

Summary of telephone interview with BG (R) Orvil Metheny by Richard Killblane, 19 March 2004. [metheny email address removed]

The ambush on 24 August 1968 was the largest ambush up to that time. It took the 25th ID 8 hours to come in and stabilize the situation. 25th ID was embarrassed by their failure to respond. It took them some time to develop the need to come in to assist us. Prior to that time, we were running up and down that road like it was Route 95. The convoys hadn't been attacked for several months.

I think that the first time that the 6th Battalion had lost any one to enemy action was when LTC DeHaven commanded the 6th Battalion. He brought the battalion over in 1965. 2 soldiers were killed and DeHaven erected a monument to them in front of Battalion Hq. There was no casualties during LTC Kieth Jones' time. So there were no deaths for 18 months to two years.

The only real hot spot that existed for LTC Keith Jones and me first few months that I was in command was an enclave half way between Saigon and Long Binh. One TC company continually got sniper attacked. The light truck provided its own perimeter security for that area. The perimeter was continually being probed. I replaced the company commander. I was not happy with the response that I was getting from him. I brought him in to Long Binh to command the 87th TC and sent the 87th TC commander to his company. I had more faith in that particular captain. I thought the other needed to get some tender loving care.

I did go to the site to check out the damage done. It was 45 miles north of Long Binh. The enemy had been taking additional ammunition off of trucks. It was a free for all with everybody was shooting. Everyone was just trying to protect their lives.

There were 2 people out of 6th Battalion captured in that ambush. The VC released one in December that year. The other was released a couple years later. He was from Colorado. In an ambush in December a third person was ambushed and he came home in the prisoner release in 1973.

That August 1968 ambush changed a lot of our procedures. Turn the vehicles around get them unloaded and back in the same day. Previously they spent the night at the destination. The combat arms could better protect the convoys one day.

COL Frank Case was 48th Group commander on 25 Aug 68. We made the drivers wear flak jackets and steel pots after the Aug 68 ambush. They had them before but it had not been a major command emphasis to wear them. From then on it became absolutely essential that everyone wear flak jackets and steel pots. We also instituted assistant drivers in vehicles with weapons.

The SOP was for drivers to continue driving through the kill zone. They would not stop and fight. The problem was if the enemy hit the lead truck, they couldn't continue to

drive forward. They could not turn the vehicles around, because the roads were too narrow.

LTC Earve Hilton, Commander of 7th Battalion, wrote SGT William Seay's recommendation for the Medal of Honor. A lieutenant from 6th Battalion was the convoy commander and was wounded. He had his flak jacket on but a bullet hit it and went through. If he had not had his flak jacket on it would have killed him. George Fuller, in Augusta, was in this ambush.

One November day, the 6th Battalion was committed to go into the Delta. 7th Battalion went up north to deliver cargo. On that day that a lieutenant was killed in an ambush.

Another ambush happened in December. The convoy was coming home from up north. Were attacked when they were empty. Security was not as tight coming home as it was going to fire bases. They weren't as alert. A lieutenant from the 7th Battalion in charge violated the rule to continue on through the Kill Zone. He turned around went into the kill zone and was killed. He received DSC. Earve Hilton wrote that one up too. He had worked in OPL and understood the awards system. He wrote his men up for a lot of awards. A 6th Battalion person was captured in the December ambush.

Hilton, however, had more people killed than 6th Battalion. One of the differences was that my battalion washed their trucks. The enemy would attack the unit that looked like it had the weakest discipline. 6th and 7th Battalion trucks went on the same convoys. Where your trucks lined up depended upon how fast the Ordinance people loaded them. Do you get to the ASP or depot on time? What is your personal relationship with the commander of the Ordinance Battalion? I talked with the company commanders and told them, "You've got to get to the front of the line. Then you would get in the front of the convoy." That meant that they would get to the fire base first, get unloaded first and get in line to come home first. Each of these little things makes a very small difference but accumulative they make a big difference.

I had six companies in my battalion during December. Two more companies came in during the Spring. 665th TC came down from Long Binh. COL Paul Swanson assigned it to 6th Battalion although it had been in 7th Battalion before. I had one reserve unit that came in from Augusta, Georgia, the 319th TC (USAR) [in September 1968], commanded by CPT Drew Troxler. It was the best company in the 6th Battalion. They stayed close together. Even now they still get together. George Fuller, who was in that company was inducted into Distinguished Member of the Regiment last year.

The next ambush happened in May. The convoy was enroute to Quan Loi in the 25th ID area. I was riding along in that convoy. I was in the lead jeep in the convoy. They hit halfway through the convoy. A couple of lieutenants were in the kill zone. The most difficult thing for me was to follow the SOP and not go back into the kill zone. Do you follow doctrine or follow impulse?

We had V-100s escorting that convoy. We had no tracked vehicles. The 25th ID was providing cover. The Infantry arrived within 15 to 30 minutes. They were just 10 miles away. It took as long it took them to mount up and drive down the road. I met the tanks coming down the road. The infantry deployed and told the trucks to put the peddle to the metal and get out of there. The tail of the convoy that was not in the kill zone had enough sense to stop. Helicopters then came in very quickly. Ambush ended after the helicopters showed up. The ambush lasted less than an hour. We spent the night up there. The next day we returned and picked up some of the trailers and trucks that were damaged the day before.

The following day, we went north again. Again I rode along in this convoy. We got up to a CP and the 25th ID stopped us. We sat at the CP for a couple of hours. When we drove through, there were VC bodies laying along side the road. They had an ambush planned. The 25th ID told us that they were going to protect the convoys. I can't say enough good things about the 25th ID.

COL Paul Swanson made an arrangement with the infantry got the tanks and got an APC to drive along with our convoys. He had gone through the Army War College with the 25th ID G3. 25th ID gave better protection than 1st ID. It was a personality issue. I found absolutely no friction between logistic troops and combat troops. Depending upon intelligence for that day whether tanks and APC escorted. They did not provide convoy security when there was no imminent threat. The APCs and tanks could not handle that kind of wear and tear every day.

I don't really remember meeting the Provost Marshal but once. He came down to the Group headquarters and we had a meeting there. I never heard of the Provost Marshal riding along in the convoys. The ranking officer in the convoy was the convoy commander. The combat arms unit was in charge if escorting convoy. I can not remember any conflicts between the logistics people and the infantry.

Bob Edwards followed me in command of the 6th Battalion.