

Running Head: MNF-I FIRST SERGEANT AND ESCORT COMPANY

Personal Experience Paper

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Abstract

After selection to MSG, the only thing I could think about was becoming a First Sergeant, for it had been a dream of mine for my entire career. With V Corps Headquarters deploying to Iraq in support of OI 05-07, I found myself in the right place at the right time with my chance to become a First Sergeant. Deploying is a difficult time but being the First Sergeant of one of the largest Headquarters in the Army was not just overwhelming but painfully exhausting. Newly developed TTPs and CENTCOM training standards made getting the Corps Headquarters in to theater even harder than originally planned. Once in theater, the rules immediately changed as the Corps Headquarters mission changed and took the role of MNF-I Headquarters. The company was successful and did not have a single casualty throughout the one year deployment.

Introduction

I have so many personal experiences over my 20 year career that molded me in to the leader I am today. Most experiences are good but there are some that are not that flattering to write about in a paper being turned in to the Sergeant Majors Academy. Luckily for me, I have either been placed in the right place at the right time or some of the best leadership in the Army has been put in charge of me. I have been fortunate in my career to have never had a “bad assignment” or been assigned to a completely incompetent unit. My experiences in garrison and during deployments have been incredible to say the least. The experiences that I have had over the years have been shared with some of the greatest Soldiers to ever lace up a pair of combat boots. In my opinion, this generation of Soldiers is the best ever. Beyond popular belief of us “old timers”, I truly appreciate this generation of Army Soldiers and Veterans. Never has this country been in a sustained fight for this long and these young men and women continue to fight. This has to mean something for today’s Army to continue to have the highest enlistment rates in the history of reenlistment with this war raging and no end in sight. The arguments will always be that reenlistment incentives are great and the economy is bad but I stand by the fact that our young Soldiers love what they do and they are proud to be Soldiers regardless of whether they are Active Duty, Reserve or National Guard. It is this reason that I chose to write about my experience as the MNF-I First Sergeant for my first few months deployed in support of OIF 05-07.

Background

As a Personnel Sergeant, deployments are very unit driven. Personnel Sergeants in a Brigade Combat Team experience their share of traditional wartime memories as IED attacks, mortar attacks, etc. but the Personnel Sergeants in major Headquarters normally never leave the FOB

that they are assigned. My first tour to Iraq, I was a Brigade S1 NCOIC at the Baghdad International Airport and did not see much of the fighting that was taking place during OIF-1. Preparing for my second tour in Iraq as a company First Sergeant, I could only relate to my previous experiences and this is where I quickly found myself not knowing as much as I thought I knew. As a matter of fact, my first week at Camp Victory, Iraq was one of the lowliest times of my life much less my military career. For the first time, I felt incompetent with no way to improve myself. This feeling of incompetence came from a drastic change in mission that took the command by total surprise. Our initial PDSS with the 18th Airborne Corps had the V Corps Headquarters being responsible for the MNC-I (Multi National Corps-Iraq) operations and the Al Faw Palace. This task was not overwhelming as it was merely nothing more than a title change from HQs, V Corps to HQs, MNC-I. The only major issue we had as a Special Troops Battalion was troop labor but we had plans that would help with this shortfall. Immediately upon arrival at Camp Victory our mission changed from not only being the Headquarters entity for MNC-I, we were now going to be a multiple headquarters taking on the mission as HQs, MNF-I (Multi National Forces-Iraq). This meant a totally different mission set for the company, we now were responsible for LTG Chierreli and GEN Casey along with both staffs and escort duty.

MNF-I / MNC-I First Sergeant

In August 2005, the Headquarters, V Corps First Sergeant position became vacant. As a SFC-promotable, I felt that this would be an opportunity of a lifetime due to the limited First Sergeant positions opened to personnel sergeants in the current Army MTOE. Also, having a tremendous amount of faith in my abilities, I was sure that I could easily out-perform the previous two First Sergeants in the command. The unit was scheduled for deployment in support of OIF 05-07 in December as the replacement headquarters for the 18th Airborne Corps at Camp

Victory, Iraq so the train was moving for the company's deployment and I had to get myself prepared for a fast paced, non-stop work ethic for the next three months. I did not participate in a Change of Responsibility Ceremony, I was selected on a Thursday, was frocked to 1SG on a Friday, and then departed to Graffenwoehr, Germany the following Monday to participate in the Corps Headquarters' MRE. The exercise was a success but the entire time, I found myself on the reactive side of everything. The company had no written SOP, the company commander had just taken command in June and we seemed to be holding on by a rope at the end of every day. We returned from the MRE and then began the deployment phase which started with the PDSS. From the PDSS to the actual first chalk's departure, our mission to take over as the HQs, MNC-I had never changed. The company leadership, commander, and myself were certain we would easily handle our mission downrange.

Immediately upon arriving at Camp Victory, the Battalion Commander, Company Commander, and me started getting the feeling that our command was not on the same page with the current command on duties and responsibilities. This is when we were told by the Corps Chief of Staff that the mission had been changed to include providing operational support to the MNF-I Headquarters. This was definitely a shock to me because once we discovered what all that support actually was, we were overwhelmed. We did not have the personnel to provide support for a 2,200 person Headquarters that required two escort platoons. The V Corps Headquarters did not even have an escort platoon and more serious, we never trained to that level of movement.

