

# LRS troops receive Army Commendation Medals

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*Sunburst staff writer*

Fifteen vehicle operators from the 49th Logistics Readiness Squadron returned from a 191-day deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with two bronze stars, 13 Army Commendation Medals and 15 Army 1st Infantry Division Patches.

The thirteen members received the Commendation Medal because in February they became the first Air Force team to assist the Army with combat convoy operations.

“Traditionally the vehicle operator career field is not involved in combat,” said 1st Lt. Brent Tschikof, 49th LRS Vehicle Operations officer. “These men answered the call to duty in order to relieve the Army.”

Not only did the team answer the call of duty, they went above and beyond it. Their convoys had a better record – transporting more cargo and escorting more vehicles – than any other combat convoy company before them.

“We were the first Air Force truck company with such a successful deployment,” Tech. Sgt. Daniel Allen said. “No Air Force unit has ever done that. They’ve done other convoys, but nothing of this magnitude.”

With only a few weeks of training, they were tasked with their

first mission: to transport themselves and their equipment from their training base in Kuwait to Mosul, Iraq’s northernmost city, said Staff Sgt. Jeremy Domingo.

“We were the only company in the Air Force that convoyed from Kuwait to our destination,” Sergeant Domingo said. “Everyone else flew and their equipment was already there.”

Their trucks were scheduled for decommissioning, but the Army told them they could be used for one final mission, Sergeant Domingo said. The team had to salvage trucks, weapons and supplies to make the trip.

It took four days for the team’s 70 trucks to make it to Mosul.

After that first mission the team would complete two convoy missions a day, six days a week. Some missions would require them to cross the country with cargo, while others would require them to escort Turkish civilian contractors.

When escorting contractors, the team watched them carefully by having two vehicles drive back and forth along the side of the convoy. Sometimes trucks would break down, and sometimes the contractors tried to get away to sell their goods on the black market.

According to Senior Airman Mazen Abdu, the team had to be on constant watch for suspicious activity.

“Especially on missions, we always had to be on guard for everything,” he said. “Trash on the road, people — Everything and anything could have been an improvised explosive device or an ambush.”

By the end of the six-month tour, the team was well-respected within the Army and other Air Force units, Sergeant Allen said.

“I think some of the other bases saw how well we worked and how prepared we were and were pretty jealous of us,” he said. “When we had to do something or when these guys were tasked to go with another convoy, they didn’t hesitate.”

Combat convoy operations are usually handled by the Army, but the Air Force was asked to assist and relieve them, said Tech. Sergeant Michael Sifford.

“We took a bunch of truck drivers and turned them into combat medics and gunners and everything else,” he said. “That’s something no one in the Air Force has done since Vietnam.”

Despite the challenges of the mission, the team worked together to live up to their motto, “15 in, 15 out.”

“We worked our tails off and worked long hours and watched out for each other,” Sergeant Allen said. “We always took care of each other and we all came back alive.”



Courtesy photos

Children outside of Mosul line up alongside the road as the 49th Aerospace Expeditionary Truck Company drives past. The Holloman Hounds from the 49th Logistics Readiness Squadron, threw toys and goodies to the children as the convoy passed.

## *The Holloman Hounds includes 15 troops from the 49th Logistics Readiness Squadron who earned decorations*

Tech. Sgt. Dan Allen, Tech. Sgt. Michael Sifford, Staff Sgt. Jeremy Domingo, Staff Sgt. Jeremy Garcia, Staff Sgt. Daryl Lane, Senior Airman Mazen Abdu, Senior Airman Donald Clayborn, Senior Airman Adam Courtney, Senior Airman Shaun Lathrop, Senior Airman Mark Mancha, Senior Airman Joseph Petty, Senior Airman Justin Rangel, Senior Airman Jason Schiavo, Airman 1st Class Matthew Grigsby, Airman 1st Class Steven Royer



Forces from the 49th Logistics Readiness Squadron encounter attacks when their convoy traveled from Kuwait to Mosul Iraq earlier this year.



Fifteen troops from the 49th Logistics Readiness Squadron convoy from Kuwait to Mosul Iraq during the team’s 191-day deployment that began in February.

## STARS

when he noticed two men hiding behind a mound of dirt about 250 meters away. He sighted the men with his machine gun.

“They began shifting around an object of some sort,” he said. “Five minutes passed and there were a lot of people on the road trying to get my attention. As I sighted the men back in, two other men with a wheelbarrow came running up behind the mound.”

All of the men gathered around the object. One of the men dropped a mortar round into the object. The round hit about 35 meters away from one of the convoy’s vehicles.

“I engaged the men, firing on full-auto,” Airman Abdu said. “The man to the left of the object was hit. He flew about two feet up in the air and four feet back. The other man lifted his hand to drop the second mortar round.”

Airman Abdu continued firing, hitting another man and the wheelbarrow. The insurgent managed to drop the round before being hit, and the second round landed 15 meters away from the convoy.

They continued on their mission and came upon a large compound with guard towers, and they were attacked again.

“I saw some movement to the right of the compound,” Airman Abdu said. “I ducked down and an RPG went right over my head, missing me by inches. The rocket continued to fly past the truck until it exploded in mid air. It was close enough that I felt a bit of

heat and a burst of air on my neck.”

The battle lasted more than one and a half hours. They laid down suppressive fire and were able to make it to Baghdad International Airport.

Sergeant Sifford was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for exceptionally meritorious achievement from Feb. 14 to Aug. 10 while serving as a convoy commander and squad leader in the 49th AEFTC. Sergeant Sifford played a vital role in starting the Air Force’s first convoy truck company.

Sergeant Sifford trained a team of 18 Airmen to perform as a highly functional team.

During one convoy, his unit encountered several improvised explosive devices and small-arms attacks.

“We put our training to work,” Sergeant Sifford said. “We adapted to the threat and overcame the challenges to get the convoy to its destination safely.”

Under Sergeant Sifford’s leadership, his team mastered drills and pre-convoy inspections and greatly surpassed Army and Air Force leadership’s expectations. He managed the daily operator maintenance of 80 vehicles maintaining a 92 percent operational readiness rate, above the Army standard of 90 percent.

Sergeant Sifford’s convoys moved over 3,000 passengers and two million pounds of cargo.

The remaining 13 men on the team received Army Commendation Medals for their service.