

Running head: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE PAPER

Combined FOB Operations

Keith E. Mayberry

Operation Iraqi Freedom II, Camp Greywolf, Green Zone, Baghdad

MSG, 11Z5, HHC, 3BCT, 1st Cavalry Division

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Abstract

Being responsible and Operating a Brigade Headquarters Forward Operating Base (FOB), consisting of 4 separate companies, 3 sister services, 2 international services, State Department, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with a combined strength of over 750 personnel is difficult at best and a nightmare at worst. This paper will show some of the problems encountered, (anticipated or not), and solutions to some of the minor and major issues encountered during my tenure as the mayor and administrator of the day to day operations of a small to medium sized overcrowded FOB with a myriad of units, host nation national workers, and austere living conditions.

At the time of deployment I had been the First Sergeant for about fifteen months, we had been previously alerted for deployment in March of the previous year for Operation Iraqi Freedom I, (OIF I), along with the Fourth Infantry Division. That deployment was subsequently cancelled, but we knew we were next in line to be deployed. We ensured that all equipment we had purchased for OIF I was accounted for and maintained, knowing we would be using it soon enough. The Brigade and Company commanders had both taken over at about the same time (May 2003). Continuity was excellent. All of the "S" shops had the same personnel as when we were scheduled the previous year.

Our unit deployed from early February through the end of February 2004. Deployment went smoothly as we had previously loaded all equipment the year prior. Everyone knew their tasks and purpose. Load out was less dramatic than one would think. Training on that was the key. We inventoried, prepared, and shipped our equipment smoother than I expected. After shipment, the issue was Soldier time and training. We ended up having about 4 weeks between shipment of equipment and personnel. We decided to ensure that personnel had maximum time with families prior to deployment. We implemented a half day work schedule, where we trained critical tasks and still made sure that the Soldiers would be home with families in the afternoon. Unless it was a very critical task, no one worked past 1300. During the PDSS, it was determined by the commander that we would require gym equipment. We then worked with the property book office at Fort Hood and obtained permission for the unit to take some of the gym equipment that we signed for from our gym. Good call on our part, for without that equipment our facilities in theater would have been severely lacking.

Once in Kuwait, we prepared our equipment. Received new additional items, Rapid Fielding Initiative (RFI) equipment, and conducted our theater specific training. Some of the training we conducted were individual zero and quick fire techniques, convoy live fire training,

certification of our contracting officers, and certification of our Field Ordering Officer (FOO). The latter two would prove very beneficial once we arrived in the final destination. At the location in Kuwait, we received our attachments to the Brigade Headquarters. The Headquarters now had one MI Company, one Signal Company, and the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop (BRT).

Convoys began moving north to Baghdad in late February. As the HHC 1SG, the commander and I were on the last convoy. We pushed the rest of the unit forward into their FOB's, and sent a small advanced party to coordinate with the unit currently occupying our location. My convoy consisted of fifty-three vehicles, mostly the MI Company, with my and the commander's vehicles. The convoy lasted for three days with two remain overnights (RON). For the most part, the convoy was uneventful, we received sporadic ground fire on two events. We used our own recovery assets and was able to arrive at FOB Greywolf with all equipment and no casualties.

I had sent our Executive Officer forward to make coordination for our arrival. The unit we were replacing made accommodations for our vehicles, so the initial arrival went smoothly. Since the S4 NCOIC had remained in Kuwait for the rear closeout and wouldn't arrive for 4 more days, it fell to me to make initial occupation and coordination for supply actions. This is where the prior training for the contracting officer and the FOO officer was a major plus.

Upon our arrival and link up with the outgoing units First Sergeant, we toured the base, examined the layout and the timeline for his departure. I settled the vehicles, troops and equipment in place and began to set up operations. During the initial tour, I found the facilities suitable in size but deplorable in condition. We had 10 days until the transition would be complete and his unit would vacate completely. I had 5 days until I would take over security and all life support operations. This was crucial to a smooth transition. We were a little crowded for space, since the FOB was set up to house 1 BCT HQ's and we now had 2, but we made do.

I immediately contacted my contracting officer and told him what I needed. He in turn drew up a contract for three hundred and fifty sets of furniture; bunk beds, mattresses, wall lockers, and 3 drawer chests. He went to drop the contract and found that he needed another contracting class. This is where the training in Kuwait was beneficial, since he had already had one class, all he needed now was the one day short version, and not the four day, new officer version. He was able to drop the contract the next day.

I now had the units bedded temporarily, the tactical operations center (TOC) running and initial systems in place. I then went to the BDE CSM to outline what I needed in support to secure and maintain the FOB. He agreed with my requirements and set the initial working relationship between myself and the 3 other company First Sergeants. We had a meeting and he and I outlined the support relationship. We all agreed on personnel requirements and that I had simple tasking authority. Major tasking would go through him. Emergency tasking was mine, with a follow up with him. This relationship solved many problems.

