

1097th Transportation (Medium Boat) Company

The 159th Transportation Battalion was activated at Ft Eustis, Virginia, on 1 September 1953. At that time it had lettered LCM boat companies, from A, B, C and D. With the end of the Korean War in 1953, the Army disbanded its Engineer Special Brigades and transferred the responsibility for amphibious landings to the Transportation Corps. The 159th Transportation Battalion assumed the responsibility for operating landing craft for combat and logistical support during joint amphibious operations and tactical mobility, combat and logistical support in the ship to shore missions. It became the only designated combat battalion in the Transportation Corps. Many of its original members were veterans from the inactivated 2nd Engineer Special Brigade, which had conducted the Inchon landing.

Each LCM company was authorized two 65-foot steel hull command boats, one 46-foot steel hull control boat and 33 LCMs. Its first landing craft were the WWII vintage LCM-6s but by 1955 the battalion received the newer LCM-8s.

In 1954, the battalion commander, LTC Michael D. Isrin, January 1954 to February 1957, received authorization for the battalion to blouse their boots, wear the green leadership tabs and red tape on side of their trousers at knee level to denote shore party. He developed the unit insignia and the motto, "Hit the Beach."

The Soviet Union tested their first nuclear device in 1949 which heightened the fear of a war. The shortest distance for Soviet long range bombers to attack the United States with nuclear bombs was across the Arctic Circle. The US Air Force established a line of Distant Early Warning (DEW) stations from Thule, Greenland to the tip of Alaska in 1952. In spring of 1951, landing craft from the 159th Battalion were attached to the 373rd Transportation Major Port (TMP) to Thule, Greenland as part of Operation BLUEJAY. In February 1952, the 373rd TMP conducted Operation Support of North Atlantic Construction (SUNAC) 52. LCMs and LCUs from the 159th discharged cargo and equipment for the construction of the radar stations along the DEW Line. The deployment to Thule Greenland to conduct the LOTS operation during SUNEK became the first deployment for the 159th. The boats were prepositioned in Greenland and crews of the boat companies participated in annual SUNEK LOTS operations every year until 1963.

On 25 September 1959, the Battalion was reorganized as HHC, 159th Transportation Battalion with Companies A, B, and C reorganized and redesignated as the 1097th, 1098th and 1099th Transportation (Medium Boat) Companies, respectively. D Company was disbanded. On 13 December 1965, HHC, 159th was redesignated HHD, 159th.

In May 1959, the company received the larger and faster LCM-8's. With LCM-8's, the unit was capable of transporting 720 short tons of general cargo per day in ship-to-shore or shore-to-shore operations. The primary mission of the unit was to provide and operate landing craft for the movement of personnel and cargo for Army water terminal operations. LCM-8's were well suited for river and inland waterway operations due to its shallow draft. The LCM-8 is steel welded, twin 27 inch screw craft. It is powered by four marine GMC 6-71 diesel engines designed to land heavy equipment, trucks, trailers, and tanks. The craft are 73 feet long and 24

feet wide. When fully loaded the craft can carry 60 short tons. The LCM-8 could carry 200 personnel on short missions. The craft traveled between nine and twelve knots fully loaded.

The 1097th participated in an over-the-beach cargo operation at Manteo, North Carolina in November 1959, TAR HEEL I, a joint amphibious operation at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina from 18 April to 26 April 1960.

The 329th, 1097th and 1098th Medium Boat Companies, 461st Amphibious Truck Company and the 554th BARC Platoon supported Operation JAMLEX from 25 October to 7 November 1960. They operated under the command of the 6th Transportation Battalion. The operation tested the “through the beach” concept to support the 1,500 man Marine landing team at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The operation was conducted in four phases with the DUKWs and landing craft discharging troops, tanks, artillery and supplies on the beach to establish a foothold. The BARCs established a ferry across the inland waterway. The second phase concentrated on the logistical support of combat forces even utilizing helicopters for emergency resupply and medical evacuation. During the second phase the amphibians and landing craft moved troops and supplies across the New River. During phase four helicopters lifted a battalion of Marines to Camp Davis and Bogue Field for further maneuvers.

