

Support soldiers help to win the battle.



My Soldiers muster up the energy to face another day. In Iraq for the second or third time, most of them find it difficult to continually get up day after day. To start their days, they wander off to the latrines to brush their teeth, shave and use the restrooms. As the morning moves on they gather into PT formations. It is important to conduct exercise while deployed to maintain health and endurance. I want to give you a look at one support unit attached to the 101st Airborne Division's 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Squadron; the "Widowmakers".

My company, Delta Company, 526th Brigade Support Battalion, the "Death Dealers", is the forward support company for the Widowmakers. We have been supporting this squadron for two combat tours in Iraq. Currently they support almost 400 Soldiers in their area of operations with a daily sustainment convoy. This convoy route is stretched out over a 10 mile course filled with every possible adventure and challenge known to the Soldiers of today's Army. Day after day, the Death Dealers continue to ensure that the cavalry Soldiers who walk the streets of the Ghazaliya (Gozz-ah-lee-ah) district of Baghdad get all the supplies they need as well as two decent meals every day.

The Soldiers of the distribution platoon are at the center of this activity. Led by 2LT Jon Gresham of Oak Ridge, TN and SFC Elizabeth Martin of Apple Valley, MN; these leaders ensure that each mission has the required amount of food, fuel, water and a host of other supplies. Each mission starts with the production of an operations order. They receive the mission order 48 hours prior to its scheduled departure. Once received at the platoon, the leaders decide who is going to go on that mission. They conduct a back brief to me to verify truck requirements and personnel management in order to put the best rested and qualified persons on the mission as possible.



The day before the mission, the distribution platoon leaders conduct a mission brief to their sergeants in the platoon. They give the sergeants the mission specifics. The different sections begin to execute the plans they made. The day of the mission comes and the Soldiers assemble in the staging yard to upload all their gear and weapons onto the trucks. They then conduct rehearsals for the mission followed by detailed inspections of the equipment to ensure everything works the way it was designed to. The unit's first Sergeant, 1SG Gary Taylor of Winfield, Alabama, supervises the inspection process. The

Soldiers gather about an hour from movement time to conduct the mission brief. They hear about the enemy situation and receive their route for that day. They also go over the specific actions at each stop along the route.

The mission begins and they travel along the roads. The common things heard are the voices on the radio. Soldiers talk about what they see on the routes, information is passed about approaching vehicles, possible suspicious persons or landmarks. The scenes are not that dramatic. Garbage litters the landscape all along the road making Iraq the ‘third world’ country it is; massive barriers line each of the routes we travel to canalize folks into the roughly 50 checkpoints scattered along our routes. They are spaced out about every kilometer or so. We pass thru them and wave at the Iraqi police and Iraqi Soldier’s manning them. Kids and adults stand on the sides of the roads as we pass by. The kids wave in excitement longing to receive some goodies from the passing trucks. Some of the adults wave as well, but most ignore us. The patrol arrives at its first location and snaps into action.

The “chow” truck backs up near the feeding area to download meals and drinks to the hungry Soldiers. Today the supported Soldiers receive a special gift; sodas, energy drinks, and Gatorade®. The first meal is what is served in the DFAC, the second meal consists of bread and sandwich meats with all the fixings, for the Soldiers to eat when they want it. The Soldiers scurry up to the back of the truck to grab every last bit of the cases of drinks, boxes of snacks and the containers of hot food. The “Supply” truck back into its respective area and begins its download process. However, this truck holds the items that make the equipment work. Parts, lubricants, and other needed items are the order of the day. A meticulous inventory is taken during the upload and then it is just as efficiently downloaded to ensure every item is accounted for. Most importantly this truck carries the mail. I think most could do without some of the food just to get a letter or a package from the home front.

While all the bustle of Soldiers carrying food and supplies are being downloaded, the fuel section drops off its customary 2500 gallons of fuel to replenish what was used. On some of the missions we will take massive amounts of 1-liter water bottles. The security section trucks circle around and discuss multiple topics, ranging from the mission that day to just small talk. The download process is usually completed in 30 minutes or less. The convoy marshals again and moves to its next location. The process repeats for the currently three supported locations. After the last stop, they move out back to the base camp.

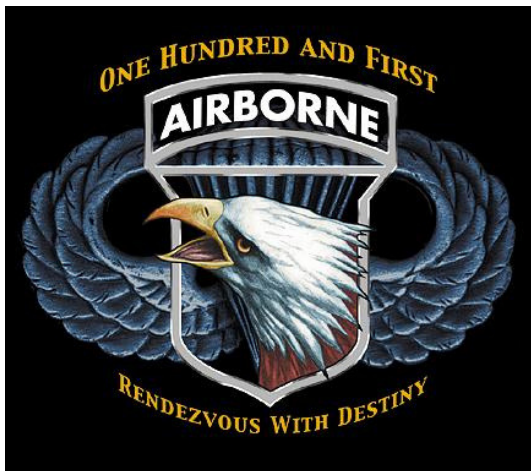
Along the route home it is much the same as a couple hours before; concrete barriers, trash, vendors, civilian traffic and pedestrians. They arrive at the base camp and proceed to the “clearing” barrels. This is the location that their weapons are unloaded and put into a safe mode for carrying on the camp. They proceed to the motor pool to drop off all the weapons and trucks into their storage locations. Finally the platoon gathers and reviews what happened that day so they can fix the problems so they don’t become a bad habit. The sun sets on the day, most folks retire to Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities for a chance to wind down. Some do more PT, others check out their email, some retire to their rooms to watch TV (AFN is piped into each trailer that 2-3 Soldiers share). Then it is off to the shower, and off to bed. In less than 8 hours they are back to the routine again.

