

UNCLASSIFIED

An Atypical Light 1

Running head: AN ATYPICAL LIGHT ARTILLERY COMBAT DEPLOYMENT



An Atypical Light Artillery Combat Deployment

MSG Gary W. Ballew

Operation Enduring Freedom-V (OEF-V) 03/23/2004 to 03/23/2005

**13Z, First Sergeant,
Bravo Battery 3-7 Field Artillery, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii**

Date written: 13 August 2006

Class Number: 57

UNCLASSIFIED

Abstract

Bravo Battery 3-7 FA was a six-howitzer firing battery with approximately 85 Soldiers assigned to the unit. We received orders for a combat deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom-V (OEF-V). Initially, the Battery's mission was to separate into two firing elements in support of an Infantry Battalion. However, we eventually separated into three fully functional firing elements. Each element consisted of two howitzers and personnel. Two of the three firing elements were assigned to support Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) teams at two of the most remote and hostile Forward Operating Bases (FOB) in Afghanistan. What occurred at FOBs Lwara and Shkin was is testament to the caliber of Artillery Soldiers that performed combat operations at FOBs Lwara and Shkin.

An Atypical Light Artillery Combat Deployment

I was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division (I.D.) on the island of Oahu, Hawaii from June 2003 to June 2006. Upon my arrival to the 25th I.D., I zealously sought and was granted the opportunity to serve as the First Sergeant for Bravo Battery, 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment. At that time, I was unaware of the profound affect that the duties and responsibility as the First Sergeant would have on me, my family, and the great Soldiers I served with.

In June 2003, Bravo Battery 3-7 FA was a six-howitzer firing battery with approximately 85 Soldiers assigned to the unit. Within the first year of my assignment, the battery received official notification that we would deploy to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom-V (OEF-V). The battery leadership was continuously briefed and updated in reference to the circumstances and operations regarding our specific area of operations (AO) in Afghanistan.

The Battery conducted all the required “train-up”, pre-deployment tasks, and equipment shipping and transfer. We did everything possible to facilitate our successful operations in the unforgiving terrain of Afghanistan.

The Battery deployed from Schofield Barracks on 20 March 2004. Because of the certain restrictions, our flights were very long and tedious. Finally, the battery arrived in Kandahar, Afghanistan on 23 March 2004. Every one was full of nervous excitement and ready to earn our pay.

Once in Afghanistan, the battery’s mission was to separate into two firing elements. One element, consisting of four howitzers and personnel, was sent to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Orgun-E. The second element, consisting of two howitzers and personnel, was assigned to FOB Shkin (approximately 800 meters from the Pakistan border). At that time, Shkin was one of the most (if not the most) dangerous Bases in Afghanistan.

Initially, the Battery Command Post was established at FOB Orgun-E, in support of Task Force (TF) 2-27 Infantry. Although we received incoming rockets and mortars on several occasions, the four howitzers did not return counter fire. From my perspective, the lack of Artillery counter fire was perplexing. When would we be able to engage the enemy? After all, we were being attacked, and we had the capability to respond!

Even though our Artillery did not engage the enemy at Orgun-E, we (the Artillery Soldiers) were gainfully employed. We developed small unit tactics and conducted Infantry patrols. We performed frequent Cordon and Search missions in the Orgun-E area. And, we conducted numerous mounted and dismounted combat patrols in the vicinity of the city of Orgun-E on a daily basis. These were unique missions for Artillery Soldiers.

While the Battery was conducting operations at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Orgun-E and FOB Shkin, another challenge was being developed for select Soldiers of Bravo Battery. In August 2004, the Commander and I were given a new mission. We had to split the Battery once again. Dividing a Light Cannon Battery into two firing elements was not standard practice, but separating a firing Battery into three separate firing elements had never been done.

The Battery Commander was preparing to change command. The new Commander would not be familiar with any of the Soldiers. So, being the Senior NCO and most familiar with the Soldiers, I had to decide which Soldiers were right for the mission. I personally selected the personnel that could perform in a barren and very hostile environment. Once I selected the "Lwara Team", we moved to the Afghanistan/Pakistan border.

The new mission consisted of attaching two howitzers Sections and personnel to an Operational Detachment Alpha (a.k.a. Special Forces "A" Team). We were required to relocate to a Base Camp named Lwara (a.k.a. Camp Tillman) and establish a functional Artillery

Command Post. In addition we had to construct effective firing positions for the two howitzer Sections.

Upon arrival, we realized Lwara was, without doubt, the most active FOB in Afghanistan. We were attacked frequently and repeatedly. We quickly integrated with the Special Forces (SF) Team. The SF Team was glad to have the Artillery and the massive amount of fire-power we offered.

