

**Roger Rahor, 363<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company “Road Runners”, email to Richard Killblane, 18 August 2004**

Richard,

Thank you for your request for information about the 363<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company and my role in it. I arrived in country January 1971 and was assigned to the 363<sup>rd</sup> TC (Medium Truck, 5-ton tractor-trailer) in Da Nang at Camp Adiner. We were south of the city in the Marble Mountain area across from a large USMC helicopter base. In fact we shared the compound with Recon Marines. What a unique group of individuals they were. At that time we were doing road convoys north to Phu Bai, south to Chu Lai and we were also responsible for local truck operations in and around the Da Nang area. At night rockets fired at the Marine Air Station often fell short and ended up in our company area.

With Dewey Canyon II in place we were hauling a lot of material north. Several of us were sent north to work with other companies out of places like Quang Tri, Khe Sahn, Fire Base Vandergriff and others that I can't seem to remember. Some of the companies we were assigned to were the 666 and 572<sup>nd</sup> TC. (the 57duce), there were others but time has taken it's toll on my memory. Most of what was hauled was JP-4. Convoys went to bring fuel for the helicopters supporting the ARVN invasion of Laos. A couple of convoys went to Khe Sahn at night. It was pretty bad. I did not keep a diary or log and so far I have been unable to locate any military records, daily logs, after action reports or anything like that. Four of us hauled dead ARVN's that were put on pallets and loaded into reefer Sea Land Vans. We took them to a boat ramp near Phu Bai and backed these vans onto U.S. boats, much like landing craft. We then picked up empty vans and got another load. This went on for 2-3 days. The smell was so bad that we burned our uniforms and washed our bodies with diesel. After that we returned to our companies.

When I first joined the 363<sup>rd</sup> TC I reported to the Company Commander and I was assigned to first platoon. There were three gun trucks in our company. Each assigned to a platoon. The Colonel, first platoon's, had just taken a hit from an RPG and was out of action. The rocket propelled grenade had damaged the front end of the truck. The Colonel had been named for a long gone Colonel who had treated the men well. She had the hull of an APC mounted to the frame of a 5-ton. It proved to be real hard to keep running as the mountain passes stressed the engine and she was often being repaired. The VC had stepped up activity in an effort to close the Hai Van Pass, north of Da Nang, to keep the flow of supplies from getting north, to Phu Bai, to support the invasion of Laos, Lam Son 719.

The other two gun trucks of the 363<sup>rd</sup> were the Pallbarers and Canned Heat. Each of these were steel boxes mounted on a 5 ton with mounts for 50 cal. Machine guns forward and aft and 60's (30 cal machine guns) in the waist. We had armor plate for the cab. Both first and second platoon had gun jeeps to lead each convoy.

In the Spring of '71 first platoon was tasked with building a new gun truck. Our daily convoys north and south needed help and the Colonel was not available often. So, we

scrounged most of what we needed from in and around the Da Nang area. Some of the steel for the box came from the Marines if I remember correctly. We worked at night after the daily assigned work and in between guard duty assignments. It was not just first platoon that did the work, it seemed that guys from all over the company pitched in. I did not do very much to help but I did help some. I think that we moved just before we finished her. My fuzzy memory again. We painted her black and held a contest to name her. One of the guys from maintenance, named Jeff, held out for Mercenary and he painted that name in blue on the side of the box. That truck was beautiful. He did a great job, hi-lighting the name against the black of the truck. The truck had blast shields separating the aft from the forward areas. It also had a wooden deck to stop ricochets. At that time I was mainly driver and gunner, for the lead jeep and was driving and working as shotgun on convoys and hauling around Da Nang.

You asked about the ambushes and when they occurred. The time frame stretches over my tour and the nature of what was going on in Viet Nam dictated the nature of the attacks. When I first arrived V.C. was hitting us up in the Hai Van Pass, north of Da Nang. This pass divides the physical north and south parts of Viet Nam. We were hauling supplies to support the invasion of Laos. For the most part they would wait until we returned from Phu Bai and were driving up the northern side of the mountain. The waterfall area was full of caves and tunnels. It faced a long stretch of switchbacks where we could only do about 5-15 miles an hour. We called this place Ambush Alley. RPG's, mortars and automatic fire kept us in a high state of anxiety. Gun trucks and the gun jeeps went into the kill zone and returned fire while talking to our top cover. We had a LOH (light observation helicopter) assigned to our convoys and a Bird Dog, fixed wing aircraft, with us when we went into the Hai Van Pass. These aircraft would send for Cobra gunships to come in and suppress the V.C.'s fire. During the period of Lam Son 719 these attacks went on with regularity. We would have contact daily for a few days then nothing. Maybe a week would go by then we would get hit again.

