

# 3rd TMRS in Japan, 1946-50

Dave Kaufman

The U.S. Army Transportation Corps (TC) has the task of moving personnel, equipment and supplies. Members of the corps perform the task by a variety of means. Utilizing rail service is one of the means, and during and after WW II, was a little publicized but very successful aspect of the war and during occupation duties.

Some of the wartime success was due to the foresight and planning of the War Department. In 1942, railroad units were transferred to the TC from the Corps of Engineers; railway units had operated in the Quartermaster Corps during WW I. In WW II, the Military Railway Service was born. It consisted of units numbered as Military Railway Service (1st, 2nd and 3rd); commanded by a Brigadier General, the units' chief responsibility was in directing the activities of Railway Grand Divisions (RGDs).

In turn, RGDs directed the activities of four or five Railway Operating Battalions (ROBs) and one Railway Shop Battalion (RSB). The ROBs operated divisions, or lines of track, up to 150 miles long. The RSBs were committed to major repairs, overhauls, and manufacture of rolling stock. Both types of battalions were commanded by LTCs. The contributions of the MRS during WW II have been well-documented on these pages and in many other sources. (1)

Numbered MRS units had a WW II TO of 22 officers and 186 EM (2). Post-WW II, the numbered MRS units were redesignated Transportation MRS, and in 1953 the TO was 60 officers, 7 warrant officers, and 139 EM.(3) Specific duties included being responsible for technical development for military purposes of railways in a given theater of operations; recommendations for the extent of the incorporation of local railroads and personnel; the disposal of railway troops and their complete unit movements; responsibility for the development and movement of railway facilities; and the well-being and discipline of MRS personnel.(4)

After the war, the Allies were faced with quickly rebuilding and then operating formerly civilian railroads to provide food, clothe and supply civilian populations. It was subsequently determined that



**Unauthorized SSI for the 3rd TMRS. Green and red embroidered silk and bullion. Those are two locomotives at the 1100 and 1300 positions; "3D TMRS" is barely legible in the base.**

the occupying armies would be directing and controlling the civilian railroads, and not operating them. Additionally, both occupation areas had geographical concerns that differed greatly. Germany is contiguous, flat in some regions, and with low mountains in others. Japan is composed of many islands, divided into three main groups – Hokkaido, in the north; Honshu, in the center, and Kyushu, in the south; and is exceptionally mountainous. The Japanese railway system, government owned and operated, had been partially destroyed in WW II, far less than Germany's had been; some 9,000 freight cars and 900 locomotives were gone, as were 966 miles of track. These were out of pre-war totals of 84,000 freight cars, 5,000 locomotives, and 1,229 miles of track. (5)

The Japanese National Railroad (JNR) had some features that were unique to the world. One stretch is a cog operation, due to the severe mountain grades; the ferry system between islands consisted of entire passenger or freight trains, coupled together (minus the locomotives), being pushed onto a ship, and then pulled off at the other end. There were even underwater tunnels.

Prior to the Japanese surrender on 2 Sept 45, the MRS sent the following units into Japan – the 737th and 770th Railway Operating Bns and the 793rd Base Depot Company. The 737th had three detachments sent to different locations to aid in the repair and operations. The 770th made

repairs and operated in the north. The 793rd took up its stores duties. (6) Both battalions were inactivated in Japan in 1946; the 737th on 10 Apr 46 and the 770th on 8 Nov.

In WW II, the 3rd MRS had been activated 10 April 44 in Iran. It was an integral element of Persian Gulf Command, which had the chief logistical function of moving supplies up from Iran into Russia. The 3rd MRS was inactivated in Iran in early August 1945. It was reconstituted, reactivated and redesignated 3rd Transportation Military Railway Service (TMRS) in the Philippines in late August 45. On 25 Oct 45, the HQ of the 3rd TMRS arrived in Japan from its previous location in the Philippines, led by BG Frank Besson.(7) HQ was set up in the NYK Building (NYK Line was an exquisite passenger ship line operated prior to WW II by the Japanese) in downtown Yokohama. Initially, the primary purpose of the 3rd TMRS was in acquiring and controlling trains, in order to bring in the first occupation divisions (1st Cavalry and 11th Airborne.) The 3rd TMRS worked closely with the 2nd Major Port, which operated under a separate command. Both units coordinated ship's arrivals and departures.

