

7th Transportation Battalion



*7th Transportation Battalion, crest (l) and coat of arms(r)
mouseover each for a description*

World War II

Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment (HHD), 7th Quartermaster Troop Transport Battalion was constituted on 17 June 1943 and was activated at Camp Livingston, Louisiana on 25 August 1943. The battalion redesignated on 30 November 1943 as the HHD, 7th Quartermaster Battalion (Mobile). The 7th Battalion was inactivated 14 November 1945 at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. For its participation in WWII the battalion received Campaign Participation credit for the Rhineland and Central Europe campaigns.

Quartermaster truck units went to the Transportation Corps following World War II. While on inactive status, the 7th Battalion redesignated and reorganized as the HHD, 7th Transportation Corps Truck Battalion on 1 August 1946. On 16 October 1952, the battalion redesignated as the HHD, 7th Transportation Corps Truck Battalion and allotted to the Regular Army. The 7th Battalion was again activated at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, on 17 November 1952. The battalion was redesignated the HHD, 7th Transportation Battalion (Truck) on 25 June 1959 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Vietnam War

The 7th Battalion, known as the “Orient Express,” deployed to Long Binh, Vietnam on 2 August 1966. The battalion was assigned to the 48th Transportation Group until 1971, when it was assigned to the 4th Transportation Command under the US Army Support Command, Saigon. The 7th Battalion assumed control of all the tractor and trailer companies: 10th, 62nd, 233rd, 446th, 534th, and 572nd Medium Truck Companies and 538th Medium Petroleum Truck.

The 6th and 7th Transportation Battalions were components of the 48th Transportation Group at the port of Saigon. The battalions often worked in conjunction with each other on operations. The 6th Battalion operated 2 ½ and 5-ton trucks with S&P trailers while 7th Battalion operated M52 trucks.

The Viet Cong ambushed a 48th Group convoy on 25 August 1968. It was a typical monsoon season day. The clouds were low, visibility was poor, and intermittent rain drenched the area. The large resupply convoy (81 trucks of the 48th Transportation Group, the 7th Battalion's parent unit) assembled at Long Binh, near Saigon. The convoy assembled with reefer trucks in the front, followed by supply trucks, and fuel and ammo trucks in the rear. In this configuration, if a fuel or ammo truck became disabled it would not stop the entire convoy and the rest of the convoy could speed out of the hostile area. Convoys resupplied the 25th Infantry Divisions (ID) 1st Brigade camp, daily at Tay Ninh located just seven miles from the Cambodian border in the Tay Ninh province. The famed Ho Chi Minh trail ran near the province. Tay Ninh is located 45 miles northwest of Saigon. This convoy normally took a few hours to complete, because the mandated convoy speed limit was 20 miles per hour.

The convoy proceeded on Main Supply Route (MSR) 1 from Saigon through the village Hoc Mon, west past the 25th ID base camp at Cu Chi, through the village of Trang Bang, across the bridge at Soui Cao Creek (also called Soui-Cide Bridge, because of a large number of ambushes that occurred there) on to Go Dau Ha at the intersection of MSR 1 and MSR 22.



Truck of the 572nd Transportation Company, part of the Gypsy Bandits (photo by Henry M. Bechtold)

The convoy next turned northwest onto MSR 22 through the village of Ap Nhi—about 4.5 miles northwest of the Go Dau Ha intersection. The convoy would be completed after passing through Tay Ninh about 20 miles from Ap Nhi. Road security from the Go Dau Ha intersection was the responsibility of the 1st Brigade of the 25th ID, but that was impossible due to a reduction of force ordered by the Division's Commanding General. The reduction in force was the result of the feared third phase of the TET Offensive (Vietnamese Lunar New Year). The 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 25th ID usually secured the convoy route, but the 3rd Brigade

was pulled back to Saigon to defend the city and its approach routes. From 17 to 24 August, the 1st Brigade fended off thirteen battalion or regimental attacks—including seven attacks on 1st Brigade bases. The 1st Brigade's Intelligence (S-2) determined that 16,000 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) combat ready troops of the 5th and 9th Divisions accompanied by an anti-aircraft battalion were leading the offensive with two attached VC battalions against the 1st Brigade. This was in contrast to the 25th ID's intelligence, which believed that Saigon was the target. The 25th ID then stripped the 1st Brigade of the 2/34th Armor, moving the unit back to Cu Chi, while still ordering the 1st Brigade to carry out all regular duties and that the "MSR clear and secure" mission should be supplied if time and manning allowed. This was a fatal mistake. The Brigade commander believed he could not defend his own bases let alone the MSR; he informed the 25th ID commander of his concerns. The 1st Brigade was left with three undermanned rifle companies, three undermanned mechanized infantry companies, and two 105-mm artillery batteries—there were no armor or armor cavalry units attached.

