

Transportation Corps in Operation Iraqi Freedom 2 April Uprising

Richard E. Killblane
US Army Transportation Corps Historian

By the second rotation of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF 2), commercial contracts played a greater role in the line haul mission. Two truck medium truck battalions conducted long haul from the TDC to logistic support areas either at Anaconda or Mosul, Iraq. Theater trucks ran the Sustainer Push mission while a Corps truck battalion pushed supplies to the forward operating bases. From there, the truck companies of forward or corps support battalions delivered cargo to the units. HETs hauled unit equipment to and from their final destinations. The Army had abandoned of old system of supply where they built mountains of supplies in favor of the system used by commercial businesses. To eliminate the cost of warehousing, companies only ordered what they needed, when they needed it and produced only what was ordered. In an efficiently managed commercial company, items would only remain in the warehouse for a few days. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld hoped to get the Army to adopt the “just-in-time” delivery concept. This would eliminate the need for a large logistical foot print. He also planned to turn the logistics over to contract companies and have the Army focus on combat. While this system worked well and reduced costs in the commercial industry, Federal Express and UPS did not have insurgents try to ambush their trucks.

Because of the attacks on convoys during 2003, Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) required military escorts of one “green” military truck to three “white” commercial trucks. Earning \$75,000, three KBR drivers would not drive in Iraq unless a Soldier making less than \$20,000 a year escorted him. Originally, convoys required two MP HMMVs as escort. Any HMMV with a SAW was considered an escort vehicle. The 181st Battalion’s Skunk Werks originated the armoring of HMMVs. The 181st Transportation Battalion had pioneered what they called the “Tiger Team” concept. Two HMMV gun trucks ran ahead of the convoy searching for IEDs and blocking traffic at intersections. Other units called it by its original term, “Rat Patrols.” Because of drive-by shootings, doctrine had evolved to where convoys did not permit civilian traffic to pass convoys.

The normal long haul for a Sustainer Push convoy began at the Theater Distribution Center at Camp Arifjan. The trucks would pick up their loads and drive to CSC Navistar on the border. There they would rest over night (RON) and pick up the latest intelligence about enemy activity on the route. The only threat crossing the border was traveling past the dirt poor, Iraqi town of Safwan. The poverty of this town in the vast open desert was theft and the locals would plant spikes in the road to stop the trucks so they could ambush them and could steal the cargo.

After passing Safwan, it was usually safe driving up MSR Tampa to their next stop at CSC Cedar II. They would RON there and leave for Scania next day. From Scania the

convoys entered “Indian country.” The closer the convoys came to Baghdad, the greater the likelihood of an ambush. This was the longest stretch of the long haul. The Sustainer Push convoys would stop at Anaconda and those heading for Mosul would depart the next morning. After downloading their cargo, the convoys would return. Depending upon the efficiency of the cargo transfer teams, the average convoy lasted from ten to twelve days. The drivers usually had one day off then were on the road again.

During OIF 1, the active duty truck companies and their battalion and group headquarters had arrived among the first transportation units in theater and provided the bulk of the transportation units, primarily since the National Guard and US Army Reserve companies took more time to mobilize. Since these Guard and Reserve companies had to be full strength to deploy, they borrowed squads from other companies. Most units were at 70 percent strength and the Soldiers cross-leveled at least knew the friends from their companies. Many of these cross-leveled Soldiers had volunteered, thinking that this might be their only opportunity to go to war. They had no idea that this war would drain the manpower pool of the Guard and Reserves.

During OIF 1, it became apparent that this struggle to rebuild the country of Iraq and ensure the successful establishment of a democratic government would require the presence of the US Army for several years. Consequently, USCENTCOM released many of the active duty units early, knowing that they would return for multiple tours. The remaining Guard and Reserve units had the privilege of completing the first one-year “boots-on-the-ground” (BOG) by March 2004. Units would leave within days of each other, creating a huge surge in transportation requirements to move vehicles and equipment that would challenge transportation management.

The transportation companies replacing the OIF 1 rotation would come almost exclusively from the Guard and Reserve. Keep in mind that many of them had offered up as much as 30 percent of their command to fill out the OIF 1 companies. Many of the OIF 2 truck companies were below 50 percent strength when mobilized for their deployment. This created a significant leadership challenge in that these cross-leveled Soldiers came from a broader manpower pool, other than just transportation units. The severe shortages resulted in majors commanding companies, captains commanding platoons and sergeants first class acting as first sergeants. In addition, many of the Soldiers did not know each other before they arrived at the mob station. Leaders would have to build cohesion and pride out of what ever tools the units brought from their home station, such as unit identity and history. What these citizen Soldiers lacked in discipline and training, however, they made up for with greater maturity and experience. They brought skills honed by their other professions that would prove integral to their operational success as the escalating insurgency turned its wrath on the convoys. They would answer the question of how well the citizen soldiers did business. During OIF 2, from top to bottom, transportation would be provided by the National Guard and Reserves.

Theater Transportation

The 375th Transportation Group, commanded by COL W. Cory Youmans, replaced the 32nd Transportation Group with its headquarters at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. The 375th Group Headquarters arrived in January and completed their transfer of authority on 7 February. To ensure some overlap, the group headquarters were replaced before the battalion headquarters, then the companies. By that time the truck battalions by type of truck and mission. The 419th Transportation Battalion, commanded by LTC Todd Burch, had responsibility for the commercial contract transportation out of Camp Arifjan. Their medium truck and PLS companies escorted Heavy Lift 1 and 2 host nation contract vehicles from the Theater Distribution Center to the Corps Distribution Center. The medium truck companies of the 346th Transportation Battalion commanded by LTC Darrel Daughtery, escorted KBR contract trucks out of Camp Navistar on the Kuwait-Iraq border on the Iraqi Express run to Anaconda and Mosul. They had abandoned the trailer transfer points and the trucks conducted long haul missions. The 495th Transportation Battalion had all the HET companies at Camp Arifjan. They moved units straight to their camps and brought units back to Kuwait for redeployment. The 10th Terminal Battalion ran port clearance operations at the SPOD.

The 766th Transportation Battalion replaced the 495th Battalion and assumed control of the 129th, 1083rd, and 1175th HET Companies. The 175th HET belonged to the 419th Battalion. The 2123rd Transportation Company (HET), Kentucky National Guard, arrived in Kuwait in January. While other units conducted one-year tours in theater, the active duty 96th and 233rd HET Companies, which had participated in OIF 1, rotated in theater for four to six months to relocate the equipment of the arriving and retrograding combat units during the February through April surge period. Their biggest customer was bringing the 1st Cavalry Division units north and hauling the 1st Armored Division back.

PVT Ronald Gallet had just graduated from AIT in December and joined the 1st Platoon, 96th HET Company at Fort Hood, Texas, on 9 January 2004. He had not even time to draw his DCUs for the deployment. The battalion sergeant major had someone buy him two pair of DCUs just so he could stand formation. SFC Samuel Powell, Jr. was the platoon sergeant and LT Renina Miller was the platoon leader. They arrived in Kuwait on 23 February to replace the 129th HET (USAR), from Kansas City, Kansas. They conducted two right seat rides with the 129th HET before the latter left. They had been pretty lucky as nothing had happened to them.¹

This was the second rotation for the 96th HET, but the first time for SFC Powell with that company. He had deployed to Afghanistan in July 2002. While getting ready for the deployment, they had searched CALL for any information and found TTPs on how to spot IEDs. After the right seat rides, they conducted about five convoys on their own prior to Easter and only encountered occasional small arms fire.²

¹ Summary of interview with SFC Samuel Powell, Jr. and SPC Ronald Gallet by Richard Killblane, 12 March 2005.

² Powell and Gallet interview.

The 812th Battalion, commanded by LTC Thomas W. Sisinyak, replaced the 396th Battalion and picked up control of all the newly arrived medium truck companies:

172nd Medium Truck (NG NB)

227th Medium Truck (NG NC)

1450th Medium Truck (NG NC)

1486th Medium Truck (NG OH)

1487th Medium Truck (NG OH)

The 591st Transportation Detachment ran a trailer transfer point (TTP) at Navistar. The 227th Medium Truck Company, from Albemarle, North Carolina, arrived in Kuwait on 14 March 2004. The 1450th Medium Truck, from Lenoir, North Carolina, started the Iraqi Express mission from Navistar to Anaconda in March. The 1486th TC helped out.

The 172nd Medium Truck Company, from Omaha, Nebraska, arrived in Kuwait on 3 March. 50 percent of the company was cross-leveled from other National Guard companies. This company had a long proud history. It had deployed to the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm. Its company commander, CPT George Petropoulos, had served in the company since he was a lieutenant and would keep their traditions alive. This company had something to rally around. On its way to Vietnam, it had “acquired” a plaster statue of a crow as its mascot while waiting at Fort Lewis, Washington. This crow had accompanied the same company to Desert Storm and found its new home in Kuwait. The crow was so famous that when word spread of its presence, colonels and general officers, who had seen it as junior officers in Vietnam, paid homage to it at Navistar. CPT Petropoulos also made up a stencil of the “Rolling Crow” for the doors of his trucks. The company had 40,000 pounds of steel donated to them while they were at the mobilization station. They brought it over as blocking and bracing material and got in trouble for bringing it even though TAACOM had not developed add-on armor for the M915s. This company replaced the 459th Transportation Company. Its commander, CPT Bisby, sold Petropoulos and his first sergeant, Alan W. Gerard, on the need to create its own gun truck platoon. They initially built nine HMMV gun trucks crewed with non-truck drivers.

The 1486th Transportation Company, National Guard from Mansfield, Ohio, arrived in Kuwait in February and moved to Cedar II on 5 March. While at the mob station, SFC Steve Mikes’ platoon had learned from the company they would replace, the 740th Transportation Company, that they would assume the KBR Escort Mission. The company formed four separate escort teams consisting of 12 Soldiers and four vehicles to escort anywhere from 15 to 35 flat beds from Cedar II to LSA Anaconda. The cycle took four days, one day northbound, one day southbound, one day maintenance/details and the last day for personal maintenance such as laundry. The rest of the company remained in Kuwait.³

The 1487th Transportation Company, National Guard from Eaton, Ohio, arrived in Kuwait on 3 February 2004. It was sent Cedar II and conducted its right-seat-ride with the 740th Medium Truck Company, from South Dakota, in February. The 740th had

³ SFC Steve Mikes email to Richard Killblane, 14 April 2005.

conducted Sustainer Push from Kuwait to Cedar II and had never been hit during its year tour. The 1487th Transportation Company's first right seat ride with the 740th was a five to seven-day trip to the Syrian border.⁴

Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq

The 7th Transportation Battalion, commanded by LTC Akin, had replaced the 181st Transportation Battalion at Logistic Support Area (LSA) Anaconda. It inherited the Skunk Werks and all the truck companies there. Its mission was to push supplies out to the forward operating bases (FOB) in Iraq. The battalion provided command and control over the arriving companies:

369th PLS (USAR)

630th Medium Truck (USAR)

644th Medium Truck (USAR)

660th POL (USAR)

724th POL (USAR)

744th Light/Medium Truck (USAR)

1052nd Medium Truck (SC NG)

1171st Medium Truck (TN NG)

1462nd Medium Truck (IL NG)

2632nd Air Expeditionary Force Det (USAF) (Gun Truck)

The 2632nd Air Expeditionary Force Detachment was a rather unique organization. The demand for truck companies exceeded what the US Army had available so it asked the US Air Force to form three line haul companies. The detachments were formed out of airmen from the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) "Bucket," an individual manpower pool for deployment. Each Bucket became available or "hot" for a three-month window each year. The Air Force did not have any driver specialty skills so the Army trained them. The first three detachments arrived around January that year with follow-on assignments to Logistical Support Areas Mosul and Anaconda, and Forward Operating Base Speicher. Upon their arrival in Kuwait, their mission changed from line haul to convoy escort or gun trucks. They scrounged weapons, 5-ton trucks and HMMVs then drove up to Camp Anaconda. According to policy, they drew their issue of 150 body bags from a medical unit before crossing into Iraq. That was an equal number of airmen in the detachments. Rumors would later claim that they did so because they did not have much confidence in their mission. Unlike the Army, the Air Force deployed for six-month rotations.⁵

The 724th Transportation Company, from Bentonville, Illinois, arrived in Kuwait on 18 February. On 20 February, the 724th discovered its vehicles crowded with others at the SPOD in great need of repair. It completed its required convoy live fire training by MPRI at the Udari Range on 27 February. They considered this the best training they had received since their mobilization. It then received its assignment along with the 660th TC to the 7th Transportation Battalion at Anaconda, Iraq, with the mission to deliver bulk petroleum to BIAP, Al Asad (Camp Webster), TQ (Camp Ridgeway), and Al Ramadi

⁴ 1LT James L. McCormick II, "The 518th Combat Gun Truck Company (Provisional) 'U.S. Regulators,'" *Transportation Corps Professional Bulletin*, Winter 2004.

⁵ Interview of 1LT Justin Parker (USAF) by Richard Killblane, March 2005.

(Camp Junction City). On 4 March, a couple NCOS in an M-915 from the 1742nd TC arrived at Camp Virginia, Kuwait, to escort the 724th to their new home at Anaconda. The next day, they crossed the border, refueled at Convoy Support Center Scania then rested over night (RON) at BIAP. They pushed on to LSA Anaconda and arrived at noon the next day. They began their transfer of authority training with the 705th POL the next day. The 705th provided right seat rides for one mission to Al Asad. The TOA was completed in five days. The 705th also had a FRAGO to leave its equipment in theater, which the 660th, 724th and KBR split the fuel tanker systems and the two military companies split the rest of the equipment. They also received the tasking to provide the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) at Al Asad with a detachment of ten drivers and equipment to support their POL needs.

Forward Operating Bases (FOB)

The truck companies based at Anaconda pushed cargo to the Forward Operating Bases (FOB). From FOBs, such as Camp Taji, Seitz, Speicher and Warhorse, truck companies of the Corps or Forward Support Battalions pushed out to the combat units.

The 66th Medium Truck Company deployed from Kaiserslautern, Germany to Kuwait. It had belonged to the 28th Transportation Battalion. It deployed with an additional four up-armored M1109 HMMVs, four M1097 MP fastback HMMVs from the 95th MP, four M1097 HMMVs, two up-armored 5-ton trucks, and two 5-tons with ring mounts, above the authorized MTOE. The ADVON of 12 persons had deployed with two iridium cell phones on 8 January 2004 a day before the main body. A few days after their arrival, their M915A3s arrived at the port. The company spent the next three weeks training and preparing for its mission at Camp Udari. They completed the three-day live fire exercise (LFX) run by MPRI. They learned proper convoy procedures, how to fire weapons from a vehicle, correctly stop and perform security on halts in a box formation. They also deployed to Camp Arifjan to have MTS installed in their vehicles. The HMMVs were fitted with armored doors.⁶

On 30 January, the 66th Medium Truck left Camp Udair in three serials to Navistar with stops at Cedar, Scania and BIAP and arrived at FOB Speicher, Tikrit, Iraq, on 1 February. There the company relieved the 846th Transportation Company. The drivers learned the routes and method of operations by right-seat-rides with the 846th. During the months of February and March, the company primarily helped redeploy units back to Kuwait and others deploy north.⁷

Things Heat Up

1LT James McCormick II was a platoon leader in the 1487th TC at Navistar. He had been a squad leader in a scout platoon during Operation Desert Storm. His convoy departed Cedar II for BIAP. They ROned at BIAP and departed the next morning at 0600. A pair of Apache helicopter gun ships escorted the convoy on ASR Mobile when an IED exploded next to an M-915. The explosion damaged the truck and wounded both

⁶ 1LT Emily Sandvig, "66th Transportation Company; Road Kings – Raise Up !" *Transportation Corps Professional Bulletin*, Winter 2004.

