

**CLASSIFICATION**

**B COMPANY 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry,  
1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper will cover my experiences during my tenure as a First Sergeant in B Company 2-6 Infantry, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division. I will discuss the Company's actions during my arrival, pre-deployment training and deployment of the unit. I will cover, in detail, the problems this Company was experiencing upon my arrival and how, as a team, we were able to overcome them and make the Company a success. I will provide a brief background of myself and my previous unit, as well as Joint Mission Rehearsal Center rotations and deployment. The issues discussed during the Company's extended delay in Kuwait will be covered as a means of illustrating the Company's accomplishment. I will discuss the Company's accomplishment of their mission in one of the most violent areas of Iraq and the professionalism of the NCO's and Soldiers during this time. I am proud to have served with this Company and I believe my term with B Company to be one of the highlights of my Army career.

Upon arrival at 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division I was introduced to the Regimental CSM. During my initial interview I informed him that my goals while at 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade were to become a First Sergeant and to establish myself as an excellent senior NCO. The CSM informed me that I would be assigned to Bravo Company 2-6 IN. The CSM informed me that this company had a reputation for poor performance due to inexperienced NCO's. He expressed that he felt confident in my ability to turn the company around. He felt that, as an experienced NCO I would be able to provide the enlisted leadership that had been lacking in the company. Upon receipt of my orders I was introduced to the Battalion CSM, CSM Brown. His initial guidance to me was in agreement with the Brigade CSM's, he felt that Bravo Company had the potential for improvement if provided with the necessary leadership. CSM Brown passed on his concept of how to improve Bravo Company for me to use as a starting point. I incorporated his advice into the plan I was already forming on how to proceed with my new company.

I arrived at 2-6 on a Friday while the Battalion was enjoying a 4-day weekend, I was told to report for duty on Tuesday. Prior to leaving for the day I was introduced to the Company Commander, CPT Lancon, as well as the Platoon Sergeant that was serving as First Sergeant. I was interested to hear from him how the previous 1SG, 1SG Cotto, had established the standards under which the Company was running. It seemed to me that 1SG Cotto had established good policies and standards, however junior leadership had failed to enforce his guidance

My first order of business was to conduct a meeting with all of the Platoon Sergeants, prior to the 0900 formation on Tuesday, in order to establish my standards and the level of professionalism and commitment I required from all of them. I reiterated these standards at the 0900 formation and was greeted with looks of incredulity from the faces of my Soldiers. Following the formation I brought all of the NCO's in the Company into my office to ensure that

all of them understood everything that I expected from them. It seemed that many of them were uncomfortable with the change. Upon further investigation of personnel trackers I believed I discovered why. Many of the junior NCO's in the Company had never been moved upon promotion. I believed that the problems the Company had been experiencing could be solved by reorganizing the junior leadership across the Company. After several days of observation I called all of my Platoon Sergeants into my office to let them know my plan. I understood that the Army advises waiting 90 days after arrival at a unit before making any concrete plans, but I felt that this issue needed immediate correction. I discussed my plan with the Commander and he felt that the change would be healthy for the Company. He felt that the majority of the NCO's had the potential to be strong leaders if they were given the proper guidance.

The Battalion was facing a deployment to the Joint Mission Readiness Center the next month, followed by a Bradley gunnery rotation, which made my personnel shift a risky venture. However, I felt that the JMRC rotation would provide a suitable testing ground for my efforts. Within the week the Company began preparation for the JMRC rotation. I was eager to put my new personnel layout to the test. I was also looking forward to this training rotation as a learning experience for myself. Prior to reaching the JMRC I was momentarily disappointed in my NCO's performance at pre-deployment tasks. The railhead and pack out operations encountered multiple problems that were well within the ability of the first line supervisors to prevent. During the next day's formation I put my guidance regarding performance expectations during the training rotations and the consequences of willfully ignoring these expectations. I understood that the NCO's in the Company were new to their teams and squads so I decided to let their actions at the JMRC rotation be the true test of their abilities. During the JMRC rotation I urged my Platoon Sergeants to conduct daily assessments of their subordinates and provide immediate

feedback to their Soldiers whenever shortcomings or strengths were identified within their Platoons. All of my Platoons participated in extensive training of the basics during their down time during the rotation, I believed that reinforcing the basics would help ease the personnel shift. This strategy worked very effectively and I was very pleased with all of my NCO's performance. I could see that the majority of the NCO's were able to keep better control of their subordinates and that discipline was improving even after such a short period. The following gunnery rotation gave the Company the opportunity to further gel with their new leaders and I had few complaints with the Company's performance. Upon redeployment back to Baumholder the Company participated in multiple Platoon Live Fire Exercises, which served to further develop the new teams within the Company.

