

51st ASPHALT PLATOON
By: Bob Grant

I was the original CO of the 51st Asphalt Platoon. After graduating from Engineer OCS at Fort Belvoir, VA in February 1967 I was assigned to activate the unit at Fort Lewis, WA together with my Platoon Sergeant, SSG Sanky Powell.

The unit acquired equipment, supplies, and limited training prior to mobilization and debarkation. We convoyed to Tacoma, WA and loaded equipment & men onto a Navy Vessel for Vietnam in Mid-August 1967.

My orders were to fly to Cam Ranh Bay, locate the 18th Engineer Brigade, and I would be given orders about the unit assignment. I was advised that the 51st Asphalt Platoon would be paving Highway QL-19 from An Khe to the Miang Giang Pass once we received our asphalt plant & were ready to erect the plant & commence with paving operations. The unit would be attached to the 589th Engineer Battalion for this project & we would probably be reassigned once the paving operation was completed.

The men and equipment arrived in Qui Nhon by LST locked, loaded, scared to death & ready to fight the war 21 days after leaving Tacoma, WA. The unit was now assigned to A Company, 589th Engineer Battalion

Prior to the Asphalt Plant arriving we did various chip sealing projects around the Qui Nhon area of operation. Our new Barber Greene Asphalt Plant arrived in early 1968. The plant was set up next to the A Company Quarry operation outside the perimeter of the An Khe compound.

We successfully assembled the Plant, produced a quality asphalt product, and proceeded to pave approximately 20 miles to the base of the Miang Giang Pass. A good day of production would allow us to pave one mile of 12' wide pavement 2-4" thick requiring approximately 1,000 tons of asphalt. During this six-month period the 51st Asphalt Platoon was the most successful military asphalt plant & paving operation in Vietnam.

The quarry and crushing component of A Company, led by Lt. Lee Ravdin, did an outstanding job of keeping us supplied with the raw aggregates we needed to mix with the liquid asphalt to produce the hot mix asphalt needed by the paving crew. D company was responsible for the road base preparation and also assisted in hauling asphalt from the plant to the paving site. The 51st Asphalt Platoon would not have enjoyed the success we had without the support of A & D Company.

We were on the "General's" tour guide stop while we were operating. Every 7-14 days we would have visitors fly in by helicopter to look at the crushing operation, the asphalt plant making asphalt, and the road trip to that day's paving site. I didn't know there were that many Generals until I visited the Pentagon many years later as a civilian.

The paving was finished by August 1968. Of the original men, almost all were draftees and they rotated out of Vietnam and were replaced during June-July-August of 1968. I do not have any history of the unit after my departure. I believe a Lt. Harper eventually replaced me and the unit remained assigned to the 589th Engineer Battalion and relocated to the Phan Rang area of operation to continue it's successful run of producing asphalt and paving vital roadways until the deactivation of the 589th Engineer Battalion in 1971.

Submitted by:

Bob Grant
sales@azce.com