

Telephone Interview with John M. Horvath by Richard Killblane, 28 May 2002.

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A Tale of Two Truck Tours

Truck Tour Number One

CPT John Horvath had been a transportation officer in charge of household goods in Germany. Because of the draw down of troops in Germany nearly everyone was going to Vietnam, beginning in the middle of 1965. He reported to Ft Bragg, NC on Memorial Day 1966. He assumed command of the 64th Medium Truck Company, which was ordered to deploy to Vietnam. Horvath was excited to receive a company command and happy to go to Vietnam. He believed that we planned to win the war.

Horvath deployed with the 64th Company to Vietnam in July 1966. After eighteen days aboard the USNS General John Pope and passing the international date line on 30 Jul 66, the unit arrived in RVN on 11 August. Its parent battalion would not deploy with it since the 64th TOE was designed for the company to act independently. The 64th had it's own personnel specialist, a finance specialist, a property book, a maintenance section, and a mess section. They followed the procedures according to the deployment AR and eventually moved with a full complement of 60 task tractors, and 186 officers and men. The movement included a number of steps. The company advance party went by air to RVN. The vehicles were shipped via Charleston with a company escort party. The main body flew by air charter from Pope AFB to McChord AFB, near Ft Lewis, Washington, then went by bus to the Tacoma Outport. The 64th became a part of those deploying with the 4th Infantry Division from Ft Lewis. Horvath made arrangements for the company mascot, a German Shepherd named Huntz, complete with dogtags and shot record and company orders, to accompany the unit. When the year was almost over, a collection was taken up, and the dog returned via commercial air to Ft Bragg to eventually live with one of the company mechanics. Huntz remained with his master, Sam Hovey and his family, until Huntz passed away in 1975. Horvath was able to set up a high-school style yearbook for distribution to the original 64th personnel.

The deployment from Ft Bragg was truly a period of challenges. Soon after the company was alerted for Vietnam, the post took away the motor pool buildings and hardstand, and we had to move the parts supplies, maintenance equipment, 60 task tractors, 120 task trailers, and 20 headquarters vehicles to an open sandy field surrounded by barbed wire. We were beginning to get a paranoid feeling. The 64th's mission at Ft Bragg had been an important one, the "cattle car" bus service for all of the thousands of reservists and ROTC students. The post personnel notified us that they were going to keep our task tractors, and that we would draw tractors in Vietnam. Our maintenance warrant officer, CWO George Sebeny Sr., had just finished a tour in Vietnam with an aviation unit, and he emphasized that the supply system in Vietnam was non-operational, that we must take the best care of ourselves as possible. We then muscled all of the best tires off of the tractors and put the tires on to the trailers.

At just about the time when we finished changing the tires, Department of the Army found out about the post policy concerning the tractors, and notified us that we would be taking the tractors with us. You guessed it; we then began to return all of the best tires to the tractors. Among the many preventive maintenance services that we did, we did a quarterly maintenance on every vehicle. This meant pulling every bearing race on every axel and cleaning it and coating it with heavyweight grease before reinstalling the bearing. The open, sandy field was gruesome to work in for such servicing, but we literally gritted and bore it. We obtained a great deal of 2x4 lumber, and we nailed a double flooring of solid lumber to the beds of every one of our 120 trailers for later removal and use in building a company area. Since we had heard that the large metal tarpaulin boxes on the 120 trailers were having the locks broken off and contents pilfered during the voyage to Vietnam, we loaded our tarp boxes with maintenance supplies and tarps. We then used our company welding tools to weld the tarp boxes shut and to later open them in Vietnam. There would be no pilfering of our supplies on the way to Vietnam. At about the same time that the 64th was alerted, a nearby Military Intelligence Battalion was taken off of alert. They had 23 large Container Express steel boxes (CONEX) for their movement, and now their area was cluttered with the unneeded conexas. We graciously offered to use our property book to sign for the conexas, and to use our tractors, trailers, and wrecker hoist for the movement, and we quickly moved the conexas to our sandy field. The post was having a large number of units alerted for Vietnam, and they had a shortage of conexas, thus each company-sized unit would be getting only three conexas. We promptly headed to the transportation office and picked up our three conexas and also moved them to our sandy field. In accordance with CWO Sebeny's informed guidance, we loaded the 26 containers with several purchased Skil rotary saws, refrigerators from the disposal yard, purchased bags of cement, sheets of plywood, parts, and supplies.

We were told that we would be flying to the west coast by commercial air, that we must prepare our weapons to move as cargo. We picked up dozens of wooden crates, tubs of cosmoline 90 weight grease, and rolls of heavy waxed paper, and grimly worked our way through the nasty job of greasing and packing the 200 weapons. At just about the time we finished with the grease job, we were notified that we would be flying by charter air, and that we were to carry our weapons into the passenger compartment. We were now indeed convinced that being paranoid was going to be pretty well justified. We settled down to the problem of cleaning all of the weapons. When the cleaning was finished, we had a 2½ ton truckload of greasy paper and greasy wooden boxes for the dump. At this time, we had driven all of our own vehicles to Charleston, and we were using borrowed vehicles for the few remaining weeks until our own departure. The supply truck driver and his helper backed up to the cliff-like dumping point, and shoved out all of the greased trash that flowed down the hill. So far, so good, but there was a trash fire burning at the bottom of the hill. The fire quickly climbed up our stream of trash, into the truck, and burned off all of the paint, the wooden bows, the canvas cushions, the tarpaulin, the canvas cab cover, and singed the instrument panel. We were able to fix everything but the instrument panel. The paperwork demanding \$1,200 reimbursement for the instrument panel followed us to Vietnam, where finally our tortured reply ended the matter.

On the convoy from Ft Bragg to Charleston we lost one tractor in a rear-ender accident and lost one as an engine locked up. The Ft Bragg supply office replaced both.

The company flew on an American Flyer charter flight from Pope Airfield at Ft Bragg to McChord AFB near Tacoma. One of the drivers had a slight stomach ulcer. He made himself cough until he coughed up blood, thus he was turned over to the medical personnel at McChord AFB. About six weeks later he showed up at the Qui Nhon personnel center for assignment to the 64th, he had only delayed the beginning of his 12-month tour.

Our original destination was supposed to be Cam Ranh Bay but when we arrived by ship at Qui Nhon, Chief Warrant Officer George Sebeny, who had flown to Vietnam about three weeks earlier as the head of the advance party, came aboard and informed us that we had to get off at Qui Nhon. This caught us by surprise since we had not prepared the equipment for offloading. Our destination had changed before we arrived. Our two containers full of company equipment were bottom-stowed on the ship since we were supposed to get off at the last stop, not the first stop. The two containers went on to Cam Ranh Bay with our company escorts, and in a few days the escorts and the containers came back to the 64th through Qui Nhon port aboard a Landing Ship (Tank).

This change generated another interesting series of events. As a separate company, we were authorized to receive a WABTOC package (When Authorized By The Overseas Commander). This consisted of about 60 pallets of construction materials, items that were "worth their weight in gold". After about a month, Horvath found out that the 64th's WABTOC package had been coded for the destination of Cam Ranh Bay, gone to Cam Ranh Bay, and disappeared. He was able to order another WABTOC package, and, you guessed it, after about a month it also wound up coded for and delivered to Cam Ranh Bay. He sent two NCOs on company orders to Cam Ranh Bay to take charge of this second batch of materials before the materials could disappear again. After a month-long struggle to get the building materials out of the hands of those who had "disappeared" the first shipment, the second WABTOC package and the two NCOs finally arrived at Qui Nhon via LST.

