

# LONG HARD ROAD



NCO EXPERIENCES IN  
AFGHANISTAN  
AND IRAQ

## Report Documentation Page

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# LONG HARD ROAD

## NCO EXPERIENCES IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

US ARMY SERGEANTS MAJOR ACADEMY

October 2007

*“The president has said from the very beginning that this would be a long, hard task that we have set ourselves upon. He said it right after 9/11, when he made it clear to the American people, it wasn’t just a matter of dealing with al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, but that this was a global war that would be fought on many fronts in many ways, using all of the tools at our disposal: military, law enforcement, diplomacy, financial controls -- you name it. And he told the American people to get ready for a long, hard road ahead.”*

— Secretary of State Colin Powell, on CNN’s Larry King Live show, October 26, 2003

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	5
Forward	6
Introduction	7
<b>Afghanistan Timeline</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>NCO STORIES FROM AFGHANISTAN</b>	<b>10</b>
1SG M. Robinson, “Recruiting Company 1SG”	12
SGM T. O’Neal, “Bridging the Support Gap”	15
SGM W. Finch, “Change in Area of Operation”	16
1SG P. McGuire, “Task Force Rakkasan”	18
SGM M. Bryant, “Afghan Militia Forces”	21
SGM S. Shank, “ANA Military Training Center”	25
MSG C. Peterson, “Baptism by Fire”	28
MSG K. Keefe, “Complacency Can Kill”	35
1SG Louis Gholston, “Air Medical Evacuation”	38
Vignette: “68 <sup>th</sup> Air Medical Rescue of the Year”	41
MSG L. Hall, “Make A Way”	42
1SG W. Gentry, “First Sergeant Role vs. Responsibility”	45
SGM C. Myers, “1-168 Inf., Iowa ARNG”	48
SGM D. Utley, “Konar Valley”	52
MSG D. Berry, “Establishing a Special Forces Firebase”	59
MSG R. Levis, “Task Force Geronimo”	62
Vignette “An Artillery Ambush”	65
SGM W. Forro, “Building a Forward Operating Base	66
MSG D. Detweiler, “Deployment to Afghanistan”	70
SGM L. Obeda, “Operation Roma”	73
SGM T. Lawrence, “Combat Advisor”	76
MSG R. Abernathy, “Reacting to an I. E. D.”	77
MSG M. Granado, “ANA Ldr Reaction and Training Course”	82
Photographs from Afghanistan and Iraq	86
<b>Iraq Timeline</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>NCO STORIES FROM IRAQ</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>“Fighting the Iraqi Army”</b>	<b>114</b>
1SG J. Bradshaw, “Invasion of Iraq”	114
SGM K. Cleveland, “Operation Viking Hammer”	118
Vignette, SSG H. Jhanson, “Engineer Company, 10 <sup>th</sup> Mt.	123
1SG B. Brown, “Convoy to Baghdad”	124
1SG B. Barren, “Tikrit”	128
SFC M. Swart, “Embedded Media”	132
SGM D. Grimes, “352 <sup>nd</sup> Civil Affairs Command”	134
SSG D. Bramlett, “A Wife Deployed”	137

SSG B. Sipp, “RPG Attack”	138
SPC A. Tietjen	141
SGM D. Veheklasen, “VBIED”	143
<b>“Fighting Insurgents”</b>	<b>148</b>
1SG R. Greene, “Eagle Troop”	148
1SG J. Thanheiser, “Convoy to Kirkuk”	153
MSG P. Johnson, “319 <sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion”	157
1SG S. Brooks, “15 <sup>th</sup> FSB Task Force Baghdad”	159
1SG T. Weiss, “Iraq’s Election, Baghdad”	163
MSG G. Wood, “Counter IED Targeting Program”	168
SSG J. Scott, “IED Attacks”	172
1SG C. Williams, “Areomedical Evacuation”	173
1SG J. Tennian, “Vermont National Guard”	178
1SG R. Evans, “Tactical Air Controller”	183
SFC D. Sparks, “Embedded Media”	186
Iraqi Forces Trained	192
Conclusion	193
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>194</b>

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Map of Afghanistan	11
Door gunner's position Chinook	12
Anti-Taliban fighter	21
1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Afghan National Army	22
Marking land mines and unexploded ordnance at Bagram Air Field	33
68 <sup>th</sup> Medical w/Chinook helicopter	41
M119A1 105mm Lightweight Howitzers	65
Map of Iraq	112
3 <sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in Southern Iraq, 23 March 2003	114
Up-Armored HUMMMW	182

## FORWARD

The call to war is often met by young Soldiers who lack an understanding of what they are about to encounter. These young Soldiers must be trained, prepared, and then led in battle by those with experience and understanding---the Noncommissioned Officer Corps. In an effort to preserve the history of the US Army Noncommissioned Officer and to provide future noncommissioned officers with an understanding of the actions necessary to prepare Soldiers and to lead them in war, the US Army Sergeants Major Academy undertook a program to gather and publish the stories of NCOs who had served in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Most of the papers received were from students of the US Army Sergeants Major Course who had already deployed to either Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom. This work highlights a few of those stories. A wide range of topics have been chosen to allow the reader to understand the preparations, training, and actions needed for NCOs to accomplish their missions.

The work is prepared in two sections: the first we call Stories from Afghanistan and the second, Stories from Iraq. Stories from Iraq is further broken down into “Fighting the Iraqi Army” and “Fighting the Insurgency.” Each story has a brief introduction to provide the reader with a background and setting for the story. Timelines are also provided to assist the reader in following the stories in relation to other events that are taking place during the same time frame. In addition, maps provide the reader with an understanding of where in Afghanistan or Iraq those events occurred.

To help readers understand many of the acronyms used by the US Army and specific units, a Glossary is made available as well; it is by no means inclusive of all Army acronyms.

Colonel David J. Abramowitz and Command Sergeant Major James E. Dale charged three members of the US Army Sergeants Major Academy staff to put this work together: Jesse McKinney (SGM Retired), School Secretariat Director; MSG Eric Pilgrim, Editor-in-Chief of the NCO Journal and a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom; and L.R. Arms, Curator of the NCO Museum and a Marine Corps Vietnam veteran. They were assisted in their efforts by Ms. Melissa Cooper, Museum Specialist, Ms. Jeannie Tapia, Academic Records Technician, and SPC Joseph Edmondson, Graphic Artist. Together they reviewed more than 683 papers to determine which papers would be included in this work. Many of the selected stories were shortened and edited for clarity; however, every attempt was made to remain true to the author’s original intent. In the future, the Sergeants Major Academy will hopefully continue to produce works of this nature, ultimately retaining the knowledge and experiences gained in warfare by noncommissioned officers.

L.R. Arms

Curator

US Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer



## INTRODUCTION

*By Master Sgt. Eric B. Pilgrim and Sgt. Maj. (Ret) Jesse McKinney*

Army General David H. Petraeus knows Iraq better than most. He suffered the first casualties of war on March 23, 2003, when a 326<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion engineer with the famed 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault) ruptured three of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade's headquarters tents at Camp Pennsylvania with grenades, killing two officers and wounding 14 others before the assault had even begun. Despite grieving the losses, he led the charge into Iraq shortly afterward, sending thousands of division vehicles pouring over the border into Iraq and rolling with lightning speed across the desert from An Najaf through Karbala, Hilla, and into Baghdad, before eventually settling down in the northern city of Mosul.

While there, then Maj. Gen. Petraeus quickly realigned his Soldiers' thinking toward a new strategy shortly after the war ended; a humanitarian strategy involving rebuilding the infrastructure through mutual trust and cooperation between Americans and Iraqis. "Goat pulls" were common occurrences under his watch as commanders sat down frequently with local Iraqi officials and broke bread in an effort to meet them on common ground. He was so successful at connecting with the local imams there that the division's efforts were lauded as the standard for building real success in the war-torn nation.

He stood on the precipice of history and watched as his Soldiers discovered the hideout of Saddam Hussein's two infamously sadistic sons, Uday and Qusay, before they pinned down the pair, eventually killing them in a fire fight. Two nations now intricately linked by renewed hope and purpose vigorously applauded as Petraeus' Soldiers cleaned streets, rebuilt schools and police stations, turned electricity back on and pumped clean water into households. Petraeus witnessed firsthand a reopening of the Syrian-Iraq border for trade. The future looked bright under his watchful eye.

A year later, he found himself back in Iraq, this time in the "Green Zone" -- the heart of Baghdad -- leading the charge as Commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq, whose primary mission was to ensure that this new democratic nation would eventually be able to protect itself from enemies inside and outside of its borders. Hundreds of thousands of eager, willing young men and women lined up at recruiting stations, often under the threat of retaliation by terrorists, in order to receive new weapons, vehicles and uniforms. More importantly, they were eager to receive real, professional, timely training in police work, soldiering, and border patrol tactics under his guidance. He faced the daunting task of rebuilding an entire military, border patrol and police force from the ground up with minimal manpower and resources while constantly facing attacks from terrorists, insurgents, cynical politicians worldwide and heavy media scrutiny. Iraqis knew his reputation for getting results; many knew it intimately. By the end of the year, he had exceeded the goal.

Now here he is again this year, back in Iraq and back in the quagmire of

political, religious, emotional and physical threats which have become an integral part of his life. The mission is even bigger and more complex than ever, the responsibilities are even higher, more is at stake as the commanding general of all the coalition forces in Iraq finds himself back in the “Zone” – now called the International Zone.

If given the chance to sit down and talk with him about his Global War on Terrorism experiences he would probably tell you without hesitation that the American noncommissioned officer has been the most critical element behind all the successes and failures. Good NCOs equal victory; bad NCOs equal defeat.

As a commissioned officer, Petraeus is accustomed to the regular rollout of non-fiction books written and produced by commissioned officers, oftentimes while at the Army War College, that chronicle military history and often are credited with shaping the future of military tactics, techniques and procedures. What he felt was sorely deficient however, was a publication wherein NCOs were the primary focus, relating their unique perspectives of best troop leading practices in an operational environment. Thus, the brainchild for this publication was born.

It was with this firm belief in the importance of America’s Noncommissioned Officer Corps that Petraeus reached out to leaders at the US Army Sergeants Major Academy with a proposal. He wanted to see NCOs publish their own book about their experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, good and bad; NCO history written by NCOs for NCOs.

The Academy’s Commandant at the time, Col. David J. Abramowitz, fittingly took Petraeus’ proposal to the Academy’s senior NCO, Command Sgt. Maj. James E. Dale. The two brainstormed and came up with several categories that they felt covered the uniqueness of major operations in Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq, the contents of this publication being the result of their deliberation and direction to the Long Hard Road Focus Group. The new Commandant, Col. Donald Gentry, has given life to Petraeus’ proposal by providing the funds necessary to put this work in to your hands.

The US Army Sergeants Major Academy sincerely hopes that the stories rendered in this publication will provide insight and direction to all of our Soldiers now fighting, or who will fight in the future in America’s Global War on Terrorism – war heroes traveling together on the Long Hard Road ...

# AFGHANISTAN TIMELINE

1980 - Soviet Union invades Afghanistan in support of People's Democratic Party

1985 - Mujahedeen forms alliance

1988 - Soviet Union begins pullout from Afghanistan

1992 - Mujahedim triumphs throughout Afghanistan

1996 - Taliban seizes power and enforces strict Islamic state

1998 - US launches missile attacks aimed at Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda

2001 -

11 September-Osama bin Laden claims credit for attack on World Trade Center and Pentagon

7 October-US and British forces launch air-strikes on al-Qaeda

13 November-Northern Alliance forces oust Taliban from Kabul

November-US and coalition forces hunt al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants

6 December-Kandahar falls to Northern Alliance

21 December-Hamid Karzai is sworn in as interim government leader

2002 -

June-Grand Council elects Hamid Karzai

2003 -

August-NATO takes control of Kabul

2004 -

January-New Afghan constitution

October-November-Karzai elected President

2005 -

September-First Parliamentary and Provincial elections

2006 -

January-Afghan National Army troop levels reach 35,000 plus

May-June-Operation Mountain Thrust

October-NATO assumes control of all Afghanistan

23 December-Mullah Akhtar Osmani killed in US air strike



## STORIES FROM AFGHANISTAN

A rugged, mountainous, arid country, Afghanistan has long been considered as a remote region of the world by most Westerners. However, the country is at the crossroads of East and West and has been invaded throughout the centuries by the Persians, Greeks, Mauryans, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, British, and Soviets. The Arabs gave their religion to Afghanistan with the majority of the Afghan people following the Sunni sect of Islam. It is home to a number of ethnic peoples: the Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbek, Tajik, and Pashtun who as the largest ethnic group makes up approximately 42% of the total population. A great number of the Pashtun, people also live in neighboring Pakistan.

In 1919, Afghanistan became an independent kingdom and remained so until 1978. In that year the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (Communist) launched the Great Saur Revolution and took over the government. Opposition was widespread with the Mujahideen (an Islamic group) taking the lead in opposing the government. The United States backed the Mujahideen fighters. On 24 December 1979, the Soviet Union, seeking to prevent a total collapse of the Afghan Communists, sent troops into Afghanistan. The result was a long and brutal guerrilla war between the Soviets and the Mujahideen. The Soviets finally withdrew during 1989 and the Communist government fell in 1992.

The Mujahideen consisted of numerous factions and were unable to remain united in order to rule Afghanistan. The country slipped into anarchy with warlords ruling various provinces or areas. From this emerged the Taliban, a group of Islamic fundamentalists with a radical belief in strict interpretation of Islamic law. Their power controlled almost all the nation, except a small area in northeast Afghanistan which was controlled by the Northern Alliance. As the rest of Afghanistan slipped under the veil of religious fanatics, the Northern Alliance held out against the forces of the Taliban.

The Taliban, feeling their remote nation was protected thoroughly by geography, outwardly supported a number of Islamic fundamentalist terror groups including al-Qaeda. Many in the al-Qaeda group used Afghanistan as a safe harbor or training ground; its leader Osama bin Laden, like the leaders of the Taliban, thought Afghanistan was an area safe from retaliation by Western nations. In 1998, the United States launched missiles in an attempt to destroy al-Qaeda elements in Afghanistan. The failure of this effort reinforced the beliefs of both the Taliban and al-Qaeda that the country was too remote to suffer an American attack.

However, the attack by al-Qaeda on 11 September 2001, demanded swift and decisive action by the United States. Within days, plans began to take shape. With an emphasis on using airpower and Special Forces units, the United States would support the Northern Alliance and destroy the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan.

On 10 October 2001, the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group deployed to a staging area not far from Afghanistan. There they united with other Army Special Operations Forces units to create “Task Force Dagger.” The units which worked with the



View from door gunner’s position of CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group were elements of the 528<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Support Battalion, 160<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), 4<sup>th</sup> Psychological Operations Group, and the 96<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion. In addition, the Air Force provided the 16<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing (SOW), 9<sup>th</sup> Special Operation Squadron, and special tactical squadron teams from the 23<sup>rd</sup> STS. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division provided security for the base at Karshi Kanadad. (Surrogate Warfare: The Role of US Army Special Forces, Isaac Peltier, CGSC)

On 20 October the first two Special Forces teams were inserted into Afghanistan. Within hours the two teams started directing air strikes on Taliban positions. The Special Forces teams quickly realized that if they split the teams into sub-teams, they would cover a larger area and could track the Northern Alliance's movements with greater accuracy. (Peltier)

By 5 November, the Northern Alliance began their final offensive on Mazar-e Sharif, a critical city in northern Afghanistan. More Special Forces teams joined the action, directing air strikes against the Taliban positions. Though foreign fighters attempted to stiffen the Taliban's resistance, the Northern Alliance, with a combination of charging horses, infantry, troops mounted in trucks and supported by devastating precision bombing, routed them quickly from a key defensive position at Tangi Gap. After the fall of Tangi Gap the Taliban collapsed and on 10 November 2001, the Northern Alliance marched into the city of Mazar-e Sharif. (Peltier)

*1SG M. Robinson was serving as the First Sergeant for the Cincinnati Recruiting Company on 11 September 2001. In the story that follows, he recalls that tragic day and explains how the events of the day and the Global War on Terrorism affected his troops and the community.*

**1SG M. Robinson**  
**Recruiting Company First Sergeant**  
**Cincinnati Recruiting Company, 09/11/2001**

The responsibilities and duties of a first sergeant are of high stature and one of the toughest jobs in the US Army. I was assigned on Feb. 20, 2001, as first sergeant of the Cincinnati Recruiting Company.

The morning of 11 Sep 01, started just like the previous days as a first sergeant in Cincinnati Recruiting Company. After sending the morning status report to the battalion S1, I proceeded to my office around 0800 and found my company commander already at his desk preparing an award for a Soldier. We began to talk about how the company would finish the month and the possibilities of being number one in the battalion. After updating the commander for about an hour we began our daily duties of talking to station commanders, recruiters and the battalion leadership team. My secretary always had her radio playing while completing the morning reports. She suddenly ran into my office and turned on

the television to CNN as they broadcast the coverage of a plane crashing into the World Trade Center. I remember sitting there saying to myself “this cannot be happening”. The Commander and I watched in disbelief without saying anything to each other. We both were thinking it was just a very bad accident and the pilot was just off course. It wasn’t until we watched the second plane hit the second tower that we realized the country was under attack. The phones began to ring from recruiters, mothers, fathers, and spouses, all wanting answers that I could not give. I received my orders from battalion to secure all recruiting stations, government vehicles and property. The Commander and I released the company to go home and ensure their families were safe and remain there until we contacted them. The next two days were full of questions and concerns from my recruiters and new enlistees waiting to know if and when will they ship to basic training. All planes and buses were grounded, so the only answer I could give them was “stand by and stay ready”. For the first time as the company first sergeant, I did not have the answer. I never realized just how much the company looked to me for answers. For the next eight days, the recruiting company remained shut down. We conducted accountability formations each morning and ensured all recruiters were taking the necessary precautions for themselves and their families. The station commanders ensured all recruiting stations and government vehicles were secured and checked for any suspicious activity around the recruiting stations. The Commander and I contacted all parents of the new enlistees to keep them motivated about shipping to basic training.

After days of watching CNN, listening to the radio, and waiting, President Bush instructed the country to go back to work, to include the recruiting command. With rumors of war, and combat on every channel, the phone calls from concerned parents and new enlistees poured in. Many wanted their son or daughter released from the Delayed Entry Program. Some parents wanted a guarantee their son or daughter would not go to combat. I knew my recruiters were getting frustrated with the same questions and did not know how to answer all the calls. I then brought all recruiters to my office and conducted training on how to address questions about the war, combat and setting the example in the community. For the next three months we lost approximately five of the new enlistees per month. They changed their minds, or their parents changed their minds for them, about shipping to basic training. As we approached 1 Mar 02 and troops began deploying, television coverage was very positive about being a Soldier. People began coming to the recruiting stations wanting to enlist. Many applicants were too old to enlist and veterans from previous wars wanted to get back in and serve their country. Production began to improve and the company regained its momentum toward mission box. Many of the enlistees that initially feared shipping to basic training came back and eventually shipped. Parents and community members routinely would stop by the recruiting stations and drop off donations and care packages for us to send to the deployed troops. People in the community began embracing the recruiters as our fellow Soldiers began to deploy for combat.

After months of rebuilding the company posture and getting back to solid recruiting, many of the recruiters were hearing about friends dying in combat and felt they needed to be back with their old units. Many of the infantry and field artillery Soldiers in the company wanted to deploy and get to do their primary MOS. Morale began to drop during the initial months of combat. Soldiers wanted to watch television and track the war during the day instead of recruiting. By 1 Jun 02, we had a 40% turnover rate of Soldiers in the company. This brought new and highly motivated recruiters but they all needed training fast to get the company back to the top. The monthly mission began to increase by fifteen contracts; a contract amount the company had never achieved. The Commanding General of the Recruiting Command sent a personal letter to each company leadership team emphasizing the importance of mission achievement. We were depleting the Delayed Entry pool and Soldiers were needed in combat now. I instructed the station commanders to call all new enlistees and inform them their ship date was moved up for basic training. Many of the future Soldiers were more than happy but some refused to go. I had parents curse and swear at me saying we were killing kids for oil and power. I often tried to explain that we were Soldiers defending freedom, but I often got hung up on or the door slammed in my face. The recruiters were facing this daily but maintained a positive attitude and just said thanks for your time sir or madam.

A few months passed as the war continued and the company achieved the recruiting quota for Fiscal Year 2002. Cincinnati Recruiting Company finished the year number one in the battalion and number three out of 42 companies in the brigade. We also finished as the Most Improved Company in the brigade. We began seeing troops come back from basic training and going straight to Iraq or a unit getting ready to deploy. All were highly motivated and ready to serve their nation. The recruiters took them back to their local high schools in uniform and they were a big asset to us for high school seniors trying to decide about enlisting. They showed other prospects they could make it and that they were fully trained and ready for combat.

Although my time as the First Sergeant of Cincinnati Recruiting Company brought many challenges others in the past had never faced, I would never trade it. The events of 11 September brought my recruiters, my company and our nation together. I enlisted six Soldiers into the Army who deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom but did not return alive. One Soldier is still missing, Specialist Matt Maupin, and many returned injured. Not only was I their first sergeant, I became a part of their family. It is extremely painful to live in the civilian community daily with the family of a Soldier lost in combat. The Soldiers of Cincinnati Recruiting Company remain very close today. Many remain in contact with those deployed and their families. Being a first sergeant was the most challenging and most rewarding position I ever held.



*Coordinating efforts of Special Forces with the Joint Logistics Command became a major concern for the success of the effort. SGM T. O'Neal played a major role in uniting the efforts of the Special Forces Forward Operating and Joint Logistics Command to feed and equip the troops.*

**SGM T. O'Neal**  
**“BRIDGING THE SUPPORT GAP”**  
**July 2002-November 2002**

After receipt of the warning order, LTC Bird and I deployed within 72 hours of notification. Apparently, there was an immediate need on the ground for our subject matter expertise, because things were not going as planned. Upon arrival, we were well- received, and immediately, we were given an update on what was happening in theater. We discovered a Special Forces Forward Operating Base was within two hundred and fifty feet of the Joint Logistics Command (JLC), and neither knew the other existed.

As quickly as possible, I prepared a brief to the JLC commander. I explained the uniqueness of special operations and how their needs are immediate, and not a Priority 15 designator when ordering through normal supply channels. Once the overview was completed, I was able to get to work for the JLC by identifying all of the US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) forces that were in theater, as well as their locations. This was a painstaking task, because not only did I have to locate them, I also had to build the point of contact for each location and begin to work on their many issues. By the time I was able to consolidate the USASOC forces in theater, I was dealing with 3x Forward Operating Bases, 9x Operational Detachment Bravos, 44x Operational Detachment Alphas, a Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force, 2x Civil Military Operations Centers, 21x Civil Humanitarian Liaison Centers, a Tactical Psychological Detachment, 8x Tactical Psychological Teams and Task Force 11. Overall, I had approximately 2,500 USASOC Soldiers in theater, all of whom had their own unique missions and different issues. The Joint Logistics Command finally saw the light.

After all of our thorough research for the JLC, we concluded that it was imperative that we bring all the key leaders to the JLC for a Special Operations Forces (SOF) Summit to introduce what the JLC could do for them. This was really “bridging the support gap” between SOF and conventional forces; and the Summit worked like a charm. After a few months of hard work, the long hours paid off. As a SOF liaison to the JLC, I was able to redeploy knowing that the relationship between Conventional and SOF had just reached a new level and I was a part of it.

*1SG W. Finch underwent two major changes prior to deployment in Afghanistan. He received a change in area of operations and then a change from dismounted to a mounted Special Forces unit. To meet these changes, he had to overcome a number of obstacles and train himself as well as his men.*

**1SG W. Finch**  
**“Change in Area of Operations”**  
**SFODA 341, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> SFG, Afghanistan, 07/2001**

On 10 June 2001, I was assigned to A/2/3<sup>rd</sup> SFGA, as Team Sergeant on Special Forces Detachment, (SFODA 341). The Company Sergeant Major informed me that my detachment’s primary mission was reconnaissance and alternate direct action. He further stated that all of the original members of ODA-341 had been reassigned to Group Headquarters. The Sergeant Major said, “Walt, your team members would be arriving in a couple of weeks, after their graduation from the Special Forces Qualification Course”.

This, however, was not what I was expecting. Normally, a Special Forces Detachment is well established with standard operating procedures and experienced NCOs. After a few weeks, my detachment members began to arrive. I met the Detachment Commander first; he was a West Point graduate, Ranger, and infantry officer with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, prior to graduating from Special Forces Qualifications Course. I had a good feeling about this Captain; he seemed both knowledgeable and capable. Next, I met with all my NCOs. Many had combat experience and infantry backgrounds; one had served as a Marine. There were positive things about having newly graduated detachment members—these NCOs were younger, physically fit, and eager to learn. They hadn’t yet been exposed to undesirable qualities a few Special Forces NCOs acquire within a few years on the SFODA.

Just when I thought things couldn’t get any more challenging, the captain and I were called in for a meeting with the company’s leadership. They informed us that four ground mobility vehicles were scheduled to arrive in two weeks. Our detachment was to change from a dismounted detachment to a mounted detachment. Mounted! This was something I had absolutely no knowledge about. Primarily, the Team Sergeant in Special Forces is the senior NCO of the Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha for all administrative, operational, and training requirements of the detachment in both peacetime and war; he supervises all aspects of mission preparation (isolation) and execution.

He must be an expert “in Army Special Operation Forces, capable of planning and executing conventional and unconventional combat operations across the spectrum of conflict in support of theatre level objectives in a unilateral, joint, interagency, multi-national, combined, or coalition environment.”

The 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, Airborne, (5<sup>th</sup> SFG), had conducted combat operations in Iraq and Somalia. They were leading the way in mounted

vehicular operations within the Special Forces community. We contacted the 5<sup>th</sup> SFGA, G-3, scrounging for SOPs, manuals, or anything else they had, so we could learn quickly about mounted operations. Shortly thereafter, we received electronic copies of detachment standard operating procedures, vehicle setup, information on various weapon mounts and systems utilized with the government mounted vehicles (GMVs).

Finally, the day arrived when we signed for 4 GMVs, BII, weapon mounts, and heavy weapons. We were officially a mounted detachment and eager to become technically and tactical proficient. I created a robust six-week training schedule. As much as possible, we went to the firing ranges and practiced firing, soon becoming proficient in a whole array of heavy weapon systems. Large open areas with sand were hard to find and coordinate for on Fort Bragg, so we used the drop zones. Day and night, the detachment practiced vehicle movement, immediate action drills, and establishment of lager sites in accordance with our SOP. The detachment continued to train on dismounted Mission Essential Task as well--conducting live fires, land navigation, cross training, and numerous other critical tasks.

In May 2001, my detachment received a great opportunity to deploy in support of Operation Desert Springs, in Kuwait. Although the mission was normally conducted by the 5<sup>th</sup> SFGA, the 3<sup>rd</sup> SFGA was increasingly requested to assist and provide operational assistance. This would be the first operation in the Middle East for me and all but a few troops in my detachment.

To be sure, the detachment was mission capable within four months of our arrival. We learned much from the 5<sup>th</sup> SFGA members operating in Kuwait and conducted hours of immediate action drills, desert operations, night vision training, GPS training, and dismounted strategic reconnaissance. We ended our training with an unsupported 1036 mile, five-day unsupported desert vehicle movement. After we returned from desert training, September 11<sup>th</sup> occurred.

On 12 March 2002, most elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> SFGA deployed to Afghanistan. The 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion went to Kandahar and began to deploy detachments throughout our area of responsibility. Along with my detachment, two others were sent to establish Special Forces Operational Base near a remote village located a few miles from the Pakistani border. We arrived on two heavily armed CH47 helicopters. We established a perimeter and performed the usual SOP criteria. Once we were satisfied with the infiltration, we moved into our new, two-room home. There were four walls approximately 16 meters high made of mud and straw.

After a few days of conducting foot patrols and inter-security, CH-47s began bringing in our GMVs. This was an exciting moment, because the detachments could now start conducting mounted operations, thus enabling everyone to become familiar with the outside surroundings. Three detachments decided that two would conduct operations while one remained at the base for communication support and Quick Reaction Force. Our company commander announced our first mission: two detachments would establish a blocking position

approximately fifteen miles east of our base. About 1830, the detachments prepared to move out. At the same time we were scheduled to receive our initial re-supply airdrop. We heard the C-130 approaching, and members of the base detachment approached the drop zone ready to make the recovery. As the parachutes began to flutter downward, they did not open. Everything plummeted downward to the ground and burned in (crashed and shattered). Immediately, I got on the radio and relayed to the company commander what had just happened. His instructions were to continue the mission and establish the blocking position as planned. We moved out with some unhappy detachment members. After enduring a long uneventful night at the blocking position, we returned to the base the next morning—only to find the tuff boxes busted. Personal items, equipment, all destroyed, and motivation was at an all time low at this point. In time we managed to recover and continued to conduct combat operations in the remote rugged terrain of Afghanistan.

For the next several months we conducted numerous mounted and dismounted combat operations, never making any significant enemy contact. We gave the enemy plenty of opportunities to make contact with us. We traveled through areas where the GMVs could barely travel through: there were mountain passes so high that if we did make contact, the weapons would not be able to elevate high enough to engage the enemy. Morale would from time to time drop when contact could not be made with the enemy. I told the members of my detachment that if this occurred, then “so be it;” however, my mission was to get everyone back home safely and “in one piece,” and that’s what I did.

*Task Force Rakkasan was part of Operation Anaconda, an attempt to prevent Taliban and al-Qaeda forces from crossing over the border into Pakistan. ISG P. McGuire recalls the efforts made by his Company, with 3-101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment to assist the troops on the ground by flying over 6,000 hours in combat support missions.*

**1SG P. McGuire**  
**Task Force Rakkasan**  
**3-101<sup>st</sup>, Aviation Regiment 03/02-08/02**

Task Force Rakkasan consisted of the 187<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team from Ft. Campbell. The task force deployed in several phases. Task Force Rakkasan was part of Joint Task Force Mountain commanded by MG Hagenbeck. Joint Task Force (JTF) Mountain consisted of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Div (AASLT), Special Operation Forces (SOF), and Coalition Forces set-up several staging bases in Pakistan and Uzbekistan to allow Special Forces to launch attacks against Taliban and al Qaeda forces. The Special Forces quickly gained several strategic strongholds within Afghanistan with the

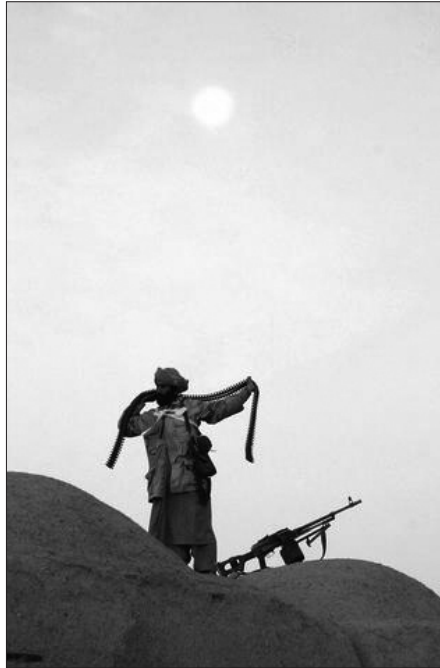
assistance with local Afghan Northern Alliance defiant to the Taliban. A Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) secured the Kandahar airfield. JTF Mountain started moving into Afghanistan. Alpha Company, 3-101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regt, consisting of eight AH-64A Apaches and a maintenance support team from our Company, 3-101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regt, deployed on 19 January 2002. This Company was part of the air combat power attached to TF Falcon. Rounding out TF Falcon was the headquarters of 101<sup>st</sup> Avn Regt, CH-47 Chinooks, UH-60 Blackhawks specializing in Command and Control, Medevac, and Air Assault capabilities. As TF Rakkasan relieved the Marine Expeditionary Force in Kandahar, C-17s carrying the air combat power of TF Falcon started landing at Kandahar. The base was hit hard during the SOF phase, driving the Taliban and al Qaeda forces from Kandahar. Task Force Rakkasan literally scratched out a Forward Operating Base (FOB) from nothing. The first major operation since JTF Mountain occupied Afghanistan was about to begin.

Intelligence and reconnaissance showed that al-Qaeda forces were beginning to crossover from the Pakistan border. They were well dug into the maze of tunnels situated throughout the mountains of eastern Afghanistan. Operation Anaconda began on 1 March 2002, with the infiltration of SOF into Shah-i-Kot valley in Eastern Afghanistan. The operation was to conduct military operations against al Qaeda and Taliban, and eliminate their last known stronghold in Afghanistan. On 2 March, elements of JTF Mountain took off from Bagram Airbase. As the Soldiers were inserted into key points of the battlefield, they immediately took fire from enemy positions situated high above in the intricate cave systems throughout Afghanistan's mountain ranges. It was difficult to pinpoint enemy positions raining down mortars, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), and heavy small arms fire. Every JTF Soldiers would tell you, that if it wasn't for the AC-130 gunships and AH-64A Apache Helicopters, the enemy would have inflicted severe casualties on the US and Coalition Forces. Six AH-64As went into the battle, and two Apaches remained in Kandahar for QRF. The A Co pilots encountered and engaged in some of the fiercest fighting. Within the first hour, two of the Apaches had sustained severe damage to their weapons systems that rendered them virtually non mission capable (NMC). The pilots of the NMC aircraft continued to fly through the valley in front of the other Apaches and drew the fire of the enemy. Their brave tenacity enabled the other Apaches to acquire the enemy targets, and eliminate them. The Apaches continued to fly mission after mission to support the ground troops. They would remain on station for as long as possible, expend their ordnance, fly to the Forward Arming Refuel Point (FARP), rearm, refuel, and return to the fight. Each aircraft sustained airframe or weapons systems damage. At the end of the day, two Apaches that received the most damage were used for parts to repair the other Apaches. There were still four Apaches in the fight. One of the Apaches at Kandahar was immediately sent up to Bagram to reinforce the fleet. The aircraft were battered, but quick and decisive Battle Damage Assessment Repair (BDAR) procedures repaired the

other four Apaches. Operation Anaconda was officially over on 18 March 2002, but fighting ended on 4 March 2002.

As a result of the fierce fighting, and the impact of the Apaches on the battlefield, the remaining elements of 3-101<sup>st</sup> Avn Regt received orders to deploy on 4 March 2002, as part of TF Rakkasan. To move the rest of an Attack Helicopter battalion, and all its assets would require serious joint cooperation. In 27 hours, the first C-17 took off from Ft. Campbell with 2 AH-64As, and 2 pallets of rockets and ammunition. In the next three days, 12 additional C-17s, and 3 C-5s loaded the assets of the 3-101<sup>st</sup> Attack Battalion bound for Kandahar, Afghanistan. Stops were made in Frankfurt, Germany for refuel, and then onto Kandahar. On 7 March 2002, the first C-17 landed in Afghanistan. Every C-17 was unloaded within 45 minutes, and every Apache was reassembled within 4 hours. As two Apaches prepared to complete their maintenance operational checks, another C-17 landed with two more Apaches and equipment to download. The maintenance support from TF Falcon can never be measured or quantified. Maintainers worked for 18 hours, collapsed in their beds and were back up in 4 hours to continue reassembling. As a set of Apaches were assembled, they were sent forward to Bagram to strengthen the air combat power. Operation Anaconda continued. On 14 March 2002, the last assets of 3-101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regt closed on Kandahar airbase.

As 3-101<sup>st</sup> Avn Regt settled into operations at Kandahar, our new CSM arrived 14 March 2002. I resumed my duties as the maintenance company 1SG. The Apache forever proved that it was a formidable weapon system. During this phase of OEF, most of the fighting was taking place in the eastern mountain ranges bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan. Split-base operations (SBO) were necessary to quickly and decisively engage the enemy. The battalion would cycle out 10 Apaches a month at a time. As the D Co 1SG, I would rotate maintenance and armament personnel to service and maintain these aircraft. The weather was much harsher in Bagram. The elevation at Kandahar was around 3,300 feet, but the elevation at Bagram was over 6,000 feet high. Winds would routinely reach 50 mph. Several times, our FARP personnel would receive small arms fire in the Khowst and Gardez eastern regions. 3-101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regt participated in 16 operations and flew over 6,000 aircraft hours during OEF from 20 January to 22 August 2002.



Anti-Taliban fighter Afghanistan

*During the early months of 2002, SGM M. Bryant and Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 361 worked with Afghan Militia Forces in Paktika Province, Afghanistan. His story tells how the units were organized, trained, and supplied to create an effective fighting force. This story also describes the Afghan Militiaman as a formidable Soldier with knowledge of both the terrain and the enemy. It describes the militiaman as a fighter with led the effort to destroy the Taliban.*

**SGM M. Bryant**  
**“Afghan Militia Forces”**  
**ODA 361, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> SFG (Airborne), March-October 2002**

The nucleus of Special Forces is the twelve-man team known as the Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA). These are some of the techniques used by one ODA during Operation Enduring Freedom working with a local Afghan Militia Forces (AMF).

In March 2002, we received orders to move into Paktika Province, Afghanistan. There we would work with the Afghan Militia. Upon our arrival, we conducted a joint mission with another Third Group ODA and the majority of the militia force we inherited. This gave us an opportunity to evaluate the AMF and

how they interacted with US forces. A local warlord supplied us with the Afghan Militia. The warlord, Zakeem Kahn is a former truck-driver turned minor thug and murderer who recruited local gunmen into his private army before the US intervention in Afghanistan. Monthly payments to the warlord guaranteed Special Forces the use of his militia. Four different tribes composed this Afghan Militia Force.

To help establish a working relationship with the militia force based on mutual trust and respect, some ground rules were initially established. First, ODA members were not allowed to use derogatory terms when referring to the Afghan Militia Forces. Using profanity or shouting at the militiamen could get you a one-way ticket back to Bagram. Most members of the militiamen did not speak English, but they did understand when you were talking about them in a derogatory manner. The rule was that you manhandled a militiaman only when it was necessary. Second, ODA members would pay the correct amount for services and goods. Not paying enough is the same as robbery and leads to ill will among the civilian population. Also, it establishes a dangerous example for your indigenous forces. The guns and troops present an intimidating image to local people, keep this in mind. No ODA member is to accept gifts. Accepting a valuable gift only sets up the expectation that you now owe the gift giver a favor. If you maintain the moral high ground when dealing with all aspects of daily



1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Afghan National Army

living, your local forces can never fall back on the excuse that their lack of self-discipline is okay because the Americans do the same thing.

Theoretically, the militia consisted of three one hundred man companies; Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. Companies consisted of five squads each with ten men. However, the squads were not always even in number because the tribal divisions among the Afghans precluded mixing different tribes within one squad. Some squads might have eight members and the next twelve. The three companies were each led by two Special Forces Soldiers. The senior Special Forces Soldier



acted as the Company Commander and the junior Soldier his Assistant Company Commander. This maintained continuity within the Militia Company if one of the Special Forces Soldiers became injured or died.

The two company commanders were the primary trainers for their companies. The first order of business was to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) across all three companies. Rifle marksmanship, individual movement techniques (IMT), cordon, and search were some of the subjects taught. The majority of the Afghans were quick learners. Some classes, such as the individual movement class required overcoming cultural barriers. The Afghans felt it was unmanly to get on the ground and seek cover or concealment. To them, a brave man charged the enemy directly and did not hide or try to conceal himself. In addition, creating training facilities such as ranges, shoot houses, demolition areas was a group effort involving the entire ODA. Other members of the detachment routinely augmented the two primary company commanders as trainers. The majority of the training was hands on tasks and battle drills reinforced through continual rehearsals.

Battlefield recovery constituted the primary means for arming militiamen in Orgun-E. Any usable arms and ammunition recovered during combat operations became the property of the militiamen and distributed based on need. The primary weapons systems used for individuals were the AK47, PKM, and RPG. The militiamen used a variety of other weapons but the goal was to standardize weapons systems throughout the militia. Special Forces Teams in the same part of the country would share resources. A team needing a particular type of weapon or ammunition sent a message stating their requirement traffic sent out to all other teams in the battalion. The team with the ammunition or weapon would send it to the specified camp via re-supply aircraft. The ODA acquired heavy machineguns, recoilless rifles, mortars, and rocket launchers for base defense and to mount them on militia vehicles.

Communications equipment consisted of civilian radios, over-the-counter models purchased on the civilian economy. These radios were not secure, and brevity codes developed by the Afghans proved useful. Cell phones solved the long distance communications problem among the militia, but this, too, was a non-secure method of communication.

Other government organizations provided uniforms, footwear, canteens, ammunition pouches, and other items to some militia units. Other units purchased their equipment on the local economy or had distinctive uniforms made. To enable Special Forces advisors to keep track of the different companies when on multiple company operations, a simple system of colored armbands was implemented.

Supplying the Afghan Militia Forces with billeting proved to be more of a challenge. Three militia company areas were set aside as part of our base-camp construction. We now had to come up with shelter for the militiamen. Initially large cargo parachutes served as tents, these were fine as long as it did not rain. Slowly proper tents purchased from Pakistan replaced the parachute tents. The tents were waterproof and quite sturdy. The tents were large enough that a squad

size element could occupy a single tent. The foundations for permanent militia barracks were in place before the disbanding of the Afghan Militia Force. Today, the Afghan National Army uses the barracks building started for the militia.

The payment of the militia at first glance appears to be a straightforward proposition. Yet, when a member of the militia could not make it to work on a given day a relative or friend would step in and take his place. To make this more complicated we were provided with a roster which gave a name matched to a weapon's serial number. An individual could arrive on payday and claim to be fighter "x" with the proper weapon in hand, some hours later another fighter "x" would arrive with the same weapon wanting to be paid. The Afghans seemed to take some perverse joy in these situations. The development of a standardized pay system was put in place by the second payday. With digital cameras, the identification issue largely disappeared. A pay book, broken down by company, containing a photo of every militiaman, his name, weapon type, weapon serial number came into being. On payday the company was formed and individuals were called forward to the pay table. The militiaman received his pay after having his identity verified first by the paymaster (SF), then by the two company leaders (SF), and last by the indigenous company commander. The Afghans still had a trick up their sleeve. One of the tribes detained six members of the militia knowing we would not initially recognize every member of the force and then substituted six of their tribe in place of the detainees. These replacement troops answered to the names of the detained militiamen and had their weapons. It took several months to sort out this deception.

The pay scale for the militia was \$100 a month for a fighter and \$200 a month for a leadership position. The payment to warlord, Zakeem Kahn was \$20,000 per month. All payments were in US dollars. The goal was to pay once a month at the end of each month. It was not always possible to pay the militiamen on time. The source of the money was at Kandahar or Bagram. Normally the money was flown out to the camp. At times, we had to send someone into Bagram or Kandahar to sign for the money and fly it out. Having the source of payment outside of military control would prove to be a fatal flaw in our operations. With one-month notice, the decision was made to stop paying for the militiamen. There was little regard as to what these militiamen would do for employment. Recommendations were sent forward to keep the militia together as a National Guard type unit or some how roll them up in the newly forming Afghan National Army.

Supplying the militia with rations was relatively simple. The militiamen simply subsisted as they had always done by living off the local economy. They drank from wells and streams and Special Forces purchased flatbread, goats, rice, or whatever was available to feed the Afghan Militia Force. On several occasions when time was of the essence, we fed US Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) to the militiamen. This resulted in lots of trash and partially eaten meals littering the roads and troops who were still hungry. From that, we learned to feed the militiamen their local food whenever possible.

Many different techniques exist for working with, by, and through indigenous forces. These are just a few examples of how one ODA during Operation Enduring Freedom worked to win the support and loyalty of one Afghan Militia Force. These indigenous forces are far less costly than conventional forces yet far more effective. They require very little support to maintain themselves in the field. The training and equipping of a large force takes place through local procurement and without the need of dedicated facilities. They have an intimate knowledge of the local geographic and the political terrain. They bring local civilian support to the fight after all their families and tribes occupy large portions of the areas in which they operate. Indigenous troops understand the culture and language with all the slang and nuances. They know the enemy, how he fights, how he moves, where his support comes from.

*Ensuring the success of the Afghan National Army became a primary concern for the United States and its coalition partners. Building a professional Afghan Army required the development of a professional training center. Special Forces Soldiers were particularly able to carry out this mission. SGM S. Shank of Operations Detachment Alpha 324 provides insight into the development of the Afghan National Army Military Training Center.*

**SGM S. Shank**  
**“ANA Military Training Center”**  
**ODA 324, SFG(A), Afghanistan 04/02-10/02**

I served in the Army for the past 23 years, all of which has been in Special Operations. After enlisting in the Army in 1983 and completing Basic Training, Advanced Infantry Training, Airborne school, and the Special Forces Qualification Course, I was assigned the 3<sup>rd</sup> Special Forces Group. Later, I was assigned to 5<sup>th</sup> SFG, 10<sup>th</sup> SFG, Directorate of Training and Doctrine SGM in the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, and Senior Instructor in Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne).

Prior to our deployment in Afghanistan, our unit was given the mission to conduct the creation and training of the future Afghanistan National Army (ANA). This will allow me to cover the operational events and requirements in an articulated and chronological order. The NCOs in the Company were extremely experienced in preparing for this type of mission. The battalion assigned the detachment the missions of identification of the critical tasks, equipment to conduct team and ANA training, base camp operations, and specific assignment and responsibilities for the conduct of ANA training. This allowed the Operational Detachment Alpha’s (ODA) to conduct their mission analysis and prepare for those operations prior to infiltration.

The NCOs in Special Forces are experts in Unconventional Warfare (UW) and Foreign Internal defense (FID) operations. My detachment had just returned

from Western Africa, conducting a Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) exercise and this posed a couple of issues during our Pre-deployment activities. The Senior Communications and Senior Weapons NCOs completed mission critical recovery of communications equipment and weapons systems that usually takes a month or two. These systems were vital to the success of all our ANA and combat operations and force protection for the team.

The detachment had numerous mission essential tasks to complete prior to training the first ANA Battalion. My Senior Weapons NCO performed with precision and great effectiveness in getting the job done. He coordinated the site selection, mine clearing and setup, along with the security measures of the battalions range operations. This allowed the Detachment Commander and I to focus on preparing for follow-on combat operations planning, rehearsal and execution of newly assigned ANA Anti-armor and mortar training. The senior weapons NCO experience, professionalism and “get it done” attitude ensured all success in dealing with unexpected hurdles. He coordinated with several nations military units, working in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), to coordinate the de-mining efforts and building of two ranges that would support the weapons training of over 500 ANA troops at a time.

Basic Rifle Marksmanship was the initial training that all ANA Soldiers received before all else, the quick setup and commencement of this training set the start date and ultimately produce the first ANA battalion, as scheduled. At the same time of this training, I gave my Senior Communications NCO the CONOP for planning and executing the ANA mortar training. This NCO set another standard in excellence, being a mortar-man prior to becoming an SF Communications NCO; he had the background to accomplish this mission with no supervision. He immediately analyzed mission requirements and had the foresight to request additional equipment from caches throughout the Battalion Area of Operation. This request enabled the Detachment Cdr and I to establish a requirement for the development of a cache inventory list and coordinate it with ANA statement of requirements and needs list throughout the Area of Operation (AOR), giving us the weapons and limited ammunition to train the ANA. The detachment conducted numerous patrols into Khost, Gardez and Ali Kehl to inspect and pick-up weapons, mortars and ammunition to support the training.

