



At left, a 1-3 ADA Avenger assumes an overwatch position during operations in an urban area. At right, a 1-3 ADA Bradley Linebacker rumbles through the streets of Baghdad.

Divisional Air Defense Artillery Units Learn Keys to Survival and Victory in Iraq and Afghanistan

by LTC Rick Starkey

Divisional short-range air defense (SHORAD) battalions have been engaged in the Global War on Terrorism since the Army started putting boots on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. The deployments have been one year in duration or longer, and these units have clearly demonstrated to the entire combined arms team that ADA Soldiers are well trained, well lead, and a most lethal, disciplined, and versatile force; capable of performing many combat missions or tasks.

With Air and Missile Defense Transformation moving out at warp speed, many of these seasoned combat veterans are redeploying to case colors, transfer Linebackers and Bradleys to other units, and transform their units into composite Patriot-Avenger battalions. After executing some of the most challenging and dangerous missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, these Air Defenders carry numerous lessons learned that our current and future force can use to enhance lethality and improve survivability while protecting the force.

Each of Air Defense Artillery's 10 SHORAD battalions have deployed forces in support of operations in Iraq or Afghanistan. Soldiers in these units have bravely taken on some of the toughest missions: fixed-site security, running division tactical assembly areas, convoy security, raids, armored recon, counter-recon, cordon and search, establishing check points, and developing force protection measures at forward operating bases (FOBs). They've done so while working with local nationals and tribal leaders, improving schools, guarding infrastructure, providing medical aid, searching caves and mountains in Afghanistan, and training the new Iraqi Army (officially known as the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. Our SHORAD

units have also been involved in providing an air picture to provide brigade combat teams and divisions third-dimension situational awareness.

All of the heroic acts and deeds have not gone without a cost. Soldiers in divisional ADA battalions have suffered numerous injuries and loss of life and have earned valorous awards alongside Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery and other combined arms Soldiers. Throughout the past few years, division and brigade commanders have learned that Air Defense Artillery is a trained and competent branch—a combat multiplier that they can rely upon to accomplish the toughest of missions. Our Soldiers have demonstrated the Warrior Ethos and the Soldier's Creed are not catch phrases, but a way of life. Reading after-action reports and stories from each of the returning battalions makes it clear our units and Soldiers are deservingly proud of the job they've done. As we cross the Transformational Line of Departure—ahead of most of the Army—we are leaving behind a legacy of competence and bravery, with mutual respect among our combined arms brothers and sisters.

Each of our divisional ADA battalions have learned how to effectively close with and destroy enemy forces, using our Bradleys and Avengers as a force protection combat multiplier. It was not uncommon for ADA battalions to share lessons learned while deploying, or while a unit was getting ready to deploy. These common lessons learned, based on missions conducted, include how to establish and improve fixed-site security, how to build barriers to provide stand-off distance to avoid suicide bombers and direct-fire ambushes, how to conduct cordon and search missions, how to plan and conduct raids, how to

search and detain prisoners, and the value of conducting rehearsals prior to conducting the simplest of missions.

While each battalion and battery has its unique story based on missions conducted in Iraq or Afghanistan, the common themes of pride, discipline, leadership, competence and safety seem to ring true time and time again. The selfless performance of our Bradley and Avenger Soldiers and noncommissioned officers has been impressive, with many serving 18-hour days for a year without a day off. They've done so professionally and without a gripe, going on countless dangerous missions while sustaining morale for extended periods.

It would take a book to capture the lessons learned for the many missions our units have conducted over the past two years, so this article will focus on the most common and tested methods that will serve any unit well in preparing Soldiers, leaders, and units for war—especially in a protracted asymmetric fight. These lessons came up over and over in each of the battalion's after-action reviews and they attack those critical issues that keep a unit together in the toughest of times. These lessons address the basic foundation of a unit's discipline and leadership. The enemy is relentless and patient, and efforts to counter their efforts require continuous offensive pressure by coalition forces to keep non-compliant forces off-balance. Leaders play a critical role in keeping the unit's head in the fight, continuously checking for suspicious activity,

enemy doesn't like to attack a unit ready to fight. **Recommendation:** Plan, rehearse, and provide adequate firepower to the simplest of military operations—and always plan that you will encounter enemy forces.

Weapons Discipline: With Soldiers continually carrying loaded weapons, there is a constant danger of accidental discharge. Nothing can decay morale faster than when a Soldier is injured or killed by a preventable accident. Leaders have to be responsible for training their Soldiers on muzzle awareness and training weapons expertise in their unit. Leaders must also play an active role at clearing barrels and stay continually on the lookout for correct weapons orientation. Leaders must build confidence in their Soldiers through training. Weapons ignorance comes in all ranks, and officers and senior NCOs must also follow adopted procedures. **Recommendation:** Incorporate weapons training into all forms of unit training.

Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield and Predictive Analysis Works: Commanders, S2s, and S3s must continuously analyze the battlefield to determine where the next attack will occur. With ADA units continuously on the road and responsible for the defense of FOBs, it is important to know where and when the enemy has attacked in the past or where there are weaknesses in your defensive plan. There are never hard and fast rules; the enemy will always develop new trends and tactics, techniques



1-44 ADA Bradley Linebacker crews detain prisoners captured during raids on insurgent strongholds.

staying prepared for all contingencies, and avoiding complacency.

Plan Every Mission as if You Will Encounter Enemy Forces: In an asymmetric fight, there are no safe convoys or military operations. Plan every mission as if you will encounter enemy forces. Whether the mission is improving schools, traveling in convoys, conducting raids or counter-recon operations, or conducting searches of vehicles or personnel, continually be prepared for the worst. The enemy is always looking for vehicles vulnerable to attack or personnel who have become complacent and not prepared to fight. Always ensure you have enough weapons (ideally, crew-served weapons) to counter an attack. Everyone in a convoy should appear vigilant, as the en-

and procedures (TTPs). Educating the force on these trends is important to saving lives while developing counter-TTPs to defeat the threat. Knowing where and how the enemy has been launching mortars, attacking convoys, or setting up improvised-explosive devices (IEDs) allows leaders to establish methods to reduce the potential for future attacks. It also enables leaders to develop the best times to plan convoys. **Recommendation:** Leaders must actively seek out enemy trends and TTPs and educate Soldiers on methods to counter the next attack.

Conduct Rehearsals: Rehearsals have long been a point of discussion during after-action reviews at the National Training Center, Joint Readiness Training Center, and during divisional Warfighter Exercises. Rehearsals

proved to be more valuable in combat, with every Soldier understanding his or her role in the event of enemy contact. Going over actions on contact drills enable Soldiers to act instinctively when hit by an IED or enemy ambush. Identifying responsibilities before mission execution saves valuable time when you need it most. Covering items like who is responsible for laying down suppressive fires, conducting vehicle recovery, and identifying combat lifesavers, as examples, will continually pay off, if and when a unit is attacked. **Recommendation:** Train



3-4 ADA Soldiers perform checks on Avenger systems and a Sentinel radar prior to a mission.

subordinate leaders on how to conduct effective rehearsals. Develop checklists in unit standing operating procedures (SOPs) for the most routine missions.

Never Break Contact with the Enemy: The enemy most frequently operates in small numbers, and they are usually out-gunned, out-manned, and out-trained by coalition forces. Always planning convoys as combat operations, with adequate crew-served weapons, combat systems, and communications ensures this will be the case. Leaders must quickly assess the situation and orient fires. Common TTPs for many combat service support units was to break contact, move out of the enemy kill zone, and establish a rally point up the road. The problem with this TTP is that it gives the enemy the opportunity to come back tomorrow to kill more coalition forces. The enemy quickly learned this TTP and began planning follow-up ambushes or emplaced an IED at the established rally point. The enemy normally attempts to avoid direct contact, hitting unsuspecting units, then running away and blending into a nearby populace center. When the enemy does make themselves visible, kill them. It is after the initial assault that the enemy is at his weakest point. **Recommendation:** Only under overwhelming circumstances should a leader make the decision to break contact. Keep a clear head and direct forces until the enemy is destroyed.

Train All Soldiers on Crew-Served Weapons and as Combat Lifesavers: As the initial units deployed and combat operations transitioned to stability and support operations, tactical convoys and daily troop movements required strategic positioning of crew-served weapons and rotation of trained operators. Training all Soldiers on the use of all heavy weapons in your unit is critical. The M249 Squad Assault Weapon (SAW) is the most prolific weapon in our units, and it is critical to sustained combat operations. Obviously, any time weapons are changing hands,

accountability and leader checks are essential. The M249 is among the most dangerous weapons we employ and is frequently the cause of accidental discharges for the fol-

lowing reasons: untrained operators cannot easily determine if the weapon is on safe and a jar can cause the bolt to ride forward and the weapon to discharge when traveling. Also, the most common place for accidental discharge for all weapons was the weapons clearing pits prior to entering FOBs. All of these hazards can be avoided through training and Sol-

diers having confidence with their weapon. Combat lifesavers are an extremely valuable tool for any combat operation in the event a Soldier is wounded. Stocking-up on aid bags within a unit prior to any deployment is a smart thing to do. **Recommendation:** Train all Soldiers on how to action, maintain, shoot, clear, and make safe crew-served weapons. Also develop a combat lifesaver training program in your unit.