The 64th Company was assigned to the 27th Battalion at Qui Nhon. The other companies included the 2nd Medium Truck Cargo (12-ton), 541st Light Truck (2 ½ ton), 359th Medium Truck Petroleum (12-ton) and 597th Medium Truck Cargo (12-ton). The 563rd Medium Truck Cargo (12 ton) came in soon after the 64th arrived. LTC Leo T. McMahon was the commander of the 27th Battalion. He had a daily command and staff meeting every evening at 1900 hours. He changed the times of his commanders meeting so his officers could not go to Mass at the airfield hanger when Archbishop Cardinal Cushing of the Catholic Military Ordinariate visited Qui Nhon. He did the same thing when Bob Hope visited and put on a show at the hanger of the Qui Nhon airfield. He was not popular. BG Albert E. Hunter was the Commander of the Qui Nhon Support Command. At that time the TC Battalion took all of the taskings directly from the Support Command. About two months after their arrival in country, the members of the 64th had a nasty surprise, which had nothing to do with the enemy.

The Qui Nhon Support Command conducted peacetime Annual General Inspection on the unit. They sent down twenty-two inspectors and the company only had eighteen officers and NCOs to escort them. The daily run of as many tractors as possible continued throughout the pre-inspection and inspection period. Horvath felt that it was entirely unrealistic to inspect a company by peacetime standards when trucks were on the road every day in a 100% effort which

never went below a 100% effort, and when absolutely nothing else was operated according to peacetime standards. The company passed the inspection and the inspectors went back to their desks at the Qui Nhon Support Command headquarters.

The line of communication ran from Qui Nhon 110 miles west on Rte 19, past the 1st Air Cav Division at An Khe, to Pleiku where the 4th Infantry Division and 173rd Airborne Brigade were stationed. There was one ice truck run north each day to the Bong Song area, and occasionally they received a tasking to haul several trailers north up Route 1 to the Air Base at Phu Cat near Bong Son.

The 64th suffered its only fatality of the first year in the dark of an August early morning when driver Kenneth Tierney was crushed between two trucks in the trailer transfer point. The unbelievably rough roads, unruly civilian traffic, high mileage, and fatigue made accidents a constant problem. Thanksgiving Day became known as Black Thursday when three tractors were lost in accidents. The tractors bounced high over the potholes, the fenders came loose, were welded, came loose again, then were chained through holes and flapped along.

On one occasion, the 8th Group Commander and the Qui Nhon Support Command Commander, Brigadier General Albert E. Hunter, came upon a 64th tractor which had run off of the end of a narrow metal engineer bridge, and was upside down in the roadside gully. The tractor had not only turned over, it had smashed the large fuel pipeline that ran from Qui Nhon to An Khe, and petroleum was gushing freely around the scene. The picture was not any prettier later when CPT Horvath was presented with a glossy 8x12 photo and asked to explain why his truck driver drove that way. Actually, there was a reason. The driver had taken both hands off of the steering wheel. He reached down through the steering wheel with one hand to the high/low range lever, and reached at the same time with the other hand to the gearshift lever, and did both functions at the same time with one clutch pedal throw. The arm through the steering wheel was supposed to keep the steering under control, but this time the sensitive power steering and the narrow bridge did not allow the customary shortcut to be successful. On another occasion, a driver and the company chain of command was required to formally march in front of Brigadier General Hunter's desk and explain why the tractor driver had had a rear-end collision. The driver calmly explained that he was hungry, that he had dropped his can of peanuts down on the floor of the cab, and that when he reached down to pick up the can of peanuts, the collision was unavoidable. Oh well, these incidents are comical now, but there was nothing funny about them at the time. There were no safety class materials available in the Qui Nhon Support Command, so CPT Horvath managed to purchase a color movie of a truck safety program from the Ohio Highway Patrol, and he also mounted a smashed vehicle on top of a CONEX container at the company front gate.

Horvath rotated the convoy commander responsibility with the three, later two, platoon leaders of the company. When on the convoy duty, Horvath woke up at 0200, then went to the company operations office to learn how many of the 60 tractors he had available and which NCO was on the duty roster for the day for assistant convoy commander. When he noted the mileage on the odometer of his M151 jeep after ten months, he had logged 20,000 miles. The other companies were "too beat up" to have enough officers to lead convoys. They had either lost officers due to

rotations back to the United States or the officers had been pulled up to staff slots at the headquarters.

At 0230, he reported to battalion operations when he was on convoy duty. The operations sergeant would brief the taskings on hand for the day. Company representatives would report the trucks they had available and would receive their assignments. The 64th's officer would be the medium tractor convoy commander every day, and the other tractor companies sent a sergeant to control their vehicles.

At 0400, the men ate breakfast in his company mess. They usually woke up at 0330. At about 0420, Horvath would stand up and announce which trucks had to pick up trailers at the different supply depots or at the port of Qui Nhon. Depots were broken down by classes of supply. 64th Company did not have any drivers for assistant drivers since it had to put fifteen men and an NCO on guard duty each day, plus battalion detail, plus company detail to build the facilities. After breakfast, the drivers drove their tractors to the depots to pick up their trailers. This was the point of origin. If their assigned trailer was not ready, then they would drive to the trailer transfer point in the Cha Rang Valley near the beginning of Highway 19, near the departure point marshalling area, and pick up an incidental load trailer.

At 0630, the tractors with loaded trailers assembled in the marshalling area at Cha Rang Valley (about the size of three football fields) in front of the trailer transfer point. On the average, each convoy had about 110 vehicles, half from the 64th and the other half from the other medium and petroleum companies in the 27th Battalion.

At 0645, the convoy commander would give the outbound briefing and make a list of vehicles by bumper number in the convoy. Horvath lined up the trucks by companies with the 64th in the lead. He had his assistant convoy commander ride up front while he lined up as the last vehicle. Since the trucks had no radios, this was the only way he would discover any problems. He kept the 5-ton "bob tail" recovery vehicle with a mechanic doing the driving, and a spare bobtail, at the trail of the convoy, to fix any mechanical problems. During the day's run, he would move up and down the convoy, and sometimes have the assistant convoy commander at the rear of the convoy.

Horvath also issued his men C rations for the road. The other companies did not. If a company drew an issue of C rations from the Quartermaster depot at Qui Nhon, then the C rations counted against the A rations for the mess hall.

Horvath discovered that the Quartermaster depot in Pleiku would issue him a pallet of C rations without charging it against his A rations account which was kept in Qui Nhon. This was at least some small repayment for having to suffer through two dusty dry seasons and two rainy monsoon seasons all in the same year, one climate daily in Qui Nhon and another climate daily in Pleiku.

At 0700, the convoy departed.

By 0915 they arrived at An Khe, the home of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. The slow low range first gear grind drive up the An Khe pass and later the Mang Yang pass usually took the convoys almost an hour each to drive. They would marshal again to filter out stray traffic and to see if they had any maintenance problems. There were usually two to three other ARVN or US convoys ahead of them waiting at that checkpoint. The MPs would release one convoy and then wait for a given amount of time before releasing the next convoy. There was no designated schedule for convoys. All the bridges had been blown and the Bailey bridge metal engineer bypasses reduced traffic to a single lane, with the westbound convoys having the priority at each choke point. At about 0945, Horvath's convoy would depart again.

