

13th Transportation Battalion

The history of the 13th Transportation Battalion is unique in Transportation Corps history. It was a short-lived unit that had no lineage from World War II, like most of the other battalions. It was one of the few transportation battalions that were organized as a product of the Cold War. What made it unique is that its history is tied to a period of significant transformation in Army organizational structure. The history of the 13th Battalion tells the story of role of a transportation battalion in a Pentomic Division.

After 1949, the Army was in the throws of responding to the growing Cold War in Europe and President Dwight Eisenhower's promise to reduce the defense budget after the Korean War. That year the Communist Chinese led by Mao Tse Tung drove the Nationalist Chinese off the mainland. The Soviet Union had also tested their nuclear bomb after having forced the installation of communist governments in its areas of occupation, which isolated the Eastern Bloc countries from the rest of Europe. In 1949, the other European nations formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for mutual defense against Soviet aggression. In 1955, Germany had become America's new ally and the Army of Occupation in Germany had transformed into a first line of defense. The peacetime US Army had an enemy: Communism. For the next three decades the American Army would focus its efforts at stemming the tide of communist expansion throughout the world. Since both the United States and Russia had atomic weapons, the US Army had to rethink its role in a nuclear battlefield.

The US Army instituted radical reorganization to create the Army of the future. The United States could not match the Soviet Army with manpower or tanks, but instead counted more on the use of tactical nuclear weapons with streamlined combat units. Under General Maxwell Taylor's guidance, the Army reduced the strength of its divisions from 18,762 to 13,748. The division organization eliminated the three Regimental Combat Teams and its battalions and replaced them with five battle groups in revised Tables of Organization and Equipment of October 1956. This was called the Pentomic Division because each battle group contained just five companies. It was essentially a brigade-size headquarters, with no permanently assigned units that could be task-organized for missions. Division trains contained a transportation battalion.

The 13th Transportation Battalion was first activated on 20 June 1957 under the 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Richardson, Alaska. The battalion along with the 2nd Infantry Division reduced to zero strength on 17 December 1957 and transferred its flags to Fort Benning on 17 March 1958. The 10th Mountain Division had also returned from Germany as part of the GYROSCOPE Program. This program, started in 1955, paired up two divisions, one overseas and the other in the United States. Instead of sending individual replacements over, the two divisions would rotate en mass. The stateside division would provide the basic training for the overseas unit. Due to expenses of travel and complaints that rotating divisions lost their combat effectiveness within several weeks before and after rotation, GYROSCOPE ended in 1958, when the 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Benning replaced the 10th Mountain Division. The 10th Mountain Division was inactivated shortly after its arrival. The 2nd Infantry Division was

reorganized into a Pentomic Division out of the remaining personnel and equipment of the 10th under the Reorganization of Current Infantry Divisions (ROCID). Similarly, the 13th Transportation Battalion was reorganized on 14 June 1958 from what was left of the remaining troops.

In August 1958, Lieutenant Edward Honor was assigned to the 13th Transportation Battalion and Lieutenant Bill Danzeisen as the Division Movements Officer in the Battalion Headquarters. Both had joined the battalion a few months later it was still embroiled in the transition between the end of GYROSCOPE and the beginning of the Pentomic divisions. More changes would follow as the US Army searched for the right organization for the future nuclear battlefield. This led to a period of confusion in the Army, as no two assignments were similar. Officers had to adapt.

The 2nd “Indianhead” Division became a basic training division for soldiers bound for Germany. Companies B and C of the Transportation Battalion had armored personnel carriers (APC), both the older M-75 and later M-59. The latest model of APC, the M-113, began to appear in the inventory in 1959. Company A had three different models of 2½ ton trucks. The five battle groups had no armored personnel carriers and were entirely dependent upon the 13th Transportation Battalion for any form of transportation. When the battle groups needed to take their infantrymen to the field, the transportation companies received requirements for armored personnel carriers just as they received requests for trucks.

