

# From Long Binh

The day started early for Charlie Company's third platoon. There would be no spare time or sandbag details this day. They had a convoy to run. At 0630 the men of "Chargin' Charlie," a Military Police convoy escort unit of the 720th MP Battalion, 18th MP Brigade, were already atop their V-100 armored cars, preparing for the long haul from Long Binh to Bao Loc, a village 100 miles to the northeast.

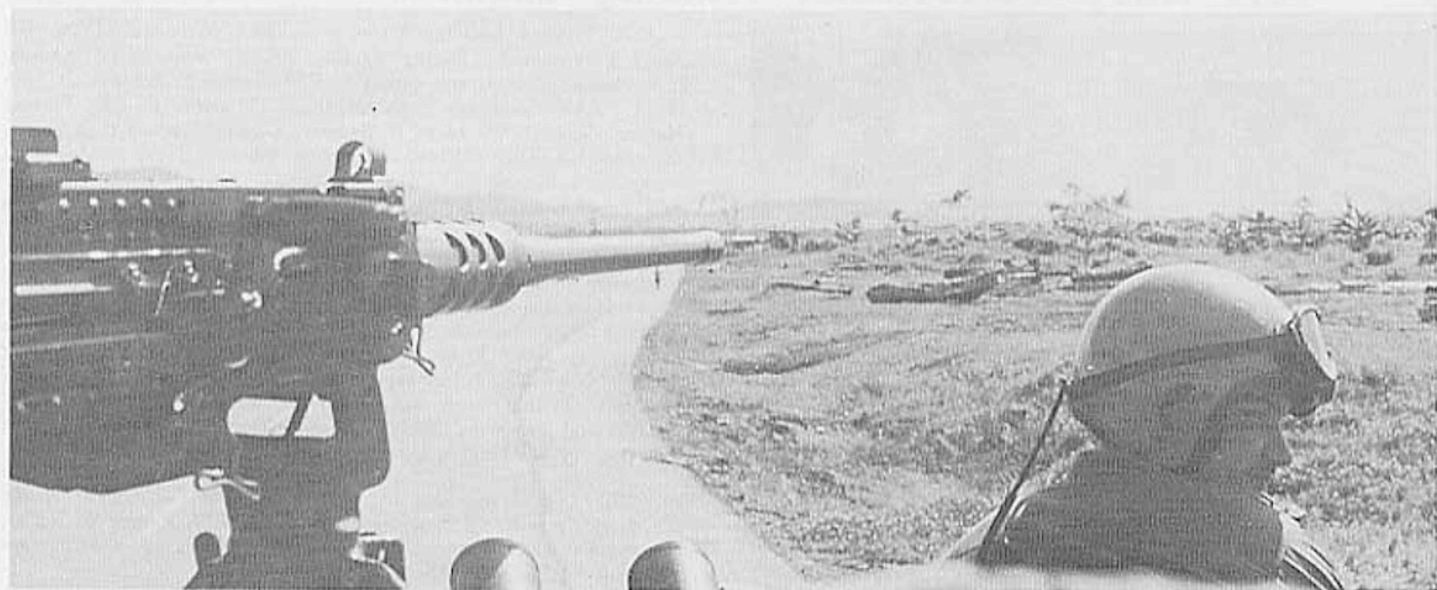
In the darkness just before dawn, a dozen men loaded ammunition, C-rations and flak jackets, checked oil and water, and uncovered the armament of the "Vs." Then scrambling aboard, they headed for the staging area, where several different convoys were being organized. Snatches of conversation drifted from the center of a huddle of drivers. "If you're fired on, don't stop," said the lieutenant, "can't have anyone left behind . . . if you break down, pull off to the side of the road . . . one of the armored cars will stay with you . . . once at Bao Loc, go right to the compound . . . remember, the Blue Room is off limits . . . any questions? . . . all right, let's saddle up."

Sitting on the front of the lead vehicle, SSG Jerry Rauch, the platoon sergeant, donned his blue helmet and said a few final words of instruction through the intercom to his driver, SP4 David Campbell. SGT Dennis Snyder, the IC (In Charge), sat atop the "V" behind the .50 caliber machine gun and the M-73, two 7.62mm machine guns mounted together.

