

LONG HARD ROAD III



NCO EXPERIENCES IN
AFGHANISTAN

“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

**Long Hard Road: Volume III
NCO EXPERIENCES IN
AFGHANISTAN**

**US ARMY SERGEANTS MAJOR ACADEMY
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FORWARD

This work is the third book in a series titled “Long Hard Road.” The first, “Long Hard Road: NCO Experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq” (2007), and the second, “Long Hard Road II: NCO Experiences in the Surge” (2009), attempted to provide the reader with an insight into the experiences and knowledge gained by NCOs in a time of war. This work, “Long Hard Road III: NCO Experiences in Afghanistan” (2010), seeks to build upon the earlier works in providing the same insight. Like the first two works, it uses the personal experience papers of US Army Sergeants Major Course students for the bulk of its primary source information.

The work is in two sections: the first are Combat Stories, and the second, Support Stories. Each section and each story has a brief introduction to provide the reader with a background and setting for the story.

A Glossary is available to help readers understand many of the acronyms used by the US Army and specific units. It is by no means inclusive of all Army acronyms.

Each work in the series titled “Long Hard Road” is the product of a team effort. As such, this work is the team effort of L.R. Arms, Curator of the US Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer; David Crozier, Editor-in-Chief of the “NCO Journal”; and Aaron Monson, Oral Historian, US Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer. This team reviewed and selected papers, determining which papers would be included in this work. Many of the papers are edited for clarity and length; however, every attempt was made to remain true to the author’s original intent. In the future, the Sergeants Major Academy will continue to produce works of this nature, ultimately retaining the knowledge and experiences gained in warfare by US Army noncommissioned officers.

L.R. Arms
Curator
US Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer

INTRODUCTION

During the early 1990s, the Taliban rose to prominent as a result of the civil war that followed the Soviet's withdrawal from Afghanistan. As warlords vied for territory and power, and a general lawlessness took hold of the country, the Taliban slowly built their power-base using the guise of Islam to establish a radical fundamentalist state. By September 1994, the Taliban received recognition by the Pakistani government as the protectors of trade and quickly gained additional power.

As the months and years progressed, the Taliban spread into more areas of Afghanistan. By September 1996, they had captured Kabul and the religious police set about beating men, whose beards were not the required one-fist length. They beat women who worked outside the home, were not accompanied by a male outside the house, or those who did not wear the burqa. They banned radio, TV, movie houses, and all western-style clothes.

Although major resistance to the Taliban emerged in the north in 1998 at Mazar-i-Sharif, the Taliban, after being repulsed, finally captured the city. They killed thousands of men, women and children, most of whom were of the Shiite sect of Islam. This gave the Taliban complete control of Afghanistan, except for an area in the north, which was under the rule of the Northern Alliance.

The Northern Alliance created a non-fundamentalist region in northeastern Afghanistan. Their forces numbered approximately 40,000 Soldiers, and they fought the Taliban with great determination. They maintained control of approximately 30 percent of Afghanistan and their numbers included many of the Afghan minorities (Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbeks, and Turkmen). Prior to September 9, 2001, the Northern Alliance and the Taliban reached a stalemate with each side unable to gain the advantage.

After the attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the situation in Afghanistan began to change quickly. The United States sent Special Forces units into Afghanistan and linked up with the Northern Alliance. Suddenly, the Taliban found itself at a great disadvantage. The devastating air power that the Special Forces Soldiers could direct to specific areas made the Taliban reel, their lines crumbling without serious engagements. When the Northern Alliance attacked Mazar-i-Sharif, the Taliban and their foreign allies made one last stand at Tangi Gap. The difference in air power between their old enemies the Soviets and their new American enemies became obvious in the rain of bombs that devastated their positions. The Northern Alliance and Special Forces units marched into Mazar-i-Sharif with little resistance.

A few engagements around Tora Bora and the mountainous south remained; however, the Taliban were on the run. Lacking the ability to intimidate or inflict cruel punishments, they hid in the caves and the rugged mountains of Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan. Their inability to stand and fight, or even put up weak resistance, led many to believe in their demise—this was not to be.

