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Keep the Flyin' Eight Balls Rollin': Military Leadership in the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company

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KEEP THE FLYIN' EIGHT BALLS ROLLIN': MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN THE
3360TH QUARTERMASTER TRUCK COMPANY

by

Grant T. Weller
Bachelor of Arts, The Pennsylvania State University, 1993

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May
1998

T1998
W458

This thesis, submitted by Grant T. Weller in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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Date 21 April 1998

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses deep and sincere appreciation to Lieutenant Colonel Elmer H. Puchta, USA (retired), for a lifetime of constructive discussions of leadership and officership, as well as for his generosity in opening his private records and memories for this work. Further appreciation is expressed to Louis A. Cook, who overcame physical infirmity to add his voice to the record.

The author is also grateful to the faculty of the Department of History of the University of North Dakota, for their guidance, instruction, flexibility, and most of all, their patience.

This work could not have been completed without the love and support of my entire family. Their encouragement kept me going when I was at the end of my own resources.

To Mrs. Elizabeth N. Puchta, who waited for her soldier to return.

ABSTRACT

The 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company, originally Company D of the 2639th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, was created in 1942 by drawing troops and officers from anti-aircraft units stationed in North Africa, to meet an emergency need for highway transportation to support the Allied advance East across North Africa. The reassigned troops and officers received no training in their new duties, but were instead immediately dispatched to the front with vital supplies. The company continued operations through North Africa, and on into Sicily and Italy. While in Italy, Elmer H. Puchta, previously assigned to the company as a platoon commander, took command.

Puchta instituted a number of changes designed to make maintenance and operations in the company more efficient. He was blessed with a great deal of independence in his command, which allowed him to make such changes with little to no interference from superiors. These changes helped the company operate smoothly in support of the invasion of Southern France, known first as Operation Anvil and later as Operation Dragoon.

In contrast to those units broken up to serve as part of the Red Ball Express in Northern France, the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company remained intact throughout the advance across France. This continuity fostered unit cohesion and enhanced morale. Post war analysis of Quartermaster Truck units indicates most did not perform well, but

the 3360th was an exception, collecting accolades and racking up impressive records for maintenance and operations.

The success of the 3360th can be linked to the general quality of the troops assigned, its longevity and continuity as a unit, and Puchta's leadership. The anti-aircraft troops were generally of a higher quality than most assigned to Quartermaster duties, by virtue of the Quartermaster Corps' low place in the Army's assignment process. The long service with minimal personnel disruption allowed the 3360th to develop a unit "soul" that fostered achievement, and allowed individual troops to become proficient at their individual duties. Puchta's leadership took advantage of these positive factors, and overcame the lack of formal training in Quartermaster duties. His willingness to innovate, deep concern for his troops, and measured discipline were crucial to the unit's success.

The operations and leadership of support units is not as widely studied as those of combat units. Such studies are of great value to both the historian and the professional warrior in understanding military leadership.

CHAPTER I: *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*: THE MEN AND ORGANIZATIONS
THAT BUILT THE 3360TH QUARTERMASTER TRUCK COMPANY



Figure 1

Captain Elmer Puchta in May 1945.¹

¹ Photograph from private collection of Elmer Puchta.

Elmer Puchta

In 1939, Elmer Puchta was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army's Coast Artillery Corps. He was a member of the organized reserves, his West Point ambitions having been foiled by poor eyesight. He was teaching math in the West View, Pennsylvania public school system, a northern suburb of Pittsburgh, when he was called to active duty on 15 November 1941. On 7 December 1941, he heard the news from Pearl Harbor on his car radio, and realized his orders calling him to active duty for one year were about to be amended.²

Puchta had enjoyed his four years of Reserve Officer Training Corps training at the University of Pittsburgh, and had a positive attitude towards his military service. He served stateside at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, and Camp Stewart, Georgia. It was at Camp Stewart that he met the future Mrs. Elizabeth N. Puchta on a blind date. Their time together was short, however, as Puchta was assigned to an anti-aircraft artillery battalion, and shipped overseas to England. The future Mrs. Puchta, a true southern belle of the old school, promised to wait for her Lieutenant, despite the raised eyebrows of her family, who were not happy about her attachment to a "Yankee." They kept their opposition muted because, as an officer, he was a gentleman by Act of Congress and therefore of marginally acceptable social standing. From England Puchta was shipped to North Africa. It was here that he was transferred from anti-aircraft artillery to quartermaster duties as a

² Elmer Puchta questionnaire 1. (See bibliography for complete descriptions of questionnaires and responses prepared specifically for this work.)

platoon leader in Company D of the 2639th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Provisional), later the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company.³

Louis Cook

On 7 December 1941, Louis Cook and his girlfriend stopped at a gas station, and heard the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Cook, the manager of the automotive department at Montgomery Ward's in Pennsylvania, volunteered immediately thereafter. He failed his initial physical, conducted in his hometown of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, but retook the physical in Pittsburgh, and convinced the doctors he was healthy enough to serve.⁴

Cook's automotive experience was quickly put to use. He was promoted to Sergeant and placed in the motor pool shortly after he came on active duty. Cook volunteered for Officer Candidate School, and was accepted on the recommendation of his Company Commander and a Lieutenant Colonel Smith of the Chemical Warfare Service. It was Smith who suggested Cook join the Chemical Warfare Service, which he did upon graduation from Officer Candidate School.⁵

³ Puchta questionnaire 1.

⁴ Louis Cook questionnaire 1. (Mr. Cook has difficulty writing, and uses abbreviated words and sentences. [sic] notations are omitted to preserve the flow of his statements.)

⁵ Cook questionnaire 1.

Cook was one of nineteen to graduate from chemical warfare training. Forty-one had started the three month course. The training included long hours of classroom instruction, late nights of studying, and training in the use of the 4.2 inch mortar, gas contamination identification devices, types of poison gas, and gas-related equipment.⁶

Following his training, Cook was sent overseas, arriving in Casablanca as an unattached replacement in 1942. He was assigned to the 84th Mortar Company, which was moved from division to division as required. It was with the 84th that he experienced his "baptism of fire," on the Vulturno River in Italy:

My orders was to take truck loaded with smoke pots down Mt. road. Had 10 men on board - to lay smoke screen for engineers to build bridge; went down a narrow Mt. road, turned corner, stopped truck. I walked a few feet. Saw the valley. 88 shell with my name on came in and missed me and hit rock, I was slightly hit with rock particles. Backed truck up and went down about 11 PM. Fired up smoke at daylight. Me 109 showed up strafing. A British group came out of the smoke. Firing 40mm guns and we went across the river.⁷

While in Italy, Cook also served as a forward observer. This advanced position gave him the chance to see Allied forces in combat. In addition to the British troops he saw on the Vulturno, later that same year Cook watched some French colonial troops, Moroccan Goums, in action: "As a forward observer, I watched the Goums under artillery fire. A shell would come in. One would get hit, some would run over to him,

⁶ Cook questionnaire 1.

⁷ Cook questionnaire 1.

another shell came in, get a group of them. They had no one directing them.”⁸ Cook would get to see French colonial troops again during Operation Anvil.

Cook had a later run in with German 88 fire. While diving for cover, he tore some ligaments in his ankle. He was not considered fit to return to his unit, and was assigned duty as a Quartermaster officer - a platoon commander in the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company.⁹ Following the war, he commanded the 3360th as part of the Army of Occupation.¹⁰

Logistics, War, and Trucks

Before a commander can even start thinking of manoeuvring or giving battle, of marching this way and that, of penetrating, enveloping, encircling, of annihilating or wearing down, in short of putting into practice the whole rigmarole of strategy, he has - or ought - to make sure of his ability to supply his soldiers with those 3,000 calories a day without which they will very soon cease to be of any use as soldiers; that the roads to carry them to the right place at the right time are available, and that movement along these roads will not be impeded by either a shortage or a superabundance of transport.¹¹

At no point in human history has van Creveld's dictum been more thoroughly proven than during the Allies' successful conquest of occupied Europe. The millions of tons of material required to support this colossal effort were stockpiled in secure locations

⁸ Cook questionnaire 1.

⁹ Cook questionnaire 1.

¹⁰ Cook questionnaire 1.

¹¹ Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1.

in the United Kingdom or North Africa or Sicily or Italy, depending on final disposition. Jokers commented that the only thing keeping Britain from sinking under the weight of supplies stockpiled on her shores were the barrage balloons sent aloft to protect from low level air attacks, but the joke really applied almost anywhere the Allies stockpiled supplies for one of the many great amphibious operations of the war.

Once they arrived on the continent, many of the supplies traveled by rail or canal or even pipeline. These methods were highly efficient. However, they could not deliver supplies to a location where no tracks or canals or pipes were in place, or where they could not be built quickly. The United States Army pushed forward the repair and construction of such means of bulk transportation far more quickly than anyone had previously thought possible, but no matter how far forward such means of transportation reached, there was still a gap between them and the fighting forces. It is on the most important means of bridging this gap that this paper will focus.

The chief means of bridging the gap was by truck. The U. S. Army of World War II was the first truly motorized army the world had ever seen. Trucks performed hundreds of tasks, under hundreds of different organizations. Puchta and Cook served in one such organization, the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company. By examining their stories and that of the 3360th, we can gain insight into how the Army utilized trucks in support of its mission, and how the same military virtues and qualities of leadership that had long been a part of the army, and other armies before the United States even existed, were applied to

units using this new advance. It can be further noted that the qualities of leadership that applied to combat were also required in the less glamorous support units.

The Army Service Forces

In 1940, when the United States Army first began to mobilize for possible war, there were only 64,000 service troops of all sorts in the army.¹² By November of 1941, that number had swelled to 453,000.¹³ At the same time the numbers of service troops underwent such a vast expansion, the organization of the army they served, especially the organization of the support elements, underwent a radical transformation.

As of 7 December 1941, the Army of the United States was divided into five main elements. Overall supervision was the responsibility of the Chief of Staff and his assistants. A second echelon consisted of the Army Air Forces and the General Headquarters, each responsible for planning and training for air and ground defense, respectively. The War Department in Washington contained several combat arms, service arms, and supply services, of which the Quartermaster General was one. Each of these was responsible for operations within its own functional area, including training and developing doctrine. The actual ground combat forces were controlled by four armies and nine corps areas. Finally, there were a variety of installations reporting directly to the Chief of Staff, (for example the United States Military Academy at West Point). These

¹² *Logistics in World War II: Final Report of the Army Service Forces*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1993), 9.

¹³ *Logistics*, 9.

arrangements included a variety of ambiguities and crossed lines of authority that resulted in a major reorganization shortly after the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁴

General H. H. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces, provided the plan that became the basis for the organization of the United States Army until the establishment of the United States Air Force as a separate service in 1947. He proposed to General Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, that the Army be divided into three commands, responsible for air forces, ground forces, and support, respectively.¹⁵ This arrangement would prevent the crisis that was developing in the general staff system of organizing an army:

Brig. Gen. Robert L. Bullard during World War I had expressed the fear that the general staff system would break down because no one man could handle the details heaped on the Chief of Staff and still direct a war.

On the eve of World War II, in spite of his orders to bring to his attention only those matters that could be handled by no one else, General Marshall was swamped by the demands on his time to decide relatively unimportant questions. No less than sixty-one officers and agencies, some with overlapping authority, had direct access to him. About fifty staff studies were given to him each day, leaving him with time for little else.¹⁶

By placing all of the functions of the army under one of the three main branches, the Chief of Staff and the general staff could focus their attention on strategic planning and coordinating the efforts of the three branches. At the same time, a movement was afoot to

¹⁴ John D. Millet, *The Organization and Role of the Army Service Forces*, United States Army in World War II, *The Army Service Forces*, (Washington D. C.: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1954), 21-22.

¹⁵ Millet, 25.

¹⁶ Millet, 25-26.

reorganize the civilian organization of the War Department to put all responsibility for supply matters under a single Under Secretary of War.¹⁷

This highlights one of the classic conflicts between strategy and logistics. The logistician wants the requirements for production - how many tools and weapons of what type - as soon as possible. The lead time for the development and production of the means of war have increased as technology has advanced. The more complicated or advanced the system, the longer it will take to research, design, and produce. The strategist wants to wait as long as possible before presenting his list to those responsible for procuring his needs. The longer he waits, the more current information he can keep in mind when making out his list. The last thing the strategist wants is to have the scope of his vision limited by the equipment orders he placed while operating with incomplete information, or before a rare opportunity presents itself. This is especially true in a democracy, where support for standing armies and military research and development has been traditionally lacking when no clear threat looms on the horizon. Thus, strategists developed their plans based on assumed production, not on what men and material were actually available.

As war has become more and more technically oriented, the lead time for developing and fielding a new system has become so long that any potential conflict will have been decided long before the military leadership could analyze the early phases of the

¹⁷ Millet, 26-27.

war and draw up new requirements based on that experience. Strategists have learned to plan around what is currently in existence, or at best on the assembly line, in cases where the production line is still open.

But in the 1940s, war was still moving at a sufficiently slow pace - and on a sufficiently grand scale - to allow modification of the logistics requirements as strategists shifted their plans. The subordination of the strategists' dreams to the logisticians list of available means was not yet total.

After much negotiation and rewriting, reorganization of the army into three commands as suggested by General Arnold was ordered by President Franklin Roosevelt on 28 February 1942, and put into effect on 9 March.¹⁸ Lieutenant General Brehon B. Somervell assumed command of the Services of Supply, or, as it was later renamed, the Army Service Forces.

In the Ground Force, commanded by General McNair, are the troops who fight on land; in the Air Force, under General Arnold, the fighters in the air. I have the third wing of our Army, the Services of Supply. Ours is the duty of coordinating all the services involved in the supply, transportation, hospitalization, and administration for the other forces except items peculiar to our Air Force such as planes. Ours is the job of bringing millions of civilians into the Army, feeding them and clothing them and equipping them and sending them to the places they are most needed when they are most needed. Ours is the job of housing them, of caring for them when they are ill, of building the camps where they live and the roads they use, of providing the ships and the trucks and the trains on which they travel. We are charged with the responsibility of putting guns and ammunition into their hands, of seeing that there are enough plants to make

¹⁸ Millet, 36.

those guns and that ammunition, and arranging for enough raw materials from which to make them.¹⁹

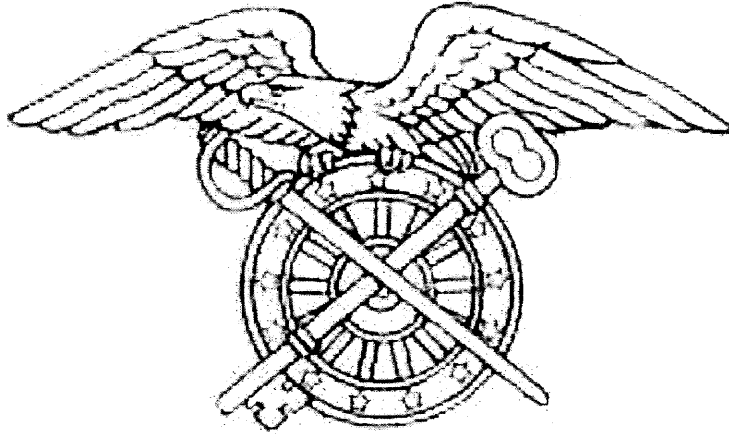


Figure 2

Quartermaster insignia, 1896²⁰

The Quartermaster Corps

The new Chief of the Army Service Forces did not inherit a well developed organization with a history of its own, as did his counterparts in the Army Air Forces and Army Ground Forces. Instead, he was given supervisory authority over a vast number of

¹⁹ Lieutenant General Brehon B. Somervell, Commanding General, Services of Supply, Army Day Address before the Military Order of the World War at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D. C., Monday April 6, 1942, published in *Senate Documents, 77th Congress, 2d Session, Miscellaneous*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1942).

²⁰ Courtesy of the United States Army, available to the public at <http://www.lee.army.mil/quartermaster/art/index.html>

organizations, each with its own focus and history.²¹ One of the most important of those organizations was the Quartermaster Corps.

On 16 June 1775, the Continental Congress established the Quartermaster General Corps with a resolution stating “*Resolved . . . That there be one quarter master general for the grand army, and a deputy, under him, for the separate army. That the pay of the quarter master general be eighty dollars per month, and that of the deputy forty dollars per month.*”²² Though the Quartermaster Corps went through many incarnations, and indeed became extinct several times, the primary functions envisioned by the Continental Congress were still the province of the Office of the Quartermaster General on the eve of World War II, including providing “food, clothing, equipage, general supplies, horses and mules, laundries, printing, salvage, graves registration, and kindred field services.”²³

The Civil War, as a large scale conflict involving the commitment of a substantial fraction of the nation’s resources, proved a crucial period for the growth and development of the Corps.²⁴ Many of the hard learned lessons, including the successful integration of rail and road transportation to move supplies from depots and dumps to the front, were

²¹ Millet, 40.

²² Worthington C. Ford, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Vol II, (Washington, D. C., Government Printing Office, 1905), 93 - 94.

²³ “Supply Wins Wars! Quartermaster Support for a Global Struggle,” *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin*, (Autumn / Winter 1994), 1, reprinted at web page *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin Archive*.