In another platoon in the company the story is a little different. The maintenance platoon spends the bulk of its day fixing all the mechanical faults of the squadron's vehicles. They are led by 2LT Alan Ibbetson of Phoenix, NM, CW3 Duane Schultz of Posen, MI and SFC Troy Stockton of LaGrange, TX. Their day starts off much the same with physical training. After a quick bite to eat in the dining facility they report to the motor pool and begin working in the various repair and maintenance shops.

The welding and fabrication section finds a variety of tasks that they work on. From modifications of the guard towers at the joint security stations, to building gym equipment, construction of sniper screens, and installation of optical systems on trucks, they stay pretty busy. Often the commander will stop in to discuss the finer points of welding and offer up some pointers as to the proper wear of protective equipment or even discussing the newest project that they work on. I typically have them work some small odd and end jobs for the unit to ensure we are staying busy.

The recovery section provides on-call wrecker support for the squadron. To date they have only been called upon a handful of times. They have been used more frequently to conduct barrier emplacement missions in support of coalition and Iraqi army and police checkpoints. This group of guys does all the "heavy lifting" in conjunction with the transport trucks from the distribution platoon. On one particular mission we were tasked to emplace some barriers to protect the Iraqi Army. Once on site the Iraqi Army was glad to see us giving them a helping hand. They came up to give us hugs and say thank-you. My guys actually saw the joy in their eyes. These mechanics are dependable to the Squadron and get asked to come out once a week to support a troop/company; our guys do it with a smile.

The maintenance section serves as the biggest part of the platoon. These mechanics conduct vehicle services, and conduct all of the unit's maintenance problems. To date they have repaired over 1250 vehicles, radios, night vision devices and weapons for the squadron in the 4 months we have been here. This is quite a number since in garrison we average a little over 25 jobs a month. They turn wrenches to fix generators, water pumps, engines, batteries, wipers, mirrors and just about any part on any military vehicle. They are able to quickly identify and troubleshoot most problems with the trucks as to get them back out to the Soldiers on the streets of Western Baghdad. Their care and dedication to their jobs makes them the best mechanics this side of Baghdad.



I am blessed to serve with 78 of America's finest Soldiers. They do their jobs professionally and are true warriors. It has been my pleasure to serve as their commander for the last 21 months. In due time we will complete our tour in Iraq and look forward to our return to our families and the lives we left in October 2006.

CPT Christopher M. Horton



The author is a native of Sandwich, IL and has served in the Army since graduation from Sandwich HS in 1992. Enlisting in the Army straight out of high school and served in the 101st Airborne Division. He attended Northern Illinois University and graduated in 2000. He continued his military career as an officer in the 101st and currently is serving his third tour in Iraq. His wife Lynn and their four children, Brenden, Ashley, Kayla and Kenneth live in Clarksville, TN.

He is a member of VFW Post 7539.



SGT Anthony Napoleon of Brooklyn, NY, carries some lubricants to upload on some trucks for delivery to a Joint Security Station in Ghazaliya, Iraq.



SPC Daniel Carter of Many, LA and SSG Carl Peyton of Chicago, IL download barriers along a supply route in Ghazaliya for the Iraqi Army.



PV2 David Pickerill of Tulsa, OK, PV2 Robin Weeks of Montgomery, IL, and PFC David Escamilla of San Antonio, TX, clean their mission after completing a convoy mission.



PVT Geoffrey Robinson of Stone Mountain, GA, SGT Laquenton Pollard of Columbus, GA, and PFC Shreya Soni of Philadelphia, PA, pose for the camera before receiving their convoy brief.



Distribution platoon Soldiers of the Delta Company 526th Brigade Support Battalion, take notes during their convoy brief on Camp Liberty, Iraq.



Distribution platoon Soldiers of the Delta Company 526th Brigade Support Battalion, download rations from a truck at Joint Security Station Ghazaliya 3.



A store front along a route Delta Company 526th Brigade Support Battalion Soldiers travel on a daily mission in the Ghazaliya District in Baghdad.



PFC Marcus McGriff of Hawkinsville, GA, takes a few minutes to chat with PFC Avila of the Security Detachment, Headquarters Troop, 1-75th Cavalry at Camp Liberty near the Baghdad International Airport.



Soldiers of the Delta Company 526th Brigade Support Battalion, download barriers in support of the Iraqi Army near Ghazaliya, Iraq.