

52nd Transportation Battalion



*52nd Combat Aviation Battalion patch
1955*

World War II

Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 204th Quartermaster Battalion was constituted on 31 May 1940 and activated at Compton, California on 10 June 1942. The battalion was redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 204th Quartermaster Gas Supply Battalion. It was reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 204th Quartermaster Battalion on 10 December 1943. It participated in the Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, North Apennines and Po Valley Campaigns of Italy. It was inactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on 13 October 1945.

It was converted and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 204th Transportation Corps Truck Battalion on 1 August 1946 and activated at Fort Benning, Georgia. It was again redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 204th Transportation Truck Battalion on 20 May 1947 the reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 52nd Transportation Truck Battalion on 16 May 1949.

Korean War

On 25 June 1950, North Korean tanks rolled across the 38th Parallel and invaded the Republic of Korea. The 24th Infantry Division led the first units of the US Eighth Army into Korea on 30 June. After a series of setbacks, they bought time for the rest of Eighth Army to stabilize the Pusan Perimeter. On 15 September, X Corps landed at Inchon with the 1st Marine and 7th Infantry Divisions and the North Korean Army began to withdraw.

In 1950, the 52nd Transportation Battalion deployed from Fort Benning, Georgia, for the war in Korea. The 377th Transportation Company arrived at Inchon at D+8, 23 September 1950. It joined up with several 513th and 515th Transportation Truck Companies of the 52nd Transportation Battalion. In mid-October the 377th Truck Company was detached from the 52nd, picked up troops and equipment and force

marched 350 miles to Pusan. They ran into sporadic enemy fire north of Taegu but arrived at Pusan in 36 hours.

Because of his success with the landing at Inchon, General Douglas MacArthur decided to pull the X Corps out and conduct landing on the other side of the Korean peninsula. On 29 October, X Corps landed at Iwon with the 1st Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division then forces opened up Hamhung as the main port of operations. They advanced to the Chinese border and the 3rd Infantry Division then arrived as the X Corps reserve.

The 52nd Battalion arrived at Hamhung and picked up control of the 377th TC again. The 377th TC took its taskings directly from the X Corps Transportation Officer. In the third week in November the 377th TC was attached to the 7th Infantry Division and moved to Pukchong.

On 29 November, the Chinese Communist Army attacked across the border. They infiltrated past US forces forcing them to fall back. The Army's Task Force Faith, organized around the 31st Infantry, fought desperately buying time for the 1st Marines on the other side of Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir. The Marines absorbed what remained of TF Faith and fought their way back to a near completed airstrip at Hagaru-ri with LTC Faith being killed in the fight. While the marines evacuated their dead and wounded, the Chinese infiltrated past the Marines and established roadblocks along the ten mile mountain pass between it and Kot'o-ri.

On 29 November, LTC John U. D. Page, a X Corps artillery officer was attached to the 52nd Transportation Battalion and establish traffic control on the main supply route to the Marines and Army at Changjin Reservoir. Completing the mission, he elected to stay with the Marines and aid an isolated signal station. He rescued his jeep driver by breaking up an ambush at a destroyed bridge. Once they reached Kot'o-ri, Page volunteered to organize and train a reserve force out of the remnants of TF Faith. During two attacks on the frozen airstrip at Kot'o-ri, Page exposed himself to direct fire on the enemy and twice mounted the rear of a tank to man the machinegun on the turret driving the enemy back with fire. On 3 December, he flew low over enemy positions in a light observation plane. He dropped hand grenades and fired his carbine into the enemy positions.

On 5 December, Major General Oliver P. Smith (USMC) ordered his Marines to withdraw to Kot'o-ri. Meanwhile Lieutenant General Almond, Commander of X Corps, organized a defense of Hamhung-Hungnam area around the 3rd Infantry Division. MacArthur ordered the 3rd ID to Wonsan for withdrawal to assist Eighth Army in the west. On 1 December, the trucks of the 52nd Battalion transported them to Wonsan, then MacArthur changed his mind and returned the infantry back to Almond. The 52nd Battalion delivered the infantry back to the Hamhung-Hungnam area on 3 December.

