



Conventional Excellence: The 528th Quartermaster Battalion in Vietnam

by Cherilyn A. Walley

Heavy duty cranes were required to issue heavy ordnance to combat units. In early 1970, combat units north of Hai Van Pass used up to ten times as much heavy ordnance as projected, causing the 295th Ordnance Company at Chu Lai ASP to struggle to keep up with demand.



THE 528th Special Operations Support Battalion is one of the few Army special operations units that has evolved from a purely conventional unit into its current specialized role. Other Army Special Operations Forces units can trace their roots to conventional infantry or aviation units, but only the 528th and the 112th Special Operations Signal Battalion can boast that they served in World War II under their own colors (as the 528th and 112th). And of the two, only the 528th has the distinction of having served in Vietnam, as well.

After almost twenty years in mothballs, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 528th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply) unfurled its colors and on 16 September 1969 again took its rightful place in the U.S. Army's order of battle.¹ Activated under the U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang (USASUPCOM-DNG), the 528th Quartermaster Battalion (528th QMB) found itself struggling to fulfill a role for which it was almost completely unprepared.

The 528th QMB's HHC was organized according to the table of organization and equipment for petroleum supply battalions (TO&E 10-476G), yet the 528th had been specifically activated to provide a command structure for a newly formed ammunition battalion. This discrepancy not only left the company without the proper equipment to perform its mission, but also prevented requisition of personnel with the appropriate military occupation specialties (MOSs)—only twelve of the thirty-two petroleum supply battalion MOSs were transferable to an ammunition battalion, and none of those had anything to do with ordnance.²

While the TO&E was inadequate, the 528th did receive all equipment and personnel organized under ammunition ordnance

battalion TO&E 9-86G used by the 274th Fortification and Construction Platoon. The 274th had reorganized itself into the 274th Ordnance Battalion (Provisional) as a stopgap measure between the 336th Ordnance Battalion (Ammunition)'s summer departure and the 528th QMB's September activation.³

In spite of HHC's problems organizing, the battalion was able to assume the ordnance control mission for I Corps Tactical Zone (ICTZ) through its subordinate companies and detachments, which were already on the ground and trained in ammunition supply functions. At the same time the 528th QMB activated, it inherited three ordnance companies and a transportation detachment from the 274th: the 40th Ordnance Company (Ammunition), U.S. Army Reserve 295th Ordnance Company (Ammunition), 571st Ordnance Company (Ammunition), and the 263rd Transportation Detachment (Crane J B). Within a week, four more units were attached to the battalion, each consisting of one officer and nine enlisted men trained in explosive ordnance disposal (EOD): the 59th Ordnance Detachment (EOD), the 133rd Ordnance Detachment (EOD), the 287th Ordnance Detachment (EOD), and the 269th Ordnance Detachment (EOD).⁴

