

EDINBURGH RISK AND SECURITY MANAGEMENT

AFTER ACTION REVIEW

OPERATION APOLLO CONTACT BIAP ROAD 20 APRIL 2005

BACKGROUND

On 20 April 2005 Edinburgh Risk personnel assigned to Operation APOLLO (support to the Independent Election Commission of Iraq) were engaged by enemy forces on Route IRISH (BIAP Road) during the execution of their duties.

Post incident Edinburgh Risk, in keeping with company policy and operational SOP's, conducted a full deliberate review conducted by an external assessor of the incident along with corresponding verbal and written AAR's. The assessor for this review was the Group's USA Managing Director. He has extensive operational experience in the military and as a civilian contactor/ operator. Having spent August 2003 to December 2004 in Baghdad, he is well familiar with the specific challenges posed by the insurgency in Iraq.

This report is the **only official Edinburgh Risk report** in regards to the incident.

AIM

The overall aim of this report is to identify friendly and enemy action during the contact in order to extract lessons identified that may be applicable to current and future operations.

INCIDENT

Phase 1 - Pre-mission orders: Prior to the move, during the evening Order's Group 19 April 05, a warning order was issued to members of the APOLLO team who would be conducting a road move to BIAP in order to pick up operators coming in from rotation. Instructions were issued in accordance with a standard military warning order with additional discussion conducted in regards to the teams SOP for dealing with the VBIED/IED threat on Route IRISH. In order to mitigate the threat of IED/VBIED attack the team was in the process of instituting a number of SOP'S in regards to the use of new operational methods to help mitigate the threat. The team reviewed video footage taken of Route IRISH during previous moves in order to identify choke points, danger areas and likely areas of enemy attack. The team was also concerned with blue on blue incidents and stressed the need to be prepared to identify themselves as required so as to avoid blue on blue with Coalition or other PSC's operating on Route IRISH.

Phase Two- Mission Orders: On the morning of 20 April 05 the team task organized for the days move and met to conduct an Operations Group. The O Group was conducted utilizing the standard 5 paragraph Op Order format. All operators were present for the

order. The detail leader, Allan Johnson, conducted the O group utilizing video footage, again, to identify danger areas and to brief the team's scheme of maneuver during the movement. Alternatively Simon Merry and Steph Surett briefed with the drivers in regards to the route and actions on when approaching danger areas, coalition or other PSC call signs. Orders were conducted from 1100 hours to 1130 hours. At approximately 1130 hours the team mustered for their final inspections and departed for BIAP.

Phase Three- Movement: The team was task organized as follows:

Lead/Advance Vehicle consisting of Soft Skin BMW Sedan

James Yeager - Driver

Steph Surette - Vehicle IC

Mark Collen - Rear Gunner (medic)

Center/Main Body B6 Armored Mercedes

Driver- Simon Merry

Vehicle IC- Ian Harris (mission 2 IC)

Rear/Follow Vehicle consisting of Soft Skin BMW Sedan

Driver - Chris Ahmelmen

Vehicle IC – Allan Johnson (overall mission commander)

Rear Gunner - James (Jay) Hunt

The team departed through Gate 12 at approximately 1140 after linking in with the Ops Room where they dropped off their route and mission card with Edinburgh Risk Ops. The team also contacted the ROC to check on the status of Route IRISH and the ROC informed them that the route was open.

Team movement was going according to plan until the team reached RV 5. RV 5 was assigned as the last foot bridge/flyover heading west just prior to the checkpoint leading into BIAP/VICTORY.

As the team reached RV5, traffic was coming to a halt and the team was halted just beneath or just outside of RV5 with the main body vehicle coming to a halt just beneath the foot bridge. The team was halted at approximately 1155 hrs.

Traffic to the front was halted due to Coalition Forces closing the road in response to an incident on the road. The team estimates that Coalition Forces were located 300-400 meters to the front of their position while halted at RV 5.

During the halt the team reports that there were approximately 10 local national vehicles to their front which cleared the area by either driving back down towards traffic and utilizing a slip road to leave the area or by crossing the median and traveling down the alternate lane of travel.

Al Johnson called for the team to move forward in order to create depth between the motorcade and local national vehicles to the rear as well as to take them out from under the foot bridge/fly over which was deemed to be a threat as it presented a danger area due to the possibility of attack from above.