MG Smith needed a mobile force organized around a battalion of infantry to clear the ten miles between Kot'o-ri and Chinghung-ni. He asked LTG Almond to provide a relief force for his Chinghung-ni force. Almond tasked the 3rd ID with the mission. On 6 December, the 3rd Infantry Division, which was in the rear, formed Task Force Dog

around the 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry with a battalion of artillery and company of combat engineers. The 52nd Truck Battalion, commanded by LTC Walden C. Winston, provided the mobility for TF Dog. TF Dog would relieve the Marine garrison at Chinhung-ni so they could clear the road north to the Marines fighting their way back from Koto-ri.

On 7 December, TF Dog left Majon-dong and reached Chinghung-ni without enemy resistance. The 377th TC had hauled 325 reinforcements from Hamhung to Changjin Reservoir area. They ran into COL Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller’s 1st Marines at Kot’o-ri. On 9 December, the Marines fought their way out of Kot’o-ri. The next day the Marines passed behind FT Dog. They loaded up on the trucks of the 52nd Battalion for the trip south. The Chinese made several attacks on the withdrawing Marines at Sundong and swarmed onto the road as the regimental supply train started through town.

LTC Page had flown down to Hamhung to arrange for artillery support of the marine column. He joined the rear guard of the retreating column. Page manned the machinegun on a tank several times to repel enemy attacks on the flanks of the column. On the night of 10 December, the convoy was stopped by enemy at the bottom of a pass. Halted in this position, the column was in danger of being destroyed. LTC Page and his Marine driver, PFC Marvin L. Wasson, fought their way to the roadblock to assault the Chinese. When Page failed to return, LTC Winston took over command at Sudong and organized a counterattack against the Chinese. The fighting lasted for several hours. Shortly after the column moved south, they found Page’s dead body surrounded by 16 dead Chinese soldiers. After that the Marines and TF Dog were safely evacuated to defend Hamhung and Hungnam. Only 21 of the 48 vehicles of the 377th TC returned from the ambushes at Kot’o-ri. Page was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross then in 1956 the Medal of Honor.

The 515th Transportation Truck Company helped evacuate the 1st Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division at Hungnam, Tangyang, Wonju and from Pyonggang to Hamgye. A platoon became cut off by the enemy for a period of two weeks. It successfully continued its mission evacuating combat units despite casualties and loss of equipment to enemy action.

From 11 through 24 December, X Corps evacuated Hamnung and arrived at Pusan. Meanwhile, the Eighth Army fell back to below the 38th Parallel.

In 1951, the front lines had stabilized into a static war similar to World War I. The 52nd Truck Battalion had elements of 5 to 17 truck companies in which it supported X Corps out of Wonju. Temporary truck organizations were created whenever necessary. The battalion ran operations 24-hours a day with trucks driving 12 hour shifts. There was no schedule for departures. They left as needed supplies whenever the trucks were loaded. They were anywhere from five to ten miles behind the front lines. It would take about three hours to reach the front. They would drop off their cargo then return. During the winter, they would sometimes stop along the way to cook their meals. The entire trip might take eight to ten hours. Trucks usually traveled in convoys of 12 to 15 trucks, all from the same company with one jeep for the convoy commander in the lead and a

wrecker in the rear. No one had radios. Because they would be sniped at by enemy soldiers along the way, the trucks had ring mounted .30 caliber machineguns per every two trucks. This did not scare the enemy so they replaced the .30 calibers with .50 calibers and that seemed to discourage enemy ambushes.

In mid-May the X Corps Transportation Officer directed the 52nd Battalion to provide 40 trucks to assist the move of the 3rd ID from south of Seoul to Soksa-ri. Anticipating the loss of 40 trucks, COL John K. McCormick, G4 of X Corps, instructed the technical services to canvass their units for trucks not hauling essential cargo. The 4th Signal Battalion, 1st and 2nd Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals, 520th Quartermaster Battalion, 69th Ordnance Battalion, and the 8224th Engineer Construction Group offered up 50 to 60 ¾- and 2 ½-ton trucks, called the "Truck Bank."

The 515th Truck company earned the Distinguished Unit Citation for its support of the X Corps during combat operations from 7 November 1950 to 6 May 1951. It transported 28,682 troops and 23,241 tons of supplies over a total of 1,021,171 miles. It was also cited for its performance during the operations at Hamhung where the platoon was cut off.