The Senior Communications NCO proved instrumental in preparing, inspecting and training the detachment in Chinese and Soviet mortars prior to ANA training. Coordinated and directed this training that ensured the detachment was fully qualified and up to speed on all mortar drills, FO and plotting procedures and firing missions. During the course of the mortar training, this Senior NCO taught and trained the detachment to conduct crew drills to the Army standard and we were capable of employing and training the mortars for our Battalions base defense plan along with the ANA training. We incorporated live fire mortar illumination and HE missions into several ODA night combat reconnaissance operations in the surrounding areas of Kabul. These missions validated the unit’s

base defense plan, but became the standard when the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Company arrived to provide our base defense while we trained the ANA troops. During the ANA training missions, the detachment conducted unilateral training in direct action and reconnaissance operations.

The team deployed to Bagram, AFB and conducted numerous types of combat related operations along the Afghanistan and Pakistan border and in areas ranging from Kabul and south of Khost. The ability and experiences that the team held allowed us to conduct convoy security, direct action, mounted and dismounted reconnaissance operations, and combat patrols with Afghanistan Military Forces (AMF). The capability and adaptability that Special Operations Forces demonstrated during the deployment allowed the unit to execute a wide range and type of operations. The lessons learned from this deployment have been essential in changing and updating all aspects of the unit deploying to Operation Enduring Freedom. The battalion has completed four OEF rotations since I left the unit and the teams have taken the lessons learned and implemented those changes to become an even better and more effective fighting force.

Doctrinally the team and even the entire unit executed the pre-deployment, deployment and ANA training within the guidelines as written, however, we found that to meet the quick changing missions we needed to analyze, execute and plan these using outside the box or doctrine philosophy. We had completed similar missions in other countries throughout our Special Operations careers and were able to adapt quickly. The concept of using doctrine as the base for a planning start point was still required. Mission concepts evolved to adapt to numerous directed, environment and commander's intent. One example was a request from an Other Government Agency (OGA) to conduct an equipment recovery operation that was on a mountain above 11,000 feet. The team readily identified the altitude constraints for our infiltration and evacuation, but the additional requirement to work with several units along with Other Government Agency's (OGA). The junior weapons NCO quickly thought of the need and potential to use mine detector equipment to locate and recover the highly sensitive and expensive equipment. He was able to learn and teach the team use of the portable mine and metal detector equipment in only 36 hours prior to infiltration of the team. I noted that the detachment worked not only within our mission focus areas but also able to conduct operations outside our doctrinal type missions by adapting and leveraging the teams prior experiences and MOS backgrounds.

We conducted the normal required re-deployment requirements both in country and at home station. The battalion used common sense to ensure that all personnel, equipment and family homecomings were flawless. The unit re-fitted quickly to ensure that we maintained the ability as a combat unit to conduct any future missions, but also reunite the Families with the Soldiers.

In conclusion the hard work, professionalism and dedication to mission accomplishment of all my NCOs ensured our success during all aspects of the training and eventual combat employment of the ANA troops and follow-on

unilateral combat operations. The ability to adapt to the changing aspects of the battlefield during all phases of the missions and using out of the box thinking and planning in tactics and doctrine ensured our mission accomplishment. The NCOs of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Special Forces Group (A) conducted themselves in the finest traditions of the Noncommissioned Officer. Their proactive nature and dependability allowed the Detachment Commander and Detachment Operations Sergeant to focus on the operational areas of all our missions and continue to prepare the team for future combat operations.

The 725<sup>th</sup> Main Support Battalion's mission in Afghanistan often changed. In October 2004, the Army and Marine Corps launched Operation Thunder Freedom. MSG Lamont Hall found himself at Forward Operating Base Salerno, near the Pakistani border, with a mission to establish water and fuel operations for nineteen units consisting of 2,500 Soldiers and Marines.

*Bagram Air Field became a major base for US Army and coalition forces serving in Afghanistan. During the Soviet-Afghan conflict of the late 1980's, it served as a primary base for Soviet troops. The Soviets extensively mined the area in an effort to preclude any Afghan attack. When American and coalition troops arrived at the base, they found that any area—except those under a paved surface—remained questionable as to whether or not it contained mines. These dangerous conditions had to be dealt with for safety reasons. MSG C. Peterson and the 705<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Company assumed the role of clearing the area of mines and unexploded munitions.*

**MSG C. Peterson**  
**Baptism by Fire**  
**705<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Company, Afghanistan 10/02-06/03**

On 9/11, I had just assumed the duties of First Sergeant for the 705<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Company, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Fort Polk, Louisiana. I was attending a Quarterly Training Brief in San Antonio, Texas on that fateful day. Soon thereafter, we received a request for two EOD Team Leaders and three EOD assistants to deploy with another EOD company to Afghanistan.

For reasons never disclosed, my troops stood down and never deployed with the first wave of forces. As the fog of war settled, the planners took a deep breath and developed a phased deployment schedule for necessary follow-on EOD forces. Battalion informed us that we would deploy as a part of the third rotation to Bagram, Afghanistan—in support of Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF-180). This timeline provided us with a full year to prepare for deployment. The benefits of time allowed us to enjoy the full gamut of pre-deployment training opportunities which included both a National Training Center rotation with the 2<sup>nd</sup> ACR out of Fort Polk, Louisiana, a two-week, theater-specific, technical-skills train-up conducted by the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Training Department at Redstone

Arsenal, Alabama and a home-station ARTEP conducted by our Battalion (which had just redeployed from the Afghanistan theater). Together, the technical-skills training and the ARTEP provided my troops with first-hand knowledge from their peers who had deployed to Afghanistan as a part of the initial forces. Above all else, I felt this firsthand theater knowledge yielded the greatest return on training for my company.

At the time of deployment, the organizational structure authorized my unit 23 personnel. In the end, we deployed with 15 Soldiers. Besides me, the company consisted of my commander, a captain, two SFCs (one served as Operations NCO and the other as the Response Section NCO, which is equivalent to a Platoon Sergeant), three EOD Team Leaders, four EOD Sergeants, an EOD Specialist, a Supply Sergeant, a Light Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic, and a Human Resources Sergeant. The 46<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion attached the Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic and Human Resources Sergeant to us for deployment. Out of 15 personnel, there were two Specialists; the remainder NCOs and of course the commander. The company's greatest strength was the experience that all the NCOs brought to the fight. Almost everyone had prior deployment experience, and my EOD Team Leaders had at least three years of experience each. Over the course of eight months, we were able to complete the deployment without injuries or casualties—due in a large part to our maturity as a whole, and God's good grace.

The theater itself posed some unique challenges not encountered by EOD forces since the Vietnam War. Specifically, we learned most operations would be conducted dismounted at extreme elevations of up to 11,000 feet. Prior to 9/11, EOD forces had trained and equipped to reach their objectives by vehicle. Because both antitank and antipersonnel landmines littered the landscape of Afghanistan, travel by ground vehicles became very dangerous; therefore, most target infiltrations occurred by helicopter. In the dismount, you could only carry so much, so my teams had to learn to balance life-sustaining items with specialized tools and equipment carried to meet mission objectives. After packing food, water, clothing, reconnaissance equipment and explosives, each EOD Soldier's pack weighed in excess of 80 pounds. Coming from below sea level at Fort Polk, my Soldiers and I knew, we would have little or no chance to acclimate to the extreme elevation challenges that lay ahead in theater. The one thing we could do we did; we road-marched with heavier packs to improve muscular endurance. However, none of this knowledge and training completely prepared my Soldiers for Afghanistan's demanding environment. The terrain was so austere that the helicopters could not land at times to offload. Chinook helicopters would hover with the rear door down, and the troops jumped out onto the sides of mountains near their objectives.

Most of the primary objectives during mountain operations encompassed the discovery of enemy caches hidden within the thousands of caves dotting the countryside. Caves containing numerous, different munitions exceeding 10,000 pounds of net explosive weight were common. This, in turn, led to another challenge: there were limited explosives in theater, and the teams could carry only

so much. Because of this, then, creative demolitions became the norm. Prior to deployment, we developed challenging training scenarios to exercise large-scale demolition operations with limited quantities of explosives to develop creative-thinking skills in our EOD Team Leaders.

Another challenge for EOD forces in theater revolved around long-range tactical communications. EOD Companies operated in both centralized and decentralized modes in Afghanistan. In our case, our Battalion co-located with us on Bagram Airbase, but our sister EOD Company set up shop in Kandahar. Each company provided one EOD team for base support and one EOD team for the Quick Reaction Force (QRF); all remaining teams either provided support to Forward Operating Bases (FOB) or remained in reserve for special missions. In essence, the teams supporting the FOBs operated in the decentralized mode. About every three weeks, we rotated teams among Base Support, QRF, and FOB support to provide equal levels of stress and rest. My company owned no long-range, secure tactical communications equipment, so Battalion gave us secure Iridium Satellite Phones to communicate with the teams supporting the outlying FOBs. Occasionally, teams passed information back from the FOBs via the SIPRNET when available. More often than not, the phones did not work. When they did, the reception was terrible.

Prior to deployment, we had a good idea of what to expect during our rotation, including the challenges we would face and the EOD-specific tactics, techniques, and procedures currently used in theater. Unfortunately, we did not get an opportunity to conduct a Leader's Recon, and we could not send an advanced party. This created a lot of uncertainty and anxiety for me and for many of my Soldiers as well. We lacked a common operating picture and had to rely on the company we would replace to ensure a smooth reception and transition.

Finally, the time came to deploy. I found it hard to believe that it took two C17 Aircraft to deploy fifteen Soldiers and their associated MTOE, but it did. I'll never forget the incredible darkness of the night when we landed. There was absolutely no starlight, moonlight, or artificial light to see anything. To make matters worse, I was completely disoriented and exhausted from the long flight. In addition, our reception party showed up with one HMMWV to move all our personal baggage and weapons to the sleeping tents. Most of us ended up carrying our bags for a half-mile in the pitch black. After a couple of hours of in-processing, we finally went to sleep around 0200.

Sometime that afternoon, I awoke and went outside the tent to get a good look at my surroundings. I found myself surrounded by tan tents, sand-filled HESCO Barriers, cement bunkers between the tent rows, and a few cement buildings with a beautiful mountainous backdrop. In the distance, I heard the roar of a plane taking off, and I wondered if someone might be going home today. A short while later, the First Sergeant from the company we would replace came by to discuss the Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority (RIP/TOA) process the Battalion developed.



Battalion gave us ten days to conduct the right seat, left seat rides and transfer the property remaining in theater. Like many units, I suspect we received a lot of equipment that no one in the company had ever seen or used: Polish Mine Boots (bags you blow into squares, place on your feet, and then go walk in a minefield), Talon Robots, civilian global positioning systems and laser range finders, Falcon View Mapping Software (for developing overlays), frequency jammers, and Polaris and John Deer all-terrain vehicles, to give a few examples. I wondered how the greatest Army on earth could let such a thing happen, it is imperative that we get the critical equipment in the hands of the users prior to deployment.

I walked around Bagram noticing many things that contradicted my preconceived ideas. For instance, no one wore personal protective equipment, and Soldiers ran the perimeter in physical fitness uniforms. In addition, I came across several permanent looking construction sites, one being an AAFES PX. To me, the most startling though were the tens of thousands of unexploded ordnance and active minefields surrounding the airbase. From these observations, I deduced that little enemy threat existed and that the Army planned to stay in this theater a long time. It also seemed that our greatest threat came from the unexploded ordnance. I can only recall three separate rocket attacks in eight months, and the closest impact was one kilometer from the air base perimeter. In contrast, at least four Soldiers stepped on antipersonnel landmines in Bagram. Even though the enemy threat remained low, explosions occurred every day from mine strikes and EOD clearing operations. This took a little while to get used to.

Fortunately, we occupied a hardstand building for our command post close to our sleeping tents. Because the showers and “mess tent” were close by, this made personnel and property accountability, and daily living quite easy. At last, the Transfer of Authority arrived, and we said our good-byes to our predecessors.

Roughly coinciding with our timeline, two other events occurred: the 82d Airborne Division completed their transition of authority, and the airbase experienced an influx of coalition forces. The forces quickly outgrew the habitable spaces available. During this time, my unit’s main support effort included clearing UXO-contaminated real estate around the airbase to facilitate expansion. Throughout the deployment, we worked closely with RONCO (a contracted explosive detection dog outfit), German Mine Clearing Teams, Polish EOD, and US Combat Engineers in a unified effort to rid the airbase of UXO and mines.

Our first real mission, just ten days in country, led to the establishment of our company motto, “Baptism by Fire”. The legs of the 82d decided to act on some intelligence. As always, the accuracy of the information depended on the price paid to a warlord trying to gain favor with the Americans, while at the same time, denying his rival of arms and ammunition. This mission included four separate objectives, each purportedly containing a vast amount of 122mm high explosive rockets. At the time, all suspected caches containing mines, mortars, rockets, and shoulder-fired weapons became high priority targets since the enemy used these frequently to attack the FOBs and the two main airbases (Bagram and Kandahar).

The sites involved mountains, caves, and elevations in excess of 9,000 feet. We task-organized by embedding two, three-man EOD Teams and my Response Section NCO (EOD command and control element) with two platoons of light infantry and two combat engineer squads from the 82d. Based on intelligence, mission-planners became concerned with the possibility that the cave entrances might be mined or booby-trapped; as a result, teams had to hump a 60-pound Talon Robot to the sites for use as a reconnaissance tool. We selected our fittest Soldiers for this mission, well aware of the physical demands involved.

The scheme of maneuver included transport by Chinook helicopters to the objectives where the Soldiers had to disembark and walk to the suspected sites. In reality, based on the drop zone and steep grade, the Soldiers crawled their way up the mountain to reach the objectives. While everyone else rested, my soldiers' work had just begun. Cave reconnaissance, ordnance identification and inventory, safety calculations for blast and fragmentation hazards, and demolition operations required considerable physical and mental energy. The mission plan also called for two overnight stays at different objectives with daily re-supply by Chinook helicopters. In Afghanistan, the temperature was very cold at night in November at an elevation of 9,000 feet. Due to wind shear, the flight crew aborted the first day's re-supply; this left the Soldiers wishing they could have carried more water.

In the end, the mission was deemed a success. We denied the enemy future access to hundreds of high explosive munitions. Physically, this mission pushed my Soldiers to the edge of human capacity. Without benefit of acclimatization and an opportunity to train in theater specific conditions prior to executing missions, we had potentially set these soldiers up for failure. Truly, I respected and admired these individuals for their gut determination and heart, which carried the day for them. For most, it took seven to ten days to recover physically from the mission. The infrequency of similar missions negated any chance to get used to the hardships, so each time I sent my Soldiers out, they came back broken. Though broken, they always returned with a smile, many pictures, and stories about terrain-altering explosions (literally blowing the sides and tops of mountains away).

Unfortunately, not all detonations went as planned. During one mountain mission involving an enemy cache hidden in a cave, several 82d Soldiers sustained impact injuries from flying debris when the backside of the cave blew out the opposite side of the mountain. The EOD Soldiers had correctly calculated the fragmentation distance based on the munitions present in the cave; they had also located all personnel outside the fragmentation distance on the reverse slope of another mountain opposite the cave entrance. Still, chunk rock and debris traveled well outside the calculated safe distance to where the Soldiers laid against the side of the hill thinking they were protected. My EOD Team Leader in charge of this particular mission documented all aspects of the mission from start to finish in his incident log while on target. Ultimately, this written testimony exonerated him

from any negligence during the accident investigation, and new TTPs and safe distance calculations were established to address the idiosyncrasies of demolition operations involving caves. The lesson is always use two separate Soldiers to calculate blast and fragmentation distances and document how you came up with your results.

The Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan for 17 years and used Bagram Airbase as both an airfield and an open storage ammunition holding area. When they finally decided to pull out, they intentionally bombed the airfield and the open storage areas. This caused sympathetic detonations of stored munitions and scattered unexploded ordnance everywhere. They also left behind active minefields surrounding and cutting across the airbase for increased security against enemy infiltrations. To my knowledge, no accurate minefield data locations existed. Early entry forces utilized friendly local nationals' to establish which areas might contain land mines. As a result, you never left the hard surface into a soft area unless at least two forms of mine proofing took place (e.g., mine dogs followed by mine detectors).



PFC M. Smith marks mines and unexploded ordnance at Bagram Air Field.

After a Dutch F16 Fighter Plane crashed at the end of the runway, we discovered one minefield. Evidently, the pilot overshot the landing and ejected because he feared the plane might hit a mine in the soft dirt at the end of the runway. This resembled a classic ARTEP scenario. The plane carried its full combat load, and jet fuel leaked continuously because of the crash. Everyone on the airbase fell within range of the fragmentation from the 500-pound bombs and Maverick Missiles carried by this plane. For two tedious days, my Response

Section NCO and another EOD Team Leader supported by two team members took turns probing for landmines up to and around the plane in order to render it safe and download the plane's stores. If I remember correctly, two Soldiers found seven antipersonnel landmines around the plane. The left landing gear wheel stopped within inches of one of the mines. For their bravery and expertise in the face of danger, I recommended both Soldiers for Army Commendation Medals with V Device, which they ultimately received. However, getting the aircraft out of the minefield, well that's a whole other story. In short, it took two Chinook Helicopters to sling-load the plane out of the minefield, saving the Dutch about \$26 million.

Shortly after this debacle, the great expansion plan for the base took off into high gear. For months, we treated individual unexploded ordnance (UXO) found on the inner fields (spaces between the runways and crossovers) one at a time. The sequence of events went like this: we discovered the UXO, the EOD Team responded and marked the UXO, taking the grid coordinates, identifying the UXO and construct protective works (at least 40 sandbags interlocked in a circle around small munitions). The Operations NCO would then develop an Operations Order and overlays in order to schedule a controlled detonation of the UXO. Every time we did this, the airfield had to shut down for a while. Most days we had to reschedule the missions because Base Operations would forget to coordinate with the Aviation Battalion to have the Blackhawks moved out of the danger radius of the planned explosion. Lesson to take to heart – use your overlay and laze everything around you to ensure all personnel and materiel fall outside the danger radius of the UXO or Improvised Explosive Device; personally, I've always added an extra ten percent to my fragmentation and blast radius calculations for extra safety (too many close calls to count). Eventually, my company task organized with an Infantry Platoon and local nationals to police the inner fields of the airfield. Besides UXO, we removed every piece of metal and trash we could find. We never encountered land mines in the inner fields. This operation greatly decreased foreign object damage to the aircraft landing and taking off from Bagram. It also, allowed greater freedom of maneuver for personnel and aircraft on the airfield.

After we completed the inner fields, we cleared a huge open storage ammunition site, which was extremely saturated with sub munitions and leaking 500-pound Soviet fuel air explosive (FAE) bombs. We used detonating cord to daisy chain the FAE bombs together and detonated them in two separate shots. One shot included the simultaneous detonation of 26 FAE bombs, which made for awesome pictures. When the blast occurred, instead of feeling the faint remnants of a blast wave, I felt an intense heat wave go past me. This operation also took about three weeks and became our last major clearance operation in theater.

*The improvised explosive device (IED) served as the favored weapon for rebel forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Traveling through seemingly safe areas, convoys often met with deadly results. Concerns of how to deal with the IED and how to successfully overcome their use filled the minds of many Soldiers. MSG K. Keefe provides a detailed account of one incident in Afghanistan.*

**MSG K. Keefe**  
**“Complacency Can Kill”**  
**Triple IED Ambush, Afghanistan 07/31/2003**

On 21 April 2003, I received a copy of a request from FORSCOM via a friend of mine at the United States Army Reserve Command. The request was for a 21CMF Soldiers in the pay grade of E7 or E8 in support of OEF.

I volunteered to be the CJ-7 Engineer NCOIC assigned to the Coalition Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) that was headquartered on Bagram Air Base, approximately 40 kilometers to the north of Kabul. I was then attached to a Civil Affairs Unit in Kabul. The CJ-7 was responsible for conducting site recons and prioritizing projects, providing construction estimates, letting the contracts, and providing quality control during the construction process once the contract was let. At any given time, there were over twenty ongoing projects in various stages of completion in four different provinces. There was no construction standard operating procedure (SOP) so developing one was my first order of business. All Captains and Master Sergeants and below pulled guard duty whether they knew what they were doing or not. The attitude on the compound was a care-free “Club Med Kabul” attitude: “we have never been hit”, “we’re here to help them”; “they will not do anything to us”. I could not believe that civilian clothes were the norm. Then our Afghans were killed in front of the American Embassy two blocks away. That got a few people’s attention. The Civil Affairs unit rotated out about a month later and an Area Support Group replaced them. Needless to say, Force Protection and quality of life improved dramatically in a very short time.

Once the Engineer team was settled in, we began to conduct site recons to check on the progress of various projects as well as to evaluate the potential for new projects. We went on Convoy Operations (CONOPS) several times a week. At one point we performed four back-to-back CONOPS. This was tough on both the personnel and our vehicles which consisted of two soft HMMWVs and four non-tactical vehicles (NTVs). In July, a representative from the Ministry of Re-Construction accompanied us on our last three or four site recons and was scheduled to join us on the 31 July 2003 mission, but was a no show at SP time so we rolled without him. Sometimes security was available, at other times it was not. On 31 July 2003, it was not. The Intel was good at sometimes and not at others, which was also the case on 31 July 2003.

The Convoy Commander was CPT A. As the NCOIC, I drove the lead

vehicle in the Convoy which consisted of two soft HMMWVs, (Appendix C) I had SSG X served as Assistant Driver, CPT Y as a passenger behind me, and Doc Salam, our interpreter sat behind SSG X. CPT A was the assistant driver in the trail HMMWV, which SSG Y was driving. I was checking my driver's side rear-view mirror, when the first IED (120mm mortar buried in the road) detonated. It exploded approximately two feet behind my rear tire. As the second IED exploded, I swerved towards the right and recovered to the center of the road. SSG X and I both yelled "in-coming," as the third explosion occurred. We immediately accelerated out of the Kill Zone. SSG X was already trying to establish radio contact with CPT A before I could tell him to do it. We continued another 200m and stopped. CPT B and I got out and provided security while SSG X continued his efforts to contact the trail vehicle, which had not yet made it through the Kill Zone. SSG X and I kept in communication with each other the entire time. He was able to contact the trail vehicle and they said they were off the road. SSG X relayed this info to me and we immediately returned to the Kill Zone to extract the rest of our Team. Upon returning to the Kill Zone, we could see that the trail vehicle was upright, on a downhill slope, above a cultivated field, approx. twenty meters off the road. I stopped my vehicle approximately 100 meters from where they were located. I had CPT B (with an M16) provide far side security. I gave my M16 to SSG X (I kept my M9 with me), and he took the Interpreter forward to provide near side security; and to question a man that was standing on the curve above the disabled vehicle. I took the hand held radio and moved along the road to the trail vehicle. As I moved toward the trail vehicle, I was able to re-establish radio contact with SSG Y. He said they were in a minefield. I asked them if they were injured, he said they were both ok. I told them to stay where they were and not to move. At this time, I was again aware of the old man standing on the inside of the curve near the disabled vehicle, he was shouting "mine, mine" to SSG Y and CPT A. Immediately, I began to determine if there were any visual indications of mines in the area and IAW the hasty minefield extraction SOP. SSG X was able to stop all traffic coming from the near side and keep them at least 200meters away. I was on the road above where the trail vehicle was. I could clearly see three craters with wires leading to them. CPT A was already on the Iridium trying to establish communication with J-3 OPS. It took several attempts due to lack of a signal but she continued to try and establish communications until she was successful and gave them a SITREP. CPT A had the GPS in hand and was at the ready to provide our grid coordinate to J-3; once communication was established. SSG Y provided security for CPT A while she was establishing communication. The terrain sloped downward with uneven ground and scattered with low scrub brush. A small ditch ran parallel to the road between me, CPT A and SSG Y. From my position on the road I could clearly see the vehicle tracks leading to the disabled HMMWV. SSG Y secured all the sensitive items from the HMMWV. The old man that SSG X was questioning was still saying "mine, mine" and pointing to CPT A and SSG Y. CPT A was ready to move towards me,

out of what we were treating as a minefield. I told her to stand fast and that I would guide her out. She could not clearly see the tracks so I guided her towards me using the HMMWV's tracks; and then I pulled her up the bank. While CPT A was moving away from the vehicle, SSG Y took a few pictures of the disabled HMMWV; and he yelled at me that there was a mortar round in his windshield. I told him to take a picture of it and move away. SSG X moved to CPT A, secured her, and moved her forward to his position. At this time, a white bus appeared from the West (far side) about 200 meters away. When CPT B quickly showed force and stopped them, they backed out and left. SSG Y then began to retrace CPT A's path towards me. I gave him adjustments as necessary and pulled him onto the road. SSG X secured SSG Y and again moved forward to his position, all the while ensuring we were covered. CPT A and SSG Y continued to provide near side security. While SSG X returned to my position, we coordinated movement, taking a quick twelve-second video and several pictures of the Kill Zone. SSG X returned to his near side position gathered CPT A, SSG Y, and the interpreter and moved another 50 to 100 meters away from the Kill Zone. After returning to my vehicle, I called for CPT B to get in and we proceeded to where SSG X had set up the near side security position. SSG X and SSG Y continued to provide security. We checked each Soldier for wounds and ensured everyone had their weapons. SSG X cut the tarp of the HMMWV immediately behind the passenger side windshield and stood up through it to provide a forward firing position. I had SSG Y remove the passenger side rear door in order to better facilitate a passenger side firing position from within the vehicle. CPT A was sitting amongst the gear on the center platform. CPT B was in the driver's side rear passenger seat providing drivers side security. The Interpreter sat in the passenger side front seat with SSG X straddling him. SSG X continued to provide forward security while we moved. Total time elapsed was less than ten minutes, we were on the low ground in an undefendable position. We did not have enough firepower to sustain any type of defensive posture. We decided to move completely out of the area because there was already a crowd of forty to sixty Afghans gathering approximately 300 meters east of the Kill Zone and another twenty to thirty to the west.

EOD concluded that it was a sophisticated IED, remotely command-detonated using a cell phone. This was the first such attack on this route. Subsequently, UNICEF and Red Crescent were hit on the same route resulting in several deaths.

What happened on 31 July 2003 is that we were more lucky than good that day. If my HMMWV had been a split second slower, the first IED would have detonated right under my seat. If we would have had a security element supporting us as in the past, perhaps the Anti-Coalition Forces wouldn't have chosen to detonate the IED's. If we would have paid more attention to all the poppy fields up and down this valley and the fact that they were sponsored by al-Qaeda, maybe we would have chosen to have it cleared prior to the mission. After

the detonation of the IEDs, we were not attacked. We believed the intelligence report we got from CJCMOTF S2 and were complacent.

*The key to survival for those injured or sick in Afghanistan often hinges on how fast they can receive treatment. During their tour of duty in Afghanistan the 68<sup>th</sup> Medical Company Air Ambulance helped save many Soldiers and Afghan civilians. 1SG L. Gholston tells of their life at Bagram Air Field and experiences.*

**1SG L. Gholston**  
**Air Medical Evacuation**  
**68<sup>th</sup> Medical Company Air Ambulance, Afghanistan, 11/03-11/04**

We departed to Afghanistan at night out of Hickam Air Force Base Hawaii. We traveled for 42 hours and made stop at Washington State, New York, and Germany, then straight through to Bagram, Afghanistan. We arrived around 0530 in the morning. The 705<sup>th</sup> greeted us when we got there and made our transition smooth. The mountains in Afghanistan were located near by and we were about fifteen miles from the nearest mountain range. The highest peaks of the mountains that surrounded us were about 14,000 feet high. Our helicopters were able to negotiate as long as the aircraft was not loaded down with equipment or patients. At these heights in the summer, the hot air restricted our lift capability in our aircraft.

The 705<sup>th</sup> showed us to our new home, which was located in the northern part of the base in an old, Russian hanger on Bagram Airfield, which was the largest military airfield in Afghanistan. The airfield was about 6.7 miles in diameter, on one side of the airfield, they had all the facilities this was the west end of base, and the other had mostly logistical containers stacked, with the airstrip in the middle between the roads that circled the airfield. We were also right next to the field hospital. The Air Force and Navy also shared the airfield with my unit, which was odd for me because I never served so far inland with these services.

The force protection on the airfield was excellent while deployed. This was the first time I had the Air Force provide our protection. This is how Bagram security worked the Airfield which was controlled by the Air Force which is considered interior airfield security operations because all the C-17s, and C 131s and other cargo and attack aircraft on the airfield with us. This was great because I did not have to provide that service which gave us more flexibility to support more missions and give our Soldiers some time off. In addition, the division military police provided all the security outside of the airfield for up to 15 miles from base. The only force protection we had to provide was in the event of a security breach, or an attack. In order to ensure we were proficient in security tasks we trained, trained, and trained. We did what any other unit would do, training, drill, and retrain any short falls and ensured our entire Soldiers knew where to report in the event of an attack or incoming. The only protection we



had to provide for ourselves was taking cover in the event of a rocket attack. I would also have to say that our new hand held radios helped us very much to keep time accountability.

While down range, we were able to get all of our flight personnel qualified on the M-4 rifle. We also had to determine who was going to use the M-4. At first, the commander wanted the M-4s issued to the pilots for them to use and the medic and crew chief in the back of the aircraft to use their M-16s and 9-Ms for protection. However, for me, having done this mission before in combat while in Desert Storm, I pushed hard for the commander to see that this weapon would better serve the crewmember in the back. My argument was that if the pilot had the M-4 and was placing suppressive fire on the enemy, then who was flying the aircraft, after all aircraft security was the primary responsibility of the crew chief and medic. On air crews the medic and crew chief are always the ones getting out of the aircraft because the crew chief provides guard duties and assists the medic, if need be. The medic, of course, deals with the patient and needs a weapon for security if separated from the aircrew. The M-4 is an excellent weapon because it is small enough to provide adequate protection yet not get in the way.

The 325 Field Hospital was located on Bagram Airfield. At that time, it had been there for about three weeks before we showed up. The hospital initially provided for our integration and inprocessing into country. This was because the Air Medical unit there was a National Guard unit and believed that we were going to fall under their operational control. This was not a problem initially because the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division was the major headquarters on the ground at that time. The 325 Field Hospital was right next to the airfield, because of all the medical evacuations from there.

Our hanger, which was also our living quarters, had an open front bay that was at least three stories in height. On each side of the hanger, we had office spaces on both the first and second floors. While there we added extra living areas, placed doors on all sleeping areas, added a 1<sup>st</sup> up room (this is where air crews on duty can relax and be collocated in one area), and a wash room with four washers and dryers. Also initially, our operation cell was collocated with the hospitals, but after a few weeks, we moved it to our company meeting room. After we had established 24-hour operations in our area, the mission response time decreased by three minutes. This was significant improvement for evacuation unit.

During our first few months on Bagram Airfield, improvements were made on the aircraft setup just by taking the litters from the top of the cabin and strapping two to the floor, and one on top. Originally, we had all three patient litters on top because of the way the previous unit had their cabin. This change improved our patient transfer time by two minutes; again, this was another significant improvement for us. Another part of this improvement was our training program, which also affected our cabin structure and patient response and transfer times.

Respiratory care was a big deal for us during many of our Medical Evacuation

(MEDEVAC) missions; we had to use the services of Respiratory Care specialists in order to provide the best care possible. This is because many times during a mission we would end up not only picking-up the patients with respiratory illness but ended up picking up one or two more patients. This would cause a problem for the medic because this would degrade the quality of care the medic could provide to its patients. Therefore, our fix was if we got a mission to pick up a respiratory patient then we would immediately ask the 325 Hospital to send a respiratory specialist to assist us. This small change in our protocol helped us with many missions.

During our first month of duty, we determined that we did not have a lot of experience with the medications being used by the special ops physician assistants to treat patients. Our fix was to document all drugs provided to patients prior or given to us during all missions. This enabled us to develop a list of medications that we needed training on. The drugs we requested training on were safely delivering those meds to the patient without violating protocol stipulated by the hospital. Some of the other drugs we requested training on, included lasix, amiodarone, phenergan, narcan, morphine, demerol, atropine, lidocaine, and benadryl. We also received training on a ventilation machine called the Positive End Expiratory Pressor (PEEP) for respiratory patients.

Host training for the mountainous terrain was very important for our mission; having said this I ended up with the first hoist mission for our unit. This mission lasted several hours and was near the Pakistan border in the mountains about 9,000 feet above ground level (AGL). The mission was for a Special Forces Soldiers with high altitude sickness. The crew on duty took the first sergeant as an additional medic just in case we had additional casualties. This was common for this particular area. After this mission, we did receive an influx of this type of mission. This also went with no incident except for the occasional rocket.

Doctors generally did not ride with us; this is because they were too value to the mission at home station. I would have to say there were a few times when a flight surgeon did make a patient transfer or two, but for the most part, I felt that they provided a better service in the emergency room (ER). Casualties during my time in country-we transported more than a 1,000 casualties most of which were local nationals and they were mostly children. Trauma was the norm for us. For the most part based on my estimates we transported more trauma patients than any other. Most were local nationals, which were children. The major causes of injuries were falls from the rooftops, but by my assessment and others, the injuries sustained did not match up with the mechanics of the type of injury. We believed that warlords would threaten locals and abuse their children in order to force the parents to submit to the warlord.



Soldiers of the 68<sup>th</sup> Medical Company assist a patient onto a helicopter.

### **68<sup>th</sup> Medical Company Honored for ‘Rescue of the Year’ Vignette**

The call came into Bagram Air Field of three Marine casualties near Forward Operating Base Asadabad. Members of the 68<sup>th</sup> Medical Company sprang to action to retrieve the casualties. Picking up a Special Forces physician enroot, they came under heavy rocket and RPG fire. They continued their mission and soon located the casualties. Due to the steep mountainous slope they could not land, but rather lowered a medic and physician’s assistant to the wounded Marine. They bandaged the Marine’s wound and then placed him on a litter to hoist him into the helicopter. Once in the chopper, members of the 68<sup>th</sup> stabilized the Marine, and flew him to FOB, Asadabad for further treatment. By the time the chopper returned to pick-up the medic and physician’s assistant, night had fallen. They retrieved the medic and physician’s assistant and finally then recovered the bodies of the other two Marines which had been killed in action. They then returned to Asadabad and picked up the stabilized Marine, and took him to Bagram hospital for further treatment.

For this rescue, the 68<sup>th</sup> Medical Company received the award from the Army Aviation Association for Air/Sea Rescue of the Year 2004.

*Based on an article by Staff Sergeant M. R. Garreau, 17<sup>th</sup> Public Affairs Detachment.*

*First Sergeant L. Hall and the 725<sup>th</sup> Main Support Battalion provided logistical support to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team. During their deployment the unit was changed to a Forward Logistics Element in support of Task Force Thunder. Changing missions amid a deployment presented many challenges and obstacles.*

**1SG L. Hall**  
**“Make A Way”**  
**725<sup>th</sup> Main Support Battalion, Afghanistan, 03/04-02/05**

In September 2003, Headquarters and Alpha Company, 725<sup>th</sup> Main Support Battalion received notification that it would be deploying to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom V. My commander and I immediately conducted a preliminary assessment on the company’s mission readiness posture. Unclear of the mission at this point, we focused on Basic Rifle Marksmanship (BRM), Individual Readiness Training (IRT), and Command Maintenance.

In November 2003, we received an Operations Order which stated that our mission was to provide logistical support to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team (BCT) at Kandahar Air Field which is located in the southern sector of Afghanistan. We received specifics on what equipment and amount of personnel that were required to accomplish this mission. We received additional support Soldiers from other companies within the battalion to fulfill the mission requirements. This was a huge requirement which resulted in my commander and me managing an oversized company of 186 Soldiers. In addition to our Supply, Petroleum (POL), Water platoons, we received a Transportation, Medical, and Ammunition platoon.

On 22 March 2004, we landed at Kandahar Air Field. Seventy percent of the Soldiers were terrified because this was their first real world deployment. We immediately set up shop, settled in on life support, and began our daily missions. Our mission at this point was to provide medical, transportation, water, POL, and supply support to 3<sup>rd</sup> BCT which maneuvered throughout the southern sector of Afghanistan. Forty-five days had passed and things were going well. There wasn’t a lot of enemy activity going on therefore the Soldiers were getting over their fears. The logistics world was great.

Suddenly, my commander and I received notification that the company’s mission had changed. The new mission was to move a Forward Logistics Element (FLE), consisting of 138 Soldiers with specific Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), to support Task Force Thunder at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Salerno which is located near the Pakistan boarder. Task Force Thunder consisted of elements from 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery; 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU); Special Forces; a Marine Attack Helicopter Unit; a Reserve Engineer Company; and 524<sup>th</sup> Corp Support Battalion.

We landed on Forward Operating Base Salerno on 9 July 2004. Task Force Thunder’s mission at this point was to launch Operation Thunder Freedom. The

operation was designed to capitalize on the success of the upcoming October 9<sup>th</sup> Afghanistan presidential election and continue that success through the parliamentary elections that was scheduled for the following Spring. Part of this mission entailed hunting Taliban and al-Qaeda militants through the Afghan Winter. Traditionally, fighters in Afghanistan lay low during the harsh Winter months and come back out strong in the Spring. Operation Thunder Freedom involved all the command's assets, including the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) that was located in Regional Command East. Al-Qaeda was a viable organization and was extremely dangerous in our area of operation.

My company's mission was to provide Class I, II, III, IV, V, VI, and IX supplies to 19 units and more than 2,500 war-fighters on Forward Operating Base Salerno. This was an extremely tough mission because we built everything from the ground up. These logistical assets didn't exist prior to our arrival.

Our first mission was to establish water and fuel operations that would support the life support systems on the base. The water section quickly assessed the situation and developed a concept that would support the mission requirements. They employed two Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPU), two 10,000 gallon water bags, three 20,000 gallon water bags, and two 50,000 gallon water bags. The two 10,000 gallon bags were used to support seven shower facilities and one laundry point. Two 20,000 bags were used to support the Dining Facility with potable water. One 20,000 bag was used for raw water. The two 50,000 gallon bags were used for non-potable water. The local water well was the main source of water supply. Water was pumped from the well to the ROWPU via an assault hose line. The ROWPU processed the water and pushed it out to the water bags via other assault hose lines. 350gpm (gallons per minute) pumps were used to push water from the bags to various facilities.

The fuel section established fuel operations almost immediately. Their mission was to provide fuel support to one Marine Attack Helicopter unit, one Army Aviation unit, and 68 ground generators. The ground generators provided electricity to all facilities within the FOB. The fuel handlers established a Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP) near the flight line. They used four 50,000 gallon fuel bags for JP8 (jet fuel) and seven 500 gallon fuel blivets for MOGAS. Two 350gpm pumps pushed the JP8 and one 50gpm pump pushed the MOGAS. They also used two 1,200 gallon fuel trucks to provide fuel to the 68 ground generators. The main source of fuel was at Bagram Air Field (BAF). Local nationals transported fuel from Bagram to our base at Salerno via "jingle" trucks (2 ½ ton Russian trucks). The problem with this was the "jingle" truck had to physically drive onto the forward operating base and download the fuel at the refueling point. This placed the entire base in grave danger. Remember, the refueling point was located near the flight line.

The Supply Platoon's mission was to establish a Class I yard. This was a tough task because the resources weren't readily available. However, the Soldiers managed to acquire 120 twenty-foot containers and began constructing the yard.

The containers were used to store dry rations, water, and beverages. Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR) managed the reefer vans which contained frozen foods. Fresh Fruits & Vegetables (FF&V) were flown in from Bagram twice a week. Dry and frozen rations, water, and beverages were transported from Bagram via “jingle” trucks. Weather conditions often were a liability. Bad weather would prevent aircraft carrying the FF&V from landing. ‘Jingle trucks’ were a liability, at times. The enemy would often destroy any truck that was supporting the American and coalition forces. We were not running convoys because Eastern Afghanistan was infested with al-Qaeda.

The Supply Platoon also received a mission to establish a Supply Support Activity (SSA) footprint and a Central Receiving Point (CRP). The SSA was responsible for receiving, tracking, storing, and issuing Class II and IX supplies to 19 tenant units on Forward Operating Base Salerno. The CRP was responsible for controlling all incoming items and supplies that entered the base. Again, resources weren’t readily available. Soldiers acquired an additional 40 twenty-foot containers and constructed the Supply Support Activity footprint and the Central Receiving Point.

The month of August arrived and the company was clicking on all cylinders. Task Force Thunder’s offensive attack caused the enemy to use the base for target practice. Remember, the parliamentary elections were to take place in October. We received mortar attacks constantly between the months of August and October. Coalition forces operating in the area also began to meet resistance from the enemy. We began to lose Soldiers from the Afghan Army as well as troops from our coalition forces. All wounded troops and troops killed in action were evacuated to our base. As the evacuations increased, key leadership realized that there weren’t any subject matter experts on the base to properly handle human remains. My company was immediately tasked to establish Mortuary Affairs (MA) operations, despite the fact that we were not authorized any Mortuary Affairs Specialist (92M).

I downloaded the Mortuary Affairs manual and trained eight Automated Supply Specialists (92A) on the proper procedures of handling human remains. This was a huge task because they were afraid of dealing with the deceased. However, they accepted this tremendous responsibility and proudly carried out their mission. One mortuary mission was too many but we executed several. Those young Soldiers witnessed things that will stay with them for a lifetime. They witnessed situations such as local infants being burned completely to troops having bullets lodged in their heads. Therefore, as a precautionary measure, I required the team to visit the chaplain after each mission.

The mortuary team was also responsible for conducting ramp ceremonies for American Soldiers that were killed in action. This was a huge ceremony. Everyone on the base would form two lines beginning at the mortuary holding area and ending on the air field. The mortuary team would go through their ritual of securing the American Flag on the casket and systematically transport

the remains to the aircraft. Seeing a fellow American Soldier being honored for making the ultimate sacrifice was definitely a moving experience.

The warriors of Headquarters and Alpha Company answered their call to duty and executed each mission with precision. They were often called upon to go above and beyond their normal duties and scope. They proudly accepted each challenge and consistently produced outstanding results. We were confronted with many obstacles but lived up to our motto, "Make A Way".

Spending a year in the desert is a very long time. The company became a close-knit family. Every Soldier trusted and depended upon each other. They nurtured each other through many trying times and realized that this was the key to surviving. More importantly, it allowed us all to make it home safely.

*In the following story, First Sergeant W. Gentry tells of Bravo Company's preparations, training, and deployment to Forward Operating Base Orgun-E and subsequent move to Forward Operating Base Sharona. Both bases are located in the high rocky mountainous region of Pakista Province where few roads exist and the majority of the population is Pashtun. The region has served as a stronghold of the Taliban for many years. 1SG Gentry emphasizes the role of training Soldiers to ensure their reactions during the all too common improvised explosive device ambush.*

**1SG W. F. Gentry**  
**First Sergeant Role vs. Responsibility**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 25<sup>th</sup> ID, Afghanistan 03/04-03/05**

Having served twice before with the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Division, I jumped at the chance of leading Soldiers into combat in Afghanistan. On 18 December 2003, I arrived in Hawaii and reported to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry "Wolfhounds".

I completed processing and arrived at Bravo Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry on 23 December 2003. The unit was on block leave. I had 11 days to get my things in order and assume my role as the First Sergeant. I walked around my company area to assess the company and passed the Commander's office. I noticed, he was at his desk and I knocked on his door. Bravo Company Commander's name was Captain John R. Sego.

Captain Sego was happy that I was there and said he needed me to fix certain aspects of the Company. He stated that he did not have confidence in the Company's NCO Corps. I asked him to go out on a limb and trust me with his Company, and allow me to do my job as his First Sergeant.

Christmas leave ended on 2 January 2004. On 10 January 2004, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade participated in a Brigade FTX in Kahuku, Hawaii. The Battalion and Brigade staffs used this training to work out their respective TOC SOPs, battle rhythms, and planning exercises. The Companies conducted Platoon and Squad level training in accordance with the Commander's guidance.

On 21 March 2004, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry arrived in Khandahar, Afghanistan. The “Wolfhounds” were to deploy forward and occupy the Forward Operating Base (FOB), located between Khandahar and Bagram Airfield on 26 March 2004.

The FOB was very primitive and did not have the comforts of Bagram or Khandahar bases. Improving the quality of life for the Soldiers would be a challenge. The unit conducted the transfer of authority, the right seat rides, and exchange of all equipment. The equipment was in terrible condition, the living quarters filthy, and I started questioning my decision.

Lieutenant Colonel W. E. Piatt commanded the Wolfhound Battalion. He deployed to Afghanistan in OEF-1. The Battalion CSM D. L. Yates started working on getting the firebase to standards. His advice, actions, recommendations, and efforts had an immediate impact on the FOB, the Soldiers, and the entire unit.

The Wolfhounds were responsible for the entire Paktika Province, which is the size of Rhode Island. The land is mountainous, with extreme winters, hot summers, and many people who had never seen anyone other than Afghans. The Afghani people were extremely poor, but resourceful in acquiring the needed items to survive. Our mission required us to conduct stability operations, gain the trust of the people, and find, capture, or kill the enemy.

The people we initially encountered were pleasant and greeted us with respect and open arms. We had to find a way to gain their trust, and win their hearts to support our endeavors. We hit the road and helped them solve their daily problems; helping build their communities, and showing we cared about them and their families.

LTC Piatt assigned my Company the mission of guarding the local governor, and working closely with the Province Chief of Police. The Company moved to establish an outpost to perform our mission. The movement from FOB to another took three hours to drive in normal conditions. The route was a dried riverbed, no paved roads existed. Each convoy was a combat operation and the chance of ambush was imminent.

Logistical support for the Company became a major task. Also, the Company performed a myriad of directed tasks: perimeter security for the FOB, detention facility guard, vehicle maintenance and recovery operations, and the Quick Reaction Force (QRF). The rest of the company traveled from village to village trying to establish relationships with the populous. Vehicle parts did not exist for recovering a broken vehicle. Broken vehicles stayed in place or underwent towing. Often the towing continued around the entire province until the unit returned to the FOB.

The Commander used the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) throughout the sector to assist in improving the many communities. This made money readily available to produce an immediate impact on villages. The Company maintained operational funds to maintain itself while on the road. The Commander made a decision to make me the paying agent for the Company.



He justified his decision, because I needed to be everywhere all the time. I needed to maintain the administrative actions; and supervise Soldiers well-being and maintenance functions back at the original location. I also maintained the influence and power to assist operations with our Company supply sergeant in Khandahar and Bagram. My people skills allowed me to work directly with the village leaders to fix problems or establish the basic life-enhancing systems for their community. I dealt directly with the contractors and builders in front of the village leaders to help create some infrastructure in the villages.

My role drastically changed when we arrived in theater. In addition to my everyday First Sergeant duties, I followed up on maintenance issues, dealt with the supply sergeant in Bagram, supervised company recovery operations at Orgun-E, and supervised the building of FOB Sharona for Bravo Company. I performed the duties of paying agent for the Company, supervised the building of wells, schools, police stations, and many other buildings for the villages in our area of operations. I dealt with the contractors and executed the logistical and administrative issues for the Company many times from five different locations.

I implemented a GT improvement program and established a program to allow the Soldiers to attend college during their recovery time. I used educational opportunities to keep the Soldiers busy--keep their minds focused on something else other than dying. I ensured the Soldiers in Bravo Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry, completed training and possessed the mindset necessary to conduct combat operations in Afghanistan.

Reaction to an IED: While deployed, I learned that the training paid off in combat. One-step in our battle drills during vehicle-mounted ambushes consisted of exiting the kill zone.

During training, I jumped out of my vehicle to make corrections. During our first Improvised Explosive Device (IED) ambush, the vehicle directly in front of me encountered an explosion. The explosion injured several Soldiers. The Squad Leader panicked and dismounted his squad from the vehicle and told his Soldiers to assume a prone position in the kill zone. As the vehicle commander in the next vehicle in the formation and in the ambush kill zone, I responded quickly. I jumped out of the vehicle and ran through the kill zone, yelling for the boys to get through the kill zone. It worked, and they executed my request with extreme haste. My thoughts were for their safety and complete execution of our practiced battle drill. Training--not combat experience--made the unit successful in a combat situation.

