

Running Head: The Red Dragons Go to Iraq

The Red Dragons Go to Iraq

MSG Jeffrey O. Adams

Deployment, OIF III, FOB: Summerall, Iraq, 01/28/2005

63Z58, Senior Maintenance Supervisor/1SG, 3-13th FA Bn (OIF III)



24 August 2006

Class 57

Abstract

This paper will address the deployment of the 3-13th Field Artillery Battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom III. The unit had many non-artillery missions including Force Protection and Combat Patrols. The use of crater analysis became a great asset for projectiles that the radar could not identify. The 3-13th Field Artillery Battalion is a MLRS unit that tested GMLRS rockets in combat on live targets. The unit was a test pilot for doctrinal change. MLRS units deploy as a battery with command and control over platoons. The battalion deployed platoons as separate units, but needed maintenance and supply equipment, tools, and personnel. This paper assesses these types of deployments, and addresses the need for MTOE changes for additional personnel, tools, and equipment to ensure success on today's battlefield.

The Red Dragons go to Iraq

My name is MSG Adams and I have 15 year of service in the United States Army. I entered the Army as a Light Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic (63B). I became a Mechanical Maintenance Supervisor (63Z) after my promotion to MSG. I served in various positions in ten different units as a Motor Sergeant, Battalion Motor Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, Senior Instructor Writer, Senior Maintenance Supervisor and as a 1SG.

I deployed as the Senior Maintenance Supervisor with the 3-13th Field Artillery (FA) Battalion in January of 2005, midway through the deployment, I became the Headquarter and Headquarters Service Battery (HHS) 1SG. I trained with the battalion for a full year prior to the deployment. We had several on post as well as two off post field exercises. I knew we might not have a traditional FA mission; consequently we trained on more than just our METL and Battle Tasks.

Before our deployment to Iraq, my battalion received additional training. In April 2004, I deployed to the National Training Center (NTC) with the 3rd Infantry Division (ID) to prepare for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) III. This was a great opportunity for me to train for the deployment. I deployed as the Battalion Maintenance Officer, Battalion Maintenance Technician, and the Senior Maintenance Supervisor. We trained on our Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) missions and non-rocket missions. During the deployment, the 3rd ID had daily maintenance meetings. I convoyed all logistical personnel to the Forward Support Battalion (FSB) every day. I attended the maintenance meeting, while my logistical personnel completed their daily duties in the FSB. We convoyed back to the battalion area at the end of each mission. 1SGs in field artillery units are normally the convoy commanders of logistical operations. I had problems the first day and decided to consolidate the logistical

convoys. I made a suggestion to the battalion commander and he thought this would be a good plan to allow the battery's to keep more of their personnel on site for security.

Additionally, we went on several field-training exercises on Ft. Sill. We used several post live fire ranges. The ranges were helpful, but lacked realism. I felt that it was hard to make training life-like in some aspects. My problem with this technique is that a Soldier rode in a 5 Ton wheeled-vehicle or in a HMMWV and fired his personal weapon. In Iraq, you move around the battlefield in an armored vehicle and one Soldier fires from a ring mounted firing position with a M240B or a M2. Therefore, I felt that the training was good, but didn't prepare the soldiers for the true battlefield.

CSM White, our Battalions Command Sergeant Major and I decided to make essential personnel changes to the maintenance teams to ensure each battery received at least one experienced mechanic for each piece of equipment. I moved maintenance personnel from the batteries to ensure the right people would complement each other. We requested additional personnel to train and deploy with the battalion. Our brigade started filling the battalion with new Soldiers and we went from 70 percent to about 85 percent of MTOE strength. I feel that this can help a unit, but can also hinder the unit at the same time. The new Soldiers do not know the total mission and often times have difficulty integrating successfully into the unit.

I deployed the battalion maintenance team to Ft. Chaffee in October 2004, just a few months before our deployment to Iraq. We reviewed lessons learned and After Action Reviews (AAR) and I suggested that we drive the wheeled-vehicles and rail track-vehicles to Ft. Chaffee to ensure the wheeled vehicles were capable of moving an extended distance. This turned out to be a good decision that identified troublesome vehicles. Overall, the three-week exercise went well for most of the battalion.