Under the direction of the 52nd Truck Battalion, a separate truck group was established to haul ammunition exclusively. Many of the vehicles were taken from units of the 52nd and others were borrowed from other units. A control point for ammunition was established at Wonju. To prevent confusion, vehicles were dispatched in serials of five to ten. At the control point the drivers could get a meal at a 24-hour kitchen and a service station provided second-echelon maintenance. Normally twenty vehicles an hour entered the ammunition dump. From the Wonju, the trucks delivered ammunition to APS No. 50 at Hongchon. There the ammunition was usually transferred from tailgate to tailgate of the front line division trucks.

On another occasion, X Corps only had a few hours to gather 300 trucks for a troop movement. The 52nd Battalion furnished 200 while the MPs commandeered another 94. There was no time to notify the parent units of the trucks that their vehicles had been taken nor time to make arrangements for fuel and feed the drivers. They had to scrounge the best they could.

The 515th Truck Company earned the Meritorious Unit Commendation for the period 1 May to 31 October 1952 for hauling supplies and equipment to front-line combat units. Drivers frequently worked on a 24-hour daily basis to transport 25,000 tons of cargo and over 20,000 personnel over 500,000 miles.

It was reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 52nd Transportation Battalion on 1 April 1954 and inactivated in Japan on 10 May 1955.

Helicopter Battalion

The 52nd was redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 52nd Transportation Battalion (Helicopter) on 13 October 1955. It was reactivated at Fort

Bragg, North Carolina on 7 November 1955. It later moved to Fort Ord, California and was redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 52nd Aviation Battalion on 22 December 1962.

Vietnam War

The 52nd Aviation Battalion “Flying Dragons” deployed to Vietnam and arrived on 19 March 1963. It supported the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) during the US advisory role in the Vietnam War. The battalion move to Pleiku in the mountainous central highlands. Fog combined with 7,000 foot peaks made flying even more dangerous in the valleys and emergency LZ's were hard to find.

Do Xa Operation, April 27 - May 4, 1964

“Do Xa used to be an impenetrable Viet Cong's sanctuary due to its intricate configuration. This enclave is a deep valley nestled against the Annamite Mountains right at peak Ngoc Linh, which raises so high (8,524ft) that sun's rays hardly reach the grounds of this valley. Because it is at the junction of three Provinces (Kontum, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai), the Viet Cong used it as an infiltration gate of troops leaving the Ho Chi Minh Trail along Laos to enter the Center areas of South Vietnam. It was also used as ammunition and food caches, as well as resting areas and field hospitals. Since ARVN troops were unable to penetrate this area, it was designated as a free firing and bombardment area. Consequently, when airplanes returned to the base after air raid missions, the pilots freely discharged their unused ordnance onto this area.

“On Monday April 27, 1964, General Do Cao Tri, 2nd Corps Commanding General, launched the Do Xa Campaign (Operation Quyet Thang 202) aiming directly at the valley of Khe Nuoc Lah, the impenetrable sanctuary of NVA General Nguyen Don. He entrusted the planning and design of this operation to Colonel Nguyen Van Hieu, his Chief of Staff, with the assistance of General Lu Lan, who was holding the position of 2nd Corps Deputy Commander.

“The Forward Command Post was established at Quang Ngai airport. The main core of the forces that took part of this campaign was divided into two groups. Group A was composed of three Rangers Battalions under the command of Major Son Thuong. Group B was composed of units of the 50th Regiment, belonging to the 25th Division, under the command of Major Phan Trong Chinh. These two Groups were reinforced with the 3rd Airborne Battalion (Captain Ngo Quang Troung who lead the Airborne Battalion received a battlefield promotion to Major in this campaign). Prior to that period, while serving at the 1st Corps as Deputy Chief of operations, Major Hieu had cooperated closely with the American Marine Corps in Da Nang through his relation with Major Wagner, USMC, an advisor for the ARVN 1st Corps. This close relationship had eased the way for the US Marine Corps Command at Da Nang to acquiesce Colonel Hieu's request for transportation assistance: the US Marine Corps Command went out its way (its operational areas were within the 1st Corps) and dispatched one H-34 helicopter squadron, the HMM-364 USMC squadron, which was reinforced with five UH-1B US

