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Transportation Soldiers adapt to ever-changing mission

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UPAR, 70th Transportation Co.

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq — The Soldiers of 3rd Platoon, 70th Transportation Co., 264th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, have had to adapt to ever-changing mission requirements.

The transportation Soldiers, based out of Mannheim, Germany, normally operate M915 line haul tractors and other heavy equipment during missions. Originally, the company prepared and trained to deploy to Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, to execute a line-haul mission transporting fuel. However, in September 2008, the 70th Transportation Co. re-located to Speicher and its mission changed dramatically.

Instead of operating as a traditional medium transportation company, the 70th Transportation Co. is tasked in multiple ways requiring the line platoons to have separate mission focuses.

3rd Platoon in 70th TC is the only section remaining that transports various classes of supply to the supported bases around Speicher. The platoon is also tasked to escort “third country nationals,” meaning non-Coalition and non-Iraqi civilians such as Turkish truck drivers, carrying fuel and water on Speicher. They also oversee the handling of fuel at the base fuel farm and the delivery of food products to the dining facilities on post.

In addition to its multiple taskings on Speicher, the platoon also has a detachment of seven personnel on Contingency Operating Site Marez-East, tasked in heavy equipment transporter (HET) recovery.

The secret to the platoon’s success is the junior leaders, said Staff Sgt. David McAllister, platoon sergeant, 70th Transportation Co.

“Junior leaders being able to make sound decisions at a moment’s notice on their own with little to no supervision from higher is paramount, as most missions are spread out, numerous and too extensive to be directly overseen by the platoon leader or myself,” said McAllister, a native of St. John’s, Mich.

He continues to explain how the size of the platoon’s mission poses unique circumstances in managing personnel. After re-locating to Speicher, the platoon increased in numbers from 40 to 60 Soldiers in order to meet all required taskings. They received personnel

from the other two line platoons in 70th Transportation Co., as well as a 12-person detail from a sister company, the 233rd Heavy Equipment Transportation Co.

Every two months, the 12-person detail from 233rd HET and two squads from the line platoons rotate in-and-out of the section. There are no breaks in the operational tempo of the mission and its multiple taskings, so 3rd Platoon is literally a body in motion with its distinct areas in a constant state of movement.

“I have just learned to be flexible at all times, keeping track of the multitude of missions occurring simultaneously, which Soldiers are Where, and who is best qualified for certain taskings,” said 1st Lt. Evan Cooney, platoon leader, 70th Transportation Co., and a native of Dallas, Texas.

His biggest challenges come from not only needing to train incoming Soldiers and non-commissioned officers, but also getting the veteran ‘core’ of the platoon to adapt to a changing group dynamic, Cooney said.

“It is extremely difficult to build and maintain with your Soldiers being constantly rotated in and out; you just have to be inventive and adaptive, using the complexity of the mission to bring forth togetherness and pride,” said Cooney.

Spc. James Blanton, a heavy-wheeled vehicle operator from Cordova, Ala., said he was surprised by the different requirements and standards for picking up and dropping loads of cargo on the various supported bases.

“It’s like getting dealt a wild card,” said Blanton. “We all just make it happen; it was an adjustment before, always needing to work with new people and face new requirements but now it comes naturally.”

The mission requires a lot of coordinating with various channels and organizations: civilians, gun truck escorts and Soldiers at other bases who are tasked with managing the yards where loads are dropped and picked up.

“It’s necessary to do a lot of networking and really put effort into building relationships with the various personnel you have to work with,” said McAllister, the busy platoon sergeant. “In understanding that, it’s easy to see how the platoon has managed to come together and form a common sense of unity.”

There are many challenges, like rotating personnel and ever-changing missions, but Soldiers in the platoon said they have a dynamic that gets the job done.

“It’s harder but it works; the Soldiers coming over from 233rd HET really bring some interesting character to the group,” said Spc. Christina Causer, a heavy-wheeled vehicle operator from Osceola, Pa.

The transportation company is currently serving in the eleventh month of its deployment to Speicher.

-30-



Soldiers from 3rd Platoon, 70th Transportation Co., 264th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, haul supplies to Joint Base Balad, Iraq. The transportation Soldiers have had to adapt to ever-changing mission requirements. The Soldiers, based out of Mannheim, Germany, normally operate M915 line haul tractors and other heavy equipment during missions. Originally, the company prepared and trained to deploy to Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, to execute a line-haul mission transporting fuel. However, in September 2008, the 70th Transportation Co. re-located to Speicher and its mission changed dramatically. (Courtesy photo)