The battalion’s responsibility also included loading the graduates of infantry training onto troop trains bound for Savannah, Georgia, to ship out to Germany. Lieutenant Colonel Rue D. Fish, Jr., commander of the 13th Battalion, was a sophisticated man who did not use vulgar language. He was a stickler for little details, though. Colonel Fish made his drivers rehearse driving the route to the rail, loading ramps, until they could make the turns without a single truck having to back up. These movements subsequently ran like clockwork. Fish could be a challenging man to work for, especially under the circumstances that Honor would walk into.

Although he had commanded a company before, Lieutenant Honor was assigned as the Executive Officer of Company A. The company had been thrown together from men and equipment left over from the 10th Mountain Division and new recruits. It had no existing Standard Operating Procedures. The leaders had to build the company from the ground up. Everything was new but the equipment, and it was in pretty bad shape. The company did, however, have plenty of good soldiers who had tried to make the company work. It only needed experienced leadership to get it on the right track.

Honor’s Company Commander, Captain Christopher, was an infantry officer who knew little about maintenance. Second Lieutenant John Souave, a graduate of Boston University, was supposed to have been in charge of maintenance. When Honor asked him what he did in the motor pool, he answered, “Just what the sergeants tell me.” With that honesty, John and Ed became very good friends. Although a very capable officer, Souave had other ambitions. He later left the service to pursue a banking career and

retired as Chairman of the Board for First Boston. The responsibility for maintenance fell to Honor. Inheriting the worst of three transportation companies in maintenance, Honor would see how his leadership methods stacked up.

Honor managed by walking around. That way he could see firsthand problem areas without their descriptions being filtered through translation. He also got to know the men responsible for turning the wrenches. He felt that if a leader did not know what his troops were supposed to do or how they were supposed to do it, then how could he assist them. Honor enjoyed being on the ground where his troops worked giving them instructions if necessary. He liked to stay involved and not stand off to the side. A positive aspect of the Officers Basic Course at Fort Knox was that it taught officers precisely what their men did. Honor had seen other officers become “nervous as hell” if they did not understand what their men did. Honor’s walks revealed problems, and his brain trust of officers and noncommissioned officers found solutions.

Since the battalion was a brand-new unit, it had its share of growing pains. Company A, however, was by far the worst company. On the bright side, this company could only improve. It had a terrible maintenance system if it had any system at all. Whenever parts came in, the maintenance personnel would pitch them into a big box. They had no idea what they had or needed. Honor instructed them to organize a system for accountability, which they did. He knew that transportation units depended upon their equipment to do their job. This required excellent maintenance. He liked to say, “We are going to maintain hard and we will play hard, but let’s maintain first, then we’ll play.”

Company A also suffered from shortages of tools for maintaining vehicles. It set up display methods to check things very quickly. Honor had the company pick up some old canvas from the salvage yard. They then drew the image of the tools on the canvas so the officers and NCOs could conduct quick inventories every time the men prepared for maintenance. They borrowed this concept from *PS Magazine*, which taught methods on how to maintain equipment. Honor had built a library of such magazines. Although he knew maintenance as well as his NCOs, Honor also learned that soldiers do well at those things the boss checks.

The officers and NCOs developed ways to determine if general tightening of nuts-and-bolts vehicles was taking place. They required drivers to put a chalk mark on every nut tightened, so at a glance supervisors could tell if something was missed. They used a process where a part of the vehicle was inspected each day so that by the end of the week the entire vehicle was inspected. Any irresponsible soldier then answered to the company commander.

The company had enough mechanics to assign one per platoon. During Motor Stables, if a supervisor from the platoon found something that the mechanics needed to fix, it immediately went in for maintenance. The mechanics also developed a greater sense of responsibility for their vehicles. Again, Honor decided to run platoon competitions to build a little esprit. He sincerely believed that most soldiers wanted to do a good job and get recognized for it.

These innovative methods brought up the standards. As they began to win a few competitions, morale started to improve. Honor learned another trick. He found that by networking up at Division G-3 (Operations) and G-4 (Logistics) he could check the master training schedule and anticipate taskings before they came to his company. Company A handled all troop movements by truck. This gave him more time to prepare, plan and organize for the missions, this proved a worthwhile lesson and added to his next principle: "Understand what happens and how decisions are made at least two levels above."