The SF Team was very accommodating and receptive to the needs all of the Artillery Soldiers. In addition, all Soldiers were pleased that the howitzers instantly increased the maximum effective range (killing range) for the FOB.

FOB Lwara is positioned in a very desolate location and the enemy forces are abundant. The enemy bombarded us with rocket and mortar attacks. From the first attack, I knew I had selected the correct Warriors to live and fight at FOB Lwara.

Bravo Battery Soldiers were attacked on 46 occasions (see the “rocket and mortar log” on page 10 and 11 of this paper). Although we had constructed bunkers with overhead cover to protect us from incoming fire, no one used them during the attacks. Our mission was to deliver Artillery fire, and we did that on a regular basis (sometimes two and three times per day).

The Artillery Soldiers fought valiantly and fearlessly during every rocket and mortar barrage. Each Artillery Soldier was actively engaged. During every enemy attack, we would respond and overwhelm the enemy with superior firepower.

An Artilleryman can not employ howitzers from a bunker. The five-foot-tall HESCO baskets surrounding each howitzer offered adequate protection and cover. In addition, the HESCO baskets allowed us to operate the howitzers and deliver numerous rounds of “105mm love” to the bad guys, even during the most ferocious firefights.

The enemy realized very quickly that our howitzers were more accurate and effective than their rockets and mortars. But, howitzers are only as good as the Soldiers employing them. I was fortunate and honored to fight beside some of the best Artillery Soldiers in the Army.

As the time elapsed, we successfully expanded the perimeter to facilitate further employment of the howitzers. We transformed Camp Lwara into a FOB that was “Artillery capable”. The SF Team could plan and conduct operations at greater distances from the FOB, because of the Artillery assets.

From late August 2004 until March 2005, FOB Lwara was aggressively engaged with the enemy. However, the enemy was attempting to penetrate other parts of the Afghanistan/Pakistan border as well. Another segment of Bravo Battery warriors were in the process of conducting combat operations in the other very active Forward Operating Base (FOB Shkin).

Since the terrain at Shkin allowed more maneuverability, the howitzers sections routinely repositioned and conducted operations outside the FOB in order to support the SF Team maneuvers and missions. Because of the Artillerymen at Shkin, the SF Teams were well protected.

In my opinion, the Artillery and SF Teams at Lwara and Shkin worked very well together. They purged and eliminated all enemy forces within our area of operations. Each segment of the Battery worked in conjunction with the SF Teams to employ tactics to overwhelm and devastate enemy forces.

In my opinion, very competent Howitzer Section Chiefs, Fire Direction Chiefs, Platoon Sergeants, and many brave men made this combat operation a success. These leaders were essential during our 13-month deployment to Afghanistan. Leaders, at all levels, were given

enormous responsibilities in order to conduct combat operations at their designated FOB. Most Soldiers within the Battery deserve great recognition and rewards.

One thing that greatly disappointed me while in Afghanistan was the awards process for deserving Soldiers. It was inadequate. I spent most of my time at FOB Lwara. During my eight months there, I saw numerous acts of valor and gallantry. However, every time an award for valor was submitted, it was denied at Battalion level. The reason for denying the awards was “You and the Soldiers are doing your job.” I did not understand that statement then, and I do not understand it now.

Even though these acts of courage were routine behavior for most Soldiers at FOB Lwara, 20-awards for valor were submitted and blocked at the Battalion level. Keep in mind, the Brigade Commander is the approving authority, not the Battalion Commander. In my opinion, Soldiers willingly risking their lives deserve better treatment and consideration than was given to those great warriors. I believe a Soldier should be given what was earned.

I have included a narrative summary for an award on page nine. The narrative summary will give you one example of the courage and behavior I personally observed. This particular Soldier was recommended for an Army Commendation with “V” Device (his name was intentionally changed to Sergeant John Doe).

Although no valorous awards were approved, the Soldiers at Lwara and Shkin acquired substantial amounts of combat knowledge and experience. In addition, those brave warriors earned my eternal respect and admiration. The experiences in Afghanistan will be used in future combat operations to teach other Soldiers how to operate in severe combat environments.

I feel that my 13-month deployment to Afghanistan greatly improved my skills as a leader. I know large amounts of experience were acquired by all Soldiers reacting to numerous rocket and

mortar bombardments. Leaders definitely discovered which Soldiers had the ability to make quick decision and use good judgment under very stressful situations. For a list of the leaders and Soldiers that earned an “honorable mention”, see the list of personnel on pages 12 and 13 of this document.