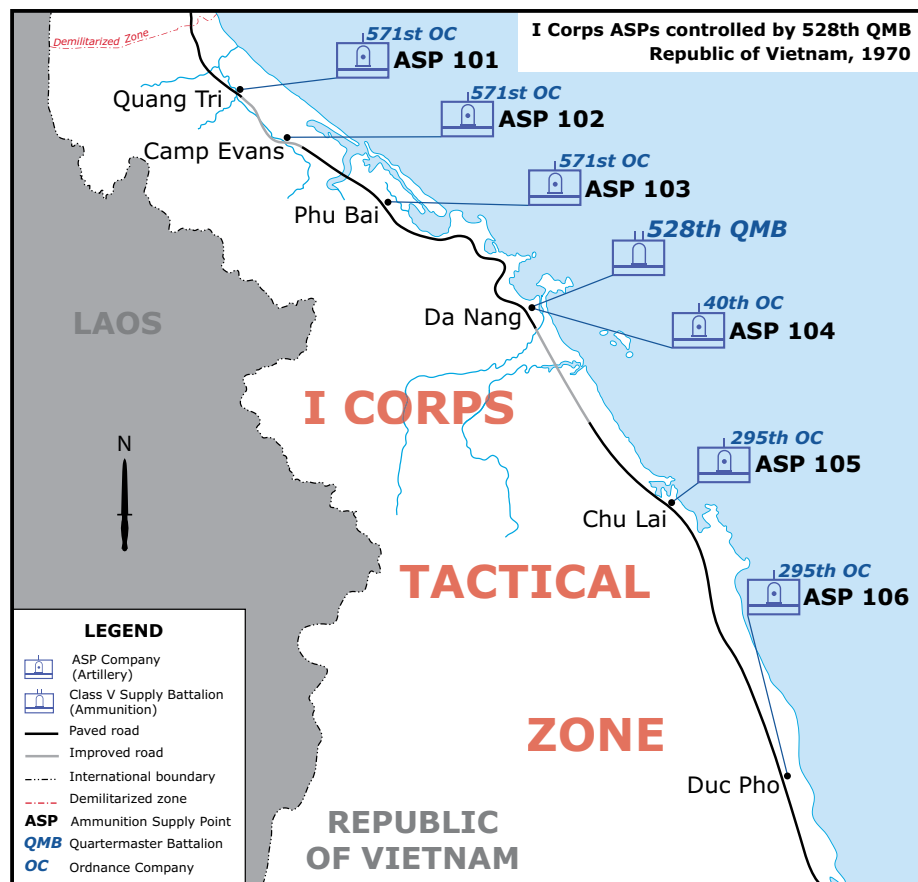
The first month of the 528th QMB's tour in Vietnam was consumed with getting itself and its subordinate units organized sufficiently to perform the ordnance control mission. At the same time, as new ordnance detachments were being attached to the battalion, one of its inherited companies handed off its mission to a replacement company and rotated back to the United States. The 661st Ordnance Company (Ammunition) moved from Quin Nhon to Chu Lai and assumed the 295th's mission on 23 September 1969, including all equipment and the more than 50 percent of the company that was not eligible to rotate home with the unit.

The flurry of attachments and detachments and rotations eventually settled down and as of 31 October 1969, the 528th QMB had an assigned strength of 18 officers, 6 warrant officers, and 710 enlisted men.⁵ By May 1970, the battalion was receiving personnel with the required MOSs in sufficient quantities to fully man the battalion with ammunition personnel.⁶

The 528th QMB's mission as the ordnance control for ICTZ was to oversee operation of the Army's ammunition supply points (ASPs). By November 1969, the 528th was responsible for six ASPs. The 571st Ordnance Company was responsible for ASP 102 at Camp Evans, ASP 103 at Phu Bai, and ASP 101 at Quang Tri. The 661st Ordnance Company was responsible for ASP 105 at Chu Lai and ASP 106 at Duc Pho,



The 6,000 pound rough terrain forklift was a vital part of ammunition supply operations. Each ASP relied on the heavy duty machines for loading, offloading, and internal movement of ammunition and heavy ordnance. At Chu Lai ASP, 295th Ordnance Company Private First Class Dennis Schuyler (far left) checked lot numbers before Sergeant Warren Hinzie moved the pallets in January 1969.



Map created by Cheryl A. Walley

and the 40th Ordnance Company ran ASP 107 at Da Nang.⁷

The work involved in running an ASP ranged from simple inventory controls to the more complicated business of maintaining lot integrity (keeping all boxes from one lot of ammunition together), to rebuilding boxes in order to protect ammunition from the elements, and the dangerous business of disposing of expired or degraded ordnance.

The 528th QMB was responsible for all Army Class V supply (ammunition and ordnance) in the ICTZ, from the moment it arrived until it was either issued to combat units or shipped back out of theater as surplus. The majority of ordnance shipments came by cargo ship from the United States or by intratheater shipment, usually from Cam Ranh Bay. The cargo ships docked at the Deep Water Port, where ammunition loads were transferred to lighterage (shallow draft vessels) and transported to offloading facilities, either further inside Da Nang Harbor and in the inland stream, or further up the coast at the smaller ports of Tan My and Chu Lai.⁸

By far the most important piece of equipment to the 528th's mission was the 6,000-pound rough terrain forklift. The forklifts were used every time ammunition needed to be offloaded at an ASP, repositioned within an ASP, issued to a unit, received from a unit, or shipped out of an ASP. Even with intensive maintenance schedules, the eight forklifts authorized to each ammunition company under TO&E 9-17G proved insufficient for the battalion's needs, especially when each company was responsible for more than one ASP,

each in a different location. Forklift shortages impacted the battalion's overall mission by delaying ammunition offloads, which in turn delayed ship and convoy turnaround times, which in turn further delayed vital ammunition shipments.⁹

Further complicating the work of maintaining stockage objectives at each ASP were the challenges brought about by monsoon season and the ever-present enemy. The former made it difficult to unload and transport ammunition to the ASPs, and the latter required security measures beyond those usually enacted by an ammunition battalion.

