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Personal Experience Paper 1

Running Head: Corps Fires in Iraq

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Abstract

The Fifth (V) United States Corps Artillery (VCA) planned, prepared, delivered, and assessed effects with a wide range of fire support assets before and during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The VCA trained, deployed, adapted to an ever-changing situation, and provided effective and responsive fires in support of the commander's scheme of maneuver during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On 201519ZMAR03, 2-4 FA (MLRS) executed fire plan "Unitary." The 13 unitary ATACMS fired represented V Corps' opening salvo in OIF, which was synchronized with CENTCOM's initial cruise missile strikes into Baghdad. The targets were Corps, division, Corps artillery and division artillery command posts from Al Basrah to An Nasiriyah to Al Amarah-- some 210 kilometers away¹.

Beginning in 2002 the Corps artillery and all supporting elements were war-fighting scenarios in preparation for a possible war with Iraq. Though diplomatic efforts were on going the viable threat of military action to thwart the plans of the Iraqi regime and enforce United Nations resolutions dictated that the United States Army prepare for any eventuality. The last resort was to move into Iraq, toward Baghdad and forcibly remove the Iraqi regime led by the despot, Saddam Hussein. V Corps received the mission of orchestrating and leading the force to do that, if called upon, led by Lieutenant General (LTG) William Wallace. While unofficial war gaming may have been going on for some time, V Corps deployed to Kuwait in October 2003 along with the headquarters elements of it's supporting fires unit, V Corps Artillery (VCA). There we linked up with a portion of the Third Infantry Division and awaited further arrivals to form the force that would eventually execute the initial phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

MSG Ebbs was the VCA G2 Intelligence Sergeant at the time and had held the job for five months. A few weeks before the deployment he was also given the job of being the Corps Counter-Fire Officer due to the Chief Warrant Officer four (CW4), that normally held that position, becoming ill and being returned stateside. The world of intelligence was new to him and what's more, the counter-fire piece was something that he knew very little about. The learning

curve would be quick and harsh, as the counter-fire fight would prove to be crucial in the war to come.

The Soldiers and leaders worked hard to train and prepare for the potential fight to come, all the while hoping that there would be a diplomatic solution, and we would all pack up and go home. It was not to be. The unit conducted many training exercises to strengthen our war fighting skills and improve teamwork with the headquarters that would interface with the Corps artillery. VCA had been training for months, on several different courses of action, before it deployed to the Kuwaiti theater and Camp Virginia. We knew almost exactly what the Iraqi army had and where it was. If we received the word to go we were confident that the enemy would not stand a chance against our superior weapons, tactics, and warrior skills. However, the enemy that we trained for did not exactly match the enemy we encountered... they rarely do.

The challenge of the Force Field Artillery Headquarters was to put together an FA organization for combat that would support the fight that the Corps commander envisioned. All the planning that we had conducted for months became obsolete when the news came down that we would begin the fight with what we had on the ground, which was not much. As we crept closer and closer to crossing “the burm” the VCA G3 had to constantly reshape the organization for combat. This would happen repeatedly as we near the start of hostilities and again as we completed each phase of the operation.

What should have been at least 5 field artillery brigades with 15 to 18 battalions to support this operation turned out to be just one battalion to start with, 2-4 FA (Multiple Launch Rocket System or MLRS) which was a part of the 214 FA Brigade, out of Fort Sill, Oklahoma. While this

was all that we had if hostilities started right away, we were constantly hoping that the war would not “kick off” until those battalions, that we knew were on the way, arrived.

The G2 cell, along with the planners worked continuously to reconstruct an ever-changing task organization. With a constantly changing timeline and the adoption of variations of courses of action (COA), the VCA G3/G2 planners had to rework the Field Artillery Support Plan continually. These plans would change again as another MLRS battalion 1-27 FA of the 41st FA Brigade arrived from Germany and we were certainly glad to have this added asset on the ground. This unit had arrived just in time because, though most people were not aware at the time, the war would start shortly afterward.

The Third Infantry Division (mech) and 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) each had their own supporting Division Artillery headquarters with three battalions apiece. The VCA G3 then task organized the two brigade headquarters, each with only one battalion on the ground, to the divisions: one to each division. The only other ground forces in the fight was the First Marine Expeditionary Force to our flank, which we called IMEF, and one British division. Could this small force take on up to 20 Iraqi divisions including the supposed fearless Iraqi Republican Guard? We would soon find out.

The challenges of a volatile situation required fluidity from all the sections in VCA. The G2 section coordinated with the fires and effects coordination cell (FECC) to modify the targeting plans, as well as the counter-fire plans based on the most recent intelligence reports.

Under the direction and guidance of the VCA headquarters, units fired more than 18,000 projectiles, over 800 multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) rockets, and more than 400 Army tactical missile system (ATACMS) missiles in support of the scheme of maneuver.

ATACMS fires were effective against a large number of targets on the battlefield. However, ATACMS required a dual-purpose improved conventional munition (DPICM) in order to be effective in counterfire operations against hard targets such as tanks and artillery. DPICM reduced the range of this system and, in the instances that these munitions would not be effective against a specific type of target, VCA coordinated with the Air Force cell co-located with the Corps to direct or redirect air assets to the target. The cooperation between the Army and Air Force proved to be decisive in many of the counter-fire engagements. We developed a well-tuned battle drill between the G2 counterfire cell, the FECC, and the Air Operations cell to bring quick and effective fires on all those deep targets that were out of the range of the two divisions' counterfire assets. As many of these target were executed we were able to watch the deliver via the Hunter or Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) hovering above the target area. This brought great satisfaction to the entire VCA team to see the devastating effects in real time from a few hundred miles away.

In conclusion, the Corps artillery provided timely and accurate fires in support of the maneuver commander's plan. VCA constantly adapted to every new situation and its effectiveness in the swift and decisive victory against a numerically superior force was clearly evident as the Corps pushed to Baghdad. However, there were many challenges that these great leaders and Soldier overcame through hard work, diligence, and perseverance.

Bibliography

1. Extract from the Field Artillery Journal, Sept-Oct, 2003 by Theodore J. Janosko, Robert G. Cheatham, Jr. (Colonel Janosko commanded V Corps Artillery and LTC Cheatham was the G3)