

124th Transportation Battalion



*124th Transportation Battalion Unit Crest
mouseover for a description*

World War II

The 124th Transportation Battalion began on 10 February 1936. On this date it was constituted as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 3rd Battalion of the 48th Quartermaster Truck Regiment. 10 February 1941 the battalion activated at Fort Benning, Georgia. On 1 April 1942, the battalion redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters detachment, 3rd Battalion, 48th Quartermaster Truck Regiment. This was an all black unit.

The first operation in which the battalion participated was in Australia under the command of the Motor Transport Command No.1 on 28 June 1942. The Motor Transport Command No.1 was also made up of the 29th Quartermaster Regiment (Truck) and other smaller supporting units. At this time the Japanese were in striking distance of the Australian port at Darwin. Darwin lacked a major rail link and it was dangerous to transport supplies by ship because of the nearby Japanese presence so Darwin had to get supplies by land. Darwin linked by regional rail to Birdum, which was 316 miles to the south. However, Birdum only linked by highway to Alice Springs and Mt. Isa. The Australians would send supplies by rail to the Central Railhead in Alice Springs and from there they would truck supplies north 636 miles to Birdum. In order to assist the Australians, the U.S. Army set up a supply depot at Mt. Isa. Cargo would come into the Australian port at Brisbane and be loaded on to rail cars and sent to Mt. Isa where it would be offloaded. At Mt. Isa the U.S. Army assumed responsibility for the convoy that took the cargo 687 miles from Mt. Isa to Birdum by motor transport. From Birdum it was delivered by rail to Darwin.

The fleet of vehicles numbered 1,482 on 28 June and manned by 3,500 African-American drivers. Along the 687-mile route, four camps were set up to provide places for the drivers to rest and to allow the soldiers a place to eat and fill up on water and gasoline. The motor convoys traversed, "some of the grimmest, hardest country on earth," almost entirely uninhabited. During the drive everything would be coated with a red "bull dust" that required the drivers to wear dust respirators. Maintenance needs increased as the operation went on because of the enormous

strain put on the vehicles from operating in such a hard environment. To cut down on maintenance needs, the mechanics removed the outer dual wheels but when the temperatures hit 130 degrees during the day this caused tires to burst. The outer dual wheels were put back on. During the summer months the temperature would get as high as 146 degrees. One out of every three drivers had kidney complaints caused by the constant jolting. Others fell prey to respiratory ailments, scurvy, and heat exhaustion. On 30 October 1942, Motor Transport Command No. 1 disbanded because it was now possible to safely deliver supplies by water. By this time, the men of the Motor Transport Command No. 1 had driven 9,504,948 vehicle miles and carried 30,329 tons of cargo. This was one of two major long haul operations undertaken by the U.S. Army in the Pacific Theater.

The battalion then shipped to Papua and New Guinea to provide transport for Army combat operations there. For its contributions in Papua, the 3rd Battalion, 48th Regiment received a Presidential Unit Citation. On 2 December 1943 the 3rd Battalion, 48th Regiment reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 124th Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile. Then it was off to the Philippines. For actions in the Philippines, the unit received a Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for the time from 17 October 1944 to 4 July 1945. The 124th Quartermaster Battalion was assigned to the Highway Transportation Division in Luzon. During this period, the battalion supported Sixth Army activity in northern and central Luzon. The primary mission was long-distance hauling. By the summer of 1945, the 100th Highway Transport Service (previously known as the Highway Transportation Division) was to truck supplies over difficult mountainous terrain in direct support of American combat units and Filipino guerrillas. After the Japanese surrender, large numbers of enemy troops evacuated by truck. Even though many people were celebrating victory, the 124th was still performing its job. The peak in daily tonnage hauled in August 1945 recorded at 3,604 tons. Only twice, did the U.S. Army conduct long haul operations in the Pacific Theater and the 124th Battalion was involved in both. Once again the battalion was converted, reorganized, and redesignated on August 1st, 1946 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 124th Transportation Corps Truck Regiment. Less than a year later the battalion was inactivated in Yokohama, Japan on 25 May 1947.

