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Gary A Bryant

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1SG A Btry 3/13<sup>th</sup> FA BN (A-TRAIN)

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## Abstract

This paper talk's about my deployment to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom OIF III. My job as the 1SG of A BTRY (MLRS) 3/13<sup>th</sup> FA BN was to deploy to Southwest Asia in support of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.

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## Mission Accomplished

On July 16, 2004, A and B Battery, 3-13<sup>th</sup> FA BN received orders to deploy to Southwest Asia in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom III to provide fire support for XVIII Airborne Corps Artillery. Soon after those initial deployment orders, HHB was added to provide command and control to support the firing batteries. The battalion conducted numerous fire support and reflexive field training exercises including a National Training Center rotation and a deployment to Ft. Chaffee in September 2004 to prepare for the demanding nonstandard missions of counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. The battalion then finished the first phase of operations completing every deployment gate and prepped its equipment and Soldiers to deploy to the Middle East for OIF III.

The Battalion advance party (ADVON), consisting of selected staff and senior leaders, deployed January 24, 2005. They spent five days laying the foundation for the battalion's arrival in Kuwait. The main body, HHS Battery and Bravo Battery, flew out of Lawton Airport on the morning of January 28, 2005 after saying good bye to family member and friends. The trail element, Alpha Battery, closed in Kuwait on January 30 reforming the Battalion in Southwest Asia.

The Battalion conducted Reception, Staging, Onward movement, and Integration (RSOI) at Camp Buehring, Kuwait for 17 days. This as hectic as the A-Train Soldiers became acclimated to the desert climate, downloaded and transported home station equipment from Arifjan to Camp Buerhring, conducted rigorous convoy training, and prepared equipment for the ground assault convoy (GAC) to Butler Range Complex (BRC) and Forward Operating Base (FOB) Summerall. The increased operations tempo (OPTEMPO) would define the battle rhythm

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of the entire deployment. The Soldiers performed superbly, accomplishing all critical requirements in order to set the conditions for the movement north.

The battalion sent an ADVON north to link up with 1-33 FA (MLRS) at FOB Summerall, and A Battery's ADVON to Butler range Complex on February 10<sup>th</sup>. Both ADVON enabled the battalion to prepare for the Relief In Place and Transfer Of Authority (RIP/TOA). After 17 days of training, preparation, and reconnoitering, it was time for Force Package 9 which consisted of 3/13<sup>th</sup> FA BN and small elements of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division DIVARTY to leave the tents at Camp Buehring behind and transition into combat operations in Iraq starting with the dangerous road march north on MSR Tampa. Early on February 17<sup>th</sup>, my Soldiers, who had prepositioned their equipment with 2 BDE, 3ID at Camp New York, started our movement to Navistar in two serials. Shortly thereafter, Bravo and HHS followed with four more serials as all units closed on Navistar, the last time the battalion would be together before redeployment. All six serials, consisting of more than 300 motivated Soldiers, crossed the international border between Kuwait and Iraq early on February 18<sup>th</sup>, driving home station equipment with thin, "hill billy" armor kits installed with tape, type II nylon or anything else we could use. With one hour intervals between serials, units started the first leg of the trip to Cedar II, a convoy support center (CSC) along MSR Tampa. It was a four hour drive that ended with a refuel on the move. After a brief two hour stop, the next move was to Scania, which is just south of Baghdad. We remained here over night based on enemy threats along MSR Tampa.

The intelligence update indicated significant enemy activity along MSR Tampa and the support routes around Baghdad. The routes the battalion was scheduled to use were under constant attack by improvised explosive device (IED) strikes and small arms fire daily. The battery spent eight hours refitting, regrouping, and sleeping before being ordered to move. As

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we left Scania, the traffic over the "Sheriff's" net described IED sweep teams spotting several IEDs and requesting EOD teams for controlled detonations. As the convoy approached a critical intersection the platoon leader spotted an IED and executed the reaction drill the unit had rehearsed at Camp Buehring. Due to the quick reaction the IED was defused by EOD and later destroyed. The A-TRAIN had completed its trip to Butler Range Complex as HHS and B Battery continued to FOB Summerall.

The road march to our forward operating position was significant for the battery with no injuries, minor tracer fire and only a few vehicles requiring towing which happened to be mind. The total distance traveled was over 600km and the success of the battery in this critical first step into Iraq set the stage for continued success.