One of the first things the 3rd TMRS did was to survey the Japanese rail equipment, particularly the passenger cars. Some of the better cars were requisitioned and rehabilitated by the US shop units. The others were in terrible condition. There were broken windows, plumbing was inoperable (and different from American standards), brakes didn't work, and equipment was generally filthy. Many were still in use, at great risk to Japanese civilian passengers, who hung off the sides, out of the windows, or rode on the roofs. The occupation forces also took over Japanese railroad shops. The cars were pretty well stripped down and completely repainted, windows were replaced, and the plumbing was upgraded. In anticipation of the brutal Japanese winters, the heating systems were restored.

As 3rd TMRS HQ was in the NYK Building, some of NYK staff was still in the building. Happenstance was that these former employees were part of a staff of



Sgt "Jake" Jacoby (?) w/ HQ Co  
guidon, NYK Bldg, Yokohama  
(courtesy A. Rankin)

caterers, cooks and waiters. They were immediately employed to staff dining cars that attached to US trains. They were provided with US food stocks and provided their own meals.

The 3rd MRS completely controlled and coordinated the day to day operation of Japanese trains and rail yard facilities, except in local Army depots and at some of the Army stations. There were numbers of MRS personnel with railroad experience. Their primary job was in operating and maintaining the diesel engines subsequently brought over to do the switching in the depots. GIs were placed on all civilian trains, but the trains themselves were operated by the Japanese. The 3rd MRS coordinated the rail traffic between Army MRS trains and Japanese civilian trains; the goal was for minimum disruption between the two. Army MRS trains included regularly scheduled passenger trains. Some of the regular Army passenger trains were given American names: the Yankee Limited between Yokohama and Sapporo, and the Dixie Limited between Hokkaido and Tokyo. (8)

The 3rd MRS utilized four divisions in routing trains: the Tokyo Division; the Sendai Division; the Osaka Division; and the Fukuoka Division. Tokyo Division



1947 Thanksgiving menu, 3rd TMRS. Note the 8th Army SSI at top and it is thought that the small insignia above "Honshu" may be another unauthorized SSI. (courtesy A. Rankin)

logically included operations in the Tokyo-Yokohama area west to Niigata. The Sendai Division operated over the northern region of Honshu Island and Hokkaido Island. Osaka Division handled operations for central and south central Honshu Island and the island of Shikoku. Fukuoka Division was responsible for southern Honshu Island and the island of Kyushu. When operations were completely restored, Tokyo Central Station had approximately 1,370 trains operating daily; Yokohama Station had 1,270. (9) General MacArthur had made it clear, as had did MG Besson, that the Japanese had lost the war, occupation was going to be peaceful and the US Army expected absolute cooperation. MG Besson told the Japanese government and the Japanese railroads, that the 3rd TMRS was an arm of the Occupation Forces and was in charge of that phase of the occupation. Every member of the MRS was in charge of a particular area of

occupation and whatever he ordered or directed would be followed.

Of course, there was some undamaged first class equipment. Early on, the Emperor's train was located. Having been well cared for, the cars were in almost mint condition. These were requisitioned for General MacArthur and his staff. As more and more occupation forces came in and began to settle, traffic increased between Tokyo and outlying areas. Most everyone is familiar with an old saying "All roads lead to Rome". In Japan, they lead to Tokyo.

The US Army, Japan, wanted to establish a sea link with South Korea. The 3rd TMRS requisitioned and had rehabilitated a couple of ferries that operated between the Island of Kyushu and Korea; the unit then operated the ferries and the train to serve the ferries.

Within each Railroad Division were Rail Transportation Officers (RTO), and

assistant Rail Transportation Officers. Wherever there was a military element of the Occupational Forces, there was a RTO. He had his own office in the local railroad station, which usually was a piece of space carved out in the Station Master's office. In some cases, the Japanese were required to build a separate office for our RTOs. The RTO worked with his counterpart, the Station Master of the local station. For the most part, RTOs were lower grade officers, but there were NCOs in the position. They were all identified with a green armband marked with "R.T.O."

Sgt Art Rankin, HQ Co, 3rd TMRS, was assigned as a conductor. He said, "I completed my Basic Training at Ft. Eustis, VA, and was sent to Ft. Warren (now Warren AFB) at Cheyenne, WY, for Signal Maintenance Training. I returned to Ft. Eustis and was transferred to Manila, PI, to work on an Army railroad unit. There was no unit there at the time; they had already been transferred to Japan, so I was sent there.