⁷ Sandvig, "66th Transportation."

drivers. SPC Jacob Bach became the first Soldier of the 1487th to become wounded in action.⁸

McCormick asked the platoon leader, “What next?” She looked at him and said that this had never happened to her convoy before. Most of the problems occurred north of CSC Scania and the 740th usually just ran convoys to Cedar II near An Nasariyah and back. This was also their first run beyond Cedar. The platoon leader pulled out her folder with the radio frequencies and medevac procedures. McCormick was surprised that no one had memorized the frequencies but him. They called for the medevac but since the helicopter had been shot down near Fallujah, they told the convoy to bring the wounded in. When McCormick walked back to the damaged truck, he saw Soldiers milling around and taking pictures as if it was a traffic accident. They were still in the kill zone. He yelled at the drivers to get back in their trucks. They continued to Camp Champion near Al Ramadi and finished the six-day run without further incident.⁹

After that convoy, McCormick’s crew painted alternating tan and black stripes on the shell of his HMMV. This made it very noticeable. McCormick wanted to name it something more fitting of its offensive role, like “the Striped Avenger” or “the Raptor,” but SPC Thomas Selemi jokingly called it, “the Zebra.” McCormick remembered that zebras run. He asked, “Have you ever seen a zebra turn and fight?” The rest of the crew thought the name was funny. They reminded him that it looked like a zebra, so he let them call it that. Attracting attention is good unless one is good at what he does. McCormick and his HMMV crew would have plenty of opportunity to prove themselves. His platoon also added a ring mount to the top of an M-915 5-ton and constructed a steel gun box on the back.¹⁰

On 22 March, the 1487th escorted a 70 plus convoy north. An IED exploded next to an M-915 just past the second bridge on ASR Mobile. McCormick turned the Zebra and the M-915 gun truck back to secure the damaged vehicle. It received fire from two insurgents maneuvering behind a small building. The Zebra did not have any crew served weapons, so the crew dismounted and laid down suppressive fire with their M-16s and SAWs. The 5-ton made four passes firing its M-60 machinegun. In ten minutes of fighting, the Americans killed the two insurgents.¹¹

After the damaged M-915 was towed away, the Zebra returned to where the convoy had staged in a defensive posture under the Platoon Sergeant, SFC Haggard. 1LT McCormick led the convoy back to Camp Champion near Al Ramadi and dropped off the damaged truck. There they received mortar fire for two days. McCormick was surprised to learn that one staff sergeant with 20 years in the service refused to drive any more. He was a good driver and well liked but did not have the stomach for driving under the

⁸ McCormick, “518th Gun Truck.”

⁹ McCormick, “518th Gun Truck.”

¹⁰ McCormick, “518th Gun Truck,” and telephone interview with McCormick by Richard Killblane, 23 July 2005.

¹¹ McCormick email and “518th Gun Truck.”

hostile conditions of Iraq. McCormick's infantry background caused him to embrace the philosophy that everyone is an infantryman first.¹²

April Uprising

On 31 March, four civilian contract body guards of the Blackwater Security Consulting, which provided security for food deliveries, drove into Fallujah and their vehicle was attacked. The contactors were killed, their bodies mutilated beyond recognition, burned and what was left was hung on the bridge over the Euphrates. BG Mark Kimmitt, Deputy Director for Coalition Operations, pledged to hunt down those who carried out killings, but added that he would not send forces into Fallujah to retrieve the remains of the victims. He asked the Iraqi police to recover the remains. Kimmitt feared that any coalition forces entering the city would encounter ambushes where the insurgents would use civilians as human shields and any pre-emptive attack into the city could lead to a bad situation and make it even worse. The US military would instead act on the time and place of its choosing. This hesitancy seemed to encourage the insurgents. Violence spread to other regions in the Sunni Triangle.

At 1300 hours on Tuesday, 5 April 2005, the Mosques in the Sunni Triangle called for Iraqi people to take up arms in a jihad against the coalition forces. A car bomb exploded next to a patrol of three US armored vehicles and two HMMVs in Al Ramadi at 1700 hours, that day.

A platoon from the 1486th Medium Truck stationed at Cedar II escorted a KBR Class IX Sustainer Push convoy to LSA Anaconda. On 5 April, SSG Dan Studer's squad escorted a KBR convoy returning from Anaconda. At 0745, three insurgents fired small arms and an RPG from a dump truck. The convoy continued to move and did not return fire. At 0750 on ASR Sword, the same convoy received more small arms fire bowing out the rear duals on a KBR truck. The convoy continued to a rally point without returning fire. At the rally point, the KBR truck changed its tires. At 0905, an orange and white vehicle approached from the rear at a high rate of speed and two passengers fired at the convoy. The convoy returned fire and injured one of the insurgents. SGT Hubert applied first aid until a medevac arrived. At 1130, a taxi with five insurgents fired on the convoy. Upon reaching CSC Scania, KBR pulled their convoys off of the road. The squad returned to Cedar. The convoy had been ambushed four times in four hours.¹³

That same day, SSG Gruver had to lead a convoy of the 1st Platoon, 1486th Medium Truck from Navistar to BIAP. He listened to the reports of attacks and had a feeling something bad would happen on that convoy. He approached 1LT James McCormick of the 1487th TC, "I would really like you to go. I've got a bad feeling. I hear you kick ass." McCormick went to his company commander to ask permission to augment Gruver's convoy. CPT Patrick Hinton said, "James, you just got wounded. You should stay back, rest and recoup." James had heard the reports too and knew that the convoy was going to get hammered on the roads going up and back. He assumed that the roads would be rated as black and the convoy would get stuck out there, so he wanted to be

¹² McCormick, "518th Gun Truck."

¹³ "1486th Transportation Company Easter Week Firefight."

with them. He talked with his commander a little longer. “Let me go, sir.” Hinton relented and let the lieutenant pick his own crew.¹⁴

McCormick picked Brian Noble as his driver, SPC Brandon Lawson as the radio operator and SGT Anthony Richardson. SPC Blue Ralph, from the 812th Battalion staff, volunteered to go. He had an infantry background so McCormick let him join them. That gave him the Zebra a crew of five.¹⁵

30 minutes before they were to leave, McCormick visited SGT Peacock, of C Battery, 201st FA (West Virginia National Guard), and said, “I need a .50 cal worse than a dead man needs a casket.” Peacock responded, “Well, yeah buddy, I’ll give you one of ours. Pull it over to the shop.” They drove the Zebra over to the shop and cut out a hole in the turtle shell top where Peacock’s mechanics installed a pedestal mount for the M2 .50 caliber machinegun. They also found some old Kevlar ballistic vests and hung them over the doors for added protection. Because McCormick was the only member of his crew who had any real experience on the .50, he manned it.¹⁶

Three gun trucks escorted the convoy. SPC Holloway drove the lead HMMV gun truck with SPC Brian Coe, SPC Justin Miller and SGT Tracy Dyer as the gunners, fourth in line of march. This HMMV had ballistic armor and ballistic glass. The Zebra drove in the middle of the convoy as the floater. It moved around the convoy and blocked traffic. A M915 had a gun box constructed on the back with a Mk19 grenade launcher.

On 6 April, a fuel convoy of the 724th POL escorted a KBR convoy from Anaconda through the town of Hit. As CPT Terrence Henry’s lead vehicle drove through the traffic circle on ASR Bronze, the SAW gunner, SPC Russell, noticed the absence of ICDC in the circle. As he turned to look back, he saw Iraqi gunmen come out from behind cars just as an IED exploded on the right side of the road. They had detonated it too early and it missed the trucks. Russell fired off 13 rounds at the insurgents as they opened fire. SGT Bailey and SGT Watson in the approaching 5-ton gun truck saw the exchange of gun fire and also engaged targets with their Mk-19 grenade launcher. SGT Bailey began picking off insurgents hiding in the doorways and behind cars. The 724th POL had its first ambush and suffered no casualties or had any trucks damaged.¹⁷

On 7 April, IEDs closed the southbound traffic. The Muqtada al Sadr’s al Mahdi Army clashed with elements of the 1st Cavalry Division and attacked a convoy on ASR Cardinals. The next day, Mahdi Army attacked convoys and clashed with elements of the 1st Cavalry Division and 1st Armored Division on ASR Sword and Cardinals.¹⁸

¹⁴ Telephone conversation between 1LT James McCormick and Richard Killblane, 18 April 2005.

¹⁵ McCormick telephone conversation, 18 April 2005.

¹⁶ McCormick telephone conversation, 18 April 2005 and “518th Gun Truck.”

¹⁷ SSG Paul L. Marsh and SSG Victor L. Febus, “On the Move with the 724th Transportation Company: Patriots in the Middle East,” n.d., and “Historical Narrative, 724th Transportation Company,” n.d.

¹⁸ Power Point, “April 9th Ambush,”

As the violence flared up, the insurgents blew up several bridges over the Euphrates River to sever the line of communication in their area. While this actually hurt their own citizens more, guerrillas often tend to blow up bridges to hinder the government civic action and make them appear helpless in the eyes of the people they are trying to win. The movement controller rerouted traffic while the Army engineers quickly spanned the bridges.

Since 7 April, the 2/12th Cavalry, based out of Camp Victory at BIAP, fought with the Mahdi militia to reassert control over their area of operations. The Cavalry patrols were frequently attacked by insurgents on ASR Sword and Cardinals. The buildings along the streets provided excellent concealment for the insurgents to fire down upon the passing vehicles. Some insurgents felt so bold as to drive right up to the tanks and Bradleys and fire RPGs at them. At 0300 in the morning of 9 April, CPT Munz ordered his patrol of C, 2/12 Cav to take the Dairy Milk Factory from which the insurgents had launched their attacks. The Cavalry patrol settled in to a defensive perimeter for the rest of the morning.¹⁹

On 8 April, SSG Gruver's convoy of the 1486th TC was enroute to BIAP. Around 1900, the lead elements of the convoy turned off of MSR Tampa toward the gate. The passengers of Holloway's HMMV gun truck could see the gate. Dyer sat on the left side, Coe stood in the middle with the SAW and Miller sat on the right side of the gun truck. Coe pointed to the right and said that he could even see one of Saddam's' palaces. Dyer and Miller looked over Coe's shoulder to see the palace when they heard SSG Gruver yell over the SINGARS, "Contact of the right side."²⁰

After the first few vehicles of the convoy had made the turn onto the service road, they heard two loud explosions in front of the convoy. SSG Martin and Elaine F. Coleman, in the same vehicle, saw a mortar round land in the median then they received small arms fire. Coleman called on the handheld radio that they were taking fire from both sides of the road and SSG Martin started returning fire. Dyer, Miller and Coe turned around and grabbed their weapons. An estimated 30 insurgents laid an L-shaped ambush. The enemy hit in the ditches concealed by the reeds on both sides of the road. A vehicle with insurgents waited further up on Tampa under the overpass and the enemy had a mortar was concealed behind it.²¹

SPC Holloway's gun truck pulled into the left hand lane to race to the intersection to provide cover. Dyer saw three Iraqis, with weapons dressed in black, running off to the left towards cover. Dyer fired his weapon at them and they received return fire from the left and front. A round severed Coe's thumb and he fell down into the vehicle. Delaney immediately went to work treating Coe's wound. He yelled to Holloway to get to the

¹⁹ SSG Paul L. March, "On the move with the 724th Transportation Company: Patriots in the Middle East," unpublished.

²⁰ Sworn Statements, DA Form 2823, Dec 1998, SSG James D. Martin, 8 April 2004; SPC Robert A. Delaney, 9 April 2004; SPC Elaine F. Coleman, 4 June 2004; SPC Stephen D. Heinmiller, 4 June 2004; SGT James Dyer, 10 June 2004.

²¹ Sworn Statement of Martin, Coleman, and Dyer.

gate because Coe needed medical help. As the HMMV began to roll forward, a round hit Dyer in the right triceps and twice in the right forearm. As they turned down the service road to Gate 7, a round hit Miller in his left arm. He fell down but stood back up to fire, all the while cursing at the enemy. Dyer also continued to fire their weapons. A mortar round landed on the left side next to the HMMV and shrapnel peppered Dyer from his right wrist to his shoulder and hit Coe in the arm and face while he was lying down in the vehicle. As Dyer had nearly expended all the ammunition in the drum of his SAW, a round penetrated his right forearm and exited his elbow causing his arm to go limp. He could no longer hold his SAW. He moved his left hand back to fire his weapon when another round hit the hand guard. He could not hold the weapon to fire it and fell back into the HMMV. As rounds pummeled the gun truck, a ricochet hit Dyer behind the right ear knocking his head forward. Miller continued to fire his weapon until they reached the safety of the compound.²²

Gruver had led the lead elements of the convoy to safety while the gun trucks drew and returned fire. Once in BIAP, he set about trying to get a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) out to kill zone. A TCN driver had halted his vehicle blocking the remainder of the convoy. The drivers of the first trucks to reach safety were waiting for their wounded comrades. SSG Stewart, SPC Keith Miller and PV2 Suter cut his Kevlar vest off and searched for many wounds. SSG Stewart treated the more serious wound in the arm. He also inserted the IV. All the while, SSG James D. Martin talked to Dyer the entire time to calm him.²³

1LT McCormick noticed three cars with Iraqis driving up and down the convoy firing at it. McCormick ordered his HMMV to turn into the fire and move to the intersection. He had to jump up on the top of the HMMV since there was not room in the hole cut out to turn the .50 and fire at the cars. A round came through the mount and hit him in the hand and another hit his sappy plate knocking him down into the floor of the Zebra. He looked up and saw two insurgents walking toward his HMMV with grenades. McCormick had dropped the ammunition because his hand was bloody so he grabbed the first thing he could, a flare, and fired it at the enemy. It started a fire in the brush and caused the enemy to flee. He then grabbed his M16 and exchanged fire with them, dropping both of them.²⁴

McCormick then climbed back behind the .50 and saw the tree branches, a 1,000 yards way, move and light up every time the mortar fired. He started working the tree line with his .50 until the mortar stopped firing. He expended 100 rounds into the tree line. His radio operator, SPC Lawson, had been shot in the leg and the tires of their HMMV shot out. The Zebra drove off of the road and continued to return fire while they called for the Quick Reaction Force to arrive. After 20 minutes of fighting, the QRF still had not

²² Sworn statements of Delaney, Heinmiller and Dyer.

²³ Sworn Statements of Martin and Dyer. Statement by 1LT James McCormick, n.d.

