

RUNNING HEAD: DEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

Deployment to Afghanistan

MSG Duane A. Detweiler

Operation Enduring Freedom V April 2004/2005

19Z5M, Troop First Sergeant, A Troop 3-4 Cavalry



11 September 2006

Class 57

I received orders for a permanent change of station to 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, located at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii in the fall of 2002. My change of station to Hawaii as a Cavalry Scout in the Armor Force was a dream come true. I wanted this assignment for 18 years, and the time arrived. I truly looked forward to this assignment as a chance to learn the light-fighter's view on tactics, and to see the other side of the spectrum after years as a mounted warrior. My assignment upon arrival was the First Sergeant of a light Cavalry Troop within the 25th Infantry Division. I was looking forward to the challenge and took things seriously because of the rumors that spread about the division possibly deploying overseas. With the rumors confirmed, I was ready for the task.

It was time to start preparations for deployment to Afghanistan. First, the division had not deployed in almost 40 years and this endeavor would be a new learning experience for everyone involved. Secondly, with my arrival to the troop, a complete chain of command arrived to the unit at the same time. I thought the preparation and deployment was an adventure for all involved because it would give us a chance to build this monster into a lean fighting machine. Furthermore, it would allow us to start, and finish together with what we were getting ready to embark upon.

With the chain of command firmly established, we anticipated individual and collective training from the division through the brigade. The leaders within the troop collectively had little or no deployment or combat experience. This would not hinder our aggressive approach towards tough, realistic training. We accepted the task, and set our sights on the deployment date of 15 April 2004.

Our unit's first priority was the revision of the troop SOP. Once we knew of our deployment timeline, backwards planning took effect in order to execute our revised SOP and

the execution of critical tasks, and battle drills. This would be imperative for the Soldiers of the troop to effectively fight and survive on the battlefield. The execution of these tasks to perfection would instill confidence in our Soldiers, and react in a manner that would be second nature.

Initially, the troop's focus was to qualify with every weapon system assigned to the MTOE. This was imperative because it would identify strengths and weaknesses at the individual level that would ultimately affect the collective level as a whole. If a Soldier had difficulties qualifying, re-training took effect immediately. With individual and crew served weapons qualified, crews began to fight as a team, and complete critical gunnery tasks that would ultimately factor into their survival on the battlefield. Once crews qualified, the focus shifted to platoon level training, and finally, to the troop. The unit, realizing the importance of lane training, set out for numerous months in and out of the field executing these tasks. In time, near perfection and measurable standards was certainly within reach. In conjunction with the field time, Soldiers attended Air Assault School in preparation for heavy sling-load operations within the theatre of operations, an indispensable skill that would reward us heavily in the end. In all, approximately five months of training prepared us for deployment to Afghanistan with a newfound sense of pride, confidence, and a sense of serving our country with dignity and respect.

The focus of individual and collective tasks shifted to the pre-deployment stage for deployment. This would lead the unit to the Conroy Bowl, and more importantly, the tedious portion of deployment, and prepping for overseas movement. In all, the division did an excellent job in the preparation and execution of this vital stage in our process for deployment. The basic areas went on without a flaw, but the RFI issue was late coming to the division. As a result, the Soldiers load increased dramatically to Afghanistan because of the extra issue of equipment.

With the training and pre-deployment criteria met, our unit set its sights on Afghanistan. The flight itself turned out to be a journey of over 4 days with stops in Boston, Ireland, Turkey, Manus, and finally, Afghanistan. The stop in Manus disembarked our unit from commercial air and manifested us for a military flight into Kandahar, Afghanistan. While in Manus, the anxiety started to build for most of us because it would only be a matter of time before we set down in Kandahar.

With our arrival into Kandahar, our advance party quickly integrated us into the unit, and our headquarters. Our initial task was to coordinate with the light cavalry troop from the 10th Mountain Division and begin to conduct battle hand over and cover areas of responsibilities. However, the unit re-deployed to the states and as a result, we had no continuity for an effective and successful rotation. The early departure of the unit only placed an extra burden on my NCOs, and they responded tremendously.

