



From left to right, Soldiers of B/1-62 ADA provide overwatch during a raid against Iraqi insurgents, defend a Forward Operating Base Warrior gate following a rocket-propelled grenade attack, and provide security for a military supply convoy.

A Maneuver Air and Missile Defense Battery Adapts to Ground Combat in Iraq

Tropic Lightning Air Defenders Learn to Fight, Survive and Win in the Contemporary Operational Environment

By CPT Winston M. Marbella and CW2 Benjamin Quesada

Forward Operating Base Warrior, Iraq, January 2005—With Army Transformation reshaping our air and missile defense (AMD) force, some might argue lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan by divisional units are meaningless. However, this couldn't be farther from the truth. We don't know what the future holds for any unit in today's Army and what missions our transformed AMD force may be called upon to execute in the future. The 31st Air Defense Artillery Brigade's Patriot battalions executed a ground security mission at sensitive, national sites in October and November of 2001. Who is to say a composite AMD battalion may not deploy as a ground combat force next year? It is important to capture and share Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom lessons learned from the perspective of an Avenger or a Bradley turret, or at the stocks of a heavy weapon. Our story and lessons learned follow.

Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 62nd Air Defense Artillery, 2nd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, deployed from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, to Iraq on 18 January 2004. Without an air threat, we were uncertain what role we would play in the fight. However, after crossing into Iraq and arriving at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Warrior in February 2004, it became evident that our battery would be employed predominately as a force-protection combat multiplier. The battery enabled the Tropic Lightning Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team (2BCT) to focus its combat power on more offensive tasks, rather than depleting combat power to protect brigade assets.

For more than a year, Bravo Battery has been conducting nontraditional air defense missions and has proven to be an incredible combat force multiplier. Collectively, the battery's three Avenger platoons, 10 Avengers and eight Stinger trucks, have traveled thousands of miles while conducting hundreds of convoy security and route clearance missions. In addition, the headquarters platoon spearheads the third country national (TCN) escort mission on FOB Warrior and, along with Air Force Security Forces, defends the only TCN access gate.

The Battery Headquarters element falls directly under the 2BCT "Warrior Brigade," an infantry brigade, while its three line platoons are attached to three infantry battalion task forces. Upon arrival in Northern Iraq the battalion task forces occupied separate FOBs. Battle tracking line platoons located at four separate FOBs was a challenge during the initial stages of the operation, while voice connectivity was still being established. As a commander, I never thought that I would be commanding and controlling platoons via Army Knowledge Online, the Army's secure Internet interface.

Convoy Security and Combat Patrols

Convoy security operations and combat patrols are an integral part of 2BCT's ground operations and these types of missions became a mainstay for Bravo Battery. The Avengers' M3P .50-caliber machine gun, forward-looking infrared (FLIR) night capability, and free-spin-

ning turret on a mobile humvee made the Avenger a likely candidate for convoy security missions. It became fairly common to see Avengers running the main supply routes, defending combat support units that required force protection to maneuver on the battlefield. For example, the Avenger platoon attached to the 225th Forward Support Battalion was the only combat arms platoon in that entire battalion. Avengers protected all logistic package convoys (LOGPACs) departing FOB Warrior.

Prior to departing our home-station, we removed the Stinger racks from our Stinger humvees, and upon arriving in theater, we outfitted them with gun mounts for .50-caliber machine guns and MK-19 Grenade Launchers. A typical air defense LOGPAC security team is composed of one Avenger, one Stinger gun-truck, and a command and control humvee. If the convoy is larger than 10 vehicles, we add a second Avenger.

An Avenger habitually provides convoy rear security due to its limited ability to fire to its front. The Stinger gun-truck is often the lead vehicle while the command and control vehicle moves in front of the Avenger. Avengers must be manned with three Soldiers. The team chief drives while another Soldier covers the Avenger's right flank, watching for improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that might be on the passenger side of the road.

