

57th Transportation Battalion



*57th Transportation Battalion unit crest (l) and coat of arms (r)
Mouseover each for a description*

World War II

The Battalion constituted in the Regular Army as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 2d Battalion, 26th Quartermaster Regiment on 1 May 1936 and activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on 30 March 1942. It redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 2d Battalion, 26th Quartermaster Truck Regiment (Negro) on 1 April 1942. It reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile on 15 December 1943. The battalion participated in the Luzon Campaign and earned the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for its service 17 October 1944 to 4 July 1945. The 57th Battalion inactivated in Japan on 20 February 1946.

While on inactive status, the 57th Battalion was converted and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Transportation Corps Truck Battalion on 1 August 1946. It redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Transportation Battalion 25 April 1966.

Vietnam

On 1 June 1966, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Transportation Battalion was once again reactivated this time at Fort Riley, Kansas. This was in response to the second build up of troop strength in Vietnam. The 57th Battalion, commanded by LTC George M. Reed, deployed to Vietnam on 1 October 1966. There it attached to the 500th Transportation Group, commanded by COL Harry E. Tistadt, at Cam Ranh Bay. On 18 October 1966, the 545th Light Truck, 585th Medium Truck and 592nd Light Truck Companies were relieved from the 54th Transportation Battalion at Qui Nhon and attached to 57th Transportation Battalion. The main body of HHD, 585th

Battalion immediately began setting up its base camp, which had been started by the advance party. Part of the cargo was taken off the ship the day of arrival, and a few days later the last of the cargo was off-loaded. During the first two weeks of November, the company's 5-ton tractors and 12-ton S&P trailers were off-loaded and immediately the company became operational in port and beach clearance, and roll-on, roll-off operations in and around Cam Ranh Bay.

On 21 October, the 585th Medium Truck Company conducted its first convoy out of Cam Ranh Bay. The convoy consisted of driving new Air Force vehicles to the depot in Nha Trang. Later the company made numerous convoys to Nha Trang, Phan Rang and Tuy Hoa. On 17 November, the company sent two men on temporary duty (TDY) to Nha Trang to assist in the movement of general cargo. One-week later 26 men were sent TDY to Phan Rang to assist in beach clearance and movement of general cargo. The company primarily ran long haul missions but still handled some port and beach clearance and local hauls.

In February 1967, the 585th Medium Truck Company played an important part in moving the 17th Aviation Group from Dong Ba Thin to Tuy Hoa and Phan Rang Air Base. In late February, the 585th was the first transportation company to make a convoy to Da Lat. On 14 April, the 585th was alerted to move to Qui Nhon. The company spent the rest of April and May preparing for the move north. It continued convoys to Phan Rang and Nha Trang.

On 18 and 19 April 1967, the 585th Medium Truck took on the characteristics of a heavy truck company when it moved 10 railroad gondolas, each weighing 16 tons, and flat cars, each weighing 15 tons. Again, on 3 and 5 May, the company was called upon to move more heavy railroad equipment as a result of the outstanding job it had done on the first move. This time it hauled one 18-ton steam locomotive, two 20-ton railroad tank cars, five 17-ton flatcars, four 8-ton flat cars and two sets of locomotive trucks (wheels). On 20 May 1967, the 585th departed Cam Ranh Bay for a permanent change of station to Qui Nhon.

In October 1967, the 57th Light Truck (2½-ton) Company was sent north to the Marine base at Chu Lai in the I Corps Tactical Zone. This northern part of South Vietnam had originally fell under the control of the US Navy and Marine Corps. The US Army would assume an increasing role in this area. After the 1st Air Cavalry Division moved north in January 1968, 1st Logistics Command needed one more truck company in I Corps Zone. 2nd Platoon, Headquarters and Maintenance of the 585th Medium Truck Company was alerted to move to Da Nang on 6 January 1968. On 14 January 1968, half of the company loaded on LST 551. Half of the 585th Medium Truck Company moved north in January 1968 on LST 551. Wayne Chalker was part of the company that remained behind to move later. Morale, in his opinion, was probably at its lowest during that time. He thought this was due to the separation of the company, and not really knowing where they were going. In February, the rest of the company loaded onto an LST at Qui Nhon and set sail for Da Nang. The 57th Battalion moved north to Dong Ha in early 1968 to

assume control of the 57th Light Truck and 585th Medium Truck Companies. The battalion established its headquarters at Quang Tri.

The 57th Battalion's mission was to support the 1st Cavalry Division operation to break the siege of Khe Sanh and drive the NVA out of the A Shau Valley. This meant that the trucks of the 57th Battalion had to deliver right up to the fire bases and camps. The 1st Cav established its base at Camp Evans near Quang Tri. The NVA launched its Tet Offensive on 1 February 1968 and sought to close down the supply lines along Route 1 with ambushes. That next month the 159th Terminal Battalion established a logistics-over-the-shore operation at Wonder Beach. The trucks of the 57th Battalion supplied the 1st Cav from Wonder Beach. The 1st Cav successfully broke the siege at Khe Sanh then drove the NVA out of A Shau Valley. The division moved down to III Corps Tactical Zone in October 1968.

On 2 May 1968, the 585th Medium Truck Company was attached to the 39th Transportation Battalion, which had just moved to Da Nang.

On 28 November 1968, the 57th Battalion moved to Chu Lai where it provided transportation, supply and service and direct support maintenance for the Army's largest active duty division, the 23rd Infantry Division (Americal). The Americal Division had been activated in Vietnam in October 1967 and operated primarily out of Duc Pho and Chu Lai in the southern part of I Corps Tactical Zone. The 57th Battalion also provided similar services to other US military non-divisional and free world assistance forces in the Chu Lai area. For the next 26 months, the battalion transported cargo all over I Corps Tactical Zone, often at considerable hazard to convoy personnel. Among other things, it operated such diversified functions as a field laundry, a bakery, frozen storage areas, helicopter refueling points, a POL bulk storage farm and a medium boat company. Strange missions for a transportation battalion.

In 1969, the 57th Battalion had the following units:

- Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment
- 63rd Transportation Company (Light Truck)
- 226th Supply and Service Company
- 588th Maintenance Company
- 596th Light Maintenance Company
- 4th Quartermaster Detachment (Bakery)
- 200th Supply Detachment (Fortification & construction)
- 126th Supply and Service Company (Illinois National Guard)
- 737th Transportation Company (Medium Petroleum Truck) (USAR, Washington)



63rd TC at Chu Lai

On 12 May 1969, a petroleum convoy of the 57th Transportation Battalion going from Landing Zone CHARLIE BROWN to LZ BRONCO came under an intense attack by a heavily armed enemy force 13 kilometers north of Tam Quan City. A direct hit by an enemy rocket propelled grenade to PFC Larry Baxter's 5,000-gallon fuel tanker set it ablaze. Realizing the immediate danger to the remainder of the convoy if he abandoned his vehicle and left the road blocked, PFC Baxter completely disregarded his own safety and continued to drive the vehicle forward into the intense small arms fire. Being struck several times by automatic weapons fire and although critically wounded, he succeeded in guiding his vehicle over a small embankment, thus clearing the roadway in order that the remainder of the convoy might pass to safety. PFC Baxter, 126th S&S Company, sacrificed his life to assure that an avenue of survival was available to fellow soldiers and was posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal. Three other soldiers were killed from E Troop, 1st Cavalry, and one from 19th Engineer Battalion.¹