The 528th undertook various plans of action to address seasonal and security challenges. In anticipation of monsoon rains, the ASPs stockpiled as much ammunition as possible so they could handle demands caused by upsurges in enemy activity. Efforts to build up ammunition stocks before projected enemy action related to January 1970's Tet celebrations, however, were hampered by rough seas and a change in combat tactics. Heavy ordnance stocks became severely depleted as units in the northern ICTZ relied on heavy artillery to prevent enemy buildup before Tet. At the same time that units were drawing heavily on the ordnance, choppy seas prevented timely offloading from cargo ships to lighterage, and from lighterage to piers, which curtailed the ASPs' ability to maintain even basic stocking levels.¹⁰

Heavy ordnance stockage levels continued to fall during February, primarily due to increased use of 8" Howitzer and 175mm Gun shells by the 108th Artillery Group. At times,

the artillery units' consumption was ten times the intense combat rate on which stockage objectives were calculated. In order to supply the required ammunition, USASUPCOM diverted ammunition shipments destined for other ports into Da Nang, tasked shallow draft vessels to move ammunition loads to ICTZ from other places in Vietnam, and borrowed ammunition from the Marine Corps.¹¹

Low stockage levels of heavy ordnance continued to be a problem throughout the spring of 1970, requiring extensive cross-leveling between ASPs—moving ammunition lots from one ASP to another, in order to keep each ASP as close

Cargo ships carried hundreds of tons of ammunition from the United States to the Deep Water Pier at Da Nang. Lacking a dedicated deep water ammunition pier, the loads were transferred from the deep draft ships to lighterage (barges), which in turn offloaded the ammunition and ordnance up stream at Da Nang, or further up the coast at Tan My and Chu Lai.



to its stockage objective as possible—which tied up considerable transportation assets. The arrival of three deep-draft ships carrying ammunition (the *Del Mundo*, the *Green Cove*, and the *Miller*) in late May and early June finally brought the ASPs back to their stockage objectives for artillery ammunition.¹²

ASPs were common targets for enemy sappers, and the 528th attempted to increase security accordingly. The battalion could only do so much on its own, though, and had to wait on engineer support for some of the bigger tasks, such as clearing adequate perimeters. Battalion troops did the best they could, repairing fences and adding roving foot patrols around each ASP, but lack of manpower and resources retarded their efforts. Security assessments called for perimeter lighting, ground surveillance devices, better weaponry, and sentry dog teams. The dogs were a viable measure for the Quang Tri and Phu Bai ASPs, but kennel facilities were so low on the construction priority list as to prevent even that precaution.¹³

In spite of the lack of assets, the 528th improved ASP security as much as possible. By July 1970, the ASPs at Quang Tri, Camp Evans, and Phu Bai had Seismic Intrusion Detectors (SID IIIs) deployed along their perimeters. The Quang Tri ASP had also added three observation towers and cleared a ten-foot strip along its perimeter. Unfortunately, the ASP lacked enough guards to man the towers twenty-four hours a day, which undermined their effectiveness.¹⁴

As part of the United States' ongoing efforts to extricate itself from Vietnam and turn over all military functions to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in the process known as "Vietnamization," the 528th QMB (also known as the 528th Ammunition Battalion by mid-1970) participated in "Project Buddy." The 528th sent a small Instruct and Advise (I and A) Team consisting of two officers and three senior noncommissioned officers to the ARVN 51st Ammunition Group. After observing the 51st's ammunition operation, the I and A team prepared a thirty-six-hour program of instruction to improve the 51st's ammunition handling program.¹⁵

"Project Buddy" became such a success for the 528th that in June 1970, the battalion trained ARVN ammunition units at three different ASPs—Chu Lai, Phu Bai, and Da Nang. In a contemporary newspaper account of the



