

Running head: Flexibility and Adaptability

Flexibility and Adaptability

CSM Daniel A. Ames

MOS 00Z50

719th Transportation Company (Medium)

Operation Iraqi Freedom, OIF-1, Camp Arifjan, 1/19/03-4/5/04

3/12/08

USASMA Class 33

Unclassified

Platoon Sergeant

Abstract

This paper is about the flexibility and adaptability of the leadership and Soldiers of a transportation company. Two very different transportation elements that merged, mobilized and deployed and through the course of these events, the Soldiers found the constant need to be flexible and able to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances. The Soldiers in this unit found themselves having to work in unfamiliar jobs, being in charge of personnel who could not speak English.

Flexibility and Adaptability

My deployment started 15 January 2003. I was a platoon sergeant in the Headquarters and Headquarters Service Battery (HHS) 1st Battalion 156th Field Artillery of the New York Army Reserve National Guard (NYARNG) when I was ordered to report to the 719th Transportation, Medium Truck Company out of Harlem, NY. The 719th had just received their activation orders and were to be augmented by the approximately 40 personnel of the transportation platoon from the 427th Combat Support Battalion (CSB). The first challenge was the integration of the 427th into the 719th. I was in a unique position of not being from either unit and knowing no one. I could watch with no bias as the two units began to merge. To accommodate some of the more senior NCOs of the 427th TC the 719th TC had to realign their leadership positions. Some NCOs from the 719th in leadership positions had to step aside and allow a “new” Soldier from the 427th to take control of their former element. This didn’t set well with some of the Soldiers. Misconception and preconceived notions had to be overcome on both sides if we were going to work as one unit. Along with the differences of the unit makeup there were also the ethnic and cultural differences to comprehend. The 719th TC out of Harlem is an urban unit made up of predominately black and Hispanic Soldiers where as the 427th is a rural unit from Northern N.Y. mainly consisting of white Soldiers. While both units were transportation elements, differences between the two were vast. The 719th TC is a line haul unit, which is non-tactical and consists of civilian type tractor-trailers. They leave improved roads as little as possible and possess more technical than tactical experience. A draw back to this type of unit is a lack of organic assets for defense which requires external support for any operations that

may result in enemy contact. A plus for this unit is that it can move large quantities of materials quickly. The 427th is an element whose equipment and procedures are all designed for tactical operations. A unit like this can defend itself against an enemy attack but moves smaller quantities of materials at a much slower pace. These were big differences but they were far from the only ones. Each element had different Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and had different levels of training in tactical and technical areas. Personally issued equipment also varied between the two elements. The successful merging of these two very different units would be our make or break point. If we were going to operate as one unit the Soldiers would have to bridge these gaps. If we couldn't there would be little hope of accomplishing even the smallest of tasks.

We arrived at Fort Dix, our mobilization site, on January 19, 2003. During our mobilization it became apparent that some of the differences between the two elements, which had earlier appeared to be problems, had actually become assets. The Soldiers in the 427th were much more skilled in tactical operations where as the 719th was much more knowledgeable in line haul operations. Having Soldiers come from very different backgrounds also gave us different perspectives on obstacles we faced. This is where our training began as a single unit, not only our military training but also the formal and informal testing of each other to gauge our professional and personal standing.

The mobilization phase was a very tedious time for us. Due to the early stage in the war when we mobilized, with the exception of Warrior Skills, training at the site was mostly outdated. The main benefit we received from the training at Ft Dix was team building, which we needed with the Soldiers still testing each other's strength and weaknesses. Our vehicles were on ground and usable for training only for a short period of time before they were processed to ship.

Unfortunately we had no other access to training vehicles. Digging fighting positions in frozen ground and trying to stay warm in sub-zero weather didn't do much to prepare us for our actual mission, which would be driving on improved roads in very high temperatures. The phrases "sand table exercise" and "rock drills" became our mantra. Although not the best way to train it was our only option and the NCOs started living outside of the box, not just thinking there. The total time we were at the mobilization site was just under 90 days and with limited training materials we were all very anxious to leave our hosts at Fort Dix.

Once in country the unit needed filler missions to keep the Soldiers occupied until our equipment arrived, which would be almost two months later. Filler missions are valid missions, necessary to the overall war effort, but have no assigned units to perform them and are often completed by a unit that lacks its primary mission equipment. Filler missions can be a double-edged sword. They will keep your Soldiers occupied until you can perform your primary mission, but can develop into full time duty if there is no one to replace you. We started participating in right seat rides with the 360th TC (Medium Truck Tanker) out of Ft Carson, Colorado. Our riding with them gave their Soldiers some much needed time off and gave our Soldiers invaluable knowledge of the routes we were going to run. We started to receive filler missions we could do without our vehicles. The potential problem was how difficult it would be to disengage from them when our primary mission began. The NCOs in the unit were fast becoming experts at being flexible with the changing missions and having to adapt. The first filler mission we picked up was riding security for Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) convoys. From an informational standpoint my NCOs were gathering more information on routes and making contacts for future convoys, but from a tactical standpoint it made little sense. Only assigning six soldiers to protect a 60 vehicle convoy, two Soldiers per 20 vehicle serial, was

hardly sound tactical judgment. Another mission we were given was to cover as stevedores on the Port of Shuaiba, which we assigned a full platoon to. This mission was accepted with reservations due to the shortages of stevedors in country. It was one of those missions that had the possibility of becoming full time instead of a short term filler.