By 1970, the 63rd Light Truck Company had all S&P vehicles and only one 2 ½-ton truck as an administrative vehicle. It also had six gun trucks: The No Slack, Preacher, Lifer, War Monger, The Private and Smiling Death; and two V-100s: Darling Maggie O'Toole and No Slack. The V-100s could accelerate faster and drive off-road. In the coastal plain, they could go after the enemy in the rice paddies. They had dual .50s on the copula and an M60 in the back. All the platoon leaders were Transportation Corps officers but the Army had an excess of combat arms officers and sent them to Transportation units. CPT Walter Anderson had one Engineer officer and several Infantry officers. He made

¹ Award of the Silver Star Medal, 1st Log Command, GO No 569, 16 July 1969; and Larry lee Baxter, Virtual Wall, <http://www.virtualwall.org/db/BaxterLL01a.htm>.

them commanders of gun trucks. They liked the hardened trucks better than being on the ground. Midway through 1970, the 63rd Light Truck was redesignated as the 563rd Transportation Company (Medium Truck). The 563rd had been a truck company under the 124th Battalion at Pleiku.



Gun Truck 'The Lifer' – refers to a career NCO who has signed up for or served 'for life'



Gun Truck 'The Smiling Death'

In 1970, the battalion headquarters, then under the command of LTC Frank Francois III, moved to Camp Haskins, Da Nang with the mission of port clearance and line haul operations throughout Military Region I. It picked up the 363rd Medium Truck Company

from Cam Ranh Bay in 1969 and was reunited with the platoon temporary duty to Quang Tri.

The 363rd Medium Truck “Road Runners” moved to Camp Adiner near Da Nang, just south of the Marble Mountain. Camp Adiner was across from the Marine Corps Helicopter base compound and the Recon Marines shared Adiner with the truck drivers. The company ran convoys north from Da Nang along Route 1 to Phu Bai, LZ Sharon, Camp Eagle, Camp Evans, Hue, Quang Tri and Dong Ha near the DMZ. At that time, the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division was located near Quang Tri. The 363rd Medium Truck had three gun trucks at that time; The Colonel, Pallbearers and Canned Heat. By January 1971, The Colonel, an APC gun truck in 1st Platoon, was damaged by an RPG. The 1st Platoon was directed to build a new gun truck in the spring of 1971. They scrounged steel from the Marines and everyone in the company pitched in to help. They held a contest to name the truck and “Mercenary” won. It was a double steel wall box style gun truck on a 5-ton cargo truck.

The battalion consisted of the following units:

- Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment
- 62nd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (12-ton)
- 363rd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (12-ton)
- 563rd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (12-ton)
- 572nd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (12-ton)

The Battalion supported the Americal Division out of Chu Lai with the following units in 1970:

- 62nd Transportation Company (Light Truck)
- 363rd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (12-ton)
- 563rd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (12-ton)
- 572nd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (12-ton)
- 226th Supply and Service Company (Class I and III (package and bulk))
- 544th Transportation Company (Medium Boat)
- 596th Light Maintenance Company
 - 533rd Engineer Detachment
 - 547th Signal Detachment
- 661st Ordnance Company (Ammunition)
- 3rd Platoon, 403rd Transportation Company (Terminal Transfer)
- 3rd Platoon, 1st Security Company (Provisional)
- 57th Signal Detachment
- 133rd Ordnance Detachment (EOD)
- 525th Quartermaster Platoon (POL) (tank farm)
- Semi-trailer Refrigeration Squad (Provisional)

Dewey Canyon II/ Lam Son 719, 30 January to 4 April 1971

The 57th Battalion earned the Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army) for VIETNAM December 1968 to March 1970. No sooner had the award ceremony taken place in the

summer of 1971 then the battalion received orders to proceed to Quang Tri in support of the ARVN incursion into Laos during Operation Dewey Canyon II/Lam Son 719. 30 hours later, the 563rd Medium Truck moved the battalion headquarters under the escort of five gun trucks to the battalion's new home at Quang Tri/Phu Bai. That first night, the camp at Phu Bai was also probed by the enemy. They were very glad to have 563rd gun trucks on the perimeter.

The 57th Battalion commenced cargo and POL operations throughout Northern I Corps from Tan My Ramp at Phu Bai to Camp Vandergrift, where the 39th Battalion would deliver to Khe Sanh. That first night there, the battalion asked volunteers to lead a night convoy from Phu Bai to Camp Vandergrift. CPT Anderson and LT Al Jones, of the 563rd Medium Truck, volunteered. As their first night convoy, it was a frightening experience. For one, Anderson did not know the road. He did not know where the obstacles and trouble spots were. Each night the battalion sent out one convoy. Each serial was no larger than 20 vehicles to include gun trucks with a 15-minute interval. None of the officers of the 563rd TC were made convoy commanders, but were allowed to ride in the gun trucks though. During the first week and a half, the convoys only ran into two ambushes. They were short, quick then they got out of there. They opened up with RPGs and .51 cals, destroyed the lead fuel tanker then left. There was no ground assault.



individual hootches at Vandergrift (I don't think the ping pong table will fit!)

With the Cambodian incursion in full swing, the enemy increased their attacks in order to shut down the flow of supplies to this operation. The VC stepped up the number of attacks in the Hai Van Pass. The trucks had to slow to from 15 to 5 mph on the switchbacks making them better targets to mortar, rocket and small arms fire. Observation helicopters and "Birddogs" observation aircraft usually accompanied the

convoys through the pass and called in Cobra attack helicopters when enemy contact was made. The 563rd Medium Truck Company had to modify their gun trucks because the enemy on Hai Van Pass might be in the culverts just five feet below the road, the gunners needed to be able to depress their machineguns down. They moved the machineguns from pedestals in the middle of the gun box to pedestals welded on the sides.



Bell AH-1 Cobra, 2-bladed, single engine attack helicopter; replaced by AH-64 Apache

Roger Rahor and three other drivers of the 363rd went north with the 57th Battalion. They hauled mostly fuel but on one convoy, they drove all the way to Khe Sanh to back haul dead ARVN soldiers loaded on pallets in Reefer Sea Land vans. They backed the Reefer vans directly onto LCUs and picked up empties. They did this for two or three days. The stench of death was so bad that they washed the bodies with diesel and burned their uniforms. After a week and a half, the 563rd TC returned with all its gun trucks but left some tractors and trailers at Phu Bai. The 563rd TC resumed its normal runs in support of the Americal.

Activity even increased on convoys heading south to Chu Lai. While driving through crowded streets of cities, someone would push an old lady in front of a 5-ton truck. Kids took hand grenades with the pins pulled and spoon taped and dropped them in the gas tanks so that when the petroleum dissolved the tape it would explode. In some cases, the convoys ran into firefights. After Lam Son, ambushes fell to an irregular patten of once every two to four weeks.



