

Joseph McCarthy II, Cdr 523rd TC, S3 124th Trans Bn

From: Joseph McCarthy
Sent: Wednesday, June 20, 2007 12:02 PM
To: tcmuseum@eustis.army.mil [Note: new email address is on Transportation Museum home page: <http://www.transchool.eustis.army.mil/museum/museum.html>]
Subject: INFORMATION REQUEST

Dear Sir,

I am seeking any information you may have regarding an encounter between the Viet Minh and the huge French Mobile 100 Group convoy that was annihilated near the Mang Giang pass on June 24th., 1954. I am aware that this event was during the French Indochina War with the French Extreme Expeditionary Force-Orient and may not fall within the scope of the US Army Transportation Corps. However, the event occurred in the same theater of operations of the 8th Transportation Group during the US & Vietnam conflict so I thought you may know where to direct me in my research if you don't have any additional information. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph T. McCarthy
From: Hanselman, David S DPTMSEC
Sent: Saturday, June 23, 2007 10:11 AM
To: Joseph McCarthy
Subject: RE: INFORMATION REQUEST (UNCLASSIFIED)

Sir,

I forwarded your information request to Rich Killblane, the TC Historian. We do study the French actions in Vietnam and in particular the ambush at Mang Giang pass because it is a precursor to our own convoy ops in Vietnam. Rich can provide better information than I can. Ironically, I was just looking over a yearbook that a gentleman brought in this week from the 54th BN, 1969. Here is a page out of the book that might look familiar.

Take care,

David Hanselman, GS-13

From: Killblane, Richard
Sent: Monday, June 25, 2007 7:40 AM
To: Joseph McCarthy
Cc: Hanselman, David S DPTMSEC
Subject: FW: INFORMATION REQUEST (UNCLASSIFIED)

The best account I have read of the annihilation of GM100 was written by Bernard Fall in [A Street Without Joy](#). This French brigade was annihilated in a series of ambushes and

attacks along QL19 from An Khe to Pleiku. This was a seasoned brigade with armored vehicles so I was curious as to what we did that the French did not do. I believe the big difference was the enemy's fear of our air power.

Right now I'm busy researching and writing about transportation in the present conflict but am also collecting what ever I can on Vietnam. When I finish this current work, I would like to go back and finish writing about transportation in Vietnam. **Could you tell me about your tour? When were you over there and what jobs did you do?** I remember that company command was usually just a six-month tour. Rich

From: Joseph McCarthy
Date: Monday, June 25, 2007 10:59
Subject: INFO REQUEST
To: richard.e.killblane@us.army.mil

Dear Mr. Killblane,

Thank you so much for the info on the French defeat on QL19.

In answer to your question about my experience there I can provide some good data for you. You are right about 6 month commands.

Mine was from June '69 thru January '70. My Battalion CO was LTC William R. Sarber for 2 months and LTC Everett Rackley for 4 months. I believe Sarber got his Brigadier Star and retired, and died a year or two ago. He was quite charismatic. He assigned me to the 523rd upon my arrival and it was in sorry shape. I relieved the first Sergeant and started from scratch. I commissioned the building of the Gun Trucks Uncle Meat and True Grit, naming them both, myself. The second half of my tour I served as the S-3 for the 124th Trans Battalion in Pleiku.

Now for some insight to our success in ambush resistance. I believe the key person who should be credited was the Brigade CO of the 8th. Trans. Group, Col Garland A. Ludy. Most credit Col. Bellino whom I did not serve under, but Ludy refined and streamlined the gun truck concept to a fine art. He would hold briefings at my company for visiting generals and various other VIP's. He had a complete set of graphics which he displayed on a tripod for his presentation. In his presentation he would explain that in each convoy there would be a gun truck with radios strategically placed between every ten vehicles. This was rigidly adhered to during my tour.