In eight months, Company A went from worst in battalion maintenance to the best. Honor had proved his talent. By September 1959, Honor assumed command of Company A. He commanded it for the next five months. But Honor had already commanded for fifteen months in Korea, it was time to give another officer a chance to command. He had essentially produced the greatest results as the executive officer.

In January 1960, Honor became the Assistant S-3 for the battalion. Honor learned that successful officers came from operations positions. When he had to serve on staff, he would seek out those jobs. He would develop the all-important staff skill of planning and coordinating training and operations with the commanders and other staffs. This assignment in the S-3 polished his staff skills, preparing him for future staff assignments. Commanders command while staff officers plan and coordinate their commander's directives. A good staff officer simplifies his commander's decision process and turns his directives into action.

In that capacity, Honor also ran the division's driver school. This was an experience in itself. The drivers presented a challenge. Honor felt that the number of drivers that passed their driver's test measured his success better than how many he could fail. This led to another principle. "Leaders are teachers and coaches." As a company commander, he first learned that watching his soldiers and unit improve resembled watching his own children grow and mature. There came with it a great sense of personal pride in having helped someone. He believed that if a student failed to learn, then the teacher failed to teach. There were some cases, however, where one's best effort did not always work.

One young soldier had been promised the position of being a brigade commander's driver if he earned his license. He desperately wanted the job and tried very hard to learn to drive. Honor took a personal interest in teaching him. Honor even told him that driving was like dancing. "You listen to the rhythm of the engine, it tells you when to clutch and when to shift." In spite of Honor's coaching, the kid just could not learn how to drive a stick shift. Honor had given his best effort and accepted this failure.

Lieutenant Colonel Walter Johnson followed in command behind Fish. A superb commander, he was a down-to-earth leader who did not get excited over small things. Johnson believed in mission-type orders. He would issue a task, and then leave his subordinates to carry it out so he could visit with his soldiers. Honor found another leader he could identify with. In January 1961, newly promoted Captain Honor left for

the Transportation Officers Advanced Course.

Second Lieutenant John Pelham arrived in the battalion during the first week of October 1960. He was a Transportation Corps officer fresh out of Texas A&M College and the Transportation Officers Basic Course and was assigned as the 2nd Platoon Leader for C Company. He signed for 20 M-59 APCs. Although his company had APCs, the other officers assigned to the company were also Transportation Corps. His company commander had just finished his branch detail with the infantry and was Airborne and Ranger qualified. First Lieutenant Robert Koneval, a graduate of John Carroll University, was the 1st Platoon Leader. This fine school had a Transportation Corps affiliated ROTC program and had a fine reputation as did Texas A&M. Koneval had also just finished a tour with transportation in the Azores. Pelham and Koneval debated over the quality of preparation their alma maters given them for careers in the Army, but Pelham had to admit that since Koneval won out mostly on account of his seniority.

As a platoon leader, Pelham had responsibility for the management, care and feeding of the NCOs and enlisted men in his platoon. Fortunately, his platoon had high quality NCOs and well trained “track” drivers. The 2nd Infantry Division was still heavily involved in training of infantry soldiers from the completion of Advanced Individual Training (AIT) through Advanced Unit Training (AUT). This included everything from squad in attack through platoon and company in attack. As a training unit, C company did not have a typical table of organization and equipment (TO&E) makeup. Instead of three platoons of 15 to 20 APCs per company, the company had two platoons of 20 to 22 APCs.

All the support units of the division were quartered in the temporary wooden barracks built during World War II on an area known as Sand Hill, while the infantry units were located across the reservation in the Harmony Church area. To support the infantry training, the APCs had to make many trips between the two areas. Pelham remembered,

Although the drivers are admonished to travel in straight lines and to maintain sufficient distance between themselves and the vehicles in front of them to afford good vision, they often would form echelons and take up half or more of the road so as to close up the distance. Hence, anyone traveling in the opposite direction, approaching a column of such vehicles is well advised to keep far to the right side of the road and to slow down or stop while the vehicles pass. One day, a column of my APCs was approached by a Major who failed to do so and was hit by one of them. Needless to say, much of the left side of his Jeep was “removed”; fortunately, no one was injured, nor was I court-martialed, although the Major did try to bring disciplinary actions against the driver and me. Cooler and wiser heads prevailed and he was advised to drop it and be much more careful when next he met a column of tracked vehicles—TRACKED VEHICLES HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY.