²⁴ McCormick, "518th Gun Truck," and telephone interview with McCormick by Richard Killblane, 18 April 2005.

arrived. They arrived as the fight was nearly over, just after the crew of the Zebra shot up a blue car that sped by shooting at them.²⁵

The fight lasted 45 minutes and the convoy of the 1486th had five wounded Soldiers, but the insurgents lost 18 confirmed killed in action. The ambush took place a mile from the gate at BIAP. A local national convoy escorted by HMMVs was also ambushed on ASR Sword.²⁶

Good Friday Ambushes

On 8 April, the 724th Transportation Company (POL) was tasked to escort KBR drivers on an emergency fuel push from Logistic Support Area Anaconda to Camp Webster, near Al Asad, the next morning. This US Army Reserve fuel tanker company was from Bartonville, Illinois. 1LT Matthew “Matt” Brown, of the 2nd Platoon, would lead the convoy. 9 April was Good Friday and coincidentally the first anniversary of the fall of Baghdad. For an enemy that liked to attack on significant dates or anniversaries, this weekend had plenty of significance.²⁷

At 2330 hours their destination changed to BIAP. The company commander, CPT Jeffrey Smith, went to battalion operations to find out what was going on. The new route was ASR Milton, MSR Tampa, ASR Vernon to ASR Irish arriving at Entry Control Point (ECP) 1. Since no one in the company had driven to BIAP, except when they passed through there on their way to Anaconda in March, he requested a right-seat rider guide. SFC Hawley, of the 1742nd Transportation Company, was tasked to meet them in the staging area at 0700 hours the next morning. CPT Smith also asked for air coverage along the route and the battalion forwarded the request.²⁸

The 724th also had a requirement to provide “shooters” to ride shotgun with the KBR drivers. Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) would provide the drivers for the “green” military fuel trucks and the 724th would provide the gun trucks and right seat-riders. This was also their first time to provide right seat riders for KBR.²⁹

KBR had the contract for transporting fuel. Since the insurgents had killed the first contract driver in June 2003, these unarmed civilian truckers required an armed military escort. The 724th Transportation Company had inherited the mission. KBR provided their drivers with brand new Mercedes trucks, but for this convoy they would drive military tractors.

At 0500 on 9 April, 1LT Brown reported to the battalion TOC for the intelligence briefing on the route. Thomas Hamill, the convoy commander for the KBR drivers, reported for his security briefing at 0600 hours. The KBR security advisor told him that

²⁵ McCormick, “518th Gun Truck,” and telephone interview with McCormick by Richard Killblane, 18 April 2005

²⁶ McCormick, “518th Gun Truck,” and “April 9th Ambush.”

²⁷ CPT Jeffrey Smith, “Historical Narrative; 724th Transportation Company,” unpublished.

²⁸ Smith, “Narrative.”

²⁹ Smith “Narrative.”

all routes were red, which meant that they could not drive. He said he would check with the military and check if the roads were still closed.³⁰

CJTF7 employed four colors to classify threat levels on any route. Black referred to imminent or ongoing enemy contact, and the route should be avoided if at all possible. Red warned of the existence of a serious threat. Amber indicated some threat exists, or that enemy contact had occurred on that route within the last 24 hours. Green indicated little to no threat.

Hamill then reported to the Total Safety Task Instruction (TSTI) with the rest of the drivers to learn who was going out with him that day. He then gathered the 19 other drivers assigned to his convoy to talk about the road conditions. About that time, the security advisor walked up and informed him that the routes had been cleared and route status changed to amber. Hamill sensed that the security advisor was still apprehensive. Of the 19 “green” military tractors, 17 hauled 5,000 gallon tankers and two were bob tails, to pick up any systems in case of a break down. After the meeting, the contract drivers climbed into their tractors and fired up the engines.³¹

The 724th escort vehicles left their motor pool to link up with the KBR drivers. Although the Corps policy required a ratio of 1:10 escort vehicles to prime movers, that day the 724th ran with five gun trucks; two M998s (HMMV), two M931s (5-ton tractor) and one M923 (5-ton cargo). At that time, any vehicle with a crew-served weapon, such as a M-249 SAW or Mk-19 grenade launcher, was considered a gun truck. There was no requirement for armor. One M915 tractor carried a Warlock jamming system. A M998 from the 644th TC accompanied the convoy for a total of 26 vehicles. That reduced the gun truck ratio to 1:4.³²

1LT Brown gave the convoy brief then SFC Hawley briefed the route. That is when the KBR drivers learned that they were driving to BIAP instead of Camp Webster. The KBR foreman had to run back to his Transportation Operations to submit a new mission sheet. Meanwhile, SFC Tolson walked up and informed them that Battalion had called on the SINCGARS radio and changed the last part of the route to ASR Sword and Cardinal entering at ECP 4, the North Gate at BIAP. CPT Smith, 1LT Brown and SFC Hawley walked over to their HMMV to call Battalion and verify the route change. Hawley asked for and received the exit number to ASR Cardinal. He then briefed the new route and drew the route out in the sand and gravel of the staging area. He mentioned that he had only made one trip to the North Gate but was sure he could do it again. The entire route should take about two hours.³³

³⁰ Thomas Hamill and Paul T. Brown, *Escape in Iraq; The Thomas Hamill Story*, Accokeek, Maryland: Stoeger Publishing Company, 2004.

³¹ Hamill, *Escape in Iraq*.

³² Thomas Hamill and Paul T. Brown, *Escape In Iraq; The Thomas Hamill Story*, Accokeek, MD: Stoeger Publishing Company, 2004.

³³ Smith, “Narrative,” and Hamill, *Escape*.

At 0957, just 30 minutes prior to Brown's SP time, the Chief of Highway Operations for the 172nd General Support Group rerouted the convoy to BIAP's northern gate because of a suspected IED was discovered along the ASR Irish at Check Point 1. The movement control battalion listed their route as red, enemy contact likely. When the Chief finally contacted the 2/12th Cavalry battle captain, the captain informed the Chief that ASR Cardinals had been closed for three days due to intense fighting. Just the day before, the Mahadi Army had attacked convoys and clashed with the 1st Cavalry in the same area the 724th POL had to drive. The Chief then sent another email message intended for the 49th Movement Control Battalion, "Sorry, it looks like Sword is closed until further notice. I am trying to deconflict." The MCB never received the message. The Chief later learned that he accidentally emailed the message to himself.³⁴

The first serial, which was escorted by the 2632nd Air Expeditionary Force (USAF) rolled out the gate at 1000 hours but had problems with its SINCGARS and turned back. As the first serial returned, the rest of the 724th escort arrived and Brown gave another convoy briefing. He told the drivers that they would head southwest out the gate to MSR Tampa, then proceed south through Taji to ASR Sword where the convoy would turn west for then after two miles turn south and drive right into BIAP.³⁵

1LT Brown had a total of 23 Soldiers, six of which were assigned as shooters for the KBR drivers. Hamill assigned a shooter to every other truck. The Battalion XO, MAJ Pagent, was at the staging area and made the call to send out Brown's convoy serial first since it was ready. They hit the front gate at 1030 hours. Meanwhile, the 2632nd convoy resolved its problem and departed at 1055 hours as the second serial.³⁶

The 724th convoy drove out the gate onto a six-lane highway. PFC Jeremy Church drove the convoy commander's HMMV at the head of the convoy with SFC Hawley as the route guide and SGT Blankenship as the SAW gunner. SPC Adams and 1LT Howard, from the 644th Transportation Company, rode in the second HMMV. Hamill followed in the tractor driven by Nelson Howell. The next 5-ton gun truck with SPC Row and SPC McDermott on the M2 .50 caliber followed behind four KBR trucks. SSG Grage drove for SPC Brown, five KBR vehicles behind. SGT Watson manned the Mk-19 of SPC Bachman's gun truck behind Grage. Five more KBR trucks followed with SPC Lamar driving a HMMV with SFC Groff, as the assistant convoy commander, and SPC Pelz as the SAW gunner. Five more vehicles behind that SPC Kirkpatrick drove the last gun truck with SPC Bohm manning the M2. Essentially, there was one crew served weapon between every four to five task vehicles.³⁷

More often, problems with the vehicles or drivers occur early on. Hamill had three new drivers assigned to his convoy from another department that morning. He saw in his rear view mirror that two of them were having problems keeping the proper 100 meter interval between trucks. One kept falling back. He coached the new driver with his radio

³⁴ March, "On the move."

³⁵ Smith, "Narrative" and Hamill, *Escape*.

³⁶ Smith, "Narrative" and Hamill, *Escape*.

³⁷ March, "On the move."

every few minutes and by the time they turned south onto Tampa, the spacing was correct.³⁸

The first part of the drive was uneventful, but after an hour and a half of driving, Iraqi vehicles started swerved off the side of the road and the convoy drivers saw fewer and fewer locals, a clear indication of trouble ahead. At 1230 hours, the convoy turned onto ASR Sword, a stretch of road known as "IED Alley." The trucks had to dodge rocks and tires in the road intended to slow them down. There were buildings on both sides of the road.

Tommy Zimmerman, in the fourth vehicle in the convoy, radioed Hamill that his truck was dying on him. The standard procedure was to have gun truck come up to the disabled vehicle and pull security until a bobtail could hook up and tow the whole tractor and trailer system off. Hamill radioed 1LT Brown "I've got a truck that is breaking down. We need to get gun support there with him." Suddenly one of the bob tails in the rear reported that it was taking gun fire. Hamill urged Brown, "We need to get this man picked up. Get the gun truck to pick him up. Let's leave the truck, just get the men." At that moment, Brown and Hamill had little idea how bad the situation had turned behind them.³⁹

SGT Watson, in the 15th vehicle in line of march, noticed that civilian cars stopped on the right side of the road then backed up. Soon after, he heard a large explosion and saw a fuel truck ahead of him, possibly the 7th or 11th vehicle in line of march, explode. As he entered the kill zone, Watson received small arms fire from the left side of the road. He immediately returned fire with his Mk-19, but the black smoke prevented him from seeing the enemy.⁴⁰

Suddenly, everyone reported on their radios receiving enemy fire. The enemy initiated the ambush with small arms and RPGs fired from both sides of the road. In the past, the length of kill zones had been very short, not more than a few hundred meters at most. The common response was to "put peddle to the metal" and drive through as fast as one could, which was about 45 miles per hour towing a 5,000 gallon load of fuel. What they did not know was that they had entered a four to five mile kill zone laid by 150 to 200 of Sadr's black-clad militia. Burning fuel trucks along the road would create a scene imagined only in hell and the wind blew the smoke across their path blinding the drivers and crews. The drive through the hail of gun and rocket fire seemed endless.

PFC Jarob Walsh, 19th in line of march, heard 1LT Brown on the radio, "We are taking rounds - everyone get ready!" Then not even a minute later, someone else incorrectly reported, "The LT's truck just blew up and I don't know where to go or what to do!" Walsh looked at his driver, Raymond Stannard, and said "Oh shit it's about to get bad." He saw a smoking truck, what he thought was the 11th in line of march driven by Tony Johnson, with PFC Maupin as the shooter, lose power and drop back to a hundred meters

³⁸ Hamill, *Escape*.

³⁹ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁴⁰ March, "On the move."

in front of his then explode into a ball of flames. It swerved off the right side of the road, through the ditch and into buildings.⁴¹

SFC Groff driving the armored HMMV gun truck, 21st in line of march, saw the burning tanker on the right side of the road and the wind blew the smoke across the road. As soon as he passed the burning tanker, he received small arms fire from both sides of the road.⁴²

With rounds now pummeling his HMMV, 1LT Brown reported back to the other trucks, “There’s a truck on fire up ahead, we’ve gotta get off this road.” The insurgents had set their own fuel tankers on fire. PFC Church turned off the highway through a hole cut in the guardrail. The trucks immediately behind him followed. Meanwhile, his gunner, SPC Blankenship, returned fire with the SAW.⁴³

Hamill grabbed the Qualcomm on-board satellite computer and typed out a message warning the serial behind them, “Convoy under attack.” Just then a bullet slammed through the door striking his forearm, knocking the computer out of his hands. The round blew a huge chunk of meat away, so he wrapped a clean sock around his arm to stop the bleeding. He then handed the radio to his driver, Nelson Howell. Just then, Hamill’s truck began to have its own mechanical problems and slowed down. Other trucks began to speed past them on both the frontage road and highway.⁴⁴

At the same time, Church drove aggressively to avoid the blast of IEDs and enemy emplaced obstacles, such as guardrails, concrete barriers, and vehicles, intended to slow down the convoy. Within the first five minutes of the ambush, two enemy rounds struck the convoy commander, 1LT Brown, wounding him in the head. While still driving, Church grabbed his first aid pouch, ripped it open and instructed 1LT Brown to place the bandage over his left eye. Church continued to fire his M16A2 out the window with one hand while navigating through the obstacles all the while encouraging his platoon leader to prevent him from slipping into unconsciousness. He told 1LT Brown to close the ballistic window to prevent further injury just moments before another IED detonated on the front right side of the vehicle and blew out the front right tire. Continuing to fire his weapon with one hand, PFC Church kept his other hand on the steering wheel and pushed the vehicle ahead on three inflated tires.⁴⁵

PFC Church finally reached the exit ramp, drove up on the overpass, turned left and drove down ASR Cardinal. He led what he could of the convoy to a security perimeter established by C/2-12 Cavalry the day before. All the while, enemy fire continued right up to the gates of the Dairy Milk Factory. Upon his arrival, Church described to the cavalry the ambush he had just driven. Church then carried his convoy commander to the

⁴¹ March, “On the move.” Walsh’s colleagues claim that he has a reputation for exaggeration.

⁴² March, “On the move.” Walsh’s colleagues claim that he has a reputation for exaggeration.

⁴³ March, “On the move.”

⁴⁴ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁴⁵ SPC Jeremy Church Silver Star Citation and March, “On the move.”

casualty collection point for further treatment and medevac. The cavalry platoon leader assisted in medevacing the wounded drivers that had reached safety.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the remainder of the convoy bore the brunt of the enemy wrath. Small arms fire riddled the sides of the fuel tankers causing them to spill their contents on the road like water sprinklers making the road slippery. RPGs slammed into four tankers causing their liquid contents to explode into flames blanketing the road with thick black smoke. Some of the tractors still managed to drive with their loads on fire. The enemy had also detonated their own fuel trucks along side the road turning the road into a living hell.

An RPG hit the fuel truck driven by William Bradley, seventh in line of march. A heavy volume of small arms fire riddled the gun truck behind it, driven by Row, blowing out the mirrors. All the while, McDermott, eighth in line of march, blazed away with his .50 caliber machinegun as brass cartridges piled up at his feet. SPC Row simultaneously fired out the window with his M-16. As they reached the exit ramp to make the left turn onto the overpass, the burning fuel truck in front of them slid off of the road and flipped on its right side killing the driver. The smoke from the burning fuel swept across the road obscuring vision.⁴⁷

The 13th truck driven by Jack Montague, with PFC Gregory R. Goodrich as his shooter, also came to a stop. SSG Grage's gun truck, 14th in line of march, came upon a fuel truck losing power. They pushed him for about a mile until they reached the overpass while SPC Brown returned fire. They could not push him any further. Grage's own vehicle took a beating. The radiator was overheating and one round went through the side window and out the front, the next round penetrated the left door and hit Grage in his left leg.⁴⁸

As Hamill's truck slipped further back in the convoy, one tanker system a half a mile ahead of him began fishtailing on the slippery road then slid off onto the median, flipped over and exploded. The driver did not have a chance to escape.⁴⁹

After passing Maupin's burning truck, Walsh, 19th in line of march, came upon the tanker flipped over on its side in the median. He then came upon another ahead on the right where he saw a man lying prone, raising his head up and down to watch them. Walsh propped his weapon on the side mirror of his truck and took aim for the man's head thinking he was an insurgent intending to blow up both trucks as they passed. He then saw that the man was holding something up something white in his left hand. Walsh's heart was pounding so hard, that he was sure it was a remote detonator, but he kept looking and held his fire. The closer they approached; Walsh recognized that the man was an American holding his ID card in an effort to let them know he was one of their KBR drivers. They could not stop to help.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Church Citation.