²⁴ Risch, 5.

forgotten in the post-Civil War period, and the Quartermaster Corps stumbled badly when the Spanish-American War broke out. This is not at all surprising, as military logistics had reached a crucial stage in its evolution. This developing change can perhaps best be illustrated by a European example:

As warfare became more complex the *impedimenta* carried by armies into the field, as well as their consumption per man per day, increased at an even greater rate than their manpower. To mention only a very few figures . . . the wagons constituting the train (field bakeries, hospitals, engineering equipment, etc.) of a German army corps numbered thirty in 1870, but this had more than doubled forty years later. The count of artillery pieces available to the North German Confederation for its war against Napoleon III is said to have stood at 1,584 whereas in 1914 the total must have been nearer 8,000, many of which were far bigger and heavier. Though the number of weapons of all types organic to each corps changed surprisingly little (the number of guns, for example, grew only from sixty-four to eighty-eight) those of 1914 were mostly quick-firing and sometimes automatic, capable of shooting off quantities of ammunition much greater than their 1870 predecessors. At that time, 200 rounds per rifle were carried along inside the various transport echelons (the body of the soldiers, battalion and regimental wagons, corps reserves) of each corps, but only fifty-six of these were, on average, expended during six months of campaigning. In 1914, the number of rounds carried had increased to 280, and these were completely expended during the very first weeks of war. In 1870-1 every German gun had fired an average of just 199 shells, but the 1,000-odd rounds per barrel held in stock by the Prussian War Ministry in 1914 were almost depleted within a month and a half from the initiation of hostilities.²⁵

Clearly, the task of supplying a modern fighting force was becoming more and more complex. The sheer volume of supplies required to keep a given unit fighting in the field was rising. The Quartermaster Corps of the United States Army would have to grow to meet its task.

²⁵ Van Creveld, 110.

Several investigations of the Corps after the Spanish-American War resulted in extensive restructuring, with the end result that just prior to American entry into World War I, the Corps grew to encompass more functions than ever before, including: "the supply of clothing, camp and garrison equipment, individual equipment, and general supplies for the Army, the transportation of the Army, the handling of construction and real estate activities, the operation of utilities at camps and stations, and certain miscellaneous activities, including the administration of national cemeteries"²⁶ and "responsibility for feeding and paying the Army."²⁷

Despite the long build-up to American involvement in World War I, there had not been the money or experience available to the Office of the Quartermaster General, as it was known at the time, to prepare for full mobilization. The Quartermaster's cumbersome contracting system was unable to keep the expanding Army fully supplied, and shortages of some items, such as uniforms, surfaced. The problems were corrected in part by purchasing overseas.²⁸ World War I resulted in changes to the functions of the Office of the Quartermaster General. Responsibility for transportation and construction were shifted to separate agencies in an effort to cope with the massive expansion of the Army, but were shifted back to the reestablished Quartermaster Corps by the National Defense

²⁶ Risch, 5.

²⁷ Risch, 5.

²⁸ William Gardner Bell, et al., *American Military History*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1989), 377.

Act of 1920.²⁹ The lessons learned about organization of a mass mobilization were absorbed after the war, and new plans were made.

During the inter-war period, the Corps made efforts to separate staff and operational functions, to ensure adequate planning for future contingencies, but over time, staff functions were reabsorbed by the operational functions. A safeguard to prevent the lapsing of contingency planning had been created in 1920, with the establishment of an Assistant Secretary of War to handle procurement planning and oversee procurement.³⁰ So, by the eve of World War II: "the QMC was a small supply agency of the War Department which had potentialities for expansion, in case of an emergency, into a large organization."³¹

Fortunately for the Quartermaster Corps, the state of limited emergency proclaimed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in September 1939 provided over two years to expand and develop the functions of the Corps gradually, though the real push did not begin until the fall of France provided additional motivation for defense preparedness.³² Numerous divisions were added to or expanded on within the Corps' structure. There were major changes in the control of motor transportation, among other

²⁹ Risch, 6.

³⁰ Risch, 7.

³¹ Risch, 7.

³² Risch, 11.

areas. Prior to the summer of 1942, motor transportation responsibility was divided between the Quartermaster Corps, the Ordnance Department, the Corps of Engineers, the corps areas, the General Staff, General Headquarters, and the various field armies.³³

There were many arguments at the time for the establishment of a new corps to oversee transportation functions, but the advantages that proponents argued would result from a separate automotive corps were not compelling enough to convince General Somervell to accept them, despite his interest in the unified maintenance organization that served the British Army.³⁴ However, the desirability of placing all motor transportation procurement and maintenance under a single corps was accepted, and responsibility for those activities was given to the Ordnance Corps, which had previously only been responsible for the procurement and maintenance of armed special purpose vehicles, such as tanks and armored cars. Thus, when Puchta and his troops needed maintenance performed on their trucks that was beyond their ability to perform in the field, they needed to go to an Ordnance Corps depot to get it.

The reorganization that created the Army Service Forces did not directly impact the organization or function of the Quartermaster Corps. However, the pressures of working for a new organization did force the Quartermaster Corps to change its structure to better match the expectations of the Army Service Forces and to interact more efficiently with the other organizations that also fell under the Army Service Forces.

³³ Risch, 20.

³⁴ Risch, 20-21.

In theory, there are two basic ways to organize procurement: functionally or by commodity. The Army Service Forces were organized on a functional model. In theory, different departments handled different functions, such as establishing requirements, negotiating contracts, procuring materials, transporting materials to depots, and distributing materials. In a commodity organization, which the Quartermaster Corps had been through most of its incarnations, a division was responsible for a single item, or commodity, from "cradle to grave." for example, a single office took care of everything having to do with tents - setting standards, accepting bids, placing orders, taking delivery, and distributing them to the scattered posts and camps. Another office would handle everything having to do with uniforms. This resulted in some duplication of effort and waste, as each stage of the process was repeated over and over for each category of supply items. While most Quartermaster offices were commodity based, some aspects of Quartermaster supply were handled functionally, such as a single office that handled overseas shipment of goods of all sorts. This mix proved untenable, and, as the majority of the other agencies under the Army Service Forces were organized functionally, a functional reorganization of the Quartermaster Corps was almost inevitable. The reorganization, completed in 1942, was not complete, as several commodity organizations survived, including those dealing with motor transportation, subsistence, and petroleum products. The aspects of motor transportation were later broken up functionally, or transferred to other branches, but the latter two continued throughout the war as islands

of commodity organization in a largely functional Quartermaster Corps. While adjustments continued to be made, this hybrid structure proved to be largely successful in producing a smoothly running organization.³⁵

At the same time the Quartermaster Corps was reorganizing to better meet the changing requirements of war, it was undergoing one of the most important revolutions in military logistics ever - the transition from animal to motor transportation.

The 1943 Quartermaster Field Manual outlined the advantages and disadvantages of wagon transportation as opposed to motor transportation:

a. *Advantages.*-Wagon transportation has the following advantages:

- (1) It can travel over terrain impracticable for motor transportation.
- (2) The capacity of a wagon is comparable to that of a light truck and equal to the pay loads that can be transported on at least 12 pack animals.
- (3) The maintenance of a wagon is relatively simple.
- (4) The required animals can sometimes live off the country.

b. *Disadvantages.*-The following disadvantages restrict the use of wagon transportation:

- (1) It is slow, moving at 3 1/2 miles per hour, or slower.
- (2) Its daily marches are limited to about one-eighth of the distance which motor transportation can travel.
- (3) The forage requirements of its animals (amounting to 100 pounds daily for the four animals per wagon) when carried on vehicles, materially reduces the pay load (other cargo), especially on trips extending several days' distance from the supply base.
- (4) Forage requirements, when grazing is impracticable, necessitate voluminous and frequent replenishments, and the animals require laborious care even when the transportation is idle.
- (5) During and active campaign, animals soon became unserviceable as a result of one or a combination of the following: insufficient water or

³⁵ Risch, 11-47.

forage, excessive marching, or neglect due to inexperienced or careless personnel.³⁶

Motor transportation was clearly more efficient than wagon transportation, except for certain very specific circumstances which the Army was not likely to encounter often. The Quartermaster Corps had to develop methods for utilizing trucks to get supplies to the troops. These methods had to overcome the special difficulties motorization caused:

Continuous operation of motor transportation requires well-constructed roads, and yet is very destructive to those roads. This materially increases the labor and materials required for road construction and maintenance. Personnel required for motor transport operation, on a ton-mile basis, is many times that required in rail operation. Motor transport cannot be operated efficiently at the low speed of marching troops. It must either use parallel routes or be restricted to specific periods of time on congested roads.³⁷

To meet these challenges, the Quartermaster Corps assigned the minimum number of vehicles possible to specific units. Those vehicles so assigned were known as "organic" transportation. Instead, vehicles, whenever possible, were pooled at higher command levels, allowing a central agency to dispatch transportation where it was most urgently needed, and minimizing idle time. The pool was not generally an actual location, but an organizational concept.³⁸

³⁶ *Quartermaster Operations*, Quartermaster Field Manual FM 10-5, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 66.

³⁷ *Quartermaster Operations*, 61.

³⁸ *Quartermaster Operations*, 62-63.

No matter how organized or how equipped, the Quartermaster Corps had a simple and clear mission. As the Quartermaster General, Major General Edmund B. Gregory put it: "Let me make this simple promise to the American people. The Quartermaster Corps will never fail your boys! We will deliver the goods. Wherever they go - to whatever point American fighting men penetrate - Quartermasters will be by their side to 'Keep 'em Rolling to Victory!'"³⁹

³⁹ "Supply Wins Wars! Quartermaster Support for a Global Struggle," 1.

CHAPTER II: BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF THE 3360TH QUARTERMASTER
TRUCK COMPANY

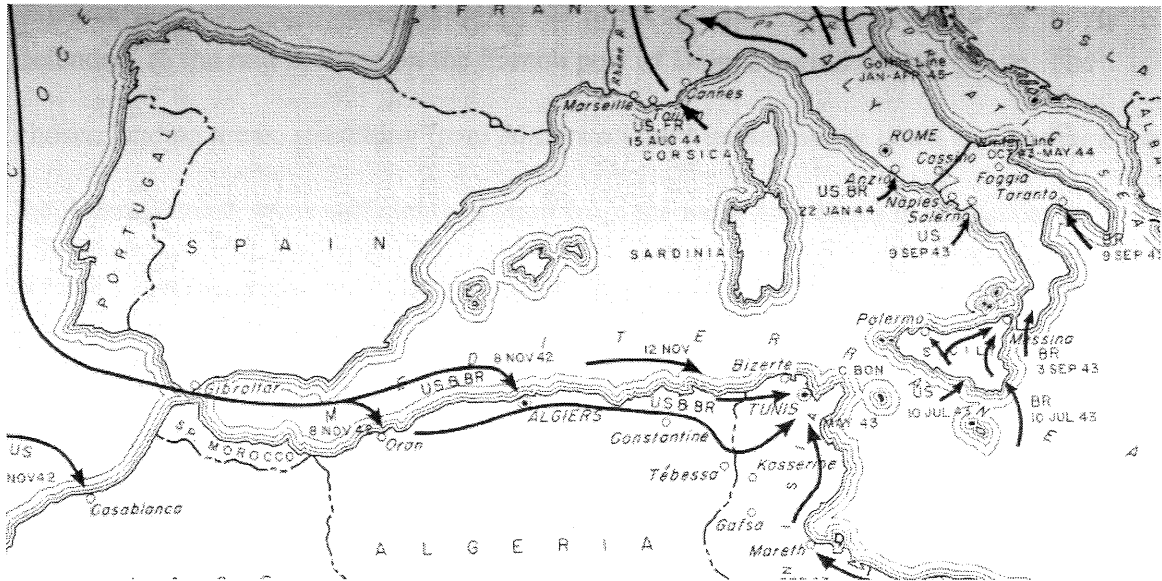


Figure 3

Map showing areas of operation of 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company - North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Southern France.¹

The North African Campaign

Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, was the first commitment of American ground troops against the European Axis powers. As such, it was a learning experience in all aspects of the operation, from the amphibious landing, to the tactical movements of ground troops, to the direction and control of tactical air power. This

¹ William Gardner Bell, et al., *American Military History*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1989), 474.

learning experience would continue across the desert, culminating in the final capitulation of all remaining Axis forces trapped in Tunisia.

The invasion of North Africa was also a tacit admission that, for the present, the Allies were incapable of tackling any target more vital to the Axis powers, or more heavily defended, as the raid in force on the French port of Dieppe would shortly prove. The chosen landing areas, stretching from Algiers on the Mediterranean coast to Casablanca on the Atlantic coast, were sufficiently distant from the main Axis bases in Tunisia as to present a significant overland campaign, with the attendant difficulties in supply. One of the chief areas where the Allies would show their inexperience was in supply.

On 23 October 1942, the British Eighth Army under the command of Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery defeated an attack by the German and Italian Afrika Korps under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel at El Alamein in Egypt. This victory set the stage for the Torch invasion forces, consisting of over 400 warships, 1,000 aircraft, and 107,000 troops.² The 8 November 1942 attack was a surprise to the French troops defending their colonial possessions for the Vichy French regime, but they fought back on all but one of the landing sites. Three days of steady advances and skillful diplomacy brought the French troops over to the Allied side.

It was fortunate for the Allies that the French colonial authorities ceased resisting the landings after such a short period. Otherwise, the inadequate logistical arrangements could have become a nightmare:

² Bell, 476.

Summarizing his command's experience at Port-Lyautey, Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr. reported to Patton [then Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr.] that "the combination of inexperienced landing craft crews, poor navigation, and desperate hurry resulting from lateness of hour, finally turned the debarkation into a hit-or-miss affair that would have spelled disaster against a well-armed enemy intent upon resistance."³

The near disaster in unloading was compounded once supplies were ashore. There was a shortage of motor transport, forcing troops to hand carry what supplies they could, adding to the exhaustion they felt following the beach assault and advance.⁴ Neither the arrival of American two-and-a-half ton trucks, nor the recruitment of native labor alleviated the problem. The American trucks were too few, and often native drivers disappeared with their loads and vehicles. Slowly, some order was brought out of the chaos, helped by the arrival of a convoy bearing support troops and equipment. Depots were established, and the tendency of unit supply officers to grab extra supplies from unguarded dumps was brought under control.

Many lessons relative to the Quartermaster Corps were learned from the Torch experience. Assault troops were burdened with 132 pounds of equipment.⁵ Many individual items of equipment - field jackets, shoes, and cook stoves - were found to be

³ William F. Ross and Charles F. Romanus, *Operations in the War Against Germany, United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services, The Quartermaster Corps*, (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1965), 51.

⁴ Ross, 51.

⁵ Ross, 55.

severely wanting.⁶ Packing materials were neither sturdy enough to survive rough handling during an amphibious landing, nor marked in symbols non-English speaking laborers could comprehend.⁷ All of these lessons would be of benefit in future amphibious operations, but before their full impact could be felt, the Quartermaster Corps had to support the Army's drive across North Africa to trap the German and Italian forces being pressed from the East by the British Eighth Army.

The advance across the North African desert slowed from its earlier rapid pace. It was known from the beginning of the invasion planning that the railway system was not extensive enough to be of much use to troops advancing into Tunisia from the west, so ocean and highway transportation would have to bear the majority of cargo.⁸ The North African highway system was extensive, but the distances to be covered were great. Many of the roads were graded to suit military traffic, but other sections would not stand up to heavy traffic in wet weather. An advance across North Africa would require large numbers of vehicles and extensive road construction and maintenance capabilities.⁹

Despite the foreknowledge of the need for highway transportation, by late November, the Allied forces were facing severe port congestion. Relieving the congestion

⁶ Ross, 55.

⁷ Ross, 55.

⁸ George F. Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, United States Army in World War II, The Mediterranean Theater of Operations, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1991), 20.

⁹ Howe, 20.

required the use of every available truck. Units moving forward were forced to leave much of their assigned organic transportation behind to help clear the ports. "What they did have - and this was supplemented by requisitioned French civilian vehicles, 'every kind of scrawny vehicle that can run,' as General Eisenhower described them - was worked to the limit."¹⁰ Clearly, this was an intolerable situation. The dangers of using non-standard trucks had been proven by the Germans during their invasions of France, and later Russia:

Since vehicles were so very hard to obtain, it was necessary to take a large proportion of them straight from the civilian economy. This resulted in an impossibly large number of types, all of which had to be kept supplied with spare parts at a rate that was greatly accelerated by the demands of war. So heavy were these demands that, during the early years of the war, it proved impossible to maintain even the modest degree of motorization achieved. In the winter of 1939-40, and again in that of 1940-1, it was necessary partly to demotorize units and services. This was in spite of the fact that, by the latter date, no less than eighty-eight German divisions - some forty percent of the total - were equipped with captured French material.¹¹

While Eisenhower and his staff may not have had the luxury of a historical analysis of the German difficulties with transportation in front of them, they could see a crisis situation developing. Emergency measures had to be taken.

Establishing the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company

The Allied forces quickly realized the need for expanded highway transportation capability. "A special convoy arriving on 6-7 March brought more than 4,500 two-and-one-half ton trucks into Casablanca and Oran. Other convoys brought more than 2,000

¹⁰ Howe, 293.

¹¹ Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 144 - 145.

per month. Great assembly plants processed the twin-unit-packed crates of trucks.”¹² These crates, each containing two deuce-and-a-halves in pieces, made the vital trucks indistinguishable from any of the other supplies that were arriving daily in various North African ports. Even the future users of the equipment such as Puchta were not aware of its arrival: “I never knew this - I often wondered how there were so many trucks available.”¹³ The new trucks would be formed into Quartermaster Truck Companies.

QM Truck Companies provided motor transportation for Army personnel and supplies. In all areas of a theater of operations, from the ports of debarkation to the fighting fronts, Quartermaster trucks hauled troops, prisoners, food, gasoline, animals, weapons - in fact, anything that had to be transported from Animals to Zippers.¹⁴

The newly arrived trucks were mated with personnel drawn from anti-aircraft units stationed in Oran and the surrounding area, such as the 431st Coast Artillery (AA), stationed nearby at Arzew, to form the 2639th Quartermaster Truck Battalion.¹⁵ One company of the 2639th, Company D, would later be redesignated the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company. Puchta, later commander of the 3360th QM Truck

¹² Howe, 498.