The pre-deployment training gave me the opportunity to assess my personnel shifts and evaluate my junior leaders. I was quickly able to identify who were the strong NCO's and who were the weaker ones. Overall, I was very pleased with the improvement the Company was making, the Commander commented as well on the Platoons' improvement during the rotation. To be sure there were still problems within the Company when it came to discipline, however I was able to move a select few NCO's around for a second time in order to finally spread strong NCO's evenly across the Company. This training rotation also helped me evaluate the officers under whom my NCO's would perform their day-to-day tasks. I was quick to spot the strongest Platoon Leader, an OCS graduate who was very eager to learn, being relatively new to his platoon himself. He was coached by the Platoon Sergeant that I felt was the strongest in the Company, together they made an excellent team. My weakest platoon was led by a West Point graduate who overly critical of his subordinates and who was very quick to offer criticism and slow to offer praise. This particular officer proved to be extremely stubborn and unwilling to

accept even small corrections to his plans, even when given to him by someone of superior experience.

I felt that it was necessary to make all of my leaders in the Company aware of how I viewed their standing. The Company Commander and I counseled the leaders of both the strong and weak platoons and gave advice of how I believed both could improve. In keeping with what I saw at the JMRC rotation the strong platoon leader and his platoon sergeant incorporated my advice into their training and pushed their soldiers, the weak platoon took my advice as criticism and did little with it. It was obvious that the Platoon Leader in this platoon was a hindrance to the development of this platoon, at times.

During the ensuing months I began to push my newly placed NCOs to keep raising the bar on standards for their soldiers. I began by emphasizing the basics, such as inspections of soldiers and quarters, accountability during on and off-duty hours and weapons maintenance. I was pleased with the initiative that my NCO's took with enforcing the standards. At first I conducted frequent checks to ensure the standards were being met, these checks were often accompanied by on-the-spot corrections and counseling, if necessary. However, as the Soldiers and NCO's began to settle into their working relationships my checks were necessary less and less frequently and the corrections became minimal. I believe that I owe my success in Bravo Company completely to this transition that I saw, the NCO's began to take control of Soldiers from the bottom up. This freed me from micro-managing my platoons and allowed me to focus on further developing my NCO's, rather than conducting retraining.

Throughout the summer, my platoons continued to improve and I was amazed at their progress. Even the bull-headed PL began to soften and eventually adopted an acceptable attitude that encouraged teamwork. Towards the end of the summer the Battalion was given fairly short

notice of an impending deployment in the fall. The Battalion immediately made the transition from training planning to deployment operation planning. The Battalion Commander notified the leadership that the Brigade would deploy to Kuwait in November, but little else. The details regarding the deployment were sketchy and I didn't know what to expect as far as where we would be going or who we would fall under when we got there. However, those details were secondary to the fact that the Battalion was deploying, and that meant a great deal of preparation remained to be done. I had learned from previous deployments that details regarding where the unit was going could change in a heartbeat. From my past deployments I learned not to place a great deal of emphasis on where we were going and I ensured that my NCO's understood this as well. I didn't want the Soldiers fixated on speculating where we going and whose patch they would end up wearing on their right arms. I needed all of my Soldiers and leaders focused on the tasks at hand.

The Battalion decided to conduct some last-minute training in order to ensure that all of the Soldiers were as familiar as possible with as many weapons as possible. The fact that we didn't know exactly where we were going meant that we didn't know what Rules of Engagement and other restrictions we would fall under. The Battalion conducted a wide spectrum of weapons familiarization and Live Fire Exercises in an astonishingly compressed timeline. During this train up I was very impressed with the level of commitment and professionalism that was displayed throughout the Company. I saw that NCO's and Soldiers took this training very seriously and understood that this training would almost certainly be valuable in the very near future.

Following the hectic period of last minute training the Battalion was given what felt like a reprieve. We were still conducting pre-deployment preparation, including vehicle and

equipment packing and shipping, uniform and equipment issue to all Soldiers and additional equipment issue to platoons and squads. However, the pace of this preparation seemed relatively sedate compared to the training schedule of the weeks before. Eventually we came to the point where nothing else remained to be packed or shipped and we began to wait for the final word ordering us to deploy. Word was eventually passed down and on November 16, 2005 the Battalion deployed to Kuwait in support of OIF '05-'07. The Battalion deployed under a blanket order for the Brigade to deploy, which meant that individual Soldiers did not have deployment orders.