⁴⁷ March, "On the move."

⁴⁸ March, "On the move."

⁴⁹ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁵⁰ In his later testimony, Walsh mistakenly assumed that man was Tommy Hamill.

After they passed the civilian hiding behind the tanker, Walsh looked in his mirror and saw the truck behind him explode, roll over and slide down the highway. He had never seen anything like it before, “It really shook me up, it was just like something you would see in the movies.” They then drove blindly through the smoke of five or six burning Iraqi tankers, with Walsh praying that they would not run into anything. The fire made it extremely hot and Walsh could hardly breathe with the smoke.⁵¹

Lester and Fisher brought up the rear in two bobtails. They looked for stranded drivers as they followed the path of destruction. Fisher picked up one soldier and a driver before being wounded himself. Lester rescued another driver, but heard one voice on the radio, screaming at him to come back, “Jack, you bastard, come back!” Lester had no idea where the man was or how to get to him, he said. “I could hear him saying. I couldn't handle that. I didn't want to answer. I didn't want to tell him, 'I can't help you.'” The situation had become a desperate live and death struggle for the drivers.⁵²

After a while, Walsh and Stannard cleared the smoke and saw a truck in front of them traveling about twenty miles per hour with its trailer on fire. In an attempt to help, they slowed down. Walsh yelled at the driver telling him to stop and they would pick them up. It was Hamill and Nelson. Walsh's tractor pulled ahead of them a little. At that moment, Hamill's truck shook violently from the explosion of an RPG which also blew the other truck sideways. Walsh's driver luckily kept our tractor under control. Nelson yelled to Hamill, “We've been hit by something – some-thing big!” Hamill yelled, “We gotta keep going!”⁵³

Further ahead Walsh recognized the overpass. One truck was already traveling over the bridge, and another was behind about a mile or two back with Groff's HMMV trailing behind it. Walsh's rig drove up the onramp, but as they turned left to towards BIAP, his driver started yelling. Walsh leaned forward and saw the smoke trail of an RPG heading toward his truck.⁵⁴

Walsh later remembered, “The next thing I knew, our truck rolled onto its passenger side. I had my seat belt on so I couldn't move, but my driver didn't, and fell down on top of me, kicking and screaming trying to get out of the truck. He was all over me. I started hitting the windshield with the buttstock of my weapon until I broke through it. He ran out through it, turned around, and started pulling at my Kevlar helmet. He was trying to pull me out of the truck by my helmet, but my knee was stuck between the seat and dash, and my seatbelt was still on holding me back. He continued pulling on my helmet really hard, and at first I told him to get down and take cover, because we were still being fired at. But then it got to the point that I couldn't breathe. It felt like my head was going to pop, he was pulling so hard. Finally, I unstrapped my helmet and he fell backwards off

⁵¹ Walsh.

⁵² Christian Miller, IRAQ: Halliburton Convoy Unprepared for Last, Fatal Run,” *The Los Angeles Times* March 26th, 2005 <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=11999>

⁵³ Walsh and Hamill, *Escape*.

⁵⁴ Walsh.

me. I yelled at him and told him to get back in and lie down, but he was not listening, instead he came after me again. I unstrapped my seatbelt and pulled my knee out of the dash, falling down on my behind as my feet went out the window.⁵⁵

“Next he started pulling my ankles to get me out of the truck. I kept yelling at him to get down but he wouldn’t listen, so finally I kicked him in the chest with my left foot, and in the face with my right. As I kicked him in the face, he fell backwards. Before he hit the ground, blood splattered all over his face. I thought he had gotten shot, I thought ‘d*** he’s dead and now I’m alone.’ But he fell back on his behind and just sat there. I thought, ‘that’s weird he’s not dead.’ I was sure he had been shot in the face, but then his eyes got big and he said, ‘Oh my G** you’ve been shot, I’m going to die I’m going to die.’ I looked down and didn’t see any bullet holes. I had no idea what he was talking about. Then I looked at him and said, “Lay the f*** down and do not get up,” just to keep him safe.”⁵⁶

“Then I stood up to get out of the truck. My right foot hurt so bad I thought it was broken. I looked down and there was blood all over my foot. Then I realized the blood on his face was from my foot - when I was kicking him I got shot! I found out later that two of my toes had been shattered. Looking down and seeing the injury, I realized how badly it hurt. But there was so much adrenaline pumping through me that I could still stand. I looked back towards the rear of the truck to see if it was on fire. There was about a six foot hole in the tanker trailer, fuel was spewing out everywhere, and a small fire was building inside the trailer and on the tires.⁵⁷

“I turned and looked towards the front of the truck, down the bridge. But before I turned my head all the way toward the front, something hit me in the chest. It hit so hard it felt like Sammy Sosa hitting me with a bat. It knocked me off of my feet, back into the truck. As I laid there, I looked down and saw a round (bullet) buried in the vest on my chest smoking. It smelled awful. I pulled it out of my vest and it burnt the hell out of my hand. I pulled myself back up and got out of the truck. I looked down the bridge in front of my truck and saw two little kids on the bridge, about a hundred to a hundred-fifty meters away. They both had AK-47s; one kid was about ten years old and the other was about seven. The seven-year old was holding his weapon upside down by the magazine, and the ten-year old was firing three rounds at a time at me. His first round hit the driver's side windshield on the truck - right next to my head. I turned around to grab my gun, and when I did, he shot me two more times in the back; the rounds went through me and into the cab of the truck.⁵⁸

“It infuriated me as he kept shooting me. I grabbed my weapon, jumped out, and fired two rounds over their heads; I didn’t want to shoot them - they were just l’il kids. After I fired over their heads, they turned around and ran down the bridge. Then I fell down onto my hands and knees; I couldn’t breathe or move. I had been shot four times! I looked

⁵⁵ Walsh.

⁵⁶ Walsh.

⁵⁷ Walsh.

⁵⁸ Walsh.

over to where my driver had been lying down - he was gone. I looked back and saw him running behind the truck, the opposite direction from where we were supposed to go. There was no way I could stop him, he was just running frantic. So it was just me on my hands and knees at this point, all alone. I couldn't breathe nor move, and my head was pounding very hard. I knew it was over with; there was no way I was getting out of there alive. I would either die or be captured.⁵⁹

"I still was not going to give up though. I got up, grabbed my weapon, and walked over to the guardrail to look down on the highway. I stood there looking at all of our trucks blown up everywhere; the whole highway was scattered with our semis and our civilians. There was fire and black smoke everywhere. It was horrible. The last I remembered, there were two vehicles left on the highway, but I didn't see them anywhere, so I figured they had been blown up also. While I was standing there looking at the destruction, about twenty or thirty rounds hit the guardrail next to me. I fell backwards and lied down. Then I started low crawling towards the end of the bridge in the direction we were originally going. Bullets followed me the entire way.⁶⁰

"Then, to my chagrin, I realized I was headed the wrong way on the bridge - into the middle of the city (Baghdad). I was just going to get shot again, and I probably wouldn't be so lucky the next time around. Bullets were striking all around me as I got up and ran back towards our burning truck. It sounds crazy, but at the time that was the safest place. On my way back, the last semi I had originally seen on the highway started coming up the bridge from behind our truck. It was almost demolished. All of the tires had been shot out, the trailer was burning, and it had bullet holes everywhere. It was losing fuel in multiple places. The tractor was completely trashed because of all the bullet holes.⁶¹

"It slowed down just enough so I could jump up on the side. I jumped up on the steps of the passenger side and told the driver to speed up. There was a driver and passenger inside the truck, both civilians. The driver was wounded, but not badly. The passenger (Hamill) was hyperventilating; he had been shot in the right arm."⁶²

Hamill's tractor had slowed to a crawl of five to ten miles per hour as it neared the exit ramp. Hamill saw the first tanker flipped on its right side with its cab crushed. Hamill wanted to stop and check on the driver, but if he did his rig would have blocked the exit for the trucks behind him. As they turned onto the ramp, they began to fishtail. Hamill shouted, "Nelson, we can't block this ramp. Try to get over to the guardrail as far as you can. If we spin out by the guardrail maybe another truck can still get by."⁶³

As they reached the top of the ramp, another truck swerved off the freeway, cut in front of them, and made the left hand turn onto the overpass. There was another tanker system that appeared to have been hit by an RPG (most likely Walsh's) and flipped over against

⁵⁹

⁶⁰ Walsh.

⁶¹ Walsh.

⁶² Walsh.

⁶³ Hamill, *Escape*.

the guard rail. Hamill's truck began to cross the bridge past the disabled truck. About a hundred yards ahead of them, the fuel truck that had just passed them was speeding up and exploded shooting flames 200 feet in the air. By then Hamill's truck was making very little progress. Just then a Soldier ran up, jumped on the running board on the passenger's side and wrapped his arm around the mirror. Hamill remembered that the Soldier yelled, "We've got to drop this trailer."⁶⁴

Nelson yelled, "We are losing air pressure, must have happened when that big explosion hit us, must've knocked out our brakes." They dragged the fuel trailer like an anchor.⁶⁵

Walsh claimed, "I continued to stand on the side of the truck as we went only about twenty-five to thirty miles per hour; there were no tires left on the truck, it was driving completely on the rims. As we entered Baghdad, I fired into the city buildings and just about everywhere trying to keep the suppressive fire down. Unfortunately, it wasn't working. The more I fired, the more rounds were fired at us. And I couldn't stabilize my weapon; I was attempting to hold onto the truck with one hand while firing with the other. I decided I would be more stable on the hood of the truck."⁶⁶

Hamill remembered, "He was standing up on the running board and had absolutely no protection. He was shot in the arm but kept firing away and trying to hold on. A couple of times he grabbed another clip, bumped it, and slammed it in his M-16. He was sweeping his gun back and forth and firing, not really picking his targets. He realized he needed a better prone position. Using as a rest, he continued firing at anything that moved. We steadily crept along, barely moving at all."⁶⁷

Walsh continued, "I grabbed the side mirror to get up on the hood, but the mirror broke off. As I was falling off, the passenger had enough sense to grab the handle on the back of my flak jacket to keep me on the truck. Since he was hyperventilating, I don't have any idea how he did it."⁶⁸

"I tried again. I reached back, grabbed the truck's passenger window, pulling myself back up onto the truck, then I jumped up onto the hood and lied down. I fired left and right into the city. There were people everywhere with weapons firing at us, it was horrible. I have no idea how I did not get shot. I heard a weapon fire really close to us, closer than the others, coming from my right side, which was the driver's side of the truck. I looked over and saw the two little kids that were on the bridge earlier, they were firing at me again. The older one, who had shot me earlier, was firing at the trailer and the semi, and the younger kid was firing two to three rounds at a time directly at me. I fired another round over their heads but they didn't budge, and apparently they were not about to. Then I

⁶⁴ Hamill, *Escape*. Hamill thought that the Soldier was SPC Gregory Goodrich. This is where Walsh and Hamill tell the same story.

⁶⁵ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁶⁶ Walsh

⁶⁷ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁶⁸ Walsh.

aimed at the younger kid's chest and fired the round. It went into his throat and out the other side, and he dropped to the ground dead.⁶⁹

“The older kid looked down at him, then up at me, and started laying into it; firing twenty to thirty rounds at a time at me. I rolled over, trying not to get hit, then I aimed at his head and shot, but I missed and it went over his head and hit the wall. Luckily it knocked enough debris down on him to drop him. I knew he wasn't dead, but he was down on the ground and that was good enough for me.⁷⁰

Hamill remembered, “We were coming up on one of the trucks that had exploded, and it was still blazing. Nelson yelled, “We can't go by they truck. We'll catch fire, too.” Their tanker was spilling fuel from both sides, but they could not stop since they were still taking small arms fire. Nelson added, “This truck's fixin' to die. It's fixin' to quit.” Their truck finally ground to a halt.⁷¹

Walsh added, “Then the truck started slowing down more and more until it came to a dead stop. I rolled off the hood and lied down in front of the truck. As I lay there, I realized all the bullets that were being fired were landing around me. A couple of strays were hitting the semi where the two civilians were. I knew that if a round hit them, they would not make it; they were already in bad shape. I got up and ran away from the truck, about fifty to seventy-five meters, and lied back down. I fired into the buildings wherever I saw anyone. At that time, to me everyone was the enemy except my own.⁷²

Hamill wrote, “We had no more choices. We had to bale. Right then a Humvee pulled around in front of us at about 100 feet and stopped. Then [Walsh] rolled off the hood of our truck and fell to the ground, picked himself up, and ran for the Humvee. Nelson was running right behind him.”⁷³

Walsh said, “I looked back at the truck and saw the driver getting out. I knew if he got out, it would draw attention to him and he would end up being shot. I started yelling, telling him to get back in the truck, but he wouldn't listen. I know I should not have done it, but I aimed and shot a round into his door handle. I knew I would not hit him, and I hit where I intended. He jumped back into the truck and shut the door. They both sat there looking at me. I hope they didn't think I was going to shoot them. I was just trying to keep them safe.⁷⁴

“We were stuck there for about ten minutes when a Hummer appeared coming towards us from the bridge. It was the Hummer I had seen earlier. That Humvee was our last chance. I jumped up and flagged it down. I helped the two civilians out of the semi and into the Hummer, then I jumped in.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Walsh.

⁷⁰ Walsh.

⁷¹ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁷² Walsh.

⁷³ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁷⁴ Walsh.

⁷⁵ Walsh.

