

## 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion (Infantry Division) Pentomic

After 1949, the Army was in the throes 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 their 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. Each battle group was essentially a brigade-size headquarters, with no permanently assigned units that could be task-organized for missions.

The division trains contained a transportation battalion with three lettered companies that would contain both trucks and armored personnel carriers providing the division both a motorized and mechanized capability. A Company had 80 2 ½-ton trucks with 1 ½-ton trailers to primarily haul personnel and supplies for the division. B and C Companies had 115 new M59 Armored Personnel Carriers (APC) each capable of hauling one infantry squad. The armor would stop small arms fire and mortar of light artillery shrapnel, and the vehicles were air transportable and could also swim rivers. The APCs would provide tactical mobility to assault elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division for pursuit and exploitation, and for other tactical missions. The battalion headquarters could also provide transportation staff planning for the division.

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.

On 15 February 1957, the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalions were inactivated and the soldiers combined to activate the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion as the new transportation battalion

of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. It was the first transportation battalion of its kind in the Army. LTC Arthur P. Wade commanded it for a little over a month. The 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion had three lettered companies. The 1<sup>st</sup> Medical Battalion and 701<sup>st</sup> Ordnance Battalion also belonged to the Division Trains.

There 444<sup>th</sup> and 531<sup>st</sup> Transportation Companies were also on Fort Riley but not yet attached to the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The 531<sup>st</sup> Medium Truck had been activated in July 1954 and the 444<sup>th</sup> Light Truck was activated on 3 December 1955. Both were assigned to the Fifth Army. As such they provided army-wide support. The 531<sup>st</sup> Medium Truck had participated in Exercise Sage Brush at Fort Polk, Louisiana. This was the largest training exercise since World War II and was designed to simulate nuclear conditions of an atomic battlefield. The company would also participate in Exercise Desert Rock VII in Desert Rock, Nevada from May through December 1957. These Desert Rock Exercises were conducted in conjunction with atmospheric nuclear tests at Nevada Proving Grounds.

On 31 March 1957, a little over a month after the battalion's activation, LTC Karl H. Zornig assumed command of the battalion from LTC Wade. Since the soldiers came from the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalions, MSG Joseph Donovan became the sergeant major. He had fought with the Big Red One during World War II and had been the sergeant major of the division's 33<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion since 1947.

Immediately upon the battalion's activation, it deployed to Fort Polk, Louisiana to participate in Exercise King Cole from 11 March to 27 April. The soldiers of the battalion familiarized themselves with their new vehicles and trained on the battalion's infantry support mission. Later that first summer, the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion hosted six weeks of ROTC training at Fort Riley and its maintenance level later dropped due to a high turnover in personnel. The replacements had to learn new skills while still supporting the infantry units in the field.

As a tradition many units in the Army adopted mascots. Since the 9<sup>th</sup> was a transportation battalion, an animal related to transportation would have been more appropriate. In September 1957, the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion purchased a three-year old Mexican burro from MSGT Walter Kirk for \$35 and adopted it as the battalion mascot. They named it Jack A. Ha and awarded it the rank of private first class. MSG Walter of C Company, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion owned a ranch near Junction City where he raised horses and burros. PFC Howard Schmidtcall was assigned as the burro's handler who learned to handle donkeys while playing Donkey Baseball in Sanger, California.

As the first Pentomic transportation battalion, it would assist in the organization of the other such battalions. In early 1958, the battalion conducted advanced individual training for 137 soldiers bound for the newly formed 20<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Coincidentally, CPT Howard K. Williams, turned command of his company over to CPT Robert W. Emmert, so he could assume command of a carrier company of the newly formed 31<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division organizing and training at Fort Carson, Colorado, which would shortly transfer to Germany. 1LT Fred Kellar likewise gave up command of A Company to assume command of the 444<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company.

On 1 March 1958, the Institute of Heraldry approved the coat of arms and insignia of the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. The wheels and track symbolized the types of transportation in the battalion and the rays emanating from the wheel represented a new enlightenment with respect to combat mobility and the atomic cloud above it represented the era of the units birth. The colors brick red and gold represented the colors of the Transportation Corps, but the additional color sky blue symbolized the battalion's support to the infantry. The underlying motto, "Fide Mobilitate," was Latin for "Faith, Reliability and Mobility.

In April, the armored personnel carriers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion conducted river crossings of the Kansas River behind Camp Funston to test the swim capability of the M-59s.

That May, seven units at Fort Riley were selected to host ROTC training during the months of June through August. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division selected the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion and the 701<sup>st</sup> Ordnance Battalion to provide transportation and supply services to the training. The 444<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company conducted training for the US Army Reserve units that same summer. For one week during the summer training, LTC Zornig turned the entire battalion over to his NCOs. First sergeants commanded the companies and SGM Donovan commanded the battalion. LTC Zornig did this because he knew that during combat in World War II NCOs had to command companies and battalion sized units. SFC Everett C. Nelson earned particular praise for his command of C Company and his flawless demonstration of the APC's capabilities. SGM Donovan greatly appreciated the level of responsibility of his commander and was glad to have him back.