¹³ Puchta questionnaire 4.

¹⁴ “QM Units Were Key to Victory,” *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin*, (Autumn / Winter 1994), 3, reprinted at <http://leednsl.army.mil/quartermaster/bulletin/archive.html>

¹⁵ Puchta questionnaire 4.

Company, was one of those transferred, on 13 March 1943.¹⁶ He was made a platoon leader in Company D: "We were notified on a Friday, assembled in Oran on Saturday, drew trucks and loads on Sunday and left for Tunisia on Monday."¹⁷ While Puchta had served as the motor officer for the 431st and thus had some experience with trucks, he had not had any training for either those duties nor his new responsibilities as a platoon commander,¹⁸ in charge of twenty seven enlisted men and sixteen trucks.¹⁹ Puchta's experience can be considered representative of the battalion:

The day was dreary with lots of mud and rain. To anyone there at the time it did not seem possible that order could grow so easily out of apparent chaos. This was not the case, however, for two short days after the personnel reported the first of the companies was winding its way across the spaces of North Africa with a cargo for the combat troops. In less than a week the entire battalion was engaged in its all important mission.²⁰

¹⁶ Major T. L. Hill, Adjutant, 67th CA [Coast Artillery] AA [Anti-Aircraft], Special Orders Number 14, extract, March 13, 1943.

¹⁷ Elmer H. Puchta, Unpublished manuscript submitted to "The Officer," February 1, 1994, 1.

¹⁸ Puchta questionnaire 4.

¹⁹ Headquarters, TSFET, Office of the Theater Chief Quartermaster, *Operational Study No. 10: Quartermaster Units Organizations and Personnel*, (n. p., November 1, 1945), 9.

²⁰ Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile to 3357th, 3358th, 3360th, 138th, 144th, 3359th Quartermaster Truck Companies, March 13, 1945, Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

Nor was the 2639th Quartermaster Truck Battalion's experience unique. Another battalion, formed in the Casablanca area, had its trucks on the road to Ouled Rahmoun, about 1,000 miles away, within a week of the trucks arrival in North Africa.²¹

Puchta notes that many of his newly minted truckers were happy about their new assignment: "There was no AAA action so the men were faced with boredom and "chicken-shit" garrison type duties. Most of them I feel were glad to get out of this environment."²² There were other reasons that the change in duties might prove welcome: "Many who had specialties were transferred in grade or had a chance for promotion."²³ With promotion would come a rise in status, and, of course, pay.

Though "the bulk of Quartermaster responsibilities required tradesmen and skilled technicians,"²⁴ as always, when provisional units are formed in the field, the units ordered to transfer personnel did not give up their best or most experienced troops: "The decision was made to form these provisional truck battalions. One from AAA [Anti-Aircraft Artillery], another from the engineers and one from the QM [Quartermaster]. There may have been others. . . Each unit was levied for so many officers & EM [enlisted men] in

²¹ Howe, 498.

²² Puchta questionnaire 3.

²³ Puchta questionnaire 3.

²⁴ Erna Risch and Chester L. Kieffer, *The Quartermaster Corps: Organization, Supply, and Services*, United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1955), 2:144.

grade or promotable. Units cleaned house. . .”²⁵ This particular phenomenon was hardly unique to Puchta’s experience: “Upon activation of truck and car units, too often the organizations or units charged with supplying the personnel to these units did not give proper consideration to the proper selection of drivers. . .”²⁶

As the troops arrived, they were quickly assigned to their new duties: “There was little formal training - can you drive a truck? Fine, you’re in the second platoon.”²⁷ Mechanics were the exceptions to this rather informal assignment procedure: “We always looked carefully a[t] [sic] men who said they were mechanics.”²⁸ There was good reason for this extra scrutiny of mechanics. As Brigadier General Henry D. F. Munnikhuysen, chief of the military Personnel and Training Division “declared in a speech, not to be taken too literally: ‘The Army can teach a man to handle a gun and make a fairly decent shot out of him in 13 weeks, but it takes from 4 to 6 years to really produce a top-notch mechanic.’”²⁹ While Munnikhuysen might have been underestimating the time it took to train a qualified infantryman, and overestimating the time necessary to train a mechanic, his point is well taken. Calling a man a mechanic on a roster does not make him one.

²⁵ Puchta questionnaire 2.

²⁶ The General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, *Quartermaster Supply Operations, File R 401/11, Study Number 109*, (n. p., [1945]), 38.

²⁷ Puchta questionnaire 2.

²⁸ Puchta questionnaire 2.

²⁹ Risch, 2:144.

While units formed in the field were not likely to meet all of the Quartermaster Corps' requirements for trained and skilled personnel, the Corps was also having problems with units it was able to create from scratch:

many thousands of the better qualified men volunteered for service in the Navy, the Marine Corps, or the AAF [Army Air Forces]. Hence they remained outside the Selective Service System and were never available to the Army for distribution. The result was that the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the AAF, in effect, had the head seat at the manpower table. The Army, in turn, operated its own priority system in which the QMC [Quartermaster Corps] usually had the lowest rating. Thus, the QMC was placed more or less in the role of a stepchild who sat at the foot of the second table and was forced to take the leavings after the other branches of the armed forces had been treated to the more choice helpings.

This policy no doubt was based on the belief that more Quartermaster functions could be performed by personnel who were inferior physically, mentally, or by reason of an underprivileged background, and that incidental failures would not imperil, to any serious degree, the success of American arms. The Quartermaster General and his staff, keenly aware of actual needs in the way of specially skilled, physically able, and intelligent personnel, protested against this policy, for the most part to little avail.³⁰

Quartermaster Corps planning called for making use of civilian skills when training new troops. However, the Corps was unable to obtain enough troops with the required civilian skills to make the system work. In the pre-war draft, the Quartermaster Corps obtained only 45 percent of the men with previous truck driving experience it needed.³¹ This increased the burden on the Quartermaster Replacement Training Centers, or QMRTCs. The situation was even worse for mechanics, where only three percent of incoming

³⁰ Risch, 2:174.

³¹ Risch, 2:149.

trainees had a background in mechanical work.³² The QMRTCs had thirteen weeks to make men experts in their fields. This was possible where the men had previous experience in their field, or a related one. If they did not, "It had to do the next best thing: teach the trainees the fundamentals so that they could be assigned as helpers and gradually become sufficiently skilled to perform their duties adequately."³³ General Munnikhuysen's four to six years simply could not be compressed into thirteen weeks. Throughout the Quartermaster Corps: "Mechanics within the companies were rarely of a satisfactory quality."³⁴

This had the unintentioned but fortunate result that although the provisional battalions formed in the desert of North Africa probably did not receive the perceived cream of the crop when personnel were transferred, the transfers were drawn from a more select talent pool, and hence were at least the equals of, or slightly better than, troops originally assigned to Quartermaster duties upon their initial entry into the service of the United States. Thus, the 3360th, for example, probably had better material to work with than the rest of the multitude of Quartermaster Truck Companies:

I don't know where AAA [Anti-Aircraft Artillery] stood in the assignment pecking order. I imagine it was rather high. After WW I, AAA was part of the CAC [Coast Artillery Corps] probably because CAC fired in 2 dimensions and AAA in three. At the beginning of WWII there was no radar for AA. They were dependent on searchlights, stereoscopic height finders (this was pretty sophisticated equipment at that time) and sound

³² Risch, 2:151.

³³ Risch, 2:152.

³⁴ *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 38 - 39.

detectors. . . Plus most AA units were mobile. I think AAA personnel were superior to troops assigned directly to QM.³⁵

As to the officers of the 3360th: "Upon the ability of its officers to train and lead these men effectively in the performance of their duties rested the success of the Corps in carrying out its mission."³⁶ And yet, first as Platoon Leader and then as Company Commander, Puchta was issued "As far as I recall, very few"³⁷ of the several handbooks, technical orders, or regulations that governed the functioning of such a unit. Without formal Quartermaster training or the appropriate regulations, Puchta and his brother officers fell back on their basic military training and previous leadership experiences. While perhaps not prepared fully for their specialists' roles in running a Quartermaster outfit,

the Quartermaster officer in World War II had to be a combat leader as well as a technical specialist. . . The rear could become the front within a few hours, and supply lines were often endangered and sometimes destroyed by bombers or tanks. The Quartermaster officer therefore had to be trained in the use of weapons and had to possess a knowledge of tactics that would enable him to defend his supply points. Moreover, he had to possess the qualities of leadership needed to direct troops in the field.³⁸

Interestingly, while Puchta and his brother officers did not receive any formal training in their primary duties, he did have the opportunity to attend a school covering the responsibilities of one of his secondary duties, Bomb Reconnaissance Officer, responsible

³⁵ Puchta questionnaire 4.

³⁶ Risch, 2:207.

³⁷ Puchta questionnaire 2.

³⁸ Risch, 2:175 - 176.

for identifying unexploded enemy ordnance and notifying disposal personnel so they could be safely detonated or removed.³⁹ Though the class was only scheduled to last two and a half hours, there were apparently great difficulties pulling officers and NCOs away from their duties to attend: "To date attendance at classes has been very irregular, due [sic] to a number of reasons, including the failure of students to report as directed due to transportation difficulties, organizations changing their minds as to personnel scheduled to attend school, and changes in the organizations assignment or attached to Eastern Base Section."⁴⁰ It would have been even more difficult to organize any sort of extensive training in Quartermaster operations. Instead, each officer had to fall back on his basic military training and his general officership training and experience to lead his unit.

Even more responsibility was to be heaped upon the junior officers leading the platoons and companies making up the logistical support of the army:

One of the most serious shortcomings of the distribution system in Europe was the lack of an adequate system of depots properly echeloned in depth. . . . There was no adequate system of intermediate depots for storing the bulk of supplies to take the pressure off the bases and provide closer support to the front. . . . The reason for all this was not so much a disregard for proper organization and control or a lack of planning as it was the nature of fast-

³⁹ Captain Henry C. Stovall, Adjutant, 2639th Quartermaster Truck Battalion to Bomb Reconnaissance Officers, 2639th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, July 7, 1943, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

⁴⁰ First Lieutenant Leonard Tolkoff, Adjutant, 46th Quartermaster Regiment to All Assigned and Attached Units, July 4, 1943, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

moving warfare which allowed no time for the organization of the logistical tail.⁴¹

The lack would have to be made up on the roads.

The entire 2639th, which later became the 55th Quartermaster Battalion, was made up of white officers and enlisted troops. Many other Quartermaster Truck companies were manned by African-American troops, and a few had African-American officers, though the 3360th never worked closely with any such units.⁴² "Approximately 73 percent of the truck companies in the Motor Transport Service in the European theater were Negro."⁴³ While that figure does not take into account those truck units that were assigned directly to units (the 3360th was assigned to Seventh Army), it does indicate the high number of African-American units. Their work has been summarized: "For the most part, the quartermaster truck and service companies . . . performed their routine duties as assigned, within the limitations of their abilities, their leadership, and their immediate past training."⁴⁴

⁴¹ James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953*, Army Historical Series, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), 533.

⁴² Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁴³ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, United States Army in World War II, Special Studies, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1994), 633.

⁴⁴ Lee, 642 - 643.

Standard Organization and Equipment

While Company "D" of the 2639th and its sister units were formed hastily, a standard pattern was followed. According to The General Board,

The mission of the Quartermaster truck company, or troop-transport company, is to provide transportation for the hauling of cargo and for the movement of personnel by motor transport. It is a mobile, flexible unit, and is organized into a company headquarters and three operating platoons. Each platoon operates 16 trucks, two and one-half ton 6 X 6 cargo, with 16 trailers, 1-ton, 2 wheel, and each platoon has sufficient equipment to perform limited maintenance. The maintenance section, equipped with complete second echelon equipment, operates under the company headquarters.⁴⁵

Table of Organization No. 10-57 outlined the manning and equipping of a Quartermaster Truck Company. The company had a headquarters section. It was authorized one Captain, the Company Commander, and one Lieutenant, a motor maintenance officer. The heart of any headquarters is its Non-commissioned Officers, or NCOs. A Quartermaster Truck Company was authorized a First Sergeant, who also served as a truckmaster, a Technical Sergeant, the motor sergeant, two Staff Sergeants, managing mess and supply respectively, and two Corporals, the company clerk and the company dispatcher. Eighteen men of lower enlisted rank - Technician Grades Five and Four (forerunners to modern "Specialist" ranks), Privates First Class, and Privates, rounded out the Headquarters. One served as armorer, four as cooks, one as a "Driver, Truck, Light" and seven as "Mechanics, Automotive." The remaining five enlisted personnel were

⁴⁵ *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 34.

simply placed under the category "Basic." The Table of Organization made provision for one cook to be detached to a platoon, if that platoon was operating independently.⁴⁶

The rest of the company's personnel were distributed in three platoons, each of which was commanded by a Lieutenant. With him in the platoon headquarters was a Staff Sergeant serving as platoon sergeant. Generally, when the platoon was on the road, the platoon sergeant and platoon leader would travel together in a jeep.⁴⁷ Each platoon was divided into two sections, and each section was divided into two squads. Two Sergeants served as section leaders, and two Corporals served as squad leaders. Each Section had ten drivers in the ranks of Technician, Grades Four and Five, Private First Class, or Private, giving each platoon a total of twenty drivers, supervised by six NCOs and one officer.⁴⁸

The Table of Organization also made provision for the assignment of twenty four additional enlisted personnel "by the War Department, when requested by the theater of operations commander, to provide 2 drivers per cargo vehicle when vehicles are used continuously in convoy or under other maximum operating conditions."⁴⁹ The 3360th never experienced such augmentation, despite the heavy operational tempo it maintained.

⁴⁶ *Operational Study No. 10, 9.*

⁴⁷ Puchta questionnaire 4.

⁴⁸ *Operational Study No. 10, 9.*

⁴⁹ *Operational Study No. 10, 9.*

The Table of Organization also gives the authorized equipment strengths for a Quartermaster Truck Company. They were authorized fifty two-and-one-half ton trucks, and fifty-three trailers, mostly one ton models, but a few lighter one-quarter ton models. The company was also authorized a three-quarter ton weapons carrier, though the 3360th never used one. Instead, several one-quarter ton trucks, the ubiquitous Jeeps, were used for headquarters personnel and the platoon commanders. Though not intended as a combat unit, it was anticipated that circumstances could arise requiring the 3360th and its sister units to defend themselves and their cargo: "They had to be mentally stable to withstand the shock of battle and capable of defending themselves."⁵⁰

They were soldiers first, suppliers second. The supplies they handled were the lifeblood of the Army, and Quartermaster troops had to learn to protect them. The supply lines, because of the world-wide scope of the war, were many times longer than they had been in any previous conflict, and were much more vulnerable as a result of the development of aerial bombing. Furthermore, Quartermaster troops were subject to attack from fast-moving mechanized forces, and endangered by mines and booby traps.⁵¹

Thus, the unit was authorized eighty five carbines, twenty five M1 rifles, thirteen .50 caliber machine guns on flexible mounts, and five 2.36 inch rocket launchers. Every man in the company had a personal weapon, either a carbine or a rifle. The machine guns were to be distributed four to a platoon, while the rocket launchers were to be maintained by the headquarters section.⁵²

⁵⁰ Risch, 2:143.

⁵¹ Risch, 2:143.

⁵² *Operational Study No. 10*, 9.

The 3360th was equipped largely as regulations called for: "We had 49 GMC long body 6x6's - we had one short body which was #27 . . . One long body was the kitchen truck and the other was the wrecker. This left 48 trucks for the 3 platoons."⁵³ Puchta never heard of the rocket launchers that in theory the 3360th should have had.⁵⁴ The 3360th did have approximately thirteen air cooled fifty-caliber machine guns, which were mounted on the trucks, one machine gun for every four trucks.⁵⁵

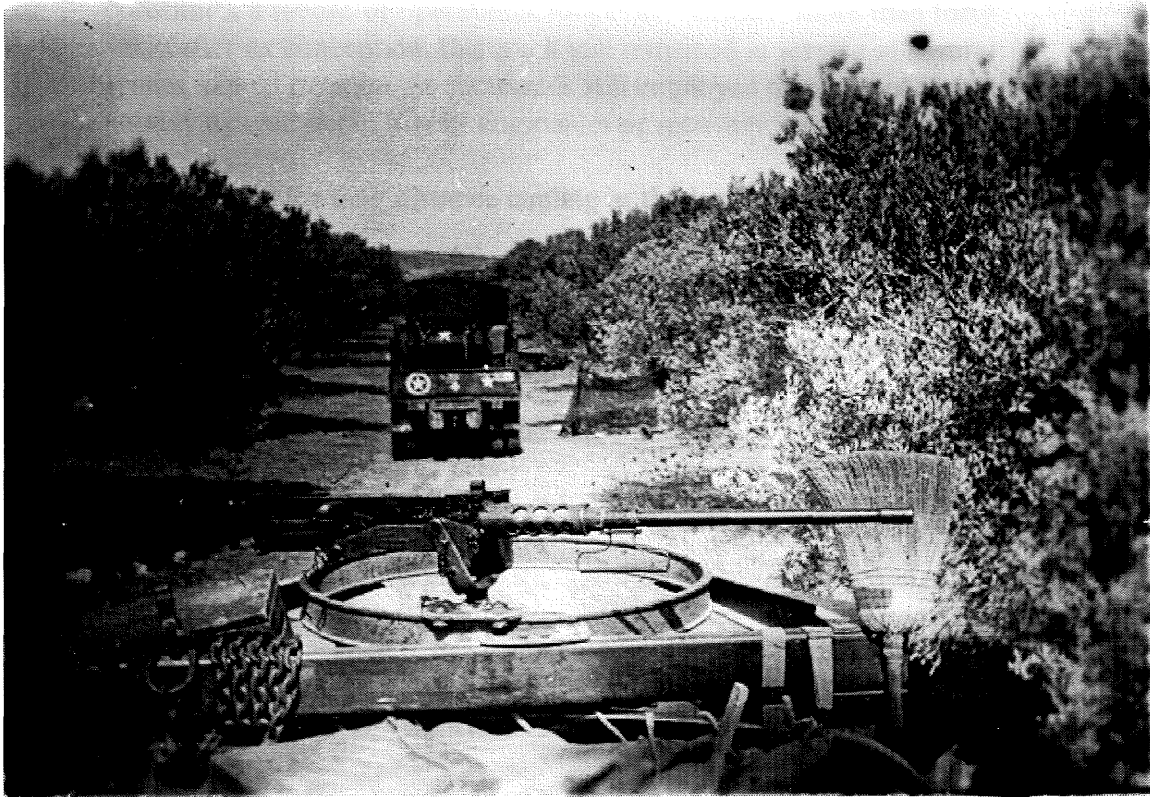


Figure 4

⁵³ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁵⁴ Puchta questionnaire 3.

