

Forward Repair Activity-Iraq (FRA-I) Drawdown

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As the sun creeps up over the horizon and the first glimmers of a new day are dawning across the Iraqi skies, Project Manager Stryker Brigade Combat Team (PM SBCT) and General Dynamics Land Systems (GDLS) Contactor Logistics Support workers gather for their daily safety meeting. They discuss top priorities and safety procedures to ensure a productive day of supporting Stryker-equipped Soldiers. Most of these employees have military experience that translates to a strong sense of pride in supporting Stryker brigades throughout Iraq. Recently, the mission and capabilities of FRA-I, which was established to support *Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)*, are being shifted to the FRA-Afghanistan (FRA-A) to support Stryker brigades there.

Soldiers of 4th SBCT, 2nd Infantry Division, patrol in Aqar Quf, Iraq, March 11, 2010. The FRA-I, as a supply node for forward-deployed Stryker units, has provided support to SBCTs and Stryker-equipped Soldiers for years. (U.S. Army photo by SPC David Robbins, Headquarters and Headquarters Co., 16th Engineering Brigade.)

FRA-I Overview

FRA-I was established in 2003 at Camp Anaconda, Iraq, which is now known as Joint Base Balad (JBB). FRA-I is a supply node for forward-deployed Stryker units and provides a higher maintenance level for the brigade support battalion, whose mission is to maintain and sustain the equipment required for combat operations. FRA-I is the central node for executing retrograde operations of battle-damaged Strykers and retrofit operations to install Stryker survivability and sustainment capabilities. After years of providing support to Stryker Brigades in Iraq, FRA-I began indirectly supporting operations during *Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)* by sending parts, people, equipment, and various capabilities to Afghanistan until the FRA-A was established.

The mechanics at FRA-I perform limited technical inspections on battle-damaged and rebuilt vehicles that cycle through. They also install new upgrades to vehicles that include slat armor, hull protection kits, and mine protection kits. These kits are all part of the blast mitigation system and retrofits being implemented on Strykers. The operations at FRA-I also include maintaining a ready-to-fight (RTF) fleet of vehicles that can be used to replace combat-damaged Stryker losses or those with mechanical failures. The RTF fleet, which once numbered more than 70



Pallets of slat armor at FRA-I await shipment to Auburn for reconstitution into slat kits. (Photo by Lynden Lawson.)

vehicles, is now less than 20 at the time this article was written.

The component repair/rebuild shop is where retrograde Full-Up Power Packs (FUPPs) are received and rebuilt for reissue to the units. FUPPs can be removed from Stryker vehicles in their area of operation and then sent back to FRA-I for repair. Upon receipt, the unserviceable retrograde FUPPs go through a cleansing and teardown phase. They are rebuilt to factory standards, run on a test stand to ensure that they can withstand the intense performance expected during combat situations, and set into a shipment can for 24 hours to check for leaks or broken seals. They are then packaged and sent to a unit with their test results. Once a spare FUPP is installed, the vehicle is ready to proceed with operations.

FRA-I also has a supply warehouse for receiving and shipping parts to the brigades and other units, and also serves to ship parts back to the United States, European Distribution Center (EDC), Afghanistan, or Qatar. In 2003, FRA-I was stood up, managing 127 lines of parts. Since that time, the lines of parts managed has grown to more than 622 lines with well more than 125,000 parts on the footprint at JBB. The FRA-I supply section manages all parts coming in and out of theater.

FRA-I Drawdown

As part of President Barack Obama's plan to have all combat troops out of Iraq by August 2010, the PM SBCT, COL Robert Schumitz, ordered a comprehensive plan to be developed in October 2009. The plan not only centered around drawing down Stryker capabilities and footprint in Iraq, but also addressed how to sustain seamless support there while repositioning capabilities to support operations in *OEF*. Schumitz delegated authority of the drawdown plan to the Deputy Product Manager Logistics, LTC Aaron Roberson, who improved and expanded existing plans to ensure timelines had built-in triggering mechanisms to keep the momentum. All personnel and sections at FRA-I embraced the plan and have been steadily drawing down the footprint while maintaining the quality of support.

