldiers were medevaced to the 71st Medical Evacuation Hospital. Of these, two were treated and released.

By September, 1968, the gun trucks combined with helicopter escorts made large scale ambushes a rarity. The gun trucks had gained a reputation.

In time the crews of the gun trucks began to paint their vehicles black with red, orange, yellow or white trim and paint brightly colored names on them. The following companies built these gun trucks:

512th Transportation company had the Devil Woman.

523rd Transportation Company had the Matchbox, Uncle Meat, Ace of Spades, Black Widow, Eve of Destruction.

669th Transportation Company had Bad Hombre.



512th TC Gun Truck 'Devil Woman'



523rd TC Gun Truck 'Black Widow'



523rd TC Gun Truck 'Uncle Meat'



669th TC Gun Truck 'The Bad Hombre'



523rd TC Gun Truck 'Eye of Destruction'



523rd TC Gun Truck 'Ace of Spades'



523rd TC Gun Truck 'Match Box'

On 1 April 1970, a convoy under the control of the 54th Battalion left for Pleiku and ran into an ambush just short of the Hairpin below An Khe Pass. A rocket propelled grenade hit the hood of the lead gun truck. The enemy opened fire with small arms, automatic and mortar fire disabling six cargo vehicles. The lead vehicles out of the kill zone

continued to drive to An Khe. The crew of the gun truck, Matchbox, saw the gun truck get hit and the smoke of the ambush. Larry Fiandt, the driver, instinctively drove in the direction of the kill zone. The task vehicles that had not entered the kill zone turned around to head back down Route 19. Many of the 5-ton cargo trucks had 105mm howitzers on them. As the trucks backed up they backed into the side of the mountain and several flipped over. One driver jumped out of his vehicle and ran away but later returned to his truck. This made it difficult for the Matchbox to get to the kill zone. By the time it arrived, it rendered assistance to the other gun trucks ammunition. The crew of the damaged gun truck did not want to leave their disabled truck so the Matchbox passed on ammunition and proceeded up the road and found a wounded driver. They had him medevaced out at the top of the pass then went down and cleaned up the ambush trucks. Uncle Meat also arrived with a reaction force of infantry walking behind it.

On 25 April 1970, the enemy ambushed a convoy from Qui Nhon. They destroyed the gun truck, Black Widow, and killed John Maddox. They also destroyed Gun Heap, killing Mason Raglan and throwing Whitie from the truck. His body was not found during the search. White hid in the weeds that night after the convoy left then the VC searched for him.

There were rarely any ambushes going to Chu Lai or Tuy Lai in 1970. Larry Fiandt, 523rd Transportation Company, returned to day convoys as the driver of the ¾-ton gun truck, Wild Thing. He did not like the name and renamed it "Malfunction," after a friend's street racer back home.

In 1969, the US Army started drawing back on the forces in country. With the reduction of forces, this reduced the daily tonnage requirements. So the number of truck companies were reduced. It was then inactivated on 13 August 1970. For its performance in Vietnam, the unit received the Meritorious Unit Commendation and Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry.

Germany

The 54th was reactivated in Germany as the 54th Support Battalion (Forward) on 1 May 1987 and assigned to the Division Support Command (DISCOM) of the 3rd Armored Division. It was stationed at Ray Barracks, Friedberg. The battalion had three lettered companies.

HHD

A Company (Supply)

B Company (Maintenance)

C Company (Medical)

Desert Shield/Storm

In 1990, the Iraqi Army invaded the country of Kuwait. The United States deployed several divisions into Saudi Arabia as part of Operation Desert Shield to preempt any further aggression as it was believed that Saddam Hussein wanted control of the oil fields