Typical village street – no traffic control or traffic signs; indicates how easy it would be to cause a roadblock or ambush

That same summer, the 523rd Light Truck (5-ton) arrived at Phu Bai. It conducted line haul to the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Vandergrift and Khe Sanh as part of Operation Dewey Canyon. Since the ARVN had priority of the roads during the day, the 523rd drove at night facing numerous ambushes. They brought the gun trucks: Ace of Spades, Uncle Meat, Black Widow, Eve of Destruction, King Kong, and Satan's Lil' Angels. During this time, under extremely adverse road and enemy conditions, the battalion established itself at Quang Tri Combat Base, and by mid-March was reaching ninety to one hundred thousand ton-miles daily. Over two hundred individual awards were made to members of the battalion during Operation Lam Son 719.



Gun Truck 'Ace of Spades'



Gunner SGT Claude Roberson, NCOIC on the gun truck "Ace of Spades" assigned to the 523 Trans Co out of Phu Bai, during Operation Lam Son 719 in 1971, showing the strain and dirt of convoy duty



Gun Truck 'Uncle Meat'



Gun Truck 'Black Widow'



Gun Truck 'Eye of Destruction'

Part of the crew of the "Eve of Destruction" on an earlier model with only single armor plate sides. It was later designed with double walls of sheet armor plating, which became the standard design for all gun trucks.



Two views of Gun Truck 'King Kong' – an M113 on the back of a 5-ton; good protection from small arms fire but the straight sides did not suffice against RPGs



Gun Truck 'Satan's Li'l Angel' after an ambush with flat tires, RPGs in cab, death of driver. 'Satan's Li'l Angel' rebuilt/replaced with 'Proud American' Gun Truck

The NVA put up a stubborn defense of their supply bases and ARVN lost many of their best soldiers in the attack. Some drivers saw the war as hopeless. All that was left was an obligation to each other as soldiers.

The 363rd Transportation Company moved to north and joined the 57th Battalion Headquarters at Camp Haskins. The 572nd also joined them. The 62nd Medium Truck Company cleared the deep water pier and Bridge LST Ramp at Da Nang, known as "Red Beach." The 363rd and 572nd Medium Truck Companies conducted line haul through Hai Van Pass to Phu Bai and Quang Tri. The 563rd Medium Truck Company provided port clearance at Chu Lai and ran line haul to Da Nang.



Gun Truck 'The Colonel' named for previous commander who time has forgotten. The weight of the M113 on the rear caused the vehicle to undergo maintenance too often and slowed the speed of the vehicle.



Gun Truck 'Pallbearers' 'protected' cab – compare with Canned Heat below



Gun Truck 'Canned Heat' and crew; unprotected cab – compare with Pallbearers above



Gun Truck 'Mercenary' and crew

In the fall of 1971, the Republic of Vietnam held its presidential elections and the closer the date of the elections came the more the enemy attacks on the convoys increased. Sanctions imposed on the citizens of Da Nang caused food riots and the gun trucks escorting trucks loaded with 40,000 pounds of food had to fight their way through crowds of armed civilians. The report came in that two NVA mortar companies had moved into the Hai Van Pass. Roger Rahor remembered that these attacks were more intense than during the support of the Cambodian Incursion.

As part of Vietnamization, the US Army Vietnam turned the war over to the ARVN and pulled its forces back, essentially abandoning I Corps Tactical Zone. It was clear from the politics at home that the American participation in the war was ending. Strife

occurred in and out of the companies. Drug use had increased and the units were divided between dopers and boozers. Conflicts increased between the draftees and “lifers” who refused to go out on convoys. There were some great career officers and NCOs in the companies but unfortunately, too many used their rank as a privilege to avoid risk. One 363rd Company commander was relieved for refusing to go on a convoy during heightened enemy activity in Hai Van Pass. Yet, other NCOs and officers showed great courage. Tension between whites and blacks also increased. The battalion commander was an African-American and had an all-black police force that harassed both black and white drivers. In spite of all this, the men still drove their trucks against an increasingly hostility from unfriendly friends. Some ARVN soldiers began to bully the Americans, similar to the way some Americans had treated them. They attempted to arrest truck drivers for accidents and friction between the Americans and the ARVN increased. In early 1971, after the ARVN arrested two drivers of the 363rd for an accident, their friends grabbed their weapons and threatened to fire on the ARVN compound. In one case ARVN soldiers shot a driver from the 572nd.

Units began to inactivate. The trucks of the 57th Battalion hauled the Americal Division south and it was inactivated in November 1971. Only the 196th Infantry Brigade remained at Da Nang. With turning the war over to the Vietnamese in process and the war winding down, units started inactivating and the drivers went home. The 563rd Transportation Company was inactivated in Vietnam on 30 November 1971. The 363rd was inactivated in February 1972. In March 1972, the NVA pushed across the DMZ heralding their Easter Offensive. They took control of Quang Tri. The 57th Battalion departed Vietnam on 29 April 1972 and was inactivated at Travis Air Force Base, California, on 24 October 1972.

Fort Lewis, Washington

Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Battalion was activated at Fort Lewis, Washington, on 16 October 1999.

LTC Robert P. Johnson, Jr., commanded the battalion from August 2001 to July 2003 when LTC Myrna L. Hilton assumed command. This was also the period of “Modularization” in which the Army experimented with new organizations for the 21st century. In order to build the desired number of brigade combat teams, the Army chose to take the billets from the combat service support branches and the Transportation Corps had three battalions, the 53rd, 57th and 106th, on the chopping block for inactivation. The upcoming war would awaken the Army to its shortage of transportation assets and all three battalions would deploy several times.

In 2003, the 57th Battalion had the following units:

- Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment
- 2nd Transportation Company (Heavy Equipment Trailer)
- 513th Transportation Company
- 21st Cargo Transfer Company
- 22nd Transportation Detachment (Trailer Transfer Point)
- 265th Transportation Detachment

355th Transportation Detachment

In 2003, the 57th Battalion conducted deployment support for elements of I Corps for the following exercises and missions: YAMA SAKURA January, real world and training deployments for 2nd Ranger Battalion and 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSO&I) in March, 3/2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) deployment to National Training Center in March. The 21st CTC provided one platoon in support of the Stryker Brigade. The 57th Battalion supported Exercise COBRA GOLD from 16-30 May. COBRA GOLD was a regularly scheduled combined training exercise with the Thai Armed Forces and the exercise in 2003 focused on peace enforcement operations with elements of the 25th Infantry Division out of Hawaii.

The 513th Transportation Company, commanded by CPT Heumphreus, deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom in March and was attached to the 106th Transportation Battalion where it conducted Reception and Staging Operations for units arriving in Kuwait and port clearance to Logistic Support Base CEDAR in Iraq. The company returned in July. The 513th Transportation Company then conducted Mobilization Support for the mobilization of 4th Platoon, 2nd HET; the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT); 44th Corps Support Battalion; the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 593rd Corps Support Group; and 29th Signal Battalion. It provided additional transportation support to other units deploying at the same time. Ultimately, the company supported the mobilization of over 300 reservists.

The 57th Battalion supported the 3/2 SBCT's deployment to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, in May for its Certification Exercise. In July, the 57th Transportation Battalion conducted Joint Logistics-Over-The-Shore at Indian Island when the 3-2 SBCT returned from the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). The 57th Battalion offloaded 897 pieces of equipment off of the *USNS Altair*. This was the first ever in-stream discharge conducted for the Stryker Brigade and the 57th Transportation Battalion beat the timeline by five days.