My platoon sergeants at the time were Arjes, Bishop, Hodge, Stankovich and Roark. These Soldiers only needed guidance and a direction and they knew exactly what they needed to do to accomplish the mission. They possessed motivation and tactical prowess unparalleled to their peers. These platoon sergeants made this rotation the success that it became. The combination of them all, keeping me informed at all times, and working through shortages as they rose. The unit owes each of them a debt of gratitude for their untiring efforts and their “can do” attitude that was instrumental at a very critical time. Each had to scramble for equipment, prepare their platoons for combat operations, account for a vast array of ammunition, conduct pre-combat inspections, and receive and analyze orders and missions. The drive for success became evident when they reported their status as ready to roll within three weeks of reaching Kandahar. I

considered this accomplishment unmatched because of the promise that they would fall in on equipment not there, nor the unit to conduct battle hand-over.

With this task complete, the platoons focused on going out of the wire. It would be a new experience for each of us. Initially, the platoons rolled out to Tarnak Farms to familiarize themselves with the surrounding area and to confirm weapon systems zeroes and night vision devices. This small task played an important part for the troop because it started to give the feel of actually being in a combat zone. The trip to and from there, still had the devastation that remained from the war that happened almost three years earlier.

With the initial tension released, the platoons started to roll out of the wire on a more consistent basis. Every platoon started to receive and analyze missions with vigor and a relentless pursuit of wanting to start making a difference. The opportunities were endless and the platoons accepted each mission as if it was their last.

With the platoons starting to roll out, re-supply became a main issue for me. With platoons out at any given time, it would be difficult, as time would tell, to resupply each of them in a reasonable time. My initial re-supply effort took approximately twelve hours to complete and that consisted of only two platoons. My headquarters section and I felt the effort it took to refit two platoons and decided that we needed a better way to re-supply them.

With our initial experience behind us, we focused on ways to improve re-supply issues for the platoons. Since our assignment to Hawaii, we fell under the Aviation Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division. With this critical piece in place, we set out to make re-supply easier for everyone involved.

I had mentioned earlier, that in conjunction with field time, Air Assault School played an integral part in our preparations for deployment as well. I had the opportunity to send as many

Soldiers as I could possibly send to school in anticipation of this very vital mission of re-supply. In a very short time, this task played an important part in our efforts. The air liaison officer assigned to 3rd Brigade played an important part in our efforts of re-supplying our platoons in a timely manner. He coordinated lift efforts that would reduce re-supply times from twelve hours to three hours. We took into consideration load time and availability of aircraft to make this mission successful.

With the aircraft firmly supporting our efforts, it was time to become creative with the lift capability. When we arrived in Kandahar, the issue of John Deere tractors played an important part in our re-supply efforts. The troop's initial issue of one all terrain vehicle hampered re-supply, but within time, our ATVs would increase to three. These three ATVs played a vital role in our continuing re-supply effort.

With the security of Kandahar Airfield, re-supply efforts seemed easy and flawless. The effort of coordination and actually loading the CH-47s, with the assistance of numerous Soldiers, was flawless. The unit would assemble the ATVs at a rally point and then load the ATVs onto the CH-47s. With preparations for movement complete, Soldiers operated the ATVs and headed out for platoon re-supply missions.

With the integration of CH-47s to our re-supply effort, time decreased dramatically for re-supplying our fighting forces. The ability to conduct this critical mission enhanced our ability to concentrate on other critical tasks. In addition, with the use of ATVs to our mission, its acceptance by the lift company came with great appreciation. The gaining factor for them was less time on the ground and less chance of indirect or direct fire. Once the lift commander identified his landing zone, the ATVs would exit the CH-47, the helicopter would lift off and re-supply operations would begin. With operations complete, radio contact brought the lift

helicopters back to the landing zone, and a reverse order of loading the ATVs began. With re-supply missions complete, the helicopter headed back to Kandahar and the efforts started all over again for the next mission.

The CH-47s assisted the troop enormously. They continued to assist the troop when it came to heavier lift requirements. Throughout the entire deployment, the Alabama National Guard lift company played an integral part in almost every operation that required lift capability. In addition to re-supply efforts, they also assisted with numerous lift requirements for our heavy up-armor HMMWVs into our areas of responsibilities. Without the assistance of the lift company, my time spent during re-supply would have been a never-ending journey.