"I was assigned to the 3rd MRS in Yokohama. My first assignment with them was as a Baggage/Express agent. I loaded and unloaded baggage on a 36-hour one way trip to Sapporo. The bags were arranged to be off-loaded in coordination with the passengers at each stop. The trains left out of Yokohama at 2100 hours, with several stops. I can recall a few - Tokyo, Sendai, a USAF base, and the final one at the port of Amori, on the tip of Honshu. A ferry backed up to the rail terminus and then we drove the train up onto the ferry. We lashed several cars down with chains for the six hour trip to the entry port at Hakodate, on the island of Hokkaido. From there, our last stop was at Sapporo, scheduled for 0800. The military train



US trains marked with white stripe (courtesy A. Rankin)



Former Sgt A. Rankin's "R.T.O." brassard ( printed red on green silk; numbers are printed in yellow courtesy A. Rankin)

crew was then off for three to five days; I did a lot of sightseeing. We stayed at very nice Japanese hotels, which were all owned by the railroad, with the Army picking up the tab while we were off.

"I did this for two months and then transferred to system conductor. This was an apprentice position until I was a full conductor. There were two conductors per train, and while one rested, the other collected tickets, ensured passengers exited the trains at the proper stops, coordinated with the baggage agents, and generally acted to keep the peace on the trains. There were no MPs on these trains; we were armed with .45s. We wore our RTO brassards. On one occasion, there was an Ord Maj who was causing problems for some Red Cross girls on one of the trains. Of course, alcohol was involved. I had to order him off the train, and he was left at a stop not used by the Army trains. He complained about my actions, and it went up my chain of command. I provided an explanation, and the Maj was sent home.

"We had a nice system for assignments. The Assistant Chief Conductor wrote our names and our assignments on a board. Since Yokohama was the second largest train terminal, trains left either north or south. We were given our preference as to which direction we wanted to go. I preferred northbound trains, but occasionally took southbound trains so I could sightsee.

"The Army trains were marked with a distinctive white stripe on each car. Only military personnel, their dependents, and American civilians could ride on these trains; no Japanese were allowed on these

trains. We could ride theirs. Our Army trains were operated by Japanese locomotive engineers, firemen and brakemen, and we always had a Japanese interpreter with us. We had a total of six GIs on each train. There was a baggage/express agent, two conductors, one mess Sergeant, and two soldiers from an APU in the mail car. The two GIs in the mail car were not allowed off the train; they could walk through it, but not exit.

"I recall that the trains were all narrow gauge, too. The JNR maintained all the tracks, all the locomotives and rolling stock, and did all the repairs. It was really something to see them repair a storm-damaged bridge using ropes, as they had no bolts, no nails, no screws. Trains used the repaired bridges right away. I was amazed at their ability to meet any adversity. Up



Sgt. A. Rankin (courtesy A. Rankin)



Float built on a Jeep to appear like a 3rd TMRS locomotive (courtesy A. Rankin)

at Sapporo, where it starts snowing in late September and doesn't let up until March, Japanese railroad workers built insulated wooden tops and sides for our Jeeps, replacing the standard canvas covers.

"The US trains ran on Japanese tracks along with Japanese trains. The 3rd MRS worked out schedules with the NYK, but our trains had rail priority. After the war, the only method of transportation in Japan was via the railroad. There were no aircraft, the roads were in poor condition, there was an extreme civilian gasoline shortage, and hardly any civilian vehicles, most of which ran on charcoal anyway. The 3rd MRS was headquartered in the NYK building; there were Quonset huts

out back for military personnel as living quarters. They were single bed configuration.

"A typical Army train layout was like this: a locomotive, a mail car, a baggage car, a dining car, one or two compartment cars, and two to three coach cars. Sometimes we would run troop trains and added more cars as needed. We transferred the 11th Airborne Division out of Sapporo and brought the 7th Infantry Division in.

"The most interesting experience I had was in approximately Feb 1948. We were on the ferry from Hokkaido and a typhoon (hurricane) struck us. I had been asleep when at 2300 hours a series of chains broke and my car bumped up against



Sgt Kenzie Letchworth, wearing his R.T.O brassard, on locomotive

the side of the ship. There is a meter, called a Clinometer, on ships that measures the degree of list before the ship would turn over; it was 38° on our ferry. I saw that meter tip to 37° several times that night. The storm was pushing our ferry every which way; chairs and tables became weapons. We had MG Dean, the CO of the 7th ID, on board that night. We were all sweating this one out together. It took us 12 hours to make that journey.