⁵⁵ Puchta questionnaire 3.

(Previous Page) 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company trucks in a staging area in July 1943, showing mounted .50 caliber machine gun.⁵⁶

The Deuce-and-a-Half and the Jeep

The trucks of the 3360th were the two and one half ton trucks produced by the General Motors Corporation.

The most brilliant symbol, along with the Jeep, of American automobile production of the 1940s, the GMC 2 1/2 Ton model CCKW also constitutes a record of operational longevity. Indeed, more than forty years after its conception, this truck still remained in service in several armies, not to mention the thousands still employed throughout the world, notably by civil public works companies or recovery services.⁵⁷

While not as efficient for long distance hauling as the larger trucks, especially tractor-trailer designs, the deuce-and-a-half carried an impressive load. The reference data provided by the Theater Chief Quartermaster shows the deuce-and-a-half had a usable capacity of 320 cubic feet, of a total body capacity of 400 cubic feet, identical to that offered by the larger five ton truck or semi-trailer, though less than half the 750 cubic feet provided by the ten ton semi-trailer. In more visible terms, a deuce and a half could be expected to carry 150 cases of C rations, sixty four average bales of clothing . . . fifteen full fifty-five-gallon drums, or twenty three such drums empty. The total cargo capacity of a Quartermaster Truck Company with trailers is given as 168 tons; without trailers, 120

⁵⁶ Photograph from private collection of Elmer Puchta.

⁵⁷ J-M Boniface and J-G Jeudy, *US Army Vehicles of World War Two*. (Newbury Park, CA: Haynes Publications Inc., 1991), 55.

tons.⁵⁸ Puchta reports that the trailers were rarely used, and were almost considered “excess baggage.”⁵⁹ Operational Study No. 10 reported that trailers were rarely used in the European Theater.⁶⁰ “Due to the shortage of transportation, and based upon road conditions, the overloading of the cargo trucks up to 100 percent was authorized.”⁶¹ Puchta notes that the size of the load allowed was determined mainly by the volume - however much would fit on the truck was how much was carried.⁶² All this material fit in a chassis about twenty feet long, seven feet wide, and eight feet high.⁶³

While unable to carry the larger loads of the semi-combinations, the deuce-and-a-half had significant advantages over its larger brethren. The deuce-and-a-half was a 6X6 vehicle, meaning all six of its tire attachment points - two on the front axle under the engine and four on two axles under the bed - were drive wheels, providing power. This meant the deuce-and-a-half could climb a 65% gradient. The drive wheels gave the deuce-and-a-half the power to slog through mud, ice, and snow, along unpaved roads or trails. Rarely was a deuce-and-a-half stranded by road conditions. The ability and reliability of the deuce-and-a-half, in many models and modifications, is attested to by its

⁵⁸ Headquarters, TSFET, Office of the Theater Chief Quartermaster, *Operational Study No. 2: Quartermaster Supply Reference Data*, (n. p., November 1, 1945), 62 - 63.

⁵⁹ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁶⁰ *Operational Study No. 10*, ?.

⁶¹ *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 36.

⁶² Puchta questionnaire 4.

⁶³ Boniface, 56.

incredible production run of 562,750 by 1945, and its equally impressive operational life of over 40 years. The total number produced set an absolute record for truck production which has only been exceeded by the Chinese Jay-Fong model.⁶⁴

The deuce-and-a-half was different from civilian trucks in a few respects. Its hood and radiator grill were designed to facilitate maintenance as well as enhance cooling efficiency. This increase in maintenance efficiency could have been offset by the lack of interchangeability of parts between deuce-and-a-halves built by different manufacturers, but trucks built by companies other than GMC were generally shipped to Allied countries under Lend-Lease.⁶⁵ The 3360th Quartermaster Truck company had GMC trucks, but "Somewhere along the way we had a couple of Studebaker 6 x 6's."⁶⁶

While produced with many modifications and variants, and produced by several manufacturers, the deuce-and-a-half was the standard truck for its purpose used by the United States. The Quartermaster Corps had no end of trouble making it such, however. During World War I, nearly 275,000 motor vehicles, of over 200 different makes, had been procured.⁶⁷ Quartermaster Corps efforts to ensure standardization ran headlong into the Comptroller General's concern for awarding contracts competitively, in accordance

⁶⁴ Boniface, 56.

⁶⁵ Boniface, 56, 58 - 59.

⁶⁶ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁶⁷ Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps 1775-1939*, Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1989), 718.

with law. Only a change in the law would allow the Corps to write specifications that would ensure standardization.



Figure 5

Elmer Puchta poses with a deuce-and-a-half in May 1945. The markings identify the truck as belonging to Seventh Army, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company, Truck number 27. This was the 3360th's sole short-bodied deuce-and-a-half.⁶⁸

In 1939, the War Department did bend enough that it was announced all tactical transportation needs were to be met through five basic chassis types, but it was not until 1940 that Congress eliminated the requirement for the War Department to advertise all contracts.⁶⁹ Finally, the Quartermaster Corps could pursue standardization. The design

⁶⁸ Photograph from private collection of Elmer Puchta.

⁶⁹ Risch, *Quartermaster Support*, 720.

and development of the deuce-and-a-half were complete in all essentials and procurement well underway when the project was transferred to the Ordnance Corps in August 1942.⁷⁰ Thus, the 3360th was equipped with the vehicle that soon became known as “the workhorse of the army”⁷¹ with a true Quartermaster lineage behind it. The value of the deuce-and-a-half was widely recognized: “The 2 1/2-ton 6X6 truck was one of the most valuable pieces of military equipment used throughout the war. It was the backbone of motor transport throughout the Theaters of Operations.”⁷² General George S. Patton, Jr. remarked late in the war that “The two-and-a-half-ton truck is our most valuable weapon.”⁷³

The other vehicle that the 3360th used extensively was the ubiquitous Jeep, more formally known as the one-quarter ton 4 x 4 truck. The Jeep was developed by the Quartermaster Corps as a general purpose vehicle with the tactical mission of close support of attacking infantry. The versatility and utility of the Jeep quickly became legendary. The famous war correspondent Ernie Pyle summarized the Jeep in 1942: “Good Lord, I don’t think we could continue the war without the jeep. It does everything. It goes everywhere. It’s as faithful as a dog, as strong as a mule, and as agile

⁷⁰ Erna Risch, *The Quartermaster Corps: Organization, Supply, and Services*, United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1995), 1:141.

⁷¹ Risch, 1:141.

⁷² *Logistics in World War II: Final Report of the Army Service Forces*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1993), 94.

⁷³ “QM Units Were Key to Victory,” 4.

as a goat. It constantly carries twice what it was designed for, and still keeps on going. It doesn't even ride so badly after you get used to it."⁷⁴

Into Tunisia

With the Allies unable to cut off the Axis forces, Rommel was able to fortify defensive positions in Tunisia and build up reinforcements. Axis forces delivered the advancing Americans a sharp defeat at Kasserine Pass, but were unable to exploit the local victory, in part due to an unsatisfactory divided command. The offensive was turned back. Command of United States II Corps, which had suffered the reverse at Kasserine, passed to then-Major General George S. Patton, Jr. This colorful figure would play a role in the story of the 3360th in Sicily, but for now his advent had a less direct impact. He was able to achieve a junction with British Eighth Army forces moving into Tunisia from the East. The combined forces pressed on the combined front and restricted the Axis forces to a small bridgehead. Despite some successful evacuations, over 275,000 German and Italian troops were forced to surrender on 10 May 1943. While the surrender reduced the burden on the combat troops, the job of the supply services was increased, having to provide food, water, and shelter for each and every surrendered enemy soldier. Puchta and the 3360th were directly involved in removing prisoners from Bizerte to detention facilities.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ernie Pyle, "The Washington Daily News," June 4, 1943, quoted in Risch, 1:141.

⁷⁵ Puchta questionnaire 4.

The difficulties encountered by the supply organizations were somewhat alleviated by the creation of the Eastern Base Section on 13 February 1943.⁷⁶ A base section headquarters was necessary to support the increasingly complex supply operations needed to support the increasing forces in North Africa. The organizational gains, however, were somewhat offset by the increasingly complex organization of the ground troops. The normal command relationships were broken up into many task forces, usually about the size of a battalion or regiment. The quartermaster forces in Africa were pushed to the limit to support these units, operating three separate railheads. It was at this time the Allies faced the crisis in Kasserine Pass. After the crisis had passed, support arrangements were normalized. The three infantry and one armored divisions of General Patton's II Corps had their own organic trucks in place now, and the quartermaster units attached to higher headquarters, such as the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company, were able to shift some of the burden to the units.⁷⁷

The nearly disastrous supply situation demanded not only the creation of new units at the battalion and company level, but also major reorganizations at the uppermost levels of command. The three separate supply organizations that supported the three distinct landing areas were too decentralized to support the advance across North Africa. British and American support functions gradually combined over the months of late 1942. This was only an interim arrangement, however. The real solution was the creation of a

⁷⁶ Ross, 59.

⁷⁷ Ross, 60.

separate theater of operations: "Constitution of the North African Theater of Operations, United States Army (NATOUSA), was announced on 4 February 1943 and all U.S. resources within its boundaries passed from the control of the Commanding General, ETOUSA [European Theater of Operations, United States Army], on that date."⁷⁸

Creation of a Theater Command separated the needs of North Africa from those of the ongoing buildup of resources in Great Britain to support the projected cross channel invasion, at the theater level, leaving the allocation of resources to higher authorities.

"Eight days later NATOUSA was further developed by the establishment of the Communications Zone, NATOUSA, a purely administrative command without support functions."⁷⁹ Actually, these new positions were filled by officers still wearing their other hats from before the creation of NATOUSA, with only minimal additional personnel.⁸⁰

"NATOUSA expanded its administrative structure on 15 February 1943, when Service of Supply (SOS NATOUSA) was constituted . . ."⁸¹ This command absorbed the supply functions and support personnel that had been assigned to the three separate base commands that had existed to support the three landing areas - Mediterranean Base Section, Atlantic Base Section, and Eastern Base Section.⁸²

⁷⁸ Ross, 66.

⁷⁹ Ross, 66.

⁸⁰ Ross, 66.

⁸¹ Ross, 66.

⁸² Ross, 66.

The disproportionately low number of service troops in ratio to combat troops that had prevailed during the last months of 1942 was corrected in the early months of 1943.⁸³

Part of the correction was due to the conversion of combat units to non-combat support duties. Company D, soon to become the 3360th, was an example of such a conversion.

Company D participated in several resupply missions while in north Africa, but one, the ninth convoy on 23 April, was particularly memorable, as it was the closest the company had come to the front.

I had 16 trucks and picked up 105 ammo at probably an ASP [Ammunition Supply Point]. When we reached our delivery point I was told to follow a guide instead of unloading. He took us to a gun battery area where, after a crash unloading, they began a fire mission. I said "Where are the Germans?" and they said "across the valley." I said "this is no place for a Quartermaster outfit" and as soon as all the trucks were unloaded we got the hell out of there.⁸⁴

On 23 July 1943, the 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, including the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company, was relieved of its assignment to the Eastern Base Section, which supervised transportation in North Africa, and prepared to move to Sicily. Lieutenant Colonel W. V. Owen, the commander of the 55th, received this commendation from Brigadier General A. W. Pence, the commander of the Eastern Base Section:

During the period of four months in which your organization has been attached to the Eastern Base Section, you have built up an enviable reputation for performance of your assigned mission. Operating as you have, with the elements of your command frequently widely separated, the unfailing promptness and efficiency with which every task has been accomplished, your low accident record, and the discipline of your

⁸³ Howe, 496.

⁸⁴ Puchta questionnaire 5.

command reflect great credit on the individual enlisted men, their officers, and yourself.⁸⁵

In the four months since its creation, the 3360th had gone from being a collection of reassigned anti-aircraft gunners to being part of a battalion that earned the notice and respect of a general officer commanding a Base Section.

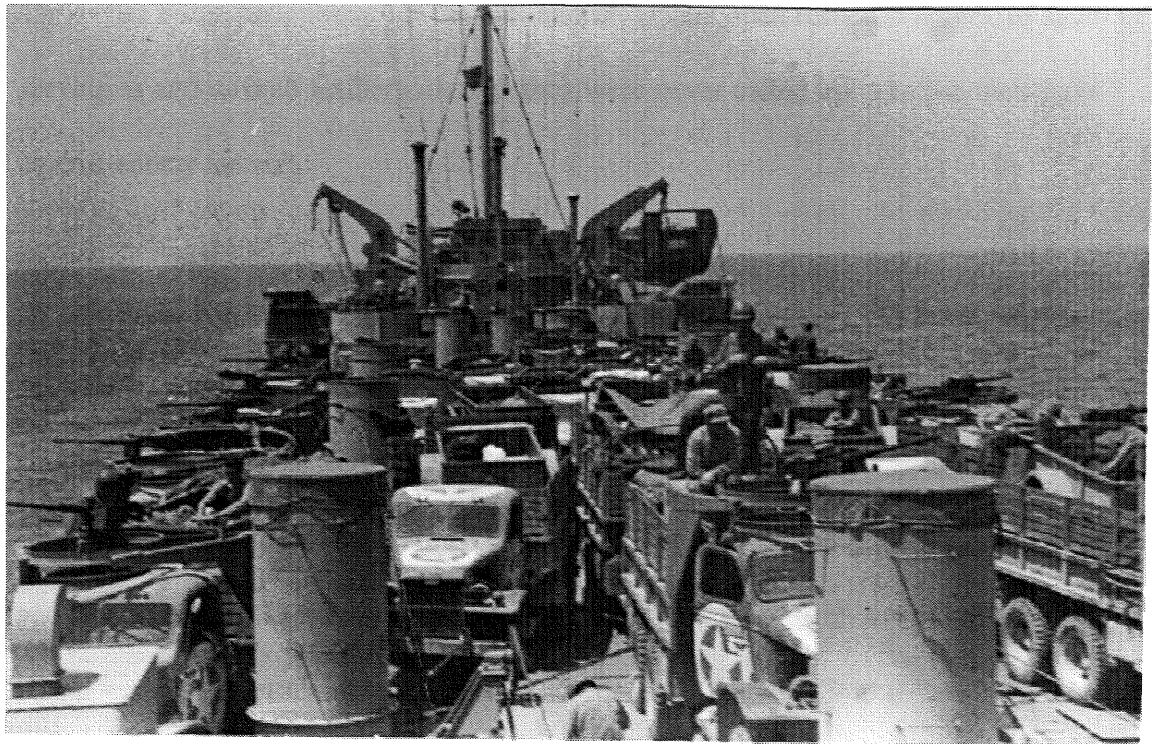


Figure 6

3360th trucks bound for Sicily, with .50 machine guns outboard to supplement the transport's anti-aircraft guns.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Brigadier General A. W. Pence, Commanding Eastern Base Section to Lieutenant Colonel W. V. Owen, Commanding Officer 55th Quartermaster Battalion (Truck), July 23, 1943, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

⁸⁶ Photograph from private collection of Elmer Puchta.

Though the fighting was over in North Africa, the 3360th was not completely immune from danger. The 3360th was dispersed to avoid air attack while marshaling for the movement to Sicily.⁸⁷ (See figure 4) During the movement from Bizerte, Tunisia, to Palermo, Sicily, the trucks equipped with the machine guns were carried along the sides of the deck, to add their fire to the cargo ship's own anti-aircraft defenses.⁸⁸ It was a somewhat ironic assignment for the anti-aircraft artillerymen turned truckers, to again be serving as anti-aircraft artillery, though they were never called upon to use their guns against enemy aircraft.

Sicily

While the Torch landings had been an offensive operation, the main purpose was essentially defensive - relieve pressure on the British in Egypt and secure the threatened supply line through the Suez Canal. Now, for the first time in the war, the Allies held the strategic initiative. It was the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff and the American President and British Prime Minister who would choose the next battlefield, not Adolf Hitler. The Allied leaders met at Casablanca, French Morocco, in January 1943 to make that choice. The choice they made was to invade Sicily.