At about 1200 they arrived at the Pleiku marshalling area. The tractors would disperse to their designated depots to drop off their loaded trailers and pick up an empty trailer. Pleiku only had depots and a TTP and the 4th Infantry Div base camp. They would line up in the marshalling area at around 1400. As Horvath waited, he would check to see what he was missing. Sometimes a tractor would have to remain at Pleiku overnight because its trailer had not been emptied. If so, the drivers had to sleep in the cabs as there were no billets set up for them. At an engineer depot, the cadre became known for not unloading the 55-gallon drums of asphalt and causing the driver to stay overnight. Near the end of the waiting period, Horvath and the driver cut the securing metal bands, the driver made a series of tight turns, and the drums were unloaded across the entire storage area. The depot cadre then found that they were able to unload quickly on future deliveries. The 4th Infantry Division sadly and unfortunately became known for holding loaded trailers for over 30 days, and over 60 days and more, and at the same time imperiously demanding more supplies. The 8th Group Commander eventually instituted a policy that said that we would not take any loaded trailers up to the 4th Infantry Division unless they had released an equal number of empty trailers the previous day. The problem became less severe, but the problem never did disappear.

At 1400 they would depart. If they delayed too long then the MPs would not let them leave because the MPs had the responsibility to close down the road. Although there was not much of a danger during this era before the ambushes from Sep 67 to Sep 68, the MPs did not want any convoys out at night. The Republic of Korea soldiers outside Qui Nhon would close down their portion of the road at dusk each evening and not let any vehicles pass.

By 1800, the convoy rolled back into the Cha Rang Valley area. The marshalling area was the release point. The drivers knew exactly what they had to do and where they had to go. The drivers scattered to their respective company areas. After dropping off their empty trailers, they returned to the company area for maintenance. Horvath had organized what he called "3 ring circuit maintenance." The 1st platoon would check and replace the tires, the 2nd platoon would wash the trucks with the water from a well they had dug, and the 3rd platoon would pull after operations maintenance with each driver. With any problems that they could not fix by 2130, they would drive the tractor to the company maintenance shop where the "night owls" worked all night. There was no scheduled maintenance down time or preventive maintenance for the tractors. Every available tractor drove every day. The maintenance section was divided into two shifts, with mechanics performing repairs at night and during the day. Tractors that would run the next day were returned to the platoons that night for use on the morning convoy. What could

be fixed by company maintenance was set up for repair during the day. What needed support maintenance was prepared for turn in to ordnance.

The men would then eat dinner and go to bed. At 0230 the next morning the next convoy commander would report to the company operations office to see what tractors were available and the process would repeat all over again.

When not escorting a convoy, Horvath performed his regular company commander duties. The paperwork did not stop on account of the war. Since his unit had just arrived in country, he spent a lot of time scrounging for building materials for his company. He also visited the depots to learn how they did business and see what he could do to reduce the time his drivers had to wait to pick up their loads. Most of this could be accomplished by just making friends with the depot personnel. At one time Horvath's supply efforts moved to the Qui Nhon harbor. He was called upon to meet the commander of the inbound 563rd Medium Truck Company out on the ship, and brief him for the actions in leaving the ship and getting set up ashore. He took out two pairs of tropical boots for trading with the ship's Navy Quartermaster officer. The boots were exchanged for 100 sets of silverware for the mess hall, a great trade.

Horvath was happiest when out with a convoy. He never saw any of the other commanders leading convoys. On account of personnel losses and shortage of officers, he believed that they were busy just trying to keep their heads above water.

Drivers were dedicated. They knew what they had to do. One only had to tell them where to pick up their load. At line up, he only had to wait for them to show up so he could get a list of the bumper numbers.

The "heavy lifter" drivers were the most independent. These 20-ton tractor and "low boy" trailers were pulled from engineer units and consolidated into a squad of about eight or ten. Their task was to go to Pleiku and pick up broken tanks or M113 Armored Personnel Carriers and bring them back to Qui Nhon. These rigs were so slow that they could not keep up with the convoys. They drove Rte 19 alone with a ¾ ton truck for assistance and escort.

Coming in and pulling maintenance until late at night did not give the drivers much time off for relaxation or sleep. They slept whenever they could; waiting for line up in Qui Nhon or waiting in the marshalling area at Pleiku. They took naps in the cabs of their trucks. If their tractor would run, the drivers were on the road. Guard duty or detail duty were the only times when they received a break from driving. During the guard day they had two hours on guard and four off throughout the day.

Both the An Khe pass and the Mang Yang pass were a long series of sharp turns and a continuous steep grade. One turn in the An Khe pass was so tight that it was called the "Devil's Hairpin". Many drivers used disposable surgical masks from the clinics to fight the choking convoy dust. During one slow and hot and dusty drive up the An Khe pass, Horvath spotted one of his drivers who was driving while "frozen" sound asleep at the wheel, with his hands, wrists, and arms locked into place. Horvath loosened his canteen, got out of his jeep, ran alongside of the tractor, jumped up on the running board, grabbed the steering wheel, and splashed some

water into the face of the driver. The severity of the conditions, without any break, was impossible to explain to anyone who had not experienced the trials of "the road".

One of the drivers had an alcohol problem. When he had several beers, he would load his rifle and threaten others in the company area. Horvath made formal and informal efforts to have him moved out of the company on any basis. The military police, Judge Advocate General, Qui Nhon Personnel office, and the battalion personnel office could not or would not do anything. Horvath kept the man under guard in a CONEX container with a bunk in the company area. After several days, the man promised that he would do his job. Horvath made him the number two truck in the convoy, behind a sergeant who was the lead truck driver. The man had smuggled some beer into the cab of his tractor. When the outbound convoy moved into the open country beyond the Mang Yang pass, the man sped past the lead truck and took off driving too fast for safety. He rounded a tight curve and rolled the tractor and trailer into a gully. At long last he finally left the area permanently by a medical evacuation helicopter with a crushed chest.

Because of the long hours, Horvath ran his mess hall 24-hours a day. The men could drop in at any time and find something to eat and drink. He also established a company club, which was named the "Crow's Nest" because the manager's name was "Crow". He bought pallets of soda and beer, which they sold. The profits went into an official incidental fund for purchase of supplies from the local economy. He also was able to have his wife send him items which were needed but which were not available from the so-called supply system such as hairnets for the ladies who worked in the mess hall (demanded by the Inspector General team), salt-shakers, sugar-shakers, checkered tablecloths, and toilet seats for the obvious use over the plywood holes. For a shower they built wooden sides around a concrete pad, roofed it, used a tank-like set of 2 navy cubes set on top of CONEXES, filled it daily from a water tanker, and had a gasoline heater from the mess hall equipment rigged into a 55-gallon barrel for warm water. The light tar penepime that was often spread on the company roads caused a bitter lesson to be learned.

If you tried to walk across it unseen during the night in your flip-flops towards the shower, you lost the flip-flops and had to remove the tar from your feet with gasoline. One such exercise was always enough to cause you to possibly wear your boots on the way to the shower. The rain or shine movie theater was a white plywood screen, benches, and a projection booth.

The company members had received an issue of rubber galoshes and arctic sleeping bags from the logistic office of Ft Bragg before they deployed for Vietnam. Horvath thought that was strange, until he became settled down in the area of operations. The nights in the Central Highlands were cold when drivers had to remain overnight away from Qui Nhon. The monsoon rains turned the company area and all other locations into a sea of mud, so the overshoes proved valuable in the mud and the arctic sleeping bags were a comfort in the clammy cold. The company lived in general purpose medium tents that were later reinforced with lumber, concrete floors, bamboo screening, and wire screening. The mess hall was a tropical wooden building that had been built by the previous company, a unit that had since been moved to another location.

