

HAMILTON AWARD

2009 Winner:

B/1-109th Field Artillery, 55th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 28th Infantry Division

B/1-109th Field Artillery, 55th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 28th Infantry Division, Naticoke, Pa., won the Hamilton Best Army National Guard Battery Award for 2009. CPT Joseph Ruotolo commands the battery with 1SG Brian McMichael.

Named for Alexander Hamilton, a Revolutionary War artilleryman and American statesman, the Hamilton Award was established in 2002. It annually recognizes a high-performing Army National Guard battery based on specific criteria and a narrative.

B/1-109 Field Artillery excelled in 2009 in all aspects from individual and unit readiness to training excellence to mission accomplishment. Throughout fiscal year 2009, B/1-109 FA maintained an assigned strength percentage of 110 percent (127 Soldiers assigned out of 115 authorized), recruited 10 new members (six non-prior service; four prior service) despite a shutdown in recruiting, beginning March 2009 and lasting for the remainder of the fiscal year, had an extraordinary overall attrition rate of 9.4 percent (well below the National Guard Bureau goal of 18 percent) and an assigned duty military occupational skill qualification percentage of 91 percent. All in all, the battery had 88 Soldiers out of 127 assigned (the majority of the remainder attending or awaiting Initial Entry Training) mobilized in support of deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan and Egypt (as part of Multinational Force and Observers).

In November 2008, following a demanding eight-month deployment to Afghanistan as backfills to 3rd Battalion, 103rd Armor, Pa. Army National Guard in support of its mobilization as a provincial reconstruction team security force battalion, 46 Soldiers from the battery returned home to a well deserved heroes' welcome.



Soldiers of B/1-109 Field Artillery prepare to load a round into their M777A2 howitzer. (Photo courtesy of CPT Joseph Ruotolo, U.S. Army)

These Soldiers served with six separate provincial reconstruction team security platoons throughout the country, earning the admiration and respect of the leadership of 3-103 Armor.

B/1-109 FA mobilized as a 90-man M777A2 howitzer battery as part of 1-108 FA, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, on September 19, 2008, with an additional 41 organic members of the battery mobilizing. The battery proceeded to Camp Shelby, Miss., to complete collective post-mobilization training, cannon live-fire exercises and preparation for 56 Stryker Brigade Combat Team's mission readiness exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, La., in November to December 2008. While at Camp Shelby, the battery qualified in accordance with

Artillery Table 15 before receiving notice that they would serve as 1-108 FA's main effort maneuver battery for the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team's mission readiness exercise. The battery enabled 1-108 FA and 56 Brigade Combat Team to accomplish their missions, earning the admiration of the observer/controllers and 56th Brigade Combat Team's chain of command.

Arriving in Kuwait January 22, 2009, B/1-109 FA calibrated 10 out of the battalion's 19 howitzers. After moving to Camp Taji, Iraq, B/1-109 FA, once again, was selected as the main effort for 1-108 FA and initially tasked with a number of missions, including main entry control point security, security for 710th Explosive Ordnance Detachment and battalion quick reaction force. On March 23, 2009, not much

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more than a month after transfer of authority, B/1-109 FA was given the additional task of providing a three-gun platoon in direct support of 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, in the vicinity of Joint Security Station Istiqlaal, Iraq. At 2040 hours local time on March 29, 2009, B/1-109 FA made history, firing its first combat artillery mission since World War II. The battery would again make history on April 15, 2009 as the first M777A2-equipped National Guard unit to destroy a target successfully with Excalibur.

With transfer of authority in August 2009, B/1-109 FA fired nearly 1,200 rounds in theater, all timely, accurately, precisely and safely, earning the admiration and respect of the Multi-National Division-Baghdad commanding general, MG Daniel P. Boger, 1st Cavalry Division. B/1-109 FA had proven itself as artillerymen of the highest caliber, having accomplished every nonstandard mission received to the highest standards while simultaneously excelling on a new towed weapon system, doing all

this while suffering no casualties and only minor injuries throughout.

Not to be outdone, Battery B (Rear), 1-109 FA conducted a rigorous training program throughout training year 2009 designed to maintain its tradition of excellence. During Annual Training 2009, at Fort Pickett, Va., with more than 80 percent of the battery not in attendance due to current OIF deployment or recent return from Operation Enduring Freedom deployments, the remaining 24 members of Battery B (Rear) fell in with the few remaining members of Battery A to man six Paladin howitzers and one battery operations center. This makeshift battery of 65 dedicated troops, many of whom had just completed Initial Entry Training, conducted Paladin Software Block II and Excalibur New Equipment Training in only three days rather than the usual five. They then certified as Paladin/battery operations center sections, firing 1,379 rounds in four days, all timely, accurately and safely with some of the finest effects on target the

battalion has ever seen — no small feat given the harsh environment of southern Va. in the summer. Additionally, as part of both a counter-insurgency situational training exercise and a force-on-force mission readiness-type exercise, the battery conducted the same cordon and search live at Fort Pickett's Urban Assault Course in the "run" phase of counter-insurgency training that they previously conducted in simulation during the Fires simulation exercise as the "crawl/walk" phase.