SFC Groff's armored HMMV gun truck, driven by SPC Lamar with SPC Pelz firing the SAW, had been the 21st in the original line of march. It began losing power as it drove through the gauntlet of fire and smoke and slowed down to last. Fisher's bobtail raced ahead then pulled off to the far right and he climbed out of his tractor. SFC Groff stopped and his crew pulled the screaming Fisher into the back. His left side was drenched in blood. Lamar then drove off trying to avoid guard rails and giant rocks placed in the slick road while receiving gun fire. Their HMMV continued to lose power. They picked up a couple more KBR drivers then PFC Goodrich and continued onward.⁷⁶

When SFC Groff's HMMV HMMV reached the overpass on shot out tires, they came up upon Hamill's truck then stopped. Nelson had climbed out of his cab and was running right behind Walsh. They dove through the right door right. Hamill ran as fast as he could, wounded and loaded down with body armor and Kevlar helmet, but was about ten feet from the HMMV when it sped off. He hollered but they did not hear him. Nelson yelled at Lamar that he had left Hamill behind.⁷⁷

Walsh added, "We took off towards the north gate of BIAP Safety. We were still about three miles away though. It was a long shot, and the Hummer had been shot up pretty badly. We drove a little ways and picked up two more people; one soldier, Gregory Goodrich, and a civilian. I was sitting behind the driver, and so when Goodrich jumped in he sat on my lap, and the civilian jumped in behind the passenger. We were really packed into the Humvee; there were about ten people in this four-person Hummer."⁷⁸

Hamill was left standing in the middle of the road with bullets still flying. He remembered the advice of his Vietnam veteran roommate in Kuwait, "If you are ever under fire, you get down on the ground as quick as you can and stay down." Hamill did just that. He examined his escape routes but saw several Iraqis running toward him. He tried crawling toward one of the houses with his good arm. Not long after he was a captive in enemy hands.⁷⁹

Wash continued, "As Goodrich lay on my lap, he fired out the window. Next thing I knew, I felt a thump - he had been shot. He started yelling, "ah..ah..ah..I got hit, I've been hit!" I pushed him forward so I could help him. I went into the back of the Humvee and pulled out my first aid pouch. I leaned back up to help him, but blood was coming out of his mouth and he wasn't moving anymore. He didn't make it. We were rolling about ten miles an hour at top speed. Then the Humvee died, I believe it had been shot in the radiator. It was not going anywhere. We were still about two to three miles from the gate, and we were under heavy fire. There was no time in this entire attack that we were not under small arms fire, RPG's, or IED's (improvised explosive devices)."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ March, "On the move."

⁷⁷ Hamill, *Escape* and March, "On the move."

⁷⁸ Walsh.

⁷⁹ Hamill, *Escape*.

⁸⁰ Walsh.

Groff's HMMV was only 500 to 700 meters from the safety of the cavalry barricade when a round through the radiator finally stopped it. Pelz saw insurgents moving up to trees all around them and began firing at them.⁸¹

Walsh remembered, "We sat in the back of the Humvee looking at each other. We all knew we were not going to make it. The passenger [SFC Groff] used the radio to call for help, but no one was answering. It was hopeless. We just sat there listening to the bullets bounce off the hummer, hoping no RPG's hit us, since it would certainly be all over over then. But we all knew it was already over; the Hummer was our last hope and now it was out of commission, and it was too dangerous to try and run for the gate. We sat there for about ten to fifteen minutes."⁸²

SFC Groff tried calling anyone on either the SINCGARS or KBR radio then SGT Blankenship answered on the KBR radio that a couple tanks were on their way. Pelz looked up the road and saw tanks emerge from the compound.⁸³

Earlier, PFC Church had rallied the cavalry troopers to mount a mission to rescue his fellow drivers then escorted them into the kill zone. Two tanks and two HMMVs pulled up. Church recognized the assistant commander's HMMV amidst heavy black smoke and flaming wreckage of burning fuel tankers. The Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle and up-armored HMMVs raced to SFC Groff's disabled vehicle to find two wounded soldiers and four wounded KBR drivers. They set up security around the vehicle while the enemy fire rained in from both sides of the road.⁸⁴

Walsh claimed, "Then we heard a loud screaming like a banshee. Three of us stood up and looked out the roof of the Hummer. We saw a Bradley tank coming towards us, it drove into the city firing at anything that moved, and two more tanks were following behind it. They pulled up on both sides of us, and two armored Hummers pulled up in the front and back. They boxed us in for security. It was cool as hell!"⁸⁵

"The soldiers got us all out of the back of the broken-down Hummer. I was put into the back of one of the armored Hummers with three other people. We were taken up the road about a mile, and then told that we were going to be put into a tank. I got out, and along with one of the civilians, helped the civilian that was hyperventilating walk to the tank. Unfortunately, the civilian that was helping him also was shot in the back and dropped. I dragged the hyperventilating guy to the tank and went back for the other civilian, but someone else had already got him. I looked around to see if I could help anyone. Then I got in the back of the Bradley. The soldiers shut the door and it took off. There were five people counting myself in the back of the tank. Three of them were dead."⁸⁶

While exposed to enemy fire, Church and Pelz set up a hasty triage, identifying the most serious wounded. Church then bandaged PFC Goodrich's sucking chest wound and

⁸¹ March, "On the move."

⁸² Walsh.

⁸³ March, "On the move."

⁸⁴ Church SSM citation.

⁸⁵ Walsh.

⁸⁶ Walsh.

carried him over to one of the HMMVs. Lamar saw Church put Goodrich in the back of the HMMV; his face was covered with his body armor. Lamar knew Goodrich did not make it. Once Church and Pelz had carried all the wounded over to the HMMV, it became apparent that there was no room left for Church.⁸⁷

Church and Pelz insisted that cavalry troopers evacuate the wounded back to the casualty collection point while he waited for their return. Groff did not know they had been left behind until he reached the safety of the compound.

PFC Church and Pelz took cover in the disabled HMMVV and engaged the enemy for the next ten minutes until the recovery team returned. Once they climbed in the HMMVs and left, an RPG hit their disabled HMMV. Upon his return to the camp, Church immediately rendered medical treatment to two more civilians with minor wounds and loaded them into vehicles for ground evacuation. Before leaving the area, Church initiated a sensitive-items check and weapons sweep to prevent capture by enemy forces. In spite of the extreme danger to himself, he maintained a clear presence of mind.⁸⁸

SFC Groff reported that he had could account for all his men except Krause and Maupin. He expressed concern about the SINCGARS in his HMMV falling into enemy hands. CPT Munz radioed 1SG Taylor to assemble a tank team to recover the vehicle. Upon their arrival, they saw 60 to 70 Iraqis dancing in celebration around it. Taylor fired an HE round at the HMMV destroying the vehicle and radio. His gunner fired into the crowd with his coaxial machinegun.⁸⁹

The ambush near Abu Ghraib on Good Friday was just one of many ambushes that day, but none of the convoys took as bad of a beating as the 724th Transportation Company. Several convoys on that same route turned around and headed back. The second serial out of Anaconda changed their route to ASR Vernon and Irish into ECP1 instead of Sword. Never before had any convoy in Iraq encountered an ambush this large or intense. The enemy had taken advantage of the inexperience of many of the new units that had just arrived during the March surge. The enemy tactics had once again changed introducing large scale ambushes to the war for the road. This ambush resulted in the death of PFC Goodrich and six KBR drivers. Eight Soldiers and four KBR drivers were wounded. Around seven fuel tankers and one HMMV were left in the kill zone, a little more than on third of the convoy. Many of the wounded were evacuated to Anaconda then Landstule, Germany. Others with minor wounds were stabilized at different camps. The 5-ton with SGT Watson and SPC Bachman missed the turn onto ASAR Cardinals and continued straight down Sword with tanker following. One KBR driver, Tommy Hamill, and two Soldiers, SGT Elmer C. Krause and SPC Keith "Matt" Maupin, were captured. SGT Krause's body was later found on 23 April and Maupin still remains missing. The KBR driver, Thomas Hamill escaped after 27 days of captivity when he heard the voices of US Soldiers outside the building he was held hostage in. Not since the ambush of the 507th

⁸⁷ Church SSM citation.

⁸⁸ Church SSM citation and March, "On the move."

⁸⁹ March, "On the march."

had the US taken such devastating losses on any ambush. This ambush was pivotal in the history of OIF convoy operations and required changes in convoy operations.⁹⁰

Many Transportation Corps Soldiers performed heroically that day, but only Jeremy Church's action earned the Silver Star Medal. On 25 February 2005, Church became the first transporter since the Vietnam War to earn this award and the first US Army Reserve Soldier in OIF. Church's coolness under fire and his disregard for his personal safety saved the lives of at least 5 Soldiers and 4 civilians.

LTC Akin pulled CPT Smith aside that day and informed him that they still had to push fuel out to Al Asad again. MG Smith, J4 CJTF7, had informed LTG Wallace that they only had four days of fuel on hand and that if the convoys did not roll then the operations would come to a halt. The combat arms units would have to shift their priority from seeking out the enemy to protecting the convoys. CPT Smith called his men together and asked for a prayer. After the prayer, he asked who would go on the missions to Al Asad the next day. Almost every hand went up. That night Smith visited the wounded at the SASV near the airfield and noticed hundreds of KBR drivers awaiting flights. They, unlike Soldiers, had the option of quitting any time they liked. During the American War for Independence, the Continental Army had encountered the same problem with contract transportation.

That same day, 15 HETS of 1st Platoon, 96th HET hauled M1 tanks of Company C, 2-8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division north. SFC Powell had heard on the radio that other convoys had been hit by IEDs or would receive instructions to go to another location on account of an IED. This made them alert. The MTS in LT Renina Miller's thin skinned HMMV did not work so she rode in the lead HET, who's MTS did work. The platoon had five MTS and five SINCGARS radios. Her driver, PVT Ronald Gallet and assistant driver, SPC Walsh, followed. They joked, "With us two in the HMMV, something is bound to happen." The 2 ½-ton with a ring mounted M2 .50 caliber machinegun was the third vehicle. SFC Samuel Powell rode in a turtle shell soft skinned HMMV with two M249 SAWs sticking out the windows in the rear of the convoy. They departed from their RON location at CSC Scania enroute for Camp Taji.⁹¹

Around 1130, they approached to within 3-4 kilometers of BIAP when a HET broke down. The guys were talking about lunch on the radio. They had halted for about 15 to 20 minutes before they fixed the HET. LT Miller asked if they wanted to stop at BIAP for lunch or push on to Taji, another 30 minutes away. For some reason, they chose to go to Taji. They had never failed to stop at BIAP before. It was a good place to relax, use the internet or phones. As the convoy started, they saw black smoke off in the distance but did not think anything about it. Smoke was not unusual in Iraq. Ten minutes later they saw five buttoned up Bradley fighting vehicles race past them heading south. They realized that something was seriously wrong. Normally they did not see Bradleys on the road nor buttoned up. Powell thought to himself, "What's going on?" The others asked themselves the same question. They began to make the connection between the smoke

⁹⁰ March, "On the move."

⁹¹ Powell and Gallet interview.

and the urgency of the Bradleys. About that time, a message came over the MTS, “MSR Sword is Red and closed. All convoys head to BIAP.” The convoy was about 15 minutes away from ASR Sword.⁹²

SFC Powell called LT Miller on the SINGARS and asked, “LT did you get the same MTS message?” She answered, “Yes. We’re going to turn around and go to BIAP.” They halted where they were. Powell switched his SINGARS to the Sheriff frequency and heard the message, “No convoys go north of BIAP. Insurgents attacking military and civilian trucks.”⁹³

Gallet was used to seeing lots of civilians along side the road, but this day he only saw one. She was hanging laundry. When the convoy stopped, she ran inside. At that moment he realized things had gone from bad to worse. Everyone climbed out of their vehicles and pulled security. SSG Hurd looked down and spotted an IED hidden in the carcass of a dog. He ran up yelling, “We are stopped right beside an IED. We need to move!”⁹⁴

Powell’s attention was focused on the black smoke ahead. They had coincidentally stopped next to a KBR convoy driven by American and Third County Nationals (TCN), which was heading south on a northbound lane. Evidently, they had turned around and drove back down the same lane. Guard rails in the median prevented them from crossing over into the next lane. Powell ran past his convoy to look for a place to turn around. A three-foot deep ditch paralleled the outside of the highway. Powell needed a flat place for his HETs to turn around. They were too big to turn around just using the width of the road. He could not find a place.⁹⁵

Some MPs in HMMVs provided security above them on the overpass. The MP HMMV drove down to ask Powell what he was doing. Powell told them that he was looking for a place to turn around. They then escorted the HETs 200 meters up the road to a level spot where the HETs could turn around one at a time. Miller waited for her convoy to catch up. The KBR trucks were parked in the inside of lane and the HET convoy in the center lane both facing south in the northbound lane. The MPs returned to the bridge. As soon as all her HETs had turned around, Miller planned to drive to BIAP. Meanwhile, Powell ran back to his HMMV, turned it around where it was and fell in behind the 2 ½-ton truck after it passed him and stopped.⁹⁶

About that time, the MPs escorting the KBR trucks pulled their HMMV right up in front of Miller’s HET, blocking its path. They halted the convoy because they had learned there was an IED along side the road. This was standard procedure if an IED was spotted ahead. In a state of high anxiety, they could not rationalize that the policy was indented to prevent convoys from running into IEDs. In carrying out the policy, these MPs had

⁹² Powell and Gallet interview.

⁹³ Powell and Gallet interview.

⁹⁴ Powell and Gallet interview.

⁹⁵ Powell and Gallet interview.

⁹⁶ Powell and Gallet interview.

halted the convoy right beside the IED and would not let them pass. Their strict adherence to the instructions endangered lives. At the same time, SGT Hurd jumped out of his truck and jogged up to Gallet's HMMV yelling, "You stopped us next to the IED!"⁹⁷

Powell called up, "What's going on?" Miller responded, "They don't want us to pass because of the IED." Powell could not believe what he was hearing. They were deliberately parking the convoy right next to the danger instead of letting them pass. Powell said, "We will go around them."⁹⁸

Miller's lead HET had to back up to drive around the MP HMMV. The other trucks had to do the same to give Miller room. SPC McEndree, the driver of the 2 ½-ton truck, climbed out of his truck and walked back to make sure he had enough room behind his truck to back up. Miller saw that McEndree had climbed out on the same side as the IED so she climbed down from her HET to warn him. At the same time, they started receiving a small amount of small arms fire. A TCN driver jumped out of his truck and pointed in the direction of the firing making a gesture with his hand to indicate shooting. The KBR drivers yelled at him to get back in his truck. Just as he started to turn, the IED exploded. Shrapnel from the IED hit the machine gunner of the 2 ½-ton in the back. It exploded just as Miller and McEndree had turned around to run back to cover and blew McEndree airborne into the ravine along side the road. Miller and McEndree were both hit by increasing small arms fire from the east side of the road.⁹⁹

Powell was standing outside his HMMV with the handset to his ear when the IED went off. He immediately notified Sheriff that he needed a medevac and helicopter gunships. An Apache gunship arrived on station within two to three minutes and the pilots talked with Powell on the Sheriff frequency. They circled high overhead and claimed that they could not see any enemy to engage. The enemy fire continued.¹⁰⁰

Powell then passed the word to his drivers, "We've got to get these tanks off loaded." The drivers and tank commanders rode in the tanks while they were chained to the trailers. The remainder of the tank crews had flown up to Taji. As soon as the ambush began, they buttoned up their hatches. The truck drivers climbed back into their HETs to maneuver the trailers so that the tanks could drive off. Powell ran up to the nearest tank and banged on the turret yelling at the gunner to put up a fight. Gallet could hear him yelling from his position several vehicles ahead.¹⁰¹

Powell then ran back to his HMMV and called the cavalry company commander and said, "Get 'em off the trucks." The commander had planned to off load just one tank, but

⁹⁷ Powell and Gallet interview.

⁹⁸ Powell and Gallet interview.

⁹⁹ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰⁰ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰¹ Powell and Gallet interview.

