

## **20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion “Combat Mobility”**

The history of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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, which consolidated all trucks and armored personnel carriers (APC) of the division. If a battalion needed either trucks or APCs, they borrowed them from the organic transportation battalion.

The Pentomic division was the first unit in the US Army to be organized around the new armored personnel carrier. The concept of the Pentomic organization consolidated all transportation into a single battalion. When any of the three battle groups needed armored personnel carriers, the two carrier companies provided them. Since these transportation battalions belonged to the divisions, the Lineage and Honors Branch of the Center of Military History did not provide them with the lineage and battle honors of any previously inactivated transportation battalions. Each would have an entirely new but short lived history tied to its parent division.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion was constituted and activated in Germany under the command of LTC Charles P. Venable as a Pentomic Battalion organic to the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on 1 August 1957. The battalion adopted the motto, "Combat Mobility," from the saying, "The 20<sup>th</sup> Trans Bn gives speed and momentum to the 8<sup>th</sup> Inf Div through ... Combat Mobility." Each transportation battalion had the minimum of a headquarters company and three lettered companies. In some cases, additional truck companies were attached. The 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion had four such truck companies:<sup>1</sup>

16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company (Light Truck)

23<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company (Light Truck)

104<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company (Light Truck)

151<sup>st</sup> Transportation Company (Light Truck)

The Headquarters and Headquarters Company, commanded by 1LT John W. Young, was stationed at Ulm. A Company was activated at Goeppingen with the 2 12-ton trucks. The M-59 armored personnel carriers of the division were consolidated in B and C Companies. These Transportation Personnel Carrier Companies provided the tactical mobility for combat units of the division. B Company was activated at Schwabac under the command of CPT Pierre Dolan. The company was originally composed of personnel transferred from the 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company, the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. C Company was activated at Artillery Kaserne at Neckarsulm under the command of CPT Patrick N. Delavan.<sup>2</sup>

During Operation Switch, the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division relocated to west of the Rhine River. The battalion moved its headquarters and A Company to Bad Kreuznach on 27 December 1957. The two APC companies moved to Baumholder. A Company's trucks drove over 89,000 miles during Operation Switch without a single accident. The mission of the company was to furnish truck transportation for general support of the division. B Company moved to Baumholder in November 1957, and C Company moved to its new home in Baumholder on 17 December 1957. Two track maintenance sections assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Company moved to Baumholder, one each with B and C Companies. The mechanics in these two sections and the ones in the truck maintenance section at Bad Kreuznach were responsible for maintaining all of the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion's vehicles.<sup>3</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company had served during World War II and received campaign credit for Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland and Central Europe. It was reactivated at Fort Eustis, Virginia on 1 December 1952 and rotated over to Germany as part of the Gyroscope program on 13 December 1955 where it was initially attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. It joined the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion upon its activation and the light truck company provided support to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Infantries of the division at Gonsenheim-Mainz.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company had likewise served during World War II but was inactivated on 25 June 1946 and then reactivated in Korea on 26 December 1946 where it served until its second inactivation on 25 January 1949. It was reactivated again at Camp Roberts, California on 22 December 1951 during the buildup for the Korean War and then inactivated at Fort Ord,

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<sup>1</sup> LTC Charles P. Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion (Inf Div)," 1 August 1958

<sup>2</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>3</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

California on 15 June 1956. It was reactivated in Germany as part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion on 1 August 1957.<sup>4</sup> It supported the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry at Baumholder.

