

May - Dec  
1966

A

HISTORY OF

HEADQUARTERS & HEADQUARTERS COMPANY  
278TH SUPPLY & SERVICE BATTALION (GS)

24 MAY 1966 - 31 DECEMBER 1966

109<sup>th</sup> Parent  
Unit

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24 MAY 1966 - 31 DECEMBER 1966

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HEADQUARTERS, 278TH SUPPLY & SERVICE BATTALION (GS)

CAM RANH BAY, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

CHAIN OF COMMAND

CAM RANH BAY DEPOT

US ARMY SUPPORT COMMAND, CAM RANH BAY

1ST LOGISTICAL COMMAND

US ARMY, VIETNAM

US ARMY, PACIFIC

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FOREWORD

The purpose of this history is to narrate the events and follow the smooth course of development of this Battalion from its reactivation on 24 May 1966 at Fort Lewis, Washington, to its assumption of a key support role in Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam, in December, 1966.

Although the 278th was originally activated on 15 December 1942 at Camp Sutton, North Carolina; earned campaign participation credits for New Guinea and Luzon during World War II and was inactivated in Japan during 1947, a history of the organization was never written. Therefore, this history is dedicated to those officers and enlisted men who served during the trying years of World War II whose accomplishments remain unrecorded and to all officers and enlisted men serving in this Battalion today in the conflict in Vietnam.

### UNIT HISTORY

This unit was reactivated on 24 May 1966 at Fort Lewis, Washington as the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 278th Supply and Service Battalion (General Support)(forward). Authority for the reactivation was Department of the Army message 759062, dated 7 April 1966 and Sixth Army General Orders 86, dated 28 April 1966. The TOE designated for the unit was TOE 29-116F (Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Supply and Service General Support Battalion, Forward) dated 9 March 1965. The purpose of the reactivation was to organize, train and outfit the unit for deployment to South Vietnam.

Upon reactivation of this unit, it was attached to the newly activating 26th General Support Group, commanded by LTC C.W. Hospelhorn, QMC. Four companies were activated under the 278th for command, administration and training before deployment to Vietnam - 139th Supply Company (Heavy Material), 248th Repair Parts Company, 239th Field Service Company and 239th Quartermaster Company (Service). The Maintenance Battalion (Provisional) at Fort Lewis was assigned as the host unit. It undertook the task of requisitioning all TOE equipment and part of the installation property for the 278th and began assembling property records. On 16 June 1966, the Maintenance Battalion (Provisional) completed the first morning report for this unit. The morning report recorded CW2 David V. Fry, the Unit Supply Technician, as assigned not joined, intransit. The activation order was referenced in the record of events section of that report.

The first member of the 278th to arrive at Fort Lewis was 1LT Albert C. Taylor, QMC, the adjutant.

LT Taylor processed in immediately on 22 June and began assembling information for this unit. On 27 June, Captain Robert E. Joiner, QMC, the Field Service Officer, arrived. The two officers began requisitioning publications that would be required for the unit and organized a team to escort other arriving officers through in-processing. The first enlisted men, Privates E-2 Overbey and Campanella, arrived on 28 June 1966 and were billeted with the Maintenance Battalion (Provisional).

The Battalion Commander, Major Kay L. Wieland, QMC, and several other officers of the staff arrived on 30 June 1966. The next day Major Wieland held his first staff meeting. He established a list of priorities and issued directives and guidelines to the principal staff members and Major Donald N. Comiskey, QMC, Executive Officer assigned tasks which placed the unit in operation.

The month of July was a busy one for the officers, all of which had arrived by the end of the month except for the Chaplain. Only a few enlisted men arrived by that date. On 6 July, the first non-commissioned officer, Sergeant First Class Charles E. Chatfield reported for duty with the unit. He was immediately made the acting Sergeant Major, acting 1SG, acting Supply Sergeant, etc. By that time approximately 13 enlisted men were on station. Captain Joiner, who had become adjutant on 5 July 1966, initiated administrative procedures for the Headquarters and supervised and maintained status on the influx of personnel. All publications requisitions were submitted, and pin-point accounts were established at Baltimore and St. Louis.

The Operations Section, under the guidance of Major Emory B. Webster, QMC, the Operations Officer, drafted the master training program and initiated lesson plans which would carry the unit through an 8 week training program (BUT/AUT) to be culminated with an Army Training Test. This training was to prove rewarding, as the majority of the enlisted men were fresh from AIT with relatively little experience. The operations section established a training aids account and projected ammunition requirements for the various weapons' ranges. The Battalion Supply and Maintenance Section, under the supervision of Captain Kenneth L. Hornburg, QMC, the S-4, obtained billeting, office and maintenance facilities as well as office furniture and supplies for the Headquarters. They finalized property records, established accountability and status reporting procedures and began computing prescribed load lists. 1LT Kenneth Bentz Jr., QMC, the Headquarters Company Commander, began organizing his unit.