MSR 22 was flanked on the sides for about a mile by the Ap Nhi and the Ben Cui Rubber Plantation (known locally as Little Rubber). The Ap Nhi side was mostly farm land while the Little Rubber side had rubber trees growing to fifteen feet of the road. Between the trees and the road were a drainage ditch and an earthen berm. The 88th NVA Regiment elements moved into the Little Rubber on the night of 24 August and prepared to ambush the Tay Ninh resupply convoy. At 1145 hours the convoy entered the sleepy village of Ap Nhi. It was misting and raining and the ceiling was at about 200 feet. The convoy met a column of Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) soldiers marching along the road. The column was marching on the north side of the MSR adjacent to the Little Rubber. The lead vehicles of the convoy had started to leave the village and the ammo and fuel vehicle were alongside the column when ARVN soldiers opened fire on the convoy. The ARVN soldiers were actually VC and NVA dressed in ARVN uniforms. This was the signal to begin the ambush by the VC and NVA troops positioned in Little Rubber and enemy forces began an intense barrage of rocket, machine gun, and automatic weapons fire. A fuel truck was immediately hit and blown up stranding the remainder of the convoy. Thirty-one trucks in front of the destroyed fuel truck sped away, but 50 trucks were stuck in the mile long kill zone. Later an ammunition truck at the rear of the convoy was hit. The initial assault had hit its mark with those two vehicles—sealing the convoy in place. The next targets were gun jeeps and vehicles with radios. The NVA and VC had thoroughly planned the ambush. The ambush occurred at the southernmost limits 1st Brigade TOAR. None of the 1st Brigade's available artillery was within range of the ambush. The low ceiling prevented air support from initially being used.



SGT William W. Seay

http://www.transchool.lee.army.mil/school/pages/medal_of_honor.htm#seay0
for more on SGT William Seay

7th Battalion Army Transporter, Sergeant William W. Seay, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his gallantry during the ambush. His citation reads, in part, “When his convoy was forced to stop, Sgt. Seay immediately dismounted and took a defensive position behind the wheels of a vehicle loaded with high-explosive ammunition. As the violent North Vietnamese assault approached to within 10 meters of the road, Sgt. Seay opened fire, killing 2 of the enemy. He then spotted a sniper in a tree approximately 75 meters to his front and killed him. When an enemy grenade was thrown under an ammunition trailer near his position, without regard for his own safety he left his protective cover, exposing himself to intense enemy fire, picked up the grenade, and threw it back to the North Vietnamese position, killing 4 more of the enemy and saving the lives of the men around him. Another enemy grenade landed approximately 3 meters from Sgt. Seay's position. Again, Sgt. Seay left his covered position and threw the armed grenade back upon the assaulting enemy. After returning to his position he was painfully wounded in the right wrist; however, Sgt. Seay continued to give encouragement and direction to his fellow soldiers. After moving to the relative cover of a shallow ditch, he detected 3 enemy soldiers who had penetrated the position and were preparing to fire on his comrades. Although weak from loss of blood and with his right hand immobilized, Sgt. Seay stood up and fired his rifle with his left hand, killing all 3 and saving the lives of the other men in his location. As a result of his heroic action, Sgt. Seay was mortally wounded by a sniper's bullet.”