in the desert. With a mandate from the United Nations, President George Bush then decided to increase the number of forces in Saudi Arabia and liberate Kuwait. The 3rd Armored Division received orders to deploy to Saudi Arabia on 8 November and the equipment deployed by rail to Rotterdam and Antwerp on 24 November. The equipment then deployed by 48 ships to Jubayl and Damman on 14 December. The personnel deployed from Rhein-Main, Ramstein and Nuernberg airports to King Fahd and Dharan airports from 14 December 1990 through 14 January 1991. Because of some logistical problems, the 3rd Armored did not receive much needed parts until it was almost too late to participate in the advance. On 24 February of 1991, the 3rd Armored moved into Southern Iraq to hold the line and defend against any Iraqi counter-attack. When the war was over, the 3rd Armored Division pulled back and took up defensive positions in Kuwait. They held those positions for the next 3 months when they were relieved by Kuwaiti and United Nations forces. In March 1991, the first units of the 3rd Armored Division returned to their bases in Germany. The 54th Battalion was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation for its service between 31 January and 19 June 1991.

With the downsizing following the end of the Cold War, the 3rd Armored Division received orders to inactivate. Its subordinate units were either transferred to other units or inactivated. The 54th Battalion inactivated on 15 April 1992. The 3rd Armored Division was inactivated on 17 October 1992.

The battalion was again reactivated as the 54th Support Battalion (Base), 80th Area Support Group, on 16 September 1994. The 80th ASG stationed at Chievres, Belgium provides support for NATO and SHAPE.

CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION CREDIT

World War II

Tunisia
Sicily
Rome-Arno
Southern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe

Vietnam

Counteroffensive, Phase II
Counteroffensive, Phase III
Tet Counteroffensive
Counteroffensive, Phase IV
Counteroffensive, Phase V
Counteroffensive, Phase VI
Tet 69/Counteroffensive
Summer-Fall 1969
Winter-Spring 1970
Sanctuary Counteroffensive
Counteroffensive, Phase VII

Southwest Asia

Defense of Saudi Arabia
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait
Cease-Fire

DECORATIONS

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1967-1968
Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered SOUTHWEST ASIA
(31 Jan 91 - 19 June 91, DAGO 14, 11 Apr 97)
Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Gilt Star, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM
1966-1970

DISTINCTIVE UNIT INSIGNIA

(Unit Crest)

Approved: 29 March 1967 for the 54th Transportation Battalion, redesignated to the 54th Support Battalion on 1 May 1987.

Description: A gold color medal and enamel device 1 1/8 inches in height consisting of a brick red disc-wheel with a gold rim and a blue hub from which emits upwardly a gold broad arrow overall, and on the lower half radially six gold spokes . The rim is inscribed in black letters with the unit's motto, "Resolutely for Freedom".

Symbolism: Brick red and gold are the colors used for transportation, the predecessor organization, and the wheel alludes to the Quartermaster Corps, from which the organization descended, and also to mobility. The board arrow and blue hub refer to the air carrier aspects of the predecessor unit and implies speed. The six arrow spokes refer to the battle honors awarded the unit during World War II for the campaigns of Tunisia,

Sicily, Rome-Arno, Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland and Southern France; the broad arrow is for the seventh one, Central Europe.

COAT OF ARMS

(Displayed on the Battalion Flag)

Approved: 1 May 1987

SHIELD:

Description: Gules (brick red), a wheel or the spokes formed by ten arrows of the like radiating from a hub azure, in chief a broad arrow of the second.

Symbolism: Brick red and golden yellow are the colors used for Transportation, the predecessor organization, and the wheel alludes to the Quartermaster Corps from which the organization descended, and also to mobility. The broad arrow and blue hub refer to the air carrier aspects of the predecessor unit and implies speed. The arrow spokes refer to defense and support. The broad arrow is symbolic of the unit's war service during World War II.

CREST:

Description: On a wreath of the colors or and gules (brick red) a cross patty of the first entwined with two palm branches proper tied with a ribbon of the second.

Symbolism: Brick red and golden yellow are the colors traditionally associated with transportation. The cross patty is adapted from the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry Award and represents that award. The palm branches are indicative of victory and achievement and allude to the unit's campaign service in Vietnam. They are tied with a red ribbon, suggesting the award of the Meritorious Unit Commendation.

MOTTO: *Resolutely for Freedom.*