I received additional maintenance personnel and placed them into MTOE positions after a short interview process. We were at 95 percent of MTOE strength in late December, which lead to hand receipt problems later in the deployment, because different Soldiers needed to sign for their equipment. I informed the HHS commander of problems with the maintenance hand receipts after the new personnel arrived to the unit. He did not seem concerned and did not take my advice to check for discrepancies. I wanted to have the new Soldiers sign for the equipment before we left, but he thought this would not matter because he planned to write off missing items during the deployment. This commander lasted about six months and then moved to work in the S-3 shop.

I deployed to Kuwait for OIF III January 28, 2005. During our two weeks at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, our unit went through classes and training to prepare for our movement into Iraq. My Soldiers picked up equipment at the port for three to four days. During this time, we conducted maintenance and repaired vehicles in preparation for the road march. We signed for and trained on factory-armored vehicles (M1114) designed to escort the convoys. I suggested to the battalion commander to do some additional drivers training on the M1114s to license the drivers on the new piece of equipment. I informed him that the new vehicles would roll over easier, because the M1114 is heavier or more top-heavy than a M998.

We put some add-on armor on all the deploying vehicles. We referred to this additional armor as "Hillbilly Armor." My maintenance personnel placed doors and a side plate on each side, which still was not adequate to ensure Soldier safety. I worked with my soldiers until 0300 in the morning, because we had to finish that day. We were scheduled to start the day before at 1300. Vehicles needed under armor as well to be even remotely safe to drive. It was our unit's responsibility to affix the add-on armor on.

I became ill with an upper respiratory infection. I fought the infection for a week, but my condition gradually worsened. Our Physician's Assistant had limited medical supplies so he sent me to the camp hospital. I received antibiotics at the camp hospital and started feeling better a few days later. We had about ninety people in each tent, so different types of viruses spread to many of our people during the first two weeks in Kuwait. This hampered the unit's ability to complete some of the essential training. Therefore, some of the Soldiers lacked the same knowledge and experience for convoy operations.

On 10 February 2005, I convoyed with the last chock of wheeled vehicles to start the road-march, I remember that day vividly. I could not stay warm and I did not know what to expect during the trip. My first stop was on the border of Kuwait and Iraq. We refueled and completed maintenance checks on the vehicles and rested. I could not go right to sleep that night. I could not see any force protection guards on the perimeter and when we entered the FOB my vehicle received no inspection.

The next morning we left early and at about 0100 hours we made our way through Baghdad. The vehicle directly in front of mine did not pay attention, lagged behind, and went the wrong direction, but I stopped them quickly and we turned around. I was completely enraged; the vehicle had a 1LT and a senior SSG in it. I could not believe this. Here was one of the most dangerous portions of the convoy and they both had such a lacksidezial attitude. We did not catch up to our convoy for thirty or forty minutes. We continued to the next fuel point, which was twenty-four hours later.

Our first vehicle broke down at the second Camp where we refueled. One of my recovery NCOs informed me that the vehicle was non-mission capable because the rear differential was locked up. We ended up towing the vehicle the rest of the way. At the third fuel point we

completed maintenance repairs on fifteen vehicles. We left late in the evening and made it to the next fuel point at 0300 the next morning. We refueled, completed maintenance, and rested until 0600. Many of my Soldiers were very tired by this time, but it was not hard to stay awake. The armored doors had a large hole that allowed all the warm air from the heater to go right out of the vehicle. Our final portion of the convoy was during the day. At about 1400, we had to stop because one of our convoy chocks that had left two hours before us was stopped in the middle of the road. We radioed to them and received word that an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was between us and the front gate of our new home, which was only about a mile away. An hour later, we moved to the gate. I was very disturbed to see two 155 mm rounds on the side of the road, which the teams dug up as we passed by the area of the IED. If the unit that was patrolling that afternoon had not seen the IED, some of us might not have made it into the gate. We had no armor under any of our vehicles, except for the M114s escorting each convoy. I could not believe that we convoyed without the armor needed to save the lives of Soldiers and myself. My commander informed me that we could not go off the FOB without a level three-armored vehicle. Ironically, I had just convoyed over 400 Kilometers without it! I was angry for a long period and this convoy was the beginning of many such experiences to come.