There would be a convoy commander (O-1 or O-2) in an armored jeep to direct the indigenous gun trucks when or if an ambush occurred. Spacing between vehicles was crucial because the enemy watched for vehicles bunching up which enabled them maximize damage. What Ludy realized was that the enemy had figured out it took 15 to 20 minutes for air support to arrive so they would hit fast and hard during that period and then retreat. This forced them to use smaller kill zones so their key was to watch for "bunching" to be more effective. Ludy would fly in his chopper, constantly, and watch for bunching. The next morning he would be at the company of the convoy commander

to chew him up one side and down the other when the bunching was flagrant for the convoy he commanded. He went right to the young officers and gave them something to remember him by. Fact is, his concept saved many lives, in my opinion.

The other part of his strategy was to train convoy commanders and gun truck NCOIC's to quickly identify the kill zone and react differently than previous commanders by:

- 1.) If kill zone (KZ) was in middle of convoy, stop all trucks behind it from driving into it. In the past the bottleneck effect resulted in more damage because of the trucks that kept entering the KZ.
- 2.) If trucks were ahead of the KZ they were told to keep moving to avoid damage and prevent bottlenecking for the trucks behind them.
- 3.) Where ever the enemy hit the convoy this basic Ludy devised tool substantially decreased enemy effectiveness and ultimately lowered the amount of ambushes because of the increased manpower and casualties that it cost the VC.

I hope this helps you. Your belief in superior air power was a big element in our success opposed to the French, but the scientific line haul principal of indigenous fire support implemented by Col. Ludy provided the key to puzzle. Air support was great but the enemy could put a real hurt on a convoy in 15 minutes and return another day to do it again. Our methods stopped them cold in their tracks in both aspects.

I also had a serious ambush that resulted in 2 Silver Stars [Lee and Champs] and seven Bronze with "v's" for the crews if you want to know the story.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely yours,

Cpt. Joe McCarthy
CO 523rd. Trans Company
6/69 - 1/70

From: Killblane, Richard
Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2007 7:23 AM
To: Joseph McCarthy
Subject: 523rd TC

So you moved up to Pleiku when LTC Sarber took command of the 124th Bn. Why did he pick you for to be his S3? What was it like working for Jack Horvath?

What was COL Ludy like? Was there anything else he did to refine convoy ops?

I learned that later, convoy commanders were the most experienced person regardless of rank and heard that many convoys were lead by NCOs. **Were there any changes to who were CCs during your tour?**

Why did you build the two new gun trucks? How many did you inherit when you took command? Why did you name them Uncle Meat and True Grit? When did the art work appear on the gun trucks?

What was the problem with the 523rd when you assumed command?

Yes, I want the story of the ambushes. I'm writing about convoy ambush case studies to teach current ccs to think tactically. Send me as much detail as you can on the ambushes. I believe Roger Champ on the Eve was one of those who earned the SSM. I have his account. Please tell me as much as you can about that ambush first. Thanks, Rich

From: Joseph McCarthy
Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2007 11:25
Subject: Response to Inquiry
To: richard.e.killblane@us.army.mil

Hello again,

Hope this helps to answer your questions. LTC Sarber was my CO at the 54th. Btn for my first 2 months then he rotated back to the states completing his tour. LTC Everett Rackley replaced him and I served 4 more months under him then went to Pleiku. COL Ludy also rotated during that period and the new 8th Trans CO told LTC Rackley to pick an officer to transfer to the 124th as the S-3. (I am drawing a blank on who the name of Ludy's replacement) What he didn't tell Rackley was that about one month later he would assign him as CO of the 124th. So I ended up being Rackley's S-3.

I saw Jack Horvath in Branson two years ago and we had a nice reunion. Jack was Rackley's 2nd in command at the 54th and the 124th. Jack's job was to be the proverbial "fly in the ointment" and he did well at it. He always treated me fairly and I respected him for that.

COL Ludy reminded me of the George S. Patton type. He was a real character, but you did not want to be on his bad side. He was a stern disciplinarian. LTC Sarber was gifted in his ability to handle Ludy and provided a good umbrella from his wrath. But I do understand Ludy's methods and credit him for running a tight ship.