While on the road we live by the conviction that speed is security and interval is safety. Speed throws off the timing of an insurgent controlling a remotely detonated IED while large intervals, preferably 100 meters, keeps the IED blast from damaging more than one vehicle. Proper interval must be maintained especially through choke points, like a police checkpoint, that force convoys to move slowly. Vehicles that are bunched together present themselves as a lucrative target to the enemy. Undoubtedly, the enemy desires to get the most kills with one IED explosion. When moving through an urban environment, our Avenger gunners aggressively search and scan, keeping the turret moving in an aggressive manner. It's impressive how fast traffic clears when people notice the turret moving deliberately. It sends a clear message that the convoy is alert and will fight if provoked. To protect the Avenger gunner, we have installed civilian bulletproof vests inside the turret, attaching it with Velcro.

We position the command vehicle in front of the rear Avenger. In case the Avenger gunner is injured, the platoon leader's driver can assume the job as the Avenger's driver or gunner. On night combat patrols, the Avenger is primarily assigned in the overwatch or support-by-fire role. With its enhanced FLIR, it's the best night vision available to a light infantry task force.

We educate task force leaders on the incredible capability the Avenger's M3P .50-caliber machine gun—when combined with the FLIR and Avenger's 360-degree turret—brings to the fight. The M3P's longer barrel gives it increased range, and Soldiers can fire the M3P mounted on the Avenger platform from a remote position. With its advanced target acquisition system, the M3P machine gun's combined capabilities are superior to the infantry's

M-2 .50-caliber machine gun. Highlighting the Avenger's capability to the task force leadership greatly enhanced our platoons' contribution to the task force's success.

Avenger Maintenance

Bravo Battery is fortunate to have a top-notch maintenance team headed by CW2 Benjamin Quesada. Due to his maintenance team's proactive and responsive maintenance operations, we've resolved every maintenance issue, including overweight Avengers and soaring temperatures that turned Avenger canopies into saunas.

Avengers modified with up-armor kits and fully combat-loaded are extremely heavy. The front wheels cant outwards from the bottom, causing tires to wear unevenly on the inside. The additional weight also adversely affected the Avenger's suspension, posing a safety concern. We fixed this problem by replacing front springs and shocks. A few of our Avengers still had their original factory-installed suspension springs, which were more than 15 years old. We replaced all standard springs and shocks. These fixes resolved the issue; however, we were poised to replace all the support arms had the problem persisted.

After the Avengers were outfitted with up-armor kits, the temperature in the cabs reached 140 degrees Fahrenheit during the hottest months of July and August. We discovered the standard Red Dot air conditioning unit that was part of the up-armor modification kit did not fit the Avenger's cab. Red Dot developed a special ceiling unit that worked well in Avengers. The U.S. Army Tank Automotive and Armament Command is working to purchase the ceiling units from Red Dot to modify the rest of our Avengers. As for the Avenger's turret, we minimized the heat by installing a 35-percent tint film on the canopy. It worked superbly; however, a tint darker than 35 percent is not recommended, for it would severely degrade nighttime visibility.

We also rescinded the low usage program as the annual service intervals for our motors and systems were too far apart and operating in Iraq's harsh environment with modified equipment caused maintenance issues. We performed complete services on our vehicles at the sixth month or 3,000-mile interval, whichever came first, and we reduced our Avenger system service interval to every three months instead of semiannually. This accelerated maintenance program prevented major maintenance issues.

Third Country Nationals Escort Mission

Everyday, hundreds of third TCNs and their vehicles enter FOB Warrior. A large number of TCNs work on base construction projects while the rest are employed as linguists, launderers, barbers, tailors and similar positions. Due to the current force protection stance, it is necessary to search every TCN and vehicle that enters the FOB. In addition, all TCNs must be escorted throughout the FOB. Bravo Battery Soldiers assigned to the manning-intensive TCN escort mission were augmented with other 2BCT soldiers.

