



The USS Spearhead carried D/3-43 ADA from Qatar to Kuwait, the Patriot system's first deployment by the Army's emerging fleet of theater support vessels.

## Spearhead: Patriot Battery Makes Epic Journey to Operation Iraqi Freedom Battlefields

### New Theater Support Vessel Speeds D/3-43 ADA into Combat

During its Operation Iraqi Freedom deployment to three different countries, Delta Battery, 3rd Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery, emplaced its Patriot launchers to defend GEN Tommy Frank's Central Command Headquarters in Qatar and the Combined Forces Land Component Command headquarters at Camp Doha, Kuwait. It then made an epic 100-mile convoy deep inside Iraq to defend Logistics Supply Area Cedar, a critical logistics base that fueled the 3rd Infantry Division's advance on Baghdad.

Delta Battery Soldiers endured the same desert hardships and surmounted the same obstacles that faced other Patriot Soldiers deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom, but it was the easy part—a short sea voyage across the Persian Gulf from Qatar to Kuwait—that caught the attention of senior Army leaders. They were borne into battle aboard the *USS Spearhead*, a glimmering silver, wave-piercing catamaran that is the first of an emerging armada of Army theater support vessels (TSVs), called "fast boats," that may one day transport entire air and missile defense battalions or entire Stryker brigade combat teams to theaters of operation.

The Army leased the *Spearhead* from Australian fast ferry builder Incat in October 2002. Modifications included helicopter pads suitable for large military helicopters and a two-part, hydraulic vehicle ramp that allows rapid loading and discharge of vehicles from the stern or alongside. With its 1,250-ton capacity and shallow draft, the *Spearhead* is the first of what is expected to become a fleet of as many as 17 TSVs.

"A few days into the war, while our battery was still emplaced at Al Udeid Airbase in Qatar, we received orders to deploy via boat into Iraq," said CPT Derik Johnson,

the Delta Battery commander. "We road marched all our vehicles and equipment in three hours. We moved half of our equipment down to the Port of Um Qasr and loaded it onto an LSV [logistical support vessel]. Less than 24 hours later, we convoyed the remainder of our equipment down to the port and loaded our equipment and soldiers onto the *Spearhead*."

"We sailed across the Persian Gulf to Kuwait, overtaking the LSV carrying the other half of our equipment on the way," CPT Johnson continued. "We arrived at the Port of Shuaiba, Kuwait, and the LSV arrived a couple hours after our fast boat."

The speed of TSVs is phenomenal compared to the speed of LSVs, the long-time workhorse of the Army's sea-going fleet. The 98-meter-long *Spearhead*, can do more than 40 knots while the Army's LSVs only average about 12 knots. Theater Support Vessels have more electronics, and computers run most onboard systems. One or two future-generation TSVs might be capable of carrying an entire Patriot battalion or an entire Stryker brigade into theaters of operation.

Theater Support Vessels like the *Spearhead* can push troops and equipment into theatre about four times as fast as LSVs and will provide the Army a new and potent capability for rapidly responding to crisis situations anywhere in the world. They are a vital part of the Army's transformation plan, and Delta Battery's Patriot systems—the first ever deployed to Qatar—were the first ever transported by TSV.

