



West Jefferson, OH
The Bronze Star

This training was critical because it taught troops, particularly those in vulnerable logistics transporter convoys, how to fight back and move down the road with authority. Seventeen units went through the initial training to learn the rules of engagement and to know how to defend from everything from thieves trying to steal water and supplies to a convoy under enemy attack.

"We had to train troops to fight back from a mounted defense when insurgents attacked," Kelly said. "Prior to 2003, most convoy live fire training involved dismounting vehicles and taking up a defensive position and returning fire rather than defending on the move."

Soldiers in convoys have successfully applied this training as a countermeasure to the persistent danger they face while in theater.

Through her efforts, many soldiers became confident in their abilities and their right to not only self-defend but also to remove the perception of being a "soft target."

"Soft targets are convoys who would appear unorganized and those who would not fight back. They were transporter trucks that didn't have much maneuverability and were literally soft skinned, canvassed trucks."

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MARIA KELLY

Balancing the roles of soldier, parent and military spouse in a dual military family is demanding and no small feat, but LTC Maria Kelly has managed to do it before, during and after deployments for 26 years.

She enlisted in the Army on active duty for three years, transitioned to the Army Reserve and later became a commissioned officer and joined the ranks of Ohio's Army National Guard.

Throughout her military career, Kelly has deployed on several occasions and has earned numerous accolades, including two Bronze Star Medals.

"During my deployment to Kuwait in 2003, I completed three safety investigations that involved fatalities," Kelly said as she explained her role as a Plans Officer with the 371st Corps Support Group, 3d Corps Support Command. "Anytime we lose a soldier in combat it's tragic, but to lose a life in an accident... it is important to come away with lessons learned so we don't repeat those incidents."

"The impact of that experience (as a safety investigator), taught me the importance of leadership and the responsibility of protecting the forces from loss of life," Kelly elaborated. "It shaped things for me as a leader."

Kelly also established the effective Convoy Live Fire Training Exercise while deployed in the austere desert environment.



HEROES

Gunners and more solid vehicles are now in the transport convoys. Soldiers have reported that the Convoy Live Fire training, now referred to as convoy logistics patrol academies, continues to save lives.

"This training gave them the skills and confidence to perform their mission effectively," according to Kelly.

As the battalion commander for the 237th forward support battalion from 2006 - 2007, she was part of the 4th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, Multi National Division-North.

Kelly noted that her biggest challenge was "the complexity of forces to support the State Department and Department of Defense at and around the Forward Operating Base Marez and Diamondback in Iraq.

"It was a steep learning curve," she recalled. "I was used to working with soldiers and other military services. But we worked with government civilians and contractors, multi-national forces, Iraqi local nationals, and third country nationals who were non-government contractors from places like Turkey, Philippines, Pakistan, and Turkey. "

At the FOB, Kelly was close to Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq. With a dense population of people so close to the base, enemy forces had an advantage of blending in.

"Frequent indirect fires occurred, but we had a hardened base and we were able to divert attacks with a posture of deterrence and training for catastrophic events.

"It's easy to criticize from here about the time it takes to see progress there, but I have grown to appreciate the complexity of the entire process," Kelly commented.

When she heard about the completion of the air terminal in Mosul on a portion of the FOB, she said that was a major milestone not only because the Army Corps of Engineers began the air tower construction during her tour, but also because it allowed the locals to travel from Mosul to Saudi Arabia via air versus bus.

Kelly has distinguished herself as a role model for other female enlisted and junior officers and is respected among her peers. Her impeccable investigative knowledge, organization and leadership skills has allowed her to consistently and efficiently serve her country and support her family.