I think this discipline was instrumental in our success. Simple stuff like ensuring the driver's and crews wore their flack jackets and helmets instead of t-shirts and boony caps is what saved lives.

As far as convoy commanders we pretty much adhered to junior officers. Sometimes a senior NCO would go but very seldom during my tour did I see that happen. I ran some

myself when possible. Every morning there would be 6 or 7 different convoys kicking out from the marshalling area. It was a sight to see. Some would contain up to 80-90 trucks with gun trucks in support. The gun truck crews would attach small flags to the long radio antennas that would fly in the breeze. The stuff of legend.

When and why they changed to NCO's running convoys is unknown to me, but it would have been later in the war. My assignment would usually be an E-5 or E-6 crew chief for each gun truck. Sgt Champ was an E-5 and he was also my 1st. Platoon Sgt.

As for building the 2 gun trucks this is how it went down. As I told you before LTC Sarber assigned me as CO to the 523rd. and his words were "There are a lot of problems there so I will let you look and then you tell me what you want to do." 2 weeks later I told him I wanted to relieve the 1st. Sgt. (an E-8). When he said a lot of problems, it was an understatement for sure.

Morale was non-existent. The company was more like a platoon since most of the troops were in their last 30 days and did not even want to go on convoys. The cadre consisted of one E-7 who got busted for drunkenness 1 month after I arrived. There were several E-6's and E-5's. The vehicles were old and in major disrepair. The only real gun truck was "Eve of Destruction" and to keep it up and running they were cannibalizing from the rest of the vehicles. The only way this outfit could go was up, which I considered a plus from a new commander's vantage point.

I told LTC Sarber that I needed a new 1st. Sgt and a new E7 for Truck master and about 80 new troops for driver and crew slots. I also said that I could not do the job without a shitload of new equipment and at least 2 new gun trucks that I wanted to build myself and not inherit from some other line haul outfit. My predecessor was doing that and getting everyone else's garbage.

So that's why I built 2 new gun trucks. I got two E7's fresh from stateside (SFC Kenyon who I made 1st. Sgt and who did a magnificent job of rebuilding the company) and SFC Treadwell who rebuilt the motor pool in fine fashion.

I assigned Sgt Champ to the 1st. platoon and put all the bad apples under him and he began kicking ass. Lots of Article 15's ensued and they started to rotate out of sight and mind.

I got my 80 newbies fresh from stateside and we built 2nd. & 3rd Platoons from scratch. SSG Lee was put in charge of 3rd. Platoon and commissioned to build "Uncle Meat." SSG Larry Cole was 2nd. Platoon and built "True Grit." Sgt. Champ got "Eve" because he had the awful task of dealing with the leftover misfits. We had 2 other old gun trucks that I gave to a couple of good E5's. We were actually starting to look like a real bona-fide line haul outfit. After building some good gun trucks the reputation of the "Eve" coupled with some real operational gun trucks was used to give the drivers something to aspire to - ie. being a gun truck crew member. This raised esprit-de-corps of the whole unit. Men began to take pride in their vehicles and the Truckmaster rigidly adhered to

daily motor stables no matter how tired the men got. He set up a coffee break room with doughnuts and treats in the motor pool which encouraged the guys to hang out down there a lot. I mean, who likes to do motor stables, huh? I hope some of this will help in your training program.

The art work on Uncle Meat was French lettering with blue shading. I chose this color to develop Uncle Meat as a sister ship to the Eve and tie into the nostalgia. As you know the Eve is French lettered with red shading. The Vietnamese learned the lettering from the French and passed it on to their offspring. We had a local do the job and he was really good at it.

True Grit was named after the "Duke" who was one of the few who supported the troops during that time and his movie was just recently out in theaters stateside.

Uncle Meat is a story in itself. It came from my rebellious side. It was the name given to the niece of Frank Zappa of the Mothers of Invention. You may recall they were an underground blues band in the late 60's and early 70's. Kind of a head group and I did like my parties, but none of the upper brass would ever make the connection so I liked that also.

