

Jeffrey Perkins, Ed Pavelik, and Jess Perez interview summary by Richard Killblane, 7 August 2008

Perkins joined the 523rd Transportation Company before it shipped over to Vietnam. It sailed on the *USNS William S. Weigle* on 27 September 1966 and arrived 27 days later on 24 October 1966. The company was discharged on LARC LXs onto the beach at Qui Nhon.

The soldiers of the 523rd built Camp Addison in Cha Rang Valley. The camp was named after the first kid [SP5 O'Neill Addison] killed [on 4 May 1966] from the unit [8th Transportation Group]. The 512th and 669th Transportation Companies also arrived the same day and helped built Camp Addison. All three companies were attached to the 54th Transportation Battalion. A dirt road ran through the middle of the camp and the military companies were on one the side of the hill and the PX on the opposite side across the road. The camp was built on the "mounds" a local cemetery, which the graves were moved from across the road. The 54th Transportation Battalion Headquarters was built on the opposite side of the road of the PX and above he tents of the units. During the monsoon, cigarettes would mildew and the PX could not sell mildewed cigarettes.

Ed Pavelik arrived in Vietnam and joined the 57th Transportation Company as a replacement in July or August 1967. [The 57th Trans Company arrived on 31 July 1967.]

Perkins was not on the road during the ambush on 2 September and left right after that.

1LT Jess Perez had arrived in Vietnam in August 1967 and became the S1 for the 54th Battalion. After the first big ambush [on 2 September 1967] and Bellino's arrival the end of that month, Bellino held several meetings in 8th Group Headquarters at Phu Tai to report on the design and construction of gun trucks. In one meeting, they discussed the problem of weight of gun trucks. Evidently the floor of the steel box on the back of a 2 ½-ton truck had been lined with sandbags during a dry day, but when it went on a convoy, it rained and became heavy. The gun truck could hardly keep up with the convoy, so they went back and only armor-plated half the bed and sandbagged the floor to reduce the weight. The gun truck was caught in an ambush in [25] January 1968 and a B40 rocket penetrated the small box and killed the crew. The next recommendation was to build double walled gun boxes filled with sand.

Perez left 8th Group and Qui Nhon in January 1968 to go north to Camp Evans with the 1st Cavalry Division. He formed a logistics task force, named TF McDonald, to support the Da Nang Support Command.

CPT Perez returned to 8th Group in 1970 as the S2. COL Langston commanded 8th Group at the time, and was replaced by COL Mortensen [in September 1970], who commanded it when it moved north to I Corps Tactical Zone for Operation Lam Son 719 in early 1971. It set up headquarters in trailer vans in an empty field somewhere around Quang Tri. 8th Group remained up north and convoyed south to a place north of Da Nang, possibly Phu Ni. As 8th Group was getting ready to inactivate [on 28 April 1971]

members of the headquarters were sent home or to the other two truck battalions. Three NCOs (an E8 and two E7s), who had come over with 8th Group in 1967, wanted to bid their farewell to the unit. They drove down in a jeep from Quang Tri and wanted to return that very night. On the return trip, they were killed.

By then CPT Perez was the HHD Commander, and when he and COL Mortensen were the only two remaining members of 8th Group, they reported to Da Nang Airport with individual travel orders. They were told that one had to stay since they did not have unit movement orders. Since Perez commanded the HHD, he had the 8th Group colors and had to stay. COL Mortensen got on the plane and left. Perez returned to Da Nang and spent the next three weeks getting an accounting classification for unit movement orders. He finally brought the 8th Group colors to Fort Lewis, Washington. They were uncased in a ceremony that resembled a change of command ceremony. He handed the colors over and they were recased and sent for storage.