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Nonstandard Artillery Tasks during OIF III

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This Personal Experience Paper will discuss 1-9 FA's non-standard mission for an Artillery battalion during OIF III. I will discuss the numerous roles each battery performed in support of the Brigade. These missions include EOD escort, IED clearing, MiTT, PSD, counter-battery artillery, patrolling, raids, sniper ops, convoy escorts, and many more. Furthermore, I will end this paper with the critical lessons learned during training and actual combat operations in OIF III. This paper should inform the reader of the overwhelming demand the war in Iraq is placing on our Army to become Infantry Soldiers first. All other MOS skills and proficiency are now secondary in priority and probably will remain so for some time to come. Training in these areas is critical if non-Infantry units are to accomplish these missions in theatre.

My personal experience as an Artilleryman (13Z) began in July 1991. I attended Basic Combat Training (BCT) and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at Ft Sill, Oklahoma. Upon Graduation in December 1991, I attained the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) of 13P Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS)/Lance Fire Direction Specialist (FDC). In January 1992, I reported to Germany for my first duty station and joined B 6-29 FA (MLRS) in Idar-Oberstein. Two years later, I received orders for PCS to Ft Sill, OK where I assumed duties as an MLRS Firing Platoon FDC Chief in B 6-32 FA (MLRS). In March 1995, I reclassified to MOS 13M MLRS Crew Member. I returned to the same unit upon graduation and executed duties as a MLRS Gunner. Three months later, I achieved SSG and became a MLRS Section Chief. Shortly thereafter, The Army selected me for Drill Sergeant Duty. After completion of the Drill Sergeant Course, I returned to Ft Sill's Artillery Training Center (ATC) as an AIT Drill Sergeant for 13F Forward Observers. Finishing the tour in ATC, I attained selection to the rank of SFC and attended the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC). My next assignment would be in Ft Hood as a Firing Platoon Sergeant. While at Ft Hood, I later took over the Support Platoon Sergeant position. Next, after being hand picked to do so, I went to NTC as the Operations Sergeant for the battalion Operations and Intelligence section. In 2001, I moved on to 2ID in Korea. While stationed at Camp Stanley, Uijonbu I held a position as a Firing Platoon Sergeant in B 1-38 FA (MLRS) when the next promotion to Master Sergeant (MSG) would come. Six months later, I obtained orders to Ft Stewart, GA. I was now part of the 3rd ID and positioned as a First Sergeant (1SG) in SVC Battery, 1-9 FA (DS). This was my first time assigned to an M109A6 Paladin battalion and in a Direct Support (DS) role. My unit deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Desert Spring (ODS) in

September 2002. I joined them in November once I was fully in-processed and prepped to deploy. Just before our scheduled re-deployment, orders were issued to prepare for Operation Iraqi Freedom. We fought the initial phase of the war overthrowing Sadaam Hussein and occupying Baghdad. The Division later moved to Fallujah, until we were relieved and redeployed home. The 2 BCT, 3 ID spent 12 months in theatre. We made it home in August 2003.

The continuity of leaders from OIF I to OIF III was about half. Approximately, 43 percent of the NCOs and Soldiers were veterans of OIF I. This was reassuring despite the fact the senior leadership was all new. Despite being new, the Battalion Commander and the Executive Officer were at least combat veterans.

Returning to Iraq two years after returning from OIF I, promised to be a completely different experience for those of us in the battalion that fought in that phase of the war. The mission in Iraq was entirely different from our initial force on force mission in 2003. Many factors changed the mission and the Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) for combat missions in theatre. OIF I for our battalion was a completely traditional Artillery mission of supporting the maneuver units in the assault on Baghdad. We shot thousands of Artillery rounds on the enemy and the country's infrastructure. This time would be different. OIF I was a challenge of logistics. The speed of battle placed severe demands on ammunition, fuel, food, as well as all the other classes of supply. OIF III however, posed completely different challenges.