*Adaptability is always the key to success for any army in times of war. In Afghanistan, C. Myers, serving as 1SG with the 1-168 Infantry, Iowa National Guard came to understand the true meaning of the word. His unit became the Force Protection element for thirteen Provincial Reconstruction Teams stationed throughout Afghanistan. He watched as staff sergeants and sergeants first class performed above and beyond the call of duty.*

**SGM C. Myers**  
**1-168 INF Iowa ARNG**  
**Afghanistan 03/04-5/05**

September 2003..... “We’re going to war men!” The Battalion Commander and the Command Sergeant Major had called all of the First Sergeants to a 1SG call in Council Bluffs IA. I was First Sergeant to Charlie Company, 1-168 INF Iowa Army National Guard. I had held this position for 6 months after taking a lateral transfer from the Iowa Regional Training Institute.

“We are going to be conducting security operations in the country of Afghanistan”, he continued. “We think the timeline will be to mobilize in January, February or March, spend 3 or 4 months in that location and then go to Afghanistan for one year”.

After getting some more information, we were turned loose. It was a two hour drive home that was filled with thoughts and mind preparation. October rolled around and through EPS, I was promoted to BN Operations SGM. Welcome to the Battalion Staff and start getting the operations section ready to deploy and fight. I would not be going to battle staff school and everything that I need to know needed to be learned “On the Job”. I also needed to know how to do it yesterday.

The next three months went by in a blur. We had numerous times to meet and discuss the mission in order to conduct some courses of action and get things moving. In February, I came on ADVON of the main force to allow me to formally prepare. I left my job as Elementary Principal and put on my uniform. It was time to put the learning to a test. This was going to be the largest deployment of Iowa Soldiers in Iowa’s history since WWII. Our numbers would be 750+ and our mobilization station was to be Fort Hood, Texas.

On 3 March, 2004, Task Force 168 mobilized and moved to North Fort Hood Texas. We received “fillers” from throughout the United States to get us the numbers and MOS types that we needed. The ones that we received were mostly Army Reserve medics and physician’s assistants.

Our actual mission was to become the Force Protection elements for 13 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). The PRTs were manned with a Civil Affairs (CA) team, the force protection elements and at times, regular military units of different shapes and sizes.

The best way to picture a PRT is to think about a fort in the wilderness sometime during the 1800's of the United States history and you have a good idea of what it might look and feel like. The PRTs are spread throughout Afghanistan and play a significant role in the reconstruction efforts of the country. In addition to the PRTs, we would man and run a regional Joint Operations Center (JOC) on Bagram Air Base, provide a heavy logistics cell on Bagram and a heavy logistics cell on Kandahar Air Base. These cells pushed out all the supplies for the PRTs as well as all of the FOBs in Afghanistan.

My job as the Operations Sergeant Major was extensive. Having done very little of this type of task before (let alone mobilize), I felt like I needed to learn and know everything about everything in order to keep the Battalion headed toward becoming qualified and prepared. I learned acronyms and terms. I learned logistics and I learned communications training. I learned about PDSS and other things that I needed to understand. In the end, I knew the inner workings of all of the S sections. I placed myself into a position to be able to answer all questions about what was happening in all areas. The schedule was a killer.

We finally received a date for going into country. We would be going into Afghanistan through two routes. Route one would take 9 PRTs worth of people and equipment and push them into Bagram. The second route took about four PRTs worth of people and equipment into Kandahar in central southern Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a difficult country to move around in. There is no such thing as a ground MSR. There is very little infrastructure so the only sure way of getting around is by air. Then that is not always "sure". Dust, cold, wind, rain, etc., can all cause problems with moving around. Since air is not always available when it is wanted or needed, it can take a long time to get somewhere. In addition, local truckers are used to get supplies to PRTs. This can be somewhat difficult. They will stop at the family house for two or three days before going on, so one can never be sure when the equipment will actually arrive. Because it was so difficult to move around and we were splitting all of our forces up throughout the country, it was hard to imagine how we were going to keep everything together and work with the situation. The Battalion Commander and Command Sergeant Major would be living right on Bagram (which is where I was living). The closest PRT to us was Parwan PRT which sat right on Bagram. The furthest PRT was in western Afghanistan in the city of Herat. This was about a 2.5 hour C-130 flight (when one would go there and that was not often).

However, it is because of these very situations that our NCOs became the most important people at the PRTs and became the best trained and working of any NCOs at any time. Four of the PRTs had ISGs and the rest of them had SFCs as the senior NCOs on the site. Due to the scope of the operations in the PRT, the PRT Joint Operation Command was manned 24 hours a day and NCOs had to be ready to make decisions that normally would be made by people 2 pay-grades above them. I watched SSG and SFC Soldiers doing things they had never done before, and doing them better than people whose sole responsibility is that task every day.

Being in an Infantry unit had just about every NCO wanting to be out on missions and it was tough to convince some to do different jobs. However, every job was extremely important and once they realized that, they became okay with it. Each PRT became a small battalion operations center in and of itself. Our elements were about a platoon plus size element and force multipliers came and went with that. Special Forces came and went. Afghan National Army and Afghan Security Forces worked in or near the PRTs so the Embedded Tactical Trainers would come in and conduct missions with the PRTs. Staff Sergeant (SSG) squad leaders became full, mixed forces, operations leaders. SSGs coordinated operations with a company of Afghan National Army, a Special Forces team and a group of US Soldiers complete with dedicated CAS, ECM missions and CH-47 insertions. This type of work for SSGs may be common in the special teams or special operations areas, but it was way out there for a regular Infantry unit.

SFCs ran forward operations and rear operations for the TOC or went out on missions to take their turns. Some PRTs had to be built from scratch and the ground up. When this took place, SSGs and SFCs became general contractors and pay agents for local workers. The big Army likes guard units when we are able to apply our civilian skills in addition to our military skills. Any NCO who had construction, plumbing or electrical work backgrounds, was pulled in to assist in building and overseeing the PRT's development. Every NCO conducted themselves over and above their pay grades day in and day out. They became experts at Blue Force Trackers, ACORNS and WARLOCs. They would learn this on the fly or at night while studying the manuals for them. They learned battle tracking, S-2 activities, order writing and Civil Affairs activities. It was by far the greatest piece of "schooling" that an NCO could receive.

While all of this was happening, I continued to work in two different capacities. After seeing the regional Joint Operations Center was set up and being run properly, I was tasked with a temporary position of Regional Operations Liaison for Task Force Victory. Task Force Victory is the TF that TF 168 came in and worked under. TF Victory oversaw operations in the western part of Afghanistan which included PRTs Herat and Farah. At the time, a major held the position but was going to be leaving on R and R (rest and relaxation) and was expected to be gone for one month. This would mean that I would do a 13 hour shift in the Division JOC every day. I was to track all activity and operations in the AO and provide daily briefs at the morning CHOPS meeting and the nightly CFC-A (Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan) BUB.

My space in the JOC gave me a computer and two phones. Just to my left were the Air Support guys and to my front was Med Ops two steps down. To the far right, were the CHOPS. These three sections were ones I came to know well.

While doing this job, two warlords in the west decided to wage war on one another. Warlords in Afghanistan have a history of having tanks, BMPs and thousands of troops on their payrolls. So when they choose to go to war, it is like two armies going at it. Ahmanula Kahn (A.K.) and Ishmail Kahn (I.K.) were

the two warlords. Ahmanula Kahn advanced one day with tanks, vehicles and Soldiers into Ishmail Kahn's territory, near the city of Herat. A clash between two warlords was something that the Afghan government could not allow to take place because of the potential to spread and create continued unrest. The US was committed to helping the Afghan government if requested, but President Karzai wanted to take care of the situation himself. The difficulty was that we had US Soldiers in the middle of the two factions.

The Farah PRT was in the middle of Ahmanula Kahn territory. The Herat PRT was in the middle of Ishmail Kahn territory. Our concern related to Herat was that the PRT stood in the middle of the city, surrounded by local housing and businesses. It would be difficult to defend in a manner that we would like. If Ahmanula Kahn pushed too far (he had threatened to take over the city of Herat) then our guys could be in trouble. Here again the NCOs rose to the occasion. Once it was determined what was taking place, NCOs began driving missions and developing plans. Farah PRT conducted recons to view the compounds of Ahmanula Kahn and talk to those left behind. At the same time, Herat PRT conducted recons to the compounds of Ishmail Kahn and talked with his Soldiers. They also went to the headquarters of Ishmail Kahn and discussed the issue with him. They led a convoy to the area of fighting in an attempt to obtain a cease fire or talk to the leaders.

On my end, I was receiving this information through phone, MIRC chat, email and predator feed. I was feeding all the information I had directly to the CHOPS. At one point, I got word through communications that an Embedded Tactical Trainer with the Afghan National Army that one of our young officers in Herat had been told that the PRT should conduct an emergency evacuation. I fed this to the CHOPS. He said to hold fast. The message was relayed back to the NCO on the ground. At one point, I had a phone in each ear and was answering MIRC chat and talking to the CHOPS all at the same time. The NCOs on the ground did an excellent job of staying calm, keeping matters in hand and providing excellent eyes and ears to the situation. Again, most of the NCOs doing this were SGT, SSG and SFCs.

In the end, (after a tense couple of days) Ahmanula Kahn withdrew. Both sides had lost men but the PRT never did evacuate. All of this was not possible without the important role played well by NCOs of the 168 INF. Not just any NCOs, but young NCOs.

My experience in the Division JOC for a month was one I did not like. However, the learning experience I gained in operations far outweighed my dislike for the task. After this experience, I held a treasure trove of information on operations in Afghanistan. I took this with me as I made visits to PRT TOCs to assist them in their operations. In addition, through the process, I was able to observe first hand some of the operations and missions out in the PRTs that I had been watching and listening to in the JOC. Knowledge was brought down from above to create a better unit.

The mission in Afghanistan ended on 31 May 2005. We returned to our homes in Iowa. We had lost one man KIA. We had numerous WIA with only two needing to return home early to allow their wounds to mend. The greatest lesson that we learned is that we must push every NCO into positions and decisions of greater responsibility on a regular basis. In fact, our greatest challenge will be our ability to provide challenging and strenuous opportunities for our younger NCOs. In our return, we have NCOs that have tasted the challenge of the next level or higher and experienced the stress. Run properly, this will challenge the leaders of these individuals, and provide future leaders who are hungry for the next position.

Along with learning that we need to challenge our NCOs as often as possible, we also need to push the envelope on training. Ask for things not there, create training that doesn't exist, drill things people do not drill on. It is because we went beyond the mandatory list for training for deployment and our NCOs worked harder than at any other time that we lost so few people. Not only was the leadership high speed, they were well prepared.

*Throughout 2004, Special Forces Soldiers hunted remnants of the al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan. They also tried to assist the Afghan people with Medical Civil Action Project (MEDCAP) programs aimed at treating local villagers' medical problems. SGM D. Utley tells of his third rotation in Afghanistan, of training and equipping Afghan Security Forces, and of actions in the rugged and remote Konar Valley near the Pakistani border.*

**SGM D. Utley**  
**“Konar Valley”**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> SFG, Afghanistan, 05-12/04**

My Team, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 364, was notified in September 2003 that we would return to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) for a third rotation in May 2004. My team had just completed its second OEF rotation as part of the Combined Joint Special Forces Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) Direct Action Company. We had participated in eleven company-size raids, with only one Soldier killed and one wounded. We had huge results in the form of enemy dead and destroyed a large amount of al-Qaeda equipment. I was confident that the team was ready.

During the time period from September to March, every team member received 45 days leave and an individual school. In March, the entire company went to White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) for an 18-day pre-deployment train-up. WSMR proved to be an excellent choice as the pre-deployment training location. The terrain and weather at White Sands are identical to the environment in Afghanistan. The only major draw back was that we did not have our Afghan Soldiers or Toyota Hi-Lux trucks to train with. The Company's Sergeant Major

and Commander's Program of Instruction (POI) consisted of ten days of team training and four days of company training, which culminated with a company raid. Goats, role players and specific scenarios were integrated into the company raid in order to enhance the exercise. The team had been issued new Ground Mobility Vehicles (GMVs) and crew served weapons which we were able to validate at White Sands. Overall, this proved to be excellent pre-deployment training.

We deployed to Bagram Airfield (BAF) and given five days to prepare for infiltration to Asadabad (ABAD). It was necessary that teams complete their preparations in five days or less in order to make room for incoming teams to prepare their equipment. The most important pre-infiltration activities are the Ammunition issue and Operational Funds (OPFUND) issue. This is because nothing happens in Afghanistan without a pay off or a firefight.

The drive from Bagram to Asadabad is approximately 80 km however it takes two days. We hired jingle trucks (2 ½ ton Russian trucks) to carry team gear that was not on the gun trucks and extra Class I. The jingle trucks were extremely slow and the roads were treacherous. However, we were unable to leave the trucks since they contained team gear.

We arrived at Asadabad and began transitioning with the teams that we were relieving. The previous unit had placed two ODAs in Asadabad; however, my unit was only able to man one ODA (Operational Detachment Alpha). The first team that we linked up with, had all of their operational and intelligence information automated, as well as maps and route overlays for us. They also prepared a detailed operations and intelligence briefing for us. Their Area of Operations (AO) had been in the Nuristan province and they were adamant that a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha presence was necessary there. However, there are no roads leading to Nuristan and the only way to get there is by rotary wing air. Nuristan was absolutely an al-Qaeda strong hold because of its remoteness, access to Pakistan and nearby refugee camps. The team had already drawn down to four Soldiers and the briefing was the only transition that we received. They were unwilling and unable to go to Nuristan with us for an in-depth orientation. Additionally, helicopter availability was an issue due to the on going Relief in Place (RIP).

The second team that we relieved did not have any automated information, maps or overlays. The team operated in the Asadabad area; when we suggested that we do a patrol together for orientation the team leadership vehemently objected. The team sergeant informed me that his guys had made it through their rotation with no wounded or killed and they were not going to risk it so close to redeployment.

The Asadabad Firebase had a Marine Infantry Company that was responsible for the firebase's security. A Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), was responsible for developing the provincial government, and infrastructure related civil affairs. The crown jewel of the camp's units was a 160-man Afghan Security

Force (ASF). The ASF had been recruited and trained by previous ODAs. We would make it our commitment to train and equip the ASF better than they had ever been; taking them to the level of conducting company-sized operations with minimal US supervision. The ASF were all from the province, and had all fought against the Taliban. They knew the terrain extremely well and more importantly they knew all of the key personalities both good and bad. During our seven months with the ASF we increased their numbers to 210 and gave them a reconnaissance capability that included sketching, GPS and digital camera operation. Additionally, we established an EOD team (the highest paid guys in the company) that dealt with all UXOs and IEDs. We also trained and equipped a heavy weapons platoon that had RPGs and recoilless rifles.

During our “Employment” phase we conducted 41 CONOPS, which included numerous direct action missions, MEDCAPS, intelligence gathering and Force Protection Patrols. The ASF participated in every mission.

The most memorable MEDCAP that we went on was on the top of a mountain about 12km West of our firebase. Our task organization was ODA 364 and a USMC platoon along with tough boxes of Class VIII, and a 6 wheel ATV with medical supplies water and ammo. We arrived on a CH-47 and the villagers were amazed to see a helicopter land at their village which was at 9500 feet. Upon our arrival we linked up with a village elder and set up a patrol base behind his house. The next day we had a huge turn out for the MEDCAP- over 400 people. We treated everything from scabies to sinus infections to burns. The funniest thing was a 50 year old man that told me that his knees hurt. I told him he needed to move out of the mountains of Afghanistan if he wanted his knees to stop hurting. We gave every child a hygiene bag and a toy. During the night while the team was conducting security, we monitored the command net and listened to another team that was in a firefight and had a wounded Soldier. The helicopter trying to evacuate the wounded Soldier was having problems with brown out conditions and could not get to the casualty. After multiple attempts the evacuation was finally completed. We left the next day; the team was frustrated, we had done a low priority humanitarian while other teams were killing bad guys. I felt that the mission was a huge flop because we had not received any actionable intelligence and to make matters worse the rooms that we used to treat the patients were not properly ventilated and 75% of the team got sick the day after we returned. My interpreter told me to wait five days before passing judgment on the mission. He was right, after about a week, people from the villages surrounding the MEDCAP site started coming in and sending messages with runners about caches and personalities. We were able to interdict some al-Qaeda operatives transporting explosives and blasting caps from Pakistan to Afghanistan as a result of the information some of the villagers provided. The lesson learned was that nothing happens fast in Afghanistan, and an enduring presence is necessary to accomplish the mission.

One day, one of our Afghan Security Force Soldiers came to us and informed that he knew of a house where Bin Laden had spent the night a few years earlier.



We did some checking around and it turned out that Bin Laden had stayed at this house after the bombings in Tora Bora. We were able to also associate the house with an al-Qaeda cell that was providing IEDs and rewards to anyone who would put an IED in the road. The homeowner would recruit and train people from refugee camps in Pakistan and then send them into Afghanistan to emplace IEDs in the roads.

We were able to conduct a close target reconnaissance and develop a plan. The house only had one road leading to it, a small mosque and a river on the East side, mountains on the Northside and a small village to the West. It turned out that the mosque was used like a hotel for foreign fighters traveling back and forth from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Our team said that they saw armed men with radios guarding the house which was indicative of a large cache and perhaps some high level al-Qaeda leadership.

We decided to cordon and search the house and the mosque at first light hoping to catch all of the males at the mosque for morning prayers. The good news was that the objective was only a 4 minute flight from our firebase. Our task organization had ODA 364, 3 ASF platoons, 2 x AH-64s and 4 x CH-47s supporting us. When we hit the ground, the assault force that was securing the mosque (only ASF entered the mosque) captured about seven bad guys and nothing else. The assault force at the house found an empty house. The house was huge and the teams kept clearing empty room after empty room. I was getting worried that the place was going to be a dry hole after weeks of planning and rehearsing. Before entering one of the rooms, an ASF Soldier threw a flash bang stun grenade in the room and a fire started. The fire was too big to put out and we had not finished clearing, so we ignored the fire and continued on. By the time that we had cleared the entire house, the fire was raging. I walked over and told the commander how pissed I was that this was a dry hole, the house was on fire, and we were going to have a hard time doing any type of exploitation of papers/pictures/documents. While we were discussing our next move I began hearing random gunfire. I almost jumped out of my skin. The objective was secure, security teams were in place and we absolutely owned the objective, how could we be taking fire I asked myself. It turned out that the house was constructed of mud bricks and ammo cans, the entire house was a cache and the ammo was cooking off because of the fire. We pulled everyone off of the objective and had the two AH-64s on station and they leveled the house. They put so much ordnance into the house that two of the Chinooks had to go back to Bagram to pick up more rockets. As we were withdrawing off of the objective, two of the ASF guys started hotwiring an SUV. They reminded me that we always needed vehicles and that they were going to take this one and assign some guys to drive it back to the firebase. Unfortunately the fire spread so quickly and so much ammo was cooking off that we had to abandon our efforts to get the vehicle started. The ASF guys ended up having an RPG competition as to who could hit the vehicle first. The mission was only a partial success- we had destroyed the cache and grabbed some bad guys but we

had not gotten the leader. After a couple of days, we had the PSYOPS guys start broadcasting that we knew where the IED cell leader's other houses were and that we were going to burn them down as well if he did not turn himself in to us. It worked, after about three days of spreading the rumor, he contacted the Provincial Governor and made arrangements to turn himself in. The mission turned into a double success when he provided information about another al-Qaeda terrorist. That was one of the best missions ever. It was a total combined arms effort with Special Forces Soldiers conducting the targeting, the planning and the leadership, Afghan Security Force Soldiers executing the operation and Apaches providing fire support.

ODA 361 (another team in the company) was located about 25 km away in a place called Nangalam, which is right at the end of the Peche Valley. The Peche Valley is one of the toughest places in Afghanistan; the Russians lasted less than 5 days there. There is only one road, which is sandwiched between the Peche River on one side and mountains on the other. The mouth of the Peche River opens up into the Konar valley and just four km away is the Pakistan border. The guys in Nangalam had been ambushed in June and one of the guys had been wounded pretty seriously. By the end of June, the base was getting rocketed 3 or 4 times a week. I approached the Company SGM and told him that 364 wanted to reinforce 361 and help them reestablish control of the area. 364 and 361 had guys that were all friends with each other and some of our ASF were related.

We arrived at 361's location and began planning. There was another valley on the South side of the Peche River that was a terrorist sanctuary called the Korengal Valley. The Korengal Valley had Arabs, foreign fighters and its own dialect. The guys that had ambushed 361 lived in this valley, and this is where the rocketeers that had been harassing 361's base planned and operated out of. The bad news for us was that the Peche River had no vehicle bridge and the river itself was impassible to vehicles except to jingle trucks, which are large Russian-made two and a half ton trucks. There was no way to get our gun trucks across the river.

We finally decided to take Toyota Hi-Lux trucks across the river in the back of jingle trucks (Russian 2 ½ ton commercial cargo trucks). We crossed the river at an adjacent valley and then we crossed over into the Korengal Valley using an old logging trail. Our ranks included about 80 guys in 11 Hi-Luxs. We crossed the river at night and drove all night long; we wound up in Korengal at sunrise. The people were sure surprised to see us. The first thing we did was seize a renegade Afghan Army Post, we took all of their weapons and locked them in their own jail.

After taking over the Army Post we began clearing the village. We cordoned and searched all of the houses that we had intelligence on or looked suspicious. This whole village was bad, some houses contained three DVD players, satellite TV and all kinds of phones including satcom phones and cellular phones. We worked all day and at the end of the day we had about 24 detainees and a bunch of exploitable papers and phones. Plus, we destroyed all kinds of IED material,

however, there were no males in the village and nobody fought. At 1500 local time the entire patrol linked-up at the Army post, drank all of their cold Pepsi (they had a generator and a small refrigerator) and began the convoy back to the river crossing site. This time we would take the one and only road that led through the Korengal Valley. On the East side of the road was a 200-foot drop to the river at the valley floor and on the West side of the road was the side of a mountain. As we were convoying back, the lead vehicle radioed the convoy and informed us that they had been ambushed in the spot they were approaching on a previous mission. Approximately 30 seconds after that radio transmission, an ambush was initiated on the lead vehicle with machine gun fire. The lead vehicle was disabled and the road was blocked. We now knew where all of the males in the village were, 400m away from us on the other side of the valley engaging us with machine guns and RPGs. The lead vehicle was disabled and the trail vehicle was taking a heavy volume of fire. Everyone had dismounted and we were returning fire, the bad guys were in prepared positions and the heaviest guns that we had were M249s. My gun trucks were sitting in Nangalam collecting dust on the M2s while we were slugging it out with M4s. We requested air support and got A-10s in about 10 minutes. They came in and dropped 500 lb. bombs and then started making gun runs. The enemy's positions were so well prepared that they would stop firing when the A-10s were on there bombing runs and then resume firing after they pulled away. The lead vehicle was fixed and we began to move out of the Kill Zone. The trail vehicle was disabled so we quickly grabbed all of the sensitive items and blew the vehicle up. A vehicle near the rear of the convoy that contained some sensitive equipment was also disabled. The equipment was too heavy to move so we implemented the destruction plan for the equipment and then the vehicle. We then were able to move out of the Kill Zone. The A-10s stayed on station and made multiple passes with both bombs and guns. We moved out of the area about 4km to the North so we could consolidate, reorganize and get ready for the river crossing.

While updating our higher headquarters, we were directed to obtain BDA of the sensitive equipment. The captain and I made a hasty plan, we had brought three ATVs on the patrol, we would ride the ATVs back to the Kill Zone and get the pictures of the destroyed equipment, and follow the ATVs with the Air force controller, the medic and the team sergeant (myself) in Toyota Hi-Lux. We cross-loaded our ammo, put oil on our weapons and headed back to the Kill Zone. We also got two Cobra Gunships to support our movement back to the Kill Zone. After we had gone about one KM one of the ATVs broke down, we pushed the ATV off of the road and put the ATV driver in the back of the Hi-Lux. 500 meters later the commander's ATV had broken down, we were now down to one ATV. The commander jumped on the back of the ATV that was still operational and they rode that ATV into the Kill Zone to get the BDA. Exactly at the moment that the ATV with two SF guys in full kit arrived at the objective the chain broke on the ATV and it would not go any further. The commander took

pictures of the destroyed equipment and ran along with the ATV operator to the Hi-Lux that was about 400M away. We then directed the Cobra to destroy the ATV and to re-engage the already destroyed vehicle. The two broken ATVs were not directly in the Kill Zone and we were able to get one started and tow the other one. The entire element evacuated without incident, one USMC Lance Corporal had a minor gunshot wound to the leg, and we had lost two pick-up trucks and an ATV. We later determined that we killed 13 bad guys.

In 2005, a Navy SEAL reconnaissance element was inserted into the Korengal Valley. A short time later, they called on the Iridium phone and said that they were in heavy contact and required emergency evacuation. A helicopter was sent and it was shot down. Three of the four men on the reconnaissance team and all sixteen men on the helicopter were killed. It was a tragic day and testimony to the enemy presence in the Korengal Valley.

The lessons learned from this rotation concern are focused on operations, intelligence, and leadership. The operational cycle (OPS Cycle) has one major shortcoming and it is an Army institutional problem. The OPS Cycle is unable to respond in a timely fashion to the Intelligence Cycle. If an individual that had provided quality information in the past walked into the Firebase and announced that a known high ranking terrorist was in the valley, it would take a minimum of two hours to get a helicopter to the firebase. The problem is twofold, one- the helicopters are not co-located with the operational units and two the Concept of the Operation (CONOP) would require at least an hour for staffing and approval. The solution is to co-locate the helicopters at the firebases and give ground force commanders the authority to direct the helicopters' employment.

The intelligence cycle requires an understanding of HUMINT and basic psychology. Information providers have their own motivations and these must be determined prior to the commitment of assets. This is a ground force operator and commander problem, and the only fix is training in interview techniques. One major shortcoming of intelligence is the lack of historical data. The SEALs went into a valley that US Forces had been at least three times before, yet they were not provided any of the previous information. The solution is to assign a historian to each of the Intelligence Centers and ensure that he is collecting both historical, operational and intelligence data.

Leadership must avoid trying to help ground forces. The ground force commander has to be the supreme authority for the assets that ground forces employ. It is the responsibility of higher leaders to ensure the assets that the wants of the ground force commander are available.

*Establishing a Special Forces firebase in hostile territory is never an easy task. MSG D. Berry helped build Firebase Lane (named for SFC Mitchell Lane who died 29 August 2003 as a result of a combat operation in Afghanistan). He discusses the problems his unit encountered in establishing a firebase and the role each Special Forces NCO performs within Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha. He also discusses the role Special Forces play in winning the hearts and minds of the local civilian population.*

**MSG D. Berry**  
**Establishing a Special Forces Firebase**  
**ODA 381, 3<sup>RD</sup> BN, 3<sup>RD</sup> SFG (Airborne)**

In February 2004, my Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (SFODA) received notification that it we deploy for the third time to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Our mission war was to establish a new firebase in an area very hostile to coalition forces. My detachment began immediately conducting research on the area of operations (AO) that we would be working in. We found that another detachment from a different company would join us. The addition of the extra detachment was good news. We would be responsible for an area of more than 200 square kilometers. With only one detachment, we would have had to decide whether to spend our time building the firebase or establishing a foothold in the area; two detachments meant that we would be able to do both.

One advantage of a Special Forces detachment is its ability to be self-sustaining. The team can conduct many of the support functions that most Army elements rely on higher HQs support elements for assistance. NCOs of the team drive forklifts to load equipment, medical needs are conducted by the team medic, the team engineer conducts supply issues, and all communication needs are handled by the communications NCOs. We develop our own intelligence briefs with the Intelligence NCO and the Assistant Detachment Commander (WO2). This was one of the most important of the pre-deployment tasks as it enabled us to gain important information on previous activities in our area of responsibility. We also were able to find out key personalities, demographics, languages spoken, and location of key villages.

We deployed to Afghanistan in mid June 2004 landing in Kandahar to temperatures near the 100 degrees. The detachment arrived with eight members, seven of them NCOs. Our sister team arrived several days before us and moved to the firebase to conduct a Relief in Place (RIP) as well as a Transfer of Authority (TOA) with the detachment that had been given the task to establish the firebase. My detachment conducted our pre-launch activities in Kandahar as part of a unit requirement prior to any detachment moving to its firebase. The pre-launch activities consist of a country in-brief, equipment test, communication checks, weapon test fire and several other checks. After 4 days in Kandahar, we were

ready to move to our firebase. One day prior to our departure, the detachment that we were replacing began to arrive in Kandahar for their redeployment back to the US. We were able to get several briefings from the leadership of that detachment as well as the communication NCO and the Operations SGT (Tm SGT). Each of the briefings that we received proved invaluable in the next few months as we gained a foothold in our area of responsibility.

During our time at Kandahar we were able to hire two interpreters, one with previous experience with Special Forces in the area we were going into. We coordinated with the local Afghan National Army (ANA) to provide us an escort to our firebase and prepared our gear and vehicles to depart Kandahar the next morning.

We departed Kandahar early in the morning to prevent moving our convoy in the extreme heat of the day. We hired two large trucks known as jingle trucks (know for the large amount of accoutrements on the front bumpers and the sound they make as the travel down the road). After finally getting on the road almost two hours late, we made good time along the newly paved road between Kandahar and Qalat. Almost two hours into the trip, one of the trucks blew the transmission. We were now stranded as a large portion of our gear was on the truck with a blown transmission. We had no way to load the gear on the other truck or any of our other vehicles, all of which were loaded to capacity. We radioed to our command and let them know the situation, and the truck driver had assured us that he could fix the transmission. Needless to say, I was quite skeptical. With only a few small tools and some bolts and nuts removed from other parts of the truck, the driver repaired the truck and we were back on our way. The remainder of the trip proved uneventful except for the rough terrain we had to cross once we left the highway. In three hours we covered 120 kilometers on the highway and the next three hours took us only 30 kilometers over the rock, dirt and sand that the Afghans call a road. Although the firebase was still in the beginning stages of construction, it was a welcomed sight after the trip.

Upon arriving at the firebase, each man linked-up with his counterpart from our sister detachment to receive a brief and become aware of ongoing activities in the camp. After a period of time, my detachment unloaded our equipment from the “jingle truck” and moved to the makeshift operations center for an intelligence and operational brief from the leadership of our sister team. We found out that very little had been done in the area concerning direct action operations or establishing rapport with the local population.

I had each NCO to inspect the firebase. The weapons NCO (18B) began by coordinating with the base security. He went to each tower in the firebase to assess the current situation, introduce himself to the Soldiers and begin his development to upgrade the security.

The Engineer NCO (18C) looked at base defense by examining the physical structure of the base. He checked the walls and towers of the base and other security measures. The base was relatively new and little had been done to bolster

base security. When we arrived, there were only a few wooden buildings and barrier walls surrounding the base. The Engineer NCO began to put together a list of materials that he would need to upgrade the base against ground attack.

The medical NCOs (18D) consisted of two individuals. The junior man had two combat deployments with the detachment under his belt, while the senior man was on his first deployment. Both unloaded their medical gear and began to set up in the makeshift aid station along with the medical personnel from our sister team. The medical NCOs were told that there was little in the way of medical care in the surrounding valley. The locals were very wary of Americans and had stayed away from the firebase even after being offered care for sick and injured by our sister team. The medical NCOs began to formulate plans to get the locals to come to the firebase for medical attention. Medical NCOs in Special Forces (SF) are normally the number one way to begin to build rapport with local populations. We knew that medical care was the primary thing that would bring the locals to us and allow us to build their trust.

My two communications NCOs (18E) were like the medical NCOs, in that the junior had two previous tours with Special Forces and the senior was on his first trip. They began setting up the radios so that we could communicate with our battalion headquarters. They used several different types in order to provide a backup. They also established computer systems that we used to communicate with the battalion and produce daily reports which included situation (SITREP), intelligence (INTSUM), status of personnel (PERSTAT) and logistics (LOGSTAT).

I went with the Team Leader to get an in-brief from the leadership of our sister team. We received a quick brief on the current situation and what operations had been conducted prior to our arrival. We discovered that little had been done in our area on a regular basis. The latest mission in the area by Special Forces had resulted in an ambush by the Taliban. When the unit we were replacing came under ambush, a Navy Special Forces patrol had gone to reinforce them and suffered an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). The IED killed the interpreter and three others in the vehicle suffered severe injuries. IEDs were common in the area and little intelligence could be gathered from the locals because they feared reprisals from the Taliban if they gave the coalition unit any type of support. In addition, we found that night letters on the doors of village elders were used to maintain fear in the region.

On the second day, I met with the Platoon Leader from the small contingent of Combat Engineers charged with building the firebase. They had fewer men than is needed for a squad and a large amount of building to accomplish before the Winter arrived. Along with the Team Sergeant from the other team, we gathered the Engineer NCOs together and formulated a plan to build the firebase up in a short time while still conducting missions in the surrounding area. We concluded that local workers would be used to help with the building. We started with the locals from the surrounding villages. Because they feared the Taliban, they

refused to work regardless the pay we offered. We decided to get workers from Kandahar. An Engineer NCOs from our sister team had helped build a firebase during a previous deployment and he still had contacts in Kandahar. Several combined teams and a security element from the Afghan National Army headed for Kandahar to hire workers to help us construct the firebase. They succeeded in hiring more than 200 workers, mostly from one extended family. In addition, they purchased building material for the firebase, and tents and food supplies for the workers.

We also began a program to take our medical NCOs into the local villages and treat the villagers. It prevented the villagers from having to come to the firebase and enabled us to show the villagers our medical capabilities. Within the first few visits, this proved successful. Along with the medical assistance, we talked with the village elders and let them understand that we were there to help and that we were staying for a long time. We asked what they needed for assistance and started forming friendships.

By the end of our seven-month tour the firebase became a hardened structure with state of the art communications capable of connecting to the internet, SIPRnet, satellite phone system and LAN. The fire base proved able to withstand intense ground attacks or repel an air attack up to 122mm rockets. A mortar crew from the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division provided the base with 81mm mortar indirect fire capabilities. In seven months we conducted more than 125 raids on Taliban forces and built both a school and a medical facility for local villagers. As we departed, there were more than 150 children attending school and the medical facility treated an average of 300 patients per week.

*Artillery is particularly well suited for providing counter fire to rocket attacks and fire support to combat patrols. R. Levis served as First Sergeant with Eagle Battery, 377<sup>th</sup> Parachute Field Artillery from October 2003 to August 2004. Eagle Battery ran continuous twenty-four hour firebase operations at two different locations and participated in Operation Avalanche, Operation Blizzard, and Operation Storm.*

**1SG R. Levis**  
**“Task Force Geronimo”**  
**377<sup>th</sup> Parachute Field Artillery, Afghanistan 10/03-04**

On 10 July 2003, the Commander notified us of a deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom III. The battery was part of a Parachute Infantry Battalion and immediately began the planning process to prepare for war. We searched lessons learned from the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and Ranger Regiments. We planned to implement the lessons learned from these great units into our battery, most importantly deploying with the ability to conduct split-battery operations. This would provide the Task Force with more flexibility.



October 10, 2003, Task Force Geronimo deployed to Afghanistan, assigned to CJTF-180 (Coalition Joint Task Force, 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corp) and attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division in support of OEF III (Operation Enduring Freedom with the third series of unit deployments). After conducting a successful airborne assault from Ganci Air Base, Kyrgyzstan, and simultaneously conducting a ground assault convoy from Bagram Airfield (BAF), Afghanistan, Task Force Geronimo closed on Forward Operating Base (FOB) Salerno located outside of the town of Khowst, Afghanistan. Over the next couple of weeks, we conducted a relief in place and transition of authority with the Italian Army. This RIP would be a simple process for our battery since the Italian Army did not have indirect fire capabilities, essentially, we would build a new firebase for our six howitzers.

By the end of October 2003, Eagle Battery had successfully established a six-gun firebase at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Salerno. After coming under fire from numerous enemy rocket attacks, we acquired a Q36 fire finder radar from Combined Joint Task Force-180. The radar section assigned to Eagle Battery consisted of Soldiers from the Massachusetts Army National Guard. The radar allowed us to pinpoint the enemy rocket point of origin and enable us to conduct immediate counter-rocket fires or fire illumination for dismounted patrols in the area to enable them to locate and destroy the enemy responsible for the rocket attacks. Eagle battery trained daily to put effective, timely and accurate response fires on the enemy rockets point of origin.

Counter fire depended on timeliness and communication. The Task Force TOC (tactical operations center) had to have a fast clearance of fire drill, the radar section and artillery platoon had to establish a reliable and dedicated communications link that could put firing data on the guns in seconds.

Operation Avalanche was a four-week long US led offensive in December 2003 designed to disrupt resurgence in the southeastern territory of Afghanistan. We left two howitzers in the FOB for base security, and deployed towards the Pakistan border with the other four howitzers. We also received a 120mm platoon from the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade 10<sup>th</sup> MTN for use during this operation. Eagle Battery established a Tactical Assembly Area (TAA) for the Task Force that included a HLZ (helicopter landing zone), 4 x 105mm howitzers and 2 x 120mm mortars, tactical operations center and ALOC (administrative and logistical operations cell), and a Forward Support Company that provided hot meals and maintenance support to the truck platoons. This TAA allowed companies to refit after multiple day dismounted patrols in the mountains searching for enemy operations and weapon caches.

During Operation Avalanche, the occupation of OP/LPs (Observation Posts/Listening Points) became important points. Eagle battery was responsible for TAA security and my NCOs learned quickly the importance of observation posts. On the second night in the TAA, we came under an enemy rocket attack. One of my Soldiers on observation post saw the point of origin but did not have the knowledge of how to call for fire. The observation post did not have an accurate sector sketch

with ranges or pre-planned targets. This leadership failure on my part would never happen again; it allowed the enemy to withdraw under darkness. We immediately enforced proper tactics, techniques and procedures by ensuring all observation posts had the following; reliable and back up communication, accurate sector sketches with inter-locking fires, binoculars, range finders, weapons with thermal weapon sites, compasses, and all Soldiers occupying the OP were proficient in call for fire procedures.

Operation Blizzard followed operation Avalanche. This operation called for the battery to provide two howitzers to Bagram Air Field for base security. This challenged my unit to establish three complete independent firing platoons out of one traditional firing battery. I had my senior NCOs gather in one tent to figure out how we would accomplish this mission. One of the pre-deployment lessons learned from our brothers during OEF I was to be able to conduct split-battery operations. With in 24 hours, we concluded we had the equipment and personnel necessary to accomplish this mission and meet the Commanders Intent. Task Force Geronimo now had the ability to maneuver 3 x 105mm Artillery platoons, 1 x 120mm Mortar platoon, and 1 x 81mm Mortar platoon.

A major problem for our battery during Operation Blizzard was the absence of the Executive Officer (XO). We immediately made my senior SFC the platoon leader, and moved up a SSG to the platoon sergeant position. This move also enabled a SGT to take over a section. The XO had many responsibilities and could not dedicate enough time to the Battery and act as a platoon leader. The position of XO is vitally important to any units' success and the Field Artillery can learn a lesson from our Infantry brothers, and make this a dedicated position in a Light Artillery Battery.

On 13 March 2004, Operation Blizzard had successfully ended in Afghanistan, and Operation Storm began. Operation Storm, our next major combat operation put Eagle Battery paratroopers in the dismounted fight, as well. During this challenging operation, Eagle Battery would be tasked to conduct village assessments, presence patrols, maintain 24-hour fire base operations, provide indirect fires to the line companies, and establish the Salerno English School for local children.

Our next major operation was called Geronimo Exodus, our re-deployment to Fort Richardson, Alaska. During the month of July 2004, Eagle Battery Soldiers had to successfully RIP with Thunder Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from Hawaii, conduct another ground assault convoy to Bagram Airfield, account for all equipment, transfer equipment to the 25<sup>th</sup> ID, repack all shipping containers, prepare all vehicles for shipment, and lastly conduct reintegration training.

We learned many lessons during OEF III. It is a challenge for all NCOs to capture lessons learned and implement them at their gaining units. I am very proud of every Soldier and their accomplishments during the many combat operations of Team Eagle. In more than nine months, the three two-gun platoons of B/377 PFAR accurately and safely delivered in excess of 1,000 howitzer rounds through our seven M119A2 cannons, including 110-extended range munitions (M913

rocket-assisted projectiles and Charge 8). Every round fired supported an essential fire support task and took the form of demonstration fires, precision registration fires, counter rocket and counter mortar fires, or danger-close support for troops in contact.



M119A1 105 Lightweight Towed Howitzers

*The ability to prepare and execute an artillery ambush to its full extent always thrills an artilleryman. As coordinates are plotted and guns registered, there is an anticipation of the call to action, for the exact moment to respond--there is excitement in the air. The following story is about one Combat Observation Lasing Team from Eagle Battery as they respond to rocket attack on a small Afghan checkpoint.*

### **Task Force Geronimo An Artillery Ambush Vignette**

On 28 May 2004, after a small border checkpoint manned by Afghan Khowst Provincial Forces came under several days of heavy rocket attacks, Eagle Battery was called into action. Two platoons of four 105-mm howitzers and a Combat Observation Lasing Team (COLT) which consisted of SSG J. Occhino, SSG B. Thompson, and Specialist D. Larson convoyed to a spot near the checkpoint and prepared for action.

The Combat Observation Lasing Team was equipped with multi-band radios, binoculars, a static ground vehicular laser locator designator, and a handheld laser range finder. Coordinating with Eagle Battery's Fire Direction Center (FDC), they prepared preplanned priority targets and shift-from-known-point missions

which were lased and computed by the FDC. The guns were registered, then, everyone waited for the first flash of a rocket.

Early the next morning, Taliban forces opened their rocket attack on what they believed was an unsuspecting checkpoint. As the first rockets headed for the checkpoint, the Combat Observation Lasing Team recorded their positions, and Eagle Battery responded with 53 high-explosive shells and air strikes delivered by Marine Corps attack aviation. When SSG Occhino sent his end of mission transmission to the FDC, he and the rest of Eagle Battery knew they had successfully completed the ambush; and the Taliban would be more than hesitant to try another rocket attack on the checkpoint.

Based on the an article, "TF Geronimo COLT in OEF Thwarts Attacks: an FO's Dream," Field Artillery Magazine, March-April 2006, Major Shane P. Morgan.

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*Establishing a presence in a remote area is often beneficial to the Army. Getting to know the local populace and their leaders is critical for success in the distant areas located far from national government controls. 1SG W. Forro tells of building a forward operating base in Orzgun, Afghanistan.*

**1SG W. Forro**  
**Building a Forward Operating Base**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion**

In July 2004, while serving as Company First Sergeant for A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry, my company received the task of establishing a forward operating base in the province of Orzgun, Afghanistan. The area chosen was critical in our efforts and required a continuous presence. A month earlier, Marines occupied a small area but only for a very short period. Other than that, military presence was non-existent in the area. With the local population unsure of personnel, great distance from the battalion main body, and lack of knowledge of the area, our issues were numerous from the very beginning.

As soon as we received the mission, the commander and I met a Staff Sergeant and a Gunny Sergeant from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). We gathered as much information as we could on the area, the local village elders, mayor, and police officials. We also planned a reconnaissance of the area identified to be our FOB. As for the distance from the battalion headquarters, we decided to leave the company executive officer (XO), NBC NCO, supply clerk, and one enlisted Soldier in Tarin Kowt with the battalion main body. These folks would be our voice to the battalion to ensure that our requests and needs were getting through to the proper people and then pushed out to our location. Since the distance was great and the road was barely passable, we concluded that the majority of our life support would have to come by air.

It was also determined that we would move in two elements to our area of

operation and secure our FOB site. All vehicles and approximately half of the company would move by ground convoy and the other half would insert by air. The commander and I decided he would lead the ground convoy and I would lead the air movement. This would allow me the time to move into the area, establish security, set up the company tactical operating center (TOC), and prepare to receive the rest of the company and its vehicles.

The only classes of supplies initially taken in were those of which could fit in a ruck sack. The vehicles carried MREs, water, fuel, a 5K generator, sand bags and concertina wire. This was in addition to the almost 65 plus Soldiers that rode on those vehicles.

As we began our new mission, it became apparent there were certain key players that would contribute greatly to the success, or failure, of this new endeavor. One such key player was our engineer squad leader. He became our Civil Affairs/Special Projects Officer. He handled all his engineer duties in addition to the numerous other projects we accomplished. His role was critical in winning the hearts of the local population and gaining their trust. The mortar section sergeant became our elections official. He coordinated and headed all meetings with the local JEMB officials. Again, another critical role as we attempted to convince the people that their vote counted and needed to go to the voting stations. This was probably the most visible event that we participated in due to the fact that these were the first elections held in the country of Afghanistan.

In an attempt to establish the base for a local government, the company commander dealt with the local, self-appointed officials. These were people such as the police chief, the district chief, and a doctor. Although he was not a village official, the doctor was a strong voice within the Uruzgon Province.

Squad leaders probably played one of the biggest roles in our mission accomplishment. They were continuously counted on to make decisions without any senior leaders present. Squad leaders led numerous missions, mounted and dismounted, with squad size elements and repeatedly, the squad leaders proved they were more than up to the task.

Lastly, the individual Soldier, using team work and sound judgment, they proved that there was nothing that they could not accomplish. Their imagination and motivation were essential and key to our FOB operating successfully on a day to day basis.

It took a total of 19 hours to get the entire company to the FOB. We had several priorities to get started on as soon as we arrived. The top three were establishing security, communication with battalion, and vehicle maintenance. The communication piece went really well and we had continuous communication with battalion shortly after being inserted. Security took a full two days to finally accomplish. This was due to the fact that we had to reconnoiter possible observation posts that would allow clear visibility of all likely avenues of approach. After several trips up the small mountains around our FOB, the commander and I finally came to an agreement as to how secure the FOB in the most efficient and

effective manner. Vehicle maintenance was another issue. Our vehicles had taken a beating on the very rough terrain that they crossed in route to the FOB. Vehicles loaded to their maximum weight allowance with water, MREs, and Soldiers took a severe pounding. This fact, coupled with the extreme heat, high altitude, and rough terrain caused several maintenance issues.

Other issues began to arise as we worked towards establishing our new home. We began to realize that although we had key personnel with our battalion main body, we were not getting the requested supplies. This was due in great part to the fact that all supplies had to be flown in. Our battalion did not have aircraft dedicated solely to them, therefore, we were fighting for space on aircraft with an entire brigade plus sized element.

Our living conditions were a definite issue. Soldiers were sleeping in the one man tents that were a rapid fielding issue (RFI) item. In other words, Soldiers had no where to go to get out of the heat or to relax. Bottled water was the only water we had and monitored closely to ensure that we did not run out. The only hygiene that could be allowed was brushing teeth and shaving. We only had what we could carry in our ruck sacks, so everyone had only one change of DCUs and four changes of under clothes. A gutted out port-a-potty served as the only latrine. This latrine had a can slipped in from the back which of course had to be burned twice daily. Burning the waste raised another issue, fuel. The only fuel we had, had been carried in five gallon cans on the vehicles and due to the weight, we could not bring an abundance of it with us.