After Lam Son quieted down the ambushes fell into an irregular pattern. Maybe we would get hit every two weeks or once in a four week period.

While all of this was going on we ran into trouble on our southerly convoys to Chu Lai also. The V.C. did not directly attack us in force but they would cause problems for the convoy by inciting the local civilians. They might have someone in a crowded town push an old lady or small child into the path of a 5-ton. We had enough trouble with 19-20 year olds driving huge overloaded trucks through crowded towns and cities. Horrific accidents became common place both north and south.

There were also kids with fragmentation grenades. The handles were taped and the pins pulled. The kids were made to put these grenades into fuel tanks of the trucks when we stopped near populated areas. The fuel would dissolve the tape and the grenade would explode. I remember drivers finding a few of these in fuel tank filters at night while topping off their tanks.

There were firefights that we got caught up in on our run to Chu Lai also. I can remember evacuating ARVN wounded, in the jeep, from a firefight they were engaging in along Q.L.1. The Ville had V.C. fighting an ARVN unit when we arrived.

I mentioned that we moved. We were assigned to the 57<sup>th</sup> Trans Battalion and moved to Red Beach, Camp Haskins north of Da Nang. During my tour many units left Viet Nam. We moved to a former Sea Bee Base on a beautiful beach north of Da Nang and became part of the 57<sup>th</sup> Trans Battalion. We were joined by the 572<sup>nd</sup> T.C. They shared our convoy duty. The 572 had many new drivers and they could not handle the Hai Van Pass. They were losing many trucks to accidents and bad driving. Soon the 363<sup>rd</sup> Road Runners had the Phu Bai run for ourselves. The road to Chu Lai was flat and mostly straight, better for new guys. We helped pull the Americal out of Chu Lai and then the 572<sup>nd</sup> handled the Da Nang hauling.

It was around this time that I came to be crew on the Mercenary. Our convoys were getting hit more often and I needed to be in a place where I could contribute more. I spent my time on the guntruck and the lead jeep.

With the elections in Viet Nam coming up events got a lot hotter in the fall of '71. While at Red Beach, we made up the morning convoy the night before. Bringing trailer loads of equipment to our compound. Picking up the ammo loads in the morning just before we left. Activity against the individual trucks bringing these loads through Da Nang at night increased. It seemed that there was always something going on, but it got real bad the closer we got to the presidential elections. Sanctions imposed against the people of Da Nang caused food riots. There were our guys driving 40,000 lbs. of food in each truckload. Gun trucks were assigned and we often had to fight it out with armed "civilians".

I received a report one morning from Battalion H.Q. that two NVA mortar companies had moved into the Hai Van pass overnight. The frequency and intensity of ambushes increased immediately. We were getting hit every day for weeks at a time. With the clear days of summer behind us, the NVA got very creative in where and when they would hit us up in the Hai Van. These were more intense than the VC ambushes up in Ambush Alley. They even hit us going down the north side of the mountain.

One Sunday in the lead jeep, I led the small convoy into a Chi Com Claymore mine ambush that had been discovered and disarmed by an ARVN, EOD, who happened to be home on leave, minutes before we arrived. This was in a Ville north of the Hai Van in an area we considered safe and where we often would stop and regroup after coming down the north side of the pass. Details, dates and specific incidents are hard for me. It was a confusing time. You will find some information at the ATAV web site where the Commanding Officer of the 572<sup>nd</sup> TC has a site dealing with the Lam Son 719 incursion and the roll that his company played.

It seemed to be many wars in one. The war with the NVA and the VC were just a part of it. It seemed that we were at war with the ARVN's too. Early in my tour they had taken

two GI's who were involved in an accident. A group of us got weapon and trucks and were ready to fire on the ARVN compound. They were released that night. I can remember a driver from the 572 getting shot by ARVN's. We were at war with the people of Viet Nam. We were at war with the "lifers" who lived in the rear and never rode convoy. Some made our lives miserable and provoked some GI's to stupid acts that put them in jail. There was a racial war too. Our Battalion Commander was a racist who had his own black police force. They harassed white GI's and also blacks who worked with and went on convoy with whites. This led to a separate and privileged group within our own battalion. Racial incidents were common.

I hope that some of this material has given you some insight into life in the 363<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company from January 1971-January 1972.

Roger Rahor email 21 August 2004

Rich,

As these communications continue I find myself getting deeper and deeper into the year I spent in Nam. My history is that of many vets who went to that War. Your questions provoke my thinking about what has been unthinkable for a long time. I guess that you need to know that my post Nam history is kind of messy. Jobs, relationships and anxiety brought about by the stress of doing what seemed necessary at that time.