The perimeter of the company area was protected by a spread of barbed wire and concertina wire. There was a regular foliage control service provided by the 359th petroleum company. One tractor and tanker with a rear hose attachment drove slowly along the fence line while one man

sprayed the fence line with diesel fuel. One tragic day somehow a warning flare in the fence line was tripped, and the nozzle man was killed in the instant inferno.

The 64th Company had super dependable Mack diesel-powered M52A1s. They had much more horsepower for hauling heavy loads uphill than the gasoline-powered M52s of the 2nd and 597th Companies. Those trucks were old and beat up and underpowered as well.

In the spring of 1967, the medium companies began to receive the undependable and underpowered turbo-charged M52A2s and diesel International Loadstar tractors as replacements. The so-called multi-fuel M52A2s had much less horsepower than the diesel M52A1s. Bad choice. The Loadstars were civilian-use tractors with single axles that were designed for local use only. In fact, the brakes would overload when coming down a steep grade. Another bad choice. The Tank Automotive Command in Detroit had pulled them out of assignment to Transportation Motor Pools in the United States and sent them to Vietnam because TACOM had no military tractor procurement contract. However, the Loadstars could not pull heavy loads and were eventually given only light loads. A M52A1 diesel of the 64th often had to drive up to the trailer in front and push the slower rig on the climbs up the passes.

Each medium truck company had 120 trailers, model M124C. Upon arrival at Qui Nhon, Horvath was directed to turn his trailers over to the trailer transfer detachment. Although they remained on the company commander's property book, he never saw the trailers again. This created a problem in that he had no control over the trailers and could not perform maintenance on them. With the four medium cargo companies, 480 trailers were turned over to the control of the trailer transfer point at the Cha Rang Valley.

There were no loading docks for the rough terrain forklifts to drive onto the trailers. Instead the forklifts would drop the sideboards on the ground and load from the sides. Unfortunately the forklift drivers would then drive on top of the sideboards, breaking them. The 8th Group Commander later instituted a policy whereby the sideboards and tailboards were removed from the trailers, and only the headboard remained. Loading and unloading locations were required to secure the loads with banding materials, and to cut and remove the banding for unloading. Maintenance of the trailers became a problem which was eventually solved when the 8th Group set up a consolidated trailer maintenance unit, took two mechanics from each of the medium companies and a CWO and NCO from the 8th Group Headquarters. The trailer maintenance facility was across the road from the Cha Rang Valley trailer transfer point and the 54th Truck Battalion. This trailer maintenance unit was really appreciated as it performed all trailer services concerning tires, lubrication, floorboards, headboards, brakes, lights, and landing gear.

The performance of drivers was measured in miles driven and safety record. The 64th Company drove over two and a half million miles during its first ten months in country. The company operations sergeant kept track of the number of miles each driver drove and his safety record. Beginning in 1969, after safe driving of several thousand miles, the company awarded the driver the "line haul" tab for wear on his shoulder above his First Logistics Command patch. They "were really proud of it." It was the equivalent of a combat infantryman badge to an infantryman.

In the first week in May 1967, the 64th Company became the first truck company to relocate to Pleiku. The 64th Transportation Company was later among several truck companies which received a Presidential Unit Citation for their direct combat support to the defenders in the December 1967 Battle of Dak To. The early aim was to establish a line haul system similar to the system used in Europe, to manage two convoys a day in each direction. With only a portion of the daylight hours available however, there eventually proved never to be enough time in the day to complete all of the four convoy segments. One convoy out of the Cha Rang Valley trailer transfer point was to 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 loaded trailers. The 64th was able to do two runs to An Khe on an intermittent basis, but this came to an end with the beginning of the ambushes in September of 1967.

Although accidents were a concern, most of the tractor washouts were because of the rough road and broken frames. The real problem was the lack of a tractor procurement system at Tank Automotive Command. Replacement tractors were not available during this period and the number of tractors in the 64th Truck Company went from 60 to 45 to 36 in late 1967, a real waste of a unit. Now they were able to see just what had happened to the 2nd Medium Truck Company and to the 597th Medium Truck Company before them. The 64th "Kings of the Road" Medium Truck Company joined the other medium truck companies as being totally used up without proper support from TACOM.

Horvath had the First Sergeant set up a duty roster, and all of the base camp personnel rotated as gunners on the convoy jeeps. Company personnel enjoyed the opportunity to see the country beyond the base camp. However, one of the cooks mentioned the practice in a letter to his mother. His mother complained to her Congressman, and the eventual administrative uproar changed the program. The cook was left off of the roster, and everyone else volunteered to stay on the roster.

Horvath put armor plating on the front of and on the sides of his M151 jeep. This was the first armored vehicle at Qui Nhon. He was trying to think ahead although the enemy presented no serious threat at that time. No ambush occurred during his first tour. He named the gun jeep, the "Patmobile" in honor of his wife, Pat. He also painted "Batman" on his side of the jeep, and "Robin" on the driver's side. The front plate came up to nearly the top of the windshield leaving a narrow slit to look over. He mounted first a .30 caliber and then a .50 caliber machinegun on the back. The convoys were not allowed to test fire their weapons before the ambushes began in September of 1967. At one bridge checkpoint stop at an infantry position, they gave him permission to fire his machinegun into a hill. All of this convoy escort time meant that, to this day, when in hectic highway traffic, Horvath will slide in behind a tractor-trailer rig and feel perfectly comfortable.

In May 1967, he received a new driver. The Personnel Command broke up the 64th and sent their drivers to other companies so that all the men in the company would not rotate back to the United States at the same time. Horvath received 2 ½ ton truck drivers and 5 ton truck drivers who did not know how to drive M52 tractors. He assigned his faithful driver, Pharaoh Manley, with whom he had covered 20,000 miles in the Patmobile, to a tractor and put one of the new

drivers on his command jeep. In the dark of the first morning for the new driver at the new company location at Pleiku, at the marshalling area in May of 1967, his new driver, unfamiliar with the reduced visibility caused by the windshield armor and unfamiliar with the terrain, slowly drove the jeep into a shadowed gully and the jeep rolled onto its side, breaking Horvath's leg in several places. Horvath had to return to the United States.

A retyping of the Unit Histories for 1966 and for 1967 is included on the next pages.

Excerpts from the 1968 History and the 1969 Operational Reports/Lessons Learned are also included.

On 1 April 71 the 64th moved from Pleiku to the 57th Transportation Battalion in Da Nang. The 64th was deactivated on 16 June 71.

LT David R. Wilson of the 64th was killed in an ambush on 31 January 1968 and the 124th Transportation Battalion compound in Pleiku was named Camp Wilson.

End of Truck Tour Number One

UNIT HISTORY

1 January 1966 – 31 December 1966

On 1 January 1966, the 64th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (Cargo) found itself continuing its previous year's mission of Post Support at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The Commanders, 1st Lt William F. Pietrowitz 1 January-5 January, 1st Lt David G. Black III 6 January –31 May, and CPT John M. Horvath 1 June-31 December were primarily concerned with the daily commitments to the John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare and to the Division Ready Force of the 82nd Airborne Division.