Since its activation, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company received safe driving streamers for December, 1957 and for February, March, October, November, and December 1958. For its safe driving record, the unit received a 100,000 accident-free mile trophy in July 1958. A trophy for the best maintenance shop in the fourth quarter of 1958 is also a possession of the company. While at Baumholder, the unit won the first place horseshoe trophy in August 1958 and the second place softball trophy in September 1958.<sup>5</sup>

The 104<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company was another truck company with a celebrated World War II record. It saw service in North Africa, Sicily, Anzio, Rome-Arno, Southern France, Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland and Central Europe. It supported the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry at Coleman Barracks near Sandhofen.<sup>6</sup> Two of the proud possessions of the 104<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company are the battalion commander's trophy for the unit with the highest rifle scores and the battalion commander's trophy for the unit with the highest carbine scores for 1958.<sup>7</sup>

The 151<sup>st</sup> Transportation Company similarly served in Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland and Central Europe during World War II. It was reactivated under the 48<sup>th</sup> Transportation Group at Fort Eustis, Virginia on 21 May 1952 and rotated over to Germany as part of the Gyroscope program on 13 December 1955 where it was initially attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. The company was assigned to the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion when it was activated and the company supports the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry at Baumholder.<sup>8</sup>

## 1958

The early months of the battalion's existence were spent in training and support missions, which served to weld the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion into a cohesive and efficient organization. The battalion continued its fine safety record when from 10 through 20 February 1958.<sup>9</sup>

Spring of 1958 brought a vigorous renewal of river crossing training and other field training exercises. Soon the battalion's personnel carriers were operating proficiently on land and water. During the closing months of 1958, Army Training Tests (ATT), Inspector General (IG) and Command Maintenance Inspection (CMI) inspections and qualification firing of Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) weapons evidenced the proficiency attained during the year.<sup>10</sup>

From 10 through 20 February 1958, A, B and C Companies went to the field in FTX Sabre Hawk in the vicinity of Hessenthal. In April 1959, A Company supported all phases of Operation Arrow. On 20 March, 1LT Robert L. Bergquist assumed command of C Company. In April, B Company conducted river crossing training on the Nahe, Mosel and Rhine Rivers. On 10 May,

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<sup>4</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion," 1958.

<sup>5</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>6</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion," 1958.

<sup>7</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>8</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion," 1958.

<sup>9</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion," 1958.

<sup>10</sup> LTC Charles P. Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion (Inf Div) 1957/1959," 1959

CPT Howard S. Reffner assumed command of HHC. In June, C Company started river crossing training on the Nahe River. Then B Company supported the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantries during ATT's and FTX's. In July of 1959, B Company supported the 16<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Infantries in crossing the Mosel River. On 7 July 1958, C Company began a three-day ATT at Baumholder. The company received a score of 98.6, highest in the battalion and was awarded the battalion commander's trophy.<sup>11</sup>

River crossing training was climaxed by the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion becoming the first such organization to cross the Rhine River. 8 through 10 September. This training included night as well as day crossings. The crossing was historically significant in that it was this very same ages old military barrier which allied commanders feared might impede the advance into Germany during World War II.<sup>12</sup>

On 2 October, BG Frederick D. Atkinson, USAREUR Transportation Officer, said he was "most impressed" after observing personnel carriers of C Company in a demonstration of their role of transporting infantry troops. The USAREUR Transportation Chief was accompanied by COL Robert B. Neely, Seventh Army Transportation Officer, COL Harvey J. Yost, V Corps Transportation Officer, and LTC Lawrence Robbins, Plans Branch Chief, USAREUR Transportation Division.<sup>13</sup>

On 20 December, the 151<sup>st</sup> rotated back to Fort Eustis, Virginia where it was attached to the 204<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. On 16 July 1962, it was transferred to the 27<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion and on 24 October 1962, the company moved to Fort Campbell, Kentucky where it was attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion, which supported the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.<sup>14</sup>

After the 151<sup>st</sup> Transportation Company Gyroscoped to the United States, the 544<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company replaced it at Baumholder and immediately began carrying its load without causing any lapse in the battalion's operations.<sup>15</sup>

On 11 December 1958, the 504<sup>th</sup> and 505<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantries arrived at Mainz from Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division became the only airborne-infantry composite division in the United States Army, the increased transportation requirements were met by the reorganization of the 544<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Companies into four-platoon companies. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company moved from Baumholder to Wiesbaden on 8 January 1959, as part of the plan for supporting the airborne battle groups in the Mainz-Wiesbaden area.<sup>16</sup>

## 1959

Once again in 1959 the units went through annual ATT's and fired their TOE weapons, testifying to the skill and state of combat readiness in the battalion. Units organized small bore rifle teams

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<sup>11</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion," 1958; and Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>12</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>13</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>14</sup> 151<sup>st</sup> T Co (Lt Trk), Historical Chronology Card, Center of Military History; and Movement Order Number 18, Headquarters US Army Transportation Center and Fort Eustis, 16 October 1962.