These were some of the logistical issues that we were faced with, but there were also moral issues to contend with. The only electricity that we had came from the 5k generator that we had brought with us. That was only used to charge batteries and keep the communication equipment powered up. Soldiers could not use it for any other personal items. The heat was intense and there was no relief from it until the sun went down. There were no air conditioners or even a fan. MREs were our only meals which was enough to lower any person's moral. Mail was almost nonexistence. There was no contact with the rest of the world it felt like. To add to all of this, there was no place to just get away and unwind. Our entire force consisted of some 155 Soldiers all living in an area enclosed by a four high mud wall approximately 150 meters by 150 meters. After almost a month of living like this, the commander and I decided that measures had to be taken to improve our situation.

Our first concern was the moral of the Soldiers and the slow incoming mail issue. We easily corrected this by moving the supply sergeant and the supply clerk to Kandahar. We did this to ensure our mail got on the aircraft and made it to our FOB. This also guaranteed that our parts got to us. This was ensured by one of them riding along in the aircraft and handing our items directly to us.

We requested a vertical engineer platoon to come to our location to assist in the building of living spaces for our Soldiers. When we received word that they were coming, I went to Kandahar and personally requested the class IV that would

be needed. This was then contracted to local drivers to ground haul to our FOB. We had to agree to meet them and escort them some 20 kilometers into our area of operation.

Battalion had issued us two satellite phones to communicate with them and to also use while out on missions. We dedicated one phone for Soldiers use every other hour. Six Soldiers an hour were allowed to call home for ten minutes. This was rotated by platoon and worked out to about one ten minute phone call every six or seven days.

On the logistical side, we requested fuel blivets of fuel to be sling loaded in. Once on the ground, the blivets had to be pulled up on the back of an LMTV and emptied into the 55 gallon drums that we had. As for the fuel to burn the human waste, we purchased that from the local town. It was of poor grade and could not be put into the vehicles, but it was certainly good enough to burn waste.

We had our battalion maintenance tent sent to us and prior to erecting it, we poured a cement floor that it could sit on. We mixed all of the concrete by hand and poured it from locally purchased wheel barrels. The mechanics could now conduct maintenance on the vehicles out of the sun and sand. It also provided a place to store extra parts.

As for the hygiene problem, we fixed the well that was in the corner of our FOB. The water was not potable but it more than adequate enough to use for a shower. Of course, the water had to be put into buckets and set out in the sun to warm up for a few hours before bathing with it.

We hired some local villagers to build an eight foot wall around our perimeter. Our perimeter covered approximately one half mile in its entirety. This allowed us to have aircraft land inside our perimeter which in turn allowed for us to have bigger items brought in. It also allowed for the Soldiers to get out and conduct some much needed physical fitness training.

As for our MRE issue, we contracted local haulers to bring in two refrigeration vans. Once they arrived, we hooked them up to a vehicle and pulled them off of the truck. It took a little time and much effort to get them working properly, but thanks to a generator mechanic turned infantryman, we were in business in no time. With the refrigeration vans, we could receive fresh fruits, vegetables, and A-rations, all of which had to be refrigerated.

Once the living conditions started to improve, the moral of the Soldiers began to rise. They realized that things were on the incline and that were going to get better with each day. It was a slow process, but over the course of four months, our FOB was fully functioning and a great place to be. Every Soldiers was sleeping in a B-hut with a heating and cooling unit. We had four 5,000k generators that provided our electricity. We had the engineers build us a mess hall that could sit 75 Soldiers at a time. Our maintenance bay was well stocked and manned with three mechanics.

*Serving as the A Troop First Sergeant, D. Detweiler knew he had to prepare his men for deployment in Afghanistan. New SOPs and qualifying weapons systems became essential. Individual training gave way to crew training, and finally to platoon training. Soldiers attended Air Assault School in preparation for heavy-sling operations. Preparing the Soldier for deployment is the focus of 1SG Detweiler's history.*

**1SG D. Detweiler**  
**“Deployment to Afghanistan”**  
**3-4 Cavalry, April 2005**

I received orders for a permanent change of station to 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> 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 First Sergeant of a light Cavalry Troop within the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 arose. 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 troops 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

*Part of the Army's mission in Afghanistan is to improve the Afghan Nation. In 2005, SGM L. Obeda and the 173d Combat Support Company built a road through the harsh landscape that ran from Qalat to Shinkay and the Pakistani border. This road, one of the few, in Afghanistan not only helped improve the Afghan infrastructure, but also showed the Afghan people that in supporting the National government they would improve their own lives.*

**SGM L. Obeda**  
**“Operation Roma”**  
**173d Combat Support Company, Afghanistan, 04/2005**

April 1, 2005 marked a historical moment in the history of the 173d Combat Support Company. That year was the company's second year long deployment to the Middle East. In February 2005, the unit has participated in OIF I, and nine months later deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom VI. During OEF VI deployment, the company participated in numerous missions to include cave and cache destruction, route reconnaissance and clearance, training of Afghan National Army (ANA) Soldiers, in addition to conducting infantry patrol missions. The company's most notable accomplishments during OEF VI

were the community relations with the local population, and the construction of Qalat to Shinkay, road better known as “Operation Roma.”

Operation Roma was a very difficult road construction mission, and one of the largest projects that the 173d Airborne Brigade had undertaken. As a light airborne Engineer unit, we did not possess the equipment necessary for such a large scale road construction mission. Our unit’s training was tailored to conduct light air field repair work, smaller road upgrades, and road repair missions. However, based on prior experience gained from deployment to Iraq and knowing that Afghanistan didn’t have many roads, we included road construction as one of our top training objectives in preparation for this deployment.

Our first obstacle was to determine where the road was going to go. This task was very complicated since the only way through the area was to drive through dry river beds and over very rough terrain. As we conducted a reconnaissance of the area, we realized that the traveled time was over nine hours and only passable in a HMMWV. During the recon, our primary function was to locate a passable route that avoided the river beds and local farmers’ fields. This task required the assistance of the Qalat Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in order to negotiate with local land owners to establish the future road.

As we started to develop the plan, we needed to build a camp in order to have our engineer equipment strategically positioned in order to construct the road in a timely and efficient manner. On or about 10 June 2005, we departed Kandahar Air Field (KAF) and made the 177km trip to FOB Lagman. Due to the amount of material that was needed to construct FOB Wolverine, the company moved in two serials. Each serial consisted of eight HMMWV gun trucks, organic engineer equipment, and approximately 30 jingle trucks loaded with materials needed to construct the FOB. It took three weeks for the camp to be able to effectively support construction, but efforts to improve the camp never stopped.

Camp Wolverine was located approximately half way between FOB Lagman Qalat and the Dab Pass and was capable of sustaining all personnel and equipment for the duration of our mission. The camp eventually grew into a base of operations for an Infantry platoon, an Artillery section, one Afghan National Army (ANA) BN, direct support and third shop level maintenance assets, and the home of the 173d Combat Support Company, “Wolverines.”

As the company developed a very aggressive plan to complete the road, the Company Commander, CPT Young, and I led the company in all aspects of the road construction. In addition, we managed a budget of over \$1.7 million, over 30 pieces of US Army Engineer equipment, over 40 pieces of Afghan engineer equipment, over 150 local national construction operators and laborers, and the first ANA engineer battalion. The environment, in which the soldiers had to work in, placed a major strain on the equipment. During the summer months the temperature was in the high 90s to low 100s. This caused the ground to turn into a powder like material that got into everything. This in turn resulted in

increased maintenance requirements for the engineer equipment, weapons, and communication systems.

The plan called for three teams and was augmented by locally contracted operators, civilian laborers, and ANA engineer Soldiers. The teams were Clear and grub team, Sub-base team, and Emplacement of culverts team.

The first team was to clear and grub the proposed road. This team had the difficult task to train the ANA Soldiers on dozer operations. ANA Soldiers were trained in clear and grub operations and assisted in the construction of the road. Since a great portion of the road was going to follow the existing trails, the initial clearing was mainly widening the road. Our D5 dozers did an adequate job of clearing the road where the terrain was flat. When the terrain became increasingly rough and required large cut and fills, it was necessary to incorporate the D8 and D85s that the civilian contractors brought to the mission. In order to keep the road out of the river bed, it required that the road go through some extremely steep and rugged terrain. The civilian contractors were able to move large amounts of material in a short period of time. This allowed the clear and grub effort to stay out in front of the sub-base team.

The second team was the road sub-base. Construction practices and techniques for completing the sub-base portion of the road went through many changes. Originally, we started using organic equipment such as 950B bucket loaders, 5-ton dumps, D5 dozers, 130G graders and the Vive Roller. This configuration resulted in an average of 200-300 meters of sub-base being spread per day. To improve the work rate, we added civilian contractors and ANA Soldiers to the company's fleet of eleven 5-ton dump trucks. At its best, the company was able to spread over 1200 meters of sub-base a day. In addition to large equipment, the civilian contractors brought water distributors increasing the California Bearing Ratio (CBR), thus making the road much stronger.

The third task of construction was the emplacement of culverts. The culverts were the most difficult aspects of the project. The project required extensive use of culverts through-out the entire road. Part of the road ran roughly two kilometers from the base of a large mountain and crossed many drainage ditches and ravines that originated in the mountains. The road also crossed numerous irrigation ditches that local farmers used to irrigate their fields. Even with the company's widespread use of culverts there were still rivers that had to be crossed using low water crossings, and eventually bridges. Particular to our culvert emplacement was the use of local nationals and elements of ANA engineer Soldiers. In an effort to help put money back into the community and expedite the culvert effort, the 173d CSC hired 50 local nationals to help in the construction of headwalls. Between the ANA Soldiers and the local nationals the company effectively installed an average of six to eight culverts with headwalls and toe walls daily.

The Qalat to Shinkay road was a 48 kilometers stretching along the Suri district and through the infamous Dab Pass onto the town of Shinkay and eventually to the Pakistan border. Located in the Zabul Province, encompassing

the cities of Qalat and Shinkay, the pre-existing road consisted of dirt trails and river beds that were washed out and unusable after heavy rains or thaws in the spring. The 173D Combat Support Company transformed these barely passable trails into a six meter wide gravel road that is trafficable by all vehicles. The road is now a main supply route for large trucks and commercial vehicles as well as a high speed route between FOB Lagman and FOB Sweeney which in the previous year was impassable due to snow. Over the course of the road's 48 kilometers, two hundred culverts were placed and over 60,000 cubic meters of gravel lay. The road provides an efficient and reliable means of travel linking 18 villages in the dangerous Suri district that had never before been effectively linked to each other. This road also connects to the only national highway, Highway 1.

*Combat advisors are a critical element in the US effort to build the Afghan National Army and Afghan Security Forces. SGM T. Lawrence served as Operations Sergeant for Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 391. SGM Lawrence's story tells of an encounter between Afghan National Army forces and Anti-Coalition Militia forces on 20 July 2004.*

**SGM T. Lawrence**  
**“Combat Advisor”**  
**SFOD 391, Afghanistan, 10 June-24 November 2004**

As an Operations Sergeant in a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 391, my detachment served as “Combat Advisors” in Southern Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom from 10 June 2004 thru 24 November 2004. The detachment conducted unconventional warfare operations with the Afghanistan Security Forces (ASF) and elements of the Afghanistan National Army (ANA). Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 391, fought with and advised forces provided by the Governor of Oruzgan Province, executed multiple operations to kill, capture, deny, disrupt, and destroy Anti-Coalition Militia (ACM) and Taliban forces operating in southern Afghanistan. My influence on the detachment and the host nation forces were critical to the successful execution of every mission the detachment executed.

I led the detachment and advised the Afghanistan National Army on numerous patrols and missions. These patrols and missions consisted of traffic control points, presence patrols, mounted and dismounted reconnaissance, cordon and search, search and attack, as well as movement to contact. These operations resulted in the confiscation of numerous weapons, ammunition, and explosives, as well as the detainment of several suspected Taliban and Anti-Coalition Militia members.

During the pre-dawn hours on 20 July 2004, as a member of a combined United States and Afghanistan National Army dismounted patrol, we conducted a cordon and search of six suspected Anti-Coalition Militia compounds in a village

north of Kandahar. The patrol came under intense small arms and automatic weapon fire from a well prepared Anti-Coalition Militia force estimated to be at least forty personnel strong.

I maneuvered a support element through corn fields and canals up to the High Valuable Target Anti-Coalition Militia compound. In order to gain the best cover and concealment from the enemy force, the support element occupied a northern blocking position just meters from the main objective.

Within seconds of engaging the first Anti Coalition Militia, the support element came under fire from an Anti Coalition Militia element approximately 200 meters north of the main objective. While bullets ricocheted in all directions, a drainage ditch in which my element used for cover was consistently being fired at with small arms and automatic weapon fire. My support element simultaneously engaged the enemy while maintaining fire superiority on the Anti Coalition Militia to the north.

After neutralizing the immediate threat, the main effort cleared the objective. I then coordinated the link up of several Afghanistan National Army forces and United States Special Forces members to clear the two additional compounds 200 meters north of the main objective. Once the main objective and the surrounding area was cleared and secured the number of enemy forces captured and killed were 16.

As the detachment was nearing the end of this tour and redeploying back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina it was difficult to adjust to a normal way of life. It wasn't more then two months later when the Battalion CSM came up to me and stated, "SGM Lawrence, get your guys trained up because we've been ordered to go back over into the Central Command (CENTCOM) Area of Operation. Before deploying to Iraqi, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 391 went to Kenya to conduct a peacetime training mission with an Airborne Infantry unit.

*The improvised explosive device (IED) has proven a favored instrument in the last few years of rebel forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. MSG R. Abernathy tells of his experience with such a device in the remote region of Chamkani, Afghanistan while on a routine patrol.*

**MSG R. Abernathy**  
**“Reacting to an Improvised Explosive Device”**  
**Team Sergeant, 3<sup>rd</sup> SFG, June 2005-January 2006**

Another cold morning in the Afghan countryside and we again embark on the long return journey to our firebase after a few days of intense mounted patrols. The firebase, which is located 14km from the Pakistani border is the only home that we have known for several months. We actually looked forward to getting back home where we really only need to worry about the occasional rocket attack and not everything else that could go wrong while outside the wire. Our patrols

didn't extend much beyond a few days, because after a few days of staying on the edge our senses would reach overload. We are currently in an overloaded state and are desperately in need of a recharge. Therefore, with our pre-checks and briefings complete, we head out of our patrol base and jump onto the primary route back (the only route). After about fifteen minutes of travel...BOOM! The first US vehicle in the convoy (incidentally, my vehicle) was hit with an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Bottom line, we experienced no serious injuries and recovered all equipment to the firebase, but many things did change. We'll now experience the changes together.

In 2001, I was promoted and moved to Okinawa, Japan, and served as a Team Sergeant for SFODA 134, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Group. During this time (post 9/11), we stayed actively engaged in OPERATION Enduring Freedom–Philippines. After three years of service in Okinawa, Japan, I was ready to return to my Special Forces home, 3<sup>rd</sup> Special Forces Group. Luckily, the Team Sergeant position on SFODA 325 was open and I was slotted. I arrived October 2004, just after the team, and battalion, completed a successful rotation. My arrival was timed perfectly, because I was able to conduct many key training events with the SFODA. This training included a comprehensive rotation to the historic Fort William Henry Harrison in Helena, Montana. We were able to review all mounted and dismounted drills in an environment which closely replicated the Afghan terrain. Our detachment was ready to re-enter the fight and we did in the summer of 2005.

Chamkani is located in the Paktya Province of Afghanistan approximately 14 kilometers from the Pakistani border. The Pashtun tribes of the Chamkani, Kharouti and Mangal ethnically dominate the area. Chamkani lies in a valley within the Hindu Kush Mountain range, and is made up of several smaller villages of which the collective whole is known as Chamkani. Local Nationals of the area, when speaking of Chamkani, are usually referring to either the Chamkani tribe or the Chamkani Bazaar which is located approximately 200 meters outside the front gate of Chamkani Firebase.

The firebase is located approximately 200 meters north of the Chamkani Bazaar with various hills surrounding the camp in a horseshoe pattern. There are three main lines of communication (LOCs) into the Chamkani valley, one coming from the east leading to Patan District and Pakistan, one from the west leading to Gardez and eventually turning north to Jaji District, and one from the south leading to Jani Khel District and Khowst. There are several small mud dwellings and other two story buildings in the Chamkani Bazaar located outside of Chamkani Firebase. The whole of the valley consists of mainly the bazaar and small farms tended by the residents of the several small villages around Chamkani.

The local populace seems to be generally positive about the presence of US and coalition forces and the positive economic conditions that have resulted since the buildup of coalition forces on Chamkani Firebase. The tribal elders assure US forces in the Chamkani area that there aren't any members of al-Qaeda (AQ),



Taliban (TB), or Hezb-E-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) in their villages. However, we have received several reports that US personnel are under constant surveillance, observation and possible attack. The major threat to personnel in the Chamkani area continues to be al-Qaeda and HIG forces, including local tribal disputes. We expect rocket attacks originating from the southern valley, as well as, improvised explosive devices (IED), booby-trapped weapons caches, and ambushes along patrol routes. The base is ever vigilant to attacks, harassment activities, and intelligence collection by enemy forces either at the firebase or while out on combat patrols.

The months leading up to October (the month of the IED) were busy, both politically and operationally. During this time we have been working diligently on establishing rapport with the local leadership and population. This meant that we were on the streets nearly every day working our areas and speaking with the locals. Some of our areas, namely Ali Kheyli, were several hours away, which required us to plan patrols that lasted a few days in duration. With our surge into the area, we maintained a presence which limited enemy activity to a few harassing rocket attacks or the occasional IED. Due to our established rapport and information collection techniques, we usually received notification from the locals of an upcoming attack. This kept our detachment ahead of the enemy, which is always a better place to be. But things would soon change.

We planned and prepared to conduct a three-day patrol to the village of Ali Kheyli beginning on 30 September and ending on 2 October 2005. Little did we know at the time, but this patrol would change the lives of several people. We had several activities planned in conjunction with this patrol, but the main reason was to continue a US and Afghan Security Force (ASF) presence in the area. Patrol orders were published and approved and final preparations were conducted.

### **Patrol- Day One:**

The patrol started with no delays and we could now expect to be in our vehicles for the next five to six hours with only a few breaks. During our planned breaks, we would conduct a short vehicle check point and establish a security perimeter. At one check point I remember confiscating a pistol from a local that was riding a moped. We had rules established in the area that prohibited anyone from carrying any type of weapon. Each household was permitted to have one AK-47 per adult male, but they still weren't allowed to carry them. We continued our patrol and arrived in the early evening in time to set up a security perimeter and conduct meetings with the local officials.

### **Patrol- Day Two:**

After an uneventful night, the day started the same as many. Afghan Security Force Soldiers scrambling to get chow out to the troops, team members taking care of their priorities of work, and the leadership dealing with the local officials. We departed our patrol base early, because we had several activities which we

needed to conduct during daylight hours. After the long day, we would egress to the same patrol base we used the night prior. We reused this patrol base several times while conducting patrols in this area, because the threat was low and the terrain worked to our advantage. We never had any engagement with hostile forces while occupying this patrol base.

Upon return to the patrol base, we were approached by the gentleman that had his pistol confiscated. He claimed to be affiliated with the government and required the pistol for his protection. This was a common line that we would hear from locals in a similar situation. We informed him that the Government of Afghanistan required the confiscation of weapons (especially handguns) and he, working for the government, should know that. With a disappointed look, he departed our perimeter, but I had the feeling that we would see him again.

### **Patrol- Day Three:**

Another morning dawned and normal activities were taking place. We were planning to get out of the area early that morning, but a little vehicle trouble delayed our return to base. During our daily pre-combat inspections, truck one it was noticed that the serpentine belt was off the pulleys and wouldn't stay in place. Upon closer inspection, we noticed that a nut had vibrated off one of the mounting bolts and required replacement. We looked locally for a nut that could be used, but to no avail. Finally, we improvised and attached some wire to the end of the bolt and it looked as if it would hold. We may need to make more security halts to inspect the improvised bolt, but at least we would be mobile.

Meanwhile, the leadership was again speaking with the local officials and, as I expected, the man with the missing pistol was at our step again. But this time he was bringing some firepower. He was with Commander Dawood's son. Commander Dawood was a HIG commander during the Soviet occupation and still is held in high regard in this part of the country, his son now attempts to carry as much respect. They teamed with the local officials and asked again for the pistol. We, team leadership, discussed the implications again, but came to the same result. We would not return the pistol, but informed him to get authorization from the provisional government for an exception to current policy. Some think that this decision triggered the IED attack.

Back at the vehicles, systems were double checked and it looked as if we were ready to initiate our movement. However, due to the handicapped truck we decided to alter our normal traveling formation and put truck three, my truck, in the lead. With the changes made and the movement order briefed, we were ready to move.

Now that we were finally moving, things seemed to get back to a normal state. All communications were checked and double checked. We were using all of the available countermeasures as we always did on patrol and it looked as if it was going to be another routine patrol back to the firebase.

We moved downhill from our patrol base on a winding dirt road and, after

passing through a small bazaar, reached the rocky valley floor. This is a large valley area which holds a small river that was crossed as we continued through. The road now turned southward and followed the valley and river and would continue to do so until we had to cross the next mountain range. You may expect this area to be desolate, but this mountainous region contained many coniferous trees and underbrush. Consequently, this made the valley floor an extremely vulnerable place and gave every advantage to the enemy.

I was having a conversation with the driver covering our activities upon return. I was seated in the passenger seat and responsible for communications from vehicle. Our gunner was in his post manning an M-2 .50 cal machine gun. We also had one additional passenger in the rear cargo area manning an M-240G machine gun. This vehicle is not your standard M 1114 (hard-shell), but an open-ended M-1113. Luckily, we did receive the required upgrades which gave the vehicle some much needed protection. We were passing some snack food back and forth and then BOOM! We rocked around in the vehicle like some giant had picked the truck up and was using it to salt his food. Everyone was out of it for a minute or two and finally snapped out of it as we heard the guns from the rear trucks laying some rounds into the hillside. I called to each of the others to see if everyone was okay. Slowly (seemed as if it took forever), everyone answered and that confirmed that we all had made it through somehow. I announced to the rest of the team that we were shaken a bit, but seemed to be okay. Once recovered, we entered the fight, but it was a hopeless effort. We were wasting rounds into the hillside. We dismounted, covered and searched a few local dwellings and several bystanders, but no evidence to tie anyone to the attack.

After securing the area, many minutes traveled past as we went through the scene and tried to put things together, but we didn't want to spend too much more time in the area, so we prepped to move. After an aerial escort arrived and scanned the road ahead, we licked our wounds and headed out again. We were ready to re-engage and expected to hit some trouble on the road home, but the rest of the ride was thankfully uneventful. After several hours of rough mounted patrolling, we arrived at our pseudo safe haven, Chamkani Firebase.

Everyone that was anyone was using every available communications link to talk with us and request several after action reports. Our medic was doing a fine job of conducting detailed medical assessments of the personnel involved in the blast. We told and retold the events of the day over and over again to our other curious firebase occupants. We were still on edge; adrenaline still flowing through the bloodstream like busy commuters through Grand Central Station. It would be several hours more, if not days, before we were back at some stable level.

*The success of the US Army in Afghanistan is closely tied to the success of the Afghan National Army. Senior NCOs, like SGM M. Granado viewed the Afghan Army in late 2005. He saw an army without a strong NCO Corps. He knew that the success of the Afghan National Army would rely on the ability to create an Afghan noncommissioned officer who could lead and train Soldiers. Therefore, while serving as the Brigade Senior NCO Mentor he began work on creating the Afghan National Army Leadership Reaction and Training Course.*

**SGM M. Granado**  
**“Afghan National Army Leadership Reaction and Training Course”**  
**December 2005**

The Leadership Reaction and Training Course (LRTC) critical thinking and team building methodology has found its way into the Afghanistan Ministry of Defense’s Strategic Training Command due to the diligence and focused persistence of the United States Noncommissioned Officers Corps. The predominant leadership factor that was hindering the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) and its ability to successfully foster and maintain a qualified fighting force was the substandard utilization and respect for the ANA NCO.

The ANA unit we were to train was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kandak, 1<sup>st</sup> BDE (a Kandak is equivalent to a Battalion) of the newly formed 209<sup>th</sup> CORPS whose mission and responsibility was to patrol and protect the entire northern region of Afghanistan. This Kandak was to be the first ANA Infantry unit to occupy the northern quadrant of Afghanistan. There were no other friendly units in the region other than Secret Special Operation Forces and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) that were commanded by the British Army.

After several unsuccessful attempts to train ANA NCOs, the idea of a Leadership Reaction and Training Course began to evolve. The actual course ideas and layouts were not new. Our initial internet research led us to Fort Sill’s and Camp Atterbury’s Leadership Reaction Courses (LRC) POI which is very comprehensive. However, we did not have the higher level of training or financial support, specified time or money and people power to build an LRC at this location at the time. In addition, the inherent bureaucracy that usually comes along with any good idea like this was also an annoyance. So we built it ourselves.

The original course layout was a combination of old Leadership Reaction Course originals designed to promote teamwork and physical fitness along with the “critical thinking” aspects to identify leaders amongst the Soldiers. We coupled this with the civilian “ROPES”, a combination of team building and “high wire” elements for confidence. This was great in theory, except that majority of our ANA Soldiers did not see themselves as leaders, and neither did their commanders, so we created scenarios that came right from their own experiences and country. We took into account their terrain and culture and created a few scenarios that might actually happen if they were at home in their own village or rural town without

anyone else available. We also used the controversial adages and commentary such as, “if your child or wife were going to die if you did not do something--what would you do?” We also identified a representative team of prospective future ANA “LRTC Fitness Trainers” (later to be identified as a Tactical Fitness Instructor or “TAC SGT”) to help us build, layout, and govern the new LRTC from dirt to final product.

The grand opening allowed for the ANA NCOs to show their ability to lead, demonstrate and conduct the training for all ANA and US commanders and senior NCOs of the 209<sup>th</sup> CORPS. This concept was new to the ANA commanders and there had been many ANA officer obstacles inherent to the process leading up to the opening ceremony. At times the US forces had problems supporting the follow through aspect of ensuring their identified ANA TAC SGTs were not put on a duty roster and or some extraneous detail as well.

The use of a hand built wooden scale model greatly enhanced the “visual aspect” of the discussion this concept was then used for the instructional squad level briefings on the course too. Finally, the ANA 209<sup>th</sup> CORPS Commander gave full support to the project and graciously accepted the invitation to the “Grand Opening” and “Dedication Ceremony”. This ceremony was a myriad of pomp and circumstance and live demonstrations by the ANA NCOs at their best. The ANA TAC SGTs had worked with the Special Forces Group that was working in our compound. That added the needed emphasis of validity and he directed that all ANA training officers, Kandak and Brigade level senior staff, 1SGs and CSMs be at the opening ceremony.

The ceremony was a live ANA NCO demonstration of the entire LRTC training process for Platoon-Squad level units. The process of course rationale briefing, course overview and safety, course equipment care and leadership, self-confidence, initiative, and team building concepts came alive for everyone. More importantly, the entire program was completely run by the ANA TAC SGTs with only minimal US support. The ceremony was so successful that it is now officially sanctioned by the MOD and has been briefed at several country Commanders’ sessions.

It was at this time that some key US senior NCOs were asked if they would take on higher responsibility and promote this LRTC concept throughout the Combined Joint Task Force of Afghanistan (CJTF-A). This personnel move was accomplished and the LRTC concept took on a country wide training perspective. The Garrison level US Navy “Seabees” assisted with their expertise in the building of an even more comprehensive course in the capital Kabul. This LRTC was built at Darulaman Garrison of the 201<sup>st</sup> CORPS. This was in conjunction the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC) and the British who trained the ANA officers along with the French who trained the NCO CORPS at this training facility. This site was ideal for this type of training, as all newly trained Kandaks leaving “Basic Training” go to this Garrison for two to eight

weeks awaiting command structure and move out orders. Hence, another doctrinally sound training facility to support the tenets of leadership and team building before the ANA units go into combat.

*“After all that has just passed -- all the lives taken, and all the possibilities and hopes that died with them -- it is natural to wonder if America’s future is one of fear. Some speak of an age of terror. I know there are struggles ahead, and dangers to face. But this country will define our times, not be defined by them. As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror; this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world. Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -- the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time -- now depends on us. Our nation -- this generation -- will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail.”*

President George W. Bush, in an address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People at the U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., Sept. 20, 2001

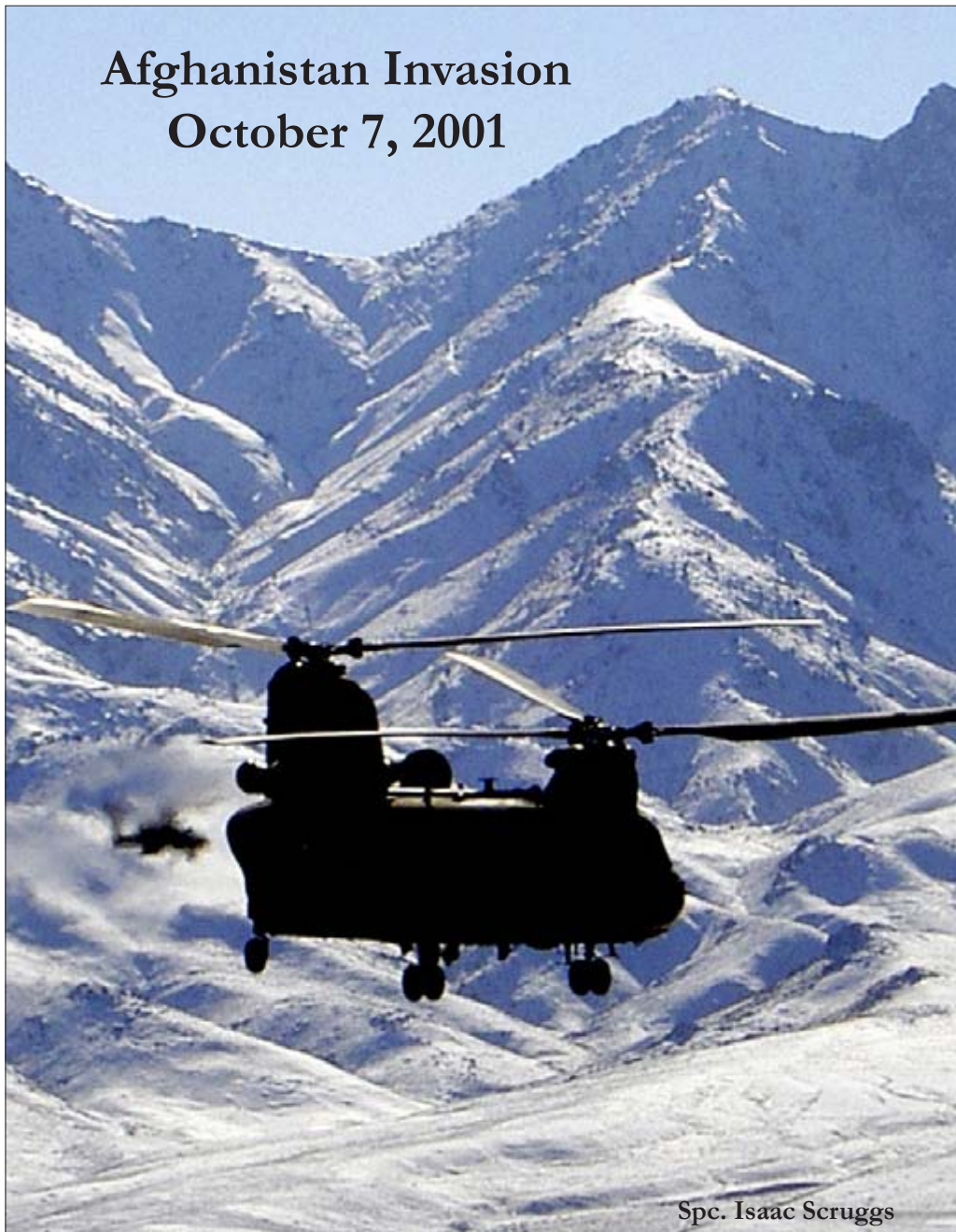
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*“We will not judge fellow Americans by appearance, ethnic background, or religious faith. We will defend the values of our country, and we will live by them. We will persevere in this struggle, no matter how long it takes to prevail. Above all, we will live in a spirit of courage and optimism. Our nation was born in that spirit, as immigrants yearning for freedom courageously risked their lives in search of greater opportunity. That spirit of optimism and courage still beckons people across the world who want to come here. And that spirit of optimism and courage must guide those of us fortunate enough to live here. Courage and optimism led the passengers on Flight 93 to rush their murderers to save lives on the ground. Led by a young man whose last known words were the Lord’s Prayer and “Let’s roll.” He didn’t know he had signed on for heroism when he boarded the plane that day. Some of our greatest moments have been acts of courage for which no one could have ever prepared. We will always remember the words of that brave man, expressing the spirit of a great country. We will never forget all we have lost, and all we are fighting for. Ours is the cause of freedom. We’ve defeated freedom’s enemies before, and we will defeat them again. We cannot know every turn this battle will take. Yet we know our cause is just and our ultimate victory is assured. We will, no doubt, face new challenges. But we have our marching orders: My fellow Americans, let’s roll.”*

President George W. Bush, in Address to the Nation, World Congress Center, Atlanta Nov. 8, 2001.

# Afghanistan Invasion

## October 7, 2001



Spc. Isaac Scruggs

A CH-47 Chinook helicopter flies through a mountain range in Afghanistan, carrying cargo and personnel to a Coalition facility. Chinooks, dubbed the workhorses of Army Aviation, proved their worth in Afghanistan often performing tasks meant for Blackhawks, which were ineffective at higher elevations.





by Sgt. 1st Class Larry E. Johns  
September 3, 2003

Sgt. 1st Class Michael O. Perkins examines the eyes of a elder male from the Kuchi Tribe near Gardez, Afghanistan. Perkins, a medical specialist assigned to the 3rd Special Forces Group, provides medical care to Afghan tribesmen in support of the Combined Joint Civil Military Task Force.



by Cpl. Jason Prescott, December 12, 2001

Three memorial displays stand in for Master Sgt. Jefferson D. Davis, Sgt. 1st Class Daniel H. Petithory, both of ODA-574, Co. A, 3rd Bn., 5th SFG (Abn.) and Staff Sgt. Brain C. Prosser MI Det. 2nd Bn., 5th SFG (Abn.) during their memorial service Dec. 10, at Fort Campbell, Ky. The three Soldiers died during a bombing accident in Kandahar, Afghanistan Dec. 4.



Staff Sgt. Kyle Davis

**September 9, 2003**

Staff Sgt. William Rothrock, left, and Sgt. Jon Soammer discuss an upcoming mission in Daychopan Province, Afghanistan. Rothrock is a squad leader and Sommer was a team leader in the 10th Mountain Division's Company A, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment. The soldiers searched for Taliban fighters and weapons caches.



Pfc. Hugo A. Baray-Vasquez



by Sgt. Drew Lockwood  
January 23, 2004

The sun rises behind a Soldier who scans the perimeter of Firebase Gereshk, Afghanistan. From his position on the observation tower he can see deep into the open desert beyond the walls of this remote encampment.



by Sgt. Andre Reynolds, May 24, 2004 | Sgt. Michelle Naylor, center, medicates a goat in the village of Kasani, Afghanistan, while Sgt. Jonathan Morehouse and a villager help keep order among the flock. The Soldiers were conducting a Coalition Medical Assistance mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.



by DoD

**July 7, 2004** | Special Forces Soldiers and a Marine Corps contingent maintain security as a medical evacuation helicopter lands to evacuate wounded Coalition personnel after a combat action south of Camp Blessing, Afghanistan. The Army is working with other services to defeat terrorism in Afghanistan.

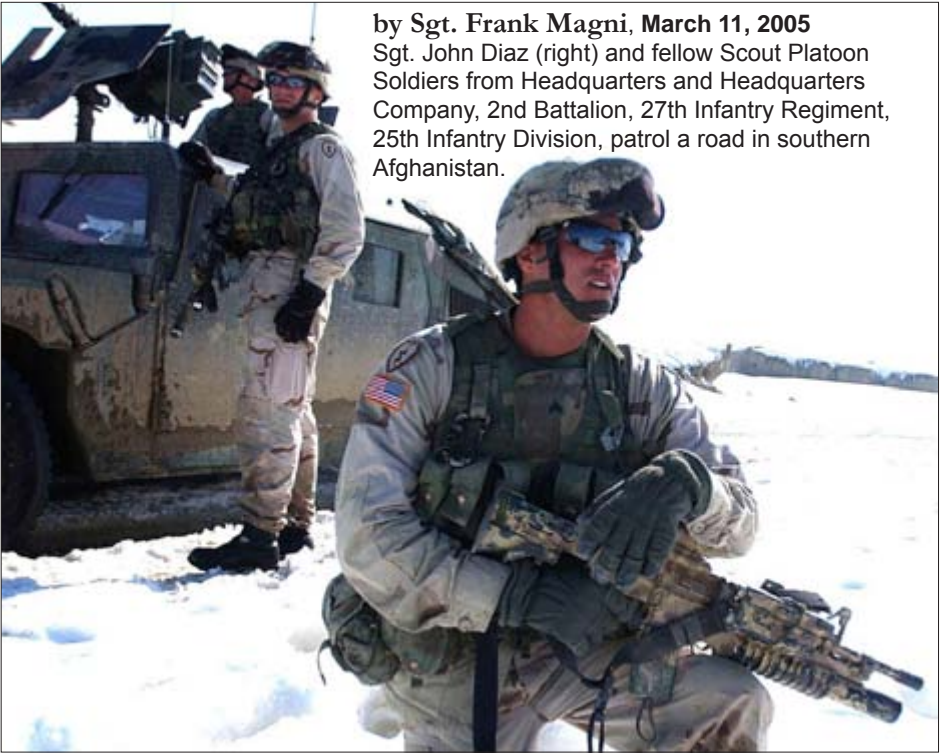
**April 15, 2004**

Soldiers operate a de-mining vehicle, known as a "flailer," to search for land mines and unexploded ordnance in an uninhabited area of Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan.



Sgt. 1st Class Sandra Watkins-Keough

by Sgt. Frank Magni, March 11, 2005  
Sgt. John Diaz (right) and fellow Scout Platoon Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, patrol a road in southern Afghanistan.



by Spc. Jerry T. Combes  
September 20, 2004  
Soldiers of the 37th Field  
Artillery, 2nd Infantry Division  
fire an M119 howitzer.





Pfc. Vincent Fusco

**July 5, 2005**

Soldiers from 173rd Combat Support Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, improve an 84-kilometer road from Forward Operating Base Sweeny to FOB Laghman, Afghanistan.



by Master Sgt. Lisa Gregory, July 1, 2005 | Staff Sgt. Vernell Hall, 55th Signal Company, interviews Maj. Christine Nichols from the Parwan Provincial Reconstruction Team, Bagram Air Base, on providing apprehension and crowd-control training to Afghan policewomen in Kabul, Afghanistan.



by Sgt. Tara Teel  
July 7, 2005

Soldiers in Afghanistan practice mountain-warfare skills with the aid of instructors from the Vermont-based Army Mountain Warfare School.



by Staff Sgt. Larry Garner  
July 26, 2005

A Soldier from the 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, searches for a weapons cache in a well near Qalat, Afghanistan.



by Staff Sgt. Joseph Collins Jr  
**August 5, 2005**

Soldiers from Company B, 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, clamber up a ravine in southeastern Afghanistan, in search of insurgents and weapons caches.



by Pfc. Mike Pryor  
**August 19, 2005**

Afghan National Army soldiers question a detainee while a paratrooper from 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, provides security from his Humvee during a search of a town in Dila, Afghanistan, as part of Operation Neptune Aug. 9.





by SrA Brian Ferguson, **September 1, 2006** | Soldiers load a casualty aboard a UH-60 air ambulance during a medevac mission near Qalat.



by Spc. Joshua Balog, **October 5, 2005** | A Soldier from Task Force Sabre performs rear security aboard a CH-47 Chinook helicopter near Kabul, Afghanistan.



by Staff Sgt. Michael L. Casteel, February 09, 2007 | Soldiers with the 10th Mountain Division's 14th Combat Support Hospital distribute clothing and other items to Afghan villagers at a staging area near Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, during a medical civil action program Jan. 15.

# Iraq Invasion



**April 2, 2003** | A pair of M2-A2 Bradley fighting vehicles secures an area south of the Karbala Gap in Iraq. Elements of the 3rd Infantry Division (Mech.) moved through the area between Karbala and Lake Al-Razzazzah as U.S. forces continued the push toward Baghdad.



Pfc. Matthew Acosta

**March 18, 2003**  
Sgt. Dunel Hagelin, Company D, 1/325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, critiques his Soldiers as they exit from a building during urban warfare training at the Udairi range in northern Kuwait.

**March 24, 2003** | Soldiers from the 3rd Infantry Division sit in firing positions during an enemy approach on their position at Objective RAMA, in Southern Iraq.



# March 20, 2003



**March 23, 2003** | Soldiers of 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (AAst), mourn the loss of Capt. Christopher Seifert at a Camp Pennsylvania memorial ceremony. Seifert and Air Force Maj. Gregory Stone were killed when Hasan Akbar threw grenades into their sleep tent early Sunday morning. The attack also left 14 other Soldiers wounded. Akbar was later convicted and sentenced to death for the act.



**March 2003**

Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, (AAslt), Fort Campbell, Ky., stand in a bunker in Kuwait, after hearing a Scud missile siren in the afternoon.

**Photos by Pfc. Joshua Hutcheson**

**April 14, 2003**

Pfc. Robert Wiltshire walks along a section of road littered with golf ball-sized bombs in the city of An Najaf.





by Spc. Jason Baker, May 2, 2003 | Battery B, 2nd Bn., 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, convoy north along Highway 8 in Iraq. The artillerymen position to support the 82nd's 2nd Brigade Combat Team during its operations to secure the main supply route leading to Baghdad.



by Spc. Dan Wiltshire, April 20, 2003 | Col. Curtis D. Potts, commander, 4th Brigade, salutes Maj. Gen. Muhammed Thumayla following the general's surrender to coalition forces.



by Sgt. Curtis G. Hargrave, July 22, 2003 | Soldiers from 101st Airborne Division (AAslt) look on as a Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided (TOW) missile strikes the side of a building where Uday and Qusay Hussein, sons of Saddam Hussein, barricaded themselves inside and refused to surrender. The two were later found dead among the rubble.



by SSgt. James A. Williams

**September 10, 2003**

A combat engineer assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade stacks Iraqi artillery shells slated for destruction at an area north of Kirkuk Air Base, Iraq. Paratroopers of the 173rd work with the Air Force to destroy the munitions. More than one million pounds of ordnance have been destroyed since the beginning of the war.



**by Spc. Chad D. Wilkerson  
December 3, 2003**

A welder works on new modified protection plates for un-armored Humvees in Iraq in preparation for changes in enemy tactics in Iraq. Anti-Iraqi forces and insurgents began developing and employing improvised explosive devices against coalition forces.





by Pfc. Chris Jones, January 14, 2004 | Maj. Gen. David H. Petraeus cuts a ceremonial ribbon to mark the grand opening of the Al Hasoodia School in Kanash, Iraq. The rebuilding of the school, a nearly \$10,000 Coalition project, began after the division conducted an air assault near the town in November. Petraeus was commander of the 101st Airborne Division at the time.



by Spc. Sean Kimmons

March 23, 2004  
First Sgt. Fidelito Ordonio helps guard the Sahilia Elementary School in Iraq during the school's dedication ceremony. Ordonio is assigned to the 25th Infantry Division's Company A, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment. Elements of the division are deployed to Iraq.



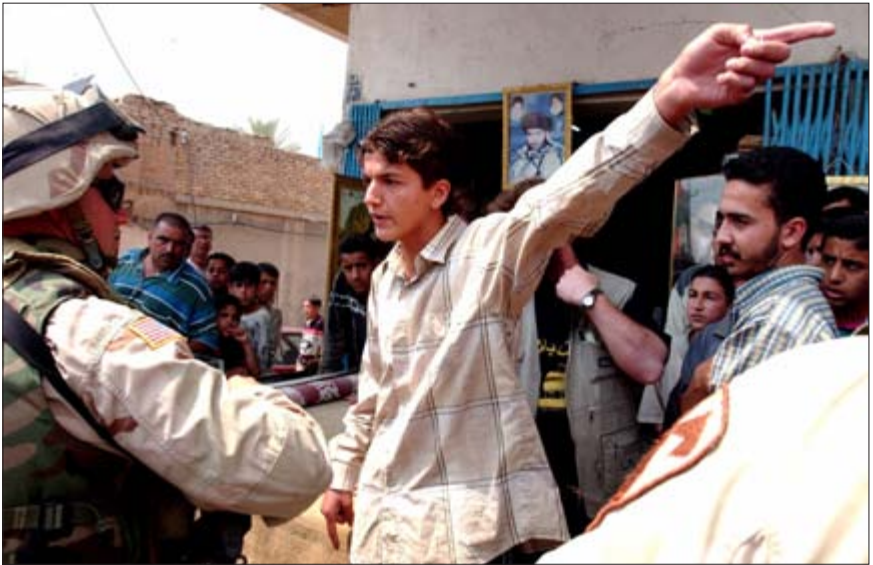
by Department of Defense  
**May 26, 2004**

Soldiers, Coalition allies and Iraqi personnel secure and survey the scene of a car bombing in which both occupants died in the vehicle. The explosion occurred approximately 500 meters from one of the entrances to the Coalition Provisional Authority during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

by SPC Clinton Tarzia



**February 17, 2004** | Sgt. 1st Class Todd Oliver paints over anti-Coalition graffiti in Kirkuk, Iraq. Oliver is assigned to the 173rd Airborne Division's Public Affairs Office. Obscuring the graffiti contributed to area stability.



by Spc. Jan Critchfield, **April 21, 2004** | 1st Lt. Brian Schonfeld, from the 91st Engineer Battalion, is confronted with resistance when he attempts to persuade a shop owner to remove framed images of anti-coalition leader Muqtada al-Sadr from his shop.



by Sgt. Dan Purcell, September 23, 2004 | Soldiers, local sheiks and Iraqi media members crowd together during a recent detainee release program held at Camp Hawk, home of the 303rd Iraqi National Guard Battalion. The 91st Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division prisoners provided security measures that facilitated the orderly release of the former prisoners.



by Spc. J. H. French, January 7, 2005  
Staff Sgt. Scott Logan, 82nd Military Police Company, 82nd Airborne Division, gives a small Iraqi girl pop tarts while on patrol in Ar Ramadi, Iraq.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Katrina Beeler

**May 5, 2006** | A Soldier from the 988th Military Police Company shows an Iraqi police officer the correct way to hold his weapon during training at Forward Operating Base Kalsu.

**July 1, 2005** | Staff Sgt. John Imperato, a team chief from 411th Civil Affairs Battalion (center), speaks with an Iraqi businessman (right) through an interpreter during a recent patrol through Tikrit's marketplace. They made contact with members of Tikrit's business community in order to help establish a chamber of commerce and study the effects of Iraq's successful first elections on business.



Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta



by Tech. Sgt. Andy Dunaway, November 28, 2005 | Staff Sgt. Jason Lyday demonstrates to Iraqi trainees how to handle the AK-47 rifle during a close-combat course at Forward Operations Base McHenry.

**July 20, 2006**

U.S. Army Sgt. Todd Swank plays his French Horn during a warm up session before the arrival of VIPs and guests to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Courage in Mosul, Iraq, for the turnover ceremony. The ceremony returned FOB Courage back to Iraqi possession.