In retrospect, the decision taken at Casablanca appears as an essential link in an apparently consistent over-all Allied strategy for World War II in the Mediterranean: first, to expel Italo-German forces from north Africa; second, to attack Sicily as a stepping-stone to the Italian mainland; third, to invade the mainland and eliminate Italy from the war; and finally, to contain

⁸⁷ Puchta questionnaire, 3.

⁸⁸ Puchta questionnaire, 3.

and wear down German forces in Italy as a prelude to the main attack across the English Channel into northwest Europe.⁸⁹

However, invading Sicily was much more of an *ad hoc* decision than it seems from the perspective of history. Actually, in January 1943, the Allied leaders had a variety of options.

In late 1942, Allied planners had surveyed and considered a wide variety of possible targets for a continuation in the Mediterranean after North Africa, including Sardinia, Sicily, Italy, Greece, and the Balkans. Top American leaders generally continued to favor a continued build up of forces in Britain as preparation for a cross-Channel attack in 1943, combined with heavy air assaults on Germany and Italy from England, the Middle East, and the newly acquired bases in North Africa.⁹⁰ The British leadership leaned towards what would later be known as the peripheral strategy: continue the build up in Britain, but hold off on the invasion until Germany had been substantially weakened on other fronts, or showed a definite crack in morale. Operations in the Mediterranean were the preferred method of wearing down the Germans and knocking Italy out of the war, though an invasion of Norway would also be suitable.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Albert N. Garland and Howard McGaw Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, United States Army in World War II, The Mediterranean Theater of Operations, (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1965), 1.

⁹⁰ Garland, 4 - 5.

⁹¹ Garland, 6, 4.

All of the planners and leaders were encouraged by the successes in North Africa, though the delays in clearing Axis forces from Tunisia made a 1943 cross-Channel invasion more difficult. There is a tendency in military planning to reinforce success, so a Mediterranean strategy had more support than it had enjoyed prior to Torch. Sicily seemed the most attractive target to most of the Combined Chiefs, if for different reasons. The Americans thought in logistical terms:

Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, Commanding General, Services of Supply, estimated that once the Mediterranean was cleared of enemy forces the Allies would save 1,825,000 tons of shipping in the first five months. [Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest J.] King supported the estimate and spoke in favor of opening the Mediterranean to eliminate the long voyage around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. Saving cargo space, the Americans believed, was much more important than eliminating Italy from the war, an aim they were sure the British would favor.⁹²

They were correct:

The British nevertheless insisted that the main Allied task in 1943 was the elimination of Italy from the war. . . The British protested that a premature attempt to land in France would court disaster. . . Reassured by British declarations accepting the cross-Channel concept, the Americans agreed to consider Mediterranean operations beyond Sicily as preliminary steps for re-entry into northern France.⁹³

So Sicily was accepted as the next major Allied target. "The purposes of the invasion were to secure the Mediterranean sea lanes, to divert pressure from the Russian front, and

⁹² Garland, 8.

⁹³ Garland, 21.

to intensify pressure on Italy.”⁹⁴ No solid agreement was reached on further goals. Thus, the 3360th would next be deployed to Sicily.

The invasion itself, Operation Husky, began on 10 July 1943. Surprise was unlikely at best, given that the Germans and Italians could read maps as well as the Allies, and knew what Sicily meant to the sea lanes of the Mediterranean, but poor weather and a successful deception plan allowed the Allies to achieve a measure of tactical surprise, much as they would in Normandy in 1944.⁹⁵ The Germans quickly blocked the British forces advancing up the east coast of the island, but American forces under the command of Patton quickly cut the island in two, and captured Palermo on the northwest tip of the island, before turning east and racing Montgomery into Messina, the port at the northeast tip of the island, and the point closest to mainland Italy.⁹⁶ Palermo was the port from which the 3360th would disembark, and from which they would operate during their stay in Sicily.⁹⁷

During their time in Palermo, the 3360th utilized Italian prisoners as extra labor.

After we got settled in Palermo Sicily, we found out that we could draw Italian prisoners from the POW compound. So we got a Sgt and 8 other ranks mainly to do KP. Never were the pots so clean and we never had a epidemic of GI's. It came out that one of the prisoners was a barber who would be honored to shave the officers. I was game but it was a funny feeling to have an enemy put a straight razor to your neck. Never did I

⁹⁴ Garland, 11.

⁹⁵ Bell, 479.

⁹⁶ Bell, 479.

⁹⁷ Puchta questionnaire 3.

have such close shaves for an extended period of time. The Italians literally cried when we left for Italy.⁹⁸

It was in Palermo that the 3360th attracted some unfavorable attention from a senior Allied leader, General George S. Patton, Jr. Puchta recalls: "Patton required helmets even though the front was hundreds of miles to the front. His villa was beyond our area in Palermo and I had to reply by 1st endorsement why my mechanics were working on trucks without helmets."⁹⁹ In Sicily, the 3360th was well behind the advancing Allied forces (though not hundreds of miles), and faced little possibility of direct attack, except by air. This would not always be the case for the company.

Italy

The Italian government under Mussolini, already unpopular after years of military defeats and mismanagement, was forced to resign following the invasion of Sicily and the first bombing of Rome. The new Italian government made contact with Eisenhower's representatives, but knew full well that the German troops in Italy would turn from allies to occupiers as soon as Italy attempted to withdraw from the war. Plans were made to seize Rome with paratroopers when the surrender was announced, but the Italians were not trusted to resist the Germans and provide aid to the Allied forces, so the plans were scrapped. The Italians surrendered anyway, shortly before the Allies landed on the Italian mainland, and, as expected, Italy passed into the realm of German occupied territory.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Puchta questionnaire 5.

⁹⁹ Puchta questionnaire 3.

¹⁰⁰ Bell, 480.

The initial Allied landing followed the Axis retreat route from Sicily over the Strait of Messina on 3 September 1943 in Operation Baytown. On 9 September, another British division was landed in Taranto harbor in Operation Slapstick, while American forces landed at Salerno in Operation Avalanche, all within range of fighters operating out of Sicilian airfields. Initial resistance was heavy, but the Allies succeeded in establishing their presence, and began advancing up the boot of Italy. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, held a series of lines south of Rome, slowing the Allied advance. Kesselring had two key elements working in his favor. First, the mountainous terrain of Italy heavily favored the defenders. Second, as the Allied buildup in Britain for the invasion of northwest Europe was continuing, the Allies could make only a limited commitment - eighteen divisions - to Italy.¹⁰¹

The 3360th did not move to Italy until after the Allies were firmly established. Puchta himself visited mainland Italy somewhat before the company's official transfer.

We were working an airport in Palermo when I hitched a ride on a flight that was going to Italy. I then would be the first in the battalion to be in Italy. There were 5 C-47's in the flight. We flew 50` off the Med in column, and since it was a milk run the pilots began to play leap frog with each other. I got to Italy and said "How crazy could you be." We got back safely, and I couldn't pull rank on those 2nd Lt. pilots.¹⁰²

In October of 1943, the Allies broke a German line along the Vulture River, and advanced north to the strong position known as the Winter Line. It was during the

¹⁰¹ Bell, 481 - 482.

¹⁰² Puchta questionnaire 5.

fighting at the Vulturno River that Louis Cook first saw combat. Company "D" spent the winter of 1943-1944 south of Cassino. During the winter, the 2639th Quartermaster Truck Battalion was redesignated the 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, and Company "D" became the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company. Eisenhower borrowed transports from the Overlord buildup to make an end run around the line and land a Corps at Anzio. The end run lodged a successful beachhead, but failed to flank the Winter Line. The 3360th operated in and around Anzio.

As with all military units, the 3360th received replacement personnel at various points, including personnel reclassified for non-combat duty due to injuries. First Lieutenant Louis A. Cook was one such replacement, joining the 3360th in Italy during the Anzio operation. He replaced Captain Puchta as a platoon commander, when Puchta assumed command of the company. The previous company commander was transferred to the command of another unit. Cook had been serving as a Chemical Warfare officer in Italy when he tore the ligaments in his ankle while diving for cover.¹⁰³ Puchta took command of Company D on 14 November 1943, with this brief communiqué:

To the Men of Co. "D", 55th. QM Truck Battalion

Since it is impossible to get you together due to our day and night operation without interfering with your sleep (wonderful thing), I want to take this opportunity to inform you that I have been placed in command of Co. "D". I am well pleased with your past record, and I feel certain you will continue your good work in the future. For the present there will be no changes in our company policy.

Keep "The Flyin' Eight Balls" Rollin'

¹⁰³ Cook questionnaire 1.

Elmer H. Puchta
1st Lt. CAC
Commanding Co. "D"¹⁰⁴

With over a year of experience as a platoon leader, he had had the opportunity to observe the operations of the company, and come to understand how policies and procedures at the company level affected his platoon and its ability to accomplish its assigned missions. As the company commander, Puchta was able to issue orders modifying the organization and policies of his company to operate more efficiently and focus on areas he saw as key to the company's success.

Puchta cared deeply about the welfare of his men, and as far as he was concerned, good meals were at the top of the list for maintaining that welfare, as well as morale. After the war, Puchta identified the most important factor in improving morale as "Good food."¹⁰⁵ The factors contributing to a decline in morale were: "Poor food - overbearing officers."¹⁰⁶ Early in his command, Puchta took steps to ensure food was a positive influence in his troops lives: "When I was a platoon commander and we came in late there was no hot food. The first thing I did when I became CO was to tell the Mess Sgt that when a convoy was due in between supper and breakfast a cook would be on duty to

¹⁰⁴ First Lieutenant Elmer H. Puchta, Commanding Company "D" to the Men of Company "D," 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, Nov 14, 1943, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

¹⁰⁵ Puchta questionnaire 1.

¹⁰⁶ Puchta questionnaire 1.

serve hot food.”¹⁰⁷ Of course, no good deed goes unpunished. The Battalion headquarters staff could travel with any of its assigned companies and draw on them for rations. “I had to put up with Bn. as I had a good kitchen.”¹⁰⁸

If good food built morale, “overbearing officers” would destroy it. One way Puchta demonstrated his concern in this area was the manner in which he took command of the company. Rather than assemble the troops and interfere with their sleep while operating at a high tempo, he simply issued a communiqué. Puchta also delegated much of his disciplinary power to the first sergeant: “I remember seeing large holes dug under the supervision of the 1st. Sgt.”¹⁰⁹ “Once I learned not to ‘micro-manage’ (not a WWII term) I never asked why the holes were being dug. I felt there was a reason and the incident was not serious enough to be brought to my attention. I feel that most of the causes were coming in drunk. We couldn’t have drunk drivers.”¹¹⁰ Puchta identified his NCOs as the “real” leaders: “they showed a great deal of initiative & ingenuity.”¹¹¹ Cook also praises the NCOs: “He had good Non-coms - and officers.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Puchta questionnaire 3.

¹⁰⁸ Puchta questionnaire 2.

¹⁰⁹ Puchta questionnaire 1.

¹¹⁰ Puchta questionnaire 3.

¹¹¹ Puchta questionnaire 1.

¹¹² Cook questionnaire 1.

In an effort to provide better support for deployed platoons, Puchta reorganized the maintenance troops. "I probably departed from normal. There were two mechanics assigned to each platoon . . ." ¹¹³ Puchta's innovation foreshadowed the organization adopted by the Army following the war for a Quartermaster Truck Company: "With platoons traveling in different directions, it is impracticable to give proper maintenance to each platoon. Each platoon should therefore be equipped with a 3/4-ton, 4 x 4 weapons carrier, to adequately perform maintenance of vehicles when operating individually in convoy and to properly maintain the tools assigned." ¹¹⁴ Puchta also modified his headquarters staff slightly. While the motor officer, First Lieutenant Turbett actually functioned as a motor officer "90% of the time," ¹¹⁵ he also took care of "basecamp - food supply, mail, etc." ¹¹⁶ An NCO also stayed at Company Headquarters: "a motor sgt - who coordinated and procured." ¹¹⁷

Puchta also changed the way maintenance was conducted. He ensured that drivers properly performed maintenance checks by keeping driving teams assigned to a single truck: "They were responsible for first echelon maintenance - periodically we would ground the truck so they could do this work. The drivers knew it was their truck and they

¹¹³ Puchta questionnaire 2.

¹¹⁴ *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Puchta questionnaire 2.

¹¹⁶ Cook questionnaire 1.

¹¹⁷ Puchta questionnaire 2.

would be responsible for first echelon stuff.”¹¹⁸ The 3360th also conducted maintenance far beyond that which the Quartermaster Corps ever intended a company to accomplish: “Companies were supposed to do first echelon. We went far beyond that. We changed motors, rear ends, transmissions - you name it. When we salvaged a truck it was junk.”¹¹⁹ Going beyond the maintenance strictly authorized allowed the 3360th to have trucks back on the road without waiting for ordnance companies to get the job done: “Ordnance was too slow - we did our own 2nd & 3rd echelon maintenance including changing engines and major components.”¹²⁰ Puchta turned a blind eye to some of the activity necessary to keep the 3360th performing maintenance theoretically beyond its capabilities: “We had a supply of engine heads and a good supply of parts. You never asked where this came from.”¹²¹

Puchta also allowed his men to come forward with suggestions to improve the company. One idea was motivated by personal considerations, but proved of benefit to the company.

Due to road conditions we had many flat tires. We, of course, had extra tires and rims. Those tires were hard to repair as you had to remove a steel ring as a first step in breaking down a tire. One of the drivers, an older man, came to me and said, “Captain, my back can’t take all this rough driving. If you relieve me of driving I’ll keep the company supplied with good wheels.” I said, “OK,” and he did. This saved driver and mechanic

¹¹⁸ Puchta questionnaire 3.

¹¹⁹ Puchta questionnaire 2.

¹²⁰ Puchta questionnaire 1.

¹²¹ Puchta questionnaire 2.

time. I can visualize his grandchildren saying, "What did you do in the war?" And his answer was, "I fixed tires."¹²²

Assigning a man to tire repair was not mentioned anywhere in the regulations, but Puchta's flexibility kept the company stocked with spare tires and kept a driver who might have ended up in the hospital with back problems in the unit and contributing to the mission.

It has long been traditional in the United States military to allow junior officers and subordinate commanders as much flexibility as possible in carrying out their assigned duties. This tradition has proved a strength, allowing those closest to the problem to identify the best solution, and take responsibility for its implementation. Puchta took full advantage of that license. His initiatives resulted in a Quartermaster Truck Company that provided better support for the troops than it had when he took command.

While Puchta was reorganizing his new command, German Field Marshal Kesselring was able to hold the Allies in the Anzio beachhead, and successfully held the Winter Line until May 1944. Rome fell on 4 June 1944, but very soon the main focus of the war shifted to Normandy, and would never again fall on Italy. The Allies reached a peak strength of twenty five divisions during their attempts to break the Winter Line.¹²³

The 3360th would not remain in Italy for much longer, but while still there Puchta made another visit to the front lines.

¹²² Puchta questionnaire 5.

¹²³ Bell, 482.

It was a nice day so I took a ride after supper. I was going north on Route 6 when all of a sudden I heard cannon fire. I thought it was AA and when I couldn't see any air bursts I realized I was in a 105 area. I imagine there was some sort of road block in front of me, but you never saw a 180 [degree] turn made as fast as the one I made.¹²⁴

A one hundred eighty degreee turn was appropriate, as another major change was coming for the 3360th. They would soon be leaving Italy for France.

The Anvil Debate

An invasion of Southern France had long been a part of Allied strategy, though it had been reconsidered several times. The first formal proposal of such an invasion was at the Trident Conference in May 1943.¹²⁵ The decision to invade Sicily had already been made, but further strategic directions had yet to be determined. Southern France was one of the possible objectives to pursue following the capture of Sicily, but was rejected on the grounds that it would require the occupation of both Sardinia and Corsica, and exploiting a successful landing would require more forces than the American planners were willing to commit to any operation other than an invasion of northwest Europe.¹²⁶ Instead, the invasion of Italy was decided upon as the next step in the Allied assault on the European Axis powers.

¹²⁴ Puchta questionnaire 5.

¹²⁵ Jeffery J. Clarke and Robert Ross Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1993), 4.

¹²⁶ Clarke, 5.

The idea of invading Southern France never left the American planners' minds, however. It soon became apparent that the Allies would have enough forces to accomplish both an Overlord invasion and some other action in the Mediterranean. In addition, there was simply not enough shipping to move all the Allied forces from the Mediterranean to northwest Europe, especially the French forces in North Africa awaiting employment. Invading southern France would act as the southern prong of an invasion of France, indirectly supporting the Allied Overlord landings, utilizing the French Army on French soil, and, not coincidentally, preventing the British from proposing any further adventures in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹²⁷ This decision to invade southern France would take the 3360th from its familiar Mediterranean surroundings and place it on the road to Germany.

¹²⁷ Clarke, 8.

CHAPTER III: THE 3360TH QUARtermaster TRUCK COMPANY ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT

The Invasion of Southern France

After moving further north up the Italian peninsula in the spring and early summer, the 3360th received new orders: the company would be involved in the invasion of southern France. Puchta comments: "I do not know who selected the 3360th to be attached to the 36th Division then the 540 Engineers. I hoped it was because we were good - or perhaps Bn [Battalion] wanted to get rid of me."¹ On 16 August 1944 elements of the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company debarked on the coast of Southern France in support of Operation Anvil.

The 3360th carried the equipment of the 11th Field Hospital, a veteran medical unit that had been in Algeria, Tunisia, Sicily and Italy, and would go on to France, Germany, and Austria by the war's end.² Organizationally, the 3360th fell under the 36th Infantry Division Beach Group, specifically attached to the 540th Engineer Regiment for

¹ Puchta questionnaire 2.