As result of the convoy ambushes in Iraq, Army chief of Staff, General Schoonmaker, directed that all CSS units conduct convoy live fire exercises. In August and October, HHD, 57th Battalion conducted convoy live fire training support for the 44th Corps Support Battalion and HHC, 593rd Corps Support Group in preparation for their deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Training included several individual and crew-served weapons ranges; a more complex Convoy Live Fire Exercise at Yakima Training Center. One platoon of the 21st CTC deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In November 2003, the 593rd Group bid farewell to its 44th CSB and also began preparing for its own deployment scheduled for CY 2004 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 2 by transferring its Group-level functions to the 57th Transportation Battalion, which was designated the rear detachment. Three platoons of the 21st CTC deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in December 2003.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

The increased attacks on convoys during the April Uprising of 2004, confronted BG James E. Chambers, 3rd COSCOM Commander, with a number of challenges with his line of communication stretching 1023 kilometers or 635 miles from the Theater Distribution Center in Kuwait to Harbur Gate on the Turkish border. This over extended supply line caused gaps in communications; different combat service support units had differing evolutions of SINCGARS. Instead of a single hub and spoke operation, he wanted to decentralize his operation into four hubs. LSA ANACONDA would remain as the central hub. FOB ENDURANCE near Qayyarah West or “Q-West,” as it was more commonly referred to, by coalition forces would become the northern hub. Al Asad would become the western hub and Tallil would become the southern hub. Each hub would have its own corps distribution center and dedicated transportation assets. Chambers considered military transportation the backbone of the hub and spoke operations. To facilitate this, the 13th COSCOM needed additional transportation assets. This additional build up of troops became known as the OIF 2.5 rotation.

The 57th Tactical Transportation Battalion, under the command of LTC Myrna Merced, deployed to Kuwait on 16 June 2004. The 57th Battalion set up operations in Convoy Support Center (CSC) Cedar, just outside Tallil Air Base, Iraq. There it fell under the command of the 300th Corps Support Group (CSG). When the battalion headquarters arrived it assumed control over a gun truck platoon, 25th Transportation Company (Gun Truck) out of Hawaii, and the 619th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (USAR ME). The gun truck platoon of the 25th Transportation Company and the 619th Medium Truck Company had already been there. The 619th had arrived in January 2004. The platoon of the 25th Transportation Company, based at nearby CEDAR II, provided 5-ton gun truck escort for the convoys.²

The 57th brought two active duty truck companies with it. The 513th Medium Truck also came over with the 57th Battalion from Fort Lewis and arrived at Tallil on 28 June into 90 degree weather. They moved into “Hadji” tents with one air conditioner per tent.³

The 89th Transportation (Medium Truck) Company rail loaded its M915A4 trucks and equipment in May and arrived in Kuwait on 15 June where it married up with its equipment. This was its second deployment to OIF and the first 7th Transportation Group unit to do so. The company spent the next 30 days training at Camp BUERHING then crossed the border and arrived at Tallil on 15 July. There were already two companies there under the 57th Battalion and neither had door armor.⁴

Initially, the battalion’s mission was to provide transportation support of all classes of supply, less Class VIII, throughout Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) for the first half

² 1LT Jason Lasher interview by Richard Killblane, 14 Oct 2005.

³ CPT Bo Cappabianca interview by Richard Killblane at Arifjan, March 2007.

⁴ SSG Peter DuRussell and SSG Kenneth Palmer interview by Richard Killblane, Sonia Klein and Jessica Nottingham, 14 October 2005.

of their deployment. They would pick up cargo and contract convoys at CEDAR then escort them to their destination at BIAP, ANACONDA, Taji, SPEICHER and TQ.

The 89th began conducting missions on 20 July. The military or “green” trucks integrated into convoys of contract or “white” trucks to provide control and establish convoy discipline. The escort ratio for KBR convoys was one green truck for every three white so for a convoy of 12 to 15 KBR trucks, a company of the 57th Battalion would provide five green trucks, essentially a squad.

The 414th Transportation Company (Light/Medium Truck) (USAR SC) and 427th Transportation Company (PLS) (USAR PA) arrived in July to add two more truck companies to the battalion.

At first, the convoys picked up three MP or Field Artillery HMMWV gun trucks at CEDAR that escorted them to SCANIA where they were stationed. From SCANIA the convoys would pick up another three MP gun trucks from ANACONDA to escort them north and the original gun trucks would escort a convoy back to CEDAR.⁵

At first, the enemy only harassed the convoys from a distance. After 21 days on the ground, a KBR convoy escorted by 2nd Platoon of the 89th Medium Truck, led by SSG Talya McKnight, to Al Hilla and back. The convoy received a FRAGO to retrograde equipment to Camp Baker, just outside Najaf. The convoy had three 5-ton gun trucks of the 25th Transportation Company as well as nine HMMWV gun trucks of their own. None of the task vehicles had any armor plating. The green trucks hauled water just to haul something since their main purpose was to escort KBR trucks.⁶

On 5 August, 2LT Jason Lasher’s convoy had returned to Scania then went west to pick up retrograde of damaged rolling stock from An Najaf. He received the usual update on enemy attacks that had happened over the last few days but nothing about the current situation such as the Marines had cornered Al Sadr and his militia in the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, the area they would drive through. No one ever informed the convoy commanders about the major on-going operations.

The convoy passed an Iraqi check point with Iraqi Policemen waving their hands for the convoy to stop. While still in its infancy, American Soldiers could not be sure they could trust the Iraqis. This time they should have. In Najaf, just outside Camp BAKER, an RPG ripped into the third truck in the convoy killing the driver, SPC Raymond Faulstich, Jr. The shooter climbed over Faulstich’s body and took over driving the truck. The convoy had entered a two-mile kill zone. They received small arms and rocket fire from both sides of the road. While most of the small arms fire was random and inaccurate, each of the driver’s doors had a single bullet hole indicating there was a trained sniper on that side of the road. The gun trucks returned fire and remained in the convoy as it raced out of the kill zone. An IED destroyed the second to last vehicle, a bobtail, and wounded the crew. The HMMWV behind it put the wounded in their vehicle and abandoned the

⁵ Cappabianca interview; and McNeal interview.

⁶ Lasher interview and DuRussel and Palmer interview.

bobtail. The convoy had a total of four wounded and one Soldier killed. The next day the offensive in Najaf began.⁷

During the ambush, SPC Christopher Williams had a bullet pierce the door, pass through the leg, testicles and stop at the right leg. It amazingly pierced the scrotum but did not hit the testicles. SGT McKenzie was not able to resuscitate Faulstich and dressed Williams' wound. Soldiers busted on McKenzie about treating Williams balls to take his mind off the death of Faulstich.

SPC Raymond Faulstich, Jr, became the first casualty of the 57th Battalion and 7th Transportation Group at Fort Eustis. SSG William Mackey and SPC Christopher Williams were evacuated to Balad then to Landstuhl, Germany. They returned to Fort Eustis to recover from their wounds. The Fort Eustis community held memorial services for Faulstich at the Regimental Memorial Chapel on 11 August. Mackey and Williams received their Purple Heart Medals from MG Brian Geehan, Chief of Transportation, in an awards ceremony in October.