Powell said, “You have permission to drop all of them.” The commander responded, “That’s what we’re here for.”¹⁰²

The HET drivers began maneuvering the trailers then the TCs ran back to unshackle the chains so the tanks could drive off. SPC Bill Adkins’ HET was right behind Gallet. Gallet ran back to unshackle one chain while Adkins loosened the other, all while under fire. Walsh pulled security. Gallet could hear the gun fire but did not know how close it hit until paint chips from the tank fell on him. He thought to himself, “Just get the shackle off.” His focus on undoing the shackle kept his mind off of the enemy fire.¹⁰³

Once they freed the tank, SSG Wardale, the driver of the HET, called Gallet forward to treat the wounded. Gallet was the combat life saver. He ran to the most critically wounded person first, the TCN driver. The wounded man’s helmet was blown off. The man had taken the blast in the front and was punctured by shrapnel. The metal was still hot and he had not started to bleed. His left arm was also dislocated and twisted around like a contortionist. Gallet bandaged him up. As soon as Wardale had left his truck, a mortar round landed on his trailer destroying the M88.¹⁰⁴

Wardale ran over to Miller and jumped on her to cover her from fire. He then yelled for help. She was still conscious but had received two wounds to her lower back. Wardale then jumped up and pulled her in between the MP HMMV and her HET. The MPs came over to help. Wardale then ran over to McEndree, who was just trying to stand up. The round had penetrated his left side, but the flak jacket deflected it back into his body. Wardale wrapped an arm around McEndree and helped him to the casualty collection point between the MP HMMV, lead HET and lead KBR truck.¹⁰⁵

While all this happened, the tanks rolled off of the trailers. The cavalry commander’s tank was the first off of the trailer. He was up behind the .50 caliber blazing away. He drove his tank down the median to flatten the guard rails so vehicles had more room to maneuver. The second tank backed off into the ditch and got stuck. The third tank threw its right track. The driver climbed out of his tank and looked at the broken track, then threw his Kevlar helmet at the tank in rage forgetting that he was under fire. Powell yelled at him, “What are you doing? You are getting shot at.” The tanker realized his peril then took cover. To Powell the tanks drove around in confusion and circled around the disabled tanks to provide protections. The commander told Powell that they had just crossed the border and this was their first action.¹⁰⁶

Two medevac helicopters arrived and Powell talked them in. The severe casualty helicopter landed on the southbound lane and the other landed in front of the MP HMMV on the northbound lane. Two more Apache helicopters also arrived.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰³ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰⁴ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰⁵ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰⁶ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰⁷ Powell and Gallet interview.

Gallet, SPC Cruz and the two MPs lifted the stretcher with the TCN and carried him fifty yards ahead to a gap in the guard rail, then across the median to the severe medevac helicopter. They climbed back over the guard rails. By this time the shrapnel in Rivera had cooled down and his wounds started bleeding. A medic from the medevac helicopter came over and pulled Rivera's flak vest off and laid him face down on the stretcher. Gallett and picked up one end of the stretcher and the two MPs the other end and they carried Rivera over to the helicopter.¹⁰⁸

By this time the insurgents were firing at them from the east, north and west. The white van that Powell had seen to the east side of the road was then north of him heading west. He realized that it was dropping off insurgents. Since the MPs blocked the south, the insurgents surrounded the convoy from the other three directions.¹⁰⁹

Powell saw a military fuel tanker racing down the southbound lane on rims leaking fuel behind it. The tires had been shot out. A 5-ton truck followed behind it. They stopped in the other lane a little behind Powell. They were the trucks from the 724th that had missed their turn. The Cavalry commander pulled his tank up to provide cover for the fuel tanker. The drivers of the tanker and the 5-ton jumped out, ran around and pulled the TC of the tanker out of the cab then drug him toward the casualty collection point. The MP HMMV pulled over to pick up the wounded soldier. He was already dead. The drivers raced back to their cabs, climbed in and sped off down the road. The MPs drove back and loaded the dead TC into the helicopter.¹¹⁰

After the helicopter lifted off, the KBR trucks pulled out, then the MPs drove off and with the road finally clear, Powell's convoy mounted up and drove toward BIAP. The four tanks also drove to BIAP and provided base security. Because the roads were rated black, the 1st Platoon, 96th HET remained at BIAP for 12 days.¹¹¹

10 April

The increase in enemy attacks that weekend changed a lot of plans for going home. On or about 10 April, a convoy of the 96th HET retrograded the tanks and equipment of the 1st Armored Division to BIAP, but the tankers learned that their tour was extended on account of the uprising. They downloaded their tanks and escorted the 96th HET back to Anaconda to stage. The 96th HET received a mission to leave Anaconda with empty trailers to pickup another load at Camp Caldwell. Only part of the convoy went to Caldwell and the rest was locked down at Anaconda.¹¹²

The convoy consisted of four HETs, four TCNs, escorted by two HMMVs. SGT David Romero drove the lead HET with the convoy commander, SSG Postile, right behind a HMMV. An IED exploded and just missed the lead HMMV but blew out his driver side

¹⁰⁸ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹⁰⁹ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹¹⁰ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹¹¹ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹¹² Summary of interview with SGT David Romero by Richard Killblane, 8 March 2005.

tires. Shrapnel hit the convoy commander on the head and shattered glass hit Romero in the face. The HMMV stopped and Romero fought for control of his HET to swerve around it. He brought his truck to a stop.¹¹³

Romero saw insurgents assaulting the convoy and he climbed out with his and SSG Postile's M-16s. He assumed that changing M-16s was faster than changing magazines. The enemy withdrew under fire. Romero then looked back at his HET. He saw the full extent of the damage to his smoking vehicle. His gas tank was peppered and leaking fuel and his trailer was destroyed. He then pulled SSG Postile out of the cab and carried him a safe distance from the vehicle, all the while watching for the enemy to return. Two TCNs came to help so Romero could return fire.¹¹⁴

About that time, a PLS convoy with a medic drove by and stopped. They loaded SSG Postile up and drove him to safety. The medic also checked out Romero. He could still drive so he disconnected the trailer and drove only his tractor. The HET trailer had caught fire.

SGT Romero earned the Bronze Star Medal with V device and the Purple Heart Medal. His wife also earned the Purple Heart during that war. They are the second husband and wife team to both receive Purple Heart Medals in the same conflict. The first was a couple during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. Both were wounded by the same mortar round that impacted in a sleeping hanger. Romero's convoy was not the only one hit that day.

The 3rd Platoon, 227th Medium Truck Company convoy had spent three to four days in BIAP because the roads were black. The convoy had equipment bound for the US Marine camp near Fallujah. MAJ Mark Greene was the convoy commander. SFC Polee Love was 56 years old with 33 years in the US Army. He had just ridden on his first mission north. At 1545 on Saturday, 10 April, the day before Easter, his convoy of 14 M-915s carrying supplies for the US Marine left for Camp Milam, near Fallujah. The Marines provided 13 gun trucks, which consisted of nine to ten armored HMMVs, LMTVs and a 5-ton gun truck. The convoy headed north on ASR Irish.¹¹⁵

They saw burning fuel tankers but kept on driving. A mile after they reached MSR Tampa, the convoy received small arms fire from the left side of the road then spread to both. For the next ten miles, the ambush consisted of daisy chained IEDs mortars and small arms fire. The convoy lost one truck. The .50 caliber machinegun in the HMMV in front of SPC Shareese McPhee's truck jammed. The Marine dropped down and came up with an M-16 and returned fire.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Romero interview.

¹¹⁴ Romero interview.

¹¹⁵ Summary of interview with SPC Shareese McPhee by Richard Killblane, 8 March 2005 and summary of interview with SFC Polee Love by Richard Killblane at Camp Arifjan, 12 March 2005.

¹¹⁶ McPhee interview.

SFC Love called in the contact and two helicopters flew down the road. Suddenly, he felt something like a wasp sting in his right leg. He reached down and grabbed the copper jacket of an AK round and pulled it out. A few seconds later he felt a sting in his left leg. He reached down and pulled back a bloody hand. Evidently, the round had passed through his left leg and stopped in his right.¹¹⁷

SFC Love called and told the convoy commander that he was hit. MAJ Green then told Love to stop. Love responded, "Hell, no. We're getting shot at." He continued driving for about 10 to 15 minutes then started to lose consciousness. He fell over with his hand still on the steering wheel. His TC, PFC Donzie Haynes, grabbed Love and moved him out of the driver's seat then took his place all while driving at 55 mph. That woke Love up then he reached down and picked up a bandoleer. He cut the strap and made a tourniquet around his left leg to stop the bleeding.¹¹⁸

While the convoy was still in the kill zone, it slowed down. A TCN driving a white truck drove past McPhee and stopped. The HMMV gun truck in front of McPhee also stopped blocking her way so she had to stop. The TCN driver was wounded. Another TCN truck came up and stopped on the left. Since the convoy traveled down the center of the road, McPhee was boxed in. She climbed out of her truck to pull security. Meanwhile the rest of the convoy ahead of the Marine HMMV had driven off. She thought, "Oh shit." While under fire, she ran over to the white truck with the wounded TCN driver to move it out of the way but could not drive it. The other TCN driver on the left also started to move his truck. A Marine told her to get back in her truck. Her TC had taken her place as the driver. As soon as she climbed in the passenger side of the truck, the last half of the convoy drove off. They received small arms fire for 8 more minutes.¹¹⁹

When they arrived at Camp Milam, drivers pulled Love out of his truck. McPhee saw SFC Love and TCN driver. Since she was a combat life saver, she treated Love. They took him to the TMC tent. He was the only US driver wounded in the convoy. The TCN died of his wounds.¹²⁰

Love remained there for two days then flew to the CASH at Anaconda. By that time, he was able to walk around. Evidently, it was a clean wound and there were no complications. There were 11 wounded soldiers at the CASH and the medical personnel would not wait on them. Love asked then to come in and change his bandages but they would not. He complained and they sent him back to Navistar. Love asked to go back to the APOD. Once there, the medical staff at the APOD wanted to send him to the medical hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, for further treatment. Love refused to leave and wanted to rejoin his soldiers. MAJ Greene sent Love down to Doha for treatment and he remained there for four and a half weeks.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ McPhee and Love interview.

¹¹⁸ Love interview.

¹¹⁹ McPhee interview.

¹²⁰ McPhee and Love interviews.

¹²¹ Love interview.

As it turned out, the round had touched the artery in his right leg and cauterized it. Had it punctured, he would most likely have bled to death. Love had carried a box of Johnson and Johnson Handiwipes in his left cargo pocket and the round entered it first. He believes that the Handiwipes slowed down the round just enough to save his life. He also joked with the doctor that the wipes had also cleaned the round when it entered his leg. SPC McPhee was submitted for the Bronze Star Medal.¹²²

The drivers praised the US Marines for their performance. The Marines had a reputation for following the instructions given them. They had to get the convoy through. They stayed with the convoy and did not run off to fight the enemy.

Easter Sunday, 11 April

A platoon of the 96th HET was to pick up the ACR of the 1st Armored Division and haul them back to Kuwait so they could stage for their return to Germany. The convoy's destination that day was BIAP. The convoy had stopped at Scania and the MCT said that they could not proceed from Scania through Baghdad because the enemy had blown all the bridges. 1LT Ishaq Khan's convoy stayed at Scania for three days. The ACR had to be a Najaf by the Monday after Easter.¹²³

At 2400 Saturday night, 10 April, they had a meeting at the MCT office with senior officers from the 2nd Brigade (or ACR), 1st Armored Division. Three convoys from the 96th HET, 233rd HET and 2123rd HET had delayed at Scania. The senior officers wanted the convoys to take an alternate route at night. The lieutenants, who were the convoy commanders, did not want to do it. LT Kahn called his battalion commander, LTC Sherry, "They want us to roll at 0200." He responded, "No, you guys are not rolling at night and if they have a problem with it, they can contact the general." The 1st Armored Division officers said, "If you do not want to roll at night how about 06 in the morning?" They agreed.¹²⁴

The convoy departed in three serials at 0600 on Easter Sunday. The 233rd HET had the first serial, the 2123rd HET the second and the 96th HET the last. The 96th HET serial consisted of 25 HETs, two level 2 armored HMMVs without ballistic glass, one 2 ½-ton gun truck and four scout M1114s from the ACR. The 2 ½-ton gun truck had double ¼-inch steel wall box with plywood sheet as filler. The box ran the full length of the bed of the truck and it had a door made of the same double steel that opened out. It had one pedestal mounted .50 cal machinegun with a swivel seat in the box and a SAW mounted on the ring mount over the cab. There was no armor on the doors of the cab. The 129th TC had built the gun truck and turned it over to the 96th HET.¹²⁵

¹²² McPhee and Love interviews.

¹²³ Summary of interview with 1LT Ishaq Khan by Richard Killblane, 9 March 2005.

¹²⁴ Khan interview.

¹²⁵ Khan interview.

Two scout M1114s ran in front of the convoy as a Rat Patrol. Kahn led the convoy in an armored HMMV. Two more scout M1114s rode in the middle of the convoy and the 2 ½-ton gun truck and armored HMMV with the platoon sergeant rode in the rear.¹²⁶

They traveled along the eastern alternate supply route (ASR) through Baghdad to ASR Irish. Right before they reached ASR Irish, they had to stop to download the M1 Abrams tanks so they could cross the span bridge. The enemy had dropped the bridge. The scouts heard small arms fire. They were in a secure area, so they downloaded their equipment. From there the M1 Abrams paralleled the HET convoy the remaining 8 miles to the convoy staging area in southwest BIAP. They reached BIAP some time after 1200 without incident.¹²⁷

Battle of BIAP

On Easter Sunday, SSG Gruver's convoy waited among the rows and rows of trucks in the gravel parking lot of Camp Flexible at BIAP for tanks to arrive and escort them to the Green Zone. At lunch time, the drivers rotated in and out of the dining facility and PX. BIAP was divided into small camps and the trucks staged in an open area near the south gate.

C Battery, 4-5 ADA, 1st Cavalry Division had responsibility for the security of the south wall and Entry Control Point (ECP) 7, which was the main gate from MSR Tampa. An 8-foot high cinder-block wall surrounded the compound. A platoon of the battery normally manned 7-8 towers with two people per tower and an Avenger HMMV on the adjacent berm. 1LT Tom Obaseki's 1st Platoon had just relieved 1LT Jason Coad's 3rd Platoon. As soon as Coad's platoon returned to Camp Victory where they lived, Coad dismissed them and reported to the TOC. There 1LT Trey Elrod, the XO, told him that insurgents were about to breach the wall. Coad quickly scrounged up as many soldiers he could, loaded about six to eight in the LMTV and drove to the wall.¹²⁸

Heider was a village outside the south gate whose population had supported Saddam Hussein's palace. Further down the road was an old abandoned Republican Guard barracks. The village was politically neutral and generally very peaceful. A civilian also came up to the gate and said there was going to be large scale attack. Reports like this were common. Village was very quiet about this time, which was unusual for this time of the day. The Soldiers at the south gate had sighted a red-listed vehicle in the village.¹²⁹

That morning, 1LT McCormick and his crew, like many others, sat around listening to reports of fighting the Sheriff frequency on their SINCGARS. On hearing that a helicopter had been shot down, McCormick looked at his map and realized that the helicopter was only five miles from BIAP. McCormick told the others, "Let me go see if they need a gun truck." They drove up to the gate but the guards would not let them out.

¹²⁶ Khan interview.

¹²⁷ Khan interview.

¹²⁸ Jason Coad email to Richard Killblane, Subj: BIAP, Tuesday, July 26, 2005 3:47 pm, and Telephone conversation with 1LT Coad, 20 July 2005.