Capabilities that were very useful at FRA-I before drawdown began were repairing differentials and refilling fire extinguishers on Stryker vehicles. These capabilities were important because units could have equipment repaired or serviced in theater, instead of sending it back to the vendor or the United States. This reduced replacement time, as well as shipping and processing costs. These capabilities are transitioning to FRA-A to support operations in *OEF*.



GDLS contractors at the FRA-I tire shop reassemble a Stryker wheel and tire assembly that will be put back into the forward supply system. (Photo by Lynden Lawson.)

Another entity that was very useful before the drawdown began was the tire shop. This shop received unserviceable wheel assemblies from units; rebuilt them using run flats, new rubber tires, and rims (if serviceable); and then returned them for use in combat operations. The tire shop averaged 200–300 assembly repairs weekly, improving the combat readiness of both brigades in theater. Additionally, wheel assemblies were sent to Afghanistan until the tire shop at FRA-A was operational. The FRA-I tire shop has now been relocated to Qatar, where it will be used to support operations in both *OIF* and *OEF* theaters.

The vetronics shop at FRA-I was used as a station to diagnose and repair common chassis electronic line-replaceable units (LRUs). This capability was extremely important at FRA-I since LRUs did not have to be sent back to the vendor for repair. This saved shipping fees, time, and the cost of replacement LRUs. The vetronics shop, which is now located in Qatar, saved the government \$833,484 in 2009.

The remote weapons systems (RWS) shop, also part of FRA-I, has been repositioned as well. One station was relocated to FRA-A in support of *OEF*, and one station was relocated to Qatar to provide continuing support to *OIF*. The RWS shop screens systems for no evidence of a fault (NEOF) and troubleshoots and repairs the systems. Technicians diagnosed and repaired



GDLS workers prep a container for shipment at a supply warehouse in FRA-I. (Photo by Lynden Lawson.)

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RWS for a savings of \$2,939,404 in 2009. There was also a mobile gun system (MGS) shop located at FRA-I that tested and screened LRUs for NEOFs and conducted repairs that saved the government more than \$100,000. This capability is being relocated to the United States.

In October 2009, support that shifted to Afghanistan included a welding trailer, a forklift, eight pallets of parts, tents, a generator, and 11 FUPPs, until FRA-A had its component repair facility up and running. The component repair facility at FRA-A received 15 FUPPs from FRA-I to help with support until it could operate at normal capacity. There were other internal reasons that made making FRA-A a mirror twin of FRA-I difficult. The infrastructure was quite different, as Kandahar, Afghanistan, where FRA-A is located, was yet to be developed to the same level as JBB in Iraq. This made planning especially important so that capabilities did not shrink in Iraq until the full capability existed in Afghanistan.

December 2009 marked a turning point for setting concrete timelines for the drawdown of FRA-I. All sections and personnel were tasked to inventory all gear, parts, and equipment, and to identify items that were over the authorized limit, so these excess parts and equipment could be better repositioned to support all units in both theaters of combat operations.

FRA-I received more than 110,000 parts in the last 6 months and shipped more than 170,000 parts to units in Qatar, the EDC, Afghanistan, and back to Auburn, WA. Further, FRA-I has

shipped more than 50,000 parts in the last 2 months as part of the responsible drawdown. FRA-I also identified items no longer needed that could be turned into the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office, so that other units had the opportunity to use these items in their own production and repair facilities. FRA-I has sent out more than 20 conex boxes of rubber tires alone and several more conex boxes full of slat armor that will be reconstituted in Auburn and assembled into complete sets.

The FRA-I mission continues to support the units and, most importantly, the Soldier in the field who is conducting combat operations. Although the drawdown signals a shift in priorities and mission, FRA-I will continue reducing its footprint while supporting the units still in theater until no longer necessary. To date, the FRA-I footprint has been reduced by more than one-third and the RTF fleet reduced by more than 50 percent; meanwhile, the FRA-A capability to support *OEF* continues to grow to support vehicles there. “We Support the Troops,” is not just a saying on the sides of our shipping crates; it is the “plan of the day!”

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