Garrison Operations were completely different after OIF I in the 3 ID. "Sergeant's Time" was no longer a focus. Sergeant's Time Training was now every day. With the new type of Guerilla Warfare in Iraq, our purpose and direction changed in regards to training. We now

re-focused on becoming Infantrymen. Training on advanced rifle marksmanship, convoy live-fire, Improvised Explosive Device identification and reaction drills, patrolling, Traffic Control Point (TCP) operations, Raids, Close Quarters Combat (CQC), and Urban assault techniques to name a few. We referenced the Infantry manuals and regulations, as well as using Infantry NCOs to train our people on these tactics. The majority of the Artillery Soldiers were excited about this new challenge. This was a change in pace and promised them a new role in combat that they all thought they could handle very well given the opportunity. Another completely foreign concept to the Artillery was Sniper Operations. However, we received high-powered rifles and spotting scopes to do just that. Two of my NCOs attended the Army Sniper Course at Ft Benning, GA. Although they completed the course and graduated top of their class above the Infantry classmates, the Artillery NCOs were not authorized the Sniper Identifier in their records. This was frustrating for the Soldiers and me alike. I had felt like they earned it, especially after finishing top of the class. However, the bottom line was they received the training and they were good.

The two years off between OIF I and OIF III were very busy with all of this training. We spent a significant time in the field in preparation for every level of evaluation. We culminated our training with rotations to the National Training Center (NTC) and to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). Both of which were scenario driven to emulate situations in Iraq. Most, if not all training was very good and prepared the unit for the upcoming mission to OIF III.

Our battalion was not sure what our mission would be in Iraq all the way, up until we actually arrived in Baghdad. Our battalion performed extremely well in many non-traditional Artillery roles in both training centers. Therefore, the Brigade Commander was not sure how to best utilize us. The missions fluctuated between FOB security, Counter Fire (Hot Platoon), EOD

Escort, and finally our own Area of Responsibility (AOR) in Sector. The decision initially split the battalion into a number of missions. A Battery would get its own AOR; B Battery (my battery) would split into two missions. First was counter-fire Platoon attached to 3-15 INF at FOB Hope. Second, was EOD escort and security operations. The counter-fire mission was a typical Artillery mission conducted by a very competent Platoon Sergeant and Platoon Leader team. I was not pleased about them now attached to another unit and living away from me and my commander but this is the nature of Artillery. EOD escort on the other hand was a new mission and one we had not trained on to this point. We trained on certain aspects of the security mission, but had never physically trained with an EOD unit and they had their own TTPs that we would need to learn and adapt too. Our primary concern was the EOD tech's safety during any EOD mission outside the FOB. Those missions included post-blast analysis, cache destruction or removal, IED and VBIED elimination, and mine disposal or clearing.

2nd Platoon conducted this mission. They took it very serious and received commendations later by the Commanding General for the best EOD security in the Division AOR. The escort team had a lot of fun, although dangerous, getting to see things blown up on a daily basis was a positive booster on the morale of the team. However, IEDs began to become more deadly and their damage was horrific. These men conducted post blast analysis of every IED that resulted in loss of equipment, Injury, and death of a Soldier. This was a gruesome and disturbing task at times and proved to be a challenge to the stamina and psyche of the men. We implemented TTPs that prevented unnecessary personnel from actually going up to the carnage and witnessing the horror. I recommended counseling for those that needed it and that seemed to get the teams through it all. The EOD escort teams continued this portion of our mission

throughout the entire twelve months in theatre and effected the elimination of thousands of tons of munitions. They were a total success and lost no Soldiers in the process. After a couple of months of shooting zero artillery rounds from FOB Hope, the Brigade Commander decided to move the counter-fire platoon to a FOB further south in order to range a city called Salmon Pak. This was the next hotbed of insurgent activity. One month later, zero rounds fired. Finally, the counter-fire platoon returned to FOB Loyalty and rejoined the rest of the battery. The Guns remained parked in the motor pool and they essentially stayed there unused for the rest of the year.