These magnificent artillerymen, most of whom had very limited urban operations experience and training, successfully cleared two complex structures suspected of being insurgent strongholds, capturing two high-value insurgents in the process, all without any friendly or civilian casualties or collateral damage. The unit displayed the ability to go from the rigors of Paladin artillery operations one day to the uncertainties of counter-insurgency/stability operations the next, demonstrating the kind of agility our Army needs.



A Soldier of B/1-109 Field Artillery visits Assyriah Elementary School. (Photo courtesy of CPT Joseph Ruotolo, U.S. Army)

KNOX AWARD

2009 Winner:

B Battery, 4th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division

Battery *Blackjacks*, 4th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, N.Y., is the winner of the 2008 Henry A. Knox Best Active Component Battery Award. B Battery is commanded by CPT Matthew Burnette and 1SG Joe Winstead.

The annual award is named for the first Chief of Field Artillery, MG Henry A. Knox, a Revolutionary War hero, and recognizes an outstanding active U.S. Army battery based on specific criteria and a narrative of performance. A similar award was established in 1924 but was phased out in 1940 as World War II loomed. The award was reestablished in 2002.

B Battery started training in preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Due to the mission requirements for Operation Iraqi Freedom, B/4-25 FA conducted several training exercises which focused on maneuver tactics, techniques and procedures. In October 2008, Bravo Battery was given a new mission; deploy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Its mission would be to provide direct support fires to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, "TF Spartan." Unknown to B/4-25 FA, it would receive an additional mission of conducting maneuver operations throughout the Jalrez Valley, Wardak province; one of the most dangerous areas of operation in the world. B/4-25 FA did not take its change of mission lightly; the unit certified on three different howitzer systems — M119A2, M198 and M777A2, while simultaneously conducting fires support coordination exercises in support of its brigade and performing platoon live fire exercises to stay proficient in infantry tasks. With 90 *Blackjack* Soldiers, B/4-25 FA would surpass all expectations in both field artillery and infantry tasks.

Once deployed to Afghanistan, B/4-25 FA manned two M777A2 and two M119A2 howitzers at Forward Operating Base Airborne and Command Outpost Sayed Abad, both with one gun section each, while also manning two M777A2 howitzers at Command Outpost Carwile. B/4-25 FA also conducted numerous artillery raids into Chak District in support of combat operations to oust enemy strongholds.

B Battery fired more than 2,000 105-mm and 155-mm rounds throughout Wardak province. Combined, B/4-25 FA's artillery platoon effectively covered more than 640 square kilometers of Wardak province with artillery fires, with the combat proven ability to raid into any district by ground or air. Even though B/4-25 FA was stretched from end to end of Wardak province, it effectively accumulated thousands of 105-mm and 155-mm rounds fired and more than 20 enemy killed in action, with every platoon in the battery achieving enemy killed in action due to artillery fires, all with absolutely zero incidents.

While still providing artillery support to all of Wardak province, B/4-25 FA excelled in the maneuver mission as well. On July 08, 2009, B/4-25 FA was made the Ground Command Unit

in the Jalrez District — a crucial valley with direct access to Kabul where many Taliban leaders reside and conduct operations against coalition and Afghan government officials. B/4-25 FA conducted key leader engagements, commander's emergency response program Projects, humanitarian aid and countless kinetic operations to maintain U.S. and Afghan interests. With only

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two Maneuver Platoons, B/4-25 FA conducted more than 200 combat patrols. B Battery captured several detainees, one of which was a high ranking improvised explosive device cell leader responsible for many of the improvised explosive devices in the Jalrez Valley.

During B/4-25 FA's tour in the Jalrez Valley, it has been in several direct and indirect fires as well as improvised explosive device engagements with the enemy. While staying true to its mission, B/4-25 FA consistently engaged the enemy and ultimately pushed it out of the valley. In doing so, every Soldier in B Battery has earned his combat action badge, and three individuals have earned purple hearts.

GRUBER AWARD

2009 Winner:

Sergeant First Class Brandon J. Aguilar

The Gruber Award was established in 2002 to recognize outstanding individual thought and innovation that results in significant contributions to or the enhancement of the field artillery's warfighting capabilities, morale, readiness or maintenance. It is named after Brigadier General Edmund L. Gruber, who as a first lieutenant in 1908, composed the *Caisson Song* that the Army adapted as *The Army Goes Rolling Along* in 1952.