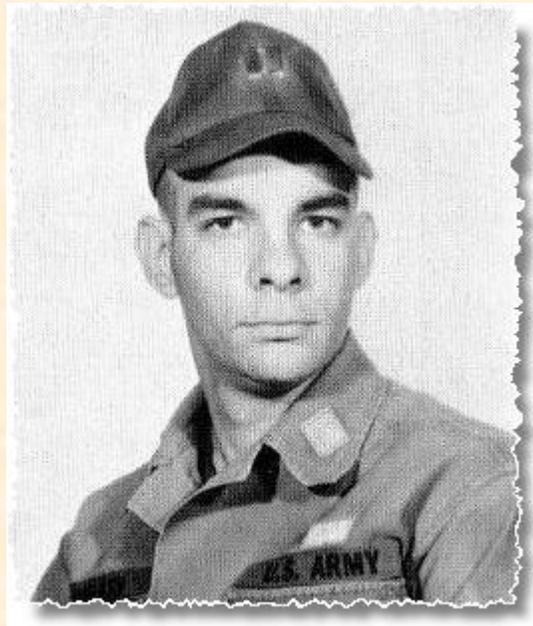
Vietnam War

With the increased military activity in Vietnam in the early 1960s, the 124th redesignated on 26 November 1966 as the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment of the 124th Transportation Battalion (Motor Transport). Shortly after, on 1 February 1967 at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, it activated. The battalion arrived in Vietnam on 24 July 1967 and assumed control of the following units at Pleiku in the Central Highlands. They were part of the 8th Transportation Group based near Qui Nhon.

- 520th Trailer Transfer Detachment
- 64th Transportation Company (Medium Truck)
- 88th Transportation Company (Medium Truck)
- 541st Transportation Company (Light Truck)
- 563rd Transportation Company (Medium Truck)

The main line of communication extended from the port at Qui Nhon to units either along the coastal highway or west 100 miles up Route 19 to Pleiku. These long haul runs usually took half a day to reach the destination so the trucks could return to their home base by the evening. Unfortunately, there was always more cargo than trucks to haul it and the blown bridges along Route 19 required convoys to drive around them. Trucks drove in convoy serials of 20 to 30 trucks to prevent bunching up and limit vulnerability to ambushes.

In the first week in May 1967, the 64th Transportation Company had become the first medium truck company to relocate to Pleiku. With the guerrilla threat, convoys were not allowed to drive at night. This limited amount of cargo delivered. 8th Group wanted to implement a line haul system like the 37th Transportation Group had in Europe to manage two convoys a day in each direction. One convoy out of Qui Nhon would run loaded trailers to the Trailer Transfer Point at An Khe. A convoy out of Pleiku would run empty trailers to An Khe and pick up the loaded ones. The convoy out of Qui Nhon would return with the empty trailers. 8th Group believed that the trucks could get two runs in per day. The 64th was able to achieve two runs to An Khe only on an intermittent basis, but this came to an end with the beginning of the ambushes in September 1967. CPT John Horvath, the commander of the 64th, felt that the real problem was the lack of a tractor replacement system at Tank Automotive Command. 8th Group went back to direct haul and transferred one more truck company to Pleiku.



CPT John Horvath

http://www.transchool.lee.army.mil/historian/viet_interviews/horvath3.htm

for more from John Horvath



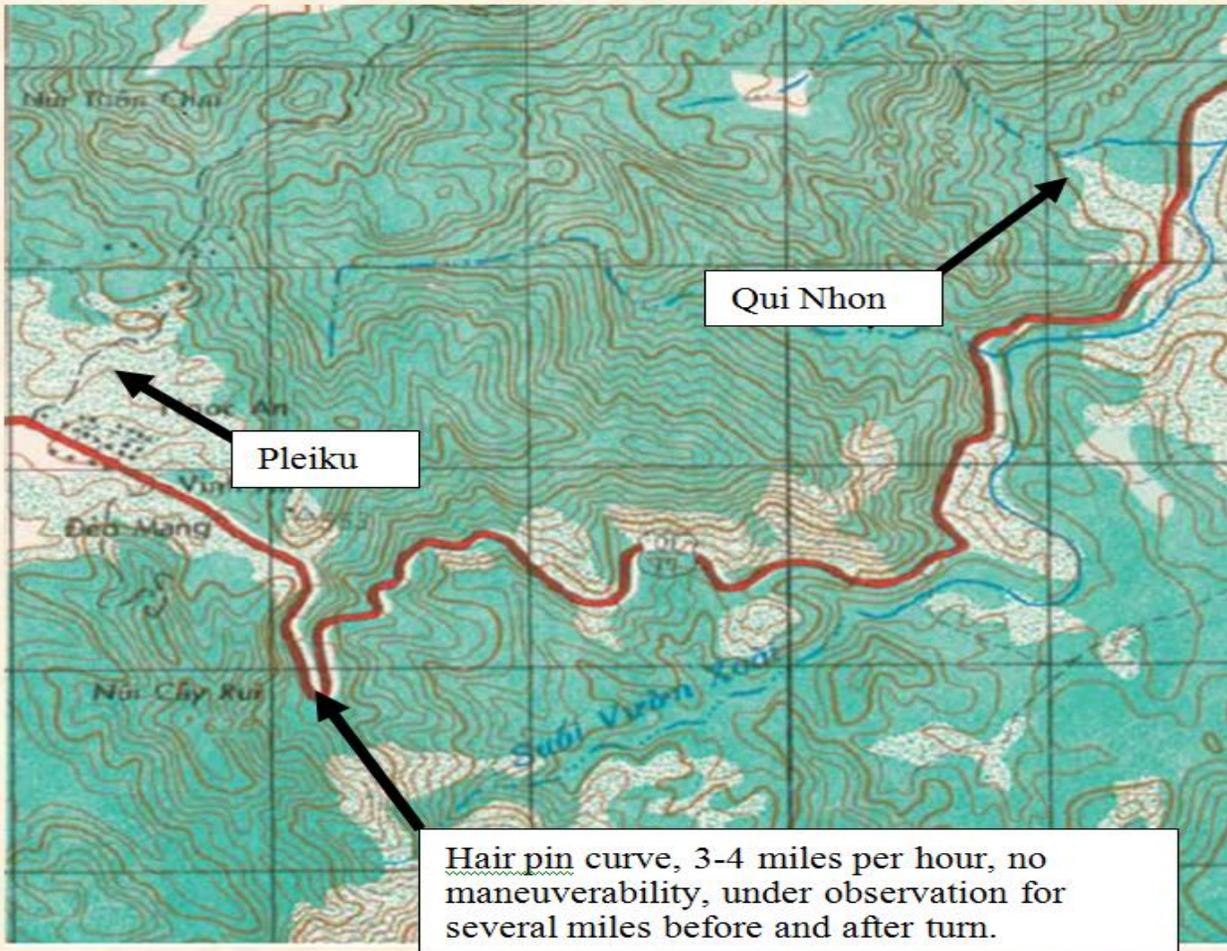
The 64th Transportation Company at Qui Nhon Red Beach waiting for busses after arriving in Vietnam