After Faulstich was killed, most NCOs in the 89th said they would not go out any more. They were pissed because they went out on a bullshit mission with no intel. Soldiers grumbled about the lack of armor and hauling cargo that was not wanted or needed. When the next mission came down, the NCOs went out but one SGT stuck to his guns. Lasher and his platoon sergeant sent him to combat stress, where he was pronounced okay. The platoon was tasked to provide a detail for gate guard so they put him on it.

After a couple weeks, other NCOs started grumbling that SGT Williams was not going out on convoys. Lasher and his platoon sergeant agreed that he needed to go out. They sent him again over to combat stress and told him, "If they say you are okay, you will have to go back out on the road." He was pronounced fine but still refused to go. The leaders made sure he understood what would happen. They logically explained why he needed to go and that he would lose a stripe. He answered, "You have to do what you have to do." They gave him a battalion ART 15 and busted him to E4. Two days after he lost his stripe, he came up and told Lasher that he was ready to go on the road. He just wanted to prove his point.

This ambush hurt the moral of the company. After the ambush, the company sat down to reevaluate what had happened and how to prevent it from happening again. The way the drivers saw the situation, they had risked their lives to deliver water that was not needed. It heightened the need for cab armor and the Soldiers agreed to write home and encouraged family and friends to tell everyone about the increased danger and the need for armor. What started out as a good idea turned sour fast as they did not limit their complaints to just the lack of armor.⁸

LTC Merced was very knowledgeable and wanted to make sure her subordinates did not make any mistakes -- that caused her to micromanage the convoys. She required all

⁷ Lasher interview and DuRussel and Palmer interview.

⁸ DuRussel and Palmer interview.

convoys to conduct rehearsals and convoy briefs to the point of dictating the times of the convoy rehearsals and coordination with the gun trucks. Although she was trying to get them to think through their time line, this gave her subordinates the impression she did not trust the convoy commanders to make any decisions on their own. Neither did she like company commanders to go out on convoys. If the movement control teams gave the convoy options of when to depart, the convoy commander had to defer the decision to the battalion. If a problem occurred on the road, the convoy commander still had to email battalion for a decision. The delay in messaging on the MTS could place the convoy in jeopardy when a vehicle broke down and the crowd of angry or inquisitive Iraqis grew. This and the death of one of their own caused dissent among the Soldiers of the 89th Medium Truck.

The complaints of the 89th Medium Truck eventually reached columnist and war veteran, David Hackworth, who wrote a scathing article about Merced on 23 August. It criticized her for things that she had no control over such as the lack of armor for trucks but the most damaging accusations in the article were personal:

A Soldier in Merced's battalion alleges she is "incompetent and certifiably insane. And our chain of command knows this and is doing nothing. In the meantime, my fellow Soldiers are paying the ultimate price because we don't have the right stuff." Another Soldier in the 57th says: "She (Merced) is currently under investigation. Three of her company commanders have filed complaints on her. A Bde (Brigade) Commander has ordered her to undergo psychiatric care and medication."⁹

There were two people from the 89th TC suspected of writing to Hackworth. Lasher had written to Hackworth before his deployment but had not done so this time. He did write Hackworth after the ass-chewing.

LT William Steinhauer had been on emergency leave during the ambush. Only Beaver and Lasher were in Iraq. Bill Steinhauer came back after the memorialization ceremony. Steinhauer was the only LT called in before the battalion commander and stood at rigid attention with the two majors while Merced berated him. They "assumed" that he wrote the letter to David Hackworth.

Others speculated that SPC Christopher Williams wrote all the details to Hackworth. Since he complained about going to Iraq and was glad his wound sent him home. No one, however, admitted writing to Hackworth.

MAJ Carlton was the XO and MAJ McNeal became the SPO having arrived after the battalion headquarters deployed.

The next day, the battalion XO and SPO called all the lieutenants into the conference room to talk about the article. LTC Merced arrived, closed the door and turned off the air conditioner then keeping the lieutenants at the rigid position of attention, she slammed

the article on the table and for one hour she accused them of disloyalty, lack of integrity and that they did not know the whole story. This did not improve morale and made the lieutenants feel even more disillusioned; however, it did not result in a mutiny like the 343rd Quartermaster Company (POL) over in the next battalion.⁹

Within a day or two, all the lieutenants went for their counseling. The company commanders told all the company grade officers to be at the 300th ASG conference room (hard stand building) in the evening. They were not told what it was about. They figured it was about the Hackworth article since word had circulated. The two majors came in and chewed the lieutenants out about OPSEC and that the allegations against Merced hurt her feelings. Lasher did not remember standing at attention or the battalion commander attending the meeting. They would not say what was in the article or mention whom it was written about but that it was written by a “washed-up lieutenant colonel who was disgruntled about not retiring as an O6.” Nothing ever happened of it. Lasher later dropped Hackworth an email that they took hell over it but thanked him. He was serious. Lasher may have been on the road when Merced had the LTs at attention. He was standing rigid at attention denying writing the article.

After that conference room event, McNeal’s true colors came through and he was belittling about disloyalty. The conference room issue was two fold; personal attack on Merced and operational security – numbers of vehicles and location.

LTC Merced did not like relying on external gun trucks for escort since they had different tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) than her convoys. She approached the Group Commander and asked for her own internal gun truck assets. By mid-August, the 144th Transportation Company (Light/Medium Truck) National Guard unit from Marianna, Florida arrived but remained at Camp BUERHING for a month. LTC Merced gave them additional 5-ton cargo trucks and assigned them the gun truck mission. They added steel gun boxes but only had enough M2 .50 caliber machineguns for half the gun trucks. The other advantage of the internal gun trucks was that they remained with the convoys for the duration of the mission. Merced later brought the 144th up to Tallil in September.¹⁰

The battalion then provided command and control over the following truck companies:

- 89th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (Ft Eustis, VA)
- 144th Transportation Company (Light/Medium Truck) (NG FL)
- 414th Transportation Company (Light/Medium Truck) (USAR SC)
- 427th Transportation Company (PLS) (USAR PA)
- 513th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (Ft Lewis, WA)
- 619th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (USAR ME)

Around the end of August, the battalion received the mission to pick up Korean equipment at Tallil and deliver to Urbil in Khurdistan. The battalion sent a convoy in two serials of 15 military trucks each. LT Robert Drown, the 3rd Platoon Leader, was made the convoy commander. After dropping off the equipment, the convoy drove to Harbur

⁹ Cappabianca interview.

¹⁰ McNeal interview.

Gate on the Turkish border to pick up generators for a back haul mission. The entire mission took around 12 days, which made time pass faster. The mission was like a long road trip that allowed him to bond with his troops better than on the routine short hauls.