On 1 April, the initial message from the Third US Army alerted the unit for deployment with the date set for 10 July. The movement order is attached as appendix 1. From its personnel strength of 145 on 1 April, the unit built up to a strength of 178 for its eventual deployment on 22 July. A roster of key personnel is attached as Appendix 2

After a controversy which raged between 31 May and 25 June, Continental Army Command informed the elements concerned that the unit would deploy as scheduled with its M52A1 Diesel 5-ton tractors. The difficulty had centered on the deployability of this tractor at a time when the M52A2 Multi-fuel 5-ton tractor was considered more desirable. The unit's initial operations, covering 971,400 miles on the road from Qui Nhon to Pleiku between 20 August and 31 December proved that the decision was the right one. The diesel tractor proved itself dependable and did not present any maintenance or supply problems.

Deployment began on 22 July when American Flyer Airlines moved the unit from Pope Air Force Base, adjacent to Ft Bragg, to McChord Air Force Base, Washington. Busses moved the 64th to the Tacoma Outport where the Military Sea Transportation Service Transport, the USNS John Pope was boarded. Sailing on 23 July, the men of the 64th saw Okinawa on 5 August, and on 10 August boarded a Landing Craft Utility for final movement to the beach of Qui Nhon, republic of Vietnam. The unit area was located 12 miles inland, in the Phu Thanh Valley. With building materials at a premium, the 64th set about the difficult business of providing themselves with a cantonment area.

On 13 August, the unit vehicles and equipment, which had on 5 July departed from Charleston South Carolina Outport aboard the US Robin Hood, arrived in Qui Nhon. A measure of the 64th's effectiveness may be gained from the previously noted mileage figure, and the fact that the task vehicle availability during 30 August – 31 December averaged 82 per cent.

The mission, continuing since arrival in Vietnam, has been the movement of general cargo from the Qui Nhon depots west on Route 19 to Pleiku Supply Points.

The close of 1966 saw the 64th well settled in the Phu Thanh Valley, and ever mindful of the requirement to keep the supplies moving.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
64TH TRANSPORTATION COMPANY (MEDIUM TRUCK CARGO)
APO SF 09318**

14 March 1968

SUBJECT: Unit Histories

Chief of Military History
Department of the Army
Washington, D. C. 20315

In accordance with AR 870-5 and USASUPCOM Regulation 870-1, the annual supplement to the history of the 64th Transportation Company (Medium Truck Cargo) is submitted:

UNIT HISTORY-1967

1. The transition into 1967 was relatively smooth for the 64th Transportation Company. For the first three months of the year all operations continued as before. An average of thirty to forty trucks a day were dispatched on the Qui Nhon-An Khe-Pleiku Main Supply Route of Highway 19, hauling semi-trailers of general cargo in convoy. Approximately two tractors were committed daily for the run to Bong Song north on Highway 1, usually hauling refrigerator vans of ice.
2. Notable during the period were the accomplishments of SGT John L. Newby and the mess section. The 64th's mess hall was selected for both January and February as the Best Mess in the 8th Transportation Group. This was followed by designation as the best mess

- in the 27th Transportation Battalion for the month of March. In recognition of these outstanding achievements, SGT Newby was promoted to Sergeant E-6 on 22 February.
3. Major personnel changes during this first quarter involved mainly officer and NCO's. Losses included 1LTs Thomas H. Romoda in February and Mason C. Johnson in March. LTs Romoda and Johnson had been with the unit at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and had seen it through the move to Southeast Asia.
 4. Incoming personnel included 2LT William Eichenberg, 05 713 313 and SSG Orville D. Sifers, RA 52 385 238. Lt Eichenberg was assigned to the second platoon with SSG Sifers as his platoon Sergeant. SGT Matthew L. Hearon arrived late in March as was assigned to supply as assistant supply sergeant. This still left the unit short one officer-the third platoon leader.
 5. April of 1967 began the personnel shuffle. The normal rotation date for the majority of the unit's personnel would be in July. Thus on 14 April word was officially received from Qui Nhon Support Command to begin transferring approximately 70% of assigned personnel. Key personnel changes in this shuffle included the loss of SFC Robert Watson, the 64th's Maintenance Sergeant, who was transferred to Qui Nhon Support Command upon being appointed to Warrant Officer. Also transferred was SSG Jose P.A. Mireles, the third platoon sergeant, who went to the 54th Transportation Battalion in exchange for SSG Hector J. Feliciano and SGT Charles M. Russell.
 6. As was expected, these personnel moves put the unit in a considerable state of confusion. This confusion was heightened when the unit received notice that it would move to Pleiku and be operational in that location by 14 May. As soon as this notification was received the unit started making plans and began packing. An advance party was dispatched on 1 May under the leadership of 1LT Thomas E. Moore and SFC Charlie Brewster. The fourteen men selected for the advance party included the company carpenters and electrician.
 7. Pleiku Sub-Area Command selected a site slightly to the north of Artillery Hill in Pleiku for the 64th's base camp. In contrast to the old Phu Thanh location, this terrain was hard-packed dirt with low scrub brush sparsely covering the area.
 8. The advance party worked hard and the area was ready for occupancy by 10 May. However, an unexpected tragedy struck on 9 May. The company commander, CPT John M. Horvath had come up from Qui Nhon the day before to inspect the new company area. On the afternoon of the 9th he had driven out to CP 88 in Pleiku to check on the convoy forming up for the return to Qui Nhon. As he was pulling the jeep in behind a line of trucks he hit a small ditch and vehicle flipped over, pinning CPT Horvath's right leg under the jeep and breaking it in two places. CPT Horvath was taken to the 18th Surgical Hospital, where it was determined that he would be evacuated to a hospital in Japan.
 9. This was a blow to the entire company. CPT Horvath had been with the unit at Ft Bragg, N.C., and had seen it through the preparations for the move to Vietnam, the long journey by ship and the first 10 months in country, wherein the 64th's drivers had amassed over two and a half million miles—driven over the longest and roughest Main Supply Route in Vietnam.
 10. 1LT Thomas E. Moore, the first platoon leader, assumed command on 10 May and greeted the main body of the company when they arrived in the new area. This move was made using the unit's own organic equipment—5 ton tractors and 12 ton stake and platform trailers. During the preparations for and the actual move there was only a slight

lessening of the operational commitment. Thus the 64th was close to being 100% operational in spite of the unit move.