Upon arrival in Kuwait our lack of orders immediately became an issue. The personnel at Camp Buehring were unaware of our deployment and had not made any preparation for our arrival. Our Battalion received word that whichever plan had originally brought us to Kuwait had since fallen through and we were now on stand-by for instruction. To this day I have been unable to find out where the Battalion was supposed to go upon leaving Germany. The Battalion leadership worked quickly to secure quarters for the Soldiers and began working through the issue of maintaining the Battalion in Kuwait. It was unclear, at my level, when we would be leaving Kuwait, so the Company Commander and I began constructing contingency training plans in the event that we were forced into an extended stay in Kuwait. I am proud of mine and the Commander's work in developing this plan, at the first Battalion meeting ours was the only Company to present such a plan. The other Companies had taken a "wait and see" attitude and were waiting for Battalion to tell them what to do during their stay in Kuwait. At this meeting it was put out that it was unclear how long we would stay in Kuwait and the Brigade has officially been designated as the Theatre Reserve. When I relayed this to my NCO's and Soldiers it came as a great shock and disappointment, the apprehension during pre-deployment preparation had



worked on the soldiers until they were almost eager to deploy and finally get where they were going. Following my announcement I was very proud of the way in which my NCO's maintained good discipline amongst the Soldiers. I know that idle Soldiers stuck in such an environment can quickly turn to an undisciplined lot and I was very pleased to see that my Soldiers maintained their military bearing throughout the wait.

The delay in Kuwait stretched out to 6 months, during which the Company took part in excellent training. We were able to utilize the Udairi range complex, which helped us concentrate on honing our gunnery skills and dismounted TTP's, to include MOUT. I was impressed by improvements made in the Udairi range since the last time I had deployed. It had been built up from a fairly basic set of buildings in the middle of the desert to a very complex village that accurately reflected architecture and city layouts found in Iraq. Although the repetitive nature of going to the range everyday brought morale down the training time we gained while in Kuwait was invaluable. This was a unique opportunity to conduct intensive training that I have not seen duplicated since. This training also gave more than ample time for teams and squads to cement their TTP's even further. By the time our delay in Kuwait ran its course every one of my platoons was a cohesive unit, I could see that soldiers were able to anticipate the moves of their partners almost by reflex.

After 3 months of waiting movement orders began trickling into the BDE for, the task organization of the BDE shifted often, producing more effective fighting units that were pushed out where needed. After roughly 6 months in Kuwait B/2-6 was task organized to TF 1-35 AR and ordered to move to Ramadi. The move was confirmed with our Battalion and I brought my Platoon Sergeants in to pass the information and put out what I expected of the platoons during the move. I knew that Ramadi was one of the most dangerous hotspots in Iraq at the time and I

expected my NCO's to enforce the standards now more than ever. I held a Company formation to pass the information to my Soldiers, my Platoon Sergeants would later tell me that most of the Soldiers were relieved to be leaving Kuwait. I think most of them had a healthy dose of fear mixed in with their emotions. However, never once did I see a Soldier's fear of where we were going and what we were going to have to do get the better of him or make him forget his fellow Soldier.

Details began to come in about who we would fall under and what our specific mission would be. We were to fall under the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force and our mission was to quell the rising influence of Al Qaeda in the area. Ramadi was known as a safe haven for insurgents at that time and we were part of the effort to pacify the area. Our initial flight into Iraq brought us to a Marine maintained FOB named TQ, from here B Company conducted a ground convoy into Ramadi, specifically Camp Ramadi.

Almost immediately the Company learned why Ramadi was considered such a hotspot. The Company immediately began conducting regular security patrols in Ramadi and the surrounding area. During our first week of conducting these patrols we had our first casualty, PFC Tribble. PFC Tribble was acting as a HMMWV gunner when his vehicle was struck by a deep-buried IED. The attack occurred on a busy intersection in the village of Tamim, right outside of a local school. PFC Tribble suffered from multiple blunt trauma and shrapnel wounds as a result of the attack. He was Casevac'd back to the Camp. Unfortunately, PFC Tribble was pronounced dead upon arrival at the Camp. This was a great blow to Company, losing Soldiers is never easy and PFC Tribble was a great friend to many of my Soldiers. The IED attack produced other casualties as well. SGT Davis was hit the worst. He was acting as TC for the HMMWV that ran over the IED and received multiple shrapnel wounds in right leg during the

attack. The medics on the scene were quick to react and applied a tourniquet to SGT Davis' leg. SGT Davis was Casevac'd to the Camp along with PFC Tribble. The medics on the Camp treated SGT Davis as thoroughly as they could and he was Medevac'd to Baghdad. SGT Davis was taken back to Walter Reed for treatment. He eventually lost his leg, but the surgeons that saw him in the hospital were quick to offer praise to the medics on the ground, saying that the tourniquet and field dressings applied almost certainly saved SGT Davis' life. I keep in contact with SGT Davis and his family to this day and I know that he wanted nothing more than to return to B Company and help his brothers accomplish their mission and get home safely. This was the first of many tragedies that the Company would face during the course of the deployment and I was proud of how my Soldiers and leaders responded to the incident. My NCO's did an excellent job of coaching the young Soldiers through the loss of their friends and ensured that everyone understood that we still had a job to do. I have seen Soldiers get into trouble following the loss of their friends in combat, occasionally Soldiers are motivated by revenge for what happened to their friends and I wanted to ensure that B Company did not go down that road. I met with my Platoon Sergeants following this event and ensured that leaders down to the team level had tight control of their Soldiers during the next few days so as to prevent any incidents. In the following days I was proud of the way my Company performed, my Soldiers conducted themselves professionally and made sure that their lost friends were honored by accomplishing their mission in a level-headed manner.