Lasher lost Faulstich along with five men wounded early on. He bonded closely with his platoon and took the change in jobs hard. However, he enjoyed going to the gun truck company. After the shuffle, the 89th TC held an award ceremony for the Faulstich ambush. In the battalion formation, Lasher stood in the 144th TC. After the Soldiers received their awards, Lasher went over to shake hands with the Soldiers who had been in his platoon. While he was talking with SGT McKenzie, Merced came up and tapped him on his shoulder then pulled him aside and told him, “You need to cut the umbilical cord. These are not your Soldiers and this is not your platoon anymore, you need to get know the Soldiers in your platoon and if you cannot do that, I’ll find a job for you that you can do.” That left him with a bad feeling. He lost all confidence in her since she had no idea what went on in the lower ranks.¹¹

As an example of Merced’s micromanaging, Lasher commanded a convoy on the western route, around outskirts of Fallujah that came to a roving USMC checkpoint of two HMMWVs. The Marines stopped the civilian traffic and waved military convoy to drive around through the median. One gun truck hit a guardrail and got a flat tire. The convoy made the turn onto the next road and stopped to change the tire. It was daylight and Lasher called up sheriff or handcuff and asked if the land force commander had a patrol in the area and would send a patrol over since one gun truck was inoperable. The truck changed the tire and thanked the roving patrol. It was a very, routine convoy.¹²

During the daily brief on every convoy, every convoy commander, assistant convoy commander, and escort commander briefed the SPO every day in the conference room with their chain of command present. They also back briefed when they came off the road. Lasher decided to give Merced a detailed brief on everything that happened to include what he did with the flat tire. After he mentioned the flat tire, she asked how he got the flat. He told her about the mobile checkpoint, she then exclaimed, “Who the fuck are you to not call this checkpoint in!” She was very agitated. “Don’t you think someone else might want to know about it.” It was apparent to him that the battalion leadership had no idea of what happened on the road. Roving checkpoints and flats were common things on convoys.¹³

When the Soldier was killed in a rollover, the convoy commander had to burn the HMMWV because of the approaching crowd. The gun truck had escorted a fuel convoy out of Cedar and did not have recovery assets. Lasher did the 15-6 because the unit lost the SINCGARS radio. Another officer did a 15-6 on the rollover and other on burning the vehicle. No one was punished.¹⁴

¹¹ Lasher interview, 3 July 2007.

¹² Lasher interview, 3 July 2007.

¹³ Lasher interview, 3 July 2007.

¹⁴ Lasher interview, 3 July 2007.

In September, the companies moved into Temper tents.

The 57th Battalion received the requirement to supply shotguns for the TCN trucks when they arrived. When BG Chambers left about three months later, the battalion told the new COSCOM commander that they did not want to put shooters in the TCN vehicles. He dropped the policy.

Around November, the battalion received 78 M1114 HMMWVs and the task of convoy escort for the three light/medium and PLS truck companies: the 144th, 414th and 427th. Although the crews of the 144th liked the height advantage the 5-ton gun trucks offered, Merced did not like that the 5-tons did not have the factory-built add-on-armor kits so she made the 144th trade in its 5-ton gun trucks for M1114s. She did not like to mix gun trucks so the convoys from then on ran with M1114s and left the 5-tons in the motor pool. The 414th only received enough gun trucks for one platoon while the other two companies were converted to entirely gun trucks. From then on, the 57th Battalion provided theater gun-truck support to all Logistical Support Area Adder (LSA) Combat Logistic Patrols and security escort for Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR) sustainment pushes throughout the Iraq Zone.¹⁵

The M915 tractors and HETs were the last vehicles to have factory made cab armor kits made. Until then, different units designed templates to cut sheets of steel cut for the doors, a back panel and front panel, in some cases six parts in all. When the convoys ran down to Arifjan or up to BIAP, ANACONDA or anywhere they saw kits, they would load them on the back of their trailers then bring the kits back to Tallil where their company maintenance personnel bolted the kits on the cabs. They would armor about two trucks per platoon each week. The 57th Battalion clearly was not a priority for up-armorment and Merced purchased sheets of steel and had CS2 Carroll, the 513th Maintenance Technician, cut and weld door armor.¹⁶

CPT Michele Jones, the 89th Commander, made deals with a friend, CPT George Petropolis, Commander of the 172nd Medium Truck Company at Navistar, to get armor bit by bit. They might have had trucks go up to BIAP to get armor but it was rare. It was safer to go south unarmored.¹⁷

The 619th Transportation Company left in October and the 892nd took its place.¹⁸

In November, the air conditioned KBR trailers arrived and the Soldiers moved into them. By mid-November the 300th CSG departed and the 122nd CSG replaced them.

On 29 November, a HMMWV of the 144th crashed near al Kut killing the gunner, SPC Daryl A. Davis. He was originally a member of the Iowa National Guard but had moved to Orlando in April 2004 to attend Motorcycle Maintenance Institute and volunteered to

¹⁵ Brown interview; McNeal interview; and Lasher email, October 18, 2005.

¹⁶ Cappabianca interview; McNeal interview; and DuRussel and Palmer interview.

¹⁷ Lasher interview, 3 July 2007.

¹⁸ Brown interview.

go with the 144th when it was called to active duty the next month. He loved beer but died at the age of 20, still too young to buy a drink.¹⁹

During two high profile operations, the battalion moved 295 short tons of critical CL V to the Marines in support of Operation PHANTOM FURY to Fallujah.

In late December 2004, the S3 of the 122nd CSG called MAJ McNeal, 57th Battalion SPO, wanting to meet in the 57th Battalion conference room to discuss a top secret mission. The Group S3 came in with three British civilians and sat down. The S3 informed the 57th Battalion that it had received an order to deliver voting machines and ballot boxes for the first democratic elections held in Iraq that would be held on 30 January 2005. The 57th Battalion would have to deliver the cargo to al Hilla-al Kut area south of Baghdad, which was known as Multi-National Division Central South. The reason for the secrecy was the fear that the insurgents in their effort to disrupt the elections would try and ambush the convoys with the voting machines and ballots. The 57th Battalion had to deliver to al Kut and Diwaniyah. The 89th Medium Truck received the mission to al Kut and the 513th the other to Diwaniyah. On 28 January 2005, the convoys left out at different times. LT Drown led the convoy of the 513th. The drivers took pride in delivering the instruments of democracy. It was the highlight of many.²⁰

In February with four months left in the tour, LTC Merced decided to have lieutenants change jobs to give them a wider range of experience, very similar to officer assignments during the Vietnam War. She wanted platoon leaders to get experience on staff and as XOs while giving those officers on staff a chance to get platoon leadership experience. While it may have broadened the experience of the junior officers, it hurt morale. Most of the lieutenants took pride in being platoon leaders and felt strong bonds with their platoons. They resented giving up their platoons. Similarly, the Soldiers had to adjust to new leadership in the middle of combat missions. Whenever a new lieutenant or captain took over a leadership position in other companies during the war, it took a long time for everyone to adjust.²¹

Under austere conditions, the 57th logged over 3.8 million combat logistic patrol miles utilizing more than 6,000 vehicles, successfully executed over 1,300 combat logistic patrols and gun-truck escort missions. The 57th Transportation Battalion consistently answered the call to do more than required of a tactical transportation battalion.

The battalion did not successfully complete its Operation Iraqi Freedom mission without adversity, the 57th Transportation Battalion withstood 100 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and small arm fire (SAF) attacks to include numerous rock throwing incidents throughout the theater. Honorably, three soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice; SPC Faulstich and SPC Davis, and SGT Holmes.