² Clifford W. Nyberg, (ed.), *Operation Successful*, (n. p., n. d.), passim.

the landing and unloading operation. The 3360th was one of two truck companies assigned to the beach group, along with a battalion of six companies of DUKWs³ - deuce-and-a-half's built into boat hulls with propellers, which could "swim" ashore, then function as normal trucks, with reduced capacity. DUKWs were very useful, but rarely operated far inland.

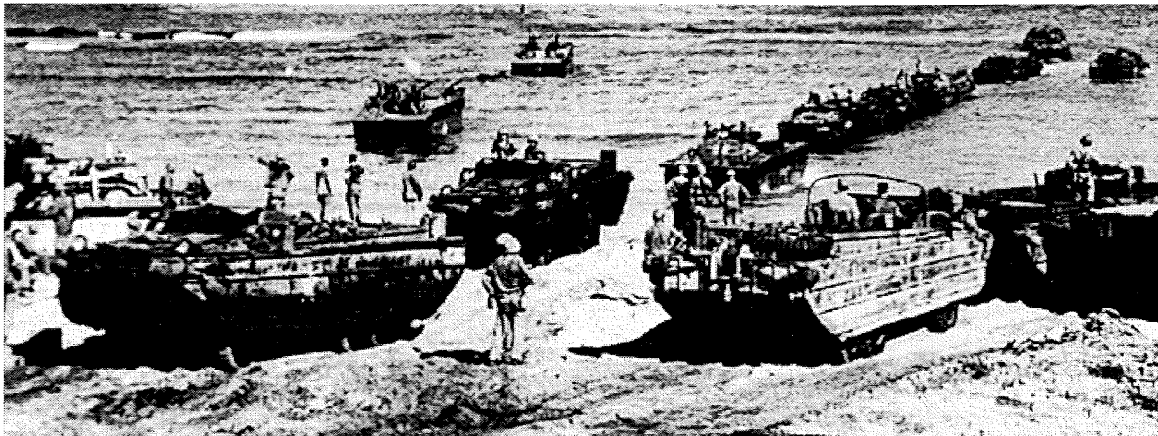


Figure 7

DUKWs unload on a beachhead near Anzio. Note 6x6 configuration of the tires, showing the DUKWs' ancestry.⁴

The Beach Group also included medical units, signals troops, engineers, ordnance troops, chemical warfare troops (operating smoke pots), and assorted service troops, all of whom would be necessary to turn the beach at St. Rafael from a bucolic seaside resort to the supply point for an infantry division in close combat with the defenders.

³ *Report of Operations, The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany, 1944 - 1945*, (Heidelberg: Aloys Graf, May 1946), 3:910.

⁴ Photograph courtesy of General Motors Corporation and the U. S. Army.

Prior to the landing in France, Puchta made some personnel realignments based on his expectations for the beach:

When we were planning to go into Southern France I found out that only two platoons were necessary for the Field Hospital. Even though we were scheduled for D Day + 1 I felt that people might be killed so I arbitrarily transferred out all the married men and replaced them with single men from the 3rd platoon.⁵

The reaction to Puchta's decision was muted: "I heard no reaction to my personnel changes prior to Southern France. I was probably cursed by many but nothing was brought to my attention."⁶

Puchta's personnel decision probably would have raised more of a stir had he also not applied the principle to himself: "With two platoons assigned to the 11th Field Hospital i.e. the bulk of my company, the question was what would I do. I could rationalize that since the bulk of the company was out of my control I should stay with the remaining platoon & HQ or go as basically a supernumerary with the hospital group. I went with the hospital group and I would have had trouble living with myself if I hadn't."⁷

This is the first principle of military leadership. The leader must never ask his or her subordinates to do anything the leader would not be willing to do.

⁵ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁶ Puchta questionnaire 3.

⁷ Puchta questionnaire 4.

The 36th Division was scheduled to hit the beaches designated Camel on the right flank of the three division assault, with its right flank protected by a French Naval Assault Group. The division was divided between Blue and Green beaches on either side of a small cove east of St. Raphael, and Red just to the west of the town.

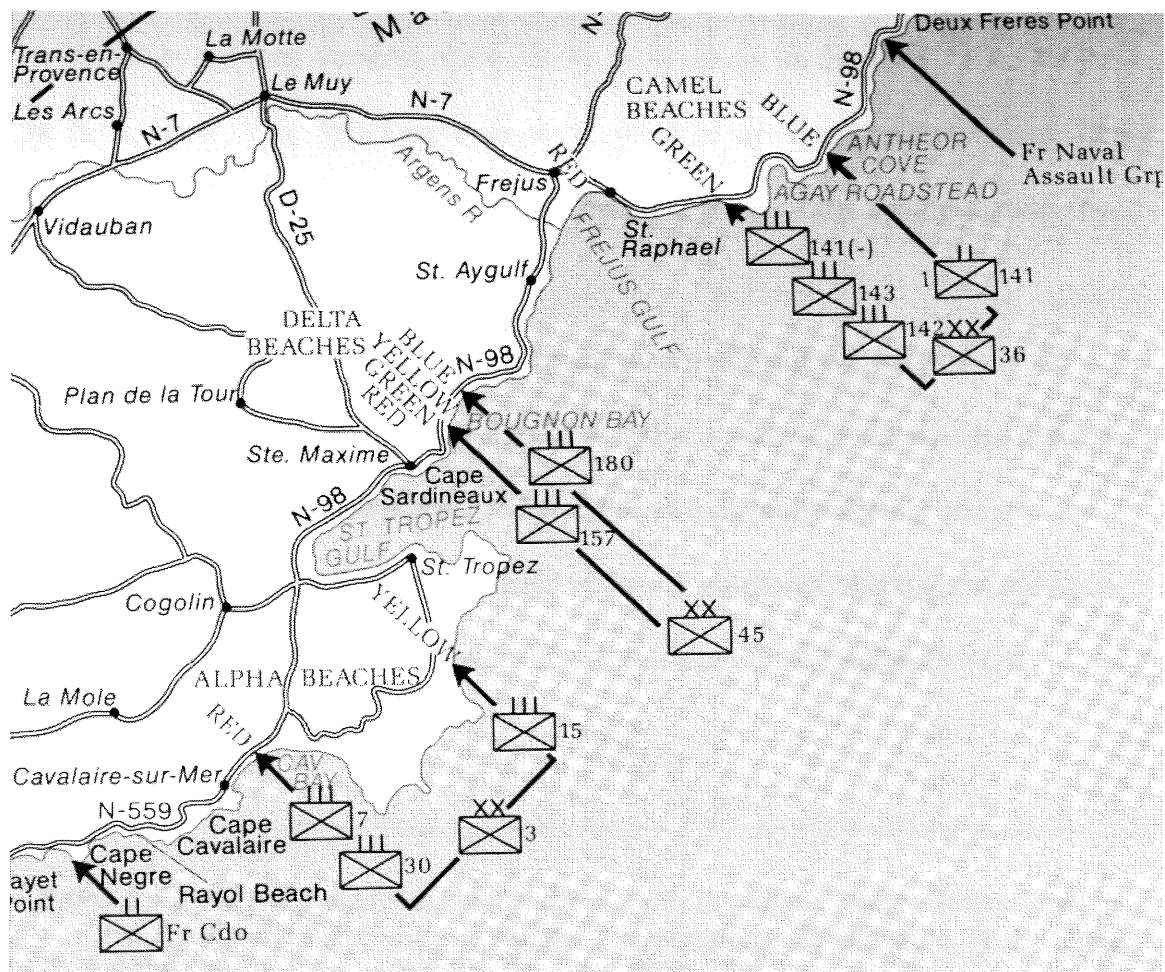


Figure 8

Map showing assault beaches for Operation Anvil, renamed Dragon. The 3360th came ashore in the 36th Division area, across the beaches code named "Camel."⁸

⁸ Clarke, 109.

As luck would have it, this was the area of highest concentration of German defenders. The Camel Red landing forces were diverted in the face of heavy resistance and formidable beach obstacles, and landed across Camel Green. Overall, however, German resistance was spotty and poorly coordinated, and the American forces had obtained a secure beachhead by the time elements of the 3360th came ashore on the 16th.⁹ The 3360th was the first element of the 55th Quartermaster Battalion to arrive in Southern France. Other assigned companies would arrive on the seventeenth, twenty-fifth, and thirty-first. The Headquarters came ashore the thirtieth.¹⁰

The peaceful beachhead was a pleasant surprise for the two platoons of the 3360th, who had expected the landing to be fiercely contested, as the landings in Sicily, Italy, and most recently Normandy had been. The two platoons arriving on D+1, now consisting of single men, were commanded by First Lieutenants Max Swartz and Louis Cook.¹¹ The third platoon would rejoin the 3360th later in the landing schedule.

⁹ Jeffery J. Clarke and Robert Ross Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1993), 113-115.

¹⁰ Report by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [October 1944], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

¹¹ Louis A. Cook, questionnaire 1.

Lead elements of the 540th Engineers had declared Camel Yellow to be the supply unloading beach, and Camel Green to be the vehicle and personnel unloading beach.¹²

With the 11th Field Hospital's equipment loaded, the 3360th was sent to Camel Yellow.¹³

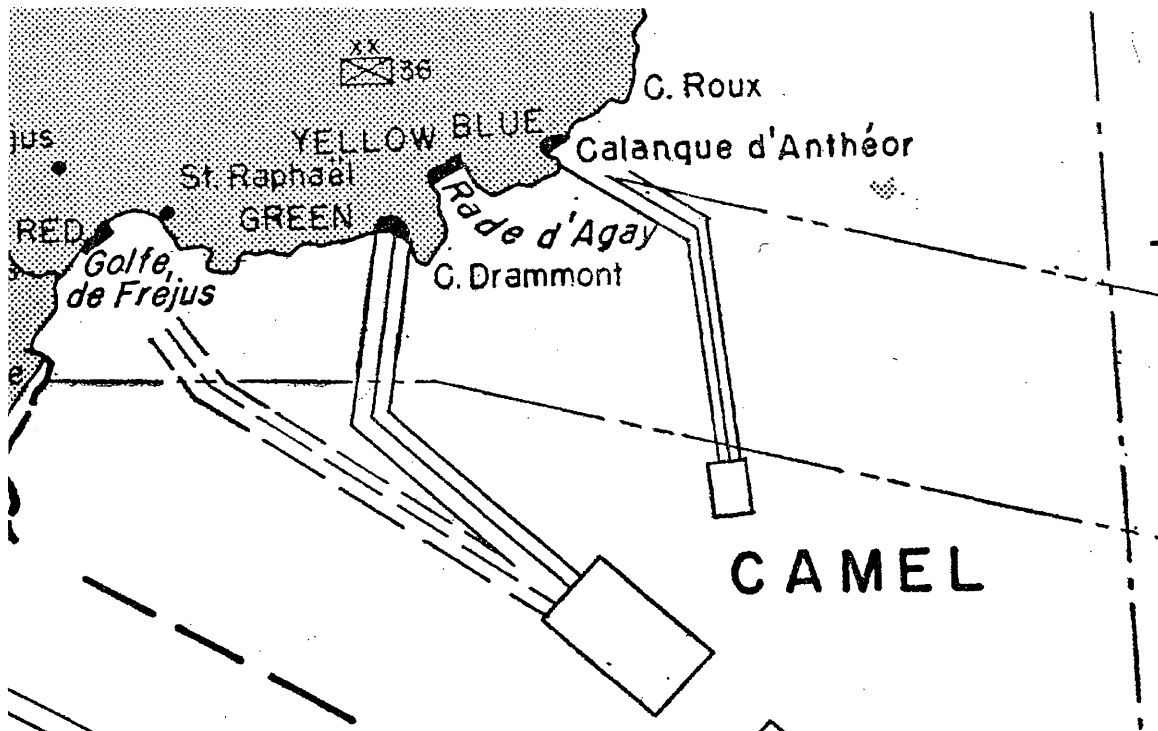


Figure 9

Detail of Camel Beaches, including Camel Yellow, where the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company disembarked. Camel Yellow was not part of the initial assault, but was taken by troops moving overland from the initial assault beaches.¹⁴

¹² *History 540 Engineer Regiment*, (n. p., 1945), 14.

¹³ Elmer H. Puchta, *Diary*, [1942-1945], private collection of Elmer Puchta.

¹⁴ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Invasion of France and Germany, 1944 - 1945*, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. XI, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957), 261.

The men of the 3360th arrived in France: "L. S. T. lowered ramp and we drove off onto dry land. It was a wooded area - still burning from the artillery - there was a huge cement pill box and a dead German, with clothes burned."¹⁵ Puchta's description of the same event is somewhat more concise: "16th Aug - Landed 1600 hrs."¹⁶ They proceeded to get the equipment of the 11th Field Hospital to the hospital's designated base, about twenty five to thirty miles inland. The 11th Field Hospital noted that most of the cots had been stolen while aboard ship,¹⁷ but apparently the 3360th was not held responsible, as the commanding officer of the 11th Field Hospital noted "the efficiency and thoughtfulness" of the 3360th in a letter of appreciation to Captain Puchta.¹⁸ The overall efforts of the 540th Engineer Combat Regiment and the attached troops earned the accolades of Lieutenant General Alexander Patch, the commander of the Seventh Army.¹⁹ It was also during the early period in France that the 3360th fired its first shots in anger, or so it seemed:

¹⁵ Cook questionnaire 1.

¹⁶ Puchta Diary.

¹⁷ Nyberg, 15.

¹⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Herman E. Wilkinson, Commanding 11th Field Hospital to Commanding Officer, 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company, August 29, 1944, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

¹⁹ Lieutenant General A. M. Patch, Commanding Seventh Army to 540th Engineer Combat Regiment and Attached Troops, September 3, 1944, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

It was almost dark that night [D Day + 1] when two Frenchmen came to our area yelling "Le Boche Le Boche". Several of us jumped in a jeep and were lead to a series of dugouts in a hillside. We fanned out and began our search. All of a sudden a carbine began firing. We rushed to the area and found Lt. Louis A. Cook with an empty carbine roaring with laughter. He said he had looked into the dugout -- saw some one facing him -- fired -- saw a flash -- fired again -- saw another flash and kept on firing until the magazine was empty. He had completely destroyed a perfectly good full length mirror.²⁰

While the episode turned out to be a humorous one, it does illustrate a few key points.

The 3360th was operating in a combat zone, in an area where enemy action was a distinct possibility, either from troops left behind when the defenses were overrun, or from infiltration. "There was an old wheeze that routinely made the rounds among combat soldiers and never failed to get a laugh. It said, in effect: "the only Quartermaster ever hurt in war was hit by a can of beans rolling off a deuce-and-a-half." Funny? Yes. But was it true? Not a chance."²¹ While the 3360th suffered no combat casualties, the men would find themselves in harm's way in the future, and no mirrors would be involved.

The unloading operations in general proceeded extremely smoothly. General Brehon B. Somervell, the Chief of the Army Service Forces, observed the landings, along

²⁰ Elmer H. Puchta, Unpublished manuscript submitted to "The Officer," February 1, 1994, 1.

²¹ "Fighting QMs," *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin*, (Autumn / Winter 1994), 1, reprinted at <http://lee-dnsl.army.mil/quartermaster/bulletin/archive.html>

with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and later landed on the beachhead, where he "took great pride in the way in which the supply situation was being handled . . ." ²²

For the 3360th, it was back to the beach:

We returned that nit, next morning they were using DUKS (boats with wheels). They were unloading into our trucks. Ammo, mostly; we would head north to designated dump and return. Elmer [Puchta] had arrived, setup temp. base for 2, 3 days. We worked day & nite as 7th army had realy moved fast. Elmer kept moving the base camp up our trips became longer. ²³

The 3360th operated as a part of the beach group ²⁴ until the Battalion Headquarters came ashore on 30 August 1944, when it was reattached to the 55th Quartermaster Battalion.

Over ten thousand tons of supplies had crossed the beaches on an average day for the first two weeks after the invasion. In a month, the total reached 280,000 tons, over the planned requirements for 278,000 tons. ²⁵

The period immediately after the landing was a time of logistical near-crisis. The troops advanced farther, faster than had been anticipated by planners. An increase in speed and distance resulted in the use of more gasoline and other petroleum products than

²² John D. Millet, *The Organization and Role of the Army Service Forces*, United States Army in World War II, The Army Service Forces, (Washington D. C.: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1954), 82.

²³ Cook questionnaire 1.

²⁴ *Report of Operations*, 910.

²⁵ Roland G. Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume II: September 1944-May 1945*, United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1995), 120.

had been initially allocated. Part of the problem resulted from the combat loading of the assault ships. Combat loaded transports only utilize fifty to sixty five percent of their available cargo space, due to the necessities of defensive armament, carrying troops and equipment on the same transport, and the need to ensure each transport carried a balance of supplies, so a lost ship would not cripple the force once it was ashore.²⁶ Anticipating the heavy resistance that had characterized previous amphibious assaults, the transports in the initial wave and immediate follow ups, already short on space due to combat loading, were weighted in favor of combat units and ammunition.²⁷ Service units, including truck units, and gasoline, were in especially short supply. The problems were only exacerbated by the rapid gains made by Allied troops; "On 14 September, D plus 30, the Seventh Army's French and American units had reached an operational situation that most ANVIL planners had not expected until around D plus 120."²⁸

There were small delays at some of the beach exits, but in general the beach unloading proceeded smoothly. Beach control was placed under the control of the Beach Control Group, and thus under the direct authority of Seventh Army, on 17 August, a day earlier than planned.²⁹ The early capture of Toulon and Marseilles allowed the beach

²⁶ *Logistics in World War II: Final Report of the Army Service Forces*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1993), 147.