Tech. Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock



1st Sgt. Stephanie Hika

*“It may take a long time, but no matter how long it takes, those who killed thousands of Americans and citizens from over 80 other nations will be brought to justice, and the misuse of Afghanistan as a training ground for terror will end. As I’ve said from the start, this is a difficult struggle, of uncertain duration. We hunt an enemy that hides in shadows and caves. We are at the beginning of our efforts in Afghanistan. And Afghanistan is the beginning of our efforts in the world. No group or nation should mistake America’s intentions: We will not rest until terrorist groups of global reach have been found, have been stopped, and have been defeated. And this goal will not be achieved until all the world’s nations stop harboring and supporting such terrorists within their borders.”*

President George W. Bush, to the Warsaw Conference on Combating Terrorism, Nov. 6, 2001



# IRAQ TIMELINE

1932 - Iraq becomes independent

1958 - Monarchy overthrown

1963 - Baath Party takes over in coup

1979 -

Saddam Hussein takes power

Dawah Party attempts assassination of Tariq Aziz

4 Sep-Iran-Iraq War begins

16 March 1981-Chemical attack on Kurds

20 August 1988-Iran-Iraq War ceasefire

2 August 1990-Iraq invades Kuwait

1991 -

16-17 January-Beginning of Operation Desert Storm

24 February-Coalition begins ground operations

3 March-Ceasefire

2003 -

20 March-American missiles hit Baghdad

9 April-US forces enter central Baghdad

July-US appointed Council General meets for first time

July-Insurgency begins

2004 -

March-Suicide bombers attack Shia festival

April-May US forces fight Sadr militia

June-Interim government established

August-US forces engage Sadr militia

2005 -

30 January-Iraqi elections for Interim National Assembly

15 December-Iraqi national elections, Shia, United Iraq Alliance take majority

2006 -

22 April-Jawad al-Maliki forms government

May-June-Rise in religious violence

30 December-Hanging of Saddam Hussein



## STORIES FROM IRAQ

Iraq has been called many different names in its history: Sumer, Babylon, Mesopotamia, to name a few. Two of its cities are among the holiest sites of Shiite Islam; these are An Najaf where Ali, son-in-law to Mohammed and the first convert to Islam, is buried and Karbala where Ali's son, Husayn bin Ali, was killed in battle and buried. From 762 to 1258, during the reign of the Abbasid dynasty and the Caliph of Baghdad, Iraq served as the center of the Islamic world. In Abbasid courts, Arab and Persian cultures mixed, and Baghdad became the intellectual leader of studies in science, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy. In 1258, the Mongol leader Hulagu Khan sacked the city with such ferocity that it never recovered its former greatness. After the Mongols, the Ottoman Turks and then the British ruled Iraq. Finally, in 1932, Iraq became an independent kingdom.

In 1958, the monarchy was replaced by a republic which featured military strongmen as its rulers. This continued until 1968 when the Arab Socialist Baath Party took power. The Baathist believed in a secular state which combined Arab

socialism, nationalism, and Pan-Arabism. In 1979, Saddam Hussein took control of the Baathist Party and Iraq.

In the same year, Iran became an Islamic republic, openly despising and challenging the secular states of the region--specifically Iraq. Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's fanatical fundamentalist religious leader, sought to spread the Islamic Revolution throughout the entire region, especially to Shiite communities in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. The Iranian challenge was answered on 22 September 1980, when Iraq launched an invasion of Iran. Iran relied heavily on waves of volunteers to force back the Iraqi forces. When it seemed Iran's human waves might succeed, Iraq responded with the use of chemical weapons on both military and civilian targets against the Iranians and their own rebellious Kurdish population. The brutal war, in which Iraq lost over 375,000 men and Iran, over 500,000, continued until 20 August 1988, when both sides agreed to a ceasefire.

Saddam Hussein did not last long as a peaceful dictator. Within two years, Iraqi troops marched into Kuwait and started the Gulf War. The United States built a coalition of nations and responded first with a devastating air campaign followed by a stunning 100-hour ground campaign that crushed any element of the Iraqi army that could not retreat fast enough.

Saddam Hussein found himself forced into a ceasefire. In the Kurdish north and Shiite south uprising followed the ceasefire. Saddam dealt ruthlessly with the Shiite insurgents in the south; however, he was forced to stop short in the north where the Kurds gained considerable autonomy, creating a near country within a country. In what became an endless game of brinkmanship, Saddam pushed the US and its allies to the brink of war on numerous occasions. The primary issue centered on weapons of mass destruction--nuclear, biological, and chemical. The United States was determined that Iraq would not possess these agents of war. Fearing his enemies would find him helpless without such weapons, Saddam proved elusive and evasive in the face of United Nations inspections.

Finally, on 20 March 2004, the brinkmanship ended in the US-led invasion of Iraq. Iraqi troops, ill prepared and equipped, fared no better than in the previous Gulf War. In a three pronged attack, the US 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division swung westward and headed for Baghdad, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division moved through the center of the country, and the 1<sup>st</sup> (UK) Armored Division moved north through the eastern marshland. American and Coalition military power, technology, and leadership proved decisive on the battlefield; within twenty-one days, the results from this powerful combination crushed the Iraqi Army.



3rd Infantry Division in defensive firing positions, Southern Iraq, 24 March 2003.

## “FIGHTING THE IRAQI ARMY”

*1SG J. Bradshaw did his best to prepare his Company for the war against Iraq hovering on the horizon. In the initial invasion, his troops found themselves in three major ground attacks in the cities of An Najaf, Karbala, and Baghdad. During this time, his Company fought for 28 days and traveled more than 1,200 kilometers before flying to Mosul. In Mosul, they stayed for nearly a year, changing their tactics from combat to stability and support operations. They found themselves on the streets of Mosul in the role of police, chasing down looters, criminals, and any resistance leftover from Iraq’s disbanded Army.*

### **1SG J. Bradshaw Invasion of Iraq 1/502<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regt., 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne 2003**

As I sat in a room full of first sergeants in early June 2002, Major General R. Cody, Commander, 101<sup>st</sup> ABN DIV briefed us on his expectations of us as first sergeants. As he continued with his speech, he said, “You will be taking your new companies into combat” and repeated those remarks several times throughout the rest of his briefing. Sitting there reflecting on what the general had said, I wondered when that date would be. Assuming the first sergeant position of B CO, 1/502<sup>nd</sup> INF REGT was an honor knowing that it was my responsibility to

get my men ready for combat. Over the next nine months, the company trained, conducted live fires, and honed our skills as infantrymen.

### **Pre-deployment**

Second Brigade Combat Team (BCT) received orders in early December 2002 for deployment to Iraq. The next two months were spent packing milvans, con-exes, and preparing all the unit's vehicles for rail delivery to the docks in Florida. We also received a large amount of new equipment, such as desert camouflage uniforms, body armor, new weapon magazines, 24 brand new M249 squad automatic weapons, ballistic goggles, and other miscellaneous equipment.

During those last couple of months, the commander and I worked diligently preparing the unit for combat. We focused a lot on preparing our families, not knowing how long we would be gone or what laid ahead for us in Iraq. This put an enormous amount of strain on the families. We primed our family readiness group (FRG) through many meetings, making contact rosters, setting up check writing classes for the younger wives, daycare, and anything else that would add comfort to the families.

Updating and managing personal data for the unit and all the requests for information by higher headquarters, although necessary, was a big challenge. It seemed at the time that we were sending up the same information to the battalion on a daily basis. Having all the new electronic technology that we have today, I suggested to the battalion command sergeant major that all first sergeants along with S-1 get personal data assistants – small, portable computers ideal for managing tasks and contacts, better known as PDAs. The command sergeant major took me up on the idea. With the new technology, we were able to “hot sink” our PDAs with each other, thus eliminating the need for passing hardcopy information back and forth with the risk of losing it. I had the entire company's information encrypted and set up on the PDA, and I carried it under my body armor to protect it. My platoon sergeants knew exactly where I kept it at all times in case I was wounded or killed in action. If that should be the case, then my senior platoon sergeant could step into my position and have the entire company's information on hand; and they would never miss a beat.

On 3 Mar 2003, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team took off from Campbell Army Airfield enroute to Kuwait. Eighteen hours later, my Soldiers became a part of the world they had only seen on television.

### **The Invasion**

After staging at Camp New York in Kuwait, we flew by UH-60 helicopters across the border 26 March to an area just outside of An Najaf, Iraq. On the afternoon of 1 April, we loaded our trucks for the initial move to the outskirts of the city into an area we called OP1. Shortly after getting off the trucks, we began receiving small arms fire from the outskirts of the city; my young Soldiers looked

bewildered and confused. After issuing initial orders to the men, I watched my “boys” lose their innocence and during the next few minutes, watched them go from young men to fighting warriors and ultimately to our next generation of heroes. I knew all the hard relentless training I had put them through was just beginning to pay off.

The next day, 2<sup>nd</sup> BCT, with B Company chosen as the main effort, initiated the largest ground attack since the Vietnam War almost 30 years prior into the town of An Najaf. We initiated a two-battalion frontal attack with a battalion in reserve as we crossed the line of departure at 1 p.m. The sun beat 98 degrees of relentless heat down on us as we wore MOPP level 1 gear. The intelligence we had received from the battalion S-2 was clear: “There is a 600-man stronghold in the town.”

Crossing the 1,000-meter open area just to get to the edge of the city is something that I will never forget. OH-58s and Apache helicopters flew overhead along with Bradley fighting vehicles and M1 Abrams tanks in support. The artillery fired rounds to cover our assault route. What an incredible site to see!

The Company lost five Soldiers crossing the open area; not to hostile fire but to heat exhaustion. This is where my PDA came into play. Without pulling out a big book notorious by most leaders, I simply turned on the PDA and all the information that the medics needed was readily available.

As we made our way through the initial sections of town, we encountered light resistance. What was surprising was many of the enemy forces were not fighting us, but rather going after the Bradleys and Abrams. Clearing only half of our objectives by 5 p.m., we received word to get to the southern edge of town by nightfall. The commander put the company in hasty defensive positions and picked the quickest route out of town. We again linked the three platoons up and after conducting accountability, moved out on the route picked for our departure. With only two hours left of daylight remaining in the day, we conducted a hasty road march out of town, moving three kilometers in under an hour. The men were tired and on the verge of dehydration at this point, so we set up a perimeter, intermixing Bradleys and Abrams tanks among us. As night fell on that first night in An Najaf, the men remained steadfast, ready for any attack that may come their way. Fighting in An Najaf lasted two days before the battalion finally loaded up on flat bed trailers and headed out: next stop – Karbala.

Over the next 22 days, we fought our way north through Iraq, traveling by trucks, helicopters, buses and C-130 airplanes. After receiving orders from division, 2<sup>nd</sup> BCT then packed up and flew to Mosul on 26 April.

Upon landing in Mosul, we relieved a Marine detachment in place and promptly moved into the heart of the city where we could see the signs of heavy fighting that had taken place during the previous few weeks. Over the next couple of weeks, my company saturated its newly assigned area of operation, intent on bringing order to the chaos.

## **New Mission**

On 1 May, President George W. Bush declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq. Our new challenge was to switch from a combat role into a stability-and-support-operations role – a huge challenge. The biggest reason for this was that the rules of engagement had changed. Training our young Soldiers to accept this was a daunting task since, in their eyes, nothing had changed. The platoon sergeants and squad leaders understood their Soldiers' frustrations with the new ROE and knew what they had to do, what every noncommissioned officer has to do – lead by example. This dynamic show of leadership and poise gave the Soldiers the confidence to succeed in their new roles.

We spent from June to September getting to know local religious leaders – known as Imams – in the area, as well as shop and hotel owners, in order to develop a core number of local informants from which we could gather human intelligence. This also allowed us to maintain a somewhat peaceful environment where people could live their lives peacefully as they grew to trust us. Although resistance was generally light during this time with only a few direct fire contacts occurring, an angry mob targeted me once with hand grenades during a riot. My sleeping quarters at the time were on the corner of the building where we stayed. Insurgents fired two RPG-7s right into the room, destroying practically everything and injuring four Soldiers in the attack.

In early September, we started experiencing an increase in improvised explosive devices along our major routes throughout the city. With this new threat, we started shifting our focus from stability operations to counter-terrorism operations. These operations continued throughout the remainder of our time in Iraq.

## **Dark Day**

November 23, 2003, will forever be a dark day for those of us serving with the Company and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade at that time. At 2 p.m., I received a call that two American Soldiers were lying dead in the street in my area of responsibility. Racing to the area, I could see my Soldier and our brigade command sergeant major lying beside their vehicle. They were covered in blood and were not moving. While pulling security around the area, my Soldiers kept looking at their friend and the command sergeant major. As I examined their bodies, I could see they had been killed with rocks; their bodies mutilated. Their weapons, body armor, and sensitive items were all missing. I picked up my Soldier and our command sergeant major, whom I considered my close friend and mentor, off the ground and put them in body bags, knowing this would be the last time I would ever get to see them. During the next three days, our company swarmed the AOR in search of their killers. After receiving a tip from an informant, we mounted a company-sized raid and captured the men responsible for their deaths.

From December 2003 through February 2004, we focused intensely on hunting down insurgents who attempted to infiltrate the area. Our company, along

with Department of Defense personnel, vigorously hunted these people down. We conducted two to three raids a week while maintaining daily local patrols throughout the AOR, force protection measures and other duties. Our operational tempo during this time, while necessary, was unbelievable.

I contribute our company's success to several things. First, our squad leaders and platoon sergeants led by example throughout the deployment. Secondly, we maintained a vigilance and steadfast belief that we were making a difference in people's lives. Last, we submerged ourselves into the Iraqi communities rather than sitting behind the walls of one of the many huge base camps that you see in Iraq today. We were capable of knowing the fine details of every road and back ally in our area of responsibility because we lived among these people on a daily basis. Developing friendships while compiling knowledge from our local informants, we were able to maintain a stable environment and growing economy for the citizens of Mosul that became the model for other cities around Iraq.

Starting in early January 2004, we conducted a battle handover of Mosul with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division's new Stryker Brigade unit and by 4 February, the Company redeployed back to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The privilege to take those men into combat is one of the highlights of my life, bar none.

*As Coalition forces struck at Iraq from the south, Special Forces units linked-up with the forces from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in northern Iraq to create a Northern Front. Together they launched Operation Viking Hammer to destroy—not the Iraqi Army—but the Ansar al-Islam organization which controlled about a dozen villages close to the Iranian border. Ansar al-Islam was a terrorist organization which believed in a fundamentalist, radical interpretation of Islam and used suicide bombers in its fight against the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. SGM K. Cleveland and the men of Operational Detachment 091 played a key role in driving Ansar al-Islam from northern Iraq.*

**SGM K. Cleveland**  
**Operation VIKING HAMMER**  
**ODA 091, Operations Sergeant, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 10<sup>th</sup> SFG (Airborne),**  
**03/28 & 29/03**

A Special Forces Groups consist of three Battalions, with three companies each. A Major and a Sergeant Major command the company, known as SF-ODB or B-Teams. An Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) consisted of 12 men; the team leader (Captain), the XO (Warrant Officer), the team Sergeant (E-8), an intelligence NCO (E-7) and two each of the following Special Forces specialties; Weapons NCO, Engineer NCO, Medical NCO, Communications NCO.

Any enlisted Soldier in Special Forces wants to be an ODA Team Sergeant. I was lucky enough to have that honor for almost 6 years. I was the Team Sergeant



for ODA 091 and we were the “GO-team”. In other words, if there was a mission that you wanted done right, you wanted ODA 091 to do it.

In 2002, we knew that the United States was going to war with Iraq; the question was exactly when. ODA 091 had the mission to go to Iraq early, link up with Kurdish Peshmerga forces and set up the mechanisms to receive the rest of the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group. Six teams were a part of that mission and attached to B Co, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion for command and control. For the next five months, we trained on weapons systems, long range communications, link up operations and other “field craft” tasks. In all, our Pre-Mission training up lasted five months.

In January 2003, ODA 091 and the other five ODAs departed Fort Carson, Colorado for Stuttgart, Germany. While in Germany, the teams would continue training and prepared for an infiltration to link up with coalition forces which turned out to be a harder task than first thought.

We were able to get some split teams, (6 man ODAs) in Iraq through Turkey, however, the rest of us weren’t so lucky. Several times, we prepared to leave and then had to stand down. During that up and down cycle, training continued with the hope that we would eventually get into the country and be able to do our mission. Keeping my teams moral up turned out to be one of my major tasks. Almost a month after we arrived in Germany it was decided to leave and move forward to an Intermediate Staging base.

After several unsuccessful attempts to reach Iraq we crossed into hostile territory, I could see the tracers of the anti-aircraft fire and hear it hitting the bottom of the MC-130H. I saw a very bright light and heard a loud bang, I thought, “we just got hit”, but it turned out to be the aircraft dropping chaff. Then I heard another dull thud and saw the air force loadmaster looking out the window. I asked him, “What happened?” He said, “We just lost engine number 3”. I sat back and told myself that there were three more to get us to the airfield. We finally landed on a dirt runway at the As Sulaymaniyah airfield.

We hurried to off-load all the equipment so that the aircraft could get off the runway and make room for the rest on the sorties. After we got all our kit off the aircraft, we loaded onto buses and taxis, and proceeded to the safe house. Along the route, every 10 feet or so, a Kurdish Peshmerga Soldier stood guard on our route. It all seemed surreal until one of the Kurdish Soldier had an accidental discharge with his RPG, which brought things back into focus. We arrived at the safe house found a spot in the corner, inventoried all our equipment and personnel, and went to bed. The next morning we received the warning order for the upcoming mission.

10<sup>th</sup> SFG (A)’s primary mission was the three Iraqi divisions just north of the “green line” but also the Ansar al-Islam (AI) terrorist organization to the south. Kurdish forces were arrayed toward and engaged with the terrorist and would not turn their attention to the Iraqis until that threat to their rear was eliminated. While preparations continued for the battle with the Iraqi divisions, Charlie Company had the mission to eliminate that AI threat. With six ODA’s

they linked-up with 6,500 Peshmerga forces and prepared for battle. LTC Tovo, the 3/10 SFG(A) Commander and Kak Mustafa, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Commander, formulated a six-pronged attack to drive AI out of the valley and a town called Sargat. The plan received the code-name Operation VIKING HAMMER. ODA 081 and ODA 091 were the main effort for the assault up the valley toward Sargat. The others would provide support and act as blocking forces during the assault.

For the next two days, the team leadership for each prong would work with their Peshmerga counterparts to finalize and synchronize the operation. One day into our planning it was determined that an additional two prongs were needed, a Black and an Orange. ODA 091 had to fill the Orange Prong slots, so the debate began, “who from our team would split and move to the Orange Prong”. Doctrine stated that the XO would take the split team and Command the Orange Prong, but the warrant officer on the team did not want to leave the main effort and Yellow Prong. I decided that I would take the junior weapon and senior medical sergeants, move to the Orange Prong, and lead the 1650-man Kurdish element. I thought to myself again, another change to the mission, but at least this time I would be in charge of this part of the operation.

We left the Halabja compound at 2300 hours on 27 March 2003, and conducted our link up with Kak Hamis Hagighalib, the Orange Prong Peshmerga Commander. The Orange Prongs main objectives were to seal off the northwestern six villages that the IGK had vacated and then set up a blocking position on top of Hill 1351. My interpreter throughout the operation would be the Orange Prong Commanders’ son, Reb War. He would turn out to be a great warrior with an excellent grasp of the English language.

At 0600 hours, on the 28 March Operation VIKING HAMMER began. The Orange Prong forces began occupying the villages with no significant resistance and we began our own movement with the Peshmerga organic equipment in tow; which included an old Katyusha rocket truck and a heavy machine gun.

The Orange Prong main effort stopped short of Hill 1351, in the village of Banasar and began the initial assault. The Katyusha rocket truck fired 20 rockets and I requested B-52 air strikes, but from our position, I could not get effective BDA on the target and recommended to Kak Hagighalib that we should move closer. At 1000, we arrived at Yalanpe, a village 1,500 meters northwest of Hill 1351 and joined a Peshmerga unit that was already under fire. Enemy fire came from structures and from the flanks of the mountain ridge above Hill 1351. The AI fighters were about 500-600 feet above the village and could fire straight down onto the friendly forces. A sniper and a machinegun pinned down the Kurds, and we came under fire within half an hour of reaching Yalanpe. By 1100 hours, I began a new call for close-air support (CAS) against Hill 1351. For the next three hours or so, my junior weapons SGT and I tried to get an effective strike. The first two “fast movers,” F/A-18s Yahoo 11 and Yahoo 12, streaked over the hilltop, which may have pushed the Ansar (or IGK) fighters into hiding. In subsequent

passes, those jets failed to deliver effective strikes. We adjusted fire south of the initial impact and re-attacked, without assessing significant damage. One aircraft ran low on fuel while another had a hung bomb. Kurdish Soldiers to the south began to move toward the Hill 1351 and delayed further combat air support. The air strikes did not have the effect that we were looking for, so we decided to begin the “dicey” climb up the southwestern side of the hill. While moving up the hill, the challenges to me, and the other SF personnel, were to keep a front line trace of the friendly forces. We were probably five-hundred meters short of the hilltop, when I saw Peshmerga from the Black Prong running back down the hill. It looked like a civil war breakage of lines the way they were running down the hill. Black and Orange Prong Peshmerga had intermingled and through Reb, I found out that the Black Prong had called an air strike on the hilltop. With all the confusion, I called the B-Tm Commander, who was controlling all fires, and put the air strike into a “check fire” status. Once I had the front line trace of all the friendly forces, I cleared the air strike “Hot”. However, we were so close to the target, I had to give my initials for danger close CAS. I could hear the ordnance fly over our heads, and when it hit, it caused a big splash of rubble and debris, which showered us with rocks. The Kurdish Soldiers were excited and thought it was the greatest thing in the world. Unfortunately, that debris that went over our head, killed one of the Peshmerga that had earlier ran down the hill.

After the air strike, at about 1600, my team and the remaining Peshmerga continued our advance to the objective. As soon we crested the top of the hill, enemy fire pinned us down. The enemy machine gun rounds were splashing the rocks in front of me and I knew we were close enough when I saw a tracer pass by my head. We were able to IMT to within 100 meters of the machine gun, but we could not move anymore. My weapons SGT continued to fire 40 mm HE, until he told me he was down to three rounds. I told him to wait and hold the rest of his HE. I asked Reb War to find a RPG gunner and bring him to the front.

We were running out of daylight when the gunner and Reb got to me. We worked out a plan to shoot the machine gun with the RPG, the plan was simple or so I thought. My weapons SGT would fire an illumination round so we could see the machine gun and then have the RPG gunner shoot it. It briefed well but the illumination went up with a pop, and I was waiting for it to burst, when the RPG gunner got up and shot in the dark, then the illumination lit up. The language barrier made the coordination impossible. I told Reb again what we wanted to do, but he said that was the last RPG round.

We closed our perimeter and waited for the AC-130 gunship to get on station. I called the American Company Commander to give him our current position and ask for an ETA for the gunship. I also had to tell him that we were down to a platoon minus in our perimeter that the rest had run off earlier. I found out it was at least 2-4 hours before the gunship would be on station, depending on the priority of fires. Reb was worried and did not want to wait, because he said, “the enemy would crawl down and throw grenades on us”. The Peshmerga

commander wanted us off the hill too, and my American boss agreed. I gave the grids to the Company Commander for the Gunship and then we left in the cover of darkness and under fire.

Just before midnight, I got back to Halabja and went to the room that we had been staying in to get some sleep, but I found the 3<sup>rd</sup> SFG teams had arrived and took our spots. I went to the Bn S-3 got the initial OK to get a couple of the Ground Mobility Vehicles (GMVs) from 3<sup>rd</sup> Grp to go back up in the morning with me. I coordinated with the team leader and team SGT of ODA 392, to see how we would utilize their team to go back up in the morning. I planned to call CAS from Banishar, move with the gun trucks to Yalanpe, to suppress the enemy on the Hilltop, and finally bound up the hill under the cover of ODA 392's grenade launchers and heavy machine guns. None of the Kurds liked the plan; they thought it was too risky and that if we continued to drop bombs on the hill we would win. At about 1000, we left with the 4 GMVs and moved north to link-up with Kurdish forces.

We arrived in Banishar at about 1100 and I briefed the plan to the Kurdish Commanders on the ground, instead of beginning the attack they wanted to eat lunch and discuss it some more. We agreed that after lunch we would try to call combat air support (CAS) from Banishar and then move to Yalanpe, if needed. Instead of me trying to call the CAS though, ODA 392 had an AF TACP that would try to do it "right".

Unfortunately, he could not maintain communications with the aircraft, so after 2 hours of trying to get CAS on the hilltop, I decided to leave Banishar and move to Yalanpe; I thought even if we could not make better comms from there at least we would be closer. Enroute to Yalanpe, I got word from the Black Prong that they had gotten to the top of Hill 1351 and met no enemy resistance. Instead of stopping, I told the driver in the lead GMV to continue past Yalanpe and get to the top.

I got to the top of Hill 1351 at about 1500. While meeting with the Black Prong commander and assessing the situation, our Peshmerga saw 20 (+) AI running over the mountain into Iran. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Grp TACP called another air strike to get the fleeing AI before they got to Iran, but the pilots were afraid that their ordinance would over fly over the target and go into Iran, so it was called off.

As it turned out, those grids I had given to the AC-130 the night prior had worked. We found two dead AI and the "gelatinous mass" of another. In addition, after looking around I found that we had gotten to within 50 meters of the machine gun the night before, not the 100 meters I first thought.

Sargat was secure and the AI threat eliminated, Operation VIKING HAMMER was mission complete. The Orange Prong Peshmerga lost 8 men and 3-4 wounded. My two team members and I were awarded the BSM with V device and the Arrowhead device for the Iraqi campaign medal for our actions.

*Amid the fluid battle for Iraq, SSG H. Jhanson sought to make improvements and upgrades to American positions with limited equipment. Finally, he arrived at Bushmaster and built more than 100 landing pads for helicopters.*

**SSG H. Jhanson**  
**Engineer Company, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, March 2003**

I was assigned to an engineer company out of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. However, our unit was attached to an engineer battalion from Fort Lewis, Washington.

We crossed the boarder into Iraq with limited equipment because much of our equipment had not yet arrived. Some of the equipment included SINGAR radios and mechanic tools. Our leadership was forced to limit the radios to key leadership positions, such as the company commander, executive officer, first sergeant and platoon sergeants. The mechanics struggled to get tools having only had what came with the contact and wrecker trucks.

As we ventured around throughout Southern Iraq, we regularly stopped at different camps to complete simple repairs and upgrades. However, we never really stayed long since the war constantly pushed further north.

We finally got to Bushmaster where we were tasked to build more than 100 helicopter landing pads for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and a field landing strip, all while maintaining 24-hour security operations. No matter how many times I had done this in garrison, it never prepared me for what we were about to see.

As the first C-130 touched down on the landing strip, we kept our heads low and our fingers crossed. We were elated when the aircraft touched down safely. But elation faded quickly when we saw other support elements loading some of the American casualties that had been transported down there to be evacuated due to the hostile fires. That's when we knew it was a pat on our backs and back to work; we had a long way to go.

We eventually moved on to what is now LSA Anaconda in Balad where we were given the mission to restore and upgrade the airfield there. It was a task that seemed to never end. We fought with the soil to get the compaction to the right measurements while having to continuously try different mixtures. After three months of constant work on this airfield, we got to witness the first C-130 landing on it.

Not done yet, next we got to work upgrading it. In order to make it capable of allowing C-5s to land, we had to work another four months to stretch the landing strip out. Finally, in October 2003 the first C-5 landed successfully. We didn't know at the time but five months later we got to use that airfield to return to Fort Drum, New York. Although it may have had a great impact on the war, I am proud to have been a part of a unit that accomplished well what were told to do.

*Conducting convoy operations in a time of war is always dangerous. Charlie Company, 440<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade crossed the Iraqi border and proceeded all the way to Baghdad without an escort. They ensured their path by using the Global Positioning System. They ensured their success by good leadership. 1SG B. Brown tells how, despite the difficulties, the unit traveled across Iraq safely.*

**1SG B. Brown**  
**Convoy to Baghdad**  
**440<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade, 03/03-04/03**

In March 2003, while serving as the First Sergeant of Charlie Company, 440<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, I was deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with a follow on mission to support the V Corps Main Command Post in Baghdad, Iraq. Our unit was in a unique situation, in that we were tasked to convoy from Kuwait to FOB Dogwood and then onto Victory Base in Baghdad alone. Our Battalion Headquarters and sister companies convoyed 10 days prior to our unit, and the Corps Main Command Post would not move until hostilities were at a minimum and the main supply routes (MSR's) were secured. My company convoyed from Kuwait to Baghdad without military escort and as an independent element.

I have been in the Army for 23 years serving in the Signal Regiment (25W) in a variety of capacities. On 7 February 2003, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Signal Brigade received a warning order to prepare to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This came as no surprise to us, we realized that it was not a question if we were going to deploy but more so when. This would be my first deployment after 20 years of service. The Company Commander and I made several inferences to our Soldiers of the potential to deploy. We successfully conducted several training lanes that served as prerequisites for deployment. Our main concerns were to insure that the Soldiers prepared their families for the deployment mentally and emotionally and to institute the systems necessary (i.e., powers of attorney, banking, wills, etc.) to sustain their families during the deployment. This was a daunting task because of all the unknowns regarding the deployment. The inability on the Commander's and my part to accurately and honestly assess what we were in store for prevented us from conveying this to the family members effectively.

We prepared our unit mentally and emotionally to depart approximately 30 days later. In less than 30 days, we had to complete Desert Camouflage Uniform (DCU) draw, conduct Soldier Readiness Preparation/Per-Deployment Preparation (SRP/PDP), pack up and prepare the MIL vans for shipment and finally prepare the vehicles for shipment. Upon completion of these tasks, on 5 March 2003 we deployed to Kuwait and prepared to move north into Iraq. While in Kuwait, we conducted standard pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections of all our signal equipment. We drew our basic load, which included AT-4's, Fragmentation Grenades, a multiple of signaling grenades and the standard 5.56mm small arms

ammunition. This process continued through the month of March; on 31 March by order of the Brigade Commander (COL J. Smith), the entire Battalion proceeded to move north into Iraq and ultimately to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Dogwood. The Battalion convoyed for 10 days stopping at different Convoy Support Centers (CRC's) until finally arriving to their final destination of FOB Dogwood. While the battalion convoyed, my unit, (C Co 440<sup>th</sup> Signal Bn) was still located at Camp Virginia conducting convoy briefs, intelligence briefs and developing the security plan for movement. We gained an additional Node Center platoon from 32<sup>nd</sup> Signal Battalion, which was assigned to us for Operational Control. We integrated them into our planning and preparation phases.

On 7 April 2003, we received our movement order which directed us to begin moving north on 8 April at 0600 hours local. The Company Commander plotted each one of the way points and created a program that would allow us to have the points downloaded into our commercial Global Positioning Systems (GPS). Our convoy consisted of four serials comprised of 58 vehicles.

On 8 April 2003, we departed Camp Virginia as scheduled. Our first challenge came as we attempted to get on to MSR Jackson. We were separated because of the traffic, and some parts of the convoy began to deviate from the route because of being unfamiliar with the area and not depending on the GPS. It was fortunate that I was in the rear of the convoy and maintained constant radio communication with the convoy commander. I informed him of the situation and requested that he pull over while I regrouped the convoy. We succeeded in getting each vehicle back on track and continued to head toward CSC Navistar. This was our first stop prior to crossing the border into Iraq. The Commander received a convoy security briefing from the MP's on site, which informed him that there would not be an MP escort through Iraq as we were informed. They gave us a strip map to Talil Air Base. At that point, we briefed all the Soldiers on the lack of MP escort and re-emphasized the importance of situational awareness, truck commander alertness and actions on contact. At approximately 0915 hours on 8 April 2003, we crossed the border into Iraq. We convoyed for 8 hours moving at an unusually slow speed because of the terrain and the size of the convoy. We arrived at CSC Kenworth and found, it was not constructed to support us as a life support area (LSA), however it was secure and it allowed us an opportunity to rest and prepare for the next day.

We spent the night at Kenworth but a sand storm developed and it made it very difficult to sleep. It was hot and muggy all through the night. While we attempted to sleep, CPT MacNeil worked on the next segment of waypoints and prepared them to input them into our GPS's. At 0600 hours the next day (9 April), we conducted a key leader meeting and issued the new waypoints. We departed CSC Kenworth at 0700 hours, as the convoy moved we encountered other convoys and it caused a back up in traffic and a separation of elements in our convoy. This traffic jam and subsequent vehicle break down slowed us down tremendously and put us behind schedule. We had a vehicle break down which again separated the convoy and slowed us down. The serial in which I was in

contained the maintenance team. We pulled over to the shoulder, our mechanics were able to repair the vehicle within 30 minutes and we rejoined the main body of the convoy without any hostile incident. We arrived at a site occupied by an Air Defense Artillery unit, where we requested to spend the night while assisting with their security and they agreed.

The next morning at approximately 0700 hours, the Commander issued the new way-points; we conducted a safety briefing and continued on the convoy. As we continued to head north, I began to get apprehensive because we were alone and had no real intelligence regarding enemy activity. We remained vigilant and alert, we watched carefully as we passed through the different towns. There were not very many people outside but every now and again we would drive through a village and the children were amazed at seeing us. In most cases, they waved and request a Meal Ready to Eat (MRE) or something to eat. We cordially waved back to them but maintained our mind set of being in a hostile environment. Prior to leaving, that morning the commander and I had conducted a map recon to assess any potential choke points or danger areas for the day's convoy.

We felt that we would reach the Karbala Gap before the day was done. This was a topic of discussion for us because we had talked about it other times before and had heard many unpleasant stories prior to our deployment. We considered it the most dangerous negotiation of terrain at this point. My Commander and I had a great relationship and we made a commitment to each other that we would make it through the Karbala Gap together. However, we had an unforeseen incident. One of our HMMWV's broke down and we were approximately 20 miles away from the escarpment in Karbala. The commander and I decided that it would not be wise to stop the entire convoy at this point. I told him to continue to move and that I would attempt to get the vehicle repaired and back on the road. I had two trucks with me for security and the company wrecker. Upon arriving at the disabled vehicle, I placed one vehicle on the road in front of the downed vehicle and one behind the downed vehicle. The Soldiers dismounted and pulled security in a 360-degree perimeter. The Soldiers in the wrecker and I stopped directly in front of the disabled vehicle and two of the company mechanics attempted to repair the truck. The truck had a busted radiator hose and we did not have another one on hand. SSG Evans made every attempt to fix the vehicle using field expedient methods but was unsuccessful.

We then decided to tow the vehicle to the next scheduled rest stop and repair it at that site. We hooked the truck up to my HMMWV in order to minimize the amount of time and distance between the main convoy and us. After successfully securing the vehicle, we continued the convoy as a five-vehicle element through the Karbala Gap without an incident. After arriving to the rest site I briefed the Commander on what had occurred and the apprehension I had coming through the Gap without him and the rest of the team. I was very proud of my mechanics and the security guards as they stood fast in a defensive posture and the maintenance team never relenting in getting that truck fixed and back on the road. We continued



the convoy without incident. The next day we arrived at FOB Dogwood and joined the rest of the Battalion.

Upon arriving, we briefed the battalion chain of command on the events that occurred during the convoy. The Battalion Commander was so impressed that he gave us a new mission. The V Corps main Command post had not moved and our company would not have a signal mission until they did move and arrive at Camp Victory in Baghdad. The battalion commander directed us to serve as escorts for different communication assemblages that had to go to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). Again, the Commander and I had our reservations about the mission because there were so many unknown variables that we could account for that might compromise the mission. We conducted another map recon from Dogwood to BIAP; we put together two security teams consisting of several of our dependable NCOs and courageous Soldiers. Our first mission came after being at Dogwood 3 days. Our mission was to escort and deliver three satellite signal vans to BIAP for their follow on mission.

Upon departure, the convoy consisted of seven vehicles, two security vehicles, the three signal vans and the Commander and I. The Commander led the convoy and I was in the rear of the convoy. We kept constant radio communication and kept everyone no more than 50 feet in front or back of each other. There was very little traffic on the roads because the local nationals were not leaving their homes during the hostilities. There was so much damage on the highway we had to travel down the oncoming traffic lanes. The distance between Dogwood and BIAP was approximately 55 miles. It took almost an hour and a half to make the trip. The map recon was flawless, however, there was one particular intersection which really made us nervous. It was a four-way intersection with a market place on the east side of the street. There were people out at this location and it caused the convoy to slow down a great deal and on occasion would cause us to come to a complete halt.

The Commander and I felt that this was very dangerous because we could not tell who or where the enemy might be. This intersection was a perfect place for an enemy attack. Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) had not been developed as a tactic at this time but as I look back it could have served as the best area to place one. Each time we approached that intersection we halted the convoy. We brought the two security teams forward and they acted as road guards for the north and south traffic lanes. They provided security as each vehicle passed through the intersection. This strategy worked perfectly as the vehicles passed through the intersection and across the highway onto the oncoming traffic lanes. We convoyed successfully to BIAP without an incident. Upon arriving to BIAP we had to drive past one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. We observed several of the local nationals looting the palace and carrying the artifacts to their homes. We felt somewhat threatened because again we did not know who may or may not be hostile. We remained at the ready with our weapons and continued to make it past the people.

We arrived at BIAP, coordinated with the 3rd Infantry Division G-3, and got the signal vans and Soldiers linked up with the unit they would be supporting. We returned to Dogwood without incident and conducted four additional missions within the next six days. After being on the FOB for 10 days our unit received a movement order to occupy Camp Victory in Baghdad. Camp Victory was approximately five to eight miles away from BIAP. We were already familiar with that route and received orders to report to the battalion command team of 51<sup>st</sup> Signal Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade, and become operationally assigned to their unit. We left FOB Dogwood on 22 April 2003 and arrived at BIAP at 1300 hours the same day. The Commander and I reported to the Battalion Commander and Command Sergeant Major. We received a convoy brief and an information brief and departed BIAP. There was no intelligence suggesting that we would be faced with a potential attacks. We arrive at Camp Victory at approximately 1800 hours. The area was war torn and in disarray from the attacks conducted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. After conducting a reconnaissance of the area, we established a hasty life support area and bedded down for the night. The days to follow would consist of establishing a more structured LSA and wait for the V Corps main Command Post to arrive. Our mission was a success. I, as well as the company commander, endured a great deal of apprehension, fear and worry. The Commander and I communicated with each other constantly throughout the mission, neither one of us had to guess what the other was thinking. He reassured me and I reassured him. I commend my Commander on staying the course and not wavering in the face of so many unknowns. To our credit, we realized the potential dangers and we mitigated the risks as best as we possibly could. His confidence gave me confidence. I felt we conducted this convoy as a genuine command team. I am very proud and honored to have crossed the Iraqi border and convoy all the way to Baghdad with my Commander Captain MacNeil.

*Saving the lives of Soldiers wounded in battle is always critical to the Army. In this story, ISG B. Barren tells how his Company established medical facilities to treat the wounded of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Tikrit, Iraq.*

**1SG B. Barren**  
**Tikrit**  
**704<sup>th</sup> Division Support Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> ID 03/03**

In May 2002, I began my duties as a First Sergeant. I was assigned to E Company, 704<sup>th</sup> Division Support Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Fort Hood, Texas. The Company was a Medical Company capable of performing Levels I and II health care. Level I care consisted of sick call procedures. Level II care is Level I plus basic trauma, dental, laboratory, radiology, mental health, and optometry services. Upon arriving at the Company we had approximately 100 Soldiers assigned, well under the authorized number for the mission. We had 100 percent

of our authorized Medical Equipment Sets and vehicles. The unit was divided into five platoons. The Headquarters platoon consisted of approximately 10 Soldiers included the Supply Sergeant and his Soldiers, NBC NCO, COMMO NCO, and orderly room members. The Maintenance Platoon consisted of approximately 15 Soldiers included a variety of mechanical MOSs. The Division Medical Supply (DMSO) Platoon consisted of approximately 10 Soldiers. This was perhaps the busiest platoon in the company. This platoon's mission was to re-supply the entire division with medical supplies from a central location. The Treatment Platoon consisted of approximately 40 Soldiers. This platoon was further divided into five treatment squads, which consisted of four medics and one Physician's Assistant. The remainder of the Soldiers either worked in the sick call section, dental, lab, x-ray, mental health, or optometry services. The Ambulance Platoon consisted of approximately 25 Soldiers. This platoon was equipped with 10 ambulances.

In November 2002, we received a warning order to prepare to deploy to Iraq. The initial plan that we received had us entering Iraq from the north through Turkey. The plan had us supporting several units by providing four treatment squads and ambulance crews.

The remainder of the unit would establish a Level II Facility in the Brigade Support Area. From November through December we prepared our vehicles and equipment for shipment. During this time frame, we received approximately 15 to 20 new Soldiers into the unit. These Soldiers came directly from Advanced Individual Training. It was a difficult task integrating these Soldiers into their new platoons. We were moving at such a fast pace with vehicle and equipment preparation it almost seemed like the new Soldiers would get lost into the shuffle. I was really concerned about their competence level as far as patient care and the fact that they had just graduated from training. Sometime around January/February 2003 the plan drastically changed and we were no longer entering through Turkey. The new plan had us entering from the south through Kuwait. As the briefings continued this became the final plan and the Commander and I began the planning process for the unit.

The Battalion began to deploy in mid-February 2003 and continued through March 2003. Another concern that the Commander and I had was we were authorized three Professional Fillers (PROFIS) Physicians. Typically, they come from a Medical Center or a Medical Activity. Our PROFIS Physicians arrived in mid-February. Each one came from a different location, one from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, one from Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and one from Fort Hood, Texas. After they arrived, they had to be integrated into the platoon, which left very little time for them to develop their battle rhythm. The Commander and I decided that he would depart with the first group of Soldiers from our unit, which was at the end of February, and I would remain behind and depart on the last flight ensuring the rest of the unit had departed. The last flight for my company was 3 March 2003. I had approximately 60 of my Soldiers and various Soldiers from other companies on the flight.

We arrived in Arfjin, Kuwait and departed shortly by bus to Camp Virginia, Kuwait. This is where the constant challenges began. They started with housing Soldiers in the same units and in the same sleep tents. There were so many Soldiers on the camp, it was impossible to house all of my Soldiers in the same sleep tents. My Commander and the Soldiers that had arrived before me were housed approximately one-quarter of a mile away from me. Accountability was a nightmare for the first few days. Things started to get better when units started to depart the Camp and head north into Iraq. At this point we were able to secure tent space for my entire unit. We stayed at Camp Virginia for approximately eight days. During this time we made several trips to the port of Kuwait to receive our vehicles and equipment. Once again the challenges continued. As we gathered our vehicles from the staging yard at the port we noticed that we had all our vehicles except the Commanders. After hours of searching and notifying the port authorities, we discovered his vehicle had been moved into another unit's area, the vehicle identification number had been removed and the front had been covered up to hide the bumper number.

When we finally departed Kuwait and headed into Iraq our destination was Tikrit, Iraq, which was the home of Saddam Husain. My unit was tasked to provide ambulance crews to various units as they traveled north to Iraq. The plan was to have a final link up in Balad, Iraq where the ambulance crews would return to the unit. Well, this didn't happen. Apparently, the arrival times of some units to Balad was later than anticipated because several units got lost. The Commander and I had concerns not only for our ambulance crew Soldiers, but if we arrived at Tikrit without them, we would not be able to support the units we were assigned to. Five days later we arrived in Tikrit and somehow things worked out because shortly afterwards the ambulance crews arrived in Tikrit.

Once we arrived in Tikrit we established our area of operation in a large sandy field area south of the airfield. We erected the Aid Station using new equipment that we had been fielded with prior to departing Fort Hood. These vehicles were called Chemical Biological Protective Shelters (CBPS). We were issued four. The unique thing about these were they expanded from the rear and created a dome like shelter. These were perfect for treating patients. They were designed to be able to be hooked together. It was obvious that this place had been bombed, perhaps during the first war. Most of the buildings were destroyed or vacant with the possibility of having unexploded ordnance inside. Initially, we were not allowed into the buildings because of the NBC threat. Late one afternoon we had a Soldier report on sick call complaining of a rash, dizziness and white powder on his arm and face. It was discovered that the Soldier had been inside a building and had been exposed to some type of substance. We immediately notified the Battalion and our NBC NCO and began our patient decontamination procedures. Simultaneously, we had several more Soldiers show up with the same symptoms. Now we started to panic. After various NBC test it was determined that the powder was some type of insecticide. For the next

few months we continued to operate in the sandy area until the buildings were cleared for occupancy by EOD.

The Commander and I located a group of buildings that were perfect for an Aid Station. Once we moved into buildings we had to modify the walls to create a patient holding area. With the amount of Soldiers that I had remaining with me, I was able to house all the Soldiers within the group of buildings and still have plenty of room for all of the service for Level II care. The only exception was Mental Health services, which we located away from the Aid Station and sleep area. During the transition to the buildings we gained a Combat Stress Control Team consisting of approximately six Soldiers and one Psychiatrist. This was a great asset to the unit and our Mental Health services. For the next several months we continually made improvements to the work and sleep areas.

Our missions began to change as more units moved onto our Forward Operating Base (FOB). We were still the primary Aid Station on the FOB especially for the National Guard and Reserves who didn't have medics organic to their units. Other battalions had their own Aid Stations and used us strictly for Level II care. We had three treatment squads and three ambulance crews located at separate sites throughout Iraq. One treatment squad was located with 1/10 Calvary, which stayed on the move. We had one treatment squad and two ambulances supporting the Division Main in Tikrit City. The last treatment squad and ambulance crew were supporting 3rd Brigade in Balad. The Commander and I rotated our visits with those Soldiers. Because of the distance and travel time, we were often gone from three to five days.

We started re-deployment operations in February 2004. During this phase, we redeployed Soldiers to Kuwait in increments until all of the Soldiers departed Iraq. Once we arrived in Kuwait we washed vehicles and packed equipment. As my Soldiers departed from Kuwait, once again I was the last one to depart. The next best feeling was getting on the plane and returning home, but the best feeling was a sense of accomplishment for bringing home safely 120 Soldiers.

In conclusion, our deployment to Iraq was very successful. As mission changes occurred, we were able to adapt to the situation and continue the fight. We encountered two major lessons learned. They were the PROFIS and the CBPS. We learned the PROFIS selection system had problems that caused late notification to the physicians. This placed them behind the unit's scheduling for uniform pickup, training, and equipment issue. The fielding of the CBPS should have been much sooner. We received them two weeks prior to shipping our equipment. This had an effect on the quality of training we received on the vehicles.

*Not long after the War of 1812, the Battle of New Orleans occurred. In today's world, the "information age" has made it so everything including war is reported almost instantly. SFC M. Swart tells of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne's experience with the embedded media during Operation Iraqi Freedom.*

**SFC M. Swart**  
**Embedded Media**  
**Public Affairs Office, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, 2003**

One could argue that any time the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault) goes off to war, it's a historic event. But for the Public Affairs Office of the 101<sup>st</sup> during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the deployment was historic for another reason: We had more than 70 media representatives from around the world embedded throughout our maneuver and support units.

Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, media members were usually herded around and "minded" by PA personnel. Usually, that meant being in "press pools" where what little information they received was carefully guarded. The media hated it, and often went out on their own because they could get better access to the military by watching from a distance than by working with us. This created operational security headaches for the military – such as during entry operations in Somalia where reporters lined the beach waiting for the amphibious landing.

But with OIF, the Department of Defense came up with a new way to handle reporters: Grant them full access to units through an "embedding" agreement that provided ground rules and left them unescorted. By agreeing to basic operational security guidelines, they received unfettered access. We embedded the bulk of our media during the day of in-processing briefings at Fort Campbell prior to the deployment in February 2003. We linked up with another 10-15 stragglers once we reached Kuwait and trekked across the desert to get them to their units. It was game time.