From 21 August to 23 September 1961, the 11th Terminal and 159th Boat Battalions of the 3rd Transportation Terminal Training Group conducted Exercise DARK SKY at Fort Story, Virginia. The purpose was to conduct LOTS operations at night using new infrared techniques. This method had only been tried before once at Camp Wallace, Virginia. A beach reconnaissance team (BRAT) searched and marked the beach, then the security force landed in the first wave of landing craft of the 329th Heavy Boat, 1097th, 1098th and 1099th Medium Boat Companies. The 73rd Floating Craft Maintenance Company of the 159th Battalion also supported the operation. The 11th Battalion provided the 105th, 117th, 123rd, 124th and 264th Terminal Service Companies. The training objectives included the use of infrared lights in night ship-to-shore operations, cargo documentation, signal communication, composite battalion command concept, local and rear area security and damage control.

The company participated in Exercise SANDUNE during February 1962. On 20 October 1962, while on a Annual Army training Test at Smith Island, North Carolina, the Battalion was altered for proceed to Kings Bay Army Terminal, Georgia, then Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for the possible invasion of Cuba.

“It was Sept 1962 when the alerts started, and usually were terminated at the Fort Eustis sea buoy. The final alert saw us keep on moving down the James River (entire units of the 1097th and 1099th Medium Boat Companies, approximately 40 LCM 8's and the ST 2122 (small tug). The remaining units in the Third Port (LT 2088, LT 1956, *BDL John U.D. Page*, and numerous J-boats, Q-boats and other craft) left shortly afterward. The Mike boats continued south in the Intra-coastal waterway operating 24 hours a day in a waterway built mainly for daylight operation. The large tugs and the *U.D. Page* traveled outside due to deeper draft requirements. At that time, I was a PFC aboard the LCM 8142 (1097th). The 329th Heavy Boat Company (LCU's) traveled mainly on the outside most of the voyage to Kings Bay Ga. (at that time an undeveloped naval property) Charleston S.C Army Terminal was a stop over, where entire

engines were changed out in a matter of hours. To boat crews who were hard pressed to get any spare parts just a month earlier, this sent a message that this was the real thing, and a mood of determination took over the entire operation. Running southbound in the intra-coastal was not without miscues, some laughable. A wrong turn up some tributaries ended up like a long island traffic jam! As the convoy moved southward, there were areas where the banks were lined with people yelling encouragement to the boat crews, they were more aware of the goings on at the time than we were!!

Paul F. Carty, 1097th Medium Boat Company, 159th Battalion (Boat) Battalion

“I do not remember the day we left but it was cold. We were put on alert sometime in Oct. 62. All the company mike boats were pulled out of the water at 3rd Port and new bearings, shafts and props replaced if needed. All we were told is to get the boats in top condition. We all new what was going on in Cuba from the news so we knew that was the direction we were heading. We departed from Ft. Eustis out to the James River heading east. The HQ. J-boat in the lead vessel with Capt. Mandina, Top Sgt. Steinfield and some other brass aboard. I believe there was a 65 ft. ocean going tug in back of them. The rest of us in the mike just fell in line in no order. As we got into Norfolk I thought they would load us onto Navy ships to take us south. Instead we headed into the locks just south of Norfolk and into the intercoastal water way. When we hit the locks only a few vessels could enter so we had to wait our turn. A lot of the guys did not pack all there gear as they thought this was just another alert and meant nothing. Well that started our journey south with hardly any sleep for the next 10 days or so. When you are 20 years old and a coxswain on a mike boat, if something breaks you are going to catch hell for it. I has a engineer and a new seaman on board who did not operate a boat too well. So it was me at the wheel all night for many nights and I would let the other 2 guys operate for a few hours during the day and take a cat nap. We had no security to speak of. Who was going to mess with these mike boats on the intercoastal waterway. Most people at that time did not even know that the Army had landing crafts or tugs or even the *Page*. When the bridges over the water way had to be opened to let us pass ,the people in the cars would get out and wave and even throw food into the well deck. Some of those bridges stayed open for a long time with all the boats passing through. They all knew we were heading to Cuba.

“They set up a mess tent in one of the mike boat well decks so when it was time for chow we would just pull along side and get it. If there was room we would stop along the banks. The intercoastal is not a wide waterway in most places. All the company sergeants were aboard the mess boat. When we got down into Florida one of the best places we ate dinner at one evening was in Fort Pierce. Just ran the mikes up to the shore or tied up at the docks. People were coming out in droves to see us as they had all hear on the news about this large convoy heading down the intercoastal.