Anyway, your most current e-mail is making me look at what was going on then. You asked how did I get into the Army. The short answer is I was drafted. Driving trucks came as my MOS after I attended radio school at Ft. Dix, N.J. On a weekend pass I ran into a guy I played High School football with. He went through the same training path that I was on and told me how it really was. So, I did just enough to get by but not enough to complete radio school. I believed that radio training led to humping a PRC 25 through the bush. The class I would have graduated with went to Belgium, lived in apartments and wore civvies. Anyway, I then went to truck driving school at Ft. Dix. Upon completion, a small group of us were held over and used as trainers at the truck school. This was 1970. I was led to believe that the war was essentially over and that G.I.'s were hardly ever in combat. Even then I felt that going to Nam was not very likely. The Cold War and all that. Prior to the Army I attended a Community College and I took a course in Contemporary American History. There I researched my term paper on American involvement in Viet Nam and used the resources at the State University at Stony Brook for documentation. I also talked to many Nam Vets who were contemporaries. I found the war to be illegal and immoral. Yet, I felt that I owed a commitment to the U.S. and prepared myself for duty to my country when I was drafted.

You asked how I felt about going to Viet Nam. I was devastated. My feelings were mixed. I still wanted to serve my country, I was made to feel that the War was very much over for G.I.s and the small child in me wanted to experience combat. Maybe even kill someone. My parents contacted relatives that we had in Canada and offered me cash and a car to get out of the U.S. Considering that I had played semi-pro football in 1969 and had been offered a tryout by two NFL teams, I often think that I might have gone on to

play ball in Canada. I made my decision, I would go. At twenty-two years old I needed to become independent. I did not want to quit and run.

You asked about how I felt when coming back. The changes in my life were huge. My ability to live in the society that I had left one year earlier was challenged. Plans that I had made during my tour were not based on reality. I came back a changed person. I felt used, a fool for going and totally unappreciated for doing what I felt was my obligation to this country. I could not talk to anyone about what had happened. I could not explain why I did what I did and I was totally rejected by Veteran organizations that I went to for help or friendship. Relationships with women were difficult. I became a violent person. I hid behaviors by setting myself up where those behaviors were accepted. By tending bar and bouncing in some large clubs I could be what was expected of yet another "crazed Viet Nam Vet". In 1983 I was first diagnosed with PTSS (what became known as PTSD). In spite of all that I finished my B.A.

You asked about how the other drivers felt. In reality I can only speak for myself, yet most of the guys knew that the war was hopeless. Lam Son 719 made most of us think that the ARVN could not keep up with the NVA. The ARVN lost most of their best men there. We could see the difference in the troops that we were in proximity to. We had an obligation to each other. We made sure that we did what we could to keep each other out of trouble. Some of these events were hilarious and some were very frightening. Every day was a challenge. It was dealing with the lifers, the Viet Nameese, the VC or the NVA every day. The trucks were constantly breaking down. The loads were almost always over the capacity of the truck to handle it. When something went wrong there was always a lifer saying that we were committing sabotage and that we would have to pay for the damage. This went on even after ambushes. Speaking for the drivers, we just wanted to do our time and go home, back to the world. There were few people that re-upped among the every day convoy drivers.

You asked why the lifers didn't go out on convoys. The short answer is because they didn't have to. Please understand that we were blessed with a few great men who were either career military or in a position of leadership. The majority of NCO's and officers were not very good. I refer to these bottom feeding low lifes as lifers.

Platoon Lt.s and squad leader NCO's really ran the show on convoy. Our young Lt.s (one was 19), for the most part did fine work as Convoy Commanders. Although Ski and I were left and abandoned by an Lt when our truck broke down near Hoi An on the Chu Lai convoy. He claimed that he radioed for help and took off in a gun truck. A West Point Grad. Luckily a south bound convoy picked us up, towed us to Chu Lai and repaired our truck.

The road remained a place where the BS would not be tolerated. I have seen great acts of courage by officers and other career NCO's on the road. Back in camp, it seemed that because we had the guts to go on the road everyday we were assigned extra duty and harassed.

We had a Commanding Officer (Captain) relieved of command because he refused to go on convoy with us. This was a time of heavy NVA activity in the Hai Van Pass. There were many times that I wish I had his courage. He was a good one.