The motorcade moved forward approximately 300 meters giving the rear gunner, Jay Hunt, in the rear vehicle enough clearance to cover the foot bridge with fire if required whilst also allowing the team to cover and close the slip road located to the right front of the motorcade so as to prevent enemy attack from that location.

At this time the three vehicles are spaced at approximately 100 meters between vehicles with the motorcade occupying an area estimated to be 300-400 meters in length from the front vehicle to the rear vehicle.

During the halt Al Johnson and Ian Harris discuss crossing the median in order to leave an area where they feel they are exposed. The decision is made not to cross the median as they are concerned that the vehicles will not clear the obstacle presented by the median.

While the team was halted Mark Collen identified a suspect vehicle along the slip road to the right flank, north, of the motorcade at a distance of approximately 500 meters. He took the vehicle under surveillance utilizing a scope mounted upon his M4. He observed one local national male in the vehicle and noted that the vehicle occupant was not paying the call sign any attention and seemed to be concentrating his attention on local national traffic halted to the suspect vehicles front. He assessed that the suspect vehicle was not a threat and informed the team accordingly.

The team remained static for approximately ten minutes while it waited to see if Coalition Forces would open the road. At approximately 1200-1210 Al Johnson made the decision to abandon the position and was in the process of ordering the team to move when the team came under intense automatic weapons fire.

Phase Four- Contact: As stated at approximately 1210 hrs, the APOLLO team was engaged with heavy automatic weapons fire which originated from north of their position along the slip road bordering Route IRISH. All three vehicles sustained damage and casualties during the initial burst of gun fire. It is assessed that the team was engaged by two or more PKM belt fed GPMG firing armor piercing ammunition. The armored sedan suffered hits which would have normally defeated standard ball ammunition. During the initial burst of gun fire the APOLLO team suffered three casualties which consisted of Jay Hunt, Chris Ahmlemen, and Steff Surette. Two of the operators Jay Hunt and Steff Surette were wounded in the hip/groin area and suffered sever trauma to the femoral artery while Chris Ahmlemen was shot in the hip and head with the head wound killing him outright.

Upon the initiation of contact the lead vehicle driven by James Yeager attempted to drive out of the kill zone and was unsuccessful as Yeager had taken the car out of drive placing

it in neutral and setting the emergency hand brake which prevented him from driving out of the kill zone during the opening stages of the contact. Upon failing to drive "off the X" Yeager, Mark Collen and Steff Surette evacuated the vehicle. Steff Surette at this point was already wounded and was located beside the vehicle in the prone though he was attempting to remain in the fight. James Yeager fell to the rear of the vehicle in order to return fire and engage enemy forces. According to James Yeager he could not identify enemy forces and thus he attempted to suppress the general vicinity of where he suspected enemy fire was coming from. After having fired an estimated half a magazine of ammunition out of his M4 Yeager broke contact from the rear of his vehicle and maneuvered to the median to the south of the engagement area. Mark Collen also positioned at the rear of the vehicle identified enemy forces firing from a white suburban vehicle and engaged the white suburban with approximately 100 rounds of 5.56 from his M249 Minimi. He then experienced a stoppage and switched to his M4 with which he continued to engage the enemy forces located within the white suburban. The white suburban drove out of sight and at that point Mark Collen provided immediate medical care to Steff Surette.

Concurrently vehicle two, the armored sedan attempted to first maneuver to its front in order to provide cover to vehicle one. Simon Merry, driver of vehicle two, reported that the car was unresponsive as it had suffered damage during the initial burst of GPMG fire which caused catastrophic damage to the transmission. Ian Harris, IC of vehicle two, exited the vehicle as the vehicle was under heavy fire. He then maneuvered to the front bonnet of vehicle one so as to provide suppressive fire in support of the team. Ian was able to identify enemy forces located within the white suburban and fired semi-automatic, well aimed fire into the rear of the vehicle. Ian reported that his fire seemed to be "bouncing off" the rear of the vehicle and, upon interviewing other team members who took the suburban under fire, they believe that the suburban was armored as their fire had little or no effect on the enemy vehicle. Ian came under severe enemy fire whilst he attempted to suppress enemy forces but he continued the attempt to win the firefight. After attempting to move the vehicle forward in support of vehicle one Simon Merry attempted to move the vehicle to the rear to provide cover for vehicle three but again, the vehicle was unresponsive. Simon Merry then exited the vehicle and positioned himself to the rear of the vehicle in order to provide covering fire to vehicle three. Simon in accordance with team SOP'S deployed a smoke grenade to the north of the motorcade in order to mask the callsign.