"One time, I took a PX train that stopped at every station in Japan, bringing PX items to troops in remote outposts. It was a six month return trip.

"The Japanese riding their trains were hanging out the windows and riding wherever they could. If a train was going through a particular stop wanted by a passenger, on its way to another stop, why, sometimes the Japanese would jump off the moving train, and just roll through the station, with people scattering out of the way. Sometimes the jumper was hurt, and sometimes not." (10)

Another conductor was Cpl. Bernard Drury. He said, "I enlisted into the Army in March 1947 to join the 1st Cavalry Division in Tokyo. I had my basic training at Ft. Ord, CA and was sent to Japan. When I got there in December 1947, it became known that I had worked as a crane hauler for the Seaboard RR, so it was suggested that I go to the 3rd TMRS. I initially refused, and as I was walking away, another GI caught me in the hall and said that I should take it, as the 3rd was the best unit in Japan.

"When I first got to the 3rd, I was assigned to personnel. After a couple of months, I thought that being a conductor was a more exciting life, so I requested a transfer. I had two or three training runs – this was strictly OJT, no tests, no schools – so we had three conductors on these runs. I really equated the job of conductor on these Army trains like being a conductor on a Pullman car. We just watched over the passengers. We didn't have to make any decisions like conductors do on civilian RRs – such as determining when a train leaves, or switching cars, things like that.

"Now, the Dixie Limited headed south to Fukuoka from Tokyo, leaving at 0900 and arrived the next afternoon at 1500. The Allied Limited left Tokyo at 2100 hours and headed south to Kokura, arriving at 2100 the next night. The Yankee Limited left north from Yokohama to Sapporo and

that was also a night time run, from 2100 hours to 0800 – a 36-hour one way trip. Both the Allied and Dixie Limited had to take tunnels to get to Kyushu. I remember that there was a tunnel exit at Moji on Kyushu.

“One night, we stopped and picked up a troop car, loaded with GIs who were returning from training at Mt. Fuji. The car was coupled as the last car on our train. I noted that the GIs had smuggled a woman on board, which was a violation. I awoke the other conductor and we confronted the GIs. They almost threw us off the train while it was moving; fortunately, some sergeants intervened and the problem was settled.

“Another problem we had was with troops who brought alcohol on board, which was another violation. In Tokyo, on the Dixie Limited, we had picked up a troop car full of GIs from the 11th Airborne Division. Between Tokyo and Osaka, these drunken paratroopers were really tearing up the car. The other conductor and I conferred, and agreed that we would stop the train and we did. We uncoupled the car right there on a side spur and left them all there. We sent a telegram up to 3rd TMRS HQ to advise them.

“I got to meet MG Dean, Commanding General of the 24th ID, on a couple of occasions. When he traveled, he used a special car that we had hooked up between the mail and the dining cars. Normally, a conductor would go through the dining car to the mail car and notify the GI mail guards that chow was ready. I had to pass through MG Dean’s car, and begged his pardon, telling him that I had to bring the mail guards through his car to get to the dining car. He just said ‘sure, c’mon through, corporal.’ He was pretty nice about it. Another time, he had traveled up from Kokura to Yokohama for a conference – this was right before the Korean War began, and there was a lot more training going on. I saw him talking and joking among some high-level staff officers, and then he broke away from them and came over directly to me and the other conductor. He thanked us both for the good trip and our service.

“I recall that another typhoon sunk a train-loaded ferry between Hakodate and Amori, and at least two GIs – the guys in the mail car, were killed, along with some others.

“I believe that there were approximately 40 conductors in the 3rd TMRS. I



Ferry for carrying trains at Amori (courtesy K. Letchworth)

was a crew dispatcher for a year, beginning in 1949, but went back to being a conductor so I could finish high school.” (11)

Sgt Kenzie Letchworth was also a conductor. He recalled, “I joined the Army in July 1946. I took my basic at Ft. Eustis, and was then sent to Ft. Warren at Cheyenne, WY for Arm RR Signal School. From there, I went to Tokyo and then Yokohama. I was assigned to the HQ Co, 3rd TMRS.