The security personnel issue was challenging. I had to secure a FOB that had 3 manned towers, 4 unmanned towers (to be manned in emergency). One access control point (ACP) and provide a quick reaction force. While accomplishing this, the security plan could not disrupt twenty-four operations of the TOC or support. The initial guard requirements at the current threat level were this; 2 personnel for 2 towers, 1 man for 1 tower, and 2 personnel at the ACP, with 1 SSG or above to act as Sergeant of the Guard (SOG). If I split them into 3 shifts it came out to be twenty-one personnel and 1 SOG. If we split the shifts as we had at home station, that would put forty-four Soldiers out of commission from their regular duties.

Together the 1SG's and I came up with this solution. The guard would be for twenty-four hours, they would be on a 4-hour shift with 8 hours off between shifts. The SOG would be on for twenty-hours for continuity. This schedule allowed the Soldiers to work their normal TOC or

support shifts in between the 4 hour guard commitment, with no compensatory time the following day. During a normal twelve-hour shift, a guard would only miss 4 hours of his normal duty, in either the TOC, or support. He still had adequate rest time, and could report normally to his next duty shift. I implemented a Guard Mount every morning, where the SOG would inspect, brief, and issue special instruction. I required each company to send an NCO with their guard commitment.

The next issue was the delivery of the ice. Soldiers are allocated 4 pounds of ice per person per day. It was beginning to get very hot and the ice was going to become an issue very quickly. The issue was storage. The unit we had replaced had not been receiving the ice so there were no storage facilities. My solution to the problem, I met with our FOO, instructed him to purchase ten chest freezers. He purchased them within 3 days, and we placed them outside on pallets throughout the FOB, in locations where there were Soldiers. We placed two at the ACP, for convoys that were leaving the FOB to have the opportunity to stock on ice prior to departure.

Problem solved, with 350 personnel assigned this alleviated the storage problem of 700 bags of ice.

Having my own FOO and contracting officer allowed me to accomplish many life support tasks. We purchased air conditioners, ceiling fans, road signs, televisions, and so on. I contracted for additional buildings, sewer repair, tower rebuilds, and other security issues.

In late July our forces began a build up for the upcoming constitutional convention and elections. Personnel on my FOB went from roughly three hundred and fifty to a peak of seven hundred and eighty. We received a SEAL team, additional personnel for our EOD team, and occasional State Department, and FBI personnel. Any given day I had between seven hundred and seven hundred and fifty personnel on the FOB that was originally set up for three hundred and fifty.

My dining facility (DFAC) was just a large rectangle shaped building. We did not have a working DFAC, we received our food in mermite from the main KBR facility within the zone. My Soldiers ate whatever was sent them. It was a very depressing place to eat. In April I decided that I would do something about it. I wanted the DFAC to be a place where the Soldiers could go and relax and be away from everything Army, and get a sense of home. I began corresponding with major restaurant chains requesting their help. Applebee's was very receptive; they closed two restaurants and sent the entire decorations from both to me in Iraq.

I had our FOO order plywood and 2 by 4's, (we brought 2 nail guns with compressors with us). I met with my mechanics and found that I had 2 carpenters. Together we redesigned the interior of the building. Working at night, after dinner, the Soldiers rebuilt the interior to resemble an Applebee's restaurant. They built a serving line, shelves, kitchen area, and salad bar. I in turn was able to procure stoves (from the interior of the palace), a deep fryer (FOO money), drink machines (FOO money), 3 thirty-two inch televisions (FOO money), 1 forty-two inch PLASMA, and 8 stereo speakers.

My cooks could now cook additional items to supplement the marmite meal. We now had pies, hot dogs, hamburgers, and chili and so on. What a morale boost.

My S6 NCOIC and myself then wired all of the televisions and speakers together to display AFN, wired it all into a stereo and amplifier. We then could play music or AFN throughout the DFAC at a volume level low enough to talk but loud enough to hear.

The rebuild of the DFAC was completed the night before thanksgiving. The Division Commander and CSM were so impressed that morning; all of the mechanics were recognized in front of the personnel in the DFAC with coins.

SUMMARY

Overall life on the FOB was not as harsh as it had been when we arrived. Due to planning and thinking like a city manager instead of a first sergeant, and the support of the Command, we made life bearable. The key to success is Command support. My commander and I had the complete support of the BDE Commander and Sergeant Major. We were free to make decisions, implement standards and enforce the same. Having a good working relationship with the other First Sergeants on the FOB was very beneficial. Things got testy at time, but talking and discussing things usually solved the issue. The support of the junior NCO's, enforcing standards, taking care of Soldiers and making suggestions was key. To have a Brigade Headquarters FOB be noted by the Division Command Sergeant Major as one of the most improved, disciplined, and clean FOB's in the Green Zone is notable.