Over the next several months B Company worked diligently to restore order and stability to the Ramadi area. We conducted security operations of every kind and innumerable security patrols and raids. The platoons eventually became very familiar with their assigned areas of responsibility, which helped save lives multiple times. The locals in the area were often

reluctant to help us due to the powerful Al Queda influence in the area and this made our fight that much harder. To be sure there were locals that wanted to help. One such local in the area was a man we affectionately named Traffic Bob. Traffic Bob took it upon himself to keep a very busy local intersection under control. He managed the flow of traffic and was always helpful to our patrols. When he saw us coming he would stop traffic in the intersection and make a clear path for us. He genuinely wanted to help improve the quality of life in the area and he believed we were the way to do that. On 7 July, 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon was on patrol nearing Traffic Bob's intersection, they noticed several large semi trucks that were off-loading what appeared to be humanitarian aide supplies. These trucks had never been seen in the platoons AO and neither had the personnel off-loading the supplies. The convoy leader felt that these trucks were suspicious and requested that an Iraqi Police patrol, as well as Bradley support, inspect what the trucks were doing. The IP were willing to conduct an inspection and arrived at the scene on the opposite side of the intersection from the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon patrol. At this point a vehicle drove into the middle of the intersection and detonated a VBIED. The resulting blast was devastating and resulted in multiple casualties to local citizens. All of my Soldiers had been either in their vehicles or behind sufficient cover and there were no B Company casualties. Traffic Bob suffered multiple wounds and was Casevac'd to the Camp. Sadly, he died as a result of his wounds. A second casualty on the scene was a local who suffered a severe injury to his leg from shrapnel expelled in the blast. He was Casevac'd as well, during the treatment process it was discovered that this individual was the TF #5 high value individual. He was successfully detained and valuable information was gained from his testimony. I arrived on the scene shortly after the attack with a trauma team to assess the remaining casualties and conduct an analysis of the aftermath of the blast. I was impressed by 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon's calm and collected attitude at the

site. All of the NCO's were ensuring that the site was thoroughly secured. The medical team began treating the locals suffering from the most severe wounds. My job on the site was to direct the cleanup of the site and restore the site to some semblance of its former order. Again, I was proud of the way 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon executed these duties, the NCO's and Platoon Leader ensured that no time was wasted on the site. I wanted the job done quickly and thoroughly and that was exactly how it was carried out, in a short time the patrol was on its way back to the Camp. I consider this event a tragedy because it illustrates the price that the locals pay when insurgent forces move into their area. Even those that are willing to help Coalition Forces are sometimes caught in the cross-fire. I am grateful that we were able to extract something positive, namely the detention of the HVI, from such a destructive event.

Throughout the deployment B Company lost many outstanding Soldiers. Our deployment in Ramadi was the most violent that I have seen. I am forever grateful to those I served with and I am still amazed at how superbly the Soldiers performed under tremendous pressure. I was continuously impressed by my NCO's ability to keep the Soldiers' morale high and the Soldiers' resiliency and eagerness to accomplish the mission. This deployment served as a testament to the Army system of training, I know that many Soldiers' lives were saved because their buddy knew what he was doing. I was also thoroughly impressed by the Company's and Battalion's medical personnel. B Company redeployed as part of TF 1-35 AR, the TF conducted a clean redeployment and I was happy to avoid any incidents during redeployment.

Back in garrison many Soldiers left 2-6 IN, both ETS and PCS, but I know that they all left knowing that they helped their brothers when they were needed and they accomplished one of the most difficult missions in one of the most violent areas of Iraq. I consider my service with B Company to be one of the highlights of my military career. I am proud of all the soldiers that

served with me and proud of the change that was accomplished throughout the Company during my tenure. I served with some of the best NCO's I have ever served with in B Company and I am still amazed at their ability to reshape the Company into the best in the Battalion. I recently saw pictures of the Ramadi area in which the locals and CF's were conducting a 5k fun run. It's amazing to see the transformation in the area, I recognized the street on which the runners were running as one that my patrols had been attacked on multiple times. I can honestly say that my Soldiers and I were part of that transformation, without a doubt we helped accomplish the mission. Upon leaving B Company I knew that I was leaving with the Company stronger and more capable than when I arrived. Our experiences in Iraq were unique and I will never forget the Soldiers we lost. My experiences with B Company were a strong force in shaping who I am today and I know that without it I would not be as competent a leader or Soldier.