SFC Brandon J. Aguilar of B Battery, 1st Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, distinguished himself through exceptionally meritorious achievement while assigned to B Battery, 1st Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, during Operation Iraqi Freedom 08-09. Aguilar's performance as 1st platoon sergeant greatly contributed to the overall success of not only B Battery's mission, but also the nonstandard maneuver mission of 1-319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment. Under his leadership and direction, his platoon completed more than 600 combat missions, including time sensitive target missions, reconnaissance and surveillance patrols, mounted and dismounted patrols, checkpoint reinforcement and overwatch, quick reaction force missions, small kill-team operations and numerous humanitarian assistance deliveries, all while sustaining zero losses to personnel or equipment.

Operating a maneuver platoon with 21 personnel, Aguilar also supported more than 20 battalion operations, and 30 battery-sized operations focused on providing and maintaining security for the local populace of Zafaraniyah. His dedication to duty and mission focus played a pivotal role in the battalion's efforts to secure the Karadah sub-district of Zafaraniyah, eliminating Jaysh Al Mahdi/Special Groups and al Qaeda in Iraq elements from the Operating Environment, and promoting peace and stability with the local leaders and populace.

In mid-August, the battalion commander and command sergeant major selected Aguilar's platoon to take on an artillery training mission with M109A6 155-mm Paladins to establish a "hot gun" capability for Multi-National Division-Baghdad capable of employing Excalibur. Aguilar moved the platoon — a M119A2 105-mm

howitzer platoon by modified tables of organization and equipment — from Joint Security Station Zafaraniyah to Forward Operating Base Hammer and trained on M109A6 Paladins to accomplish the counterfire and direct support role for the brigade combat team, should the need arise to replace the platoon from 1-82 FA.

While this would be a daunting task to any artillery unit after operating for a year in a nonstandard maneuver role in full-spectrum operations, Aguilar's element attacked the mission with the same consistent tenacity as all other tasks it had accomplished throughout the deployment, and 1st Platoon excelled in its new role. The platoon's training allowed it to participate in eight live-fire exercises from August 12, 2009 to September 17, 2009. Despite working on an unfamiliar system, the platoon participated in the firing of more than 213 rounds with zero incidents or safety violations, while constantly achieving standard mission times.

The battalion command sergeant major called upon Aguilar to coach, teach and mentor howitzer sections and key leaders in field artillery operations to support the battalion's mission upon redeployment. He demonstrated superior knowledge in artillery tasks and gunnery, successfully developing four inexperienced gunners, four howitzer section chiefs and four lieutenants after conducting twelve months of nonstandard operations in Iraq. He worked tirelessly, constructing and supervising training that shaped the battery in basic artillery skills and consistently received praise from the battalion's leadership. He was chosen due to his leadership abilities and commitment to excellence in his craft, which he demonstrated on numerous occasions.

Throughout his tour and without exception, Aguilar consistently focused his efforts on improving the unit by implementing thorough training, rehearsals and after-action reviews following execution. His stalwart leadership and focus on standards had a lasting impact on the battery's ability to accomplish any mission or task, showing versatility in both maneuver and field artillery operations. Aguilar established himself as a true combat multiplier, earning the respect and

confidence of his superiors, subordinates and peers throughout the airborne artillery community.

Aguilar demonstrated superb attention to detail and accountability while preparing all sensitive equipment, fifteen section and platoon equipment containers, and four M119 howitzers for deployment in October and November of 2008. Aguilar supervised three unit movement officers, five custom inspectors and two gunnery sergeants during the preparation of all equipment for deployment, ensuring zero deficiencies in the battery's equipment. His efforts enabled the battery to assume full-spectrum operations rapidly upon arrival in theater.

With coalition forces moving out of the cities and rapidly undergoing many base closures and realignments during Operation Iraqi Freedom 08-09, he again moved the battery's equipment, this time from Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah to Joint Security Station Zafaraniyah, all while maintaining a fierce battle rhythm in the operational environment. This NCO's attention to detail and fierce enforcement of standards and property accountability resulted in the battery's ability to maintain 100 percent accountability of equipment despite multiple moves throughout the deployment. His knowledge and experience allowed them to do so in a manner that facilitated quick inventory of the equipment after each move and rapid fielding for combat operations.

Aguilar coached and mentored his platoon's fire direction chief, SSG Ronnie Mason, for the prestigious Sergeant Audie Murphy Club board. Mason received the second highest score in the brigade combat team and was inducted into the prestigious club on September 12, 2009.

The success of B Battery and 1st Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, could not have been achieved without the diligent efforts of Aguilar. His actions are in keeping with the highest traditions of this prestigious award and reflect great credit on him, the 1st Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment; the 3rd Brigade Combat Team; the 82nd Airborne Division; and the U.S. Army.