



# 100 miles of fear

An MP convoy winds its way through Vietnam . . .

By DAVE BERRY

**ENROUTE TO BAO LOC, Vietnam**  
THE DAY started early for Charlie Company's third platoon. There'd be no slack time or sandbag details today. They had a convoy to run.

At 6:30 a.m., the men of "Chargin' Charlie" Company were already atop their V-100 armored cars, preparing for the long haul to Bao Loc, a village 100 miles to the northeast. Charlie Company, a Military Police Convoy Unit, is a part of the 720th MP Bn, 18th MP Brigade at Long Binh.

In the darkness just before dawn, a dozen men loaded ammunition, C-rations and flak jackets, checked oil and water and uncovered the armament. Then they headed for the staging area, where several different convoys were being organized.

The sun was coming up as the convoy escort crews milled around waiting for the officers in charge of the convoy to finish their briefings and start them rolling.

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."

"Where's Trail?" asked a machine gunner, referring to the third V-100 which brings up the rear of the convoy and as yet hadn't made its appearance. A voice from inside the lead vehicle mumbled an answer as "Trail" rumbled into the staging area.

A dozen heavy trucks roared and belched smoke as a convoy bound for Tay Ninh rolled out of the area heading for the gate. Another platoon of armored

cars from Charlie Company was their escort. The Bao Loc convoy was to follow them out.

"Let's go," someone said, and the MP escorts took their positions. The big V-8 engine of the lead "V" roared to life and the trip was under way.

Sitting on the front of the lead vehicle, S Sgt Jerry Rauch, the platoon leader, 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-cal. machine gun and the M73, two 7.62 mm 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.

Sitting on the rear of the three vehicles, three gunners locked and loaded belts of ammunition into their M60 machine gun and placed their loaded M16s nearby. From atop the turrets of the "Lead" and "Trail" vehicles the clack of the heavy bolts of the 50-calibers signaled that they too were ready.

Halfway back in the string of tankers, tractor-trailers and jeeps, Sp4 Bob Mohr, the IC of the second escort vehicle loaded up his "40 mike-mike." The 40mm automatic cannon, a new weapon which can fire 250 M-79 grenade rounds a minute, was mounted on the armored car a month before.

The convoy rolled on through towns and villages as children flocked to the roadside to watch. Sgt Snyder in the lead "V" acted as a 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, 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 the hell was that?" Fior yelled at 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 convoy from ahead, their occupants pointing back up the road and yelling about an ambush. The convoy halted.

"Load your weapons," Snyder yelled. They were already loaded. The radio came alive as Sgt Rauch and the three ICs went into a quick huddle over the air waves. "Let's go," said Rauch.

Two of the MP escorts raced ahead to the scene of the fighting. "Trail" stayed with the convoy, stopped on the main street of a small village.

Up ahead, an ARVN soldier lay dead along the road, the victim of a Viet Cong uncertain. More ARVNs were in a grove of rubber trees searching for the enemy. Cobra gunships were called in. The two V-100s and their crews stayed on the road, their weapons trained on the tree-line. Soon, a Light Observation Helicopter circled overhead, dropping low, looking, trying to draw fire. The Cobras waited higher in the sky. Nothing moved. The enemy had fled.

Once again the convoy was moving. The radio crackled. "Trail" wanted to know what had happened, but no-one was really sure. All they were sure of was that their convoy was intact and rolling. By this time the Birdog, a small single-engined plane circling high overhead watching the convoy, arrived on station.

Over a pontoon bridge, through hamlets and Montagnard villages, the convoy weaved on into the mountains. Thick vegetation pushed in from both sides of the road. Bamboo hung out over the pavement brushing the radio antenna as the V-100 passed. The asphalt ended and dust choked everyone but the men of the lead vehicle. All the men of "Trail" could do was don goggles and breathe through their teeth to strain out the big pieces.

Snyder disappeared down through the hatch. Soon he was back. "No commo," he called back over his shoulder. The radio was dead.

The driver downshifted and slowed the big vehicle as Snyder spotted an accident on the road ahead. The shrouded body of a man lay in the road near his mangled motorcycle. An American officer waved them past. "No Americans involved," he said. The convoy kept moving.

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. The V-100s pulled to the side as big tankers and tractor-trailers rumbled off toward separate destinations.

Rauch traded places with Snyder. "I'll see if they can fix the radio," he said as Campbell, the driver, steered the lead vehicle toward the communications shop.

"Let's grab some chow," said Snyder, and the remainder of the three crews headed for the Bao Loc compound, where they parked the "Vs" near the messhall.

As Snyder pulled off his helmet, the radio crackled again. " . . . could you investigate an accident involving one of 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, the driver of the trail "V", was just dismounting.

Lunch would have to wait. One truck hadn't quite made it to its final destination after breaking off from the convoy. "Chargin' Charlie" still had a job to do.