Maintenance, Training and Safety are a part of Combat: Great units do the basics well. Units can not sustain a high operational tempo for long if they are not conducting quality services and preventive maintenance on equipment. This may sound trivial, but it takes commitment to ensure it occurs when units are rotating on and off shift and performing for long periods each day. Conducting training is also important as it keeps expanding knowledge of current TTPs and does a lot to avoid complacency in a unit. It is a challenge to ask leaders to conduct training and maintenance when you know they are tired and being asked to contribute so much to the force protection burden.

Among the toughest tasks SHORAD units are being asked to do is fixed-site security. Staying vigilant at night or in 130-degree temperatures for 12-hour shifts for a year is difficult, especially for two-man Avenger crews. Establishing a method of active leader checks is critical to keeping crews vigilant. Safety too is an item that requires command emphasis and enforcement of often-communicated standards like placing only trained operators on equipment, wearing seat belts, accounting for sensitive items, maintaining muzzle awareness, and clearing/safing weapons. It was not uncommon for less disciplined units to get Soldiers hurt unnecessarily. **Recommendation:** Great units do the basics well and hold leaders responsible for communicating and checking standards. Estab-



Bradley Linebackers from the 1st Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry, left, and 1-44 ADA, right, carry the fight against insurgents into rural areas of Iraq.

lish a list of rules—perhaps a nonnegotiable "Top Ten"—that all leaders carry with them.

Strong Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) and Rear Detachments Greatly Assist Forward Deployed Leaders: Spouses have to carry a heavy load while Soldiers are deployed. Strong FRGs and high-quality rear detachments can make the deployment a much smoother operation and keep forward-deployed units from worrying about the home front.

Casualties are significant events...

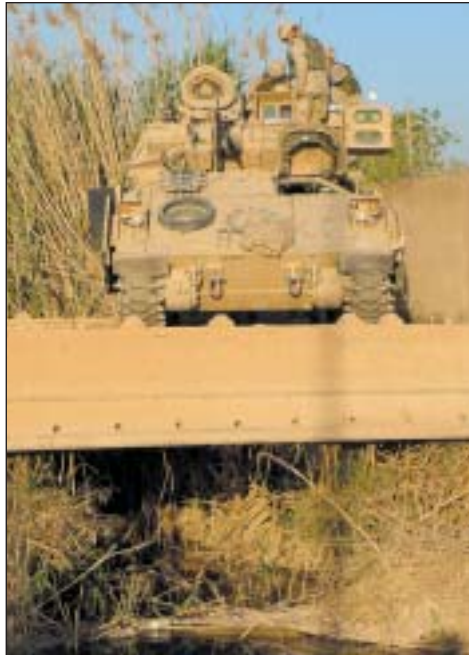
A great FRG and rear detachment also come in handy in the event of casualties in the organization. Casualties are significant events that can take the wind out of a unit. Amazingly enough, casualty notification is rarely discussed in unit tactical standing operating procedures, though it needs to be. Communicate the rule that no one makes contact with the family by phone or e-mail. Army policy clearly states that "the casualty assistance officer (CAO) has this responsibility, not the unit." Casualty notification is a very sensitive, organized, and controlled process to ensure proper execution. There were incidents when units entered the process early and the wrong family was notified, or incorrect information was disseminated. Access to all phones and e-mail should be controlled or shut-off, pending positive notification to the next of kin by the CAO, when a unit sustains a serious injury or death. Battalion commanders should notify the rear detachment commander and the FRG leader of casualties to prepare them in the event spouses of wounded or slain soldiers contact them for assistance or the CAO requests support during

the notification process. The CAO will contact the unit once notification is made.

Recommendation: Establish a strong FRG and rear detachment when deploying, coordinate with your local Casualty Assistance Office and become familiar with the notification process, and ensure the unit tactical standard operating procedures and rear detachment standing operating procedures spell out actions to be taken in the event of a casualty.

As we transform, it is critical that we share lessons learned to ensure future ADA units avoid the same mistakes and optimize past successes. It is also important that we focus on the ground fight, as well as the air fight. Our SHORAD Soldiers have performed in a truly heroic manner and many have earned the right to proudly wear the new Close Combat Badge. As they depart the divisions, they leave behind them a legacy of trust in our war fighting excellence. With transformation leaving the air defense and airspace management (ADAM) cells as the only representation of

ADA within our divisions, we should continue to seek out training opportunities with the maneuver force to hone and reaffirm our basic combat skills. Short-range air defense units are rightfully proud of the contributions they have made to the Global War on Terrorism, and we will continue to pray for all Soldiers deployed in harm's way.



A 1-3 ADA Bradley Linebacker takes up a position on a bridge spanning an Iraqi canal.



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