The war kicked off on 19 March. From our vantage point in Kuwait at the Division Main Command Post at Camp New Jersey, we tried to keep tabs of what the reporters were reporting, and provided additional support when possible.

I was pulling night duty at the PAO desk in DMAIN on 22 March. The ground assault was ongoing, but the 101<sup>st</sup> headquarters was still operating from this staging area in the middle of the Kuwait desert, about 20 miles from the border.

That night at about 1 a.m., the radio erupted in chatter.

"Camp Pennsylvania is under attack!!" shouted someone over the radio at the front of the TOC. We had dealt with SCUD alerts for days, but confused looks rippled through the staff at the thought of an Iraqi ground attack on one of our bases this far into Kuwait.

There was more chatter and commotion on the radio over the next few minutes, and the old military cliché "the first report is always wrong" once again

proved to be true. As follow-on reports came in, first they were suspected Kuwaiti terrorists; then Kuwaiti translators; then a report came in that translators were being detained. Within an hour, we began to get something closer to the truth – a Soldier was being held for allegedly attacking his own brigade command post. At the time, all we knew was that there were a number of injuries; by morning we discovered that two of the service members from our 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, the 327<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (Bastogne) lost their lives as a result of the attack.

In the hours immediately following the attack, I witnessed what I considered to be something of historical significance, if only to my own career field. It happened something like this:

After the attack, I immediately ran to get my PAO, Major T. Cate, so we could start working the issue. When he came back to DMAIN, our embedded reporter Rick Atkinson from the Washington Post came with him as well.

And there, in the middle of the night, I watched 101<sup>st</sup> commander Major General David H. Petraeus, our division JAG officer, our PAO and our embedded journalist work together to determine what we could release. It was a great feeling of satisfaction to know that we had found a way to bring media into the fold while still protecting operational security. In my mind, this was the most honest, timely and effective means of handling the situation. We were balancing facts at hand with how much information we could accurately release. We knew that it was probably a fratricide, but in the interest of accuracy, Atkinson was willing to work with us to ensure that facts, not first reports, got out.

Major Cate could have played dumb and left Atkinson asleep in his cot that night, and General Petraeus could have booted him out of the DMAIN as soon as he walked in. But both officers recognized that for the embed program to work, they would have to take a chance on the new system in bad times as well as good.

As we worked out the details in the DMAIN, embedded Time reporter Jim Lacey, who was with 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team at Camp Pennsylvania, broke the story by satellite phone to CNN with accompanying still imagery. He was in the other end of the group of tents that the command cell was in. We watched the reports on the big screen in the DMAIN – Soldier scurrying, the brigade commander with his arm in a sling, getting the situation under control. The embeds stuck to their rules, and although it probably went against the basic military instinct to control everything, we made no effort to shut anyone down.

I learned something else about the embed program when I ended up with sort of a dumb quote after I talked to our New York Times embed Jim Dwyer. It read: “I was really shocked when I found out that a service member was suspect in this. ... I know those who were in there, and they are really great guys -- it’s amazing that anyone would strike at them.”

Are those the exact words I’d choose at a planned press conference? But that’s another part of this deal; they catch us at our best, and sometimes at our worst. They see us being in our environment as we are. One of my Soldiers was

friends with one of the officers who died, and he was also deeply affected by the incident. The whole idea of fratricide just turned my stomach. At that point, it's a wonder I didn't say anything worse than what I did.

I'll never forget that night, because it showed me that we were truly in the dawn of a new era in dealing with the media. The military had finally taken steps to catch up with the instant-communication age. The 101<sup>st</sup>'s fledgling media embed program had left the nest, and to this day I believe the embedded media are the most effective, responsible and honest way to let the American people know the struggles and reality their military faces.

Regardless of anyone's personal views on Iraq, it is clear that America supports its Soldier: it is evident if nothing else than because of the yellow ribbons seen on vehicles every day. Those aren't for the war – they are for the service members! I can't help but think that the embed program has contributed to this by allowing the American people to see that Soldiers are real people, thrust into extraordinary circumstances and faced with extraordinary challenges.

*Soldiers have seldom been charged with saving the cultural heritage of an enemy nation. One of the noble endeavors of Operation Iraqi Freedom was saving the national treasures of ancient Iraq. SGM D. Grimes, while serving with the 352<sup>nd</sup> Civil Affairs Command, helped save the treasures of the Assyrian city of Nimrud. He also served as an escort to the Iraqi National Orchestra when it visited Washington, D.C. He accomplished both missions while Iraq spiraled into the chaos of uncontrolled looting and sniper fire.*

**SGM D. Grimes**  
**352<sup>nd</sup> Civil Affairs Command**  
**Operation Iraqi Freedom 2/03-3/04**

I was assigned to Headquarters/Headquarters Company (HHC), United States Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (USACAPOC), Fort Bragg, North Carolina. HHC USACAPOC was a non-deployable unit. My rank at the time was Master Sergeant. However, on 26 February 2003, at approximately 1630 hours, I received mobilization orders by facsimile to report to Fort Bragg not later than (NLT) 0800 hours 28 February 2003.

Being in the United States Army Reserve (USAR) I had to make immediate preparations for deployment in addition to giving notice to my civilian employer. I had many personal affairs to handle also. Since my wife had experienced Desert Shield/Desert Storm she was familiar with what her role would be. I normally take care of our business, but she had demonstrated that she could step right into that role. With all our personal affairs in order I reported to Fort Bragg, as directed.

I was transferred from HHC USACAPOC to the 352<sup>nd</sup> Civil Affairs Command (CACOM) to fill their battle roster. The in-processing to active duty was no different than any other units. The 352 placed me in the S1 on the battle roster.



Most of my experience was in operations so this was an assignment that I was not very familiar with.

When training and validation were complete the 352<sup>nd</sup> CACOM received the movement order. The unit was assembled and notified that 59 slots were available for movement. Personnel were asked who was prepared for movement. After several changes I was manifested because I was ready from the first notice. Movement was scheduled for 0400 hours. I had my equipment in place and was about to load the bus for movement to Pope Air Force Base when I was pulled aside and told I was transferred within the Command to the 411<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion (CAB).

I reported to the 411<sup>th</sup> CAB and learned that I was needed there to validate them. I assisted them in validating and again received a deployment date. Since I had already experienced packing vehicles and equipment for air transport I had no trouble preparing the 411<sup>th</sup> CAB for movement.

I contacted the movement officer at Pope Air Force Base, who was also a member of HHC USACAPOC, and learned that our equipment was scheduled for movement on a chartered Boeing 747 Cargo Plane. I volunteered to accompany the equipment to Kuwait.

The unit deployed on a chartered air liner and I followed with the equipment 12 hours later. Upon arrival in Kuwait, I learned that the unit had moved to Camp Arifjon. The Commander and NCOIC had not left anyone at the airport to assist me with the equipment. The vehicles were packed with sensitive equipment and ammunition.

With assistance of the movement officer at Kuwait Airport and the Private First Class who accompanied me, I was able to move the vehicles to Camp Wolf. Once I processed in country I tried every means available to contact the 411<sup>th</sup>. Unable to make contact with anyone I began to plan how I could move vehicles and equipment 35 miles. While in the movement headquarters I overheard a Sergeant First Class (SFC) question the movement officer on how he could move his Military Police (MP) Unit to Camp Arifjon. The requirement was convoys could not move unless they had ammunition. Once the SFC finished his conversation I pulled him aside and asked if he was able to move his personnel. The MP NCOIC told me they didn't have ammunition and could not move to Camp Arifjon.

I told the MP NCOIC that I had ammunition but I was in need of drivers and assistant drivers for my vehicles. We agreed to assist each other with movement. We then contacted the movement officer and I became the convoy commander. I distributed ammunition to the MPs, and the MP NCOIC assigned his personnel to drive my vehicles. We moved to Camp Arifjon without incident. This is an example of what NCOs can accomplish. The MP NCOIC and I had never met before. We found ourselves in need of each other's service and we combined our resources to accomplish the task before us.

I began to train personnel in the 411<sup>th</sup> CAB in movement and tactics. Before I was able to complete the training I was summoned to the 352<sup>nd</sup> Command

Headquarters. I was informed that I was transferred again. This time I was assigned as NCOIC of the Special Functions Team.

When movement orders came to cross into Iraq, I remained with the Special Functions Team. Upon arrival in Baghdad, the Special Functions Team was augmented with two Marines, (Sergeant and Corporal) and one Navy Lieutenant Commander. Our mission was to assist three United States Ambassadors with reconstruction. This mission continued for the first few months in country. My team was outside the wire everyday with these missions.

Through our contact with locals we were able to locate the treasures of Nimrud. The treasure consisted of gold crowns and other pieces of gold jewelry. The estimated value was 5 billion dollars. The treasure was located in a vault at a bank in Baghdad. It took three days to pump water from the basement so we could recover the treasure. Once it was located we moved it into another vault and British historians cataloged it and verified that the collection was intact. We later displayed the treasure to the world, through the media, at the Baghdad Museum.

On 28 June, 2003, while conducting a mission in northwest Baghdad, our team was hit by sniper fire. One team member was wounded. Since we were in the city we had no means to evacuate our wounded except by vehicle. We evacuated the wounded to the nearest aid station where he was treated. The wounded Soldier's life was saved, but he is paralyzed from the neck down. This condition has little hope for recovery. We returned later and identified the sniper.

On 1 July, 2003, First Sergeant C. Coffin, HHC 352<sup>nd</sup> CACOM was killed in a motor vehicle collision as he was returning to Kuwait from Baghdad. Having been a civilian police officer for over 30 years, I was detailed to investigate the collision. I was also detailed to accompany his remains home for internment.

On 1 September 2003, I was promoted to Sergeant Major in my primary Military Occupational Specialty, 18ZW8B. When the 352<sup>nd</sup> Commanding General could not find time to pin my chevrons on, I asked Command Sergeant Major to pin me. As in many other occasions NCOs took the lead. My pinning took place on the bank of the Tigris River in Baghdad on 6 September 2003.

In early December 2003, personnel from the United States (US) Department of State were in search of a senior military Soldier who had a current US Passport. I was the only Soldier identified who had a passport in possession. I was detailed to escort the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra to Washington, DC. The symphony was scheduled to perform at the Kennedy Center. President George W. Bush was scheduled to attend the performance. I escorted the orchestra from Baghdad to New York City. As a side note, it was snowing in New York upon arrival. This was the first time any of the Iraqis had seen snow. I took time to show them how to throw snow balls. I was met by a group of State Department personnel who took charge of the Iraqis. We were bused to Washington, DC. President Bush and General Myers, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and other officials attended the performance. The day after the performance the orchestra leader and lead violinist

were escorted to the White House for a personal visit with President Bush. The visit lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Having my passport allowed me this experience. Knowing that orders would be issued for movement as an NCO I was prepared for any situation. I had no idea that I would need the passport, but being prepared for any situation paid off. Many officers were not pleased with the assignment, but I was the only senior Soldier who had a valid passport. Jordan required a passport for entry to their country.

While in Washington, DC, I expected at least one Iraqi to leave the group and stay in the US. I was surprised that no one defected and requested asylum in America. Everyone returned to Iraq with me.

In late December 2003, my team was moving along a major highway in northern Baghdad near Canal Road. I was driving the lead vehicle when I suddenly had a bad feeling. We were approaching another convoy of three vehicles about to drive under an overpass. I exited the highway onto Canal Road as an IED hit the other unit. I immediately turned and drove onto the overpass (high ground) to cover the unit that was hit. My team deployed along the bridge and engaged personnel in the high grass near the attack site.

The last significant incident occurred on 18 January 2004. My team was hit by an improvised explosive device (IED) and our interpreter was killed. Two Americans received minor injuries. The IED had been buried in the median of a four lane divided highway in eastern Baghdad. We did not see the insurgent who detonated the device.

Redeployment began in late February 2004 and I arrived at Pope Air Force Base on 3 March 2004. I was released from the 352<sup>nd</sup> CACOM and later reported to my new assignment at the Joint Special Operations University, Hurlburt Field, Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

*For years wives and mothers have told stories of how they waited anxiously at home while their husbands and sons fought in wars overseas. In today's Army the story may be somewhat different. The following is a story by SFC D. Bramlett, who tells of how he tried to deal with his wife's (SSG L. Bramlett) deployment to Iraq as he anxiously waited at home, wishing he could somehow protect her.*

**SFC D. Bramlett**  
**“A Wife Deployed”**

I was deployed at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, when the planes hit the World Trade Center. Soon afterwards, I returned to Fort Campbell and then six months later went to Germany with my wife, SSG L. Bramlett. She was serving as the secretary/driver for the CSM of the 30<sup>th</sup> Medical Brigade.

I was far from prepared for the biggest change in my life that would soon take place. After the President declared Iraq a major threat, our unit started to mobilize in order to deploy in the upcoming invasion. My wife's unit deployed

before mine and was sent to Kuwait. For some unknown reason the day before my unit was scheduled to deploy we had to stand down. We were not deployed in the first wave of the invasion.

Instead, I ended up watching the invasion unfold on television and wondering if my wife was in that first group of Soldiers. This was the most distressful thing I had ever been through. Later I learned that my wife did move behind the first wave and ended up settling in Balad, Iraq where her unit made their headquarters. I spent the next few months watching television, pulling guard duty, and conversing with my wife on e-mail. I sat there and watched while the war on terrorism took place with my wife right in the middle of it.

As soon as the troops secured Baghdad, my wife and her unit moved into one of the palaces in the city. Before they could get settled, the suicide bombers and rebels started up. My wife was driving the CSM all over Iraq and was on the road the majority of the time. It scared the hell out of me and I expressed this to her. She assured me that she was alright, but still I felt like I needed to be there to help her, if nothing else.

*The rocket propelled grenade or RPG was widely used against the US and Coalition forces by the Iraqi Army and by insurgents that followed. SSG B. Sipp, in this vignette tells of such an attack against Soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.*

**Staff Sergeant B. Sipp**  
**RPG Attack**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division (Mechanized) PAO**

*Author's Note: I would like to preface this by saying that this was a hard account to write. As journalists, we are taught to tell the story, not to be part of it. We report on and share what we see--we do not take part in it. Riding with 2-69 Armor (and we have been, continuously since we "crossed the berm" over a month ago) has been a non-stop roller coaster of experience. In the following account, we unintentionally got caught up in a situation and the line between reporting and participating got blurred. For those who were there with us, I hope I got it correct.*

BAGHDAD, Iraq - On 6 April, at approximately 4:30 p.m., or 30 minutes after occupying the Arab Petroleum Training Institute in al-Tajeyat, on the outskirts of Baghdad, members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division's Task Force 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 69<sup>th</sup> Armor Regiment, from Fort Benning, Georgia, were attacked by Iraqi small arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire in an attempt to disrupt the refueling and rearming operations that were commencing.

Incoming red tracer and RPG fire immediately targeted the lead cargo Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck full of High Explosive Anti-Tank and SABOT rounds for Hard Rock Company, as well as the two fuel HEMTT's and Assassin

Company's rearmament HEMTT. As the rounds impacted, the lead vehicle burst into flames. Fire began to consume the tank and Bradley ammunition and explosives stored on the vehicle. When the rounds got hot enough, they inevitably "cooked off" and exploded. Such a horrific explosion would surely impact the fuel and ammunition HEMTTs parked behind, thus destroying the Task Force's ammunition and fuel supply in one fell swoop if something was done quickly.

During the heavy incoming fire, Pvt. K. Prewitt, 2-69 Armor, was hit in the leg as he moved from around the HEMTT fueler. Prewitt, from Alabama, was a newly assigned tank crewman who was filling a spot as a refueler until a tank slot opened up for him. Knocked down by the round and in obvious pain, Prewitt managed to sit up and gain situational awareness. Seeing the burning ammunition vehicle and volume of small arms fire all around him, he began pulling himself backwards toward the high grass and in the direction of his fellow Soldiers who were returning fire.

Across the compound to the east, Sgt. M. Wood, Spc. N. Warren and Pfc. J. Krieger -- all members of the 2-69 Scout Platoon -- were pulling security in their Humvee when they too came under fire from the Iraqi attackers. Pulling their vehicle around, they were hit by a rocket-propelled grenade that skipped off the ground and exploded under the vehicle and under Krieger's driver-side seat.

"Our radio exploded, the (driver's) seat was on fire and he (Krieger) was thrown out of the vehicle," said Wood.

Adding to the confusion, a smoke grenade went off inside the vehicle and mixed with the smoke from the rapidly burning interior. As the volume of small arms fire increased, Krieger was further injured when he was hit in the leg by shrapnel or enemy fire. Seeing his driver down and his vehicle destroyed, Wood rushed to Krieger and helped him through the gate and into the building where the 2-69 medics were setting up a triage. Warren began laying down suppressing fire to cover their retreat and moved into position to provide much-needed fire support where events were still unfolding near Prewitt and the burning ammunition vehicle.

From the second floor of the Petroleum Institute, Staff Sgt. J. Harrison, a medic with 2-69 Medical Platoon, saw the events unfolding on the road out front. Seeing Prewitt dragging himself through heavy fire, he ran down the stairs and out into the firefight. Outside, he met up with Spc. W. Edmonds, a C Co., 203<sup>rd</sup> Forward Support Battalion medic, and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Eppers, the 2-69 assistant S-1, who was carrying a stretcher. They were joined by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. D. Pray, the battalion chemical officer, who, after bringing a dazed Soldier in from the line of fire, went back out to lend assistance at Prewitt's side. With rounds slicing through the air all around them, they stabilized Prewitt as best they could and loaded him aboard a stretcher. Lifting in tandem, they were able to remove him from the area and get him back to the building.

As the ammunition HEMTT began to "cook off", a call of "Who knows how to drive a HEMTT?" was heard to our rear. Presumably, the idea was for

any available HEMTT drivers to sprint through the gunfire, get in the cabs of the remaining vehicles, and move them away from the lead ammunition vehicle which was rapidly being consumed by fire. Being a former petroleum supply specialist, I was licensed on the M978 HEMTT; but more importantly, I was in position and knew how to drive one. I quickly dropped my mask (I figured it would get hung up on the fence) and proceeded to climb over the fence leading into the field of fire. I kind of figured it would be just myself running out there and that I might have to make two trips because there were two vehicles that needed to be moved. I cleared the fence and began an all-out dash to the rear ammunition HEMTT, praying that if I got hit, it would only be a graze, which wouldn't stop me, or that the plates in my vest would stop any round. I could hear rounds whistling by and could see tracers as I neared the HEMTT. What I didn't see, however, was an ornamental white chain that separated the road from the grass field. Approximately 10 feet from my destination, I hit that chain in full stride. I would later learn that many of the Soldiers providing cover fire believed that I'd been hit at that point.

What I saw, when I picked myself up off the ground to enter the cab of the HEMTT, is something I will carry with me forever. I was never alone out there. I may have hopped the wall first and believed it was only me, but every member of our "group" had followed me over that wall and into the same danger. Spc. E. Molina, a broadcast journalist and one of my two Soldiers attached to 2-69, was only two steps behind me the entire way. Molina had never been inside of a HEMTT, but he had "my back." Spc. A. Nuelken, a print journalist and my other Soldier, was laying down cover fire for the both of us. Sergeant 1st Class E. Collazo, a tanker with 2-69 who was pulling duty as a security element for the Air Force ground controller, was right behind Nuelken adding suppressing fire of his own. Everyone had jumped that same wall and everyone had chosen to define that moment rather than letting the moment define them.

Molina, keeping his feet better than me, managed to get into the cab a step ahead of me. With the vehicle already running, he quickly figured out the parking brake and threw it into reverse. I pointed down the road and told him to "not stop for anything." When I turned around to get in the HEMTT fuel truck in front, I saw who I believe to be Capt. M. Southern, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade S-3, in the cab and preparing to move. I stayed there until the HEMTTs had left and then recall feeling very vulnerable at that point. Rounds were still cutting through the air and the lead ammunition truck's cargo was starting to cook off only 30 feet ahead of me. I looked back and could hear Soldiers yelling for me to "get out of there." Get out of there is just what I did.

Remembering exactly where that chain was this time, I ran back through the field toward 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. J. Cline, the 2-69<sup>th</sup> liaison officer, who was also helping direct fire. It was there when the ammunition vehicle's large tank rounds began to explode with an earth shattering force. It was quickly decided that we should climb back over the fence and take cover as far away from them as possible.

Collazo, Cline, Nuelken and I hopped the fence like it was an Olympic sport and took cover closer to the building.

The direct combat may have been over at that point, but the night was far from over. Everyone who was involved has their own story to tell -- this is just one of them. From the Soldier (few of them actual ammunition specialists) who hopped onto the ammunition HEMTT that Molina saved and began to upload Assassin Company's tanks with ammunition in order to get them back into the fight to the medics, whose professionalism and coolness under fire have given me an undying respect for their abilities, and to Sergeant 1st Class T. Dale, 2-69 Fire Support noncommissioned officer, who spent more than an hour searching the darkened halls of the building for something as mundane as a mop and bucket to clean up the blood from the floor of the hallways in order to show respect for the wounded and because it was the "right thing to do," Task Force 2-69's Soldiers and leaders truly came together that night under the most trying of circumstances and showed why they train as hard as they do and why they cannot be defeated when they are fighting for one another.

Authors Note: PV2 Kelley Prewitt died of his wounds approximately 30 minutes after he was evacuated, despite the valiant and heroic efforts of the Panther medics. They treated, and saved, many patients that day, and their professionalism and expertise is second to none in this writer's opinion.

*When Soldiers prepare to go to war their minds fill with thoughts of encountering a hardened enemy on the field of battle. However, for many there are greater experiences to be gained than those limited to the battlefield. Each deployment takes a Soldier to a new and distant land where they encounter not only enemies, but a variety of people on the road of life. In the following story, SPC A. Tietjen describes an encounter with Christian Iraqis in a small village where she was treated with kindness and compassion.*

**SPC A. Tietjen  
A Small Village**

**514<sup>th</sup> Medical Company Ground Ambulance, 62<sup>nd</sup> Medical Brigade**

It was a beautiful day in April 2003 as we were convoying through Iraq, heading toward Irbil for a mission. I was assigned to a medical company ground ambulance unit, serving as a Tactical Operations Center NCO, when we had another unscheduled stop.

We had just entered the town of Qaraqosh, a small quaint village full of Christians fifteen kilometers outside of Mosul when one our 5-ton vehicles had a double blow out. We stopped alongside the road and pulled security around our vehicles. While on guard, we noticed that the people from the village that were outside at the time quickly retreated back into their homes.

After about ten minutes of working on the 5-ton to get back on the road, a

woman approached me. She spoke very good English and asked me if we were there for Saddam Hussein. I informed her that we were not; in fact, we were only in the town because one of our vehicles had two flat tires. She seemed pleased at this answer and went back toward the center of the village. After no more than five minutes, everyone – kids, men, and women – had come back out of their homes and came up to our convoy. Some of the Soldiers in my company were a little nervous, seeing as the villagers just didn't come at a slow walk but rather like they were kids running for the ice cream man.

The woman I had talked with earlier came back to me and thanked us for our service. She thanked us, the United States Army, a branch of service that was there impeding on their soil. This was unbelievable to me. She introduced herself as Geenah and I introduced myself. She said she was a Christian who taught English at the university there in Iraq before all of the attacks. Many of the women and men invited us into their homes to have tea, lunch, take a shower; the offerings were immense. The unique thing about them offering us showers was that they had no running water, and no electricity. They were offering us the last of their clean water so that we could wash up.

We greatly appreciated the offer but politely turned them down. They had families to attend to, yet, here they were offering the little things that they had. Many of the young women offered us female Soldiers their crosses. They were taking them from off of their necks and trying to give them to us. These women were showing their gratitude by giving us their worldly possessions. Once again we declined them.

When I declined Geenah's, she was taken aback. She asked me, "Are you Muslim? Is this why you do not take my necklace I give you?" I told her that I was not Muslim nor was I a Christian. She asked me, "Then you do not believe in God?" I told her, "It is not that I don't believe in one god, I just believe there is more than one. I am what the Americans call a Wiccan."

She was not surprised of this, nor did she ask what I was talking about. She knew of my religion. She told me, "You not being a Christian or not believing in one holy being is no difference to me. You were brought here for a reason, and I appreciate you for who you are. Your beliefs have no impact on the love that we have for you and all the rest of your Soldiers."

This was quite moving to me. I am usually ridiculed, or shunned in regards to my beliefs. Yet, here was this woman I had never met in my life until this moment who accepted me for me.

We stayed in this small village for sometime until the 5-ton was fixed and during this time, the kids climbed in and out of our ambulances, asked questions in broken English, the women offered us cakes and tea; and the men, knives and leathers. One little boy went to his mother and asked for money, then went to a little ice cream shack a little ways down the road and came back with two little cups. He looked up and said, "Pretty soldier, take this for thanks from me, and I can have the other?"



Now mind you, we had been told never to accept anything from the nationals, regardless of where it came from. But here was this little boy, couldn't be more than 5 years old, offering me a cup of ice cream. He was so proud that he was helping us in a small but meaningful way that I accepted it. And would you know that still to this day, I have never tasted anything that was even close to as good as this ice cream. It wasn't the flavoring or the sheer coldness on such a hot day that made it taste good. It was the unselfish, full-of-love and compassion and sheer relief that we were not there to destroy their village that made it taste so good.

This memory of Iraq will always remain first in my thoughts; not the turmoil caused, the destruction, the convoy rides through the hot sun, and the cold nights. Not the missions I went on, not the people I deployed with, but instead it was of a little town in Iraq where the people believed in us to be there to help them put Iraq back on a good track so that they did not have to hide the fact that they were Christians – Christians that showed no indifference to those of us who chose not to be; Christians unlike many of those here in America today.

*1SG D. Veneklasen had been in the Infantry several years when he took over as First Sergeant of A Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. When they traveled to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom I in 2003, much of the training he had grown to expect throughout his career was about to run head-on with what he was about to encounter in Samarra, Iraq.*

**1SG D. Veneklasen**  
**VBIED**  
**A Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment**

I assumed responsibility of A Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, based at Schweinfurt, Germany, in early July 2003 with full knowledge of the upcoming deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom II early in 2004. Soldiers from 1-26 Inf., had deployed numerous times to places like Kosovo, Bosnia and Macedonia. However, the focus had been on peace keeping and stability operations prior to Iraq. Now the focus is on combat operations trying to implement a voting process to mold a Democratic process for the Iraqi people.

Six months prior to the deployment, the unit focused on training, such as advanced marksmanship which includes reflex fire techniques, military operations in urban terrain training, platoon and company live fire exercises, detainee operations, medical evacuation requests, and a big concentration on getting 100 percent of the Soldiers in the unit qualified on Combat Life Saver skills. We initiated an intense training schedule; Soldiers knew their mission wasn't going to be a simple live fire exercise. Fortunately, our senior leaders maintained continuity throughout the deployment. It turned out that our training had adequately prepared us for the successes and failures we experienced during this challenging time.

## **Introduction to Car Bombs**

My unit took on many challenges after relieving the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of their duties in Samarra, Iraq, early March 2004. Samarra sits just 30 miles north of Tikrit, home of fallen dictator Saddam Hussein. In 2004, it was full of corruption; full of insurgents.

Our intent when we arrived was to educate the local city council members on what it meant for them to restructure council to be self sufficient and abide by the law. We worked feverishly to enable the city council to self govern, rebuild, protect, employ and maintain safety for its 250,000 citizens. After 45 days of constant patrolling, meeting with the local Imams, and working with the established leadership, a decision was made to allow the community leaders to take the first step in promoting a safe and secure environment for the local Samarra people. Before long, they had established a police force and the city council was working hard to clean the city; it seemed our mission was running as planned.

We felt the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry was making progress but we still maintained presence patrols throughout the city, focusing our efforts toward civil affairs functions, such as rebuilding schools, establishing electricity and running water for the local populace, and helping to clear the streets of any remaining insurgents. My unit in particular seemed to be making large steps forward, but we all felt as if it was almost too good to be true. Although progress was made, we had issues hiring interpreters, and encouraging locals to help clean the streets. It seemed that the trust value between coalition forces and the city remained cautious.

During the rebuilding efforts of Samarra, my unit also took on the role of training what was then called the Iraqi National Guard (ING). We established a training headquarters building just to the east of the Tigris River where others focused on the entry and exit point of the city. We worked a Green, Amber and Red cycle system in support of the ING, rotating the duties internally throughout the battalion. We still maintained a concentrated focus on presence patrols, route clearing, forward operating base (FOB) security, and additional civil affairs efforts. I've never seen better command relationships internally since I joined the Army.

My company's continuing assignments became more complex, with limited boundary changes and our mission included a platoon-minus on quick reaction force missions, a platoon-plus on force protection missions, and a platoon forward working as a combined force supporting the Iraqi National Guard. Our main mission seemed clear: My platoon forward was responsible for the perimeter security, the battalion's mortar platoon maintained a counter battery, and the ING worked the entry control point (ECP).

## **Heat of Battle**

Shortly after 10 a.m., on 8 July, 2004, a vehicle-born improvised explosive device detonated next to a building within the ING headquarters. Within minutes we heard the report -- high casualties among both US and Iraqi National Guard

Soldiers. I prepared for the worst as my quick reaction force and I left the gate. The ING headquarters was a short drive from FOB Brassfield-Mora.

Our equipment status was clear; the battalion's standard operating procedures specified that the QRF include the medical ambulance and a recovery vehicle. We approached the Iraqi National Guard headquarters at around 10:30 a.m. It was clear a coordinated attack was in place as mortar rounds still rained in on the ING Headquarters upon our arrival. As a company first sergeant, I was challenged with numerous tasks, including the Iraqi desert giving off 140-plus degrees and non-stop enemy small arms fire and mortars coming at us. The two-story building housing both Iraqi and US Soldiers was devastated. I was very fortunate to have "Wolfpack 6" Capt. J. Sowers involved with the quick reaction force. It was clear the anti-Iraqi forces had coordinated a catastrophic blow to the US Army and the ING. Our priorities were clear – Capt. Sowers worked the radio, getting additional assets established, while I worked Bradley Fighting Vehicle sectors of fires and a casualty recovery plan. We needed it because it was clear there were casualties already, along with numerous wounded Soldiers.

Our Soldiers were hit and hit hard, with enemy small arms fire still coming from the west bank along the Tigris River. Soldiers that were not pulling security and destroying the enemy were involved with recovering Soldiers from a collapsed building. What was unclear was the number of Soldiers trapped underneath the building. Our Soldiers were staring fatigue and exhaustion in the eyes as the battalion focused efforts on taking care of and evacuating the casualties.

Temperatures now reached 145 degrees and started taking its own casualties as Soldiers started showing serious signs of dehydration as they concentrated on recovery efforts. After four hours of continuous fighting and digging through the collapsed building, Soldiers were starting to show signs of heat exhaustion, so I told Capt. Sowers to request an immediate re-supply of 200 intravenous bags. The Soldiers worked from their hearts but they needed an immediate rest plan. After speaking with Capt. Sowers, I established an additional casualty collection point just for Soldiers to receive an IV. I immediately surveyed the area, taking Soldiers I perceived to be exhausted out of the fight. Our medics were now required to stick every Soldier sent to them with an IV. The medics asked if a uniform degrade was possible during this effort to allow the Soldier to breathe more naturally. When I almost agreed, another round impacted 200 meters east, changing my mind. We decided to leave them in their full gear and pulled in all available leaders to get them refocused on the importance of staying in full battle gear during this challenging time.

The buddy system also needed to be fully implemented. I issued guidance on water consumption, eating, fatigue, sickness and heat injury. I also emphasized that leaders also needed a buddy. Once the fight and recovery actions were well established, we evacuated more than 20 Soldiers, identified four who killed in action, and learned that one was missing. We didn't know if he was still buried or had been evacuated, so the Soldiers continued to dig.

Despite feeling consumed and overwhelmed during the fight, I emplaced Soldiers and vehicles, and designated their sectors of fires. But I didn't realize the impact of the feelings the Soldiers may have had until seven hours into the fight. I spoke with Capt. Sowers and we decided the combat stress team was something that needed to happen and happen soon.

While still trying to coordinate and confirm a battle roster on the number of medically evacuated Soldiers and any missing sensitive items, it was apparent our roles as Soldiers had changed. I often speak of Capt. Sowers as if he was my commander. However, he belonged to Headquarters and Headquarters Company and only became part of the QRF because of great concern over his mortar platoon located the ING Headquarters. Capt. B. Marlin, the Company A commander, was focused on force protection efforts on FOB Brassfield-Mora, although he wanted desperately to be part of his organization in Samarra.

Capt. Marlin later assumed responsibility of the devastated ING headquarters, relieving Capt. Sowers after his outstanding war fighting effort.

The recovery of all US Soldiers and the destruction of anti-Iraqi forces were our priorities until the relief could take place. With one warrior still missing and the temperature starting to recede, our efforts started coming together. We felt it was time to try and piece this tragic day together. Still struggling to find the buried Soldiers, we maximized our force bringing a heavy engineer unit in to help with the rubble. Eight and a half hours later, we finally recovered the missing warrior's body.

### **Reflections of War**

Prior to the attack, the Iraqi National Guard compound had been reinforced with 15-foot high by 15-inch thick concrete barriers – called T-barriers. Workers also had emplaced Hesco barrier bags completely around the entrance, leaving two ING Soldiers guarding the entry control point. The A Company leaders from 3rd Platoon had established quadrant security inside the compound using Bradley Fighting Vehicles and a platoon of mortars. The Iraqi National Guard had maintained a 10 to 25-man force, also within the compound, and took responsibility for the ECP. Observation and rooftop security at the ING headquarters had been left to my A Company Soldiers. We established our presence on the roof with four 50-caliber machine guns and two sniper rifles, which gave us a 360-degree field of fire.

Time spent in this defensive posture allowed us ample time to reflect on the events that had occurred earlier that day. Staff Sgt. W. Horton said he remembered seeing a small sedan parked at the entry control point around 10 a.m. that day, right before the explosion. Bradley Fighting Vehicle Soldiers covering the southeast quadrant also remembered observing the event. Horton said he remembered seeing the driver wearing a police uniform.

A section leader from Alpha Company remembered seeing an ING Soldiers running away from the entry control point shortly after the car was spotted. The

car then sped through the entrance and smashed into the T-barrier, exploding on impact and damaging the right side of the headquarters building, which buried the 20 US Soldiers under the rubble, killing five of them. The blast was so great that the only recognizable piece of the car bomb was the front bumper.

With all the initial confusion, it seemed logical to think the Iraqi National Guard Soldier had been part of the attack. Adding to this belief was the fact that many ING Soldiers were never seen again after the attack and their bodies didn't turn up. Many of us believed they had moved to a secure area with advance warning in order to minimize their losses. I personally feel that to be very true as well.

Our battle focus changed after the attack. We established a new standard and focus toward defeating an enemy that thrived from disrupting any and all gains we put forth toward assisting Iraqis in establishing an Iraqi-run democratic nation. The loss of five warriors and the wounding of another 26 due to lack of security is a cost we cannot afford.

My personal experience also changed how I focused on my leadership style. The lessons we learned were detrimental to our previous training strategy. Complacency is a word I do not believe in but I realized the forces we had trained lived a different value system from us. Our Soldiers were not the issue, however, our senior leadership was. Interpretation and execution of the responsibility given to Iraqi National Guard Soldiers turned into the worst combat experience of my military career. Like any other missions, we double and triple checked our Soldiers prior to executing the mission by using sand tables, rehearsals and back briefs. However, we did not include or at least were hesitant in involving the ING in these rehearsals. Whether it was a fault of mine or our senior leadership, it was a fault that killed five of our service members.

We American Soldiers train to stay aware of our left and right flanks but don't always realize our left and right flanks may include foreign Soldiers. The one-team, one-fight method for everybody is what will make the mission a success.

## FIGHTING INSURGENTS

The Army and the world were stunned by the rapid collapse of the Iraqi Army in 2003. However, the joy was short lived; it soon became apparent that a variety of groups would challenge US and coalition troops in Iraq. There were old Baathists, militias, al-Qaeda and foreign troops, and a variety of others trying to kill American or Coalition Soldiers with car bombs, improvised explosive devices, rocket-propelled grenades, and the ordinary bullet. American troops responded, establishing bases inside Iraq from which they could fight the insurgents.

*1SG R. Greene and the Soldiers of Eagle Troop constructed and maintained two Forward Operating Bases (FOB) in Iraq. This stretched their logistics capabilities to the limit, yet they maintained. They also assisted in the development of a Border Patrol Academy for Iraq thereby helping to stem the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq.*

### **1SG R. Greene “Eagle Troop”**

#### **Eagle Troop, 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment, 07/03-03/04**

During my deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom I, I took on a very challenging assignment as the First Sergeant of Eagle Troop, 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment. Prior to my departure from Fort Carson, Colorado, I received training on Tactical Convoy Operations, Traffic Control Point Procedures, Weapon Qualification, Weapons and Ammunition Identification, Improvised Explosive Device Training, and a Situation Report on the Regiment's combat situation in Iraq. The unit's Rear Detachment was well organized and had systems in place to ensure that my family would be taken care of in the event they needed some type of assistance while I was deployed.

Upon my arrival into to Kuwait I was given numerous briefings, which consisted of Improvised Explosive Device Awareness Training, Antiterrorism Training, Combat Live Fire Training, Rules of Engagement Training and numerous other types training. I was very eager to join my new unit in the fight in Iraq. My movement into Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom I was on a two-hour flight in a Chinook armed with heavy machine guns. The helicopter took me to an old Airbase by the name of Al Asad Airbase in Iraq, which was previously owned and operated by Saddam Hussein's Army.

Upon linking up with my new unit I was greeted by the Squadron Command Sergeant Major. He gave me a briefing on the combat situation of the Regiment and then later introduced me to the Eagle Troop Headquarters Platoon Sergeant. There was no First Sergeant available for a battle handover briefing when I arrived at the Troop I was given a black binder with a few administrative documents enclosed. The unit had already been in the fight for four months when I joined

them in Iraq. They had already taken several casualties, one of whom was killed in action (KIA), and the moral was very low. I knew I had my work cut out for me from that day on. I began to establish a plan that same night on what I wanted to discuss with my Commander and Platoon Sergeants.

My Commander and all the Platoons were out on a recon mission, which later resulted in the establishment of two Eagle Troop Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). When my unit finally returned from their mission, I let them all settle in and get situated. My first experience with my Troop Commander went very well. I explained to him that I was there to support him and the Soldiers of the Troop. I also explained that I had been doing some planning while he was out on the recon. Prior to speaking with my Troop Commander, the Squadron Commander had already briefed me on our battle space and the unit's mission. The mission was to establish a Border Patrol Academy, a Saudi Arabian Border Check Point, and to help rebuild one of the Iraqi towns in our area of operation.

The Regimental Headquarters had assigned us a Squadron-sized battle space, and we realized that it would be tough to cover with a Troop-sized element, but we knew that we had to make this mission a success. The Troop Commander and the Executive Officer sat down with me the next day to layout the details from the recon. Immediately following the meeting with the Troop Commander and Executive Officer, I called a meeting with all my Platoon Sergeants. I introduced myself and told them what I expected of them. I also explained to them that I was there for them, and they should not hesitate to ask me questions about anything that they were unsure of.

We immediately begin to discuss the plan for this operation, because we had to move out in about 5 days. The first thing I wanted to know from them was maintenance and weapons issues they had in each of their platoons. They explained that some of their vehicles were not fully operational due to the shortage of parts. The unit was composed of 10 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 9 M1A2 Abrams Tanks, 2 Mortar Tracks, 12 Up Armored HMMWVs, and some Maintenance/Supply assets. For the most part, their weapon systems were holding up pretty well. I later discussed the critical logistical pieces with all of the Platoon Sergeants and the Executive Officer. I was pretty impressed after speaking to each of the leaders, and they seemed to have their "ducks in a row."

This mission required extensive planning and outside support from Army Reserve Constructional Engineers. My Executive Officer did a really good job of bringing all the support elements on board. Prior to moving out the unit conducted several Pre-Combat Inspections to ensure that our Soldiers, vehicles, weapons, and other equipment were ready for combat. On the way to our new Forward Operating Base, helicopters escorted us with crew-served weapons mounted on them. The unit was already well versed in Tactical Convoy Movement in a hostile environment, but the helicopters were used to scan for Improvised Explosive Device emplacement along the route. Upon our arrival at the new location, we had to immediately establish 360-degree security.

The Commander and I called a meeting upon our arrival at the new Forward Operating Base. We discussed our contingency plan and new priorities of work. We also established a new time line that incorporated a sleep and security plan. The next day was a very long day because we had to build a Forward Operating Base from almost nothing. The buildings that we occupied had been stripped of all the wiring, windows, plumbing, etc. The Army Reserve Constructional Engineers that were attached to us were well prepared to accomplish this mission. Some of the Engineer Company's leadership had accompanied my commander on the recon mission.

Once the Forward Operating Base work was started, we had to come up with another plan to build a second FOB about 120 miles away from the current FOB. Once both Forward Operating Bases were established, we started our combat operations and continuous improvement to the Forward Operating Bases as time permitted. As stated previously, the mission was to help rebuild an Iraqi town in the Al Anbar Province, establish a Iraqi Border Patrol Academy, and to establish Traffic Control Points to stop the shipment of illegal weapons and Improvised Explosive Device making material across the various borders.

The establishment of the two Forward Operating Bases provided us with a place for Soldiers to conduct business simultaneously 120 miles apart. The Commander and I selected the individuals who would man the border checkpoints, and those who would train the Border Patrol students. The Iraqi students were very eager to get trained to defend their borders from terrorists operating in their country. Later in the deployment, the distance between my two FOBs became very strenuous on my Logistics. I was required to put a convoy together every four days for Logistical Package (LOGPAC) Operations. The convoy had to travel a distance of 120 miles each way.

The long distance and frequent trips truly took a toll on my vehicles. We destroyed two M998 Cargo/Troop Carrier HMMWV engines on these long missions. The Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System (SINCGARS RADIO) had some communications issues from one FOB to the other or even short distances outside of any one of the FOBs. The unit encountered a few hostile situations while operating on the border, which resulted in the deaths of several Iraqis, but nowhere near what they had faced while fighting in Fallujah, Iraq. The Border Patrol Academy was a real success story for the Regiment. The establishment of the border checkpoints allowed over 20,000 Iraqi Nationals to drive through Iraq and into Saudi Arabia to attend the annual celebration of Ramadan. Ramadan is an Islamic religious observance that most Iraqis long to attend at some point during their life.

Upon completion of the Regiment's mission during Operation Iraqi Freedom I, the United States Marine Corps relieved us in Al Anbar Province. When the Marines arrived, they seemed very hostile and not willing to listen too much of what we had to say. One thing that amazed me about the Marine Corps was that they had a First Sergeant for Administrative Operations and one for Logistical



Operations. When I met both of them, they seemed to think that they knew everything there was to know about our battle space that we had just spent the last eight months occupying. Although they did not want to listen, I insisted that I would do the morally right thing and continue to push as much information to them as I had during our right and left seat rides.

Nevertheless, during our last week at one of my Forward Operating Bases, I asked the Logistical First Sergeant if he would need any more logistical support from my unit before they took over. He replied with “no thanks I’ve got it handled.” I ordered the Logistical Package anyway, because he was failing to realize that he had to feed over 300 Soldiers and needed Classes I, III, and V for two separate Forward Operating Bases. The Class III would not only be used for tracked and wheeled vehicles, but for power generation and for the four helicopters that were assigned to his unit. On the fourth day when my Logistical Package was about 30 minutes out from the Forward Operating Base, the Marine Logistical First Sergeant came to me and asked me if I could order him one more package before my unit left the area.

This really made me feel good, because I responded that I had already ordered the package because I knew he was going to need it. I told him that it sometimes pays to listen to the people that you are doing a Battle Handover with. During this conversation, my unit was preparing for a long road march from Iraq to Kuwait. Prior to reaching this point, we had to conduct numerous redeployment tasks to ensure that all administrative tasks were conducted before moving back to Kuwait. We had to conduct weapons qualification, crew drills for Tactical Convoys, SRP packet updates, and numerous other redeployment classes.

Before moving out on the convoy, the leadership conducted Pre-Combat Checks, and the Commander and I conducted Pre-Combat Inspections of every vehicle. Extensive Risk Assessments were conducted because of the amount of distance we had to travel in such a hostile area. The unit made it back to Kuwait with no injuries to personnel or loss of equipment. Upon our arrival in Kuwait, we had our work cut out for us at the wash rack. The Regiment spent about 3 weeks trying to get vehicles clean enough to ship back to the United States.

In addition to our wash rack duties, I had to establish another unit Command Post, which was shared by several other units. The sleeping conditions were not the greatest, but we had seen worse. The establishment of my unit in Kuwait required a lot of coordination with the Squadron Personnel Actions Center for manifesting flights, mandatory debriefings from the Chaplain, etc. Some Soldiers were identified as high-risk individuals and therefore could not go with their Families until after a 72 hours cool down process upon their arrival in Fort Carson, Colorado. Explaining to some of these Soldiers that they would not be able to go home immediately was pretty tough, but it was part of the Risk Management Process that was mandated from our higher Chain of Command.

My unit learned a lot of difficult lessons while deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom I. One of the main things that we learned is that there cannot be

enough training on combat-related tasks. The training that we received prior to the deployment was great, but we needed to focus more on Urban War Fighting Tactics. As NCOs, we have to remember to continue to train our subordinates' two levels up. This will help to ensure that our Soldiers are ready to step up to the next level if the combat situation dictates.

The next lesson learned was that the SINCGARS Radio had some issues when operating 120 miles away from the next Forward Operating Base. The Regiment had radios with the capability of talking further than this, but they were in limited supply. This put Soldiers' lives at risk. During some of our Logistical Operations, my Soldiers and I had to travel long distances without radio communication. The technique that I used was that when I departed for the Logistical Package mission, I would call my other FOB via satellite radio or satellite phone to inform them that I was en-route to their location. They knew that if I did not arrive by a certain amount of time that they needed to come and meet the LOGPAC.

The final lesson learned was Administration Operations. I started to question my NCOs about counseling and Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Reports. They told me that the guidance they received from the chain of command was that these reports would be waived, because this was the start of the War on Terrorism and the higher headquarters did not have a plan to track evaluations. As mentioned earlier, when I first arrived at the unit, the administrative paperwork that I received consisted of only a black binder with a couple of documents in it. I immediately begin to fix this problem for my Soldiers and Noncommissioned Officers.

I had to put systems in place to get the reports done. I explained to my Noncommissioned Officers that just because a unit is in combat, your Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Reports do not stop. The Army will still continue to hold promotion boards and promote Soldiers during combat. This was a tough task to accomplish with the limited systems that we had in place, but eventually we made it happen.

The unit encountered a number of problems upon redeployment. The initial problem was with Soldiers who had developed marital and financial problems. These individuals were advised to attend counseling sessions to help them try to get their lives back together. The unit also had problems with establishing new work areas, because the footprint that they had prior to deployment had been given to mobilized Reserve and National Guard units that had been called up to perform duties on Fort Carson while the Regiment was deployed. The Rear Detachment was supposed to have all these issues resolved prior to our redeployment, but it did not happen. Our equipment took quite a while to return from Kuwait to Fort Carson and limited our ability to continue to train our Soldiers on critical combat tasks.

In conclusion, Eagle Troop and the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen successfully completed our mission during Operation Iraqi Freedom I. Upon the completion of our tour in Iraq, Eagle Troop was awarded the Unit Armor Draper Leadership Award.