Vehicle three occupied by Al Johnson, Chris Ahmlemen, and Jay Hunt was engaged as well during the initial burst of GPMG fire with Chris Ahmlemen, the driver, being killed - thus the vehicle remained static. Jay Hunt who was hit in the initial burst attempted to evacuate the vehicle and take enemy forces under fire but was almost immediately out of the fight due to the nature of his wounds. Al Johnson the vehicle IC evacuated the vehicle in order to try and treat Jay Hunt and Chris Ahmlemen. He moved Jay Hunt to a position of cover behind the left front tire of the vehicle and then moved to treat Chris Ahmlemen who was by then deceased. He then returned to treat Jay Hunt who was hit in the femoral artery.

The initial contact lasted 32 seconds in accordance with the video footage taken from a dash mounted camera in vehicle three. Within that 32 seconds three operators were combat ineffective due to enemy fire and related wounds and all three vehicles were disabled either through mechanical failure and/or driver errors and wounds. All three vehicles were taken under fire almost simultaneously which leads to the belief that there was more than one enemy element engaging the motorcade though only one enemy element was ever identified by the members of the team. The volume of enemy fire and the consistency and accuracy of that fire in relation to a callsign that was spread out over three hundred meters indicates either a very proficient enemy operator or the presence of more than one GPMG during the contact.

Enemy forces engaged the motorcade for no more than one minute and ten seconds at which point they had evacuated the engagement area.

Upon disengagement with enemy forces the team consolidated its position with Mark Collen and Al Johnson continuing to provide medical treatment to Jay Hunt and Steff Surette while the rest of the team provided 360 degree security.

Phase Five- Consolidation: Simon Merry signaled to Coalition Forces (CF) who were located three hundred meters to their front (west of the contact area) who responded to the signals by approaching the engagement area slowly with three Humvees. Concurrently James Yeager left his position at the median and moved to vehicle three in order to provide close in support and security to Al Johnson who was still attempting to treat Jay Hunt. While, at the rear of vehicle three, Yeager engaged a local national vehicle that was attempting to move into the engagement area from the east on Route IRISH. Believing this to be a possible VBIED, Yeager fired two shots into the vehicle at which point the vehicle stopped and did not attempt to move any closer into the engagement area.

At this point Coalition Forces had reached vehicle one with Ian Harris providing them an immediate sit-rep as to the situation while asking for CF support in order to evacuate the casualties. CF took command of the scene and instructed Ian Harris to police up team members, equipment and vehicles that were mobile and evacuate the scene. They instructed the team to move to Camp VICTORY where CF would evacuate the wounded team members to the Camp VICTORY Aid Station.

Ian Harris rallied the surviving team members and loaded into vehicle's one, two and three. Vehicle two was un-serviceable and thus abandoned. Al Johnson stayed with CF forces and was still treating Jay Hunt along with a CF medic at this point. Al Johnson was hit in the buttocks during the engagement but continued to remain behind in order to insure that CF treated and evacuated the wounded/dead. Ian Harris evacuated the team with vehicles one and three departing for the CASH at Camp VICTORY.

During the consolidation and preparation for evacuation a call sign from Olive Security approached the motorcade from the east on Route IRISH arriving at vehicle three and interfaced with Al Johnson and James Yeager. Olive offered assistance to the team and,

due to the fact that CF forces had run out of room within their FLA, Olive evacuated the body of Chris Ahmlemen along with some team equipment. Olive proceeded to Camp VICTORY meeting Edinburgh Risk call signs at the check point leading into BIAP/VICTORY and instructed the team to follow them into VICTORY as they had the body and equipment with them. Al Johnson had been loaded onto the CF FLA and moved to the CASH at VICTORY via the CF FLA. Olive remained with the APOLLO team at the CASH and continued their support. At the CASH, Chris Ahmlemen and Jay Hunt were pronounced dead and Steff Surette was undergoing treatment during which he died. Al Johnson continued to stay with the casualties until he was ordered by the military to receive treatment. The remaining team members consolidated all equipment and personnel and returned to Edinburgh Risk HQ located within the International Zone. Support was provided to the remaining members of the call sign for this move by Edinburgh Risk's Operation Hermes and continued support from Olive.