Now 1st Platoon acquired the mission to clear route “Pluto” of IEDs. That mission came to us with an average of 25 IED incidents per month for the last three months. That platoon’s efforts reduced the IEDs to a total of five in the next three-month period. They were hugely successful and positively impacted the civilians along that route. During this time, that platoons, two patrol sections took strikes from three IEDs. None of the devices caused significant damage or injury to the patrols. That same platoon undertook numerous different missions. They became the “do all” platoon. They conducted every type of mission imaginable. Examples would be, IED clearing on routes, PSD missions, UAV team escort, QRF, Outer Cordon for A Battery’s raids, etc. The list goes on.

In June 2005, I became the NCOIC for a Military in Transition Team (MiTT). I was to go to Adahmiah, Iraq to train an Iraqi Infantry Battalion from the enlisted perspective. I was not happy about this mission because it removed me from my battery. I had full competence in my two Platoon Sergeants to handle things in my absence but it was still not a comfortable feeling. However, I had orders to execute, so I did. I only spent a month with the Iraqi Battalion. That month was interesting to say the least. Everyday, we were mortared, shot at,

attacked with many VBIEDs, and so on. We were a small team of nine personnel. The OIC was my battalion XO and he was extremely talented. We trained the Iraqis' on weapon firing, maneuver, planning, tracking, discipline, organization, etc. All the basics you would expect a professional Army to understand. They did not have a clue, but did make small improvements over time. Two months later the XO attained a promotion to LTC and assumed command of the BDE MiTT. This was a good experience but I was glad to get back to my battery. Shortly after returning to the unit, I went on R and R leave. I was excited to go, but again felt uncomfortable being away from my troops. The day I returned from leave was a good day until 2300 that night. One of first platoon's patrol teams encountered an IED attack. The TC, SGT Arthur R. McGill died instantly from shrapnel wounds to his temple. The shrapnel went straight through his helmet. The driver, SPC Benton, received severe leg wounds from the blast. He lost most of his lower left leg muscle and was in severe pain. The Gunner, SPC Flores, reacted valorously and deservingly received a commendation for those actions. He was able to some how keep the presence of mind to evaluate SGT McGill, account for the sensitive items, contact the patrol leader and perform first aid on the driver. His actions saved SPC Benton's leg and enabled the patrol leader to control the situation swiftly and accurately. The loss of SGT McGill was tough for the battery. His passing was devastating to his friends and to his Section Chief. We conducted the memorial ceremony for Sgt McGill and that helped us move on and continue the mission. We bought KIA bracelets for the whole battery and everyone wore them in his remembrance. SGT McGill's picture hung on the wall next to the orderly room. Soldiers would write memoirs to him on the walls surrounding his picture.

Our mission would change again shortly after the passing of SGT McGill. We were relieved of the IED clearing missions and given an AOR. We conducted this AOR mission with

three patrol sections. One of which we took from the EOD escort mission. Now the Forward Support Company would have to provide a patrol section for that mission. B Battery would still Head the EOD effort with one experienced team. Once given our AOR, we began all the responsibilities of owning an AOR. This included patrolling the area, meeting the people, humanitarian drops, project management, Raids, Sniper missions, Clearing Operations, Joint missions with the Iraqi Police, Intelligence gathering, etc. All of which were tasks we trained for and executed flawlessly. The battalion was now officially a maneuver unit and no longer an Artillery Battalion. We had a huge impact on our area, which was east of the Tigris River in Baghdad. We arrested hundreds of insurgents, disposed of tons of munitions and weapons, and changed the relationship with the IP's and the local government for the better. We knew we accomplished a mission we were not structured to accomplish and it felt good.

We learned many lessons during OIF III. Overall, we learned how to be flexible and prepared for any mission given. We were under-manned and ill equipped but got the job done. The most critical lessons learned were the following: Every soldier must be proficient in his warrior tasks and drills. All soldiers are experts in first aid. Drivers training and roll-over drills on an M1114 are critical. Weapons' clearing is always battle-buddy supervised. Always have communication with your elements, dismounted or mounted. PCCs and PCIs are crucial to mission success and safety when in theatre, leaders must be ruthless in this procedure or Soldiers will die. Ethical behavior was a combat multiplier in Iraq. Take every training event serious because it will save lives in combat.