COMBAT STORIES

*The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is.
Get at him as soon as you can. Strike him as hard as you can, and keep moving.*
Ulysses S. Grant

During the years following the collapse of the Taliban, the United States and its allies attempted to rebuild the Afghan nation and create an Afghan National Army. The Taliban and the few remaining al-Qaeda fighters turned to vehicle-born and improvised explosive devices to continue their struggle against the United States, NATO, and the Afghan government. Slowly, they attempted to regain some of their power, especially along the southern border with Pakistan.

As the years progressed, the Afghan National Army took a larger role in fighting the Taliban. Many American Soldiers were sent to serve in embedded training teams, which helped train the Afghan National Army and help to build an effective fighting force. Joint operations between the different American services or between American and foreign allies, served a large part in that effort.

At Forward Operating Base Ghanzi, MSG Zachary Hansarik learned several important lessons. He built friendships with other NCOs that are still an important part of his life. He saw how assistance projects helped change an Afghan village and province, and felt the grief of losing fellow Soldiers in combat.

FOB Ghazni

MSG Zachary Hansarik

S-1, 2nd Battalion., 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division

Off to Fort Drum

I was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and was working as the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) of Strength Management for Army's III Corps Headquarters. It was June 2003 and there was a buzz in the air that we would be deploying to Iraq. Rumors were running rampant about when it would be and when we were going to get the official word. So imagine my surprise when I received notification that I was on assignment instructions to report to Fort Drum, NY, in November. With no official orders saying we were going as a Corps, I started my move in preparation of my new assignment.

Before my arrival at Fort Drum, my gaining unit contacted me. It was an Air Defense Artillery battalion, which was getting ready to deploy around the first part of September to Afghanistan. The majority of the 10th Mountain Division was preparing to deploy as well. The 3/62 Air Defense Artillery was going to be my new home. Having been contacted by my new unit and knowing what was ahead of me, I eagerly anticipated this upcoming assignment.

Upon my arrival at Fort Drum, I was directed to report to the division headquarters and see the G-1 sergeant major (SGM). He informed me that the 10th Soldier Support Battalion was in Afghanistan; however, a small number of Soldiers had been left behind to support the installation. The 10th Soldier Support Battalion was made up of finance and personnel Soldiers, and the rear detachment needed some leadership. He asked me if I was up to being the rear detachment first sergeant (1SG). With a little disappointment in my voice, I agreed. Getting to be a 1SG as a sergeant first class (SFC) would be a good career move, but I wasn't excited about rear detachment duties. I had heard the horror stories. The 10th Soldier Support Battalion was now going to be my new home. I completed my in-processing and reported to the battalion.

Immediately upon arrival at the headquarters, I was told I was being re-assigned to the 2/87 Infantry, who were in Afghanistan. They were attached to 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division and were operating out of Bagram Airfield (BAF), Afghanistan. They needed a senior personnel sergeant, and I was it. Be-

ing a bit agitated at getting bounced around, I took my new orders and headed off to 2nd Brigade to in-process before reporting to the battalion.

Destination Afghanistan

The 2nd Brigade command sergeant major (CSM) welcomed me to Fort Drum, to the brigade, and to the team. He briefed me on the battalion's mission, what was expected of me as a senior noncommissioned officer in the brigade, and his concern that my family was settled. I was impressed and knew going to 2/87 was going to work out very nicely. I arrived at the battalion motivated, ready to get aboard a plane and get this deployment started.

The battalion rear detachment 1SG briefed me on what I needed to do during the upcoming weeks before Thanksgiving. I was told that I would be taking a small group of new arrivals to the battalion. They were trained and ready to deploy. With a checklist of requirements I needed to do before deployment and the order to spend some time with the family, I left the battalion even more motivated than before; I was now a "Catamount."

After stops in Ireland, Turkey and Manas, Kyrgyzstan, we arrived in Bagram, Afghanistan on a C-130. A small fleet of Toyotas, four-wheelers, and members of the battalion greeted us. After securing our gear and getting settled at the battalion area, I was briefed on current events. The battalion had been operating out of Bagram, but a week earlier the entire task force (TF) had moved to the Ghazni province to help establish a U.S. presence and provide security to the Provincial Reconstruction Team that arrived there as well. The battalion CSM informed me that he was flying back to Ghazni in two days and to keep my stuff packed; I was going with him.