Each Ammunition Supply Point consisted of ammunition bunkers specifically designed and placed to reduce spread of fire and to contain explosions. As the ICTZ ASPs attempted to keep enough ammunition and ordnance on hand to meet combat unit demands, they were forced to crowd pallets and minimize safety distances.

program, instructor Staff Sergeant Alonze Jordan from the 571st Ordnance Company commented, "The students we have here are very attentive and know their business, and they are eager to learn our ways of ammo handling."¹⁶

As Vietnamization continued and American troops began to withdraw, the 528th QMB was no longer needed. On 11 September 1970, USASUPCOMDNG began reassigning the 528th's subordinate units to general support groups. The 661st Ordnance Company, the 40th Ordnance Company, and the 269th Ordnance Detachment were reassigned to the 80th General Support Group. The 263rd Transportation Detachment and the 571st Ordnance Company were similarly reassigned to the 26th General Support Group. By January 1971, the 528th itself was at zero strength in preparation for its formal inactivation at Da Nang on 15 April 1971.¹⁷

Thus ended the 528th QMB's first and final tour as an ammunition supply unit. The battalion served well under more than difficult circumstances. It kept the ICTZ Army combat units supplied with ammunition and ordnance in spite of monsoons and enemy attacks on the ASPs. While the 528th's experiences in Vietnam were completely conventional in nature, they certainly provide a worthy heritage for the 528th Special Operations Support Battalion. ♣

Endnotes

- 1 General Orders 744, 16 September 1969, Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 "History of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 528th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply), 16 September 1969–31



1st Logistical Command, under which the 528th QMB ultimately served in Vietnam, provided support directly and indirectly to every U.S. soldier in Vietnam between 1965 and 1970. As a descendant of 1st Logistical Command, 1st Corps Support Command now wears this patch.

- December 1969," Department of the Army, Headquarters Company, 528th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply), 14 March 1970, 2, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 "Operational Report of 528th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply) for Quarterly Period ending 31 October 1969," Department of the Army, Headquarters, 528th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply), 31 October 1969, 1, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 4 General Orders 766, 20 September 1969, Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang; General Orders 772, 22 September 1969, Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; General Orders 773, 22 September 1969, Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; "History," 9.
 - 5 "History," 1.
 - 6 "Operational Report—Lessons Learned, 528th Ammunition Battalion (DS/GS), for Period Ending 30 April 1970," Department of the Army, Headquarters, 528th Ammunition Battalion (Direct Support/General Support), 15 May 1970, 1, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 7 "History," 1–2.
 - 8 H. D. Smith, "Senior Officer's Debriefing Report," Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, 27 July 1970, E-1, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 9 Smith, E-2.
 - 10 "Operational Report—Lessons Learned, 528th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply), for Period Ending 31 January 1970," Department of the Army, Headquarters, 528th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply), 15 February 1970, 2–4, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 11 Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Hayden, Assistant Chief of Staff, Ammunition, "Ammunition Service Support," U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, 8 June 1970, 2–3, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; H. D. Smith, "Senior Officer's Debriefing Report," Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, 27 July 1970, E-1, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Smith, E-1.
 - 12 "Operational Report—Lessons Learned, 528th Ammunition Battalion (DS/GS), for Period Ending 31 July 1970," Department of the Army, Headquarters, 528th Ammunition Battalion (Direct Support/General Support), 15 August 1970, 2, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 13 "Operational Report... 31 January 1970," 1–2; "Operational Report... 30 April 1970," 2.
 - 14 "Operational Report... 31 July 1970," 2–3.
 - 15 Specialist 5 Cres Vellucci Jr. and Specialist 4 Jim Marino, "Project Buddy," *The Northern Log*, 15 June 1970; "Operations Report... 31 July 1970," 2, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 16 Vellucci and Marino.
 - 17 Requests for Orders by Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Hayden, Assistant Chief of Staff, Ammunition, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, copies in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; General Orders 8, 10 January 1971, Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

Each ASP consisted primarily of ammunition and ordnance bunkers, and was surrounded by a defensive perimeter. Enemy sapper attacks against ASPs were difficult to prevent given the few guards and little equipment made available to the ammunition units.