As HHS and B Battery conducted operations from FOB Summerall, the A-TRAIN Soldiers assumed command of Butler Range Complex. It did not take long for the battery to set the conditions for success east of Baghdad. We quickly manned four towers and one gate and established a full time quick reactionary force (QRF) that responded to any insurgent activity on or off the FOB. Butler Range Complex required 60 of my Soldiers to man four towers, one gate, and a base reaction force. The requirement to provide fires support with the MLRS around the clock was extremely difficult. The mission at Butler Range Complex was unique among the units of the Task Force. A Battery occupied the range complex as a single unit with no external support or direct oversight. The A-TRAIN Soldiers seized the initiative by conducting patrols and MEDCAPs in the local villages, upgraded the severely ignored facilities and infrastructure, and quickly took the lead in coordinating with 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division for funding and contracts to improve the range and quality of life for the Soldiers. I must say that this tested all of my leadership skills to keep the Soldiers focused on the task at hand. Butler Range became a vital

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training ground for Coalition Forces and the Iraqi Army, and the A-TRAIN Soldiers did a superb job handling every mission they were given.

The M31 guided unitary rocket changed the tactical capabilities of M270A1 equipped MLRS units. During OIF III area munitions were not authorized due to high collateral damage. The only munitions authorized for MLRS were guided. Once the M31 was fielded A Battery and our sister B Battery north of Baghdad quickly executed test fires Bayji to validate the capabilities of the rocket. Both test fires proved the accuracy of the weapon at ranges out to 63km. The success of the test firing quickly led to the repositioning of forces. In July 2005, Task Force 3/13 received orders to move two platoons in support of Operation Al Sayaid (Hunter) in the Task Force Freedom AO. Task Force Freedom (TFF) consisted of 1-25 SBCT, 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR, and the Headquarters Troop of the 11<sup>th</sup> ACR. In addition, TF 3-13 deployed LNO teams to the TFF headquarters in Mosul and into Combat Outpost (COP) Rawah to coordinate operations. Shortly after receiving orders, my 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon moved to COP Rawah in the middle of the Al Jazeera desert. This really had a drastic effect on my mission at Butler Range Complex.

In the southwestern sector of TFF 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon quickly occupied and trained for combat operations in support of TF 145, 2-14 CAV, 1-25 SBCT, and 1 MARDIV. COP Rawah was located in a very austere environment with constant dust storms and limited hardened facilities approximately 15 KM north of the town of Rawah. This was Viking living at its best with no morale boosters for the Soldiers. Rawah along the Eurphrates river, was an insurgent focal point because of the bridge across the river. 1-25 SBCT occupied the COP in July 2005 and began clearing the area of insurgents. The training and discipline the battery practiced daily paid off on 11 September when they were called on to provide GMLRS fires. 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon fired six M31

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rockets destroying the Mish'al bridge being used by insurgent forces to transport fighters and weapons in the Al Anbar province in Western Iraq. A battery and B battery 3-13<sup>th</sup> FA were the first MLRS units to fire the GMLRS in Urban Combat Operations. It not only was able to hit enemy positions with a great deal of precision from 60 kilometers away, but was able to limit collateral damage. The physical and psychological effect the system had on the enemy was extremely valuable.

Throughout the deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom III the A-TRAIN Soldiers proved its value to the Multi-National Corps Iraq. While performing the primary mission of providing fires for the MNC-I commander, the battery also conducted numerous other missions displaying the unmatched flexibility and capabilities of a MLRS battery. During the deployment the battalion received 100 indirect fire attacks resulting in one Wounded in Action (WIA), four direct fire attacks, discovered one VBIED, and had seven IEDs detonate on seven separate convoys resulting in four WIA, one KIA and damaging one M270A1, one M1114, and three M985s. 3-13 FA was the first MLRS unit to fire GMLRS in combat and fired 31 M31 rockets in support of TF Freedom and II MARDIV. The successes the A-TRAIN Soldiers enjoyed were a true testament to the Soldiers and leaders, their hard work, sacrifices and loyalty to the 1SG and Commander of this great outfit.

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## APPENDIX A:

- (1) Advance party (ADVON)
- (2) Reception, Staging, Onward movement and Integration (RSOI)
- (3) Ground assault convoy (GAC)
- (4) Butler Range Complex (BRC)
- (5) Forward operating base (FOB)
- (6) Operations tempo (OPTEMPO)
- (7) Relief in place and transfer of Authority (RIP/TOA)
- (8) Division Artillery (DIVARTY)
- (9) Convoy support center (CSC)
- (10) Improvised explosive device (IED)
- (11) Quick reactionary force (QRF)
- (12) Task force freedom (TFF)
- (13) Combat outpost (COP)
- (14) Wounded in action (WIA)
- (15) Vehicle borne explosive (VBIED)

## PUBLISH ARTICLES:

Field Artillery: A Fires Battalion in OIF III, Jul-Aug 2006

3-13FA BN: Operation Iraqi Freedom III