²⁷ Clarke, 200.

²⁸ Clarke, 200.

²⁹ Clarke, 201.

unloading operations to come to an end before the end of September, avoiding the storm season. However, even the opening of the ports did not diminish the transportation crisis. The rapid advance outstripped the planners.³⁰ Each step forward the Allies took lengthened the round trip necessary, whether to port or beach, to bring supplies forward. Seventh Army assumed control of all separate truck units earlier than had been planned, and also on occasion took control of truck units organic to the field forces.³¹ Even the hijacking of organic truck units was not enough. At one point, troops were placed on two-thirds rations to free up trucks to carry fuel and ammunition. Efforts to rehabilitate the railroads to take some of the strain off the trucks were generally successful. Railroad units were landed early, and began to repair the damage. Trains were soon rolling, but the problems were not completely solved. Even the routes served by rails sometimes still required truckers to move cargo around breaks in the tracks or bridges not yet replaced.³² Fortunately, the roads in general were capable of supporting military traffic. Many bridges were left intact by the rapidly retreating Germans, and several fords were usable until the autumn rains began, so truck transportation could get through in nearly all areas. There was a shortage of bridging units, so those bridges that were destroyed proved major obstacles, involving detours. It would be a busy fall for the 3360th and the other truck

³⁰ Clarke, 208.

³¹ Clarke, 206.

³² Clarke, 207.

companies operating in southern France, trying to keep up with the rapidly advancing troops, and ferrying cargo around the breaks in the rail lines. Trucks hauled 220,000 tons from the beaches and ports in September.³³

The 3360th rejoined the Headquarters at Manosque, France, in early September.³⁴ Manosque is nearly one hundred miles in a straight line from the invasion beaches, even longer following the roads, an indication of how rapidly Allied forces pushed inland against weak German resistance. The period is summarized in the 2nd Anniversary message:

Festung Europa, cracked and broken by the swift advance of the Seventh Army. The dash from the beaches to Grenoble and beyond. The tremendous distances for supplies to be hauled, trucks rolling with stops only for changes of drivers, gas and oil. Long hours over the mountains with desperately needed supplies for the fighting men of the Seventh Army. A story of many miles and days to be put in words - an impossible task - done.³⁵

The Battalion then moved to Poligny, where the 3360th was assigned to the ammunition run between the railhead at Arbois and a local dump.

³³ Clarke, 207.

³⁴ Report by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [October 1944], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

³⁵ Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile to 3357th, 3358th, 3360th, 138th, 144th, 3359th Quartermaster Truck Companies, March 13, 1945, Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

This mission assignment illustrates the utility of the Quartermaster Truck Company. While railroads in general are more efficient at moving large quantities of equipment, it requires trucks to take supplies where tracks don't go.

The Advance North

The period from the landing in Southern France to the end of the month was business as usual for the 3360th, once it had completed the unloading of the 11th Field Hospital's equipment and moved on to the ammunition run. The Battalion noted a shortage of spare parts, but achieved overall high effective rates, attributed to excellent preventive maintenance and first echelon repairs. Morale was high,³⁶ as might be expected when the armies the 3360th and her sister companies supported were advancing rapidly, ahead of timetable and without the terrible casualties that often accompany amphibious assaults. While the assignments themselves were nothing out of the ordinary - hauling rations, ammunition, petroleum products, and general cargo from either the landing beaches or the ports to the troops - the pace of operations was quite fast. Puchta's diary, which listed specific dates, convoys, and tonnage for the periods prior to the "Champaign Campaign," as the southern France campaign was known, simply lists the towns and villages the 3360th worked out of or passed through, an indication of the extreme pace of operations:

³⁶ Report by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [October 1944], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

Die Lavoulte Rochemaure, Grenoble, Gulleste, Digue, Lavoulte, Orange, Montelimar, Lauvaulete, Romans, Bourg - Bourgain, Briancon, Barcelonette, Narbonne, Montfeller, Ales Vallon, St Etienne, Vienne, Bourg, Moriste, Chamben, Albertville - la Chambre, St Michel, Modane, Guillaumes, Abeville, Arras, Rogs, Aoinous, Sedan, Verdun, St. Michel, Troyes, Orleans, Chateauraux, Tours, Augers, Nantes³⁷

This list takes the 3360th through the first twenty five days of the campaign. The port and beach runs ended shortly. "By early Sept. we were hauling from a railhead. We worked nit and day."³⁸

In theory, the responsibilities of the Quartermaster Truck Company ended when the convoy of trucks arrived at its appointed destination. Troops on hand - at the depot, the railhead, or the unit - were supposed to take care of all loading and unloading, giving the drivers the chance to rest before beginning the return trip. However, as Battalion noted, drivers would often pitch in and assist in the loading and unloading when labor was short.³⁹ There was another way the drivers of the 3360th, and presumably other companies, would "assist" in unloading: "Many supplies - 5 gal gas, 155 mm shells, 105 shells - were unloaded by putting down the tailgate, fast back up, stop and letting Newton's Law take over. This probably didn't show in unloading regs."⁴⁰ Actually, the

³⁷ Puchta Diary.

³⁸ Cook questionnaire 1.

³⁹ Report by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [October 1944], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

⁴⁰ Puchta questionnaire 4.

Field Manual for Quartermaster Truck Companies gives specific guidance for carrying ammunition:

The movement of ammunition . . . in trucks is a highly dangerous task. It is, therefore, essential that personnel know and observe all safety regulations. . . Explosives must be securely placed in the vehicle to prevent shifting and falling. They must never be carried on the tail gate. . . drivers should be careful about making sudden stops or turns. . . Artillery projectiles should be laid on the side instead of on the base, with sides of the projectile parallel with the truck body.⁴¹

Any time a truck travels empty, it is simply using fuel, time, and labor without actually benefiting the army, except by moving to a location where it might be more



Figure 10

Trucks of the 3360th carry German POWs back to a rear area.⁴²

⁴¹ *Quartermaster Truck Companies*, War Department Field Manual 10-35, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1945), 42 -43.

⁴² Photograph from private collection of Elmer Puchta.

useful. Therefore, the 3360th trucks often carried a load of one sort or another back from wherever they had delivered supplies. Sometimes enemy prisoners took the place of the off loaded supplies. "The picture of the German prisoners has an interesting far fetched side light. I have a very distant relative living in Wunsiedel, Germany. When we met - we talked war stories. He was captured in the 7th Army area about the time we were there. Perhaps he was on one of those trucks."⁴³

Prisoners were not the only troops carried back to rear areas by the 3360th:

"There is another part of our operation that is not nice to remember. Many times when we took supplies to a forward area, we were directed to go to a Graves Registration Unit and bring back deceased GI's in mattress covers to a rear area."⁴⁴

While Eisenhower had originally planned to control all Allied forces in France through two Army Groups, one British and one American, he accepted a War Department suggestion that a third Army Group be created to control the Anvil forces advancing from the South.⁴⁵ The Sixth Army Group was to be activated upon the transfer of Anvil forces to the European Theater of Operations from the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, and placed under the command of General Jacob L. Devers. The rapid advance of both the Overlord and the Anvil forces brought on the assumption of operational control by

⁴³ Puchta questionnaire 4.

⁴⁴ Puchta questionnaire 4.

⁴⁵ Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1996), 265.

Eisenhower and SHAEF more quickly than anticipated: "At 0001, 15 September, in accordance with the order of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the 6th Army Group became operational under the command of General Devers. It and the First French and Seventh U.S. Armies passed from Allied Force Headquarters to SHAEF."⁴⁶ However, the Mediterranean Theater of Operations maintained responsibility for administering civil affairs in Southern France, and for supplying the troops that had come ashore in Southern France. The 3360th now hauled supplies provided by their old Mediterranean Theater, but under orders from the European Theater.

While of great importance to the high command, the change had little impact on the day to day operations of the company: "Theater changes meant nothing. A dock was a dock; a railhead was a railhead; a dump was a dump."⁴⁷ The 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company carried on with its assigned missions, which still came from the same army and the same battalion.

Of far more concern to Puchta than the transfer from one Theater of Operations to another was a disciplinary task beyond the purview of the First Sergeant:

As far as I can recall there were no Court martials in the 3360th. There was something called "Company Punishment" which was under my control. As far as I can remember I only used it once. In the spring of 1945 we sent 40 trucks to Paris to get part of 7th Army's share of requisitioned liquor that the Germans had stored. This was just part of a huge convoy. It was a "hot cargo." The platoon lieutenants, sgts, & drivers signed for the load.

⁴⁶ Pogue, 266.

⁴⁷ Puchta questionnaire 3.

They couldn't unload when they came back to Lunneville so they parked in the company area. In the middle of the night the 1st Sgt woke me and said that someone had broken into one of the trucks. We found several bottles under the seat of one of the trucks. We quizzed the driver - he denied it - finally I tried the last bluff telling the 1st to get the finger print kit which of course was non-existent - the driver then said OK Captain "I did it." So I told him that he would request to be reduced to the grade of private without prejudice.⁴⁸

Measured discipline seemed to be effective. As Puchta noted, no Court Martials were required throughout the existence of the 3360th.

The month of October saw the 3360th engaged in a variety of haulage. Trucks operated in and around the assault beaches near Ste. Maxime, Marsailles, and points inland. "By Oct. they had Marsailles port repaired. We made some hauls from there. It was 12 hrs down and 12 back."⁴⁹ Port clearance and hauling are not the most glamorous of military duties, but the 3360th and other truck companies were dealing with the key potential logistical bottleneck, now that the Allies had a sufficiency of ocean-going transport ships, and the need for the specialized landing ships was eliminated, or at least substantially reduced, by the possession of ports.⁵⁰ To deal with maintenance difficulties while on the road "We had mechanics truck at the rear. Most problems were flat tires - pick up schrapnel."⁵¹ The company was broken up as platoons were dispatched to

⁴⁸ Puchta questionnaire 3.

⁴⁹ Cook questionnaire 1.

⁵⁰ William Gardner Bell, et al., *American Military History*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1989), 470.

⁵¹ Cook questionnaire 1.

different areas, though overall command remained with Captain Puchta and the Company headquarters, who in turn took his direction for the Battalion staff. Towards the end of the month, elements of the 3360th went as far north as Omaha Beach, where Americans had come ashore 6 June 1944. These operations involved transporting personnel to the Third Army's area of responsibility. Fortunately for the company, its units avoided General Patton's notorious tendency to hijack needed transportation assets that wandered into his area.

November of 1944 again saw the 3360th close to the front lines. The majority of the company spent the month moving supplies from the railheads at Thaon, Epinal, Darnieulles and Hymont to local supply dumps. Sixteen trucks were detailed to haul supplies, mainly gasoline, to a forward armored group. The deuce-and-a-halves of the 3360th were interspersed with armored vehicles to provide protection.⁵² This again indicates the potential proximity to combat. That trip overlapped Thanksgiving:

... I was sent with 15 truckloads of gasoline to the 14th Armour Div. in Vosges Mt. & Forest. Started to snow. Tank commander was waiting for orders to move - we were there all nit. Snow got 10" deep was really cold. The guys in the tanks had their engines running and were warm - my jeep was open as were most of the trucks, it was freezing. Elmer arrived with containers of warm turkey meals next morning (Thanksgiving Day) - we unloade gas went back to base.⁵³

⁵² Report by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [December 1944], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

⁵³ Cook questionnaire 1.

Puchta's concern with providing his troops with good food was still operating.

Puchta's unorthodox maintenance arrangements also continued. He even assisted in circumventing the Army supply system in order to allow his troops to perform their own maintenance:

Another assignment that I recall gives an indication of what sometimes was done in support of a unit's mission. We sent forty trucks to the Renault factory in Paris to get rebuilt GM engines. Through innovative paper work only thirty-nine trucks were unloaded. We needed replacement engines in many of our trucks. This work was to be performed by a Heavy Ordnance Company. They were busy and would give you a requisition for another truck if the work wasn't completed in a certain number of days. This wasn't satisfactory as we knew our trucks, and a piece of paper won't carry a load. So our six mechanics, two to a platoon, replaced an engine in eight hours. Problem solved.⁵⁴

While techniques such as these kept the 3360th's trucks rolling, it must be noted that the price for such "out-of-bounds" activities cannot be measured. Surely, someone, somewhere, was waiting for that missing engine. If all, or most, units carried on activities such as Puchta's, the aggregate of missing parts could explain the chronic slowdowns at higher maintenance echelons. Ironically, this would form a self-perpetuating cycle of late repair jobs, frustrated companies, and missing parts, which would lead to more late repair jobs. However, it is also possible that the slow responses of the ordnance maintenance units were unrelated to the pilferage conducted by company-sized units. This was a tactical decision made by a commander in the field to accomplish his mission. Puchta believed the potential damage to the ordnance repair system was worth the improvement

⁵⁴ Elmer H. Puchta, Unpublished manuscript submitted to "The Officer," February 1, 1994, 2.

in the efficiency of the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company, and the improvement in its ability to accomplish its assigned missions.

The 3360th continued its usual pattern of operations into December, continuing to haul supplies from railheads to local dumps. However, during the month, several detachments were sent on special assignments. Fifteen vehicles hauled ordinance to the 12th Armored Division. Thirty six were later dispatched for use by the 103rd Infantry Division. The final detachment of twenty vehicles hauled personnel and equipment of the 36th Infantry Division. The 3360th closed the month by returning to hauling supplies from railheads, but from Sarrebourg, Avern, and Schweighausen rather than Luneville and Hymont, as they had at the beginning of the month.⁵⁵ During December, Cook was exposed to the other chief danger to a Quartermaster Truck Company other than hostile fire - the road itself, especially when combined with bad weather:

... we were ordered to move the 28th Infantry Division [possibly the 36th] into Vosges Mts. I'm not sure but I think the whole 55 QM Bn was involved - in front of my convoy was 3357 trucks. All our trucks was canvas covered for personal. We made our way freezing rain, mountain roads were ice covered. We climbed higher and started down other side. Roads were hardly wide enough with a drop off of 1,000 ft or more on right side. The 3357 truck ahead of my jeep started to slide and went over the cliff. It was still dark. As we looked down we saw a light - we later heard that a G. I. had a flash lite. They had landed in deep snow - one serious back injury. We continued to hug the bank and made it to our destination.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Report by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [January 1945], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

⁵⁶ Cook questionnaire 1.

The potential proximity of the 3360th to the fighting was again illustrated in December 1944:

I found an abandoned factory in Bischwiller which had garages and usable buildings. After reporting our new location I became curious as to the location knowing that Bischwiller was only eight kilometers from the Rhine River. I checked in the G-3 office and to my chagrin found that there were no units between us and the Rhine. I was told that it was a quiet sector and that a recon squad patrolled the Rhine bank two or three times a day. It was a funny feeling knowing that a QM Truck Company was the point for the Seventh Army in that area.⁵⁷

Shortly after the first of the year, I received a call in the middle of the night ordering me to evacuate the area as there were reports of German paratroopers landing north of us. We immediately prepared to leave and I took off to find a new site. I shall always remember members of the FFI (French underground) directing traffic in Bischwiller while the Americans vacated the area.⁵⁸

At night, we could hear small arms fire along the river. We got orders to pull out and move back. We packed up. Elmer took off to find a new location back a ways. All the way back we had to stop at checkpoint. The story was out that German paratroopers dressed in G.I. clothes were in the area. We had to give a password (baseball questions). Elmer found a place in Luneville. We soon learned Battle of the Bulge had started north of us.⁵⁹

Again, no actual fighting overtook the 3360th, but the threat was very real.

⁵⁷ Puchta manuscript, 2.

⁵⁸ Puchta manuscript, 2.

⁵⁹ Cook questionnaire 1.

The 3360th later received replacements reclassified for non-physical war related injuries: "After the battle of the bulge, we received 13 reclassified infantrymen. They seemed quite normal until we had the threat of an air attack."⁶⁰ "We thought they had fooled the medics - that was until we had the first air raid."⁶¹ These thirteen replacements were transferred in to replace troopers transferred out to become infantrymen: "At a time when the number of soldiers in the U.S. Army stood at the highest in the history of the United States, riflemen available for front-line duty were in short supply."⁶² This seeming incongruity was caused both by heavy relative losses among front line infantry riflemen, but also by the difficulties of allocating and training personnel a year or two in advance of their actual use in combat.⁶³ Eisenhower ordered non-combat units be tapped for personnel. Puchta faced a crisis, when Eisenhower's directive regarding replacement infantrymen came down. Puchta describes the situation for the 3360th: "Shortly after the Battle of the Bulge, the replacement pool of infantry riflemen was '0.' So all non-combat units were ordered to transfer 10% (13 men) to be retrained as riflemen."⁶⁴ The decision as to who to send was left up to Puchta: "I asked for volunteers - got none so we had to

⁶⁰ Puchta questionnaire 1.

⁶¹ Puchta questionnaire 3.

⁶² Pogue, 391.

⁶³ Pogue, 391.

⁶⁴ Puchta questionnaire 3.

pick 13 men knowing that we were signing a death warrant for 1/2 of them. . . This was the hardest thing I had to do."⁶⁵

Comparison to the Red Ball Express

While the Seventh Army moved up the Loire Valley, other Allied forces broke out of the beachhead in Normandy and raced across France. Both advancing forces faced serious supply difficulties,

All along the front we felt increasingly the strangulation on movement imposed by our own inadequate lines of communication. The Services of Supply had made heroic and effective effort to keep us going to the last possible minute. They installed systems of truck transport by taking over main-road routes in France and using most of these for one-way traffic. These were called Red Ball Highways, on which trucks kept running continuously. Every vehicle ran at least twenty hours a day. Relief drivers were scraped up from every unit that could provide them and the vehicles themselves were allowed to halt only for necessary loading, unloading, and servicing.⁶⁶

Initially intended as an expedient, the Red Ball Express, as it was known, became an institution lasting through November, and extending well beyond its initial operational area.⁶⁷ By its end, a circuit of the Red Ball was over seven hundred miles.⁶⁸ Over one

⁶⁵ Puchta questionnaire 3.