It is imperative that Soldiers escorting TCNs be rotated. If not, familiarity and closeness between Soldiers and TCNs can develop, which can be dangerous. The enemy can use TCNs as an intelligence-gathering tool. For example, a TCN may ask about a rocket attack last night on the FOB and may show genuine concern. The unsuspecting escort, due to his familiarity with the TCN, may pass on critical information, such as impact location, casualties, etc. Unknowingly, the Soldier just gave the TCN an accurate damage assessment. If this information is passed to the insurgents, they can fire or adjust fire from the same firing position, since they have been made aware of their firing effectiveness from the previous night. The friendliest TCNs are the ones wanting information and these individuals merit scrutiny and a report to the S-2. However, it is important that escorts be reminded to treat all TCNs with respect and dignity. The TCNs—who work on base and live off—also serve as an important resource for our information operations. Treat them accordingly, and they will spread the good word about coalition forces.

Closely related to the TCN escort mission is the defense of the only TCN access gate onto FOB Warrior. Although the FOB is primarily defended by the Air Force Security Forces, Bravo Battery's headquarters platoon has taken "ownership" of this gate. On any given morning, close to 600 TCNs and 200 vehicles enter the FOB through the TCN access gate. The presences of an Iraqi National Guard compound just down the road made this gate an even more lucrative target.

The most dangerous threat faced at the gate is a possible vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack. Hundreds of TCNs, Soldiers, and Airmen congregate at the gate each morning, making it a high value target. To counter the VBIED threat we installed a second drop arm separate from the main gate. This provided us with a 200-meter blast stand off. In addition, we built a 30-foot guard tower to overwatch gate operations and avenues of approach. To prevent a VBIED attack, we organized a dedicated gate quick reaction force, which is composed of our six-man search pit crew. As a show of force, our quick reaction force's humvee, with its .50-caliber machine gun, was parked on an elevated dirt mound so it was clearly visible to everyone outside the gate.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of conducting multiple battle drills for a VBIED attack. The drill must integrate Soldiers with all first response elements: other security forces, medical personnel, explosive ordnance disposal, and the fire department. Understandably, one cannot conduct a dry run on all possible scenarios with these other elements. However, simply talking over all possible scenarios with your Soldiers establishes a basis for appropriate immediate actions.

Conclusion

The primary lesson learned during Bravo's Operation Iraq Freedom rotation is a lesson reaffirmed: properly-led ADA Soldiers can accomplish any mission set before them. When Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld extended

the tour of duty for some units deployed to Iraq, including Bravo Battery, I emailed the following message home to the B/1-62 ADA Family Readiness Group:

As you might have heard by now, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that several units in Iraq will have their tour of duty extended due to ongoing combat operations. This announcement extended our battery—B/1-62 ADA—two months past the scheduled one-year redeployment mark, extending us to March 2005.

I gathered the battery and personally told Bravo Battery's brave, young warriors our new redeployment date. As expected, a few heads hung low. I told them, "Our Nation is calling upon us to fight beyond our scheduled redeployment date. The Army is not for the weak and faint-hearted. If 28 February 05, is the road to home, let's attack it head-on with renewed vigor and not fail the American people whom we swore to support and defend."

Afterwards I told them, "You have 10 seconds to scream, whine and complain at the top of your lungs." They let off a loud and thunderous war cry that echoed across the entire camp. To my amazement, a few yelled, "Too easy!" When the 10 seconds were over, those selfless warriors picked up their rifles, put their war faces back-on and went back to the business of defending everything we cherish as Americans.

I told them to call home and let their loved ones know. I'm certain tears were shed as their spouses, parents, and children heard the news over the phone. Nevertheless, I'm comforted by the fact that, just like us Soldiers, our Army families are just as resilient. Army wives are a special breed. They are one of a kind.

Team, the true measure of a man (or an Army family) is taken not during times of comfort and convenience, but rather during times of challenge and difficulty. Your service to our nation has exceeded all measures of dedication and selfless service.

America is grateful for the sacrifices its troops and their families make while our Nation is at war. You're an embodiment of everything that is good and noble as Americans. Thank you for your patriotism and love for our country. God bless all of you and God bless America.

Bravo Battery has adapted well to nontraditional ADA missions. Its role in force protection has enabled 2BCT to focus combat power towards offensive operations. This is Bravo Battery's primary contribution and a testament to its relevance, even in the absence of an air threat, as a true combat multiplier.



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