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Personal Experience Paper (Our Reaction to an Improvised Explosive Device)

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Abstract

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8 July 2004, during a Combat Logistic Patrol heading north on the Samara bypass, my unit reacted to a detonated Improvised Explosive Device and another unexploded device in close proximity, which rendered four casualties to include my Battalion Commander and Command Sergeant Major. In my opinion, while we experienced some human errors, the severity of the injuries and the failure of the attack against our convoy were simply due to Soldiers' readiness and training. Prior to any mission, soldiers undergo extensive rehearsals and training on reacting to contact, MEDEVAC, recovery procedures, Landing Zone (LZ) procedures, and communications training. That day, every tactic, technique and procedure we rehearsed the day prior, we exercised during the attack. In the "Fog of War" Soldiers have only their training to rely on, it is imperative that while training your Soldiers, you train and replicate the environment as much as possible as it will save your battle buddy's life.

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While assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 38<sup>th</sup> Personnel Services Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Personnel Command (1<sup>st</sup> PERSCOM), based out of Bamberg, Germany, I was assigned as the First Sergeant for a 47 personnel detachment. Prior to my arrival, the Battalion had recently been alerted for deployment to provide personnel services and postal support for the Big Red One (1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division) in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II (OIF II), from 2 February 2004 to 8 February 2005. This mission was strenuous to the battalion as it performed split base operations in both Central Region (Bamberg, Wuerzberg, Kitzigen, Schweinfurt, Grafenwher, and Vilseck Germany) and Iraq. Boosting the Battalions' total authorized strength to 120 percent did slightly lessen the impact.

My duties and responsibilities as the 1SG were the administration, training, physical fitness, safety, welfare, discipline and morale of all the Soldiers and officers of the detachment. While my responsibilities were specific and extremely important, our intent geared specifically to the training, discipline and safety of the Soldiers as we prepared for combat. Given our mission for OIF II, and our area of responsibility in Iraq, we had to focus on training, acquiring and learning equipment, never before authorized in our MTO&E or new to the Army due to After Action Reviews. These equipment stemmed from crew-served weapon systems (M240B-Machine Guns and M2- .50 Cal Machine Guns), to Common Access Card (CAC) machines. The focus on training as stated before also shifted. Lessons learned scenarios became readily available and more realistic. We attempted to replicate the battlefield conditions as much as possible in the areas of reacting to IEDs (Improvised Explosive Device), First Aid and MEDEVAC

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training, drivers training, vehicle recovery and convoy operations training, communications training and postal operation training.

Our battalion's area of responsibility stemmed from Mosul in the North, with elements as far South as Basra, with our headquarters in Tikrit (see map below).



This brings me to the highlight of my experience while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II. Upon arrival into Kuwait, and being part of the Big Red One, we were under the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division Support Command's (DISCOM) umbrella. We began to establish and link-up with our counterparts for equipment, supplies and processing of

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reports. We received Add-on-Armor (AOA) to prepare and harden our vehicles for the grueling 74 vehicle, three and a half-day, 520-kilometer Combat Logistic Patrol (CLP) from Kuwait to Tikrit, arriving on the 23 of February 2004. We joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (replacing unit), and began left/right seat ride and our RIP/TOA (Release in Place/Transfer of Authority) for the next 10 days.

Due to the Battalions' detachment locations throughout Iraq, the leadership had to make and participate in many Combat Logistic Patrols in order to check, visit, and transport supplies to our warriors on the many Forward Operating Bases (FOB). As the Headquarters Detachment, the majority of combat logistic patrol fell under the responsibility of my commander and me. On a weekly average, our Headquarters —Terminators”, consisting of mechanics, supply, signal, and admin/postal personnel were up and down MSR Tampa.

On 2 July 2004, we received FRAGO 38 outlining our mission, to conduct a Combat Logistic Patrol on 8 July 2004, to Logistic Support Area (LSA) Anaconda located in Balad, Iraq approximately three hours south of FOB Speicher (Tikrit). Our mission read——① order, HQ, 38th Personnel Services Battalion conducts a 6-vehicle Combat Logistical Patrol to and from Logistical Support Anaconda 6-8 July 2004 in order to conduct command group visit, review R&R procedures, provide maintenance support, conduct postal technical inspection (TI), search Logistical Support Area Anaconda for postal 2-2f (Fork Lift), and conduct OER/NCOER counseling. On return trip, visit personnel team at FOB Brassfield-Mora”.

The following will be a detailed list of events that occurred, both positive and negative during our reaction to an Improvised Explosive Device attack on our scheduled

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return march from LSA Anaconda to FOB Brassfield-Mora, and follow-on to FOB

Speicher.

—On the morning of 8 July 2004, we began our preparation for our return march. Our mission was to transport our Battalion Commander and Command Sergeant Major to visit personnel and postal teams at FOB Brassfield-Mora and follow-on to our home base, FOB Speicher.

35 minutes into the CLP, at approximately 0945 hrs, the lead vehicle (HQ6), was struck by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), which was emplaced on the right shoulder of MSR Tampa. The explosion resulted in four casualties (Bn CDR, CSM, Driver, RTO) and rendered HQ6 Non Mission Capable (NMC). A second IED was discovered approximately 5 minutes after the initial explosion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> IED was approximately 200 meters south of the first detonated IED.