In my opinion, if senior leaders lead by example during combat, the Soldiers around us will respect and learn from that example. As long as leaders provide great examples for Soldiers to emulate, Our Army will always succeed and achieve victory.

May God bless America and all the Soldiers that protect her!

Narrative Summary

Army Commendation Medal with "V" Device Sergeant John Doe

During the extraordinarily active period from August 2004 to March 2005 while assigned to Bravo Battery, 3RD Battalion, 7th Field Artillery, Sergeant Doe distinguished himself by displaying great valor and superior leadership during 46 enemy rocket and mortar attacks at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Lwara, Afghanistan.

Routinely, upon hearing any initial rocket or mortar impacts, Sergeant Doe rapidly donned his Interceptor Body Armor and other protective gear. During each attack, he could have entered the safety of nearby bunkers. However, on every occasion, he charged from the centrally located Command Post section of the Firebase attempting to proceed approximately 300 meters to 2nd Howitzer Section.

His usual route from the Command Post to the Howitzer Section diverted him from the protection of HESCO barriers onto the Helicopter landing zone and onto a service road. Frequently while in the unprotected area between the fortified Command Post and the Howitzer position, rockets and mortars impacted within 50 meters of Sergeant Doe. Each time he took immediate action by promptly laying flat on the ground to avoid shards of shrapnel that emanated from each explosion.

Between rocket and mortar volleys, Sergeant Doe very quickly regained his bearing, and hastily continued to 2nd Howitzer Section. Each time, upon his arrival at the Howitzer position, and under torrential enemy rocket fire, he immediately began to analyze the situation and contribute his technical and tactical abilities to the Howitzer Section and the Section Chief.

As a former Howitzer Section Chief, Sergeant Doe's knowledge and competency was an enormous advantage to 2nd Howitzer Section. Sergeant Doe assisted the Section with the assembly of the ammunition, shell and fuse combination, and time settings. Also, he assisted with all counter-rocket missions, to include numerous "out of traverse" fire missions.

Concurrently while receiving rockets and mortars in his position, he ensured the accuracy of the fuse settings and proper charge for each round. He then transferred the ammunition from the ammunition holding area to the Howitzer. His performance facilitated the rapid delivery of urgently needed lethal fire in response to the enemy attacks. His actions resulted in 23 enemy casualties. For eight months, he assisted with innumerable counter-fire missions with over 500 high-explosive Artillery rounds fired. Overall, his actions expedited the number of 105mm artillery projectiles that were fired in response to the enemy rocket/mortar bombardment.

In addition, during each enemy rocket launch, an audible "explosion" and subsequent "screaming" sound could be heard prior to the impact of each rocket. The "explosion" and "scream" during the rocket launch allowed Sergeant Doe to alert the Section and ensure that all Soldiers were concealed behind the protection of the HESCO barricade.

Numerous rockets and mortar rounds have impacted and detonated as close as 50 meters from the Howitzer position. The rocket/mortar detonations resulted in massive reverberations, shrapnel, rocks, and dirt being flailed into the interior of the HESCO barrier; where the Sergeant and the members of 2nd Howitzer Section were returning fire. Sergeant Doe's attentive actions and valor under repeated vicious enemy bombardment unquestionably, prevented numerous injuries and saved Soldiers' lives.

For eight months at Lwara FOB, Sergeant Doe continually demonstrated exceptional leadership abilities, courage, and concern for Soldiers throughout 46 enemy rockets and mortar attacks. He has led by example and habitually inserted himself into hazardous situations. His dedication and commitment to Soldiers are tremendous and are worthy of admiration. He is undeniably a leader to emulate and a colossal asset to any unit.