The M-59 APC was equipped with a .50 caliber machine gun mounted in the turret. When transporting an Infantry squad, the squad leader occupies the cupola

and fires the machine gun as needed. As part of the training provided the Infantry units, we trained the squad leaders in the care and use of the guns. While seemingly a good idea, the guns themselves were very difficult to deal with. First, they were mounted on their side with the ammunition belt feeding shells up over the top of the cupola down into the gun's breach. Second, the sideways mounting and the difficulty of ammo feeding compounded a problem keeping the guns "timed" and fed properly. Suffice to say these problems combined to created a challenge to anyone with the responsibility of operating them; hence, the need for training the squad leaders in their use. We used a remote long-distance range for this purpose and a mock-up of the cupola with its gun for ease of viewing the gun, the ammo belt and the feeding mechanism. The training usually worked well, but as with many such operations, there were occasional malfunctions. Fortunately, we never had one blow up!

Around the middle of 1961, the 2nd Infantry Division, along with the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, became part of Strategic Army Corps (STRAC). This meant that the division could deploy to any contingency with short notice. During that time, the division went to Fort Stewart, Georgia for its annual training exercise (ATX). Pelham remembered, "One of the airborne divisions provided some very lively and realistic aggressor operations against our units. This became a little more real to us when later; we were being made ready for impending deployment to Germany."

During the summer of 1961, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev demanded that the United States, Britain and France pull their forces out of West Berlin. On 13 August, Khrushchev flexed his muscles and closed the border to Berlin. President John F. Kennedy responded by mobilizing a number of divisions for possible deployment to Germany. The 2nd Infantry Division participated in a two-week training exercise at the Naval Training Base in Norfolk, Virginia, where they learned procedures for transporting our equipment via ships and techniques for making beach assaults. In addition, they received their inoculations necessary for deployment, drafted wills and powers of attorney, and received an issue of winter clothing, sleeping bags, and equipping protective masks. Fortunately, the Berlin Crisis passed and the 2nd Infantry Division did not deploy to Europe.

Divisional training continued until the summer of 1962, rumors circulated that the Soviet Union shipped substantial offensive weapons to Cuba that might include medium range bombers or nuclear missiles. As the closest Army unit to the island, the 2nd Infantry Division was tasked to send units and materiel to Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, for possible deployment. Pelham participated in the loading of equipment and materiel on planes bound for the Florida staging base. Pelham finally left the 13th Battalion on 2 August 1962. In October, Kennedy had photographic proof in hand that the Soviet Union had shipped nuclear missiles to the island. Kennedy deployed units to Florida to stage for an invasion of Cuba while the US Navy quarantined the island. Fortunately, Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles and the units returned home. That was the last significant event in the history of the 13th Transportation Battalion.

The concept of the universal Pentomic Division was seen as unrealistic. In 1959, General Bruce Clark, Commander of the Continental Army Command, put his staff to work on a new organizational model for a more mobile army. In field tests, this concept did not meet the Army needs around the world. General Herbert B. Powell followed Clark as commander of the Continental Army Command in 1961. Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Clyde Eddleman, directed Powell to develop a new organization of the infantry and armored divisions for fielding in 1965. Powell called his study, the Reorganization Objective Army Divisions (ROAD). The planners felt that the infantry battalion organization was much more appropriate than a battle group. The division would consist of three brigades with three battalions each. This was a return to the triangular division. The new organization eliminated the transportation battalion of the division for a supply and transportation battalion in the Division Support Command (DISCOM).

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy outlined his “flexible response” doctrine. His Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, directed that the Continental Army Command develop an air assault division based upon the study by a board of officers lead by Lieutenant General Hamilton H. Howze. The 2nd Infantry Division provided the majority of the soldiers for the activation of the experimental division, 11th Air Assault Division, on 1 February 1963. It was reorganized according to the ROAD Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) on 15 February 1963. Consequently, the 13th Transportation Battalion was inactivated at Fort Benning on 25 March 1963 and its one truck company rolled over into the Supply and Transportation (S&T) Battalion.

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