11. A week after the move was completed the 64th was assigned the additional mission of operating the Pleiku Truck Terminal. 1LT Eichenberg was assigned as Officer-In-Charge, with SSGs Sifers and Feliciano to assist him. In all, 12 people were involved in this operation.
12. The company's primary mission had also changed in that the unit was now to provide line-haul between Pleiku and An-Khe and also provide local shuttle of semi-trailers for the Pleiku area. These functions were to be carried out under the operational control of the 27th Transportation Battalion in Qui Nhon. As can be imagined, operations were somewhat hampered by poor communications between Pleiku and Qui-Nhon.
13. The 8th Transportation Group in Qui Nhon furnished additional support for the mission. On 23 May the second platoon of the 563rd Transportation Company was transferred to the operational control of the 64th. Under the platoon sergeant, SSG Wallace Keyes, this addition increased the 64th's fleet by 20 tractors.
14. The unit was brought up to strength officer-wise on 4 June when CPT Charles A. Gray assumed command. CPT Gray was formerly the S-4 of the 27th Transportation Battalion. He brought with him 2Lt Stephen R. Bathon of the 444th Transportation Company to be the third platoon leader. Lt Bathon's primary duty was as convoy commander on the An Khe run.
15. With the onset of the monsoon season at the end of May operations were severely complicated. Heavy rains turned the company area and especially the motor pool into a sea of mud. In spite of continued efforts to firm up the area (such as dumping 12 truckloads of crushed rock into the motor pool) the mud was getting worse and worse. Finally the company's tractors had to be parked on the main road in front of the company because of the length of time it took to maneuver out of the motor pool for the morning convoy.
16. However, the mud was a minor problem compared to the events of the night of 8 June, and the weeks that followed. At approximately 0130 on the morning of 9 June the company was awakened by explosions of incoming mortar rounds, followed by a long eerie, shrill cry of Artillery Hill's alert siren. The mortars were followed by a long exchange of small arms and automatic weapons fire. Fortunately the perimeter was not penetrated and no damage was incurred. However, SP4 Richard Gagnon was shot in the right leg as he was guarding the vehicles parked on the road in front of the company.
17. Apparently stray rounds hit several of these trucks. SP4 Gagnon was rushed to the 18th Surgical Hospital and from there evacuated to Qui Nhon.
18. Later that morning the company commander, CPT Gray, was called to meet with COL Fitzpatrick, Commanding Officer of the 52nd Artillery Group on Artillery Hill. At this meeting CPT Gray was informed that the 64th would have to relocate to the East side of Artillery Hill. As a result of the previous night's attack, COL Fitzpatrick had decided that the 64th was blocking the artillery's field of fire to the north, and furthermore, the company was in the line of fire of the 62nd Maintenance Battalion, located to the West.
19. Again the 64th packed its equipment and made ready to move. However, this time there was no date specified for completion of the move, and the distance was slight, so more time could be spent in developing the area before the actual move. The company was

- completely moved into the new area by 20 June, having had the good fortune to have a week free of the rain in which to pour cement floors for the orderly room and mess hall.
20. This new area proved to be far superior to the old location, not only as concerned security, but also because it was a hard-packed and rockered area on a slope, which allowed the monsoon rains to run off. With this escape from the mud, living conditions for the men were considerably improved.
 21. The month of July was spent making two trips a day to An Khe and in building up the company area. Much effort was also spent in fighting the monsoons and the slick and hazardous roads it produced. On 26 July operations were substantially changed with the arrival of the 124th Transportation Battalion from Fort Devens, Mass. Control of the 64th then passed from the 27th Battalion to the 124th. This control also extended to the Pleiku Truck Terminal.
 22. The monsoon season continued on through September. During this period the company deadline rate rose to a high of 40%. Many vehicles were washed out by ordnance for cracked frames and the number of tractors on hand went down to 45.
 23. Major personnel changes during this period included the departure of 1LT Thomas E. Moore in late July and the arrival of 2LT Dale H. Sindt. 1LT Stephen R. Bathon rotated in middle of August and was replaced by 2LT David R. Wilson. CW4 J.B. Virgil came in to replace the departing CW2 George J. Sebeny as the company's Maintenance Officer. The major personnel shuffle was completed with the rotation of CPT Charles A. Gray. CPT Juan R. Lopez, former S-4 of the 124th Transportation Battalion, succeeded him. CPT Lopez assumed command on 1 August, thereby becoming the 4th commanding officer for the 64th in less than a year.
 24. On 2 September, for the first time in over a year, there was a major ambush of a truck convoy on Highway 19. Fortunately there were no 64th Transportation Company personnel involved, but the attack was of such magnitude that the security forces guarding the road ordered an earlier closing time for departing traffic, reducing the closing hour from 1700 to 1500. This move cut down the number of round trips to An Khe from two a day to just one, and insured the 64th's drivers of a much needed shorter day and fewer miles.
 25. The 64th continued on the An Khe run exclusively until November when the Battle of Dak To erupted. Then the major emphasis was shifted to the movement of cargo north on Highway 14 to Kontum and Dak To. During these trying days the drivers of the 64th performed admirably—delivering much needed ammunition and supplies to embattled elements of the 4th Division and the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Generals Westmoreland and Abrams, who stated that never before in a major battle have the combat troops been so well supplied, expressed appreciation for their efforts.
 26. The operation at Dak To continued on into December, during which time 1SG Edward A. Simpson had returned to CONUS and 1SG Edward J. Dockery Jr had come down from Battalion to be the new First Sergeant. Also during this period, in part due to heavy operational commitments, the task vehicles in the company fell to a low of 36 tractors out of an authorized 60. Necessarily, the mileage and tonnage fell with this figure.
 27. In spite of this severe drop in operational capability, the 64th Transportation Company finished the year 1967 with an admirable record of accomplishments. Having survived two monsoon seasons—one in Qui Nhon and the other in Pleiku, plus two unit moves, a complete turnover in personnel not to mention going through four company commanders,

the 64th nevertheless amassed over two million miles and directly supported the largest and most successful combat operation in the history of the Vietnam Conflict.

JUAN R. LOPEZ
CPT, TC
Commanding

COPIES FURNISHED:

CINCUSARPAC, ATT: GPOP-OT, APO 96558

Commanding General, United States Army, Vietnam, ATTN: AVHGC-DST, APO 96375

Commanding General, 1st Logistical Command, ATTN: AVCA-GC-O, APO 96348

Commanding General, US Army Support Command, ATTN: AVCA-QN-GO, APO 96238

Commanding Officer, 8th Trans Group, ATTN: Command Historian, APO 96238

(Page 1 only) DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

64th TRANSPORTATION COMPANY (MEDIUM TRUCK CARGO)

APO SAN FRANCISCO 96318

UNIT HISTORY 1968

With the coming of 1968, it found the 64th Transportation Company (Medium Truck Cargo) heavily committed to the mission of supporting the embattled elements of the 4th Infantry Division in Kontum, RVN, and Dak To RVN. The major emphasis was on the movement of cargo North on highway QL14 to Kontum and Dak To RVN. Although there were daily convoys on highway QL 19 to An Khe and return to Pleiku, RVN. It was on such a convoy to An Khe,

that the 64th Transportation Company had its first ambush of the year. On 31 January 1968, while returning from An Khe to Pleiku, the 124th Transportation Battalion convoy in which 1Lt David R. Wilson, a member of the 64th Transportation Company, was convoy commander, and which was made up mostly of 5 ton tractors and trailers from this company. The resulting action saw 1Lt Wilson killed when his jeep took a direct hit from a mortar round. The Company also had four other personnel wounded in the ambush. 1Lt Wilson was presented the Silver Star posthumously, with "V" device for his gallant actions, when he speedily went back into the kill zone to move his personnel out of the kill zone. SP4 Jimmie Tidwell was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" device for his actions in the ambush.

The primary mission of the 64th Transportation Company is to provide transportation for movement of general cargo by Motor Transportation. This mission is further broken down as follows: to provide transportation for movement of personnel, general cargo, bulk petroleum products and missiles by line and local haul operation within the II Corps Tactical Zone as directed. Also included is local transportation support to HQs, Pleiku Sub Area Command, in excess of that unit's organic capability, as directed. Providing security for convoys in line haul operation, supporting combat operations as directed and providing security for portions of the 124th Transportation Battalion perimeter.