*There are times when training fails to prepare a unit for real action on the ground. ISG J. Thanheiser tells of how his unit, lacking in combat experience, did not prepare with realistic scenarios for what lay ahead on a convoy from Kuwait to Forward Operating Base Warrior in Iraq. There were major questions that needed answers. How do you guide the lead vehicle? What happens if a vehicle breaks down? Are the rules of engagement practical and usable for the situation?*

**SGM J. Thanheiser**  
**Convoy to Kirkuk**  
**1-27 Infantry, 02/08/04-02/11/04**

When the airplanes flew into the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001, I was a First Sergeant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry. We were stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Initially we had no direct orders to deploy in support of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). We were the Army's Pacific punch. A year later, we were put on notice that we would be going to Afghanistan. In the Battalion, we had only 20 Soldiers who had previously experienced combat. We did send a platoon from the Battalion to augment the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). This added roughly 34 Soldiers to the combat experience pool, but it was in Iraq not Afghanistan.

21 January 2004, Task Force (TF) 1<sup>st</sup> BN 27th IN deployed to Camp Virginia, Kuwait as part of TF Warrior 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. As a light infantry battalion, we were task organized to depend on supporting units for transportation. Our mission was to perform a Relief in Place (RIP), with elements of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade in northern Iraq. Throughout our deployment, I was the First Sergeant of Headquarters, Headquarters Company (HHC). Although we had gone through several months of preparation for our deployment, we still had a great many tasks to complete prior to crossing the "berm", the unofficial name for the border between Kuwait and Iraq.

Originally, we were going to deploy to Afghanistan. Our train up for that deployment included many days of air assault training. We were told that very few missions would be conducted on the road. Our goal was to complete all re-supply missions by air. With that as our battle cry, we ensured all personnel were very familiar with sling load and air movement of personnel and equipment. During our pre-deployment field training exercises, we conducted one Ground Assault Convoy (GAC), which was to the Brigade Support Area (BSA). We put very little emphasis on the convoy operations, figuring any ground movements would be tactical operations involving few Company personnel. The Company Sections that had trucks, anti-tank, mortar and medics had specific Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs) and would be executing them. The support platoon owned the battalions light medium tactical vehicles (LMTVs) and the majority of the battalions high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs)

and would be giving them to the line companies, and concentrating on air re-supply.

In November 2003, everything changed; we would be going to Iraq. There would be very little air support for re-supply, and we needed to be prepared to conduct almost daily ground convoys to forward operating bases (FOBs) for resupplies. We also conducted a change of command at the company level in December. Our new Company Commander had not been involved in any of our pre-deployment training.

Immediately upon arrival in Kuwait, we started preparing our vehicles. We had four M1114s up-armored HMMWVs in the battalion. The remaining vehicles were soft skinned cargo or “clamshell” HMMWVs. We started bolting scrap metal found on Camp Virginia, Kuwait to every vehicle. We also experimented with placing sandbags on the floor boards of our vehicles. For some of the trucks this was the bridge too far. We cut back to covering the passenger side floorboards and one or two in other locations. Most of our vehicles needed at least some maintenance and some had not endured the boat ride very well. We were given gun mounts to mount in front of the passenger seat. In addition, all cargo trucks were fitted with pedestals in the bed of the truck. On the surface, this seemed like a great idea, but we had not trained with them, and set up and placement was randomly established. Some of the pedestals were still in place a year later when we redeployed but not many. In addition to preparing vehicles for the trip and subsequent missions, we were loading container express (CONEXs) for ground shipment, establishing load plans for the trucks that would be conducting the convoy north and organizing for the mission. The young NCOs who ensured their Soldiers were in the right place at the right time made this seemingly impossible mission possible.

We had established that no one would cross the berm until they had zeroed their personal weapon. My reconnaissance platoon had received several new weapons just prior to deployment and spent several days familiarizing and then qualifying those systems. The tactical platoons were not difficult to get to the ranges, the staff and platoons whose missions revolved around trucks however were another issue. It was difficult pulling significant numbers away from planning and preparing vehicles to get them to ranges and still complete all the truck modifications. We also lost those Soldiers for the day due to the distance to the range. We accomplished this task through outstanding small unit leadership pushing and leading from the front. Coaching the new Soldiers through the zero process, while ensuring they stayed hydrated and warm. When we left Hawaii, it was about 86°; in Kuwait, it was in the 40s.

In addition to individual training, we received classes from “veterans” on how to conduct operations north of the berm. We did complete our first convoy live fire on a range that allowed for 180° fires. We conducted this training with a skeleton crew, because we could not afford to stop working on vehicle preparation. Therefore, minus the majority of the personnel that would be traveling in our

serials, we were allowed the opportunity to conduct our operation with key personnel in each serial. However, the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) training was detrimental. We were told to stop for any suspicious amounts of garbage on the side of the road, when we stopped we should go into the “box” defense. First, anyone who has traveled Iraqi roads would note that they are full of suspicious amounts of garbage, and since most roads in northern Iraq are lined with large drainage ditches attempting to put the convoys’ vehicles into a box formation would probably drown the side vehicles. The plus out of this training though, was that the convoy commander and his assistant had the opportunity to experience on a minor scale some of the issues they would face. Experience with large convoys over several days was a shortcoming that we would gain only after completing our initial mission. Battalion had selected my Company Commander to be the convoy commander and we had selected our mortar platoon leader to be his assistant. The Platoon Leader had more convoy experience and seemed a good choice. Looking back, we should have made him the commander and selected his Platoon Sergeant as the assistant based solely on experience.

The Rules of Engagement (ROE) were stressed at every level. We briefed and back briefed until all leaders were confident that they were well known. Looking back, our ROE were unrealistic and did not take into account what our mission was. We were insuring the security of our force through a somewhat overly protective set of rules. Any vehicle that got within our safety zone was fair game, regardless of what actions they were taking. This could have resulted in catastrophe had any Iraqis driven too close.

Prior to departure, we sent a leaders’ recon to the “berm” to get “eyes on” the route. This was supposed to make day one smooth. From my serial, the commander and the truck commander (TC) from the lead truck were the only ones to go. On game day, the lead truck and crew were positioned at a final check point leading to the road to Iraq. Four serials came through our check point. On serial five, my serial, only the convoy commander had been on the route recon. He did not position himself in a location to see where the convoy was going and the convoy rolled past our check point and headed south to Kuwait city instead of Iraq. This caused a delay of about one hour getting the convoy back together and headed in the right direction. Some of the contributing factors were unwillingness by drivers to break standard civilian driving rules. They continued down the highway looking for a “legal” turn around, instead of hitting the first available turn around heading in the right direction. We had not gotten out of the training mode and into the combat mode yet. This incident did get all the Soldiers in my convoy to readjust their thinking and remember that we could not afford to adhere to driving regulations when they conflicted with tactical decisions. That was the only incident that I can recall where we allowed ourselves to separate the force because of local laws. After we had reformed the convoy we headed north to FOB Navstar, when we arrived, we had completed the shortest leg of our trip. We were the trail serial of the battalion convoy, and along with the Company Commander

and me, we had the Battalion Executive Officer (XO) and Command Sergeant Major (CSM). Their guidance was at times painful but they did get results at the stops along the way that made the operation smoother. That evening we ate at the best Dining Facility (DFAC) on the planet. We received a briefing on the next day's routes and departure times. In addition, we completed final preparations before crossing the berm.

We were the fifth serial in TF Wolfhounds convoy and each serial departed with approximately 40 vehicles. We were separated by timed intervals to prevent becoming a massive target. It was a great plan on paper, but in order for the lead serials to maintain speed, convoy leaders were leaving behind broken vehicles or vehicles that could not maintain speed. By the end of the day, our 40 vehicle convoy consisted of around 60 to 70 vehicles, moving at approximately around 30 miles per hour. This added stress to everyone concerned with our convoys' security. We also had to fight the weather; our SOP at that time was to travel with our windows down so that we could return fire, if needed. The cold caused some to bundle up so much that they could not return fire.

Our goal had been to fly as many Soldiers north and keep only enough behind providing a driver, TC and gunner per vehicle. We almost met that goal. However, we still had one or two extra Soldiers per vehicle. The benefit was added security during movement, but at stops, these extra Soldiers seemed to want to run off resulting in delays. We also suffered delays due to miscommunication. When the XO heard we could get extra tires along our route he mentioned that it would be a "nice to have item". We wasted several hours waiting for the commander to get back from his scavenger hunt. Many of the "way stations" along the way also wasted our time with pointless hoops through which we had to jump in order to receive parts and services.

We received a briefing every night on the next day's route. We were given a strip map that was supposed to make our route clear. These maps rarely met that goal. We also had new technology that allowed properly equipped vehicles to see a map with all similarly equipped vehicles marked on their screen. Unfortunately, we did not put one of those vehicles on point. We relied on those equipped with the global positioning system (GPS), to communicate with the point vehicle and give a heads up on turns. This system caused several heated exchanges when the point vehicle would miss a turn. In one case while traveling through Baghdad, an IED was spotted. This caused a break in contact and a refuel site was identified as a link up point. When we had everyone back together we had lost several hours, and patience throughout the leadership was gone. We then moved to our final way station on the route. The strip map did not make very clear where we were going and the point vehicle drove past the turn point. We were overwhelmed by the radio traffic from those who had onboard GPS telling us we had missed our turn although we had received no word of warning that the turn was coming.

The last official night of the convoy was spent in FOB Speicher. In the morning, we met our escorts for the last part of the trip and hit the road. The first

thing we noticed was that we had not been going nearly as fast as we could go. The scouts zipped down the road as fast as they could get their trucks to go. For this part of the trip, we had no strip maps and were at the mercy of the scouts. We pulled into FOB Gainsmill shortly before sunset, with the goal to get our Soldiers who were going to FOB Warrior on the road before the sun went down. This caused some initial confusion; but again through strong team leader action, the proper people were put on the proper vehicles and we convoyed to FOB Warrior. HHC minus arrived after gathering Soldiers from five separate serials just after the sun set, and we were welcomed to Kirkuk by two rockets and a handful of mortars.

### **Lessons Learned**

The most important thing is the proper use of those young leaders. From a theater change to a core change in how operations take place young Soldiers make it possible. The second major factor is never waste training time. We should have rehearsed how we were going to guide the point vehicle. This is no longer a problem since most of our vehicles were fitted with GPS systems. Nevertheless, it should have been rehearsed. We should have spent more time on convoy contingencies at the battalion level, (i.e. What is the plan for vehicles going down and what is the plan to get them back to their convoy.)

*MSG P. Johnson writes about a rear area Army post in Kuwait. She, like most people, received a surprise when she arrived; a fully developed Army post with a well-equipped physical fitness center, shower facilities, laundry tents, and a PX. Though the mess hall was over a half a mile away, the food was good and plentiful. She also marveled that dogs, cats, and rats seemed to accompany the Army wherever they went, even in the middle of the desert.*

### **MSG P. Johnson 319<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion Operation Iraqi Freedom, 12/03-3/05**

On 9 September 1975, I was eighteen years old for six days and woke up on a bus at Fort McClellan, Alabama. My unit was the last female only Basic Training unit at the fort. My excitement quickly changed to anxiety when we received a greeting of, "Put those cigarettes out and get off my bus!" What have I done? It was too late. I was in the United States Army.

After 30 years of service in the United States Army, I got the opportunity to do what Soldiers are trained to do – defend my country against an enemy.

Upon arrival at the 319<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, Sacramento, California in July 2003, I was informed the battalion was awaiting receipt of mobilization orders to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II (OIF II). The news filled me with emotions, surprised, curiosity, anxious, nervous, excitement, the whole range.

Although I had been a Signaler my whole career, it had only been the last seven years that I'd actually be assigned to a Signal unit. Most of my assignments had been with MI units.

The MOB order directed that we use Fort Bliss, Texas, as our MOB station and we mobilized to Fort Bliss 12-13 December 2003. Sustainment and Support Operations (SASO) training and validation took three months. It seemed BN movement was not the norm. We strained resources everywhere we went. Then it was off to OIF II.

The flight was long and we arrived in Kuwait at night. The BN was split – some went north; some went to Doha and the remainder stayed in Kuwait.

The next day was a memorable day for all. Tents everywhere! Chemical latrines everywhere! The dining facility half a mile, one-way! This was home for the next 12 months.

Our camp had compliments of all the coalition forces. In hindsight I should have kept a diary. I was often surprised by which force has females.

Civilian news reports always showed a low level of support for the US being in Iraq. But to those of us on the ground civilian support was very high. This assessment is from the amount of comfort items and letters received. The camp MWR tent stayed very well stocked, as were the unit MWR tents. Some conflict harden Soldiers were reduced to tears at the reception received on the way home for R&R.

We relieved the 151 Signal BN from the Nevada Army National Guard. About six weeks after we got in country, during the RIP, one of the guardsmen was participating in physical training when he suddenly fell ill. We were later informed that he died of a heart attack. That was my first experience of actually knowing someone that died during a war/OOTW. After the 151 returned stateside we kept in touch with some of the members. We were sad to hear that after their return one of the Soldier committed suicide. No reason was given but from our interaction with the Soldier it was really out of character!

The most memorable thing about Kuwait was the nights. They did not hold any hints of the scorching heat or barren landscape. Everyone says the desert is nothing but sand when in fact there is a layer of rock not too far underground. The sand is treacherous though. Gloves stored in a zip lock bag inside a duffel bag were full of sand upon my return CONUS.

The sight of herds of camel on the Udiari weapons range was also memorable. It was just like in the movies!

Another memory for me was the sight of a cat outside our tents. How does a cat become a stray in the desert? There were several around our tents, obviously after the rats, but I do not associate domestic cats with the desert. There were packs of wild dogs but you can see how they got there, but cats?

Physical fitness played an important role with morale for deployed Soldiers. Walking everywhere, to shower trailers, dining facility, laundry tent, PX, place of duty helped. As a member of a combat service support unit, life consisted of



six days of 12+ hour shifts. Obviously the Army is aware of the need because the fitness centers were complete and well equipped.

*1SG S. Brooks, Headquarters and Distribution Company, conducted a thirty-six hour convoy to Baghdad as part of the lead element for the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. Their mission was to provide all logistical and life sustaining supplies for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team (BCT). He attributes training as the key to success of the unit, however, he admits in entering battle Soldiers always have many doubts.*

**1SG S. Brooks**  
**15<sup>th</sup> FSB, Task Force Baghdad**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Cav. Div., 01/04-02/04**

The training of Soldiers was my top priority, as the First Sergeant for Headquarters and Distribution Company. I was responsible for ensuring the unit could execute all assigned tasks, as the Battalion relied on Headquarters Company to spearhead all requirements. As the unit First Sergeant, I felt as if I was the right noncommissioned officer (NCO) for the job. I believed that I brought a lot to the table and could see the confidence in me from my Soldiers and NCOs.

My unit consisted of fuel handlers, cooks, water treatment personnel, communication specialists, administration clerks, truck drivers and numerous other specialties. After seventeen years of service in the military, I was confident in my abilities to lead my unit. My assignments included tours with Infantry Battalions and Signal Brigades, an Airborne Pathfinder Company at the Aviation Center in Fort Rucker, 3/325<sup>th</sup> Airborne Combat Team in Italy and five years with the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces. My Soldiers would receive my best and deserved nothing less.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, received orders to deploy to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in the Fall of 2003. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team (2BCT) would spearhead the deployment. The 15<sup>th</sup> Forward Battalion supported the 2BCT and was critical in the deployment phase. The unit train up process took about six months conducting several Field Training Exercises (FTXs) and one NTC rotation. The most beneficial training we received occurred during SGTs Time Training. The unit would go to training areas and continuously drill on convoy operations. The training included react to direct and indirect fire, actions from the halt, react to an improvised explosive device while at the halt and several other tasks. The training occurred in three phases, crawl, walk and run, which was extremely beneficial as Soldiers became comfortable and confident in the training, themselves and each other. We qualified all Soldiers several times in weapon marksmanship with individual and crew served weapons.

I felt confident the unit was trained and prepared to deploy, and immediately following the New Years Holiday of 2004, we started the initial deployment on 8 January 04, with the last Soldier arriving into Kuwait on 22 January 04. Additional

training in Kuwait occurred and after completion of that training, orders to go forward followed, with my unit to wheel convoying into Iraq.

The convoy in which I traveled consisted of approximately thirty vehicles of which none had the standard up armor available today. The only modification made to the vehicles were to sand bag the floors, not exceeding the vehicle capability and mount crew serve weapons, if modifications could be made to accommodate that particular vehicle. After seventeen years of service, I had entered a combat zone facing an able and willing enemy, who was lurking and waiting for a chance to take my life and any of the one-hundred forty-seven Soldiers in my company.

Trained for the mission, both anxious and nervous, we traveled over six-hundred miles without incident. Our arrival into our Forward Operating Base took approximately thirty-six hours by wheel convoy, resting overnight twice in route to the city of Baghdad. We met the advance party, which departed thirty-six hours ahead of us, but forty-eight hours behind the pre-advanced party. Their mission was to receive and integrate the main body. I could feel the tension and nervousness in the air as we traveled along the highway. Soldiers did not know what to expect, and for the first time, many had a basic load of ammunition in their possession, and a round chambered in their weapon. Soldiers had permission, in accordance with the rules of engagement, to defend themselves, their friend and Army property by the use of deadly force, if needed.

The unit's mission and tasks was clear; provide all the logistical and life sustainment for the 2BCT. Our Brigade was the lead element for the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, and we would secure and establish an operational Forward Operating Base (FOB) prepared to receive three additional Brigades with attachments and detachments.

My company, within 15<sup>th</sup> FSB, would be operational and prepared to receive and distribute Class I-IX, in forty-eight hours. The unit we replaced was a support company assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division out of Germany. This unit had very little to offer us. Their supplies were depleted and their equipment was not to standard, however my right seat ride with the unit First Sergeant was enlightening and informative. Through the First Sergeant, I gained some insight to the unit mission, the challenges they faced, and issues they dealt with.

Soldiers discussed death, wondering if they would see their loved ones again. What was our true purpose for being in country? Exactly who was the enemy? Were the local nationals on the FOB creditable or did they have an agenda that was not in our best interest? Could I really trust my buddy with my life? There seemed to be more questions than answers.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Forward Support Battalion would provide all the force protection for the site, which was approximately a four-mile perimeter. To set-up a defensive perimeter would not be as difficult as you would imagine, we were inside of one of Saddam Hussein's private hunting grounds fully equipped with thirty-eight guard towers. The towers surrounded the FOB, making it ideal for the task.

The Coalition Provisional Authorities (CPA) were in place as the former

regime was in hiding, captured or on the run, to include Saddam Hussein. A primary mission for the Task Force was to set the conditions for national elections that would lay the groundwork for a functional government. Sectarian violence was on the rise given the number of roadside bombings, suicide car bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings. The violence was an intimidation tactic used to discourage any support for the CPA, Coalition Forces or anyone who supported our cause.

Training was the key to our success, nothing we encountered was a total surprise. We anticipated 99 percent of the missions conducted. Uncertainty was something that existed in us all. Our primary mission was logistical support to include wheeled vehicle convoy re-supply. The Battalion Commanders guidance was that convoy commanders and assistant Convoy Commanders would be NCOs; this was the confidence that the commander had in the NCO Corps. The Officer Corps in the unit at the time was young to the military, which may have explained his rationale.

Convoy re-supply operations were our focus, with each convoy consisting of an average of ten wheeled vehicles and the appropriate gun trucks. The unit would conduct re-supply missions almost nightly, using all Soldiers at one point or another. Operations would start with a warning order from the Battalion Headquarters, identifying the cargo, location and time of execution.

All convoy operations would take place after midnight as intelligence provided to us showed a startling trend. Statistics showed that only about five percent of the roadside bombings occurred between the hours of 2400 and 0400, and because of this information all convoys conducted in the Battalion would occur within this window, unless totally unavoidable. This thought process and the undisputed facts reassured the Soldiers. The staff had definitely done their homework, giving the leadership the tools and information to prepare for the mission. In my opinion, intelligence played a key role in the 100 percent success of convoy operations in my unit

The first step was to assign a senior NCOs as Convoy Commander and as Assistant Convoy Commander. Each unit in the Battalion provided logistical support. The 1<sup>st</sup> Company Forward Support Company's provided the 5 K Tankers, our Company contributed lowboys loaded with class IX supplies, EFSMC provided medic support, the 3rd Forward Support Company provided the material handling equipment, and 4th Company provided the gun trucks. This consolidated effort was successful, and allowed for the rotation of personnel. The process also gave the command the flexibility to conduct simultaneous missions, ensuring all supported units could maintain their combat readiness posture and allowed the Battalion to conduct other required tasking without interruption.

Pre combat (PCCs) checks prior to mission execution consumed the leadership. Convoy Commanders had approximately thirty hours of notification prior to mission execution; this was standard operating procedures and provided the maximum preparation time. Unit convoy operations were in a matrix type

format and as far out as possible. We had some predictability based on the consumption of supplies and equipment, and scheduled missions accordingly. The best NCOs available performed duties as Convoy Commanders; there was simply no room for error on this type of operation; Our Soldiers deserved the best. PCCs started with mission notification, and then every vehicle went through a preventive maintenance checks and services conducted by the maintenance company. Each vehicle would receive a “go” or “no go” in accordance with the appropriate technical manual.

The process would normally take anywhere from eight to ten hours. The Convoy Commander would give his official Operations Order briefing, with all participants present, including the chain of command. With the Operations Order briefing complete, the equipment staged and ready, a sleep plan would go into effect. Two hours prior to departure pre combat inspections would occur again. Every First Sergeant in the battalion was required to be present, for last minute inspection of vehicle loads, and personnel.

First Sergeants conducted personal inspections of Soldiers, checking for the proper uniform and wear, a full basic load of ammunition, medic bag if applicable, knowledge of situation, based on the intelligence briefing, and the Soldiers state of mind.

Convoys departed only after the Senior NCO leadership, including the Battalion Command Sergeant were satisfied that Soldiers and equipment were ready to go. You might think that this would be micro managing or undermining a Convoy Commanders authority, but to the contrary, I believed it just reassured the Soldiers of the importance of the mission and concern of the leadership for their welfare.

The Supply Support Activity (SSA) performed superbly, the demand for Class IV, VII and IX was great. This SSA would receive and process on an average of 1500 military request orders (MROs) a day, in contrast to ninety a day, given normal operations. Soldiers in the SSA would work around the clock to keep up with supply and demand. I had the SSA Platoon Sergeant devise a work schedule that allowed for only five hours of sleep for each SSA Soldiers and with all meals provided at the work site. This scheduled allowed minimal work disruption. Soldiers also performed tower and gate guard contributing to the FOB force protection requirement, which was a tremendous display of physical and mental stamina for the Soldier and NCOs. The Assistant Division Commander (Supply) would publicly recognize the SSA platoon for a superb performance on many occasions throughout the deployment.

The unit would not be without some social and personal issues. Considering that the Battalion had its mix of male and female Soldiers, both NCOs and Officers. Fornication and adultery became a major issue that affected combat readiness. The command evacuated several pregnant Soldiers. Sexual relations, both heterosexual and homosexual were evident, adultery was rampant, although easily prosecuted once identified. Mutual sex amongst Soldiers occurred although

highly discouraged due to the possibility of unplanned pregnancy and the extreme environmental conditions. Environmental conditions were conducive to sexual transmitted diseases and all Soldiers were educated on this subject by medical personnel.

After fourteen months in theater, the unit returned OCONUS, but only after the re-deployment operation would take place. The unit did a right seat ride with the 256<sup>th</sup> Support Battalion, the incoming unit, identified and laterally transferred millions of dollars of supplies and equipment. My unit left over 70 percent of its rolling stock in Iraq, to include up armored vehicles. No item acquired in country could return stateside, it became property of the incoming unit.

After completion of this phase of redeployment, the 2BCT relocated to a holding area for outbound units. The command produced exhaustive and constantly changing manifests for both wheeled convoy, and airlift operations to Kuwait. The process ensured that the 2BCT re-deployment would synchronize and be conducive to the incoming unit. With all re-deployment requirements met, my unit began re-deployment in the middle of February 2005 with the last Soldier returning in March 2005.

Fortunately, I can say that my unit did not lose a single Soldier, not to the enemy or by accident, which so many did. I fully understand that other units, having different missions, and conducting them under different circumstances, suffered unavoidable casualties. I believe that much of our success was a result of good leadership, and the difficult and realistic training that took place prior to and during our deployment. My opinion is that leadership at all levels performed superbly. We all realized that nothing could take the place of our greatest asset, the American Soldier.

*During January 2005, C Company was part of the effort to ensure free so that open elections were held in Iraq. Essentially, they would construct a barrier defense for polling places in their sector and with the assistance of Iraqi Security Forces, every Iraqi was able to vote in peace. At the same time they had to be mindful of the continuing fight against rebel forces.*

**1SG T. Weiss**  
**Iraq's Election, Baghdad 22-30 January 2005**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regt., 5<sup>th</sup> BCT, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry**

**Cobra Company**

Cobra Company consisted of four platoons and had been in country for 10 months. During the months of April and November 2004, the company fought in the Shi'ite uprisings. We conducted several different types of missions and were ready for the task at hand. The company had gone through rigorous training at Fort Hood, Texas. Military Operations in Urban Terrain training was the focus while there and we received some advanced rifle training while in Kuwait. Each

platoon patrolled their sector twice a day. The squads worked day on and day off.

In January 2005, Cobra Company deployed to Baghdad, Iraq and my company was located in the Dora District of southern Baghdad. With 150 Soldiers attached to us from the Third Iraqi Baghdad Battalion and a company of Iraqi Special Forces, with only two weeks remaining before Iraq's elections, we were charged with protecting more than one million Iraqi civilians and safeguarding delivery of their ballots - we were ready. Three neighborhoods within Baghdad comprised Cobra's sector - Al-Sahaa, Abu-Dasheer and Al-Mechanic.

Red Platoon (1<sup>st</sup> Platoon) consisted of two squads with 17 combat Soldiers and one medic in each. Our equipment involved two Abrams tanks, two combat armored Humvees, and two cargo up-armored Humvees. Red's sector was Al-Mechanic located on the eastern most side of the Company's sector. Al-Mechanic was inhabited mostly by, ex-Bathe party and Saddam's police forces, making it the most wealthy section in sector. It was mostly quiet but it is widely believed that the occupants supported the insurgency financially.

White Platoon (2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon) consisted of two squads, eighteen combat Soldiers and one medic, with two Abrams Tanks, combat up-armored Humvees, and one standard Humvee with an add on armor kit. White's sector was Abu-Dasheer located in the Southwestern part of sector. Abu-Dasheer is Baghdad's southern slum, a kinder box and haven for Muqtar Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. It was by far our most active sector and the location of the Battalion's two largest battles during our tour.

Blue Platoon (3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon) consisted of two squads, eighteen combat Soldiers and one medic, with two Abrams Tanks, one combat up-armored Humvee, and three Humvees with add on armor kits. Blue's sector was Al-Sahaa the northeast end of sector. Sahaa was believed to be a prostitution district but was a fairly quiet neighborhood, frequented by gun smugglers and drug dealers when they had a pocket full of money. An occasional raid on a brothel would provide us with information on gun smugglers and gun dealers.

Green Platoon (4<sup>th</sup> Platoon) consisted of three squads, thirty personnel attached to us from the 4/5 Artillery Battalion was comprised mostly of cooks and mechanics. Their equipment consisted of two combat up-armored Humvees and two Humvees with add on armor kits. Green's sector was a small piece of Sahaa and Abu-Dasheer. It bordered Iraq Highway #8, also known as Airport Road. The sector was small and dangerous; it was closest to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Falcon, and used by the enemy to launch mortar attacks against the FOB. It was also home to one of Sadr's top lieutenants and a popular Shiite Mosque.

Black Platoon (Headquarters Platoon) consisted of two squads, twenty personnel, sixteen combat troops, one medic, and three support personnel. Their equipment consisted of combat up-armored Humvee, two Humvees with add on armor kits, one Light Medium Tactical Vehicle (LMTV) with up-armor kit, and

two five tons. Black Platoon patrolled the entire company sector and supported platoons in their sectors as needed.

### **The Barrier Plan**

CPT Schmucker and the Platoon Sergeants (with input from the Platoon leaders) developed a plan to use cement barriers and concertina wire to secure the poll sites. The plan was to prevent suicide car bombers from getting into the crowds. The Iraqi's Third Battalion, Baghdad Division was attached to the Mustangs (1/8 Cav). Troops from the Third Iraqi Battalion would be used at the Poll sites to search civilians as they entered the sites. To prevent the enemy from pre-positioning explosives, the sites were kept secret until the Third Iraqi Battalion could be moved into to secure them. 170 cement barriers and 1000 rolls of concertina wire were allocated for our sector. Headquarters Platoon would emplace the barriers, to keep from taking the other platoons away from their sectors of responsibility. Platoon Sergeants would accompany the Headquarters element during operations to ensure emplacement of the barriers met the intent of their respective plans.

Once the Poll sites were secured, the Platoon Sergeants and Squad Leaders notified the local civilian leaders of the barrier emplacements. This was done to prevent cars from being blocked in behind the barriers, and they would be aware of the traffic disruptions. The barrier emplacements were conducted after the 2200 curfew, and completed prior to daylight. The equipment needed to move the barriers, trucks with cranes, were limited making emplacement a logistical challenge.

Red's sector held most of the poll sites and was farthest from the FOB and would be first to receive barriers. All of the Platoons took personal ownership of their neighborhoods, and tended to ask for more material than they actually needed. Our limit was 170 concrete barriers, although the Platoons had requested a total of 240 barriers. Concertina wire would be used to make up the shortages. Al-Mechanic would be a two-day operation.

Abu-Dasheer would be second in line, being the most volatile area, and would require the bulk of the barriers. Black conducted a joint recon with Green and White platoons throughout their sector - it too would be a two-day operation. Close to the FOB and easily accessed it would be an easy operation, providing the enemy would cooperate. White would also use mostly concertina wire. It would be emplaced the day before the elections, to prevent theft by the locals. Routine patrols conducted by White supported by Black and Green would conduct the wire emplacement.

Blue's sector would be a one-night operation with only two poll sites. Both sites were easily accessed and would only take two convoys to complete. This would be the drivers' fifth night in sector and they would have driven all routes, into and out of sector. The challenge for us was the use of an Iraqi Special Forces Company that was attached to us within the final days of the operation.

## **Cobra's Support Elements**

The Support Battalion had two wreckers capable of lifting the barriers. The trucks on the FOB would be loaded with a crane and unloaded in the sector with the wreckers. The flat bed trucks could haul eight barriers at a time, and this would be the first time for most of the drivers to be in the sector. Cobra Black would escort the convoys into the sector and provide dismounted security while emplacement operations were conducted. You could sense the anxiety in the drivers. During the first ten months we rotated our mechanics into our squads, giving them patrol experience. That paid dividends for us during this operation.

Prior to any patrol leaving the FOB a convoy brief was conducted. To ensure everybody had the proper frequencies, knew the succession of the Chain of Command, location of the medic, and actions on contact. The mechanics had a familiarity of the sector and would be used as vehicle Commanders (TCs), gunners, and drivers on the support trucks. Operations were conducted after curfew so it wouldn't be hampered by local traffic, but were still vulnerable to insurgent attacks. Some of the female drivers had been in sector as part of female searcher teams during raids, but it would be their first time conducting this type of operation, in one case a female served as a gunner on one of the wreckers.

On the Road March into sector the second truck in the convoy took a turn too sharp and lost his barriers, blocking the road for the rest of the convoy. Luckily, the truck behind him was a wrecker driven by one of Cobra's SGT Mechanics. The young SGT quickly used the wrecker's heavy bumper as a plow and cleared the route for the rest of the convoy. This mishap would set us back a day and emphasized the absolute necessity for ensuring that cargo is properly secured and that drivers operate at a safe speed to ensure cargo safety.

Once on site in Al-Mechanic, I briefed the Commander of the situation. My recommended course of action would be for me and the Platoon Sergeant from Black to escort the empty truck back to the FOB, swap it out with a full one, and get this one reloaded, and put into the second serial. The Commander approved the course of action. As the emplacement of the barriers began, I briefed the NCOs in the convoy of the required security and their responsibilities. I had the platoon sergeant reduce our crews to the minimum required to travel and used the rest to provide security for the operation. I notified Mustang TOC of the situation, and requested that they contact the support Battalion to help facilitate the change in order to keep the mission on schedule.

Before leaving the site I inspected the security and talked to the operators to ensure they knew what was going on and that their weapons systems were properly oriented. Enemy activity had been surging in this sector over the past few days. We departed using the most direct route to the FOB. All coordination was completed once we returned to the FOB and the swap out went smoothly. The coordination was conducted and executed by junior NCOs, from both Battalions, another testament to how US Army junior NCOs are trained. We were able to rendezvous with the Commander at the second site, with no incidents, and kept the



operation on schedule. With four companies in need of the support assets, it was vital to mission success that we completed our mission according to schedule.

### **The Attachments**

The Third Battalion numbered 300 Iraqi Soldiers and was attached to Cobra and Dog companies. Along with 150 from the Third Battalion we were given a company of Iraqi Special Forces. The Special Forces would go to Blue Platoon, and one Iraqi Company each from the third Battalion went to Red and White's sectors.

With the Third Battalion's Troops in position on the Poll sites, we executed the barrier plan after dark. When Cobra Six entered the first poll site, he received some small arms fire. Which confused me at first, because the sites were secure. The fire was coming from the friendly Iraqi forces. I contacted Mustang TOC to inform the third Battalion's Chain of Command of the situation. After twenty minutes we were able to continue mission. Each Platoon on patrol that night received warning shots coming from our own Iraqi Security Forces, this situation caused us to pull the Iraqi Company Commanders together on day two and work out recognition signals. After the elections the third Battalion's leadership was responsible for picking up the ballots and transporting them to a secure location outside of Baghdad to be counted.

They performed admirably; the Battalion Commander and S-3 were well trained and in sync. As each poll site closed down, the Battalion leadership would convoy around gathering the ballots. Our mission during the election was to stay out of the way, and allow the Iraqi military to handle it. We patrolled the sector continuously, and sealed off all routes in and out of the sector utilizing armor and dismounted troops. No civilian traffic was allowed in sector to reduce the threat of attack. It was an emotional day for us and the Iraqi population. We watched them come out to vote, entire families in their best clothes walking down the streets holding hands. It was a powerful message the people were sending to the enemies of democracy. As the polls closed we watched as the people of Iraq came back out and rejoiced. It truly had a holiday feeling. Children played in the vacant streets and adults watched as they celebrated their newfound freedom.

### **SGT Bowman and the weapons cache**

While operations were on going we received a report that a white Toyota pickup truck was paralleling our patrols in the Al-Mechanic sector. SGT Bowman was the gunner on the Red Platoon Leader's truck; during a routine patrol in their sector he observed a white truck pull out of a house. Remembering the report he informed Platoon Leader, they put together a plan to capture the truck and operator. As the truck moved down a parallel street they moved to intercept. The lead truck rammed into the suspect's vehicle stopping him in his tracks. Inside the vehicle they found two 155MM rounds rigged as IEDs ready for emplacement. The Commander and I took a patrol to link up with Red One to conduct a search of

the suspect's house. The detainee was taken back to battalion for interrogation.

We arrived at the suspect's house and conducted a raid. Once inside we found four more 155MM IEDs and several cell phones setup as detonators. A through search of the house turned up some Iraqi Police uniforms and a sweep of the grounds turned up five barrels buried in the ground. It was unbelievable how much stuff was there, the list included Det-cord, 1000s of 7.62 rounds, machine guns, RPG launchers, C4, and home made rocket launchers.

Another interrogation was conducted and our suspect quickly informed us of another cache. We put together a raiding party and moved to the new address. At this house we found medical supplies and detained four more individuals. The house next door was abandoned, so we conducted a quick search and found more weapons and ammo in it. One of the detainees said the he owned the home, but said he had it rented to some people who lived in the country. Dog Company moved south to continue operations based on the new information. Dog conducted three more raids rounding up suspect after suspect. We notified EOD about the cache and continued cleanup of our two sites. Once everything was loaded up we moved back to the FOB. After all the dust settled from this operation there were a total of seventeen suspects arrested, enough weapons, ammo, and explosives to make the elections a very exciting event. Sergeant Bowman had great situational awareness and it saved countless lives.

*Understanding and being able to counter improvised explosive devices is critical to survival of Soldiers in combat. MSG G. Wood tells of how the National Guard Intelligence Center attempts to develop training for Soldiers before they go to war, so that they may survive war.*

**MSG G. Wood**  
**“Counter IED Targeting Program”**  
**National Guard Intelligence Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> M.I. Center 04/04-06/05**

The NGIC received a mission to provide an analytical solution to the gaps that existed in the Technical Support Working Group's (TSWG) proposal for targeting IED bomb-makers in early 2004. The mission of the NGIC is to Produce and disseminate all-source integrated intelligence on foreign ground forces and related military technologies to ensure that US forces have a decisive edge in the current and future military operations. I supported the National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC) from September 1999 to July 2006. My duties as the senior operations NCO in the S3 were to coordinate the operations, plans, and training of more than one thousand military and civilian intelligence and support specialists who carry out the mission of the NGIC.

The TSWG proposal was presented to the Joint IED Defeat Task Force (JIEDD-TF) which recommended the Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) review the proposal and make recommendations back to the JIEDD-

TF. INSCOM tasked the NGIC to conduct a mission analysis of the proposal and to develop a workable Concept of Operations (CONOPS) to implement the program. Upon receipt of this new mission, the command assembled a tiger team from the primary staff and knowledgeable analysts to develop a staff study and make recommendations to the Commander regarding how NGIC could provide these gaps. WIT Background and Future (n.d.) states the following:

The resulting mission analysis led to the proposal of establishing a proof of concept mission called the Counter-IED Targeting Program (CITP). CITP consisted of three basic parts - Weapons Intelligence Teams, a forward fusion cell, and CONUS based fusion center. The mission of the CITP is to increase the collection of technical intelligence through the Weapons Intelligence Teams (WIT) and to provide a forward and rear fusion cell to support the targeting of bomb-makers and their networks.

Upon acceptance of the NGIC, mission analysis. I was charged to recruit and mobilize volunteer personnel from the available reserve programs because I assisted in the leading of a thirty-two person staff responsible for programs and policy governing operations, plans, training, and reserve component integration. The Commander directed me to process the immediate transfer of four Soldiers currently assigned to the NGIC Iraqi task force, to the forward fusion cell. This transfer was accomplished by providing the personnel section with the necessary mission requirements and justification, resulting in the mobilization station at Fort Lee, Virginia producing a temporary change of station deployment order. Since these Soldiers were already mobilized under operation NOBLE EAGLE and not IRAQI FREEDOM it was necessary to coordinate for them to process through the Combat Readiness Center (CRC) at Fort Bliss, Texas, prior to deploying. During their two weeks at Fort Bliss, they received the required combat training for the Iraqi theater of operations. During this process, I located and coordinated the mobilization of three other Soldiers, one from the National Guard. In total over thirty Soldiers from 5 different INSCOM units assembled in late October 2004, at Fort Gordon, Georgia, to begin an intense training and equipping period on the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP's) needed to establish the United States Army's first Weapons Intelligence Teams. The mission of the WITs is to conduct scene analysis of IED incidents (pre-blast and post-blast) to include evidence collection/shipping, scene documentation, and reporting. When an EOD team responds to a pre-blast or post-blast IED site, if available, a WIT accompanies them. Once the EOD teams have rendered the area safe, the WIT photographs the scene, interviews witnesses, collects evidence, and prepares a WIT report. The report is used by NGIC fusion cells for possible Intelligence Information Requirements (IIRs) and any evidence collected is sent to the state side agency for further exploitation.

The proof of concept called for six Weapons Intelligence Teams, an escort section and a detachment headquarters. The training would take approximately six weeks to complete prior to the detachment's deployment in mid-December

2004 to the Iraqi theater of Operations. During the initial proof of concept phase NGIC stood up all three recommended activities. I was involved in the daily coordination to meet the suspense laid before the staff to have these new elements in place by December. The necessary Request for Forces (RFF) was a collaborative effort between the NGIC and CENTCOM staffs to prepare it for DA approval and processing. The RFF process was a daily battle since we were requesting an Army asset that did not yet exist, to support a newly developed provisional concept. The design of the Army mobilization and deployment process is to leverage existing assets. I believe that if not for the foresight of several commanders, the dedication of the many staffing personnel at all levels to acknowledge the potential of this new concept, deployment and mobilization would not have occurred. The required Request for Forces (RFF) did not arrive until November. JIEDD-TF relied upon NGIC to use its expertise and resources to improve the process of defeating the IED issue that continues to kill so many of our dedicated Soldiers. This was definitely a paradigm shift for NGIC as it shifted from a heavy strategic focus into direct tactical support. Additionally the current NGIC staff was stretched in the planning process to develop not only this new initiative, but also other new areas in tactical document exploitation teams and biometric analytical cells simultaneously. "Upon arrival in theater, the six Weapons Intelligence Teams where MNC-I planners directed the six teams assignments based on overall theater IED threat. The forward fusion cell was made up of both DA civilians, contractors, and the mobilized military" WIT Background and Future (n.d.).

"By providing an intelligence capability that did not previously exist, the Weapons intelligence Team concept proved a great success. In May 2005, MNC-I approved an extension of Phase I - Proof of Concept for an additional 180 days and requested the CITP program expand by adding an additional seven weapons intelligence teams for Phase II" WIT Background and Future (n.d.). The NGIC Commanders guidance for the staffing of phase II was to mobilize The 203d Military Intelligence Battalion (Technical Intelligence). The 203d MI BN is the US Army's only Technical Intelligence Battalion. A Multiple Component Battalion, the unit is organized into three companies and one detachment. The 203d MI BN mobilized and assumed the Weapon Intelligence Team mission in May 2005, 47 reserve component and seven active component Soldiers, and deployed to Iraq in September 2005. This task force provided 13 Weapon Intelligence Teams to 13 Brigade Combat and Regimental Combat Teams.

The responsibility to mobilize Charlie Company (+) was again given to me. I began by drafting a request for mobilization memorandum to our major command INSCOM and staffing it through the command. Planning correctly to ensure sufficient processing and notification time is an imperative. Policy required a 90-day requirement for the processing of all mobilization requests. CONUS mobilization request are validated by the MACOM, and then sent to DA mobilization cell for processing and ultimately final approval by the Under

Secretary for Reserve Manpower and Affairs. We had the challenge again that we were required to request the unit before the RFF was completed to validate the request. If we waited until the RFF was completed there would not have been sufficient time to notify the Soldiers with notice of a thirty-day mobilization alert order from DA. Keeping this request moving through the approval process was daunting at times. My staff members accomplished this through daily coordination between INSCOM, DA and US Army Reserve Command (USARC) elements. Once the correct time line was determined the NGIC Deputy Commander notified the Commander of the 203<sup>d</sup> to prepare his unit for mobilization and deployment. The Commander was directed to modify and accelerate his annual training plan. The challenge of this was very difficult for the staff of the 203<sup>d</sup> as there were not sufficient funds and personnel available to make such a drastic change in direction so quickly. Unfortunately, this task was overwhelming for the current commander and he was relieved of his command. This again provided new challenges for the NGIC staff to assist with the training development of our operationally controlled (OPCON) subordinate Battalion. The 203<sup>d</sup> is OPCON to the NGIC for peacetime training, but was flagged or administrative controlled (ADCON) by the USAR giving them a dual chain of command. As a USAR unit and without a mobilization order, the supporting USAR command could not fully fund the required mission change. Without the necessary funding and personnel, the NGIC stepped in to provide both. The USAR Chain of Command appointed a new Commander, and NGIC provided a MAJ to oversee and develop the pre-mobilization training. The Soldiers that were identified to be mobilized in support of this tasking were notified. The unit then conducted an accelerated annual training at Fort A. P. Hill, Virginia with great success in training these Soldiers in the required Warrior Tasks. It was determined that the specialized pre-deployment training required six weeks of extensive training at home station.

After working through the mobilization process the mobilization order was approved and issued with only two weeks before the required start date to meet the suspense for the required no later than arrival in country date. Lastly, the NGIC was challenged again as it was determined that First Army required a two week unit validation at Fort Dix, New Jersey prior to deployment. The extra time requirement required us to modify the pre-deployment training to include evenings and cancel part of the planned block leave in order to meet both validation requirements and stay on schedule for the RIP/TOA. I was very impressed at how motivated the Soldiers were during one of my site visits in that they truly understood the enormity of the task before them. They were also very appreciative of the new skills they were receiving. These new skills are now being written up into a new skill identifier and the entire process of Training for Phase III began in May 2006 and will once again be based out of Aberdeen Proving Ground with the 203<sup>d</sup> Military Intelligence Battalion serving as the headquarters.

The first step to transition the training mission from INSCOM (NGIC) to the United States Army Intelligence Center (USAIC) will take place during Phase III

training with USAIC conducting a right-seat-ride for the training.

The Army is constantly transforming to meet the current needs of today's Soldiers and leaders at every level must think not only out of the box, but also out of the circle to accomplish this enormous task. Leaders at all levels are responsible to work together for the good of the Army and develop with our changing environment.

*SSG J. Scott survived eight improvised explosive device attacks and saw a number of Soldiers and innocent civilians either killed or wounded. He remembers the days he spent in Iraq in the following story.*

**SSG J. Scott**  
**IED Attacks**  
**02/05-02/06**

I was in Iraq from February 2005 to February 2006. I have participated in many missions in many cities in Iraq. Missions ranging from: Cordon and knocks, raids, cache searches, TCP's to trying to console a mother whose child had just been killed by insurgents road side bombs (IED's), or small arms attacks. I remember looking at the faces of those children and seeing the faces of my own children, and thinking about how that mother must have felt about the loss of her child. I saw dead bodies of insurgents, military personnel, women, and children. I survived 8 IED strikes. I saw big strong grown men crying like children at memorial services for fallen comrades. I remember being one of those men. I remember thinking about how that Soldier's Family would go on. We used to sit around and talk about what story they would tell our Families if we met that same fate.

One Soldier who was a forward observer attached to our unit from Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was 19 years old. He was so young that he had not even begun to grow facial hair yet. We were enroute to conduct a raid. We were at a security halt to clear a danger area. This consisted of dismounting from an up-armored vehicle to walk along side the road to look for IED's or wires leading to IED's. The furthest Soldier out was 200 meters from the road. We were in a wedge formation. Well after a few times of doing this the insurgents took note of our procedures. This one particular day they decided that they were going to put a 155mm mortar round in a fallen, hollowed out palm tree. It exploded and one Soldier's head was completely blown off. Our F.O had lost both legs from the knees down. Helping our medic apply a tourniquet on both legs and getting sprayed with blood. To this day, I still remember the screams of that young Soldier saying he did not want to die. I remember watching the MEDEVAC chopper as it flew off and wondered if that soldier was going to make it, he did. He now has two prosthetic limbs.

I remember this SSG who was a dismount squad leader and his unit was getting ready to redeploy back to the states. We were conducting right-seat ride. He was in a different platoon than the one we were working with. He survived 2

IED strikes and 2 small arms attacks without receiving any injuries. At the end of mission they returned to the FOB. He decided that he was going to go to the PX to buy a carton of cigarettes and then call his wife and let her know that he was done with missions and he made it. He stopped at a pavilion in the designated smoking area to burn one. A mortar round landed center mass of the pavilion killing him. That has always stuck with me because of the fact that he survived almost a year in Iraq without a scratch and to die smoking a cigarette in a pavilion in the FOB on the day his last mission outside the wire. It made me think that no matter how safe you were or how much luck you thought you had, when your time was up, it was up. That was between you and whoever you called God.