We started our Relief in Place (RIP) with the 1-33 Field Artillery Battalion the day after we arrived at Forward Observation Base (FOB) Summerall. Our RIP lasted two weeks. During the two-week period, we endured long days and the training was intense. We took over the force protection for the FOB and we were responsible for maintaining a Reactionary Force that had to do some patrolling off the FOB. The leadership and staff had meetings every evening at 2000 to ensure all tasks were complete to the required standards. I had to be at every one of

those meetings and they seemed to take days to complete. Our force protection mission went well for a while, but it was not a conventional mission for the battalion. The enemy tested us right away with 122 mm rockets and mortars of all sizes. We received incoming fire on the FOB at different times almost daily. Many tasks that most Soldiers never use or even think they might use became important. Crater analysis is just one example of a task that became very important. I never received any formal training on crater analysis, but regardless, had to perform it now. The enemy would fire two or three volleys and move away from the firing points rapidly. The radar did not pick up a lot of the attacks, because the projectiles were fired at low trajectories, making crater analysis essential. It took some time, but our Soldiers became very proficient at crater analysis during the deployment. We were able to calculate areas that the enemy was using more than once. The patterns and times that the enemy was using gradually became more evident. We were able to slow our attackers at times, but new insurgents would move into the area and the cycle would start all over.

In April of 2006 my father passed away and I went on emergency leave. This was a difficult time for me. I have no words to express my emotions or what I felt, but the sorrow and emptiness changed my demeanor. I learned of my father's death on the phone. The battalion called the motor pool, but could not get through, because I was on the phone. The TOC sent a runner to find me, but I already knew. I went on a ground convoy that day to FOB Spikier and flew to Kuwait. I left Kuwait that night and was with my family the next day. I want everybody to know this meant the world to me. I am eternally grateful to the people that helped me with my travel. I buried my father and returned to Iraq.

June came very quickly and the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) rockets arrived in the area of operation. My understanding of the total mission became clearer. My job

became very difficult because I had to manage repair parts and personnel over long distances. Our battalion was the first unit to test the new rockets in a non-schoolhouse environment. We fired two different tests, in different areas and on different days. My maintenance personnel ensured the launchers were fully mission capable at all times. We worked long hours and used control exchange daily to maintain the capabilities needed to fire rockets. Our tests on firing the new rockets were a great success and the XVIII Airborne Corps Commander wanted the rockets used on live missions.

We deployed two launcher platoons into remote areas to fire them and test them on live targets. The problems and hazards of sending a platoon alone were enormous. A MLRS Battery is set up for battery task organization. Our maintenance and supply section have only enough personnel and equipment to support a consolidated battery. Our MTOE and doctrine were not set up for this type of deployment. This experience would be the impetus for change, in doctrine and the MTOE if this mission was successful. We made decisions and changed several assets to ensure the two platoons were set up for success. I led one of the logistic teams sent to different FOBs to ensure accounts and supplies would make it to the platoons. The two platoons were not going to be close to the battalion and they themselves were on different sides of Iraq. This set up took large amounts of manpower and senior leaders would have to be at different locations. The S-4 NCO and I, accompanied by two other Soldiers, comprised one team. We set up accounts and coordinated with transportation companies to move personnel, equipment, and repair parts to both platoons. Coordination between units was difficult at times, but we used many different channels to make it possible. This experience was a great opportunity to be able to do the battalion's core mission and to have Soldiers spread over the battlefield.

