

8th Trans Gp, Oct 66 – 67, Qui Nhon

COL (R) Philip N. Smiley telephone interview by Richard E. Killblane, 2 April 2004.
Cdr 27th Trans Bn, S-4 8th Trans Group.

MAJ Smiley was assigned to organize the 8th Transportation Group at Fort Lewis, Washington, in August 1966. When he walked in to 8th Group Headquarters, he saw LTC Ramsey, the XO, and two other off sitting around one desk. That was all the headquarters had in personnel and equipment. Smiley became the Group S-4. COL J. P. O'Connor commanded the Group. MAJ Murphy was the S-4. They formed 8th Group at Ft Lewis along with several movement control teams. The 54th Transportation Battalion, commanded by LTC Melvin M. Wolfe, was also being organized there. The 54th Battalion left with 8th Group to Vietnam. The 506th Transportation Battalion left for Okinawa from there.

They had to form the group and the battalion headquarters and requisition all the equipment and go through unit testing. They ordered "web packages" to meet them in Vietnam. Web packages included enough lumber, tentage and equipment to house a company of people. They also requisitioned the trucks to meet them in country. The vehicles were not there when the 54th Battalion arrived [23 October 1966]. Six months later, they received their tractors. The 8th Group took control of the 27th and 54th Battalions.

Smiley arrived in Vietnam on 4 October 1966. They received push packages in Vietnam or depot equipment sent to Vietnam. The depot people supposed to meet the unit TOE equipment, clothing supply. The depot had no accountability of what it had. As Group S4, Smiley went down to depot and picked out whatever he needed. A year later, the Support Command received depot personnel and got accountability of what they had.

LTC Smiley assumed command of the 27th Transportation Battalion from MAJ Leo T. McMahon in January 1967. The 27th Battalion still had old M54s that it had come over with. Four companies of the 27th Battalion received International Harvester Company (IHC) tractors in early spring or summer. They were not dual tandem and were too light to pull the load. Pulling heavy loads up the mountains everyday destroyed them in 2 months. The battalion finally started to get in M52A2.

Two companies of tankers, the 359th TC and 60th [61st] TC, were transferred to the 240th QM Battalion after his arrival in January 1967. BG Meyers, Commander of the Qui Nhon Support Command, directed to turn over. They were already in country by then.

A platoon of GOERs was given to the 359th POL Co. The 359th came over without its equipment. GOERs drove around Pleiku. They were not good for long hauls.

The road going up to Pleiku 110 miles shook the truck to death. VC were laying booby traps from the time Smiley arrived there. The 54th and 27th Battalions built gun trucks before Christmas 1966. They build sandbag pillboxes on the backs of 2 ½-ton or 5-ton

trucks, because they did not have the ring mounts for the machineguns. They just put one M60 in back. All were built about the same time. They also put steel plating on the sides of truck bed before the ambush of 2 September 1967. They did not have more than two gun trucks. This created so much weight that they had to replace the shocks at a rapid rate.

After ambush on 2 September 1967, 8th Group put more gun trucks with the convoys. They put one gun truck in front and one behind then one in center in a convoy of 30 trucks. They increased the box to include two soldiers with M60s. They did not increase the number of gun jeeps. Steel plating started arriving after Smiley left around 4 October 1967. The ring mounts had not arrived yet either.

They also received air security when available. L19 "Birddogs" flew surveillance anytime intelligence suspected enemy was in the area. They did not get it on a daily basis.

COL O'Conner commanded the 8th Group until he returned to the United States for an eye operation before Christmas 1966. LTC Ramsey the group XO, replaced him in command until around March 1967. Then Noble Taylor assumed command until September 1967. Smiley commanded the Battalion until September 1967 and left Vietnam around 4 October 1968. LTC John Burke, Commander of the 124th Transportation Battalion at Pleiku, held the command until COL Joe O. Bellino arrived. Bellino was gregarious, full of life and everyone liked him.