SUMMARY

Given the nature of the contact, the violence of action executed by a capable enemy force and the volume of enemy fire levied upon the team during the initiation of the contact, the team responded as well as could be expected under the circumstances. Without doubt, this was a highly capable and well rehearsed group of insurgents initiating a deliberate ambush.

Retrospectively, the team should not have remained static for a protracted period of time in a canalized area such as Route IRISH. It is understandable that the team tried to create depth between themselves and local national traffic due to the threat of VBIED on the BIAP road. Inadvertently, this maneuver also resulted in the team unmasking from the concealment provided by low profile saloon vehicles within the main body of local traffic. During the debrief the team acknowledged the fact that they were static in one location for too long a time however they also state that they were in the process of leaving the area when enemy contact was initiated – it is possible that the enemy deliberately waited for this moment to initiate the contact.

Actions during the contact itself were conducted in accordance with the team SOP. The team attempted to drive out of the kill zone but this action was precluded due to operator error for vehicle one and mechanical failure due to enemy fire with vehicles two and three. Upon failing to extract by vehicle the operators evacuated the vehicles and established a base of fire in order to suppress enemy forces so as to then be able to break contact as required. The fact that the team suffered 50 percent casualties in the initial volley of fire detracted from their ability to sufficiently suppress the enemy thus also negating their ability to then break contact. James Yeager in accordance with the team SOP attempted to break contact in the opening stages of the contact yet fire superiority and or suppression had at that time not been established. Ian Harris and Mark Collen, each under heavy enemy fire, were the only two individuals during the contact who attempted to suppress enemy forces. Simon Merry was continuing to try to maneuver his vehicle to a position of support to vehicle one and then two whilst Al Johnson was busily treating multiple casualties at his location with vehicle three. James Yeager was in a

location at the median where he could not engage enemy forces as he did not have a line of fire from his location. Ian Harris as team 2 IC provided leadership to the team through the use of verbal commands and fire control while the team leader, Al Johnson attended to the wounded personnel from his vehicle. Ian Harris, with assistance from Coalition Forces and Olive Security, consolidated the team and evacuated the area.

LESSONS IDENTIFIED

Many of the lessons identified are well known but it is worth reiterating them:

- If forced to go static on Route IRISH (or any route for that matter) teams need to act in accordance with SOP and immediately evacuate the area.
- If enemy forces initiate fire it is imperative that the team under fire first establish fire superiority prior to breaking contact. It is imperative that team members who have eyes on the enemy call out fire direction, distance and description so as to alert other team members to the enemy location. You can not maneuver until you have established an aggressive base of fire.
- Team Leaders should have no additional duties other than that of team leader.
- Crew Served Weapons must be kept running during the course of the fight. If one goes down due to a wounded or killed operator then that weapon must be immediately put back into action by another team member.
- Every move needs to include at a minimum one weapons system utilizing 7.62 NATO in order to defeat enemy forces employing hard and soft skin vehicles.

CONCLUSION

PSCs have experienced countless attacks on Route IRISH as well as on other MSRs within Iraq. PSCs, while having the ability to defend themselves and their clients to a degree, will only be as successful as the conditions established by Coalition and Iraqi security forces. The fact that enemy forces can mass and execute operations in the vicinity of Route IRISH as well as throughout Iraq is a testament to the current conditions within Iraq. PSCs, in order to operate successfully, must swim in a sea of security established by “green army”. If general security is not established by Coalition and Local National security forces to a degree that precludes the enemy’s ability to operate in strength across Iraq then PSC’S and their clients will continue to become a collateral target of an insurgency that operates with impunity.

Signed on Original

Christopher Farina
Managing Director
Edinburgh Risk and Security Management
ERSM-USA LLC
Reston, Virginia
USA