For the first time in my career I found myself feeling like I was in over my head and thinking that I was not the right person for this job. I was a good leader but what this command needed now was a tactical leader with escort and outside the wire experience. It was over the next few

weeks and months that I realized how good the Soldiers in my command truly were and how much they were dedicated to the mission.

We instantly made two escort platoons within the company. One platoon consisted of a National Guard chemical platoon from Arkansas who was attached to the MNF-I and the second platoon we created utilizing a mixture of Military Occupational Skills; 13F-Field Artillery, 63B-Mechanic, 88M-Driver, 92Y-Supply, and 92G-Cooks. We were in no shape to worry about the MOS of these Soldiers. It was our job to get what we had trained and ready to go outside the wire 4-8 times daily. The command found a range that was capable of running convoy lanes and the firing of the .50 caliber machine gun. The range was named Butler. The logistical piece of getting both platoons to Butler Range became a tactical problem; we did not have enough vehicles to support the personnel and equipment that was needed. This problem was fixed by the company and battalion leadership flying to Butler Range and the two platoons would rotate through the training. Once we got to Butler Range, all lanes were developed and set up by the company and the battalion. Our scenarios were driven by the current TTPs and this development process was one of the best training events that I had experienced. I literally was learning as I was training and the Soldiers knew this as well and I had no problem with that. After all training was completed at Butler Range, we developed small arms training and shooting ranges at Camp Victory. These efforts were to ensure there would be no complacency among Soldiers and to keep their combat skills sharp.

Training was complete and it was now time to execute the convoy escort mission for the VIPs, dignitaries, and leadership of the MNF-I. The Soldiers in these two platoons performed amazingly. I had never before seen Soldiers taken out of their comfort zones and execute the way these Soldiers did on a daily basis. The normal routine for a Soldier at Camp Victory was

basically no different than being back in their garrison but the Soldiers of these two platoons were putting in 18-20 hour days and that would be the standard for the remainder of their tour. We designated a 2LT, logistical officer as their platoon leader and a SFC, senior maintenance NCO as their platoon sergeant. With little PL or PS time and absolutely no wartime convoy experience, these two young leaders were phenomenal. These two platoons carried out over 600 convoys in our deployment and escorted over 1,500 personnel throughout the Baghdad AOR. We were even given the mission to escort President Bush to the green zone on an unexpected visit to Baghdad if air transportation failed.

MNF-I Experience

I never thought in a million years that being a First Sergeant was going to have me working 18-20 hours a day, seven days a week. Once I actually came to grips with the company's entire mission, it was mind boggling. As a company, we were accountable for the following: 2,200 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians; 1,500 pieces of rolling stock; Dining Facility; MNF-I Reenlistment; and management of the Al Faw Palace. We did not have many officers in the company or STB so we placed Non-Commissioned Officers in charge of these responsibilities and they executed and carried out these missions better than expected. It was rarely brought to my attention that anything in our AOR was failing or not being taken care of professionally. The tasks were so overwhelming at times that I made the conscious decision not to take my R and R leave. This decision did not go over well with the STB Commander or Corps Chief of Staff but it was a decision I made to ensure there were no shortfalls on our watch. This decision was not made because I thought that things would fall apart if I left for three weeks, it was made because it had taken me six months to learn my job and develop a battle rhythm and I did not want to start all over again upon returning from R and R when I knew that

redeployment was quickly approaching. I had full faith in confidence in the Soldiers and leaders in the Company; it was me that could not afford to fall behind.

Conclusion

All of my experiences in the Army have shaped me in to the leader that I am today. The experience of being a First Sergeant of a deployed unit was the most wonderful experience of my life. Initially, I would never have made that statement but due to the Soldiers in my command I was successful. The single common denominator in my experiences as a leader is the Soldiers. There is no doubt in my mind that I have made selection to Sergeant Major due to the hard work and selfless service of the Soldiers that I have been fortunate enough to lead throughout my career. The argument about “new” Army versus “old” Army does not exist in my kit bag because through my experience as a First Sergeant, the Soldiers I lead would have run circles around me when I was a young Specialist and I am proud of every one of them.

ATSS-MH (870)

MEMORANDUM FOR Commandant, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas 79918-8002

SUBJECT: Access Agreement for Personal Experience Papers

1. I, Corey W. Gill, have submitted a Personal Experience Paper to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives regarding events and experiences from my participation in OIF 05-07 that may be of historical significance to the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

2. I understand the manuscript and attached documents will be accessioned into the historical holdings of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives and will belong to the United States Government to be used in any manner deemed in the best interests of the United States Army as determined by the Chief of Military History or his representative. I also understand that I may retain a copy for my own use subject to classification restrictions.

3. I hereby expressly and voluntarily relinquish all rights and interest in the paper to the United States Army with the following caveat/exception:

(☒) None
() Other:

I understand that the information in this paper may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and therefore, may be releasable to the public contrary to my wishes. I further understand that, within the limits of the law, the United States Army will attempt to honor the restrictions I have requested to be placed on this material.

Date: 2 APR 14

Printed Name: Corey W. Gill

Signature: [Signature]

Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

Printed Name/Date: _____

Signature: _____

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