Colonel Paul Swanson commanded the 48th Group beginning in November 1969. At that time, Lieutenant Colonel Orvil C. Metheny commanded the 6th Battalion and Lieutenant Colonel John D. Bruen commanded the 7th Battalion. Metheny went on to become a Brigadier General and Bruen attained the rank of Lieutenant General. Prior to Swanson, battalion commanders served only six-month tours in Vietnam. Swanson believed if

combat commanders had to serve one-year tour, then logisticians should too; Metheny and Bruen each served one-year in Vietnam. Their continuity greatly enhanced truck battalion operations in Vietnam for the 48th Group. The battalions ran mostly “Round Robins” meaning they departed in the morning and returned at night. Swanson also rotated companies that performed line haul operations to the Rest and Recreation area. This ensured that all companies could take advantage of the vacation area and were even provided a half of a day off when they delivered to there. Swanson assigned drivers their own truck and allowed the drivers to personalize them. Swanson believed the drivers would take care of their truck if they were allowed to add armor or paint the wheel hubs. Swanson and Metheny did oppose the use of gun trucks. Both believed the combat commander was responsible for convoy security and they did not want to interfere with the infantry’s mission. Swanson told the infantry if they wanted ammunition and rations they had to keep the Viet Cong away from the convoys. Three serious ambushes occurred during Swanson’s command.

The first to respond to the ambush were “Huey C Model” helicopters from the 25th Aviation Battalion. These aircraft were equipped with two door gunners, fourteen rockets, and a mini-gun. A Huey pilot saw friendly forces in the ditch and enemy soldiers were unloading the trucks and carrying the supplies into the tree line. The helicopters had a tough time engaging the enemy. The ceiling was still low and the regular angles of attack were impossible. The Huey’s normally rolled in on the target with a steep dive from about 1500 feet—the low ceiling meant the pilots had to fire rockets flat often over or under shooting the target. It took eight hours for the division ground reaction force to arrive; the convoy was pinned down the entire time. The delay in the response was caused by a communications problem and the remoteness of the ambush location. Thirteen to fourteen transporters lost their lives in the ambush. Following the ambush the battalion installed 30-caliber machine guns on battalion jeeps. The division also began adding armored personnel carriers, tanks, armored cars, and helicopter air support to reinforce the convoys. Up until the Phu Con Bridge was built, convoys had to pass through Saigon. Going through Saigon made convoy travel time too long to return the same day. The bridge made the convoys safer and quicker.

For the 7th Battalion’s service in Vietnam, the battalion received the Meritorious Unit Citations for July 1968 to March 1969 and April 1969 to September 1969. The battalion departed Vietnam on 29 March 1972 and inactivated at Ft. Lewis, Washington on 30 March 1972.

Post War

The Commander of 1st Corps Support Command (COSCOM) wanted the command and control of the motor truck companies to fall under a different transportation battalion and not the 46th General Support Group. LTC Paul Hurley activated the 774th Transportation Battalion (Motor Transport) (Provisional) in late 1972 with the idea that it would receive TOE status and adopt the honors and lineage of the 774th Transportation Group. The battalion assumed control of the 126th Medium Truck Company, 546th Light/Medium Truck Company, 839th Airborne Car Company, Corps (3/4-ton), 403rd Terminal Transfer

Company, 140th and 172nd Cargo and Documentation Detachments. Different units at Fort Bragg gave up personnel billets each for the provisional battalion. The 330th Movement Control Battalion contributed 0-5 and CSM billets along with about a dozen other positions. In July 1972, the 330th Battalion was activated to manage the movement of soldiers, equipment and supplies for the XVIII Airborne Corps. The 774th Provisional Battalion answered directly to COSCOM. However, when the 774th Provisional Battalion received its TOE status it would become the 7th Battalion instead. The 7th Transportation Battalion was reactivated in conjunction with a change of command ceremony on 21 July 1974. LTC William B. McGrath assumed command of the battalion. The 7th Battalion assumed the responsibilities of the 774th Provisional Battalion.

Operation Urgent Fury, Grenada

To curb the expansion of communism in Central America, President Reagan ordered the invasion of the Island of Grenada, Operation Urgent Fury, in the Caribbean in October 1983. The US Marines took the northern half of the island by amphibious assault while the Army Rangers seized the Point Salinas air Port by airborne insertion followed by the landing of the 82nd Airborne Division. The 403rd (Arrival/Departure Airfield Control Group) (A/DACG) Company coordinated the flow of air traffic in and out of the tiny island.

The unit deployed soldiers to St. Croix, Virgin Islands following the aftermath of the effects of Hurricane Hugo in September 1989. The 403rd again provided Arrival/Departure Airfield Control Group (A/DACG) and upon arrival, organized and directed the movement of critically needed supplies and expedited the evacuation of stranded citizens.