From Pleiku, the 124th would transport supplies out to the bases of the 4th Infantry Division, the 1st Cav, and the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Then the drivers from Qui Nhon would take the empty trucks back to Qui Nhon. However, this did not work as well as it did in Europe because of the wear on the vehicles, road closure after dark, and combat losses. The 124th would receive cargo directly from Qui Nhon and then deliver it out to the surrounding areas such as Dak To and Kontum. Another advantage of having a truck battalion at Pleiku was the establishment of facilities for drivers to eat, rest over night (RON) and pull maintenance on their vehicles.

The 124th drove some of the most dangerous routes in Vietnam. Route 19, which went from Pleiku to An Khe and then on to Qui Nhon was the same road where the French Mobile Group 100 (it was roughly the same size as a brigade) was annihilated. While driving along Route 19 American soldiers in the trucks could see the tombstones that marked the buried French from that ambush. The 100-mile trip along Route 19 covered some of the worst terrain for trucks in Vietnam. The road around Pleiku was relatively straight and flat, but as the road headed east toward Qui Nhon, it traveled through two of the most treacherous passes in the world: the Mang Yang Pass, located about halfway between Pleiku and what was the 1st Cavalry Division's base at An Khe; and the An Khe Pass, about 50 miles west of Qui Nhon. Convoys generally slowed down to as little as three miles per hour, which caused convoys to stretch out to over a wide area. Drivers along this route always tried to stay extremely vigilant.



*The plaque here is in Vietnamese and French.
“Here, on 15 April 1954 French and Vietnamese soldiers, died for their country.”
Marker commemorating the initial assault on the French Mobile Group 100
(roughly 2000 of 3500 died compared to 100 for Viet Minh forces).*



Map sheet 6736I showing segment of QL19 between Qui Nhon and Pleiku with An Khe pass and hairpin turn.

Beginning on 2 September 1967, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong began launching company-sized ambushes against the convoys. The transportation battalions quickly countered this by turning 5-ton trucks into gun platforms. For every 10 trucks in a convoy, one would be an armored gun truck to assist in defeating the ambushes launched by the enemy.

Most of the 124th Battalion convoy runs were to An Khe but this stopped in November of 1967 when the Battle of Dak To broke out. The emphasis of the 124th was now to make sure the combat troops of the 4th Infantry Division and the 173rd Airborne had enough ammunition to win the battle in December. The 124th did such an outstanding job that Generals Westmoreland and Abrams stated that never before in a major battle have the combat troops been so well supplied.

On 31 January 1968, 1LT David R. Wilson, 64th Transportation Company, led a convoy run to An Khe, which was made up mostly of 5-ton tractors and trailers from this company. On the return trip Wilson's convoy was ambushed. Although he was safely out of the danger zone, he unhesitatingly returned to the scene of the action to lead his men to safety. Many of the vehicles had halted in the kill zone and were subject to an intense enemy mortar and small arms fire.