¹²⁹ Coad telephone.

As the Zebra returned to the staging area, its crew heard a loud explosion and saw a large cloud of dust rise up from the area where the trucks parked, 400 meters from the wall.¹³⁰

What they heard was an M-6 Linebacker (ADA Bradley), manned by SSG Green, that had fired a 25mm HE round at the vehicle on the Red List. The Bradley manned a blocking vehicle 300-400 meters behind the drop arm of Gate 7.¹³¹

At 1220, Iraqi insurgents attacked the south wall near Gate 7 with small arms and rockets. Some drivers were with their trucks, others at lunch or the PX. SGT Ron Ball's 3rd Platoon, 227th Medium Truck Company had split up that day and his part was waiting at BIAP on a back haul mission. Ball was driving back to the staging yard. The drivers drove their M915 tractors everywhere around BIAP rather than walk. Before he reached the yard, he saw drivers in firing positions so he stopped. He and his TC climbed out of their tractor and took up firing positions behind it. Ball did not fire a round since he did not see anything.¹³²

Gallet had just finished eating lunch and walked out of the dining facility to make a phone call. He heard explosions, which was nothing unusual at BIAP, but it was followed by mad chaos of mortars, RPGs and lots of small arms fire. Gallet ran to his truck and grabbed his weapon. He saw that a HMMV had driven up on a dirt mound adjacent the wall. The drivers on both sides had formed a "V" and opened fire with everything they had, .50 caliber, M16s and AT4s. The vehicle he saw was the Zebra.¹³³

As soon as the enemy fire began, McCormick saw a dirt ramp along the wall adjacent to the guard tower which the QRF fired over. McCormick told Noble to drive to the ramp. McCormick yelled up at a Soldier in the tower, "We are ready to go, we'll get up on the berm and fire." The Soldier yelled down, "Wait a minute, wait a minute." Suddenly the guard tower came under heavy enemy fire. McCormick told his driver to drive up on the ramp anyway.¹³⁴

Once on the ramp, the Zebra came under fire from a house on the left and from an irrigation ditch about 50 yards from the wall. McCormick saw more than 40 insurgents dressed in black running in the open as if assaulting the wall. The lieutenant opened fire with his .50 and ordered his crew to get out, take up positions and return fire. CPL Richardson, SPC Lawson and SPC Ralph immediately dismounted on both sides of the HMMV and returned fire. McCormick fired off 100 rounds of his .50 in less than a minute. He thought that if he could lay down enough fire, the attack would slack off. Instead, he received a hailstorm of enemy fire. The rounds passing overhead sounded like a storm of hornets had been stirred up from their nest. The situation looked bad. McCormick looked over his shoulder and called for more help but saw some Soldiers

¹³⁰ McCormick, telephone interview, 18 April 2005.

¹³¹ Coad telephone.

¹³² Summary of interview with SGT Ron Ball by Richard Killblane, 121 March 2005. Sworn Statement of ISG Ronald L. Partin, 20 June 2004.

¹³³ Powell and Gallet interview.

¹³⁴ McCormick, telephone interview, 18 April 2005 and email June 1, 2005.

running away. After 15 minutes of fighting, SFC Haggard, from 1st Platoon, 1487th, drove his M-915 gun truck up pulled up to the right of the ramp. It had a higher platform, so he could almost see over the wall. Haggard climbed up on the wall, identified targets and directed fire of the Mk19 gunner. Five minutes later truck drivers from the 1486th and 1487th came up and joined them.¹³⁵

The attack seemed concentrated on the area of the guard tower. RPG and mortar rounds hit the wall causing it to buckle. Truck drivers ran up to the wall to fight. 1SG Ronald “Ron” Partin, SGT Christopher “Chris” M. Lehman, and SGT Matthew D. Eby were sitting next to their HMMV gun truck parked next to the west wall when they heard gun fire south of them. They quickly cut their poncho shade away from their HMMV and donned their ballistic vests. 1SG Partin organized the other drivers into a defense. Lehman climbed into the gun turret and began loading his Mk19 while Eby drove their HMMV gun truck up to the wall. When they arrived, they saw 1LT McCormick’s HMMV pulling up on the ramp then he opened up with his .50. SSG Stewart’s gun truck also joined them.¹³⁶

SGT Thomas “Tom” R. Butler, Jr. was returning from lunch when he heard the small arms and mortar fire. He ran to his HMMV where SSG Stewart, SGT Hernandez and SPC White joined him. They climbed in their gun truck and raced to the wall. SSG Stewart, SGT Charles “Chuck” M. Gregg and SGT Tom Butler then dismounted and ran up to the ramp next to the Zebra to fire their SAWs at the house on their left. SPC White fired his M16.¹³⁷

The enemy reached an irrigation canal about 50 meters from the wall and the front part of McCormick’s HMMV would not let him depress his .50 low enough to engage them. His SAW gunner fired into the canal instead. The lieutenant then grabbed his M-16 to also engage them.¹³⁸

After reaching the staging area of BIAP, the HET convoy accompanied by the tanks of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division saw soldiers in “full battle rattle” in prone positions. Kahn asked what was going on. Someone told him, “Sir, the insurgents are attacking the wall.” A couple mortar rounds landed in the staging area but did not hit anything. The drivers climbed out of their HETs and dropped down into prone positions. The Abrams tank pulled up to the tower nearest the gate. The brigade commander climbed up and took charge of tower.¹³⁹

The colonel in the tower told McCormick to back off the ramp and let SGT Lehman’s gun truck replace them. He wanted the Mk-19 to engage the enemy mortars. While backing off, several rounds hit the Zebra’s windshield wounding the driver, Noble, in the

¹³⁵ McCormick, telephone interview, 18 April 2005 and email June 1, 2005 and 30 July 2005.

¹³⁶ Sworn Statement of 1SG Partin, SGT Christopher M. Lehman, 20 June 2004, and SGT Matthew D. Eby, 25 June 2004.

¹³⁷ Sworn Statement of SGT Thomas R. Bulter, Jr., 22 June 2004, and SSG Thomas G. Stewart, Jr., 16 April 2004, and McCormick email June 1, 2005.

¹³⁸ Telephone interview of 1LT McCormick.

¹³⁹ Khan interview.

face with shattered glass. Noble climbed out of the HMMV and fired his M-203 at an insurgent in a tree to his front. After the Zebra pulled off the ramp, SGT Lehman's HMMV replaced them. Richardson treated Noble's wounds. McCormick had fired 500 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition and the Zebra had been hit 14 times that weekend. After 30 minutes of fighting, he was exhausted. He saw his men laugh and cry in the same minute. Those were the side effects of adrenaline.¹⁴⁰

SGT Eby and Lehman saw a number of insurgents maneuvering from a building approximately 75 meters to their left to behind the mounds of dirt along the irrigation ditches about 100 meters from the wall. They saw a mortar tube at that berm. SGT Butler directed Lehman to fire at the mortar position which was protected behind a wall of sandbags. He fired 10 to 15 rounds and destroyed the sandbags and mortar. After five minutes of firing, Lehman yelled that he was out of ammunition so Eby crawled on top of the HMMV and helped him load a second box into the tray. Eby informed Lehman about another mortar he saw at a berm 300 meters away. By that time, McCormick and Noble came up to the ramp and spotted a third mortar tube 800 to 900 meters away. After Lehman emptied that box of ammunition, he called down for more and Eby repeated the same reloading process. The colonel in the tower called for a cease fire. After everything went quiet, the truck drivers scanned the area for enemy. Eby and a few others began collecting magazines. The tower also shouted down that the tanks were on their way. Eby backed his HMMV off the ramp to make room for the tanks. After 30 to 40 minutes of fighting, an M1 Abrams tank replaced the gun truck on the wall and ramp. One fired its main gun at the house and worked the ground in front with the coaxial machinegun. The fighting died down after that. Eby and Lehman passed out water and Gatorade to those around them and those in the tower. They drove back to find more water and learned that water had been sent forward.¹⁴¹

Coad arrived right after hearing the Abrams fire its first two main gun rounds and saw it fire the third. He also saw tanks clustered around the main gate next to the Bradley. He dismounted and told SGT Crouthamel to take the men in the LMTV up to the wall. Coad then went to find out what was going on. At that time, the two towers were still engaged by insurgents in two houses outside the wall and along an irrigation ditch. The building to the far right was two-story and the insurgents could fire down into the staging area. Coad's battery commander and 1SG Purdue went to the ECP. 1LT Elrod tried to get the tank platoon out of the road. The 1st Platoon leader was nowhere to be found. His men claimed that he was hiding in a bunker.¹⁴²

The LMTV pulled up and Coad quickly reinforced the first tower with an extra Soldier. Since the colonel had control of the first tower, Coad took the LMTV to the next tower, a 10 minutes to drive. He remembered that the fighting raged on the whole time. He sent a Soldier up the second tower and gathered a situation report. He learned that they had counted 13 insurgents in black firing at them from the weeds. The crew of the Avenger said they had fired approximately 100-125 rounds from the M3P .50 caliber machinegun.

¹⁴⁰ Sworn statement by SGT Lehman, SGT Eby and McCormick.

¹⁴¹ Sworn statement by SGT Lehman, SGT Eby and McCormick email, June 1, 2005.

¹⁴² Coad telephone conversation.

When Coad returned to the first tower, he ran into McCormick. Coad told him to try to pull some people off the wall because things were out of control. About that time, rounds started coming from behind them. Coad ran over and told an Engineer officer to pull his guys off the wall and stop the people behind them from shooting. The tank had taken the fight out of the insurgents and the fighting had already ended.¹⁴³

No one conducted a battle damage assessment for three days. By that time, the bodies had been removed leaving only blood trails. The Soldiers in the second tower had counted 13 insurgents and McCormick's men had estimated that they had killed 19. A local Iraqi and a boy were killed. The Soldiers on the ECP claimed that the man had run out of the house with his boy shooting. The Soldiers had admitted killing four cows, one by a tank sabot round, but the village claimed they had killed 13.¹⁴⁴

According to the truck drivers who witnessed it, the gun trucks beat back a determined enemy attack. The story of the gun trucks on the ramp circulated among the truck drivers and became legend. The guard towers only sent three reports of mortar and small arms attacks during the period from 1220 to 1305 hours. In the context of the fighting that continued across the Suni Triangle around them, few paid any attention to this fight. It was not even a blip on the radar screen of battles that weekend. Few drivers knew who the gun trucks belonged to but they credited them with saving BIAP from being overrun that Easter Sunday.

Ambush at Iskandariyah

Later that night, a HET and a US Air Force PLS convoy pulled in that night and a mortar round landed right where the crews were standing, but did not detonate. It just broke apart on impact and no one was injured.¹⁴⁵

Northbound convoys were significantly aware of the increase in enemy attacks on convoys around Baghdad. A convoy made up of 44 vehicles of the 172nd and 1486th Medium Truck Companies along with 43 vehicles driven by foreign nationals hauled the equipment of the 1st Cavalry Division back up to the Green Zone. Around 30 of the trucks belonged to the 172nd TC. Four armored HMMV gun trucks of the 172nd TC escorted M915s and TCN drivers of white trucks. CPT Petropoulos managed to get those HMMVs armored through a "drug deal" with a friend at Camp Arifjan. Kuwait-based companies were lower on the priority for add-on armor to Iraqi-based units. CPT Amanda R. Gatewood, of the 172nd TC, was the convoy commander. SFC Richard "Rich" A. Bartlett was the NCOIC of the 1486th TC drivers, but SSG Aaron Brown asked to be the convoy commander of the 1486th trucks, but CPT Gatewood refused. The 1486th TC had arrived in country ahead of the 172nd and was instructed to pass on their experience to the new arrivals. Brown may have misinterpreted this guidance. Gatewood was not the best qualified TC officer to lead a convoy and Brown seemed intent on undermining her authority. Many of the wounded from the 9 April ambush were from the 1486th. The awaiting convoy also learned that there was a credible NBC threat within

¹⁴³ Coad email and telephone.

¹⁴⁴ Coad email and telephone.

¹⁴⁵ Powell and Gallet interview.

25 miles of the area that they would have to drive. SFC Bartlett gave classes on and distributed chemical detection paper to each driver and conducted training in battle drills. CPT Gatewood rode in the lead armored HMMV with SSG Steve LeClair. Because of his superb land navigation skills, SSG Brown selected his to be the lead M915 in the convoy.¹⁴⁶

The convoy of 87 vehicles had to rest over night (RON) outside of Scania the night of 10 April. They departed at 1345 hours the next day up MSR Tampa with the escort of MPs. Because the insurgents had blown several bridges and overpasses, the convoy had to take a detour onto ASR Cleveland through an urban area. Two miles after they made their turn, the MP advance party halted and warned the convoy that they had received fire further ahead. SSG LeClair and Gatewood came to the same conclusion. He said, "We can't turn around," and she replied, "Let's push on." Bartlett calmly relayed that information to the rest of the convoy. He also knew that any attempt to turn the convoy around would lead to devastating results, he decided to continue on. The convoy proceeded with caution and made the turn at a crawl onto ASR Jackson toward BIAP. Two miles ahead the MPs halted and did not proceed any further. The convoy sped up as they reached town of al Iskandariyah one mile further. LeClair rammed into the civilian cars to get them off of the road.¹⁴⁷

At 1430 hours, as the convoy drove through the town, insurgents on both sides of the road opened fire with small arms, mortars and RPGs. The insurgents fired from the yards, corners and roof tops of buildings. IEDs exploded next to LeClair's HMMV. The enemy fired mortars at a low 45 degree angle at their HMMV, shredding the driver's side tire. SGT Anthony Hernandez, the machine gunner, kept the RPG gunners pinned down while SSG LeClair "hammered down" on the gas pedal to speed ahead of the convoy. They cleared the kill zone before the HMMV came to a halt. Their HMMV received a lot of small arms fire and LeClair admitted that if he did not have the add-on armor, they would have been killed. The second HMMV gun truck, in the middle of the convoy, raced to the front as soon as it learned that the lead gun truck was disabled. The third gun truck and the last gun truck remained in their original positions in the middle and rear of the convoy. All placed suppressive fire on the enemy. Hernandez was shot across the arm, but continued to fire his .50 caliber machinegun. His was the only HMMV gun truck to run along screening the convoy.¹⁴⁸

SPC Lloyd drove the lead HMMV gun truck, while SPC Delaney fired his Mk19 from the ring mount and SSG Steven G. Wells kept the rest of the convoy informed of the actions of the insurgents while firing his M16 out the window. Wells selected a floating rally point two to four miles outside of the town. He positioned his HMMV so as to pull security and block southbound traffic from driving into the kill zone. The rest of the

¹⁴⁶ Narrative recommendation for the award of the Bronze Star with Valor to SFC Richard A. Bartlett and interview with CPT George Petropoulos and SSG Steve LeClair by Richard Killblane on 5 May 2005.

¹⁴⁷ SSG Aaron Brown, "Supplemental Narrative for Awards, 11 April 04 – Iskandariyah, Iraq." Sworn Statement by SPC Brandon E. Sallee, 11 April 2004 and Narrative of Bronze Star to Bartlett.