Operation Just Cause, Panama

Drug indictments against the military leader of Panama, Manuel Noriega, created another US crisis in 1988. Southern Command developed two contingency plans, one for deployment and the other for offensive operations. The deployment plan initially required 96 hours of deployment into country to cover the infiltration of Special Operations Forces (SOF). The offensive plan called for simultaneous strikes at H-hour with the SOF targeting command and control facilities and the Army Forces neutralizing the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF). Essentially the SOF would cut the head off of the snake and the rest would kill the body. Southern Command conducted two deployments in Panama as a response to a coup in 1988 and Noriega's nullification of the presidential elections in May 1989. On December 19, 1989, Southern Command executed Operation Just Cause. SOF, helicopters and tanks had infiltrated over two days then the Rangers and a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division parachuted in at H-hour. By the time the day was over, simultaneous strikes had caused the PDF to cease to exist.

There were only two C-141 capable airfields in the Panama City area. Since the primary means of deployment into Panama was by air and the US had to have two points of entry. This required the Rangers and 82nd to seize Torrijos-Tocumen International Airport. One platoon of the 403rd A/DACG parachuted in with the 82nd at Torrijos and another landed to run the operations at Howard Air Force Base.

The 7th Battalion sent elements from three units to set up and operate a Transportation Motor Pool (TMP), a Class IX supply point and two A/DACGs. The TMP run by the 126th Transportation Company and Class IX supply point run by the 249th Supply and 612th Quartermaster Companies along with the 129th Postal Detachment directly supported the XVIII Airborne Corps.

Operation Desert Shield/Storm

Operation Desert Shield/Storm was the next test for the 7th Transportation Battalion's soldiers. The battalion deployed almost 1,000 soldiers to Southwest Asia in August 1990. The battalion received recognition for its establishment of Log Base Charlie, with the movement of over 300,000 short tons of supplies. Additionally, the battalion ran the Transportation Consolidation Center-North, providing rapid redeployment support to the XVIII Airborne Corps units in a record 21 days and over 500 miles. The battalion drove over 6 million miles during these operations. Finally, the battalion provided rigger support throughout the entire theater of operations rigging in excess of 1,300 tons of supplies and dropped over 130 tons during the ground war.

7th Transportation Battalion riggers deployed to Turkey in support of Operation Provide Comfort rigging supplies for airdrop to the Kurdish refugees left stranded after war. The battalion's soldiers assisted in the rigging effort which resulted in over 7,000 CDS bundles dropped in a 30-day period. It is the largest humanitarian airdrop mission on record.

Next elements of the battalion deployed to support operations at Guantanamo Naval Base.

Hurricane Andrew hit Southern Florida devastating Dade County on 21 August 1992. It was the third strongest hurricane to hit the United States on record. Elements of the 7th Battalion deployed as part of Joint Task Force Andrew to provide relief in the form of food and shelter for the hurricane victims.

The 129th Postal Company deployed to Somalia in support of Operations Restore. In 1994, elements of the battalion deployed under the 46th Corps Support Group to Haiti in support of Operation Uphold Democracy in 1993.

Other elements deployed to Bosnia in support of United Nations peace keeping missions.

Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan

In response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Towers on 11 September 2001, President George Bush called it an act of war and determined to hunt down those responsible. Intelligence evidence indicated that the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organization al-Qaeda led by Osama Bin Laden was responsible and hiding in Afghanistan. In October, the United States launched air attacks against the Taliban government harboring Bin Laden and sent in Special Forces. They opened up the logistic support base at Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan, known by the soldiers as K2. In late November the Marines seized Kandahar and in December the 10th Mountain Division seized Bagram. These became the Around February 2002, the 530th CSB moved by C-130 and opened up the Bagram APOD. The 7th Transportation Battalion replaced the 530th CSB at K2.

SPC Jason A. Disney, of the 7th Transportation Battalion, died shortly after sustaining injuries during a construction project when a piece of heavy equipment fell on him at Bagram Air Base. He died on 13 February 2002.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

The 7th Battalion deployed to Camp Anaconda, Iraq, and provided command and control for truck convoys in the most heavily ambushed area in Iraq, the Sunni Triangle.