*Today's Soldier has more chance of surviving if wounded than at any other time in history. One of the primary reasons is the areomedical evacuation of Soldiers on the battlefield. 1SG C. Williams tells how the 236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company (Air Ambulance) served with distinction and made the difference to many wounded Soldiers.*

**1SG C. Williams**  
**Areomedical Evacuation**  
**236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company (Air Ambulance) 01/05-12/05**

Fighting the Global War on Terrorism on several different fronts simultaneously has stressed the Army's air evacuation system to its limits. The 236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company (Air Ambulance) deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom 04-06 from its home in Landstuhl, Germany, and provided medical evacuation support to the southern Iraq and Kuwait areas of responsibility (AOR). Mid-tour, the unit received orders to send two aircraft and crews to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Although the unit had encountered adversities on numerous occasions, the Soldiers of the 236<sup>th</sup> never lost focus of the mission's objectives. These objectives were to save lives and take care of each other. Demonstrated leadership by example and enthusiasm is a tremendous motivator for Soldier. Even though there were issues, which a few remained unresolved, the Soldiers of the 236<sup>th</sup> never gave in to complacency nor allowed adversity to deter their desire for success. On 16 December 2005, the unit redeployed without any loss of personnel, aircraft or equipment.

The war on terror has caused the United States to reevaluate how it will fight future wars and conflicts. Army leaders must prepare to encounter and resolve complicated adversities that are new to this way of fighting. As combat operations evolve from months to years, the Army will need to demonstrate innovative ways to rotate forces and equipment without compromising combat power. As the Army transforms, so does the aviation community and Aeromedical Evacuation system. Today's leaders must know how to integrate and employ active and reserve component forces together and to maintain command and control of a

multifaceted Task Force conducting joint operations. To be successful, leaders must use knowledge, preparation, discipline, and motivation to meet these challenges.

Upon the completion of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 04-06, the unit had evacuated more than 1,500 Soldiers, civilians, contractors and enemy combined. Flying more than 3,000 hours under extreme desert conditions, the unit maintained an average aviation operational readiness rate of 85%, 10 % above the Department of Army standard. Evacuating intra-theater patients in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan simultaneously, the unit successfully returned to Germany without any loss of aircraft or unit personnel. Each Soldier's professional and competent manner of dealing with unforeseen difficulty was the key to the unit's success. This success was also a direct result of the unit's previous deployment experience and the intense pre-deployment individual readiness training (IRT) program.

Assigned in January 2002 to the 236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company, I was proud to be part of an organization with such a reputable history. I was not new to the Aeromedical community, having served since 1992 in such positions as flight medic, Air Ambulance NCO, US Army School of Aviation Medicine Instructor/Writer, and DA standardization instructor for the Directorate of Standardization and Evaluation (DES). Upon arrival to the 236<sup>th</sup>, it quickly became evident that the unit maintained an extremely high operations tempo. This high OPTEMPO would continue for the next four years, culminating with the deployment to OIF 04-06. The 236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company was one of three Air Ambulance Companies in Europe assigned to the 421<sup>st</sup> Medical Evacuation Battalion. From January 2002 to October 2004, the unit continuously deployed one or more Forward Support MEDEVAC Teams (FSMT) in support of USAREUR and NATO operations. The unit maintained an even balance of experienced and inexperienced aircrew members. This proved to be invaluable when designating battle crews for deployment. In October 2002, the unit deployed six aircraft and aircrews to Kosovo in support of Operation Joint Endeavor. Originally a six-month deployment, the unit didn't return to Germany until nine months later in July 2003.

From August 2003 to October 2004, the unit was the only air ambulance company remaining in the Europe performing theater medical evacuations. The unit received several warning orders for deployment, which kept Soldiers in a continuous state of deployment training for the next 17 months. The unit experienced a minimal Permanent Change of Station attrition rate during this time. This stabilization enabled the unit to develop competent, professional Soldiers, who collectively comprised an organized and cohesive team. In July 2004, the unit received a warning order for deployment to Mosul, Iraq, with command and control coming from Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I). The initial deployment order required 15 aircraft, all assigned personnel, and equipment. Shortly after the receipt of the original warning order, the unit received an additional order for six aircraft and crews to support the Kuwait AOR with command and control coming from Coalition Forces Land Component



Command (CFLCC). This discrepancy would remain unresolved for most of the pre-deployment validation process. Despite the discrepancy, the unit developed a battle plan, placing nine aircraft and headquarters in Iraq in support of MNC-I. Six aircraft and crews would support the Kuwait AOR in support of CFLCC. In order to conduct split base battle operations, the unit commanders were required to divide unit personnel and equipment accordingly. Two months before the unit's latest arrival day, the aircraft and personnel requirements changed. The nine aircraft and crews would cover southern Iraq in support of MNC-I, while the six aircraft and crews would still support the Kuwait AOR. The company headquarters would remain in Kuwait. CENTCOM determined area MEDEVAC requirements by number of aircraft needed in theater and not by number of MEDEVAC companies. It was common for one MEDEVAC company to have three or four slice elements from other companies under their command and control.

The unit's personnel, aircraft, and equipment arrived in Kuwait in early January 2005. The unit completed the refit of all 15 aircraft and equipment in three days. Upon completion of the refit, the aircraft and unit personnel relocated to Camp Beuring, Kuwait. The aircrews conducted local area orientations and environmental qualifications, completed RSOI requirements, and prepared the slice element aircraft, personnel and equipment for transport to Iraq. Immediately upon the unit's arrival to Camp Beuring, the command received a directive to laterally transfer three aircraft to the National Guard's 1159<sup>th</sup> Air Ambulance Company. With this transfer was the requirement to assist the 1159<sup>th</sup> in the completion of their environmental qualifications and local area orientations. This tasking would require the use of company aircraft and standardization personnel, which hampered the unit's ongoing Transfer of Authority. In early February 2006, the unit sent nine aircraft and six aircrews to support 44<sup>th</sup> Medical Brigade located in Balad, Iraq. Upon their arrival in Iraq, the other six aircrews relocated to Talil, Al Kut, Ad Diwaniyah, and Balad. This diverse repositioning of personnel and aircraft made communication with the Soldiers difficult. In addition to deploying aircraft and personnel to Iraq, transferring three aircraft to the National Guard and assisting with their RSOI, the unit was also conducting their own Transfer of Authority with the 1022<sup>nd</sup> Air Ambulance Company.

The 236<sup>th</sup> (Kuwait) and 1002<sup>nd</sup> completed their TOA for the Kuwait AOR within two weeks. This was a direct result of displayed tactical proficiency and experience of both companies. By the end of OIF 03-05, the 1022<sup>nd</sup> had completed three operational deployments within a five-year period. Previously embedded with active duty units in the past, the 1022<sup>nd</sup> did not lack the tactical proficiency and MEDEVAC experience that had hindered units in previous operations. The TOA transpired under the guidance and control of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Medical Brigade out of Fort Lewis, Washington, which became the air evacuation command and control point for the Kuwait AOR. The 62<sup>nd</sup> arrived in Kuwait in November 2004. The brigade provided command and control of the 236<sup>th</sup> for the next nine months.

The Brigade also controlled the launch authority of MEDEVAC aircraft for all MEDEVAC requests.

Udari Army Airfield is approximately 25 kilometers from Navistar Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) located on the Iraqi and Kuwait border. Camp Bucca MTF is located approximately 20 kilometers southeast of Basara, Iraq and 100 kilometers from Udari. Flight time from Udari to either location is less than a 30-minute flight. On several occasions, MNC-I MEDEVAC crews located in Talil, Iraq received mission requests for these AORs. Flying time from Talil to Bucca or Navistar is approximately one hour. On several occasions, units under the command and control of MNC-I contacted the 236th Flight Operations section based out of Udari, requesting urgent MEDEVAC evacuation from the Basara area. Due to the dispute over area responsibility between MNC-I and CFLCC, the CFLCC G-3 deferred requests to the MEDEVAC crews in Talil, Iraq, delaying the medical evacuation of critically wounded Soldiers. The previous MEDEVAC units in Kuwait experienced the same issue and attempted to rectify the situation without success. These units expressed frustration and resentment with the issue and stated that attempting to resolve the issue was futile. The 236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company maintained an advantage that the previous units did not have. Although the MEDEVAC crews in Talil fell under the command and control of MNC-I, they were organic to the 236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company. With communication, enthusiasm, and determination, the two MEDEVAC commanders in Kuwait and Iraq addressed and developed new standard operating procedures, simplifying the CFLCC launch approval process and significantly reducing the launch approval time. Not only did this enhance the medical evacuation capabilities in southern Iraq, it improved the morale of the aircrews for both companies.

In May 2005, the unit received a warning order requiring two crews from Kuwait to deploy to Afghanistan for a four-month period. In June 2005, the unit loaded two aircraft and crews aboard a C17 transport. Upon arrival in Bagram, Afghanistan, the crews augmented 68<sup>th</sup> Medical Company based out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. The movement order had the crews returning to Kuwait in early October 2005. For a four-month period, the 236<sup>th</sup> Medical Company maintained six aircraft and crews in Kuwait, two aircraft and crews in Afghanistan, and six aircraft and crews in Iraq. In Kuwait, the unit's leadership began to plan and execute the unit's redeployment to Landstuhl, Germany. With command and control of only 50 percent of the company, the leadership could only estimate the return of attached personnel. The priority of redeployment began with the return of aircraft and crews from Afghanistan. The two aircraft and crews eventually returned to Kuwait in early October 2005. By this time, the redeployment process was well under way. The command and control of the crews in Iraq would change three times from October to November 2005. The units, both north and south, transitioned under a newly arrived command in early November. Later that month, both units would transition under an Aviation brigade in accordance with the Army's aviation transformation initiative. The multi-level transitions of command

and control increased an already difficult redeployment process. Despite the issues with command and control, the unit's greatest obstacle remained the return of aircraft and crews from Iraq.

Although 57<sup>th</sup> Medical Company maintained command and control over 236<sup>th</sup> aircrews, the 57<sup>th</sup> Command would not relieve the crews located at the outlying remote sites. The 236<sup>th</sup> crews in Iraq would not return to Kuwait until 86<sup>th</sup> Medical Company, a National Guard Air Ambulance company out of Massachusetts, replaced the personnel and aircraft. To assure the timely return of the aircraft and crews, the 236<sup>th</sup> in Kuwait would aggressively receive and assist the 86<sup>th</sup> upon their arrival in Kuwait. This assistance included the refit of aircraft and completion of all RSOI and theater aircraft qualifications. Upon completion of these requirements, the 236<sup>th</sup> transported the aircraft and crews to Talil, and assisted in the Transfer of Authority. The 236<sup>th</sup> would complete this assistance while concurrently conducting its own transfer of Authority in Kuwait. This would also prove to be challenging, for the unit that replaced the 236<sup>th</sup> was a Navy helicopter unit performing Medical Evacuation for the first time.

Fighting the Global War on Terrorism on several different fronts simultaneously had stressed the Army's air evacuation system to its limits. The Department of Defense had to look for new alternatives to resolve the shortage of Army Air Ambulance companies. The decided course of action was to assign the mission in Kuwait to the US Navy. The Navy had never previously possessed dedicated aeromedical evacuation assets within its aircraft inventory. The Navy combined a CSRA helicopter unit and a Navy Submarine Search and Destroy unit to form one air evacuation unit within the Kuwait AOR. This directive required almost one year of preparation and training before deployment. Even with a pre-deployment site survey visit conducted in August 2005, both units quickly realized that significant differences in service tactics, techniques and procedures needed resolution. The most significant issues to overcome were the differences in aircraft equipment, maintenance requirements, and assigned unit personnel.

The Navy efficiently modified the HH60 and SH60 to perform medical evacuation. Each aircraft had less than 100 flight hours and is equipped with the most current avionics equipment available. One obstacle was the communication incompatibility between the two services. This was resolved with designated stay-behind equipment. In addition, the Army's logistical system was unable to meet the Navy's repair and reconstitution requirements. If the unit could not repair an aircraft part or major component on site, the unit's home station shipped the needed equipment to Kuwait. This required the unit to maintain a bench stock of extra parts and equipment; otherwise, the unit would incur additional down time of operational aircraft. The Navy also lacked MOS-specific personnel to fulfill the positions required in an Army MEDEVAC company. The Navy used non-essential personnel to fill these critical shortages. These individuals required

extensive training before assuming the mission. For four weeks, both units worked long and laborious hours to resolve these differences and ensure mission success. The historical Transfer of Authority occurred in early December 2005.

The six crews and aircraft from Iraq arrived in Kuwait 6 December 2005. The unit had to complete all aircraft and equipment redeployment requirements within a three-week period. The CFLCC Theater Support Command designated the unit's 12 five-tons, six HEMMT fuel tankers, and six M998 HMMWVs as stay-behind equipment. This did not alleviate the unit from transporting the vehicles to port and clearing customs. The unit personnel transported, cleaned, and hand-receipted the vehicles to CFLCC, in accordance with the Army's Aviation transformation directives, the National Guard signed for six more aircraft returning to Kuwait from Iraq. In turn, the 1106th Aviation Classification Repair Activity Depot, located in Kuwait, transported the aircraft to CONUS for distribution to the National Guard. The unit successfully prepared and redeployed all assigned aircraft and unit equipment within three weeks. The unit redeployed to home station on 16 December 2005, with six aircraft and assigned personnel.

Although the unit had encountered adversities on numerous occasions, the Soldiers of the 236<sup>th</sup> never lost focus of what was necessary for mission accomplishment. Demonstrated leadership by example and enthusiasm is a tremendous motivator for Soldiers. Even though there were issues which remained unresolved, the Soldiers of the 236<sup>th</sup> never gave in to complacency nor allowed adversity to deter their desire for success. Armed with technical training, a positive attitude, and a goal for excellence, the 236<sup>th</sup> met every challenge head on.

*There are few in the Army who do not realize that the commitment of large numbers of Reserves and National Guard troops in Iraq have caused some severe strains on those organizations. 1SG J. Tennian of the Vermont National Guard details some of the problems his unit faced during deployment. He attributes the unit's success to junior noncommissioned officer leadership, which amid turmoil continued to perform their duties in a professional manner.*

**1SG J. Tennian**  
**Vermont National Guard**  
**Convoy Support 12/04-12/05**

At the time our unit was ordered to active duty, I was the First Sergeant of B Company, 2-172 Armor, Vermont Army National Guard, 86<sup>th</sup> BDE with a total of 27 years service. My career began in the US Marines on 25 June 1973 and I served for 4 years in the infantry and on several deployments. I joined the New York Army National Guard in October 1979 and have had continuous service since then. Before I deployed, I retired from my job as a New York State Correction Officer with 25 years service. I now live in upstate New York with my

wife Penny, and I am working on my BS in Emergency Management at Empire State College, State University of New York.

The 86<sup>th</sup> BDE, Vermont Army National Guard went through SRP during the summer of 2004. Data extracted from processed units revealed a significant number of “No-Go’s” for various reasons, mostly medical “needs-fixing”. Other issues that delayed approving Soldiers for deployment were many Family Readiness Plans and legal issues. The numerous disqualified Soldiers created an additional strength problem in the already marginally staffed units. The unique requirement of the National Guard to recruit and retain its own members has led to retaining even marginal Soldiers. The 86<sup>th</sup> BDE was unable to meet minimum strength requirements to deploy as a whole unit. The missions we were eventually assigned required the Brigade to consolidate units and form two separate Battalions; Task Force Green Mountain (TFGM) and Task Force Saber (TFS). This created a problem with picking and choosing leadership to balance the assembled Task Forces. I was reassigned from my duties of Co B, 2-172 Armor First Sergeant to S-3 NCOIC, and many senior leaders were tasked to positions below their rank.

TFGM consisted of 5 Line Companies and a Task Force Headquarters Company. The fragmentation of units created severe discontentment among some leaders whom expected to lead their Soldiers during a deployment. This would eventually add to the low morale and internal lack of cooperation of TFGM. The 600 Soldiers of TFGM consisted of Forward Support Battalion Soldiers, Infantry, Armor and a collection of many other MOS’s. TFS collected 350 of the most experienced and qualified Soldiers available and were attached to the 28<sup>th</sup> BCT for service in Anbar Province, Iraq.

TFGM arrived in Kuwait on 26 December 2004, and reported to Area Support Group Kuwait (ASG-KU) for SECFOR duties assigned to the northern US Army camps in the country. The line companies were tasked with Force Protection at Buehring, New York, Victory, Virginia, and Navistar. ASG-KU also separated 32 personnel to assume duties for the Camp Command Cell at Navistar. I was originally assigned as the camp contracting NCOIC. The Soldiers of the TFGM assimilated into their duties quickly and a stabilization period followed without serious incidents. The biggest challenge was the logistics of communicating with the separated companies throughout Kuwait. Our Command Sergeant Major and Battalion Commander expected professionalism from the TF Soldiers and lead by example. ASG-KU published SOP’s and regulations and they were disseminated by the CSM. This was the very first active duty experience for most senior NCOs and Officers in the TF, and many were reluctant to accept the major change from the leisure of the National Guard culture.

Because of the lack of personnel to deploy, many senior NCOs were forced into positions normally held by two ranks lower. For example, an E-8 and E-7 were assigned MWR duties. The BN Staff officers were also unhappy with their assignments. Most were senior company commanders whom were reassigned to

the Staff for deployment. Basic military bearing such as addressing Officers and NCO's with proper courtesy were grudgingly accepted by some senior leaders. Simple uniform standards and SOP's were argued and disputed. NCOs that had no prior experience leading Soldiers were failing to respond to counseling by the CSM. Other NCOs were openly defiant in refusing to comply with weapon and body armor SOP's. Charges of fraternization against a female company commander were investigated and she was relieved of command. The TF settled into a "shift-worker" mentality and stimulating motivation became difficult. The CSM was being criticized by some leaders as unnecessarily harassing the Soldiers. Interpersonal conflicts and rivalries that were deeply imbedded for many years began to surface. The overall support of the Staff and NCO corps for the CSM and BC began to deteriorate and polarize toward leaders with lower expectations. The CSM was fiercely supported by many of the NCOs including myself, but the most of the senior leadership was unwilling to accept the notion of being disliked over being a good leader. Many of the wavering leaders were becoming rallied by those critical of the CSM and BC. This hostility toward the CSM and BC continued for many months. Poor performance and other issues eventually lead to the dismissal of the Camp Navistar Sergeant Major, and I was reassigned to that position in February 2005. The 1SG of one Company was relieved and the Scout PSG was also relieved within a short period of time.

The dismissal of these leaders was justifiable under the circumstances, but increased the resentment of the CSM and BC. Senior leaders whom opposed the decisions began e-mailing the State Adjutant General (TAG) and other Vermont State AGR Officers with complaints and one sided opinions of events. As more senior leaders were becoming accountable for sub-standard performance, they reacted by creating negativity among the ranks and soliciting Soldiers to submit complaints about the CSM to State Headquarters. The TAG responded to often exaggerated complaints by directing the BC to relieve the CSM for his actions, and the BC refused. The senior leadership of the organization was becoming more strained and the spirit of teamwork within the staff was declining. Most of the Soldiers were unclear of the events and confused about the turmoil in the Battalion. For example, when I ordered the PSG of the scout platoon to get rid of the puppies they were keeping for pets, he questioned the legitimacy of the order even though it was a CFLCC directive. The PSG was unable to get complete control of his platoon because his Soldiers were suspicious of the authority I possessed. This became a problem with almost every order that originated from the CSM, BC or I. Unfortunately, the questioning of directives and policies became almost customary. Instead of obedience and support by the leadership, they regarded simple regulations a personal assault. Throughout this period, the junior NCOs in the Battalion did a fine job of focusing their attention on the immediate mission, while the senior leaders fought each other over trivial issues.

The operations of Force Protection required long hours during severe temperatures that sometimes exceeded 140° F. Our junior leaders were conducting

risk assessment and enforcing water discipline, when needed. The junior NCOs did not appear to be affected by the turmoil at the senior leader level. Indications of superior performance by the Soldiers and first line supervision in the Battalion are the zero negligent discharges, few equipment losses, and minor injuries. As the Camp Sergeant Major I aggressively implemented several safety programs. I required Heat Injury training each quarter, health and safety inspections and weapons clearing procedure training. Many of my programs were resisted instead of being supported because of the division in our Battalion, and I was accused of being to extreme at times. Many leaders just could not grasp the simple fact that “taking care of Soldiers” does include being their friend and giving them every comfort that they demand. A good example is the plywood furniture and overstressed electrical systems in the camp. Plywood furniture is not allowed in tents because of the danger it becomes during a fire. The 1SG and PSGs did not like to enforce this directive and it was necessary for me to order them several times to enforce the standard of “no ply-wood”. At the root of their argument was a desire to allow as many comfort items to the Soldiers instead of the difficult action of enforcing the rules. The same is true of generators that can become over-strained and create an electrical hazard. Many times the senior leadership was reluctant to aggressively enforce basic safety standards such as body armor plates, ACU sleeves rolled down, or off duty uniform policy.

Another factor that caused internal conflict was the inability for some leaders to accept the active Army standard of conducting counseling’s, writing awards, and NCOERs. Every Soldier that attends Army NCOES has learned that the only standard is the Army standard. Leaders were very resistant to recording counseling sessions. A popular argument is that the ARNG does not usually have the time during drill periods. Although this may be true, it should not be an excuse while on active duty. The standards for awards were also inconsistent in the ARNG, and NCOERs were rarely accurate in content and format. Administrative problems created by past practice were identified early in the deployment, and formal classes were initiated to prepare the TF for administrative obligations during the redeploy phase. Some leaders were resistant to change their previous pattern of completing NCOERs and awards which resulted in more tension during redeployment.

The battle hand-off to the relieving unit went well and our unit was mission complete on or about 5 December 2005. The awards ceremony was held at each of the company’s camps and our unit received a generous amount of recognition for a job well done by ASG-KU. Redeployment was well organized and we maintained our scheduled departure. We arrived at Camp Shelby for out-processing and were greeted by a contingent of hand selected Army National Guard officers and senior NCOs from the State of Vermont. It was obvious that their secondary mission was to interview Soldiers about the events of our deployment to verify accusations received from the TF. Soon after our arrival and reception in Vermont, the CSM and BC were relieved of command.

During a review of the events of our deployment, the problems that developed revealed a consistent pattern. The CSM and BC were never really firmly in control of the Battalion. This was the result of a variety of issues beginning with the fragmentation of 86<sup>th</sup> BDE and division of our original Battalion. It is the duty of the National Guard to be prepared to deploy, and our unit failed in our obligation mostly because of unit strength. Units were hastily manufactured overnight, destroying unit integrity and stability. Senior leaders were inserted without regard to their previous experience or training. Leaders were unfamiliar with the NCOs and Soldiers that they lead. The CSM and BC struggled to inspire a sense of unit cohesion and distinction, but lacked the enthusiastic support that develops over time and history.



Up-Armored HUMMMV

A major obstacle our leaders had to overcome was the lack of support from the State Headquarters. Involvement in deployed units should only be allowed for administrative issues. Soldiers can become suspicious of the true authority their leader has if outside leaders interfere in internal issues. There are available options for Soldier complaints and no-one was ever refused attention on any issue.

The support of the entire leadership is necessary for operational success. This was not the case of our TF, and was a source of great tension during the deployment. Senior leaders were reluctant to change their attitudes or petty personal conflicts for the stability of the unit. The mission training focus of our Armor battalion did



not prepare us to assume a static SECFOR posture. This major change in roles was a major shock to the naturally aggressive Armor community. The overall success of our mission can be directly credited to the junior NCOs maintaining great leadership and Army values.

*1SG R. Evans and his Company deployed to both Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan they used the nine month rotation to cross-train all controllers on tactical and fixed based Army Tactical Combat (ATC) operations. In Iraq he and his unit employed the Army's new Air Traffic Navigation, Integration, and Coordination System (ATNAVICS) which proved to be a combat multiplier in Operation Iraqi Freedom.*

**1SG R. Evans**  
**Tactical Air Controller**  
**A Co. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 58<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment 10/04-10/05**

In December 2002, I requested a permanent change of station to Fort Bragg to assume a company first sergeant position in Company A, 1st Battalion, 58<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment. One month later, our entire company deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan, tasked to operate a fully instrumented airfield at Kandahar, conduct Tact Team Operations at Serlarno, and an Airspace Management A2C2 Team at Bagram Air Base. This was quite a bit to cover down on but our NCOs and Soldiers stepped up to the challenge.

We used the nine-month tour to cross-train all controllers on tactical and fixed base ATC operations, which in retrospect set our company up for success once we returned from theater. Our command focus was to ensure that all controllers receive at least one ATC rating during their deployment to Afghanistan. In order to be MOS proficient, controllers require a steady volume of aircraft for effective training. Kandahar offered a target rich environment for it.

A Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) controller normally requires four calendar months to complete the radar-training program. An ATC Tower controller normally requires six calendar months to obtain their first Air Traffic Control Service (ATCS) certification rating. Tact Team members are checked off on tactical equipment operations and local area proficiency prior to being recommended for an over-the-shoulder review and rating by an ATCS examiner in approximately two to three months, based on air traffic volume.

The mission was a huge success. We controlled Air Force fixed wing aircraft, host nation civilian aircraft and coalition force aircraft from the French, Germans, Italians, Romanians, British and Russians. As members of Task Force Tiger, we also conducted combat launch and recovery operations for large package rotary wing Air Assault missions. Our controllers also provided direct combat mission support with tactical air traffic controllers going forward to participate in combat missions.

In September 2003, the unit redeployed from Afghanistan, fully trained and proficient in performing our company Mission Essential Task List with no issues. After reintegration, our company leaders were informed we would be the test bed for the Army's new Air Traffic Navigation, Integration, and Coordination System (ATNAVICIS). All of our controllers were excited because this would allow us to upgrade from analog radar to digital and use the very same equipment that is currently being used at many major US airport air traffic control facilities.

Our current radar – the AN-TSQ 71B – is more than 50 years old and new tactical radar was past due.

The project manager set up a fielding date and location. Contractors conducted the initial training with our GCA section and we began the familiarization process. Good fortune would have it that the unit had just returned from the Afghanistan deployment and our controlling skills as a company were up-to-date. This allowed us to focus on emplacement, set up and operation of the new ATNAVICIS radar.

In May 2004, our battalion was tasked to cover down on the upcoming G-8 Summit. We were to provide mission support for the President George W. Bush. We had identified a number of ATNAVICIS radar issues with the fielding team and manufacturer working closely with our unit in order to adjust and make necessary changes. The biggest problem up to this point was that our new radar had never passed an FAA-approved flight check. This step is crucial because in times of poor or no visibility, pilots rely on guidance from the air traffic controller to direct them safely to the runway. This step took on more importance now that our customer would be the president.

Our team uploaded the ATNAVICIS on low boy trailers and shipped them to Saint Simmons Island. A back-up ATC AN-TSQ 71B radar was sent from our sister company, Company F – from Fort Stewart – as insurance in the event that our new AN-TSQ 31 radar did not work. Our teams checked and rechecked measurements and set up. As a Terminal Instrument Approach/Enroute/Departure Procedures (TERPS) specialist, I developed, prepared and submitted for publication the proposed special GCA approach for the president. We were able to get an FAA flight check aircraft to fly the approach and it was determined that the proposed approach was within the required tolerance and the approach approved for military use only.

The presidential mission turned out to be a huge success. This caused the ATC community to take notice of the new ATNAVICIS radar and its capabilities. Once we redeployed to Fort Bragg, we documented the adjustments made on the equipment in order to pass the flight check. The manufacturer made several adjustments because of data provided to them during the presidential mission.

The down side of not being on a deployment or a mission for tactical air traffic controllers is a lack of real training opportunities. We cannot conduct air traffic controller radar training without an ATC Tower facility, the necessary aircraft and an airfield or landing area to include restrictive airspace necessary to protect the approach and missed approach areas.

In August 2004, we received orders to deploy the ATNAVIC radar along with 14 controllers, two maintenance personnel and one PLL clerk within the next 120 days. As stated earlier, the request far exceeds a normal GCA section company MTOE for this section. Normal GCA sections by MTOE only assign seven Soldiers to the section. Our company was forced to move controllers from other sections to cover the mission requirement. At the same time, our company receiving another tasking; this time to provide a tactical flight following team in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Army leaders were carving up our company almost one section at a time and sending them to different locations under different commands. This presented the command team with a unique challenge. Keeping command and control of our Soldiers proved difficult as e-mails and early morning phone calls became routine.

By October 2004, the command team had devised a plan to separate the commander and me. I would move forward with the ATNAVICS radar team and provide senior leadership downrange for the section. As an ATCS examiner and a TERPS specialist, I would also assist in the emplacement of the radar. A request came to conduct additional training on the ATNAVICS radar in order to increase the number of controllers certified on the new radar prior to departure.

Military air support was provided, which allowed us to train at our home station an additional 40-50 days and move our equipment by military air. The air load was another first for the ATNAVICS radar.

We departed Fort Bragg, arrived at Kuwait City International Airport and off-loaded the equipment with no issues. The 204<sup>th</sup> ATS Group liaison officer, Lt. Col. Williams greeted our team. Once I accounted for everyone ensured the pre-combat inspections were conducted, we convoyed to Camp Buren, Udairi Army Airfield. It was very late and the entire team was exhausted.

The following day, we were introduced to the headquarters personnel of the Louisiana National Guard's 204th Air Traffic Services Group and completed our in processing. A survey of the airfield was conducted and compared to the existing data as we began to formulate the TERPS data that would be necessary for emplacement of the ATNAVICS. We had to match operational requirements against the current airfield layout. Necessary concessions were made on both sides in order to place the radar on the airfield at the optimum location. DOD civilians operated the ATC facilities, which added a few extra steps to the coordination process.

Our team worked around the clock but we had not had a chance to acclimatize properly. The ATNAVICS was placed into operation; the airspace approved, approached and the TERPS package submitted. In a combat zone, the TERPS specialist is authorized to publish a tactical approach for emergency use only with command approval until it can be fully certified by FAA-approved flight check. Our team was able to provide full instrument airfield capabilities to accomplish our mission within 96 hours of arriving in country. It took another month to get approval and an in-country clearance from our host nation to allow a US Air Force

flight check aircraft in country to certify and commission the ATNAVICS. It was approved as an acceptable navigational aid suitable for use by both fixed and rotor wing aircraft. This became the first AN-TSQ-31 ATNAVICS fielded in a combat zone in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The success of this mission created a safer aviation environment. The emplacement of the radar allowed aviators the option of recovery in emergency or during normal operations to an airfield under instrument flight rules. The only other option prior to the ATNAVICS' arrival was to set the aircraft down during periods of limited visibility or dust storms, which occurred frequently in the region. The radar also could be used to observe and visually track air assets. The most comforting part to aviators was the fact that the GCA radar could provide vectors to the runway in the event of total instrument failure or battle damage.

The deployment, emplacement and flight check of the ATNAVICS proved to be a combat multiplier that made a big difference to the OIF aviation community; most importantly, it saved and continues to save lives today. I am extremely proud to have been a leader and part of this very important and successful mission performed to standard by Soldiers and NCOs.

*In today's information age, few people like to wait fifteen minutes to get an answer to their question. This has had a dramatic impact on reporting the conflict in Iraq. The embedded media is a part of Army life in Iraq. SFC D. Sparks points out both the good points and bad points to that experience.*

**SFC D. Sparks**  
**Embedded Media**

**Public Affairs Operations, 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment, 03/05-02/06**

During my long flight from Fort Carson, to Kuwait, I had time to read a book that I deemed critical to my mission and operational success as the Public Affairs NCOIC for the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment. That book, *Narrowing the Gap – Military, Media and the Iraq War*, proved to be very critical reading and would later become a source for my validation of how I thought the Regiment should deal with embedded media during my tour in Iraq.

Already having the misfortune of joining the Regiment only one month prior to deploying, I didn't get the opportunity to truly prepare the troopers and leadership of the Regiment. Of particular importance, I didn't have the necessary time to establish relationships with the commanders – particularly at the Troop and platoon level, so they could get a chance to understand my role as the sole Public Affairs noncommissioned officer in the Regiment.

My only training opportunity with the troopers was a one-hour Media on the Battlefield class that I gave to each of the squadrons. Although this training was necessary at the troop level to ensure the Regiment's troopers understood that any Soldier at any given time could conduct an interview with a reporter, my

ultimate goal was to engage the leaders throughout the Regiment and explain the importance of having media embedded within our units to highlight our future successes to the American public back home.

I didn't deploy with the Regiment during its first deployment in 2003, but I did my own research and media analysis to see how effective the Regiment was covered by the media. There wasn't enough adequate press coverage of the 3d ACR, but what little I found – it wasn't too positive. But this was the Regiment's second deployment and we were fortunate to have a commander, Col. H.R. McMaster, who truly understood the importance of his Public Affairs assets and the significance of having embedded media at the troop level – because it is widely known by military scholars that wars are won at the platoon and squad level.

Upon arrival to Kuwait, I was able to gauge the Regimental command staff and squadron leaders to determine what the individual and collective attitudes, beliefs and past experiences with media. To no surprise at all, many “did not trust” the media and preferred that I “keep those damn reporters away” from them.

Regardless of how the leaders and Soldiers felt about the media, I continued to tactically refer to the Department of Defense Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on embedding media during military operations. It would be foolish for me to educate leaders on the argument that “the media is not the enemy” so I constantly quoted, “Our people on the field need to tell our story – only commanders can ensure the media get to the story alongside the troops.” Armed with this PAG I knew that I could persuade even the staunchest opposition from those who didn't see any need for media embeds.

Shortly after my arrival in Kuwait, I received the first journalists who were to be embedded with the Regiment – Bill Johnson and Todd Heisler, a reporter and photographer with the Rocky Mountain News newspaper. Two weeks before leaving Colorado, I had a brief encounter with this duo. The three of us sat down with Lt. Col. Brown, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron Commander, for a half hour and discussed their scope of interest and how we could provide them access to our operations. At the conclusion of this meeting, Brown assured them that he would support their embedding with little restriction. I can still hear Brown say, “All I expect is for you to tell the truth.”

Nearly one year before I deployed, I wrote an editorial highlighting the importance of having embedded media alongside our troops in Iraq. There was much public debate at the time regarding this issue. In my column I wrote, “The entire world witnessed first hand how lethal a well-trained, well-equipped Soldiers can take out his enemy on the battlefield. Breaking tradition and putting aside its differences with the media, the Department of Defense allowed embedded journalists and reporters to eat, sleep and get dirty with Soldiers. Although there was some early debate and griping from the American public about how much news coverage was too much, there is no question the role of the media played for delivering into our homes the successes and determination of the American Soldier on the battlefield.”

Through debate my argument for supporting embedded media was simple – without the journalists on the ground, the American public do not get to see the sacrifices, hardships and victories that our Soldiers endure in serving our nation during war. Without those journalists, the American public could not give us the unwavering support that we needed to fight this war. With that premise, I made it a priority to engage leaders at all levels to understand the importance of accepting embedded journalists and allowing them unprecedented access to their operations.

### **TRIAL BY FIRE**

In a span of seven days, two incidents would define how the Regiment would handle its commitment to dealing with embedded media within our area of operations. The first, on 11 April 2005, legitimized my reasons for having embeds.

While accompanying troopers of Lightning Troop, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron on a patrol outside Baghdad, Johnson and Heisler's Humvee was blasted by an improvised explosive device. Fortunately no one was killed by the bomb. Johnson was sitting in the rear passenger seat and took the brunt of the blast. Heisler was thrown completely out of the vehicle.

As Johnson wrote in a column that appeared in the 12 April edition of the Rocky Mountain News, "I have rerun the tape of the explosion in my head numerous times, and I still don't know what to think. I keep looking at the pictures of the busted Humvee and still shake a little. It seems every single Soldier from Lightning Troop has stopped by our room... Todd and I, it seems, have passed our trial by fire and have become members of this warrior fraternity."

The two journalists were eventually advised to get the perspective of what happened for the very Soldiers they were there to assign. It was in those intimate interview sessions where I believe my Media on the Battlefield training paid off. The troopers were everything I asked them to be – honest, direct and candid. I remember telling all the troopers that if they didn't remember anything else to remember that the Soldier is the most effective communicator of the American story.

Sgt. G. Baty, a Bradley Fighting Vehicle gunner, said it best when approached by the two reporters. "Now you know exactly what we face every day. People think they have an idea of what we do, but they really don't understand. One minute the sun is shining; the next you are on your ass, wondering if your legs are still there. Now, you can tell them."

If we didn't have embedded media inside that vehicle it would have just been another serious incident report. It would have been just another day for American Soldier fighting the good fight on the war on terror. It would have been nothing more than a tale of survival by the men who escaped this harrowing experience.

Instead this was a story that was read by more than 300,000 newspaper subscribers on the day of print and read by thousands more via the Internet. I do

not know that actual number of people who actually read Johnson's column, but this was a Public Affairs success story. Through his near-death experience, he was able to capture the dangers of these fighting men to inform and influence thousand of Americans back home to keep supporting our Soldiers on the warfront.

Not long after the event, the two journalists returned back to Colorado with a newfound respect of the Soldiers they ate, slept, and lived with. The same respect was give to them as well. Many stereotypes were broken and both the Soldiers and the journalists have formed an appreciation for each other that would not have happened without this embeds experience.

When I finally got the opportunity to talk to Johnson and Heisler, I told them that I was extremely glad they survived the blast; but also glad they saw for themselves the horrors and ugliness of war. I told them they now have an obligation to continue to talk about their experiences so people back home don't forget.

### **A FATEFUL DAY**

In the book *Narrowing the Gap: Military, the Media and the Iraq War*, I highlighted a particular paragraph detailing concerns the Pentagon had regarding operational security with embedded journalists. In summary, the attitude by military leaders was to limit access to the "action" based upon fear that journalists would compromise operational security by disclosing information that could be used by the enemy. The counter argument to that particular thinking was there is not a single military mission that the military could not undertake that could not be covered by an embedded journalist – as long at the rules of engagement have been agreed upon.

Two weeks into Iraq, I wasn't quite sure how to assess how the relationship between the Regiment and the media would be. On 17 April 2005 I would soon find out. On a dusty road on the outskirts of Latifiyah, Iraq, my Humvee was ripped by an improvised explosive device which killed the gunner and seriously wounded the Regimental command sergeant major.

A half hour earlier, a Washington Post reporter was sitting on my right side in the rear passenger seat of the vehicle; however ten minutes before the blast I arranged for her to ride with the Regimental commander so she could have some time to get his perspective on our area of operations. She is alive because of my decision.

The headline, "Horror Glimpsed From the Inside of a Humvee in Iraq," along with a photo of myself providing security for my fellow troopers was featured on the front page of the April 21<sup>st</sup> edition of the newspaper to more than 700,000 readers. The journalist wrote a moving article describing the heroic efforts of the troopers on the ground trying to save their injured and fallen comrades. The article also appeared in the *Early Bird*, an Internet brief featuring concise news articles published by the Department of Defense and is read daily by DoD leaders and personnel.

The paper also published a photo of the wrecked Humvee. The photo did not contain any of the wounded nor killed Soldiers and the wreckage was taken from a distance. The photo was like many others that had been published in numerous newspapers including Stars and Stripes. However, the photo was taken by a Soldier on the ground – not by the journalist.

The day following the attack, the reporter saw the photos taken by the Soldier on the ground and requested copies to have for her personal use. My initial judgment was to deny her copies of the photos because of the sensitivity of the nature, but I wanted to make sure that I was following proper Public Affairs guidelines. After reading the PAG, I decided the photos did not violate any of the ground rules and released a couple of the photos – including the photo published in the Washington Post.

In the DoD PAG under Ground Rules it states, “These ground rules recognize the right of the media to cover military operations and are in no way intended to prevent release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative or uncomplimentary information.” Also in section 4.H.1. the PAG reads, “Media representatives will be reminded of the sensitivity of using names of individual casualties or photographs they may have taken which clearly identify casualties until after notification of next of kin and release by OASD (PA).

When the Regimental commander saw the photo in the Stars and Stripes it became apparent that I made a mistake in releasing the photos. This was my first real-world lesson on how Public Affairs and Information Operations integrate on the battlefield. Although the photos did not violate the rules of Security, Accuracy, Policy or Propriety; they could have been potentially used as part of the enemy’s propaganda campaign against US forces. The photos could have been used as a part of the enemy’s recruiting campaign to enlist more anti-Coalition fighters. It was a lesson that I would never forget from that day forward.

Although this was a tragic event, once again, the American public was informed of the sacrifices and risks by the men and women deployed in harms way. The article alone provided a first-person eyewitness account of a Soldier dying on the battlefield. The words painted a picture for the reader to visualize the catastrophic event.

Many journalists would argue there was no harm in printing the photo. The photo captured a factual moment of the war. Even under our own guidelines, the photo did not have any casualties nor was there any violation of operational security. As a photographer and newspaper editor I clearly understand that argument. Even from a Public Affairs standpoint, I can support the journalists’ argument that the American public need to see the good, bad and ugly of war.

Yet, I also have my commander’s intent – which is absolutely essential to every Public Affairs practitioner. The commander’s intent is the commander’s stated vision which defines the purpose of an operation, the end state with respect to the relationship among the force, the enemy and the terrain; it must enable subordinates to quickly grasp the successful end state and their part in



achieving it. Public Affairs personnel advise commanders on decision making and communication with the media, their Soldiers and the American public. They can not do this effectively unless they have direct access to the commander, are credible and have knowledge of all battlefield operations.

In trying to establish their relationship with the commander, the Public Affairs leaders must also maintain building relationships with the media and news organizations. The Public Affairs team faces a tough dilemma when trying to tell the strategic picture from the commander and allowing the media the access it desires to cover issues from their scope of interest. Unable to balance the commander's objective and the media's needs can lead to a poor cooperation between the unit and the press and ultimately shortchange the American public.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Global War on Terrorism has become an excellent opportunity for the American media and military to rebuild what was once a very adversarial relationship. There was a huge gap in the military-media divide, but the Department of Defense recognized embedding media with units during operations would have a major impact in shaping public opinion on the national security environment.

Remnants of the Vietnam War have definitely had an impact on the attitudes of many of our military leaders. Many Soldiers had already shaped their opinions about the press despite never encountering a journalist. Despite DOD policy directing all leaders and commanders to allow embedded press by facilitating maximum in-depth coverage of US forces in combat and related operations, there are still some hostile reservations towards having media. However those are now the minority.

Because commanders recognize the media's role in informing the American public, many are well adept in dealing with the press and have become media-savvy when talking to reporters. Commanders and leaders at all levels now understand how they can use the media to help dominate the information battle and to get their unit's story to a wider national audience. The most important lesson learned is that a good professional relationship between the commander and the media is essential for success in future operations. Although not all interactions with the media have been favorable, feelings of distrust have not been a significant worry from the leaders and Soldiers on the ground.

Finally, many leaders and Soldiers who were once critics of the embed media program now give support and praise. It is the sergeants and lieutenants today who will become future sergeants major and general officers and they will be able to look back at their experiences with the media. Hopefully they will conclude the media was "not the enemy," and more media on the battlefield training for their subordinates is critical as part of their operational planning.

Lt. M. Olsen, a platoon leader with 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 3d ACR, is an example of how attitudes towards the media can be changed. He told the two embedded reporters assigned to his troop, "When I first heard they were coming that he

didn't want them around. "But since then, I've seen what your being here has meant to my wife and Family, the other troops' Families, how they can know day-to-day what we are doing, and I've come 180 degrees on it."

IRAQI FORCES TRAINED  
AS OF 22 JANUARY 2007

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

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Police	135,000
National Police	24,400
Other MOI forces	<u>28,900</u>
TOTAL	188,300

MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

Army	132,700
Air Force	900
Navy	<u>1,100</u>
TOTAL	134,700

Taken from "Iraq Weekly Status Report January 31, 2007," Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, US Department of State.

## CONCLUSION

It has now been more than six years since that fateful day, September 11, 2001. Soldiers have gone to Afghanistan and Iraq and fought a determined foe in each country. Both wars still continue; however, there are many success stories and many lessons to be learned from those who have returned.

These stories by noncommissioned officers who served in Afghanistan and Iraq provide insights into how young Soldiers march to war and subsequently return to their loved ones and families. In the pre-deployment phase, NCOs stress training, mastery of skills, and preparation of equipment. During deployment, NCOs work with coalition partners, use superior technical advantages and firepower, and trust in the leadership of junior noncommissioned officers to decisively defeat the enemy on the battlefield. After the fight, they lead their Soldiers in an effort to win the hearts and minds of the local people and adapt to the situation on the ground.

Today, the American Army still fights determined foes in Afghanistan and Iraq. Noncommissioned Officers continue to train and prepare Soldiers for the day they encounter those foes on the Long Hard Road to victory.

# GLOSSARY

1SG: First Sergeant

al-Qaeda: Terrorist group responsible for 9/11

AMF: Afghan Militia Force

ANA: Afghan National Army

AN/PEQ-2: An infrared target pointer/illuminator/aiming laser used on a variety of

US Army weapons

AOR: Area of Responsibility

ASF: Afghan Security Forces

ASOT: Advanced Special Operations Tactics

BAF: Bagram Air Field, former Soviet base in Afghanistan

BDOC: Base Defense Operations Center

BMO: Battalion Medical Officer

CDS: Containerized Delivery System

CENTCOM: Central Command

CJSOTF-A: Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan

COLT: Combat Observation Lasing Team

CQB: Close Quarters Battle

CSM: Command Sergeant Major

EPW: Enemy Prisoners of War

ETT: Embedded Tactical Trainers

FDC: Fire Direction Center

FOB: Forward Operating Base

HMMWV: High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle

JCET: Joint Combined Exchange Training

Jingle truck: Russian 2 ½ truck

K2: Karshi-Kanabad, former Soviet airbase in the south-central Uzbekistan

LRTC: Leadership Reaction and Training Course

MEDCAP: Medical Civil Action Project

MSG: Master Sergeant

ODA-XXX: Operational Detachment Alpha (the three numbers following the hyphen identify group, battalion, company, and team)

OEF: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM

OEF-P: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES

OIF: Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

OPFUND: Operations Fund

OPLAN: Operations Plan

PRT: Provincial Reconstruction Team

RIP: Relief in Place

SF: Special Forces

SF O&I: Special Forces Operations and Intelligence

SFARTAETC: Special Forces Advanced Reconnaissance, Target Analysis, and Exploitation Techniques Course  
SFC: Sergeant First Class  
SFD-K: Special Forces Detachment-Korea  
SGM: Sergeant Major  
SGT: Sergeant  
SOCPAC: Special Operations Command Pacific  
SOF: Special Operations Forces  
SOR: Statement of Requirements  
SOTIC: Special Operations Target Interdiction Course  
SOT: Special Operations Tactics  
SSA: Supply Support Activity  
SSG: Staff Sergeant  
Taliban: Islamic Fundamentalist who governed Afghanistan prior to Operation Enduring Freedom  
TOA: Transition of Authority  
TOW: Tube Launched Optically Tracked Command Link Wire Guided Missile  
USASFC: United States Army Special Forces Command  
USSOF: United States Special Operations Forces

Americans watched in horror as airplanes crashed into both towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, the Pentagon and in a Pennsylvania field Sept. 11, 2001. As the dust settled across the American landscape, Americans looked to their leaders to defend what had clearly emerged as one of the nation's most precious commodities -- freedom. In just one hour, everything had changed. The al-Qaeda Network and its leader, Osama bin Laden, became household names and Army noncommissioned officers found themselves leading the charge on what President George W. Bush promised not to be a quick war but a long, protracted one. Noncommissioned officers found themselves on the front-lines of a long, hard road ...



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