¹⁴⁸ Interview summary with SGT Anthony Hernandez by Richard Killblane, 8 March 2005.

convoy followed through the cross-fire as both the drivers and assistant drivers fired out of their trucks.¹⁴⁹

An RPG penetrated the Conex of SSG Rich Bartlett's load narrowly missed the oxygen and acetylene bottles by a foot or two. Shaken by the possibility of the explosion, Bartlett and SPC Brandon E. Sallee continued through the kill zone. An RPG hit the front Conex of SSG Carter's load but it was a dud causing it to bounce off and land in the median. Delany, the MK19 gunner in SSG Wells' lead gun truck fired at the rocket and caused it to explode. An RPG did disable a truck driven by a driver from the 172nd. SGT Heather M. Blanton and SGT Kirk W. Brown stopped their truck long enough so that the dismounted driver could jump on the running board and exit the kill zone. Signd Mahamd, from Pakistan, hauled two M113 APCs with two Soldiers from the 1st Cav. An RPG hit his truck, tore out his hip and caught his cab on fire, but he kept on driving out of the kill zone. At the lead edge of the kill zone, his truck came to a halt; he finally fell out of the burning vehicle.¹⁵⁰

As soon as SGT Ronald "Ron" C. Hicks and SPC Andrea Motley's truck turned onto ASR Jackson, they heard an explosion followed by small arms fire on both sides of the road. The kill zone spread out from the turn to the town. Motley drove through the kill zone firing both directions and came upon a foreign national crawling away from his burning truck. Motley pulled his truck up in front of the other and halted. Hicks dismounted and to treat Mahamd's wound. The two 1st Cavalry Division Soldiers provided covering fire while Hicks then drug Mahamd out of the way of passing trucks. Hicks then bandaged the leg wound. SPC Michael P. Shugrue pulled up and stopped. As the convoy commander, SSG Brown rode in an M915 bobtail in the middle of his convoy. He came upon Hicks and jumped out to help load the Pakistani driver into his cab while Shugrue dismounted and pulled security.¹⁵¹

SSG Jeffery A. Drushel with SPC Colby Leonard as his assistant driver drove the middle M915 in the convoy. Drushel saw LeClair's disabled HMMV ahead just outside the kill zone. He stopped his truck where it did not impede traffic, then both dismounted. Drushel ran forward to provide covering fire while the LeClair changed the tire.

SSG Brett A. Baxter and SPC Joanna Kim came upon a disabled white truck and observed that the driver was still in the cab. They stopped and helped him into their cab then drove off. As they drove on, they saw the disabled truck belonging to SSG Zaremba and SGT Mullen. Baxter stopped to see if they needed help but did not see anyone in the cab. An RPG hit the M915 driven by SSG Zaremba and SGT Mullen. Both were slightly wounded and the rocket set their truck afire. They abandoned the vehicle. They received enemy fire and SPC Kim returned fire on the right side. They also stopped to

¹⁴⁹ Sworn Statement by SPC John D. Delaney, 16 April 2004; and Narrative of Bronze Star to Wells.

¹⁵⁰ Narrative from SGT David Boron, Narrative recommendations for the award of the Army Commendation Medal with Valor to SGT Kirt W. Brown and SGT Heather M. Blanton.

¹⁵¹ Sworn Statement by SGT Rohald C. Hicks, jr., 11 April 2004 and SSG Aaron B. Brown, 14 November 2004, Narrative recommendation for award of the Army Commendation with Valor to SGT Ronald C. Hicks and SSG Jeffery A. Drushel.

help, but were told to drive on to the rally point. They drove forward continuing to engage the enemy. Meanwhile, the two cavalymen jumped into the seat vacated by Hicks. Hicks reassured Motley that he would be safe and Brown and Motley's trucks drove off.¹⁵²

SSG Charles M. Schrack and SGT James Dominguez followed checking out each disabled vehicle to make sure no drivers were left behind. They arrived in time to see SSG Brown and SGT Hicks load the Pakistani driver in Brown's truck. Schrack stopped his M915; Hicks jumped in next to Schrack and began firing at the enemy while they drove off. They stopped near some MPs pulling security. SSG Schrack jumped in a HMMV to go back and to recover disabled vehicles.¹⁵³

SPC Thomas F. Shaw drove the last M915 in the convoy. He had to negotiate around the damaged vehicles in the kill zone, while returning fire and maneuvered his truck so as to prevent civilian traffic from entering the kill zone.¹⁵⁴

At the rally point, the trucks formed into a box formation; the drivers dismounted and took up firing positions from behind their vehicles. The NCOs checked for casualties and ammunition status. Baxter pulled up, dismounted and took charge of the box. He placed the drivers in a 360 degree perimeter while receiving sporadic small arms fire. He calmly waited at the end of the box for the rest of the truck to catch up. His calm demeanor spread to the other drivers. SPC Kim treated the wound of the foreign national in their truck then placed him in a foreign national bobtail. The insurgents were aware of the practice of forming a box several miles down the road and had prepared a second ambush. Ten minutes after the trucks started forming a box an orange civilian dump truck with a mortar drove to within 1,000 meters of the rally point from the left side of the northbound road and fired rounds into the box. Delaney fired 40mm grenades from his Mk19 and scared the assailants away. Without waiting for the remainder of the convoy to arrive, the drivers mounted up and pulled out. SSG Rich Bartlett made the decision to halt at FOB St Michaels, since not all of the trucks had caught up. St Mikes was a US Marine base. The ambush lasted around 45 minutes.¹⁵⁵

The Marines sent out a QRF and counted 29 enemy killed by the drivers of the convoy. They also reported that the insurgents had mortar positions dug along the dirt road that ran parallel to ASR Jackson. The convoy lost four TCN vehicles, two green trucks and only two TCNs wounded. Hernandez was also the only American in the convoy wounded. He received the Bronze Star Medal with V device.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Sworn Statement of SSG Brett A. Baxter, 14 November 2004., and Accident Report/Serious Incident Report, 812th TC BN, APO AE09304, Camp Navistar, Kuwait, 12 April 2004.

¹⁵³ Sworn Statement of SSG Charles M. Shrack, 14 November 2004 and Hicks.

¹⁵⁴ Narrative recommendation from the Award of the Army Commendation Medal with Valor for SPC Thomas F. Shaw.

¹⁵⁵ Sworn statement of Delaney, Sallee, Brown and Narrative from SGT David Boron and Narrative of Bronze Star to Wells, Narrative recommendation for the Award of the Bronze Star with Valor to SSG Brett A. Baxter.

¹⁵⁶ Hernandez interview.

CPT Gatewood did not seem to know what to do. LeClair asked her for the Alpha Roster so he could get an accountability of the drivers. He lined the drivers up and called out the names with each Soldier responding when his name was called. When he asked those to raise their hands whose names had not been called, ten raised their hands. He realized that the roster was incorrect and he would have to question the Soldiers to determine if any one was missing. The camp commander of St Michaels asked CPT Gatewood if she had all her Soldiers accounted for. She did not know for sure. The colonel was livid. He informed her that if she was a Marine, she would be on the next plane home. Keep in mind that the Marines had suffered badly in the press when a young Marine died in the desert because the company commander did not know he was missing at the end of the training day. There was no inter-service rivalry. The Marines provided the Army convoy any help they wanted. While LeClair took his wounded Soldier to the aid station, the Marines changed all the tires on his HMMV.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, their commander, CPT Petropoulos, was riding in a convoy 30 minutes out from Navistar when his truck master called him about the ambush. Gatewood had reported the incident to her company by MTS and the truck master informed both his commander and the battalion Commander. Petropoulos was on the returning convoy and had four other convoys north.¹⁵⁸

SGT Shane Wilson drove the tenth M915 in a 100 vehicle convoy of the 172nd Medium Truck southbound from Camp Anaconda during the Easter ambushes. It had 20 to 30 Strykers as escort. Wilson's M915 was the tenth in the line of march and right behind a white truck driven by a TCN. The convoy drove at 25 mph because of the Strykers. The convoy commander told the escort commander that they needed to move as fast as they could. They were driving at 50 mph when they ran into the ambush. The IEDs exploded in the center of the convoy and a TCN driver in front of Wilson stopped splitting the convoy in two. Wilson and the rest of the convoy did drive around the TCN. Wilson could see and hear small arms fire. He radioed ahead then was knocked out by an AK round that hit his helmet. He slumped over with his hand still on the steering wheel, while they were still moving. His TC woke him up and put his helmet back on his head. They caught up with the rest of the convoy. Wilson climbed out of his truck and ran back to the Stryker for treatment. Firing began again. The infantry wanted to put one of their own men in the truck to replace Wilson as the driver, but his TC took his place. The convoy rolled into Scania.¹⁵⁹

That Easter weekend, the insurgents had dropped about five bridges and blocked the MSRs. They overran both An Najaf and Al Kut and blocked our alternate supply route. The vast number of ambushes caused the movement control authorities to close down the roads and code them black. The 172nd TC had four convoys north, one at BIAP, one at TQ, one at Scania and Gatewood's at St Michaels. The convoys were locked down where they were for 21 days until authorities considered the roads safe.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Petropoulos and LeClair.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Petropoulos and LeClair.

¹⁵⁹ Interview summary with SGT Shane Wilson by Richard Killblane, 8 March 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Petropoulos and LeClair, and MG Stultz, 7 August 2005.

Legends had been created. Drivers would recount the act of heroism of the truck drivers that defended the wall at BIAP. In particular, they described the heroic defense by a lone black and tan striped HMMV, the Zebra. Similarly, rumors spread about Gatewood's performance. Rumor's claimed that she had left drivers in the kill zone. This claim was unfair, for the mere fact that although she was the convoy commander, she was not in charge. Two senior NCOs made most of the decisions. While there was talk, no one wanted to come out and outright call her a coward, but she had definitely not had a good day. The Marines minced no words on the subject. They sent an email message to CPT Petropolous that if he ever sent her north again on another convoy, they would kill her.¹⁶¹

Green Zone convoys

The 1st Cav claimed that they needed their containers urgently delivered to the Green Zone. The Green Zone was an enclosed area of Baghdad where the 1st Cav had taken up residence that was considered safe. The afternoon right after their defense of BIAP, SFC Haggard and 1LT McCormick had to go on a convoy with 14 flat beds of the 1486th and 1487th carrying mission essential cargo. SFC Haggard was the convoy commander. The 1st Cav led the convoy with two tanks out the north gate.

The loads on the flatbeds of Gatewood's convoy were considered mission essential for the 1st Cav and convoy crowded St Michaels, so the Movement Control Battalion decided to let her convoy continue to BIAP. The MCB kept delaying the departure time until Wednesday morning. The convoy pushed on to BIAP without incident. After they reached BIAP, 1st Cav tanks and Bradleys escorted them on local runs to the Green Zone and other camps to drop off their loads. The drivers became frustrated to see some of the containers stored away or learn that some of the APCs could not run and other APCs had to tow them off. The drivers had risked their lives to learn that their loads were not that important after all.¹⁶²

Commander CJTF-7, LTG Ricardo S. Sanchez's obvious response to the uprising was to close the roads to convoy traffic. BG Scott G. West, J4 for CJTF7, informed his commander that they only had five days supply of fuel on hand. They came face-to-face with the reality of the concept of on-time delivery. It does not work when the opposition is determined to kill your drivers. Sanchez had to face the reality that he had to divert combat units from attacking the enemy to protecting the convoys. While most convoys were locked down for as many as ten days, the fuel trucks had to run.

The ambushes shut down the roads for weeks except for priority cargo. The ratio of gun truck to prime mover was established at 1:5 after the ambushes. On 15 April 2004, Task Force Baghdad, made up mostly of the 1st Cavalry Division, assumed responsibility for Baghdad and its environs from the 1st Armored Division. After the retrograde was complete, the gun truck ratio would return to 1:10.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Petropolous

¹⁶² Interview with LeClair.

On 17 April, a HET convoy of the 1175th and 2123rd Transportation Companies hauled Bradleys of the 2-37 Armor (Iron Dukes) and 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, 1st Armored Division from Al Hut to Najaf for retrograde back to Kuwait. 1LT Robert Henderson II, a platoon leader in the 2123rd, rode in the lead HMMV. The convoy came upon an over-turned trailer near the city of Diwaniyah and slowed down to drive around it. The convoy then received small arms fire and RPGs from 50 or more insurgents in groups of two to three. Two rounds hit Henderson in the leg, one round severing his femoral artery. If not quickly clamped, his heart would rapidly pump enough blood out that major artery that he would die in a matter of minutes. Instead of being evacuated he insisted that the driver, SGT Cheney, turn his HMMV around and back the convoy out of the kill zone. One HET was already disabled in the initial engagement. Each of the tanks and Bradleys had a driver and TC riding in their vehicles. Henderson's HMMV stood between the enemy and the convoy while the tanks fired up their engines, broke their chains and rolled off the trailers to engage the enemy. For the next hour they fought with the insurgents accounting for 30 enemy killed. The tankers lost two of their own.¹⁶³

Henderson was evacuated to a field hospital but died from the loss of blood buying precious time for his comrades. 1LT Henderson's death became the talk among truck drivers as the example dedication to duty. When he had to choose between saving his own life or that of his Soldiers, he chose the latter. He was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and Kentucky Distinguished Service Medal.¹⁶⁴

CPT Thomas Moore, of the 1175th, emailed MG Marty Dempsey, Commander of the 1st Armored Division telling him that "if it were not for the courage and actions under fire of the 2ACR and 2-37 soldiers that day, he is certain all his men would have been killed." He asked the commanding general if his Soldiers who were engaged in that fight could have the honor of wearing the 1st Armored Division combat patch. MG Dempsey replied he would be honored.¹⁶⁵

This began a new tradition. Prior to OIF 2, units did not wear combat patches until they returned home and then only the patches of the units they were assigned to. The Army Regulations leave the option of what combat patch to wear up to the wearer. The only requirement is that they were either assigned or attached to the unit. Up until then, most veterans simply sewed on their right shoulder the patch they had worn on their left shoulder, after they returned home. During OIF 2, units started sporting combat patches while in theater. 2nd Infantry Division and 101st Airborne Division Soldiers reverse the direction their Indian or eagle faced so that the head on both patches faced forward. Truck units interpreted the vague guidance to include any unit that they supported. Keep in mind that many of the units proudly wore one patch at their home station but were assigned to commands that wore entirely different patches. From then on, nearly every truck driver wore two patches, the right one was often a combat division.

¹⁶³ Email from GOMO to GOMO (3) April 28, 2004 and "In Memory of 1LT Robert Henderson, II, 2123rd Transportation Company – Kentucky Army National Guard, KIA – Diwaniyah, Iraq – 17 APR 04," <<http://www.2113th.org/henderson.html>>

¹⁶⁴ In Memory.

¹⁶⁵ GOMO email.

The enemy uprising had run its course by the end of April and subsided under the pressure of the Marines and Army attacks. The Marines pulled out of Fallujah on 30 April and the Madhi militia turned in their weapons for money. A lull followed as the insurgents reorganized and regrouped for their next offensive. When they resurfaced, they focused their attacks on civilian targets or the Iraqi military and police in an effort to disrupt the national election set for January 2005. The threat against convoys reduced to IEDs and small arms fire. On 15 May 2004, the CJTF7 was redesignated as Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNCI), under the command of LTG Thomas F. Metz. MNCI similarly made its plans to recapture Fallujah in the fall of that year.