¹⁹“Accident claims life of Florida National Guardsman in Iraq,” Department of Military Affairs, <http://www.dma.state.fl.us/read.asp?did=3777>; “Army Spc. Daryl Davis,” Honor the Fallen, Military Times, <http://www.militarycity.com/valor/536835.html>.

²⁰ McNeal interview; and Drown interview.

²¹ Cappabianca interview and Brown interview.

The battalion had successfully integrated three Active Component, one National Guard, and four Reserve units into a seamless transportation system into a 900-person battalion. The 57th Transportation Battalion not only provided remarkable support to the Operation Iraqi Freedom Theater, it also established the only Army element Joint Force Protection patrol teams and Quick Reaction Force (QRF) teams to augment the LSA ADDER Coalition Defense Operations Center (CDOC). This was a direct reflection of the battalion's personal commitment and involvement in the internal security of Tallil. The Battalion left Kuwait on 1 June 2005.

OIF 05-08

After only a year back in the States, the 57th Transportation Battalion returned to the CENTCOM Theater of Operations on 21 July 2006, under the command of LTC William O. Thewes, and this time was stationed at Camp Arifjan's Zone VI. MAJ John McNeal was on his second deployment with the 57th Battalion, but this time as the XO. CPT Robert Drown was also on his second deployment with the 57th this time as a battle captain in the Operations Section. The 57th Battalion immediately began learning and training on the tasks of the outgoing unit, the 180th Transportation Battalion out of Fort Hood, Texas. The 57th Battalion fell under the control of the 336th Transportation Group. The 57th Battalion picked up control of the two USAF companies, 70th and 424th and like every battalion in theater had one Navy Electronic Warfare specialist, Lt Warren Shadke (USN), to instruct the battalion on the proper employment of the electronic jamming devices. With three of the Armed Forces represented in the battalion, it referred to itself as a Joint Logistics Task Force (JLTF) 57.

The 57th Battalion again brought its organic 513th Medium Truck Company led by CPT Arnold Camacho and 1SG Marcus Leslie which arrived on 27 July 2006. On 13 August 2006, JLTF57 completed the transfer of authority (TOA) and provided command and control over the following companies:

- 70th Medium Truck Detachment
- 424th Medium Truck Detachment
- Alpha Battery, 5-113th Field Artillery
- Charlie Battery, 1-12th Field Artillery
- A Company, 31 Forward Support Battalion
- 513th Transportation Company (Medium) (Ft Lewis, WA)

The Arrow Express delivered supplies to Al Taqqadum (TQ) West (Marine AOR), Baghdad International Airport (BIAP), and Logistics Support Area Anaconda (LSAA), and Tallil totaling over 170 missions with a RON of three days. The Common User Land Transport (CULT) missions for brigade rotations throughout Iraq totaled over 450 missions with a RON of five days. The Local Haul Convoys ran almost daily to Kuwait Naval Base (KNB) and the SPOD and hauled Heavy Class VI, STMR-Ammo, Aviation Class IX supplies and moved the theater reserve force around. The LTF 180 conducted an average of 20 missions a day. The battalion also managed the two contracts; PWC had

the Arrow Express mission that many of the drivers spoke English, and IAP ran the CULT missions.

The 57th Battalion had an intelligence analyst and an excellent S2, CPT Bo Cappabianca. Cappabianca had been a platoon leader with the 57th Battalion during its OIF 2.5 rotation and had plenty of convoy experience. He and his analyst studied the information on attacks to predict the patterns to enemy attacks. They identified certain periods of time that the enemy attacked and blocked these out. Once at Navistar, the convoy commander would pick up the latest enemy intelligence and the MCT would provide the routes so the convoy commanders would then pick their times of departure and routes. They even started using ASR Jackson to avoid the attacks on Sword and Tampa. However, not every convoy commander liked Jackson and preferred to run up Tampa and Sword. Because of the times blocked out and the requirement to travel at night, the convoys had even shorter windows to travel requiring them to stop at Tallil and Scania on the way to Anaconda or BIAP. What used to be a two-day trip became a three to four day trip, but it decreased the number of attacks. From then on long haul convoys took an average of six to eight days to complete.

The 513th replaced A Company, 5-113th FA in August 2006.

The 181st Battalion consolidated gun trucks into one company, the C Battery, 1-12 Field Artillery, rather than have internal gun trucks. The USAF lost its internal gun trucks. The advantages to consolidated gun trucks were less logistics tail such as spare parts and simplification of maintenance. By supporting just four companies, the escorts are able to develop a relationship with them. The gun truck company only has to train four positions: senior gun truck commander, assistant gun truck commander, gunner and driver.

The 89th Medium Truck Company led by CPT Jesse Wentworth and 1SG Duane Davis from Fort Eustis, had arrived at Arifjan, Kuwait on 17 August. It had had served with the 57th Battalion during its previous deployment and completed the battle hand over from C Battery, 1-12 Field Artillery out of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in September. Upon its arrival, the 89th received the semblance of a certification checklist and improved it. Six months into the tour, they did the training and evaluation again. There are things on the checklist every gun truck crew does. The certification training ensures cross training.

The 89th spent more time on the range at AP Hill firing SAWs and .50 from the mounted position. Every five months in Kuwait, they conduct familiarization firing. They have done it three times so far. They test fire their weapons every time they go out at Cedar and Scania.

The 222nd Medium Truck Company, led by 1LT Gordon J. Smith and 1SG Connie Brannock from Casa Grande, Arizona, arrived on 18 August 2006 and replaced A-31 FSB in September.

The 594th Medium Truck Company led by "Professionals" commanded by CPT Catharine Babbitt (EN) and 1SG Douglas Emmons came from Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Upon the completion of the rotation of truck companies in September, CJTF57 provided command and control for the following:

- 89th Transportation Company (Medium) (Ft Eustis, VA)
- 222nd Transportation Company (Medium) (AZ NG)
- 513th Transportation Company (Medium) (Ft Lewis, WA)
- 594th Transportation Company (Medium) (Ft Campbell, KY)
- 70th Medium Truck Detachment
- 424th Medium Truck Detachment

The 222nd TC (AZ NG) painted their 158th CSB patch on the doors of their vehicles. SPC David Draper was the artist. 513th Medium Truck painted the Road Runner as its logo on the nose of its trucks. The 89th Medium Truck, from Fort Eustis, painted the 7th Group patch flanking the number 757 on the doors of their trucks, which stood for the area code for that part of Virginia where the 89th came from. The 594th Medium Truck Company was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division and painted their “Screaming Eagle” patch on their trucks. The 513th received written permission from Disney to use the Roadrunner as their logo on the vehicles. This may be the first time since WWII that Disney has granted such permission. The 70th Medium Truck Detachments (MTD) maintained the same Scorpions and the 424th Detachment continued the Centurions.

During the regularly scheduled surge, JLTF 57 deployed the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit and the 1-172 Stryker Brigade’s Rapid Deployable Packages, the 10th Mountain and 4th Infantry Divisions. With the US mid-term elections coming up in November, the enemy increased its number of attacks. August set the record for the most Americans killed, ten, topped by September and finally October set the record. With the increase in US casualties, the JLTF 57 had no one killed on convoys. The surge was busy as usual. The Soldier hardly had any down time. During the time after, they had as many as three days down time between missions.