⁶⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), 308.

⁶⁷ Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*. United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1961), 690.

⁶⁸ *Logistics*, 161.

hundred truck companies became involved in the effort,⁶⁹ which translates to over six thousand trucks.⁷⁰ The Red Ball Express was highly successful, moving over 135,000 tons of supplies by mid-September,⁷¹ but the success was not without cost.

The cost of this achievement was high - mounting strain on personnel and equipment, continual use of vehicles without proper maintenance, rapid deterioration of equipment and roads, abuse of vehicles by overloading and speeding, a large number of accidents caused by driver fatigue. The Red Ball fostered the habit of poor road discipline, offered opportunity for malingering, sabotage, and black marketeering, and tempted combat units to hijack and otherwise divert supplies. Haste contributed to poor documentation of shipments and concomitant sparse information on the status of supply.⁷²

In addition to the physical deterioration of the men and trucks running the Red Ball route, there were other impacts, as Puchta notes: "The Red Ball express got a lot of publicity, but from what I understood, it took months to get things straightened out. Units lost their identity - everyone just drove any truck that was available and it was just go-go-go. We were never in such a situation. We drove our trucks always in command of a Sgt. or officer."⁷³ While the 3360th was heavily worked in support of the rapid advance of the Seventh Army, it was never broken up. While Puchta at times had trucks scattered across

⁶⁹ Blumenson, 690.

⁷⁰ Captain Daniel G. Grassi, "Refuel on the Move: Resupplying Patton's Third Army," *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin*, (Summer 1993), 1, reprinted at www.qmfound.com/history.html.

⁷¹ Blumenson, 690.

⁷² Blumenson, 690.

⁷³ Puchta questionnaire 2.

Europe, they were always under his command, and eventually made their way back to him at one of his Company Headquarters. This continuity greatly enhanced unit morale. "I always felt our morale was excellent."⁷⁴

While in the field, the 3360th operated very much as an independent unit: "When we became separate companies we went our merry way . . . The concept was to have a Bn for administration and dispatching. Though there were times when we were on a direct line with 7th Army Transportation."⁷⁵ "Elmer would check in daily with 7th Army."⁷⁶ This would have been typical, as: "In the Seventh US Army all transportation operated directly under the Transportation Section, a separate special staff section organized for that purpose."⁷⁷ Puchta continues: "It's hard to explain how isolated we were. We were told to go to a certain area - usually near a railhead or if we were near a port, an area as close as possible. . . While we did some railhead work we seemed to get the special assignments. There were times when I had trucks spread all over Europe and I wouldn't see them for a week."⁷⁸ Despite these long separations, "The platoons were never really on their own. They were on dispatch for a specific mission. They reported to 'X' who

⁷⁴ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁷⁵ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁷⁶ Cook questionnaire 1.

⁷⁷ The General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, *Quartermaster Supply Operations, File R 401/11, Study Number 109*, (n. p., [1945]), 36.

⁷⁸ Puchta questionnaire 2.

used them as conditions indicated. When the assignment was completed they returned to the company.”⁷⁹ There was little contact with other truck companies, except in convoys as described above by Cook. Puchta notes: “I may have met other [Company] CO’s at meetings but they were few and far between.”⁸⁰ Thus, Puchta had a great deal of flexibility in taking care of his troops and accomplishing his missions, “There was no one who could challenge my decision.”⁸¹ Puchta was not completely independent, however. “Battalion, unfortunately, was too close. They, for most of the time, attached themselves to us for rations as I had a good kitchen.”⁸²

⁷⁹ Puchta questionnaire 3.

⁸⁰ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁸¹ Puchta questionnaire 2.

⁸² Puchta questionnaire 3.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS

Final Tally: Success or Failure of the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company

The overall record of Quartermaster Truck Companies, as analyzed after the war, was not good. "There was a constant and continuous shortage of trucks throughout the operations. Maintenance was generally poor, and spare parts at times hard to obtain."¹ Mechanics were also held at fault: "Mechanics within the company were rarely of a satisfactory quality. The lack of necessary replacement parts resulted in the operation of trucks without proper repairs, thus causing excessive wear on other parts."² Drivers were also criticized: "Driver training was often found lacking, and qualified driver replacements were often difficult to obtain. Those drivers actually assigned were too often of a type lacking in intelligence and sense of responsibility. Training consisted of on-the-job operations."³ Officers leading Quartermaster Truck Companies and Platoons were also

¹ *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 36.

² *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 38-39.

³ *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 36.

criticized: "Generally, officer personnel in truck companies were not sufficiently trained in motor transportation and maintenance. Officers in some cases were assigned to Quartermaster units, after having become inefficient in other branches."⁴ This is not a glowing endorsement of the Quartermaster Truck Companies.

The 3360th proved an exception to the general pattern. The company consistently reported a high percentage of vehicles available for missions.⁵ The monthly reports filed by the 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion were consistently positive.⁶ "Trucks were seldom left stranded due to failure of mechanical parts or breakdowns for a period of more than 24 hours."⁷ "This high rate of availability was due to the cooperation between the Companies and the convoy commanders, also the training of drivers in first echelon repairs and preventive maintenance."⁸ While not perfect, the maintenance situation was never critical, and what delays did occur were often beyond the control of the company. "The ordnance services were handicapped by lack of spare parts. This alone reduced the number of trucks available for rotational checks."⁹

⁴ *Quartermaster Supply Operations*, 39.

⁵ Reports by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [October 1944 to June 1945], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, [October 1944].

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

The 3360th also garnered accolades from the commanders the company supported. Some came from high enough levels that the officers writing the letters were speaking to an aggregate mass, and it is difficult to tell how much of their praise specifically applies to the 3360th, such as that of General Patch, whose appreciation is noted above. However, the 3360th also received letters of appreciation from officers in a position to note directly the effectiveness of a single company, and not compelled by high rank and position to issue blanket statements of praise. Lieutenant Colonel William V. Owen, commanding the 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, noted that "The cargoes were delivered by the drivers of the trucks of each platoon in this battalion so the greatest commendation for accomplishing our mission with high efficiency is due to the enlisted men who drove the vehicles and kept them in repair."¹⁰ He also noted "Company 'D' is deserving of highest commendation for their excellent record in keeping vehicle deadlines to an absolute minimum during all our operations in Sicily."¹¹ Major Jesse T. Reese offered praises to the battalion's officers, including Puchta, Turbett, and Schwartz:

1. It is my desire to convey to you my appreciation which you so richly deserve for your outstanding services during the past year.

¹⁰ Lieutenant Colonel William V. Owen, Commanding 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, to Commanding Officer, Company D, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, first indorsement, 11 Dec 1943, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

¹¹ Lieutenant Colonel William V. Owen, Commanding 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, to Commanding Officer, Company D, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, third indorsement, 11 Dec 1943, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

2. Solely through your efforts, and those of other officers who were with this organization at its inception, has success in performing our assigned tasks been possible.
3. In a short space of time we were formed and hauling payloads. This is no mean accomplishment and as attested to by the various organizations with whom we worked it has been more than a mere success.
4. I commend each of you for your exceptional devotion to duty and for your eagerness to prove that you are the best officers in any organization.¹²

Further praise came from Owen:

1. For the past few weeks your company has accomplished an excellent maintenance record. With the campaign in Italy progressing so rapidly every vehicle is needed to supply the combat troops.
2. I wish to express my appreciation to all your Officers and drivers for their conscientious work and high standards.
3. Please convey my special commendation to your maintenance section for their important part in keeping "dead-lines" to a minimum.¹³

This is an impressive record of commendations. Combined with the consistently high rate of vehicle availability and the lack of serious disciplinary infractions, accidents, or other incidents that would reduce the 3360th's ability to perform its mission, it can be concluded that the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company was a successful unit.

¹² Major Jesse T. Reese, Jr., Acting Commander, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, Mobile, to Captain Stovall, et al., 13 March 1944, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

¹³ Lieutenant Colonel William V. Owen, Commanding 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion, Mobile, to Commanding Officer, 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company, 5 July 1944, private collection of Elmer Puchta.

Key to Success: Puchta as Leader

There are several factors that contributed to the success of the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company. The 3360th started out with troops drawn from a pool that was probably above average for a Quartermaster Truck Company. The men assigned to anti-aircraft artillery had to be capable of using advanced equipment to accomplish their mission, and thus had to have some technical ability and learning potential. The troops appear to have had at least a measure of self discipline. "For some reason or another an EM was transferred to another company. Shortly afterwards he came down with VD; our company was clear, the other company got the black mark."¹⁴ This was the only such case Puchta remembers.

The 3360th also had the advantage of longevity. Then-Lieutenant General George S. Patton noted that "divisions and armies are not animated tables of organization but have souls just as human beings have, and that in order to get the best results, they must be maintained at strength with men who have been in them long enough to acquire the unit soul."¹⁵ His statement also applies to company sized units. The 3360th had a long history, by wartime standards, beginning at Oran and continuing on as a part of the Army of Occupation. There was relatively little turnover of personnel. A few officers moved on. Puchta moved up. Cook moved in. Thirteen enlisted troops became infantrymen, and

¹⁴ Puchta questionnaire 3.

¹⁵ *The Personnel Replacement System in the United States Army*, (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, facsimile edition, 1988), 419.

thirteen reconditioned battle veterans joined the ranks. Occasional reassignments were made, but overall this was a very stable unit. Such stability ensured that corporate knowledge was passed on to the few newcomers. Troops learned their jobs, and became more proficient at them as their experience level built. As one of the monthly reports from southern France noted: "The experience of over a year and a half of trucking in Africa, Sicily and Italy stood our units in good stead."¹⁶ Though its platoons were often sent out on independent missions, the 3360th avoided the disruption of being broken up to serve in the Red Ball Express, the deleterious effects of which were noted both in the official records and by Puchta.

There were also significant obstacles for the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company to overcome in effectively accomplishing its mission. The men transferred to the newly formed company were those the units ordered to give up personnel were most willing to release, for whatever reason. It is possible their men given up were desperately bored, and wanted to do something more to aid the war effort: "It turned out that EM [enlisted men] who couldn't stand the chicken-shit site life became excellent truckers."¹⁷ It is also possible the men were released for less flattering reasons, such as their superiors' low opinion of their potential. No matter how enthusiastic the men, only a limited number had special skills that would be of use to the new unit, such as Puchta's experience as

¹⁶ Report by Headquarters, 55th Quartermaster Truck Battalion (Mobile), [October 1944], Archives, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

¹⁷ Puchta questionnaire 2.

motor officer for his anti-aircraft unit. There was no time for training of any sort, as trucks had to roll as soon as the units could be assembled. The only experience from which the new truckers would benefit was their own, as they gained it.

The key factor in overcoming difficulties and making the most of advantages in the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company was leadership, specifically leadership at the company grade officer - lieutenants and captains - level.

When asked long after the war why he fought, Puchta responded that he "Didn't fight - fulfilled my obligation as a commissioned officer."¹⁸ He also emphasizes that the day to day life of the commander of a Quartermaster Truck Company was not normally dangerous or stressful, "I had a quiet and peaceful life as C. O. There were many days that the most important thing I did was initial the morning report."¹⁹ Despite his own analysis, Puchta was the key factor in the success of the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company.

Puchta had no training in commanding a Quartermaster Truck Platoon or a Quartermaster Truck Company. In civilian life, he had been a math teacher, which perhaps taught him patience, and gave him experience in carrying the mantle of authority, but he had not been a trucker or a dispatcher or run a trucking firm, or had any experiences that would be of direct relation to his duties. What Puchta did have was

¹⁸ Puchta questionnaire 1.

¹⁹ Puchta questionnaire 2.

military training and experience. What technical knowledge he needed to command a Quartermaster unit, as opposed to a Coast Artillery or Anti-aircraft unit, he acquired on the job. What was of more importance and benefit to the company was his ability to lead a military unit, no matter the mission.

Puchta took full advantage of the independence and flexibility available to the commander of an independent company. By keeping drivers with the same truck, Puchta helped the drivers form a bond with their vehicle that would inspire them to ensure all preventive maintenance was accomplished promptly and correctly. Puchta enhanced this bond by doing everything possible, including bending the rules, to ensure the 3360th kept their original vehicles, rather than turning them in to an ordnance depot and receiving a different truck in exchange. This bond between men and machines allowed the 3360th to accomplish maintenance feats that were theoretically beyond its capabilities, and thus kept 3360th trucks on the road when another unit might have downlined them.

He also used his independence to slightly modify standard Army motivational techniques. "There were times when I gave a bottle of liquor to the motor sgt. to make certain the trucks were available in the A.M."²⁰ Such perks were not the only motivational tool Puchta used. His deep concern with the quality of food his men received was a significant factor in keeping morale high. His personal efforts in this area, such as driving Thanksgiving dinner to a forward area in his own jeep, were appreciated by his men, and reflected in their extra efforts. The cooks may have been less than happy when roused to

²⁰ Puchta questionnaire 2.

serve a hot meal to a platoon returning late, but this seems to have been outweighed by the happiness of the men at receiving a hot meal at the end of a long day. In addition to keeping his men well fed, Puchta also did his best to preserve their rest, taking command of the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company with a simple message to all the troops, rather than rousting them for an assembly, ceremony, or speech.

Puchta's belief that overbearing officers were a detriment to morale kept him out of most disciplinary matters, which he delegated to the company First Sergeant. This seems to have been largely effective, as no major disciplinary infractions were noted. When faced with an incident too serious to be left to the First Sergeant, he responded with creativity, and when the threat of the fingerprint kit uncovered the culprit, he responded with tempered discipline that punished the culprit while keeping him an effective part of the unit.

Of all the decisions he made as a commander, Puchta recalls those involving personnel assignments as the most difficult. In many ways, his position was more difficult than that of a commander in the combat arms. Despite the dangers any soldier faced from air attack or a sudden enemy breakthrough, the men of the 3360th did not spend each day in imminent mortal peril. It was Puchta who had to decide who went ashore on D + 1 on the Riviera beach. His decision to transfer all of the married troops out of the two platoons making the landing was no doubt controversial, but was designed to minimize the suffering casualties would cause. The decision might have caused widespread resentment

had it not been for his decision to join the landing force himself. It made his transfer decision fair, as he went with the rest of the single troops. It was also an example of leading from the front. His troops knew Puchta would be sharing their fate on the beach, good or bad.

Puchta's second major personnel decision was more difficult for the very reason he could not lead from the front and share his troops' fate. The thirteen troops who were retrained as infantrymen would face risks Puchta would not. So, Puchta made his decision and moved on, leading his company, including the new replacements. His former troops were beyond his ability to protect, and so he carried on, doing his duty by the men of the 3360th Quartermaster Truck Company as he saw it.

His ability was also noted by those who served him: "I found the 3360th to be a company run with precision. Elmer Puchta Capt. was an excellent Company Commander. He had discipline, was always available, and took good care of his men . . ." ²¹

Those seeking lessons in leadership from military history always seem to turn to the combat arms. The books, such as *Thud Ridge*,²² *Platoon Leader*,²³ and *Company*

²¹ Cook questionnaire 1.

²² Colonel Jack Broughton, *Thud Ridge*, (1969; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1985).

²³ James R. McDonough, *Platoon Leader*, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1985; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1986).

*Commander*²⁴ which young officers are encouraged to read to absorb such lessons are written by those who pull the trigger. However, as Puchta demonstrated, the lessons of military leadership can also come from support units that never fired a shot in anger. Such leaders and such units are worthy of the study of both historians and professional warriors alike. The insights and lessons so obtained are of value to both.

Commanding a separate truck company was a satisfactory experience. We were expected to have forty out of forty-eight trucks available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week carrying a 100% overload whenever the cargo permitted. Most of the time we met this requirement because we had excellent morale, strict first echelon maintenance and a dedicated group of mechanics. the [sic] "Red Ball Express" got all the publicity, but companies like the 3360th - nicknamed "The Flying Eight Ball" carried the bulk of the supplies in the ETO.²⁵

²⁴ Charles B. MacDonald, *Company Commander*, (United States Army, 1947; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1978).

²⁵ Elmer H. Puchta, Unpublished manuscript submitted to "The Officer," February 1, 1994, 3.

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DUKW photograph courtesy of General Motors Corporation and the U. S. Army.

In support of this thesis, I was able to interview both Elmer H. Puchta and Louis Cook. I interviewed Mr. Cook by questionnaire in December 1995, using the U. S. Army Military History Institute standard questionnaire distributed to World War II veterans. Mr. Cook attached a written supplement. Information derived from this questionnaire and the attached notes is listed as "Cook questionnaire 1."

I also interviewed Mr. Puchta using the same questionnaire in December 1995. Information derived from this questionnaire is listed as "Puchta questionnaire 1." I sent Mr. Puchta a second round of questions in September 1996. Information from these answers and the extra notes he added in October 1996 is listed as "Puchta questionnaire 2." I met briefly with Mr. Puchta in January 1998. In response to several written and oral questions I asked at that time, he sent me a letter, information from which is listed as "Puchta questionnaire 3." A follow up letter followed in February 1998, referenced as "Puchta questionnaire 4," and the final letter, from March 1998, is referenced as "Puchta questionnaire 5."