Army gunships and two UH-34s from the VNAF to ferry troops into Do Xa's enclave. In addition, the US Army 52nd Aviation Battalion lent troops transport and the VNAF also provided two Skyraiders to cover troops insertion.” Nguyen Van Tin, Do Xa Campaign, 22 February 2000, <<http://www.generallhieu.comdoxa-2.htm>>

“The U.S. Army aviation support for the assault on the Do Xa Valley (also referred to as Sure Win 202 by U.S.M.C.) involved the entire 52nd Aviation Battalion, which included both the 117th Avn Co, Qui Nhon and the 119th Avn Company, Pleiku. I flew with the 117th on that assault. My UH-1B and crew flew the ARVN troops in, the first day and remained for the following four days for resupply and medevac missions. We also flew out 150-200 captured weapons and ammo, including two US-made 30 cal machine guns, plus TNT used to make booby traps.

“There was an Army H-37 from the 339th Trans Co flown by Captain Kerry Foster. I can remember talking to Kerry as we checked out the 50 cal holes in the side of a downed VNAF Skyraider.

“That was one nasty assault! The 52nd Avn Battalion flew into an LZ that would only take two Hueys at once and it was in a very narrow valley. We were strung out in a line a mile long. Sixteen flights of two ships each could hardly be called a formation. We were under constant automatic weapons fire from ridgelines on both sides of the valley. Each Huey made seven landings in that LZ, which included at least two burning wrecks. As soon as the ARVN troops were out the doors, we climbed as high and fast as we could back to Gia Lang for more troopers, then back to that tiny, busy LZ.” William E. McGee (*Courtesy of Vietnam Center Archive*) <<http://www.generallhieu.comdoxa-2.htm>>

The 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion (CAB) was stationed at Camp Holloway, Pleiku. It was reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 52nd Aviation Battalion on 25 January 1965. It was later assigned to the 17th Aviation Group on 1 March 1966. After the US combat units arrived and took over ground combat operations the 52nd CAB primarily provided support for the 4th and 25th Infantry Divisions as well as the ARVN units.

On or about August 1966, the Commander of the 52d CAB, began organizing, equipping and training the Pathfinder Detachment to conduct combat operations by October 1966. The mission of the pathfinder was to provide forward air to ground assistance and navigation to all US and Allied Army aircraft and through formal coordination, all US and Allied Airforce aircraft.

The initial detachment members were all infantry trained, out of the ten enlisted members, eight were airborne qualified, and most of them were assigned to the 52d Battalion shortly after completing jump school, never being assigned to a regular infantry unit. This provided a real challenge to the training cadre in their preparation for combat.

By May 1967, the detachment was operating in three locations of II Corps area of operation. Jackson Hole, the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry, Bam me Thuot with the

155th Combat Assault Helicopter Company and out of Camp Holloway itself. At Jackson Hole and Bam Me Thuot the pathfinder's provided air traffic control at these sites and also pathfinders were being forward deployed with infantry company or battalion establishing new fire support bases or resupply missions.

November 1967, the detachment was challenged by providing support by establishing, coordinating, and operating all the air to ground resupply missions to both the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry and the 173rd Separate Brigade (Airborne) during the battle of Dak To. Which at the same time providing pathfinder support to Bam Thuot and a new brigade fire support base located at the Oasis.

31 January 1968 TET Offensive begin the following morning seven pathfinders were ordered by the 52nd Battalion Commander to assist the 57th AHC at Kontum in securing their perimeter for the next eight days while other pathfinders provided support for Dak To, Oasis and Bam Me Thuot. During the year 1968, the pathfinder role was expanded by Major Robert Morrison, the 189th Assault Helicopter Company Commander. Major Morrison where and whenever his aircraft were deployed on combat assault or extraction a pathfinder team would be on the ground to provide air to ground assistance.

On 25 November 1968, the battalion was reorganized and redesignated as the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 52nd Aviation Battalion. In 1970 spearheaded flight support for the NE Cambodian operations. It left Vietnam on 28 April 1972.

It was reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 52d Aviation Battalion on 21 June 1979. It was again reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 52d Aviation Battalion on 16 October 1987 then inactivated in Korea 16 October 1988. It was redesignated as the 52d Aviation, a parent regiment under the United States Army Regimental System on 16 January 1996.