“For the first six months, I worked as a baggage express agent or a mail guard. I then transferred to being a conductor and remember the tunnels. There was one between Honshu Island and Kyushu; I remember the route because both Hiroshima and Nagasaki were on the run. It was rather dark

in the tunnel; when I went outside the train on the back of the last car, I could see water between the rails. There were pumps in the tunnels, so you never saw any water at the entrance or exit to the tunnel.

“Now, because of the extensive incendiary bombing damage to both Tokyo and Yokohama, you could see only brick smokestacks for as far as you could see. I got to go out on inspection tours, too. One of them went all the way to the extreme north of Hokkaido, as there was a small Army contingent in the town of Moakkani. On a clear day, you could see Russia. On another inspection tour to Hokkaido, the train was stuck in the snow for two days.

“Now, we carried a jeep on a special



Cpl Bernerd Drury (L) w/ friends at 3rd TMRS NCO Club (courtesy B. Drury)



DI for RTO in 3rd TMRS



DI for RTO in Kyoto Division, 3rd TMRS

flatcar on these tours. We took the jeep out too far, and it too was stuck in the snow. We talked to some officials from the town, and then the people of the town were called by church bells ringing. The townspeople got their shovels out and shoveled a path for the jeep that was three miles long. It just goes to show that people will help you out anywhere.

"I was a conductor on the northern routes for approximately eight months to one year. I then transferred to Sapporo as Station Master. I lived in a hotel in Sapporo that was within walking distance to the train station. I ate in the hotel dining room with the other GIs assigned to the trains. We couldn't imagine anyone in the Army being treated as well as we were treated.

"My duties as Station Master included meeting the trains as they came in; meeting passengers, making arrangements that the supplies were consistent with the number of passengers on the outgoing train; designating special areas, and working with the 11th Airborne Division Funeral Honor

Guard and their special funeral car. Normally, we took a break during the day, but we had to be back for the 2100 train." (12)

The 3rd TMRS was inactivated in Japan 25 January 50 and following two other redesignations, reappeared again, this time in Korea 26 August 50 as the 3rd TMRS. (10) Following the truce in Korea 27 July 1953, the 3rd TMRS resurfaced back in Japan.

### The Insignia

All three of the men who were interviewed for this article recall wearing only the 8th Army SSI. None recall seeing the bullion example nor do any recall seeing either of the two DIs illustrated. They were, for the most part, assigned away from HQ, for days and even months at a time, and all spent their off-duty time frequently sightseeing.

### Footnotes

1 Kaufman, Dave, "The 725th Railway Op-

erating Battalion", *The Trading Post*, Jul-Sept 1995

2 Gray Jr., BG (Ret) Carl R., *Railroading in Eighteen Countries: The Story of American Railroad Men Serving in the Military Railway Service 1862 - 1953*. (New York, Scribner, 1955) page 21

3 *ibid.*, 22

4 *ibid.*, 70

5 Gross, H.H. "Tokyo Express", *Railroad magazine*, 1947

6-7 Gray, page 296

8-9 *ibid.*, 297

10-12 interview with author

### Bibliography

Gray Jr., BG (Ret) Carl R., *Railroading in Eighteen Countries: The Story of American Railroad Men Serving in the Military Railway Service 1862 - 1953*. (New York, Scribner, 1955)

Gross, H.H. "Tokyo Express", *Railroad magazine* 1947

Kaufman, Dave, "The 725th Railway Operating Battalion", *The Trading Post*, Jul-Sept 1995

Lyon, A..W. BG (Retd) interview by Cpt Thomas Swarren 22 Apr 85  
[http://www.lic.eustis.army.mil/documents/OCOT\\_Interviews/lyon.htm](http://www.lic.eustis.army.mil/documents/OCOT_Interviews/lyon.htm)

Massaro, Jay, "DIs", *The Trading Post*, Jan-Mar 1976

## US Army Trial Defense Service

Army Times

The Trial Defense Service, the Army's defense attorneys, have their own SSI. The CO of TDS insisted that their new SSI incorporate their old SSI, which was the Department of the Army Staff Support (DOASS). This was the original WW II insigne of the Army Service Forces.

The shield-shaped SSI represents the nature of TDS attorneys in defending thier clients; the scales of justice represent balanced justice, and sword reflects that TDS personnel are soldiers as well as attorneys; the SSI of DOASS completes the design.

TDS was activated in 1980, and was an element of DOASS. The CO decided

that having their own SSI was a way to show their independence. The current TO of TDS is approximately 300 soldiers.



JANUARY-MARCH 2007