Due to the lack of personnel and equipment this unit had reduced capability during 1968. However, the unit averaged 30 to 35 task vehicles committed daily in local and line hauls. There were also 4 gun trucks and 2 to 3 gun jeeps with crews committed daily. During the year the unit's average shortage of personnel was thirty enlisted men and two officers. We had an average vehicle shortage of twenty multi-fuel tractors. Even though there was a shortage of men and equipment we amassed over a million miles and hauled 150,000 tons of cargo.

A 6.4% deadline rate was maintained throughout 1968. A high of 30.1% during the monsoon season to a low of 1% that was obtained after the unit move in August.

(One page from the 1969 64th Med Truck Co Operations Report/Lessons Learned)

III. OPERATIONS AND TRAINING:

- a. Each month the company has a practice alert.
- b. Mandatory subject training consists of Character Guidance, CBR, Safety, Physical Training, Command Information, Military Justice, Code of Conduct, Prevention of Heat Injury, Weapons Qualification and Familiarization, Psychological Warfare, Armed Forces Censorship, Safeguarding Defense Information, and Survival Escape and Evasion. In addition personnel of this unit are constantly undergoing driver maintenance retraining.
- c. Combat Service Operations consisted of local haul support to the Pleiku area and line haul support to Kontum, Dak To, An Khe, and Qui Nhon.

- d. Combat Actions started with the death of truck driver SP4 Gerald R Acton who was killed on 8 May 1969 while waiting at the marshalling area at Ben Het for the departure of the convoy.
- e. On 8 June 1969, when the 124th Transportation Battalion ran a convoy from Dak To to Ben Het, the embattled base camp, SP5 Barrent Torgerson and his gun crew on the "Mighty Minnie", participated in the heaviest contact encountered all year.
- f. On 14 June 1969, SP5 Ronald Taylor and his gun crew gave good account of themselves on the "Highland Animals" gun truck in an ambush at Pump Station #8 on QL19.
- g. In a convoy from Pleiku to An Khe, SP5 Cliff Bottorf, NCO of the "Death and Destruction" gun truck, was wounded seriously and medevaced in an ambush at Bridge #25 on 23 August 1969.
- h. On 15 November 1969, SP5 Roger Spencer and his gun crew on the "Ho Chi's Hearse" provided the base of fire in the kill zone enabling the convoy to clear an ambush at Bridge #30. This marked the end of combat actions for the year of 1969.

- IV. PERSONNEL: Throughout most of the year the company was under strength. The average strength for the company for the year was 151 personnel assigned. Particularly critical was the shortage of Squad Leaders, Sergeants E-5.
- V. LOGISTICS: There were several items that were difficult to obtain including tires and tubes, hydrovacs, and regulators. In December the company began a turnover of trucks replacing the oldest vehicles with tow trucks.

Truck Tour Number Two

While back in the United States, Horvath read Bernard Fall's book, *Street Without Joy*, which described the French experience in Indochina. He was especially interested in the chapter on the destruction of French Mobile Group 100 along Rte 19 to Pleiku. He sent a copy of the book to COL Joe Bellino who commanded 8th Transportation Group in Qui Nhon at that time. Col Bellino wrote back to Horvath thanking him for that book and noting that it was in great demand among the Group staff officers. A retyping of the Col Bellino letter is included at the end of this second tour recap.

When Horvath first went to Vietnam, he went over there to win the war for democracy. He did not encounter any antiwar sentiment after his return. However, he was surprised at the lack of understanding by civilians about the war. At a dinner with his relatives, someone asked him about his feelings about going back to Vietnam for his upcoming second tour. He said he did not care to be separated from his wife and two small children. Someone asked why he could not take them with him, that the impression that these civilians had was that, even in 1967, military personnel took their families with them to Viet Nam. As a Regular Army officer, he did not have a choice about going to Vietnam for a second tour after about 24 months from the end of the first tour. As a matter of fact, The Transportation Chief of Personnel was unfortunately very enthusiastic about the high percentage of Transportation Corps officers who were going to

Vietnam. This was regardless of whether it was their second tour, and regardless of the fact that other service corps branches had many officers who had not yet gone to the RVN on their first tour. Furthermore, many transportation corps officers on their second tours were filling slots that were not even transportation corps slots. On his second tour he had no indication of the withdrawal policy. He had not heard of Nixon's promise in 1969 to start pulling troops out. MACV units invaded Cambodia while he was there. To him the Army still planned to win.

MAJ Horvath was assigned as the Executive Officer (XO) for the 54th Transportation Battalion during his second tour in Vietnam, which began in July 1969. The 54th Battalion was still located in the Cha Rang Valley, next to the trailer transfer point, and across was a Post Exchange, the marshalling area, a petroleum tank farm, and the consolidated trailer maintenance unit. His first battalion commander was LTC, later BG, William Sarber. LTC Everett Wayne Rackley was his next battalion commander.

The 54th Battalion was part of 8th Transportation Group, which now also included the 27th Battalion in the Phu Thai Valley outside of Qui Nhon, commanded by Wayne Rackley's brother and the 124th Battalion, located in Pleiku.

The 54th Battalion had the 512th Truck (5-ton), 523rd Truck (5-ton), 669th Truck (5-ton) companies at Cha Rang Valley, and the 545th Light Truck company at Tuy Hoa.

The 27th Battalion had the 2d Medium Truck, the 597 Medium Truck, and the 444 Light Truck in the Phu Thai Valley, with both the 88th Medium Truck and the 505th Trailer Transfer Detachment at An Khe.

The 124th Battalion had Horvath's old 64th Medium Truck, 359th Medium Petroleum Truck, 541st Light Truck (2 ½-ton) Companies, and the 520th Trailer Transfer Detachment at Pleiku.

Having the 124th Transportation battalion at Pleiku provided facilities for the Qui Nhon convoy drivers that did not exist during Horvath's first tour. They now had maintenance shops to fix any problems that occurred on the road. They had a base of operations from which to serve the Pleiku air force base, the artillery firebases, Kontum, and Dak To. In the event that the drivers had to remain over night, they had a temporary barracks in which to sleep and the 124th Battalion's company mess halls in which to eat.

There were a number of notable changes in the two years between 1967 and 1969. Han Jin, a Korean contract company had moved to Qui Nhon. Han Jin provided trucks and drivers for the direct haul route to Pleiku and for the other routes. Even though they were civilians, they were great. They lined up in the convoys like anyone else, wore their steel pots and flak jackets, and drove with professional dependability. The Han Jin Company also took over a large amount of the stevedore operations in the Qui Nhon port. SeaLand vans and wheeled chassis were now regular loads for the medium tractors.

The trailer maintenance procedure was routine during Horvath's second tour, there were now 600 trailers. The living conditions, which had been tents during the first tour, were now the wooden, screened, tropical buildings.

The lines of communication out of Qui Nhon stretched north along Rte 1 thirty-five miles to Bong Son and Duc Pho, south along Rte 1 to Tuy Hoa Bay and west to Pleiku. Occasionally a convoy went north to support the AMERICAL Division at Chu Lai or Tam Ky. The 2 ½-ton trucks ran the convoys to Tuy Hoa. The road between Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa was so bad that only 2 ½-ton trucks could drive it. The 5-ton M54 straight trucks ran west past Pleiku and Kontum. They would travel on to firebases at Dak To and Ban Blech and beyond. The 5-ton straight trucks now had drop sides for easier loading and unloading. The 5-tons also made excellent guntruck platforms, and guntrucks were now a normal part of everyday operations.