During the surge, the gun truck ratio had three gun trucks per convoy. The 336th Group Commander, COL Don S. Cornett, had his S2 look at the numbers to see if they could run with four gun trucks per convoy. They could only do this during non-surge periods. The 336th Group then increased the size of the convoys from less than 30 to up to 45 vehicles so they could add another escort to the convoy. This fourth gun truck gave the convoy more flexibility with two floaters. The lead and rear gun trucks cannot leave their positions. That allows the pair of gun trucks to act like wingmen.

Many drivers were on their second and even third rotations in theater. While there had been many improvements in the standard of living and most would not recognize Zone VI, this progress had come at a price, increased discipline. Arifjan complex was becoming more like a hardship tour in Korea than a war zone. While the vast majority of the Soldiers at Arifjan would never see the war, the truck drivers did. They would drive north across the berm and spend over a week in the war zone then return to safety of garrison for two to three days. They lived in a contradiction. They actually had to go

north in the war zone to relax. One Soldier said he would rather be dodging IEDs than dodging details.

LTC Thewes monitored how often the officers rode on convoys and used this as a form of competition to encourage them to go out. He wanted officers of all ranks to share the burden of the drivers and lead by example. He and McNeal averaged about one convoy a month. This was the pattern with most of his company commanders. The problem was that long haul convoys took commanders away from their companies for four to six days at a time. The problem was that by this time in the war, senior officers above group level who were not fighting the war were more concerned about space utilization of the motor pool or strict compliance with regulations.

Drivers were issued the Nomex coverall like the combat arms wear but not the light weight flight suits.

The latest threat to convoys was the Energy Formed Projectile (EFP), a copper platter charge that could rip through about any armor. To counter this new threat, the Army began adding thicker doors. When the 89th Trans Company arrived, the battalion had add-on-armor cab kits. Ten gun trucks had the interim frag 5 kits, which weighed 800 pounds each, and the rest were bare M1114s. They were still adding interim frag 5 kits until early December 2006 when the word came down from battalion to stop. They had the objective frag 5 kits. CPT Wentworth would send three M1114s to FRA for installation at a time. It would take about three days to get them back. Sometimes he would have overlap and have six gun trucks at the depot at a time. By the end of January 2007, all the M1114s in the 89th had objective frag 5 kits. None of his gun trucks were hit by IEDs after they had the frag 5 kits to know how they work.

When the 89th arrived, they could not use the Warlocks with the MTS. The EWO examined the problem and showed the units where to place the Warlocks on their vehicles and by October, the two systems could work together. By January 2007, the battalion replaced MTS with Blue Force Tracker. Dukes arrived as the latest evolution of electronic jammers. Because the 70th MTD was always at the forefront of innovation, the JLTF 57 selected them as the first medium truck line-haul in the 336th Transportation Group to implement the new Duke Warlock electronic jamming system.²²

The first time the 89th ran with 4 gun trucks and 45 vehicles was in December. They had the mission to move Class V and BMPs from KNB to the Iraqi Army. They had to keep the BMPs covered up and travel in Kuwait under the cover of darkness, because the Kuwaitis do not like seeing Soviet armor.

The drivers of the 89th usually average up to two days down time. Sometimes they may get three days off and on other times they “turn and burn.”

The JLTF57 strived to increase the quality of life for its Soldiers. The Task Force moved the maintenance operation for six units into newly renovated Maintenance Clamshells,

²²70th MTD MUC Narration.

which enhanced maintenance operations by providing overhead cover and reducing the amount of debris and dust. The clamshells also contributed to the units having a total of zero heat casualties and allowed the Task Force to provide 24-hour maintenance operations successfully. This capability in turn allowed the JLTF 57 to maintain its vehicle fleet at an operational readiness rate above 92% throughout the course of the deployment.

Due to a significant shortage in the availability of Soldiers with the 88M Motor Transport Operator Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), the JLTF 57 established a drivers training course to train and refresh non-88M MOS-qualified Soldiers. This training program resulted in 200 Soldiers being trained to a high standard of competence.

The third rotation of the 424th MTD was commanded by CPT Daniel C. Holser. It arrived on 18 October and completed its TOA during the first week in November. The 424 MTD organized, trained and equipped 166 Airmen from 37 different locations with 8 different air force specialties codes. Finally, the 424 strived to improve conditions for all personnel on the roads in Iraq by focusing on transient living quarters on the road. Through extensive planning and coordination efforts, they transferred and set up new transient tents at Convoy Support Center Scania, a critical layover point that is utilized by over half a million coalition drivers annually. The 424th MTD departed on 10 May.²³

In December 2006, the third rotation of the 70th MTD under the command of CPT Shad J. Lacktorin replaced the second rotation. This was the third six-month rotation of the USAF detachments in Kuwait. The 70th MTD was recruited from 32 different bases and seven different occupational specialties, most of them were from headquarters. They still deploy with an intelligence specialist. About 30 airmen were on their second rotations. The Air Force detachments felt they received more missions because they were only deployed for only six months. They had to do more missions in a shorter period of time to keep up with the Army. They averaged 13-18 missions per six months. The third rotation of the 70th MTD departed in June 2007.²⁴

There were some definite cultural differences between the Army and Air Force. The Air Force officers interpreted the attention Thewes paid to them as demanding and he was definitely not laid back. The Army was more rank conscious, but Air Force officers of different ranks could talk friendly while in the Army it is usually a one way conversation. CPT Daniel C. Holser said he had his ass chewed more in this job than in his whole time in the Air Force. In fact, if a senior officer had to council a junior officer in the Air Force like the battalion commanders do in the Army that meant they would be fired. Thewes believed that the Air Force commanders appreciated his mentorship. He interpreted their comment that they received more attention from the Army commander as a good thing.

On 20 July 2007, the JLTF57 conducted a color casing ceremony, after which it was officially released from its mission in support of Operation IRAQI Freedom 05-07. Upon completion of the transfer of redeployed subordinate units to the HHD, 1144th

²³424th MTD MUC Narration.

²⁴70th MTD MUC Narration.

Transportation Battalion out of Delavan, Illinois the 57th Transportation Battalion departed Camp Arifjan and returned to Fort Lewis, Washington.

Soldiers involved in these incidents were recognized for their actions with a over 120 Combat Action Badges. Over the course of the deployment, the JLTF 57 lost only three M915A3's due to battle damage. The JLTF 57 lost no Soldiers during the course of Operation IRAQI Freedom 06-08.

Interviews

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SFC (R) Arthur Lee Turner, Sr answers to questionnaire on 27 December 2002.

Frank Whitlock telephone interview with Richard Killblane, 26 October 2006.

COL (R) Walter Anderson interview by Richard Killblane, July 2006.

CPT Bo Cappabianca interview by Richard Killblane at Arifjan, Kuwait, 2 March 2007.

CPT Robert Drown interview by Richard Killblane at Arifjan, Kuwait, 2 March 2007.

MAJ John McNeal interview by Richard Killblane at Arifjan, Kuwait, 2 March 2007.

LTC William O. Thewes

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