Passing through the ambush zone, 1LT Wilson, with complete disregard for his own safety, turned around and reentered the kill zone to insure the safe passage of the rear element of the convoy. While making this final courageous effort to insure the survival of these personnel, he was mortally wounded by an enemy mortar round falling on his vehicle. Through his extraordinary heroism and outstanding leadership ability, 1LT Wilson was able to save the lives of many of his personnel who otherwise would have been halted in the kill zone subject to the most intense enemy fire. For his personal bravery, 1LT Wilson was posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal.



1LT David R. Wilson

During the Tet Offensive, LT Gregory Debrocke, 563rd Light Truck Company, led a small convoy loaded with concertina wire to Ben Het, a Special Forces camp west of Dak To near the Cambodia/Laos border. This was a regular run for these truck drivers. Everyday, they began their convoys with "Let's Roll." Every time they stopped at a checkpoint, they started up again with the same, "Let's Roll." They hauled ammunition, fuel and food to the grunts and aviators out in the forward camps. The drivers would hear the grunts cheer them as they arrived. It was not uncommon to hear an infantry man say, "You guys are f***ing crazy! You'd never catch me doing that." The drivers would unload then "chow down" and drink beer with the grunts then leave early the next morning.

That night the camp was overrun by NVA. They actually drove in while the attack was under way. When the convoy arrived with their Quad .50 gun truck, the Special Forces team was very pleased to see them. The 563rd had mounted a Quad .50 on the back of a 5-ton truck. They turned back the attack and left the next day.



563rd convoy going north from Pleiku on Route 19

By late 1968, the number of ambushes declined because of the adjustments that the gun trucks the transportation battalions in Vietnam had made. By the end of 1968, the 124th Battalion had the following gun trucks; Death and Destruction, Highland Animals, Highland Raiders, Ho Chi's Hearse, Mighty Minnie and Quantrill's Raiders.



Death and Destruction Gun Truck



Highland Raiders Gun Truck



Ho Chi's Hearse Gun Truck



Mighty Minnie Gun Truck

When the 4th Infantry Division attacked NVA sanctuaries inside Cambodia at the direction of President Richard Nixon in June 1970, the 124th provided convoy support. Major Jack Horvath, then the Battalion Executive Officer, established the turn around point for the convoys right on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border, co-located with the 4th Infantry Division Logistics Trains.

In August 1970, the 124th Battalion moved to Cha Rang near Qui Nhon where it continued to operate until 16 May 1971 when it was inactivated. For the actions it performed in Vietnam, the 124th Transportation Battalion received a Meritorious Unit Commendation for its service from 1966 to 1967. The unit earned a Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Gold Stars for the service it performed in Vietnam from 1966 to 1970.

On 11 June 1986, the 124th Transportation "Make A Way" Battalion was re-activated at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, under the command of LTC Kindred as part of the Army Chief of Staff's initiative to convert the 24th Infantry Division to a light division. The battalion assumed command of the combat service support elements of the 45th Support Group: 5th Transportation Company (Heavy Boat), 25th Transportation "The Road Masters" Company (Light Truck), the 147th Transportation Company (Medium Lift), 39th Transportation Detachment, 52nd Quartermaster Detachment, 5/57th ATC Platoon, and 147th Medical Detachment (Air Ambulance). The 124th became a multi-functional battalion with the capability to provide tailored support packages for division deployments in support of Western Command and Pacific Command. It deployed on such training exercises as Team Spirit in Korea, Cobra Gold in Thailand, Orient Shield in Japan, Kangaroo in Australia, Yama Sakura in Japan and Cascade Peak at Fort Lewis, Washington. The 25th TC provided Corps-level ground motor support with 50 5-ton cargo trucks and ten 5-ton tractors. The 5th Heavy Boat had six LCU-1466s.

By 1990, the battalion had picked up the 40th Supply and Service “The Outlaws” Company, the 87th Quartermaster Detachment (Parachute Riggers) and 605th Transportation Detachment (Logistics Support Vessel LSV-2) *USAV CW3 Harold C. Clinger*. The 5th Heavy Boat traded in its six Vietnam vintage LCUs for LSV-5 *USAV MG Charles P. Gross*. The battalion lost the 147th Medium Lift for the CH-47D Chinooks of B Company, 214th Aviation Regiment. This is the only medium lift capability in Hawaii. The 147th Medical detachment became the 68th Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) Detachment with UH1Vs.

The 124th Transportation Battalion was redesignated the 524th Corps Support Battalion on 16 October 1993. In 2003, it consisted of the following units:

HHD

25th Transportation Company (Light-Medium truck)

40th Quartermaster Company

87th Quartermaster Detachment (Riggers)