ROCKET/MORTAR LOG

1. 14 APR 2004	5 ROCKETS (ORGUN-E)
2. 28 MAY 2004	6 ROCKETS (ORGUN-E)
3. 05 JUN 2004	5 ROCKETS (ORGUN-E)
4. 11 JUN 2004	3 ROCKETS (ORGUN-E)
5. 20 JUL 2004	8 ROCKETS (ORGUN-E)
6. 30 JUL 2004	7 ROCKETS (ORGUN-E)
7. 21 SEP 2004	15 ROCKETS (LWARA)
8. 24 SEP 2004	9 ROCKETS (LWARA)
9. 28 SEP 2004	7 ROCKETS (LWARA)
10. 02 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
11. 03 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
12. 05 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
13. 07 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
14. 09 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
15. 13 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
16. 19 OCT 2004 (MNG)	2 ROCKETS (LWARA)
17. 19 OCT 2004 (EVNG)	2 ROCKETS (LWARA)
18. 22 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
20. 27 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
21. 28 OCT 2004	? ROCKETS (LWARA)
22. 07 NOV 2004	7 MORTARS (LWARA)
23. 02 DEC 2004	2 ROCKETS (LWARA)
24. 06 DEC 2004	6 ROCKETS (LWARA)
25. 07 DEC 2004	10 ROCKETS (LWARA)
26. 12 DEC 2004	12 ROCKETS (LWARA)
27. 22 DEC 2004 (MNG)	7 ROCKETS (LWARA)
28. 22 DEC 2004 (EVNG)	2 ROCKETS (LWARA)
29. 24 DEC 2004 (MNG)	8 MORTARS (LWARA)
30. 24 DEC 2004 (NITE)	2 ROCKETS (LWARA)
31. 24 DEC 2004 (NITE)	2 ROCKETS (LWARA)
32. 25 DEC 2004 (MNG)	1 ROCKET (LWARA) KILLED 1 ANA
33. 25 DEC 2004 (EVNG)	3 ROCKETS (LWARA)
34. 27 DEC 2004	4 MORTARS (LWARA)
35. 29 DEC 2004	2 ROCKETS (LWARA)
36. 30 DEC 2004	6 ROCKETS (LWARA)
37. 02 JAN 2005	4 ROCKETS (LWARA)
38. 04 JAN 2005	4 ROCKETS (LWARA)
39. 11 JAN 2005 (MNG)	10 ROCKETS (LWARA)
40. 11 JAN 2005 (EVNG)	2 MORTARS (LWARA)
41. 12 JAN 2005	6 ROCKETS (LWARA)
42. 04 FEB 2005	8 ROCKETS (LWARA)
43. 15 FEB 2005	6 ROCKETS (LWARA)
44. 25 FEB 2005	7 MORTARS (LWARA)
45. 06 MAR 2005	6 MORTARS (LWARA)

UNCLASSIFIED

An Atypical Light 11

ROCKET AND MORTAR LOG (Cont)

46. 12 MAR 2005

2 ROCKETS (LWARA)

- 30 SEP 2004: ANA HIT AN IED 10 WOUNDED, 3 KIA, 1 RTD (NORTON, OLIVARES, BALLEW ASSISTED W/ TREATMENT AND MEDICAL EVACUATION).
- 28 OCT 2004: FIRE MISSION KIA 3 ENEMY SOLDIERS
- 11 FEB 2005: FIRE MISSION KIA 11 ENEMY SOLDIERS
- 25 FEB 2005: FIRE MISSION KIA 9 ENEMY SOLDIERS

UNCLASSIFIED

COMBAT LEADERS AND LOCATIONS

Battery Commander(s):

CPT Richard Smith Orgun-E 6 Months
Lwara- 1 Month
BAF- 6 Months

CPT Gabriel Zinni Lwara- 7 Months

First Sergeant:

1SG Gary Ballew Lwara- 8 Months
Orgun-E 4 Months
Shkin- 1 Month

Platoon Leaders (LTs):

LT Nathan Wilburn Shkin 9 Months

LT Michel Norton Orgun-E 4 Months
Lwara 9 Months

Platoon Sergeants:

SFC Scottie Johnson Shkin 13 Months

SSG Manny Colon Orgun-E 4 Months
Lwara 9 Months

SFC Dwalyn Dasher Orgun-E 13 Months

HONORABLE MENTION:**SSG David Noel**

Shkin- 12 Months Gunnery Sergeant

SSG Hector Gutierrez

Orgun-E 4 Months Section Chief
Lwara 9 Months Gunnery Sergeant

SSG Eduardo Juarez

Orgun-E 4 Months Howitzer Section Chief
Lwara 9 Months Howitzer Section Chief

SSG Fred Smith

Orgun-E 4 Months Gunner
Lwara 7 Months Gunner
KAF 2 Months Ammo NCO

SSG James Chriso

Orgun-E 13 Months Section Chief and Gunnery Sergeant

SGT Kevin Hudson

Orgun-E 4 Months Gunner
Lwara 9 Months Gunner/ Section Chief

SSG Jody Allen

Orgun-E 4 Months Commo NCO
Lwara 8 Months Commo NCO

SGT Eddie Moana

Orgun-E 4 Months Gunner
Lwara 9 Months Gunner

SGT Daniel Olivares

Orgun-E 4 Months FDC Chief
Lwara 9 Months FDC Chief

SSG Ignatius Gilkagnang

Lwara 5 Months FDC Chief

SGT David Alamazan (KIA-August 2006, RIP My Brother)

Orgun-E 4 Months Battery MEDIC
Lwara 9 Months Battery MEDIC