Many of the NCO's would use any excuse not to go with us. Sometimes the officers would cop out too. There have been convoys that I have been on where the CC (Convoy Commander) was an E-3. How did officers and NCO's get away with it? I'm not sure. There was a constant rotation of officers through our company. The CO when I arrived at the 363rd TC was a great man who respected the job that we were doing. He would go on convoy, fight along side us and stand up for us. He was there for about four months of my tour. We also had a revolving door of First Sgts. The last was the worst. Not everyone was pulling their own weight.

I ended up on the Mercenary because I asked for it. The guys in the crew asked me and I went and made the request to my platoon sergeant, Sgt. Waters. The finest man I have ever known! I was feeling naked out on the jeep and still feel really bad about leaving Larry Cunningham out there on the jeep.

Your news about the 363rd Trans Co being inactivated in Feb. '72 caught me by surprise. I do not know what happened to the guys I left behind. In 1976 I toured the USA by Greyhound Bus and sought out some of the people I served with. I found one or two. No one gave me the information that the Company was inactivated.

Yes, my last name is Rahor.

I would like to ask you a few questions if you don't mind. Do you have any information about combat that my company was involved in? I ask because I have a claim for compensation with the V.A. for PTSD. They have denied my claim many times even though I have been diagnosed with PTSD and have been treated for it at VA facilities for many years. I need documentation that I was in combat or at least there was combat that I could have been involved in.

We were rocketed at Camp Adiner many times and also at Camp Haskins. There were numerous attacks by VC in camp. I am unable to document the attacks up in support of Lam Son 719, the ambushes, ground and rocket attacks because orders were never cut to send me up there. It was a "grab your stuff, your going north for awhile" thing. Records of our convoy ambushes have to be somewhere and I am not able to locate them.

Even my Military Medical records seem to be impossible to locate. I was told by my Company Commander, First Sgt. and Platoon leader, that I was to receive a decoration (Silver Star) two different times and I raised a major complaint each time. I didn't want them. Yet, there should be some information about this somewhere. One of these decorations was initiated by a Marine Lt. up in the Hai Van Pass. The Battalion Clerk, 57th Trans Battalion, would tell me that there were numerous reports written about my

activity during ambushes and that these records seem difficult for the VA to find. I know that I can not find them. Maybe you can help.

I hope that the information that I have given you is able to shine some light on what we faced in 1971 with the 363rd Transportation Company. I went to visit William Cisternelli, in Mass. a few years ago. He worked maintenance in our Company. When he left the company he got a plaque. It read "From the Mekong Delta, to the DMZ, through mud, blood and tears with the 363".

God bless you.

Let me know what else I can do.

-----Original Message-----

From: Roger and Gayle (email address removed)

Sent: Monday, January 17, 2005 8:34 PM

To: Killblane, Richard

Subject: Re: 363rd TC

Richard,

Please excuse my using this old e-mail to contact you. At times my job is too hectic to have very much fun. I guess that you are looking for stories about Nam and some of the things that went on. So much of it rattles through my head at times maybe this will help. As you suggested it is therapy.

On a quiet Sunday we ran a small convoy through the Hai Van Pass going north. From Da Nang to Phu Bai. Five or six 5-ton tractors a gun truck, I don't remember which one, and a lead gun jeep. We cleared the Ville of Lang Co and headed to a place that we always stopped after running down the north side Hai Van. It was a place with a lagoon on the western side and high sand dunes on the east. The South China Sea was on the other side of the dunes. A beautiful place and one we made a regular stop. In the telling it sounds so stupid.

Anyway, we rolled along out of town and noticed a group of Vietnamese standing around in a small crowd at the far end of the dunes. A kid began running toward us waving and we stopped the convoy. The Lt. walked over and came running back, yelling "move the trucks" repeatedly. When he got to us he was shouting "mines, they got the dunes mined." I got the jeep turned around and told the drivers to move their trucks and why. 5-tons, split shifting in reverse, I've never seen it before and I haven't seen it since.

We cleared the area and picked up the Lt. He told the gunner and me that a kid had spotted a mine in the dunes earlier and went to Lang Co and told someone. There happened to be an ARVN EOD specialist home for the weekend and he was in the process of disarming these Chi-Com Claymores when we showed up. There were about eight buried about 6 or 7 feet up. He had to blow one, it was booby-trapped, we all could see that they were set at door height.

The ARVN asked for a lift back to town and I was a bit apprehensive because he had one of these mines with him. I remember it emotionally as large as a sewer cover but it most likely smaller than that. A nice quiet Sunday, with a small convoy didn't mean that it was any safer than some of the mammoth 60-80 truck convoys that we ran.

Please let me know if this is the right thing to be doing. I don't know if you need this stuff or am I just blowing smoke.

Thanks,

Roger