Past the Long Binh gate and out onto the open highway the convoy rolled. Wind whipped at the hair and stung the eyes of the men riding atop the escort vehicles as they passed the vendors and open air markets into the countryside. Halfway back in the string of tankers, tractor-trailers, and jeeps, SP4 Bob Mohr, the IC of the second escort vehicle loaded his 40mm automatic cannon, a new weapon which can fire 250 M-79 grenade rounds a minute. The convoy rolled on through towns and villages as children flocked to the roadside to watch. Sergeant Snyder in the lead "V" acted as a



*Above: The crews of the V-100s secure their gear and prepare for the one hundred mile trip from Long Binh to Bao Loc. Getting the convoy completely organized before the onset of the mission is the key to success. Below: SSG Jerry Rauch, the convoy escort platoon guide, checks to see that the large trucks and other vehicles he is leading are following. Beside Sergeant Rauch is his protection, a .50 caliber machine gun.*





*Left: SGT Dennis Snyder, IC (in charge) of the lead V-100 armored car, controls his crew through an intercom system and acts as a traffic director, waving civilian vehicles aside and warning them that a convoy is coming through. Bottom: SP4 David Campbell, the driver of the lead vehicle, keeps a hand on his weapon as he peers out the hatch into the grove of rubber trees, attempting to catch a glimpse of the enemy. 2nd from bottom: The men on the convoy have to be on full alert when passing through mountainous areas where dense foliage presses in from both sides of the road. These are the positions where the convoy is most vulnerable to attack.*

# To Bao Loc

traffic cop warning slow-moving vehicles that the convoy was coming by. Hours passed and the crews settled into the routine of heat and dust. "Wait'll we get up higher in the mountains," said PFC Americk "Rick" Fior, Jr., the red-headed machine-gunner on the lead vehicle. "If anything happens, it'll probably come later." Just then a muffled explosion boomed off to the right up ahead. "What was that?" Private Fior yelled at Sergeant Snyder. The man in the orange helmet could only shrug and scan the area in the direction of the sound.

Two MP jeeps roared past the stopping convoy, their occupants pointing back up the road and yelling about an ambush. Two of the MP escorts raced ahead to the scene of the fighting. The last V-100 armored car stayed with the convoy, stopped on the main street of a small village. Ahead a South Vietnamese soldier (ARVN) lay dead along the road, the victim of a Viet Cong ambush. What had happened was still uncertain, but more ARVNs were in a grove of rubber trees searching for the enemy. To assist in finding the enemy, helicopter support was requested. Soon, a Light Observation Helicopter circled overhead, dropping low, looking, trying to draw fire while the larger gunships waited higher in the sky, but nothing moved—the enemy had fled. Once again the convoy was moving.

Over a pontoon bridge, through hamlets and Montagnard villages, the convoy weaved on into the mountains. Thick roadside vegetation made vision to the flanks difficult, and bamboo hanging over the pavement brushed the antennas of the V-100s as they passed. As the paved road ended and dust choked everyone but the men of the lead vehicle, the men of the trail vehicle donned goggles and breathed through their teeth to try and filter the air.

Four and a half hours after the convoy had rolled out of Long Binh, the gates of Camp Smith, an engineer compound near Bao Loc, loomed into sight. "Let's grab some chow," said Sergeant Snyder, as the three crews headed for the Bao Loc Military Assistance Command mess hall. As Sergeant Snyder pulled off his helmet, the radio crackled again. "... could you investigate an accident involving one of your trucks? ... hit an ARVN jeep on the way to the airport ... flipped it over ... no apparent casualties."

"Come on Kos, we'd better go get it," he said. The others had already gone to chow and PFC Frank J. Kos, Jr., the driver of the trail vehicle was just dismounting. Lunch would have to wait. One truck hadn't quite reached its final destination after breaking off from the convoy. "Chargin' Charlie" still had a job to do.