As far as the ambushes, Sgt Champ (on the Eve) and SSG Lee on Uncle Meat were the two NCO's that I wrote up for the SS's. One of the keys to the event was that they were picking up Vietnamese rice farmers and throwing them into the gun trucks to prevent them from getting killed by VC crossfire during the ambush. Very rarely did trans personnel receive valor awards, it was always combat infantry units that got em. I wrote a huge award packet (6 inches or more thick) to compensate for this drawback and it worked. I do not have any of it today but Sgt. Champ might have his award certificate that would have a synopsis of the event. I have not been able to locate SSG Lee, primarily due to the commonness of his name. Sgt. Champ and I have become very close. We visited each other several times and communicate often.

Hope this helps,

Cpn. Joe

From: Killblane, Richard
Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2007 12:03 AM
To: Joseph McCarthy
Subject: 523rd TC

So what did you see in SGT Champs to make him a Plt Sgt?

I read SGT Champs' citation and interviewed him but he remembered nothing of what happened with the rest of the convoy. I would like to know details such as the location of the ambush, direction of movement and organization of the convoys. Champs said his gun trucks were responding to the ambush of another convoy serial. **Which gun trucks**

were in the first serial and what did they do? Did the lead gun truck escort the trucks ahead of the kill zone to the next security point? Which gun trucks stayed in the kill zone? Which gun trucks were in Champs' convoy serial? How many entered the kill zone? How many trucks were trapped in the kill zone?

What do you remember about why you put Champs and Lee in for the SSM?

Although I have a copy of the citation, citations are usually vague. I am looking for what impressed you about their acts of bravery.

Thanks again, Rich

From: Joseph McCarthy
Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2007 12:22
Subject: Re: Response to Inquiry
To: richard.e.killblane@us.army.mil

About the only other thing I remember is that the ambush was in the valley area, not a usual ambush site. I do recall that it was atypical. Your best bet would be to contact Dept of Army and request records of the event and the write up I did. I never followed up afterwards and cannot remember the kind of details you are asking about.

As far as why I chose Lee and Champ. Cole and Lee were the only two E-6's I had. If you met Champ you can probably figure out how charismatic he is. He was the best E-5 I had left of the 3 or 4 available to me to be platoon sgt. All 3 of these NCO's far exceeded my expectations so there was a little luck involved in my choices. Also the fact that a CO had the moxy to relieve an E-8 attributed a little to the fear factor of NCO's that arrived after his removal.

The key on why I put Lee and Champ in for the SS's was the fact that they cared enough about innocent Vietnamese civilians to carry them to their own gun trucks for safety. Remember this was the era of Lt. Calley and Mi Lai, so it made for good counter PR to that load of crap used by the slimy politico's back in the states. Plus the fire fight was a very big one and it was another legend building event for the two gun trucks "Uncle Meat" and "Eve of Destruction."

From: Killblane, Richard
Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2007 1:25 AM
To: Joseph McCarthy
Subject: Re: Response to Inquiry

We have no idea if the ambush reports were saved and where they are. We've searched the National Archives, Center of Military History, Center of Army Lessons Learned and Carlisle Barracks. No one has them. That is another reason that I am trying to recreate what happened. I also get requests from the VA to confirm that some drivers were in ambushes.

If you remember any other details about this ambush please send them to me.

Were there any ambushes in the 124th Bn while you were the S3? Could you describe them? Rich

From: Joseph McCarthy
Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2007 13:44
Subject: Re: Response to Inquiry
To: richard.e.killblane@us.army.mil

Rich,

I would have thought they kept the Battalion morning reports on file but I'm not sure. I served almost 6 years and got out in 1972. As far as verifications I have assisted a few also but when it gets below NCO level it gets rather vague for me. I do remember that the ambush frequency in Plieku was pretty low during my time there. Nothing big that I recall. Keep up the good work Rich. This history is very important to all of us.

Cpn. Joe