<sup>15</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>16</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

and competed in firing matches. Intramural sports took on new emphasis with all personnel taking part in a program to make them proficient in at least one sport during their overseas tour.<sup>17</sup>

1LT Bergquist departed for the United States 22 March 1959, and 1LT Henry A. Shockley, formerly of B Company, assumed command of C Company. In May of 1959, C Company crossed elements of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 504<sup>th</sup>, and 505<sup>th</sup> Infantries over the Rhine River. Then 22 through 23 June, newly assigned men crossed the Nahe to complete their basic carrier operation training.<sup>18</sup>

In January 1959, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company moved to Rhine Kaserne at Biebrich to support the 505<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantry. From March through August 1959, the company drove over 100,000 accident-free miles.

For over 16 months, the 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company drove 593,051 consecutive miles without a single accident. This achievement merited a special award from Major General Philip F. Lindeman, former 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Commander. The company, commanded by Captain Declan B. Lehane, received the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Traffic Safety Award for the first quarter of calendar year 1959. This award was given to the unit that achieves the lowest number of privately-owned vehicle accidents and military moving vehicle accidents in the entire 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. In addition to this award, the 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company received two certificates of achievement and two commendation streamers for safety. The 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company demonstrated the effectiveness of its maintenance system by achieving the lowest percentage of first and second echelon maintenance deficiencies in the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion for Seventh Army roadside spot-check inspections. In sports, the 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company also captured the Mainz-Gonsenheim Regional Bowling Tournament trophy.<sup>19</sup>

The 104<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company accrued over 513,000 accident-free miles over a period of 517 consecutive days supporting the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry and later the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry. In the spring of 1959, the 104<sup>th</sup> lent its support to the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry in Operation Boot Out. In April of 1959, the company received a superior in its annual ATT. When the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry underwent its river crossing training in May, the 104<sup>th</sup> supported the infantrymen with transportation.<sup>20</sup>

As of 15 June 1959, A Company drivers have operated their vehicles over 1,970, 300 miles of German roads and have had less than one accident per quarter million miles.<sup>21</sup>

1LT John O. Scott assumed command of Headquarters and Headquarters Company on 20 June 1959 when CPT Howard S. Reffner became the Battalion S-4. CPT Lawrence Valla commanded A Company until 15 June 1959, when 1LT Charles W. McAlister assumed command.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion eliminated any grounds for similar apprehension when its C Company crossed the Rhine with elements of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 504<sup>th</sup> and 505<sup>th</sup> Infantries on different dates in May. Then on 22 and 23 June, newly assigned men crossed the Nahe to complete their basic carrier operation training. B Company supported the 16<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Infantries in crossing the

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<sup>17</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>18</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>19</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>20</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>21</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

Mosel River in July 1959. B Company also supported division battle groups in the annual ATT's for 1959.<sup>22</sup>

From the period August 1957 to August 1959, the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion drove more than 3,000,000 miles or 120 times around the world, in all kinds of weather and over all kinds of terrain with a minimum of mishaps. This outstanding record was permanent proof of the skill and proficiency of the men of the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. It was also evidence of the battalion's preparedness to help keep the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division battle-ready at all times.<sup>23</sup>

In December 1959, the 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion was inactivated and the APCs of B and C Companies were assigned to the battalions along with drivers. The 544<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company was attached to the 38<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion.

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<sup>22</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."

<sup>23</sup> Venable, "20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion 1959."