“Don't want to get too far ahead of myself. We pulled into Kings Bay Georgia which was a Navy weapons depot. There we waited for a few days as this was our turning point. Russia did not budge to remove the missiles, so they installed 2 racks of .50 caliber machine guns on all the mike boats. It had a maintenance trailer on my boat which they removed and put on a duce and a half and a trailer filled with ammo. All the company had to sleep on shore in pup tents. Only problem with that was the place was loaded with rattle snakes and water snakes. Several of the

guys were bitten. I went back to the mike boat and slept on a litter over the engines. Nice and warm and no snakes. After leaving Kings Bay we headed south again to Port Everglades.

“We did have to maintain a little radio silence between the mike boats unless a problem came up with a boat. I happened to have a good working radio aboard my mike C-11 and did a lot of relaying from the command J-boat to the last vessels who the J-boat could not reach. We had constant problems at night with the command vessel getting lost and having to stop or mikes braking down. We were stretched out for miles. Well doing all the radio relaying that I did, a southern Major we had in the company, who's name I do not remember, but who liked to chew on cigars came up to me when we arrived in Port Everglade to thank me for the radio work. He gave me and my crew a 24-hour pass into Ft. Lauderdale.

“Port Everglades at that time in 1962 was not to large of a port area. There was only a small pier area for the smaller freighters that came in. The 159th took command of the entire port. Most of the mike boats were run up on the beach area around the port. They were also bringing a lot of 90-day wonders in to bring the company to full battle strength. The boat crews stayed at a old college dorm in Ft. Lauderdale. I mainly stayed on the mike boat. I always took boat watch at night. There was plenty going on in the port area at night. The 329th with the LCU's came down the coast as they drew to much water for the intercoastal. We could shower and eat chow on the LCU's. All the residence of Ft. Lauderdale were bringing us food and drink.

“We did a little bit of amphibious training but not much. Ran a few time runs down toward the Keys, I guess just to see if we could make the run to Cuba on our own or load the boats on ships for transport to Cuban waters. We were well trained anyway. 1099th spent a lot of time in Little Creek. We took more Marines and Army personnel to the beach in amphibious assaults at Ft. Story than I can count. We also trained with the Navy who at that time called themselves beach jumpers who are now the SEALs. They would take the jumpers several miles out into the Atlantic off of Ft. Story and have them jump from a chopper and try to make it to shore. It was a long 3-mile swim for some, if they could not make we would scoop them out of the water with the ramp down. We also were well trained with the M2 carbine which was our weapon at that time as well as the .50 and .60 caliber machine gun.

“The 159th was assigned to the 101 Airborne Division. They were to jump into Cuba and we were there to supply them. Also sent your email to Paul Carty who was in the 1099th with me but than went into the 329th, so I'm sure you will be hearing from him also of what he remembers of the CMC.”

Bill Muller. 1099th Trans C.

The 1097th deployed to Florida with the 159th Battalion on 23 October and returned on 1 December.

From Spring to Fall of 1961, three LCMs and crew members of the 1097th participated in Support North Eastern Command (SUNEC) 61 in Goose Bay, Labrador, to conduct logistics-over-the-shore (LOTS) operations to support the US Air Force Defense Early Warning (DEW) Line. In the Spring of 1963, the 1097th deployed to Thule, Greenland, for SUNEC 63.

In July 1964, the 1097th was transferred from the 159th Battalion to the 394th Battalion. It was also reorganized to only have 19 LCMs divided into two boat platoons of 8 boats each. Three boats were for the Salvage and Maintenance Section. 12 men of the company participated in SUNEK 64.

The 1097th Medium Boat Company arrived in Vietnam on 30 May 1965. The US Army supplied the units in Vietnam through three major ports. The three medium boat companies of the 159th Battalion deployed to each of them. The 1097th conducted ship-to-shore lighterage at Cam Ranh Bay.

On 26 June 1967, it moved to Dong Tam where it was assigned to the 9th Infantry Division. Its parent organization, the 159th arrived in Vietnam on 10 August 1966. The 1097th was the only tactical boat company in the Transportation Corps. Its mission was to tow artillery barges of the 3rd Battalion, 34th Artillery.

