

Non-Standard Mission, Standard Excellence

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Abstract

In the beginning of 2004, the 115th Field Artillery Brigade Headquarters Battery sent a command element forward to conduct a non-standard mission, for an artillery unit, to provide a security element headquarters for a theater level command. The actions then changed again as the unit was split again to provide command post operations for the tenant and transient unit camps in Kuwait. The actions of the NCOs and their soldiers were above standard in almost every way. The task they faced was tremendous and arduous for soldiers not trained as support personnel. I intend to show that their achievements forged a new standard for camp operations throughout the theater, while also operating in a non-linear environment. It also provided the unit with a new SOP for non-standard operations.

When the 115th Field Artillery Brigade Headquarters Battery deployed in January 2004, the unit took on a difficult and non-standard mission for an artillery unit headquarters, force protection. As basically an oversized operations section, the unit took the command staff augmented with soldiers from the unit, and operated a force protection unit for the 377th Theater Support Command, then as that mission changed, became smaller operational cells to man mayor's cells for the transient and tenant unit camps in Kuwait. The missions required a fast "catch", or train-up, for the staff and soldiers and an expedited "hand off" of the mission from the unit replaced, from the Kansas National Guard. Upon receipt of the mission, the brigade was required to fill a manning roster with minimal preparation time, so soldiers was selected based on a variety of skills. The normal planning considerations were taken, and civilian occupational skills were factored in to round out the deployment robustly.

In the initial phase of the deployment, the staff operated in support of the 377th Theater Support command as the force protection office, while a small detachment was assigned directly to the ARCENT Kuwait Command Staff for operational support. Many portions of the staff operated in their assigned MOS and as an assigned battle staff, which it normally did during other brigade deployments. The major change occurred as, the 377th TSC mission changed and the brigade staff was split out to run mayor cells throughout the theater. The force protection mission was normally a brigade staff

function, but the size differential encountered challenged the operational capacity of the personnel. Additionally, the unit had to operate in a joint environment, which hadn't happened before. Naval units operated in the theater, as did their Marine counterparts. Medical support came from the Air Force contingent in country, as did the veterinary support. Along with these interactions came encounters with civilian contractors. While the senior NCOs were halfway adept as these encounters, it was quite a learning curve for the rest of the soldiers. And as a mayor cell staff, it was also incumbent upon these soldiers to master all the tasks before them rapidly, to be able to serve needs of the customer units.

As a staff of the mayor cell at Camden Yards on Camp Arifjan, we had to emplace and operate our own communications systems, to include the electrical supply. The major mechanical support came from the ARCENT DPW office, but there were instances where we were required to power up our office trailers without DPW support. Fortunately we had three personnel who had experience as electricians and phone installers. The wire support personnel from the battery (155th HHB personnel) also were busy between three camps in a 50 mile zone assisting each camp when available. Our camp also had to be cleaned up to allow for expansion, which involved moving and discarding of approximately 8 tons of debris and discarded materials from departed units moving forward into Iraq. NCOs were tasked with devising the missions on their own and determining end state without much supervision. This required forward thinking and large amounts of initiative and ingenuity. But with minimal guidance, piece by piece, it

happened and in the span of two months, ground was prepared and covered with new tent pads and filled with soldiers. Safety was also paramount in all these activities, and without a great deal of upper level input, the NCOs conducted a daily risk analysis, carried out job safety briefings when beginning all activities, resulting in mission accomplishment with no lost time due to injuries. The initiative if these individuals carried the day on occasions too numerous to list, and they did this with conspicuous motivation and dedication.

As non-standard operations continue to develop, it is increasingly important for NCOs to be able to operate fluently in a joint environment. Greater technical capability is important, and as an artillery unit, it was unconventional for us to delve so deeply into a mission predominantly performed by quartermaster and logistics units. But the unique thing about a National Guard unit is the additional skills brought along with its soldiers. A trucking company on the camp had an astonishing readiness rate (94%) due to the civilian acquired skills of its mechanics. We were fortunate to have the computer skills of a forest service IT employee to allow us to develop and troubleshoot our server nets and their interfaces with the ARCENT wire feeds which dramatically reduced system failures. This greatly enhanced the success of the mission with noteworthy readiness and responsiveness. We also had a civilian engineer who possessed a great deal of insight into how to develop a future model of usage that would facilitate increased availability of communication assets. As a result, we developed several SOPs for the follow-on units to use and modify to be successful and enhance the quality of life for the soldiers on the camp. Moreover, their skill and attention to detail also trimmed the overall expense per soldier for operation of the camp. The underlying qualities and traits exhibited by those

NCOs and their soldiers are the hallmark of legendary leaders faced with overwhelming challenges. As the deployment culminated with the arrival of the replacement unit, the NCOs who led these extraordinary efforts were held in high esteem by the NCOs who replaced them. The ARCENT Kuwait staff also recognized their high degree of professionalism and technical competence, and was grateful for the support to the development of a new SOP for camp operations throughout the theater. Additionally, the sailors and airmen who worked alongside the NCOs expressed their gratitude for the lessons learned and exchanged with their army counterparts.