The NVA had conducted intense ambushes along Route 19 between An Khe and Pleiku from September 1967 through September 1968. As a result, at the suggestion of a maintenance warrant officer, the 8th Group Commander, COL Joseph Bellino, (known respectfully as "Jumping Joe" because of his enthusiasm), encouraged mechanics and volunteer drivers to harden their trucks and to create guntrucks. In general, there was one guntruck for each 15 task vehicles. By the time Horvath returned in July of 1969, the ambushes had declined and were no longer the threat that they had been between September 1967 and September 1968. Guntrucks had ended the ambushes after the one year.

Timothy J. Kutta, in his excellent 1996 book, "Guntrucks" noted that the 8th Group statistics were:

Ambushes 36

Mining incidents 65

Sniper incidents 65

Bridges blown 18

Other incidents 39

US KIA 38

US WIA 203

Enemy KIA 104

Enemy WIA 10

Enemy POW 5

Vehicles damaged/destroyed 287

As a consequence of the development and the success of the guntrucks, 8th Group became the "show case" transportation unit in Vietnam. It would receive visits by generals or equivalent civilians every three or four weeks. VIP briefings in the 54th battalion area at the Cha Rang Valley had become routine. They would eat breakfast at 0600, complete with china and linen. An 8th Group command briefing with flip charts would follow, which would show all of the routes from the Cha Rang Valley marshalling area. The briefer would talk the visitors through the Group's entire daily convoy activity. The visitors would then go to listen to the convoy commander's briefing to the drivers, watch the guntrucks test fire their weapons on the hill beside the battalion compound, visit the trailer transfer point operations office, and visit the consolidated trailer maintenance facility. Because of this high visibility, the now widely known reputation of the success of the guntrucks, the 8th Transportation Group received "water walkers" for commanders after COL Bellino's excellent leadership. In fact, several of these commanders went on to general officer rank. These commanders did not permit anything unnecessary like IG inspections to interfere with the convoy operations.

The 8th Group sent taskings down to the battalions by radio at night. The depots loaded trailers according to the priorities. The battalion operations offices would assign the taskings to the companies in no particular pattern, just according to what trucks were available. There were always more loads than trucks to haul them. Every available truck drove. At night the company operations sergeant would report in to battalion and collect the taskings. The operations sergeant assigned the trucks to the locations. In the morning the drivers dropped by the company operations office to see where they had to pick up their trailer. The 5 tons and 2 ½ tons had night loading crews, so these convoy drivers just picked up their trucks from the nearby night parking areas. The various types of vehicles formed up for their separate convoys to their assigned destinations.

The critical loads were prioritized. If the depots did not have the trailer ready then the driver took his tractor to the trailer transfer point in the Cha Rang Valley and picked up an available trailer. The Trailer Transfer Point always had dozens of loads ready.

LTC Wayne Rackley assumed command of the 124th Battalion in Pleiku upon giving up command of the 54th. He took MAJ Horvath with him as his XO. Horvath was able to arrange for the publishing of a yearbook for the members of the 54th and of the 124th battalions. The 124th had fuel tankers designated for AVGAS, MOGAS or diesel. They would send their empty fuel trailers back to Qui Nhon but occasionally they would receive a request for more trailers of a specific type fuel than were empty. They would have to pump the product into another trailer of a higher-grade product but could not pump into a lower grade product tanker. While the depots at Qui Nhon had pumping facilities, the 124th Battalion's 359 Medium Truck Tanker Company only had the "Little Joe" pony engine mounted on the side of each fuel trailer. The cleansing process to change product took all night and on one occasion a fuel leak caught fire and burned two trailers and a tractor.

MAJ Horvath finished up his second tour with a weeklong assignment as the 8th Group transportation control officer in the 4th Infantry Division forward support base for a large operation across the Vietnam border. With a jeep, a driver, a small tent, some pierced steel planking, and a large TC flag, he became the turnaround point for the daily dozens of trucks,

which brought in the supplies for the operation. He built a field shower by mounting a mess hall water tank trailer onto the bed of a flatbed trailer. His last official act as the XO of the 124th Transportation Battalion was to gain control of a Viet Cong cargo bicycle, which he brought back in his baggage for presentation to the Ft Eustis Transportation Museum.

The Tale of Two Truck Tours was over.

MAJ John M Horvath retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1988. He went to work as an administrator for an insurance company, and he and his wife settled in Tucker, GA, on the east side of Atlanta. One daughter became an Army Officer and one daughter became a San Francisco Firefighter/Paramedic.

The letter to LTC Horvath from COL Bellino dated 7 February 1968 is retyped on the next two pages.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, 8TH TRANSPORTATION GROUP (MOTOR TRANSPORT)
APO SF 96238**

AVQN-TG 7 February 1968

CPT John M. Horvath

2568 B Pratt Rd.

Fort Eustis, VA 23604

Dear Captain Horvath,

Of course I remember you from Mannheim and I am glad to know that you later commanded the 64th Trans Co.

This fine company is now commanded by Captain Juan Lopez and he is doing an outstanding job. The 124th Bn, now consisting of the 64th, 563rd, 88th, and 28th (Plt) is commanded by LTC John A. Johnson, who was in COMZ when you and I were in Germany.

I'm pleased that BG Fuson has gotten the info I sent him into the hands of people who will spread the word to our young TC officers. I can't emphasize enough how unique in our history is the every day experience of the 8th Group since September 67. As one indication of this uniqueness let me cite a couple of statistics September 1967 to date:

9 ambushes

15 convoy personnel KIA

63 convoy personnel WIA

82 known enemy KIA

7 known enemy WIA

45 vehicles destroyed or seriously damaged

In addition to the above, incident of road mines is so great that I won't attempt to tabulate the number. As an indication of the frequency, a couple of days ago each of the three battalions had a convoy in which one truck was damaged by road mines. All of this coupled with road closures due to blown bridges and heavy sniper fire has reduced considerably the ton/mile capability as you remember it.

I have in front of me, on my desk, the names of fourteen men who have been approved to receive the Bronze Star Medal for Valor (two more are pending approval for the award of the Silver Star) and all these result from just two of the ambushes – 24 Nov & 4 December.

AVCA QN-TC 7 February 1968

So you see John why I take such pride in being associated with the 8th Group during this period, and why Generals Westmoreland, Abrams, Rosson (IFFV), Peers (4th Inf Div), and Koster (Americal Div), have singled out the 8th Group for commendation. I feel this especially keenly because sixteen years ago, as of a member of the first TOAC to use the new Tschool, I sat in the auditorium to listen to a combat arms type from CONARC tell us how/why the technical services types were an albatross around the neck of the combat commander. Further, why he believed transportation and other such services should be performed by the combat arm in the Theater of Operations (I wonder if he was around long enough to learn how wrong he was?).

In a matter of a week my S3 and Asst S3 (Major Jasinski & Captain Williams) have read almost all your book "Street Without Joy". I intend to start it as quickly as they will let me. You are most thoughtful in sending it along to us – I had been told of the book. I will leave it to the 8th Group with your letter glued to the inside cover.

In this way all who read it will appreciate your pride in the TC and the 8th Group in particular.

Please remember me to my contemporaries there at Ft Eustis and the best of luck to you.

Sincerely,

/signed/

JOE O. BELLINO

Colonel, TC

Commanding

Postscript:

John

At 1010 hrs this morn, 7 Feb, our convoy to Pleiku was hit 14 km east of Pleiku –

3 convoy pers. WIA

2 enemy KIA

1 vehicle & load of ammo destroyed.

/initialed/ B