Captain Pagonis distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 31 January 1968 while serving as Company Commander of the 1097th Transportation Company during a tactical move of the 3rd Battalion, 34th Artillery, down the Rod Ruong Canal, Dinh Tuong Province, Republic of Vietnam. As the boats of Captain Pagonis' company were moving the artillery barges through a hazardous portion of the narrow canal, enemy forces attacked with intense automatic weapons fire and high explosive recoilless rifle rounds. After receiving word by radio that one of his LCM-8 boats had been hit and was dead in the water, he immediately turned his command boat around and weaved his way through both friendly and enemy fire to the damaged craft. Calmly issuing instructions to his boat crews, he was able to get the column moving again. During the entire action, he remained exposed to hostile fire as he controlled the operation from his quarter deck, directing his boats' gun crews and personally returning fire upon the insurgent force. Captain Pagonis' aggressive action, coolness under fire, and leadership were deciding factors in the successful movement of the column through the enemy attack. Captain Pagonis' extraordinary heroism in close combat with an armed hostile force is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.

The company earned three Meritorious Unit Commendations, July 1966 to February 1967, September 65 to March 1967, and March 1967 to September 1967. It also received the VDC, TCC and three VCC.

On 26 July 1969, the 1097th turned over its LCMs to the ARVN and was inactivated. Those soldiers who had not completed their year in Vietnam transferred to other units. The colors of the 1097th returned to Fort Eustis and the 599th Transportation (Medium Boat) Company was redesignated the 1097th on 5 August 1969.

The 1097th transferred to Panama. The 1097th Medium Boat Company delivered cargo, equipment and personnel in support of USARSO training missions, disaster relief and contingency operations as well as clandestine insertions and extractions of Special Operations Forces through out the littoral of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The 1097th originally had ten LCMs.

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. There were three means for the in-place Army units to assault their targets at H-hour, helicopters, Armored Personnel Carriers and trucks. Many of infantry and MP units drove to their targets. LCMs of the 1097th Boat Company and LCUs of the 329th Boat Company would later ferry cargo, passengers and prisoners of war across the canal in the aftermath of D-day. Although, Desert Storm would dwarf Just Cause in the size of the operation, many generals would consider Just Cause the beginning of military operations for the Twenty-first Century. The cost of the US war machine after Desert Storm reduced its size to where it was no longer feasible to line forces up and push the enemy across the battlefield.

In 1991, it became a multi-component company with four platoons, headquarters, maintenance, medium and heavy. It traded off four LCMs for two 2000 series LCUs and three 1600 series LCUs.

In 1990 (?) President George Bush authorized the Armed Forces to support law enforcement agencies in the war on drugs, Operation FRONTIER LANCE. USARSO picked up the mission of providing an LCU to Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). This mission initially fell to the 1097th Transportation Company assigned to Panama.

When the lead battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment deployed to Panama during Operation NIMROD DANCER on 15 May, the battalion moved from Howard Air Base to Camp Sherman by the LCMs of the 1097th and helicopters of the Task Force Hawk. From 20 December 1989 to 7 January 1990, the Company participated in Operation JUST CAUSE to remove Noriega from power and restore the government back to the people of Panama.

In 1993, the medium boat platoon completed 331 missions, hauling over 2,891 tons of equipment and 9,872 passengers. The heavy boat platoon completed 44 missions sailing 53,701 nautical miles delivering 3,912 tons of equipment. In 1994, it received the National Defense Transportation Award.

In 1995, the 1097th moved to Rodman Naval Station after Fort Davis was handed over to the Panamanian Government. In 1998, the company reduced from ten to four LCMs. The 1097th was scheduled to move to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico with USARSO Headquarters when the United States turned over the Panama Canal to the Panamanian Government. Instead the 1097th was inactivated in 1998 and the requirement for USARSO support fell to 7th Transportation Group at Ft Eustis, VA.

The Carter-Torrijos Treaty would turn over everything in the Panama Canal to the Panamanian Government by midnight 1999. The incumbent Panamanian president leading up to that time decided that she did not want the US military in her country. The original plan was for the 1097th to simply relocate to Puerto Rico since the boat company had continuous missions in the SOUTHCOM area. A last minute decision was made to inactivate the 1097th in 1998 and hand over the on-going missions to boats in 7th Transportation Group in Fort Eustis, Virginia. The company was inactivated on 15 November 1999 in Panama

CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION CREDIT

Vietnam

Defense

Counteroffensive

Counteroffensive, Phase II

Counteroffensive, Phase III

Tet Counteroffensive

Counteroffensive, Phase IV

Counteroffensive, Phase V

Counteroffensive, Phase VI

Tet 69/Counteroffensive

Summer-Fall 1969

Armed Forces Expeditions

Panama

DECORATIONS

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1965-1966

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1966-1967

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1967

Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM
1966-1968

Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM
1969

Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class, Streamer embroidered