On 26 June, the battalion finally received its official battalion colors when LTC Zornig presented them to the battalion color guard on the parade ground at Camp Forsyth.

After the summer ROTC training support, the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion immediately conducted an Army Training Program followed by their first Army Training Test from 18 through 20 November. This was an official evaluation to determine the proficiency of the battalion in its missions and it earned a rating of excellent.

In March 1959, the battalion conducted its first fully mounted, motorized and mechanized review in celebration of the second anniversary of its activation. On 22 July, LTC Fred C. Allen assumed command of the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion from LTC Zornig. LTC Allen came from Military District of Washington, DC, and LTC Zornig was assigned to Fort Lee, Virginia. SGM Edwin Thomas replaced MSG Joseph Donovan as the battalion sergeant major. Donovan then became the first sergeant of the Headquarters Battery, Division Artillery.

That year, the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion provided the same summer support as before. During the 1959 ROTC summer training at Fort Riley in July, a platoon of A Company conducted a static display and tactical demonstrations of the new vehicles in the battalion.

In early 1960, the 444<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company (Light Truck) and 531<sup>st</sup> Transportation Company (Medium Truck) were officially attached to the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. In addition to the normal support and training, the battalion provided support to all the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division command post exercises. During the summer, the 444<sup>th</sup> and 531<sup>st</sup> Transportation

Companies provided support to US Army Reserve active duty training at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. On 8 July 1960, MAJ Orville F. Marks assumed temporary command of the battalion from LTC Allen. LTC Allen would then attend the Armed Forces Industrial College at Fort McNair, Washington, DC. On 28 July, LTC Richard J. Scherberger assumed command of the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion from MAJ Marks. MSGT Avent replaced MSGT Vaughn as the battalion sergeant major. In December, the battalion conducted the Army Training Test on the 444<sup>th</sup> and 531<sup>st</sup> Transportation Companies and both received evaluations of excellent.

On 10 July 1961, LTC Richard Scherberger passed the battalion colors to LTC Joseph P. O'Connor. LTC Scherberger deployed to Cambodia to serve in the Military Advisory Group, and LTC O'Connor came down from the office of Deputy for Logistics, Department of the Army.

On 30 April 1961, the 444<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company at Camp Funston hosted the 821<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion (Truck) from Topeka to conduct its annual range qualification with its carbines. In July, the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion trained the 766<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion and its four companies at Fort Riley. The 766<sup>th</sup> was an Army Reserve unit from East Chicago. The 542<sup>nd</sup>, 555<sup>th</sup>, 579<sup>th</sup> and 915<sup>th</sup> Transportation Companies (USAR) trained on day and night operations with the armored personnel carriers (APC). This was the third year in a row the 766<sup>th</sup> had trained at Fort Riley. Meanwhile, members of the 444<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company supported ROTC summer training at Fort Riley and 50 men of the 531<sup>st</sup> traveled to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin to support Army Reserve training up there. The 444<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company became the first company of the battalion to drive 200,000 miles without any accidents.

Meanwhile, LTC O'Connor also served as the interim division trains commander. The battalion executive officer, MAJ C. S. Bornman, was promoted to lieutenant colonel on 18 August and filled in as the interim battalion commander until LTC Joffre H. Boston assumed command of the division trains on 1 September.

From 16 October through 9 December 1961, B Company participated in a field training exercise in the Pike National Forest, Colorado. The next year, the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division deployed to West Berlin for six-month participation in Exercise Long Thrust IV. In the standoff between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Soviet Union, NATO forces occupied West Berlin deep inside Soviet occupied East Germany. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy ordered the US garrison immediately reinforced. The 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 1<sup>st</sup> Battle Group convoyed through East Germany to Berlin without incident. However, 7<sup>th</sup> Army feared reinforcing West Berlin would weaken its defense of West Germany, so the decision was made to deploy battle groups from the Continental United States on quarterly rotations. A Company deployed with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle Group to Rhein Main Air Force Base on 9 July 1962. There they trained for three months at Wildflicken, Germany. In October, the battle group crossed the border into East Germany. While the treaty arrangements permitted NATO convoys along the autobahn, they were subject to Soviet inspection. Once across the border in Marienborn, the American soldiers had to dismount to be counted by Russian officers. The battle group arrived at its new home in West Berlin on 8 October where it remained for three months.

The Pentomic organization was wrought with flaws and consequently replaced with the Reorganization Objective Army Division (ROAD) organization, which began in 1963. The

armored personnel carriers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion were issued to the infantry battalions and the cargo trucks remained under the division trains. The 9<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion was inactivated on 2 January 1964.

The 531<sup>st</sup> Medium Truck Company continued to provide support to local training exercises and with the buildup of American forces in Vietnam, it was alerted for overseas deployment in September 1965. On 28 November, it departed Fort Riley and arrived on Okinawa on 14 December where it was attached to the 506<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion for port clearance of Naha. The 444<sup>th</sup> Light Truck Company deployed to Vietnam and arrived on 28 October 1965.

### Bibliography

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