**What Happened:** O/A 080945JUL04, an IED struck Vehicle 1, HQ6. Vehicle 2, Gun truck HQ3, 100m behind HQ6, reacted by passing HQ6 on the left and moved into a 12 o'clock security position. Vehicle 3, HHD-6 slowed attempted communication with HQ6, negative contact, maneuvered along the left "safe" side of HQ6 and made contact with Tiger X-ray informing them of IED and 6-digit grid coordinate. Vehicle 4, Gun truck HHD-7, maneuvered to right "attack" side of HQ6 and initiated security. Vehicle 5, Recovery/Litter Vehicle HQ8, pulled to the left, rear of HQ6, and pulled security. HQ6 was obviously not recoverable. Vehicle 6 Gun truck HQ6A completed box formation blocking diagonally across northbound lanes and securing 6 o'clock position. The Detachment Commander, from Vehicle 3 approached HQ6; all 4 occupants were conscious and able to convey extent of injuries. The battalion commander informed the

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detachment commander of serious leg wound. The battalion commander already had a one-hand tourniquet around his thigh as he was bleeding excessively. The detachment commander tightened the tourniquet and called for a combat life saver (CLS). The CLS and I arrived to assist and position the Bn CDR so that his legs were out the door of the vehicle. Our second CLS arrived, assessed and treated the CSM who had already put a pressure bandage on her face and, was bleeding excessively from her arm and face. The RTO, the left rear passenger in HQ6 was holding his nose due to shrapnel being lodged in his sinus cavity, and the driver, a severe calf and knee injury. We pulled the Bn CDR out of HQ6 and placed him flat on his back in the road with his leg elevated. The CLS bandaged the Bn CDR's leg and applied more pressure to the tourniquet, attempting to control the bleeding.

Simultaneously, Tactical Commanders (TCs) setup perimeter, covering 360 degrees with interlocking sectors of fire and left and right limits for each firer. Trailblazers (TB) (IED sweepers) arrived approximately 5 minutes after detonation. TB informed the Detachment CDR of second IED approximately 200m back (where CLP originally slowed on detonation) and recommended moving HQ-6A into closer blocking position to shield casualties. Medics from TB helped stabilize the BN CDR and assessed the other casualties. TB called in the 9-line MEDEVAC report. We stabilized all four casualties, and prepped them for movement. The four-member Landing Zone (LZ) team set up the LZ, provided security 150m from casualties, and set up VF 17 panel. TCs improved perimeter positions by moving security out to berms 10-25m off road. All leaders continued to check soldiers for vigilance and water consumption.

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First MEDEVAC Helicopter landed and the BN CDR was loaded. The helicopter departed with empty seats that could have carried the CSM as well. The VF 17 panels were blown away by rotor wash. The Detachment CDR, prepped to move three remaining casualties via ground CLP back to LSA Anaconda when two more aircrafts arrived. The first aircraft did not know where the LZ was located due to missing VF 17 panels, and was about to land adjacent to second IED, but was waved off by soldiers. Pilots checked with S-3 to determine priority, eventually taking last three casualties to 31st Combat Support Hospital (CSH).

While securing all sensitive items and equipment from the disabled vehicle, the EOD team arrived, and assessed the second IED. The 498<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company, whom was heading south bound, assisted us in the loading of HQ6 to haul it back to LSA Anaconda. We were directed to move north another 150m while the EOD team detonated the second IED. Upon detonation, we mounted our vehicles and returned to LSA Anaconda to reconsolidate and check on our wounded Soldiers. Upon arrival to the CSH, it was determined that the extent of injuries to our wounded warriors were much more serious than assessed, and surgery and preparation for MDEDVAC back to Germany was underway.

### **Lessons Learned/Insights (AAR)**

After Action Review resulted with the following response:

SUSTAIN:

-Rehearsal of CLP was a key factor in execution. Train as you fight, full battle-rattle in the heat.



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-Initial reaction was very good; Box Formation and security set up quickly with TCs in charge, took accountability, set perimeter and sectors of fire.

-CLS performed very well; assessed major injuries and priority of casualties; stabilized and re-assured casualties.

-LZ team set up security and panels quickly with enough room to land MEDEVAC helicopter.

-Team-work with Trailblazers and 498th Trans was seamless.

-Six vehicles and 23 personnel were necessary to pull security, treat four casualties, and set up LZ. Would have been next to impossible with a four vehicles CLP.

## IMPROVE:

-Initial internal communication; TCs talking to CLP Commander with ACE/Sitrep.

-CLS reacting immediately, getting to NMC vehicle without being called.

-After most serious injuries tended to, completely assess casualties for other, not so obvious injuries.

-Nine-line MEDEVAC must be second nature – more rehearsal/training required.

-VF 17 panel must be anchored to prevent rotor wash from blowing away.

-Upon initial IED detonation, watch sectors of fire and scan for secondary IEDs.

-Must have multiple litters; do not remove bandages to check wounds; possible infection.

-Clear communication with MEDEVAC necessary for expeditious evacuation.

How many can go and on which bird?

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In closing, we knew the probabilities to engage with the enemy were great, as the transfer of authority to the Iraqi interim government had recently occurred. However, the confidence in our capabilities and in each other based on the performance of the rehearsals, training, and preparation of our Soldiers, resulted in the mitigation of chaos from becoming fatal. To Provide With Pride!