The predetermined Personnel on Station Date was 5 August 1966. By that time the unit was to have had 75% of the TOE authorized strength present for duty, however by midnight, 5 August, the strength was 16 officers, 2 warrant officers and 47 enlisted men out of the authorized 17 officers, 2 warrant officers and 73 enlisted men. The present for duty percentage (71%) would not have been adequate for the initiation of the training program, scheduled to begin on 15 August. Fortunately by that date the strength had risen to 16 officers, 2 warrant officers and 53 enlisted men (77%) and the 8 week training cycle began. The Stock Control Section and the Plans and Control Section, under the direction of Major John A. Kolb, QMC, the Supply Control Officer, volunteered for and became the principal instructors during the cycle as they had no other operating mission at the time.

During the month approximately 30 hours per week were expended in formal training. Each staff section devoted 14 hours weekly for informal on-the-job training in order to smooth out section responsibilities and procedures. TOE equipment began pouring in. It was immediately processed for use and hand receipted to each section.

By the last half of August, the 248th Repair Parts Company and the 239th Field Service Company had been detached from the 278th and the 139th Supply Company (Hv Mat) had been accelerated for deployment to Vietnam in September. The acceleration of the 139th terminated their 8 week training cycle immediately and efforts were directed toward preparing equipment and processing personnel for overseas movement.

During September, packing and crating material was ordered for the 278th and set aside until completion of the training cycle. The Battalion Chaplain, Captain Daniel P. Phillips, CH, reported on 12 September. Weapons firing was conducted and all personnel qualified with their individual weapon. Machine-gun and 3.5 inch rocket launcher teams were familiarized on the respective weapons. The training shifted from BUT to AUT. Two field training problems were conducted before the unit underwent its Army Training Test during the week of 26 September - 1 October. The 278th received a rating of EXCELLENT in all areas and was rated ready for combat. On 27 September, during the 278th's ATT, the 139th Supply Company (Hv Mat) had departed McChord Air Force Base by commercial 707 for Vietnam.

The training cycle was completed during the first week of October and the TOE equipment was immediately readied for overseas movement. The Fort Lewis G4 performed a POM inspection for the unit on 6 October and the tedious process of packing and crating began under the supervision of Captain Thomas R. Prickett, QMC.

The thoroughness and attention to detail during this process was outstanding, as would later be discovered upon arrival of the equipment in Vietnam. Many after-duty hours were expended in preparation so that all equipment would be ready for shipment on 20 October. On 23 October the Personnel Readiness check was held for the 278th by Fort Lewis G1 resulting in a ready-for-deployment rating. Predeployment leaves of 15 days duration were granted for the majority of the unit in order that families could be settled and personnel matters could be resolved.

On 25 October all vehicles and general cargo were moved to the Port of Tacoma for loading aboard the Sioux Falls Victory. The vehicles and equipment arrived at dockside without incident.

November, the departure month, was as active as the previous months had been. On 2 November, the red circle TAT departed for Oakland Army Terminal, California for loading on the troop ship that was to carry the unit to Vietnam. On 4 November, the 239th departed the Port of Tacoma aboard the USNS Darby for Vietnam, thus leaving the 278th without attached units. By 5 November, the Personnel Readiness Date, all personnel of the 278th returned to Fort Lewis from leaves except for 1 enlisted man who had become snow bound in Alaska. Many last minute details were accomplished and by early morning, 8 November, the unit was ready for movement.

At 0600 hours 8 November, the main body, headed by Major Wieland, departed Fort Lewis by bus for Seattle-Tacoma Airport with 15 officers, 1 warrant officer and 60 enlisted men. Remaining behind were 2 officers (the Battalion XO and Adjutant), 1 warrant officer (the Unit Supply Technician) and two enlisted men (1 non-commissioned officer and a PFC) who comprised the rear/advance party. Also remaining behind were 4 other enlisted men who were unable to deploy at that time for various reasons.

After experiencing engine difficulties, the commercial jet-liner, carrying the main body, departed SEATAC at 1015 hours for San Francisco International Airport. Upon arrival at San Francisco, the main body was transported by bus to Oakland Army Terminal where they immediately boarded the USNS Gordon at 1245 hours, 8 November. The vessel departed Oakland for San Diego on 9 November to pick up a unit of Marines also bound for Vietnam. On 10 November the States were left behind and the unit was headed overseas. Most of the 278th personnel were involved in ship's staff responsibilities. Off-duty time was devoted to reading, playing cards, eating and sleeping. On 17 November, the Gordon crossed the International Date Line and suddenly it was 18 November.