Once our equipment arrived in country our missions became a little more predictable. We would move incoming units vehicles and equipment from the Port of Shuaiba to Camp Udari for their train up phase and move trained units equipment as far north as Mosul, Iraq. Once off loading equipment at the incoming units destination was complete we would look for retrograde hauls going back to Camp Arifjan. We still had smaller missions consisting of two to four truck convoys inside Kuwait, which were considered local and less dangerous. I tasked my younger and less experienced NCOs with these to work on their convoy commander skills. It turned out to be extremely valuable training for them, honeing their skills and giving them added confidence in their ability and the ability of their teams.

Quite often our convoys were augmented with civilian contractors or Third Country Nationals (TCS). Contract vehicles being placed in our convoys did two things, it augmented our hauling capacity but deluted our combat effectivness. The TCNs I dealt with were mostly from Egypt, Pakistan, India, and the Phillipines. Very few of these operators could speak English and none of them were armed or trained in military convoy procedures. Their vehicles and equipment were substandard and in some cases so were their driving abilities. These drivers would bunch up if they were in an area they thought was dangerous because they were afraid of getting separated from the convoy. What they didn't understand was that it made us a larger target. They also placed value on their position within the convoy. They thought the closer to the front of the convoy the higher you were regarded so they would pass each other whenever possible,

safe or not. I had problems with several of them on a convoy with 11 contract vehicles and a final destination of Mosul. At our first stop at Camp Udari two of them ran into each other but were still operational. A third had broken conex locks so it couldn't be loaded and had to be replaced. Several had flat tires when we arrived at the Scania refuel site and another had to be left Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) when it had mechanical failure. Arriving at LSA Anaconda a contract vehicle rear-ended a military flat bed, putting yet another vehicle down and left behind. Our retrograde load from Mosul was rolling stock that required chains and binders. On the return trip we were forced to stop the convoy several times due to chains snapping on the contract vehicles, each time putting the whole convoy in danger. As the convoy was approaching Anaconda once again a contract vehicle rear-ended another, but both vehicles were still operational. South of BIAP the convoy had to stop for approximately 30 minutes for another contract vehicle to fix his throttle linkage. I don't believe the benefit of the extra hauling capacity provided by the contract vehicles outweighed the time delays and unnecessary exposure to possible enemy contact.

During our deployment I also witnessed a change in transportation doctrine. In the past, during an ambush, convoys vehicles were to exit the kill zone or be kept from entering it. If a vehicle was disabled in the kill zone the Soldier was to dismount and climb on to a passing vehicle. This made sense up until vehicles in the kill zone were given instructions to gain speed to exit the kill zone. This has now been changed to stopping the convoy outside the kill zone, returning fire and attempting to secure and clear personnel and equipment from the site. I believe this to be much better. In the beginning, during convoys going through towns and cities in heavy civilian traffic, we had a difficult time keeping civilians out of the convoys. We needed to come up with a non-lethal way to remove them from our convoys. As we continued to do

more missions we started to solve these problems. At times we had to be forceful but the civilians would comply. The dilemma was trying to balance force with compliance. Most civilian traffic didn't want to be in the middle of military convoy and would leave of their own volition. Others were a bit more stubborn and those were the ones I was concerned about. We would no longer allow civilian vehicles to pass our trail vehicle coming up from the rear. If a vehicle did make it into the convoy we would pull up along side it and wave them off the road. Luckily the civilian vehicles would remove themselves when we requested directly. Doctrine for transportation is now starting to reflect the real world situations in which we find ourselves.

Our redeployment and subsequent demobilization went without a hitch. There were no big outstanding issues, which bring me to the point of this paper. I believe there were no big issues because of flexibility. Two NYARNG units came together and could not have been more different, from the types of transportation units to the Soldiers themselves. The 719th TC and the 427th were both pulled away from their comfort zone yet were still being able to adapt to the ever-changing environment. The first challenge successfully met was internally at Fort Dix, with the two units merging Leaders, Soldiers and personalities. The second was arriving in country and picking up different types of filler missions, which we were not trained for but quickly adapted to in order to perform. Dealing with the civilian contractors was something I had never done before, whether they were Americans or Third Country nationals. We had to be flexible enough to work with them and accomplish the mission. Repeatedly flexibility proved the key to being able to deal with the circumstances we found ourselves in on convoys with the civilian Iraqi traffic and the changing convoy conditions. The flexibility shown by the Soldiers, NCOs, and officers at Ft Dix is what set the tone and carried us through the rest of our deployment.

