



13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary)

Public Affairs Office, Joint Base Balad, Iraq
APO AE 09391

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
RELEASE No. 20091024-011
October 2009

1218th Transportation Co. arrives and is ready to support

13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) Public Affairs

AL ASAD AIRBASE, Iraq – Nearly 12 months ago the 1218th Transportation Company, now attached to the 751st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 96th Sustainment Brigade, was a shell of what it is now. The unit was recently re-flagged as a truck company; unit strength was less than 50%, according to the Human Resources Sergeant, Sgt. Julia Norberg native of West Palm Beach, Fla. To complicate matters the clock toward mobilization day had just started ticking. Their mission: provide transportation support to the western part of Iraq.

In the fall of 2008, the unit laid out a very aggressive and comprehensive training plan. Just to get everything accomplished, the 1218th in effect had to “max out” all available training time and resources. A normal two day weekend drill period, typical for an Army National Guard unit, was often stretched out to four or five days in order to accommodate the extra training required for deployment. The normal two week Annual Training period, was stretched to a month. According to Staff Sgt. Traci Caicedo, native of Lake Worth, Fla. and the

1218th Trans. Co.'s training noncommissioned officer, the average Soldier of the 1218th logged approximately 45 extra training days during the 2008-09 training year, prior to being mobilized and placed on active duty status. "All the extra training put a strain on the Soldiers and their families. Especially, since they knew they were heading overseas for a year," Caicedo said.

The first big challenge at hand was licensing 170 Soldiers on the M1070 Heavy equipment tractor, the M1075 palletized load system and the M915 tractor-trailer combination. The state of Florida transferred and signed out vehicles from Missouri, Kansas, Georgia and South Carolina in order to assemble a fleet of vehicles for the 1218th to train with. "It wasn't easy, Florida having to scrounge up the trucks, but they did and set us up for success," said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Tallent, the 1218th Trans. Co. Truck Master and West Palm Beach, Fla. native.

During the 32 day annual training period, the unit focused on driver's training and finalizing required pre-mobilization training. "We spent the first two weeks just driving, that was all we did, day in and day out, was drive," Tallent recalled. Drive they did. The 1218th was able to exceed projected licensing goals by a wide margin, the typical Soldier of the unit is qualified on all three trucks.

1st Sgt. Bobby Parlor, of Wellington, Fla., attributes the success to the synergistic effect of merging two truck units together, "The 144th Soldiers knew a lot about driving and brought a lot of experience to the table; the 1218th Soldiers were eager to learn and were highly motivated. That combination proved to be completely invaluable. We learned a lot from each other and we really started to

come together as a unit.” The unit was totally integrated. From top to bottom; platoons were made a mix of Soldiers from the 144th and the 1218th. According to 1st Sgt. Parlor, “It was rough at first, a lot of growing pains, but we emerged from annual training as one unit.”

On July 5, 2009, the unit was mobilized and deployed to Camp Atterbury, Ind. There they spent the next 45 days training on collective skills and tasks and preparing for their mission readiness exercise. According to Staff Sgt. Traci Caicedo, “[Camp] Atterbury really set up the Soldiers for success by taking care of a lot of their readiness and administrative needs.” The real test, however, came toward the end of the mobilization period at Camp Atterbury. The unit spent six days out in the field performing the Mission Readiness Exercise. During the exercise, the unit put all of its skills it had learned to the test. It was the first time the unit had conducted continuous 24-hour truck operations. For the six day event the unit ran approximately four missions a day, reacting to numerous changes and tactical situations. “The MRE was probably the best training we have ever had as a unit,” said Sgt. 1st Class Tallent. On August 24, 2009, the unit was unequivocally validated for deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Fast-forward to October 2009, and the hardships and challenges of pre-mobilization have set a strong foundation and established a shared experience for a very diverse group of Soldiers. The unit has overcome a lot of challenges in a short amount of time. Within a year they had had to fill the ranks, train on equipment that didn’t even exist in Florida and merge two separate units into an effective company. When talking about the year long train-up 1st Sgt. Parlor said,

“There were a lot of long days and short nights, a lot of training and a lot driving. We made it happen and the lessons we learned along the way are helping us tremendously today”. Indeed it has; Parlor also said that so far the unit has transported nearly 300 tons of supplies and 150,000 gallons of fuel throughout Western Iraq within its first 30-days since the Transfer of Authority ceremony.



CAMP BLANDING, Fla. – 1st Lt. Robert Sather, native of Titusville, Fla. gives instruction on the M240B machine gun to Soldiers of the 1218th Transportation Co., 751st CSSB, 96th Sustainment Brigade. (From left to right) Pfc. Marc Thompson, a wheeled vehicle mechanic, of West Palm Beach, Fla., Sgt. James Kellam, a wheeled vehicle mechanic from Ft. Lauderdale Fla., Fueling Operations Staff Sgt. Ignacio Tuaroni, who is a Miami, Fla. native, Staff Sgt. Bismarck Santamaria, a West Palm Beach, Fla. native, and a senior wheeled vehicle mechanic, Pfc. Timothy Gandolfo, a wheeled vehicle mechanic of West Palm Beach and Sgt. Julia Norberg, from West Palm Beach, Fla. and a human resources sergeant, listen intently to the block of instruction during pre-mobilization training in June.



CAMP ATTERBURY, Ind. – 1st Lt. Garret Paladino, a platoon leader and a native of Orlando, Fla., supervises his Soldiers from 2nd Platoon, 1218th Transportation Co., 751st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 96th Sustainment Brigade, load an M1114 vehicle during the Mission Readiness Exercise in late August 2009.



AL ASAD AIR BASE, Iraq – Spc. Rick June of Stuart, Fla., Spc. Windsor Montas, from Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. and Spc. Terrell Smith, a West Palm Beach, Fla. native, pose for a photograph in front of the Florida Flag. These three Soldiers are assigned the additional duty of being the unit CREW Specialist and are charged with ensuring all counter IED electronic warfare equipment is operating properly before 1218th convoys depart Al Asad Air Base.

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Photos and story by Capt. Scott Peterson, 1218th TC, 751st CSSB, 96SBDE.
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