At this time our mission became very difficult to manage for reasons not known to me. I was relocated back to FOB Summerall and laterally appointed as the HHS 1SG. I took total control of our force protection mission and combat patrol teams. I would have enormous responsibility. My job would grow exponentially and I had no transition time. I became the 1SG of a unit with the mission of providing force protection for FOB Summerall and providing combat patrol teams. The combat patrol teams patrolled local areas and also conducted convoys to sites where launcher platoons and logistical teams were located. Our Force Protection mission became very taxing on the Soldiers on the FOB. Our set up entailed fewer shifts, making the Soldiers' duty times at least twelve hours long, seven days a week. There would be no relaxation time at all for any Soldier in the battalion, yet we still sent personnel home for rest and recuperation leave. If a Soldier was hurt or did not feel well, the FOB's security became weaker. Our limited personnel strength did not allow for the absence of even one Soldier. The battalion's troop-to-task ratio was extraordinary.

The 187th Infantry Battalion arrived at FOB Summerall and the Division Commander relieved us of the Force Protection mission. The XVIII Airborne Corps Commander wanted the battalion to relocate to FOB Q West (Endurance). We packed all the containers and equipment and prepared for movement. My commander and I designed a plan to move all of our equipment. Our plan made the move conducive to what the platoons needed. Initially, we moved only half of the staff and their equipment to our new site and this gave them time to set up operations before the second half of the staff packed and moved. During the move, we needed supplies and had to close out our receipts at FOB Spikier. I had the combat patrol teams take personnel to FOB Spikier three times. We needed to turn-in excess equipment. The third convoy was hit by an IED and one of the NCOs would die later in the deployment in the

same vehicle that was damaged slightly in this IED attack. My commander went forward to Q West and I stayed at Summerall for command and control. My convoy went well and arrived without incident. Our field artillery replacements would be located at Q West. Our battalion, minus the deployed platoons, would move to Q West and set up operations there.

Our battalion was spread over six different locations within Iraq and my battalion commander could not get a flight easily. So, we had more than one Combat Patrol Team and the commander used one of them all the time.

A few weeks before our replacements arrived, we had a terrible incident. An IED exploded next to one of our vehicles. The vehicle caught fire, flipped, and rolled off the road. The driver was able to get out through the ring mount. However, the passenger did not get out and the patrol team tried to get him out unsuccessfully. The fire left very little of the vehicle. This was one of the hardest incidents for me to deal with as his 1SG. The Soldier was a maintenance NCO that had worked for me before I had become the HHS 1SG. We had a Memorial Service for him, but we had to go right back on the road within days. This would become one of the most difficult times in my life. The NCO had bad reservations about going on this convoy. Late the night before he left, he informed me that he did not feel right about this mission and did not want to go. I informed him that he would go and assured him he would be back in few days. I felt responsible for his death. I had lost my father not long before and had to provide strength for my family, being the oldest male. My mother was of course, devastated by the loss. Now once again, I would have to be strong; however this time it was for my Soldiers. I had a hard time with this NCO's death and to this very day, I do not believe I will ever be completely over it. I did not let anyone know how I felt and my duties did not suffer once. The 220th Field Artillery Battalion's advance party came in and we started getting ready for the RIP.

A week later the rest of the unit arrived. We started the RIP with them, which lasted for two weeks. During the RIP we packed our equipment for movement back to Ft. Sill. We left Q West the January 7, 2006 and flew into Kuwait. We flew out on one plane and landed at Lawton, Oklahoma January 14, 2006. We held our redeployment ceremony and regenerated for the next ninety days.

My deployment was a success and I reaped great rewards from it. I learned so much during this deployment. I am a changed and more understanding person, because of the teamwork and unity that I had with my Soldiers. We deployed and returned with only one death in the battalion. I lost some friends at FOB Summerall. The Soldiers were not in my unit, but I ate with them and knew them in their weak and strong moments.

We learned many different types of jobs that were non-MTOE missions. Though the missions were different than what we were used to, the Soldiers did very well. As leaders, we think we know what we are going to do in certain situations, but I was surprised at some of the leaders' decisions and attitudes. My battalion did many non-artillery missions, but was able to receive one of the greatest honors in combat. We were able to fire the GMLRS rockets in combat on live targets; these actions provided the basis to make changes in current MLRS doctrine. The use of platoon level deployment instead of the battery-level concept was new and required more assets to be completely successful. Soldiers of the 3-13th Field Artillery Battalion were successful at their missions and introduced new concepts to help future deploying units fight and win.