During this time, the rear/advance party was busily closing out buildings and property accounts and accomplishing last minute details at Fort Lewis. It was during this period that the enlisted man who had been snow bound in Alaska returned to Fort Lewis to become a sixth member of the rear/advance party. On 18 November the party departed Seattle-Tacoma Airport for San Francisco International Airport. From there they traveled by bus to Travis Air Force Base where they were to take-off at midnight for Saigon, South Vietnam. However, the flight was cancelled and the party was bussed back to San Francisco International for a flight departing at 0400. This time they made it and after stops at Honolulu, Wake and Yokota, Japan, the plane touched down at Ton Son Nhut Airfield, Saigon on the evening of 20 November. They spent a hot, sticky night at Camp Alpha before departing by C-130 at 1300 hours, 21 November for Cam Ranh Bay. Upon their arrival that afternoon, they made contact with the 96th Supply and Service Battalion (DS), commanded by LTC Arthur Gregg, QMC, which had been appointed as our host unit. The party was taken to the new 278th area to spend the night. Preparations

for receipt of the main body were begun by the advance party on 22 November.

This included straightening the tents, which the 96th had erected for the 278th; obtaining office furniture and supplies for the Headquarters building; obtaining ration cards, pay and mail for the unit; and a myriad of other details. On 2 December the Sioux Falls Victory unexpectedly arrived with the vehicles and general cargo for the unit. The advance party worked night and day and moved all items to the Battalion area and positioned them by 4 December. Miraculously nothing had been damaged during shipment.

Meanwhile, the USNS Gordon had docked at Okinawa on 26 November for refueling and to take on provisions. The main body was allowed to go ashore for a few hours. On 27 November the vessel sailed on for Vietnam. It arrived in the harbor in Da Nang on 30 November and after discharging the Marines, departed for Qui Nhon on the same day. After laying off Qui Nhon for 3 days because of rough seas, the Gordon discharged more troops there and moved on for Cam Ranh Bay on 4 December.

The morning of 5 December was final destination date for the 278th. A boarding party, consisting of LTC Gregg, Major Comiskey and Captain Joiner met the unit aboard the Gordon at 1000 hours. After an exchange of greetings, LTC Gregg, Major Wieland and Major Comiskey departed the vessel for a meeting with Colonel N.A. Gage, Jr., TC, the Commanding Officer of Cam Ranh Bay Depot. The remainder of the main body off-loaded on South Beach at 1200 hours and were bussed to the Battalion area, 16 miles north of the Depot. They were paid, issued ration cards and given mail after moving into their quarters. That afternoon all officers and enlisted men were briefed as to mission, etc., and the unit was readied for work.

At 0700 hours on 6 December, Major Kolb and his Plans and Control and Stock Control sections reported for duty with the Cam Ranh Bay Depot as commodity managers, thus dissolving the TOE structure for the two sections. Because of this arrangement, the 278th lost operational control over those functions although the personnel remained assigned to their parent unit.

On 10 December the Battalion became fully operational. General Orders Number 79, Headquarters, U.S. Army Depot, Cam Ranh Bay, dated 8 December attached the following units to the 278th Supply and Service Battalion:

- a. 56th Supply Company (Hv Mat)(GS)
- b. 67th Engineer Detachment (Gas Gen)
- c. 68th Engineer Detachment (CO2)
- d. 109th Quartermaster Company (AD)
- e. 239th Quartermaster Company (Service)
- f. 383d Quartermaster Detachment (AS)
- g. 588th Transportation Company (Depot)
- h. 623d Quartermaster Company (AE&D)

The attachment of the units increased the Battalion strength to 1000 personnel. These units had previously been attached to the 96th Supply and Service Battalion (DS). Three of them were assigned missions in the depot - the 56th Supply Company (Hv Mat)(GS) was responsible for operating an Engineer class IV and lumber yards; the 239th Quartermaster Company (Svc) had responsibility for outside storage of firepower and mobility, industrial and general supplies; and the 588th Transportation Company (Depot) was responsible for operation of a bin-warehouse containing firepower and mobility items and repair parts. The 67th Engineer Detachment (Gas Gen) was responsible for generation and supply of acetylene and oxygen. Extreme difficulties were encountered with this detachment, because it was drastically below strength in trained personnel. Also, the generating plant had shut down because of faulty equipment thereby ceasing oxygen production capabilities. The 68th Engineer Detachment was responsible for generating CO2, however

it had not become operational because of incomplete siting. The 109th Quartermaster Company (AD) had mission responsibility for rigging equipment and supplies for airdrop and the execution of those drops in conjunction with the Air Force. Attached to it was the 383d Quartermaster Detachment (AS). The 623d Quartermaster Company (AER&D) was responsible for repair of air items utilized by the 109th and also back-up supply.

The remainder of the month was utilized in refining procedures, gearing the operations of the Headquarters to fit the assigned mission and improving living conditions. The first Christmas in-country was a lonely one for the unit, however not so lonely as to hamper mission accomplishment. There was little doubt as the year drew to a close that the Battalion had come through many tests of ability and endurance and was now ready for a new year of successful accomplishments, all of which would be in keeping with the Battalion's motto, "We Will Provide."

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