Ghazni

Making the trip by helicopter, I stepped off the Chinook and took a long look at my new home - four walls in the shape of a large square. At that time, I felt I knew what the defenders of the Alamo thought when they first saw it. The headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) along with scout platoon was set up in this area, while the three companies were spread out in other areas of the province. Tents were still being set up when I arrived. I quickly set up my area in the Administrative & Logistical Operations Center (ALOC) and established a list of things that needed be done.

The administrative officer or S-1 was a platoon leader who had been notified just four days prior that he was going to be the S-1. We sat down and discussed what needed to be done and how we were going to do it. We quickly accounted for everyone then took care of some minor administrative problems that some of the task force Soldiers had. We then developed a plan to get mail

to our location and how to distribute it to the companies. It was actually a very simple plan that was well received by the leadership of the TF. We coordinated with the S-3 Air back in Bagram to let my Soldiers, who were with him in Bagram at the S-1, to know when we had airlift coming in our direction. My Soldiers would then get the mail to the flight line and load it on anything flying our way. This was the only way it could be done, based on the fact that we were about a 50-minute helicopter ride south of Bagram. Within a week, we were getting mail on a regular basis.

It didn't take me long to figure out that there wasn't enough human-resource work to keep me busy. The finance and personnel unit was in Bagram, along with my Soldiers. Anytime I had to have something taken care of, I used the iridium satellite phone and had them take care of it. I didn't feel that there was a need for me there, but the CSM wanted me there. So with that said, who was I to argue? Before long, I was jumping on anything leaving the gates. I usually was able to hitch a ride with the scouts who accompanied the TF commander, when he went out. He and the CSM went out often as they were always checking on missions the companies were conducting, as well as checking on their warriors. The commander often had meetings in various locations with the governor of the province. Negotiations concerning the building of schools, drinking water wells, and first aid for the people of his district were his major concerns.

January 29, 2004, was a day that I will never forget. An element from the TF had been sent to destroy a weapons cache and was preparing to destroy it. For reasons unknown, it detonated before it was supposed to and eight members of the TF were killed. Four others were seriously injured. The reality of war and death was a very sobering event. These were Soldiers that I saw every day, and I had gotten to know a few of them in a short period. These weren't the first casualties nor were they the last that TF Catamount had, but the reality of war and why we were there gave me a new perspective on life. We had a mission to do—we paid tribute to them and moved on.

Shortly after, the TF commander asked if I wouldn't mind being a paying agent. Having no idea what that was or what it involved, I agreed. Before I knew it, I was going out with the commander assisting with projects to help the province as we slowly began to earn their trust. From the building of schools, seeing wells built and working with the Civil Affairs Soldiers, I saw the transformation of a village and a province. I was able to see and meet people who for years had been suppressed by the Taliban. Over the next few months, we completed numerous projects in the area, as well as continuing to build up forward operating base (FOB) Ghazni. Prior to our departure in May, we had built a dining facility, motor pool, a morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) building with a satellite for e-mail, as well as a bathhouse for showers. A large

area was established, and buildings were built for the Afghan National Army (ANA) Soldiers outside the compound. The showers were much needed, along with getting the internet; these were the highlight of the deployment for those at Ghazni. Army and Air Force Exchange Services began flying in supplies, as we opened up a small post exchange. The ability to provide magazines, snacks, cigarettes and chewing tobacco to the Soldiers that were doing the fighting was self-rewarding. Having a hand in getting it open and operating is something I took a lot of pride.

In April, the 25th Infantry Division started arriving in Afghanistan, and by the first part of May was arriving by air to take over Ghazni. The battalion from the 25th Infantry Division that was taking over our area was eager to get started and continue the work we started. I was impressed with the unit that was replacing us based on their desire to listen to what had worked for us and what didn't. They were anxious, and it was good to know that we were one step closer to going home.

As we did the right seat, left seat with the guys from Hawaii, the village showed up at the front gate with a cow and food that they had prepared for us. After explaining to the commander and CSM that they wanted to thank us for what we had done for them, the leadership decided to allow the event to occur. In good faith, to show the village that the unit replacing us would continue what we had started, the elders of the village were taken to the dining facility to enjoy a feast. The cow was slaughtered and cooked outside the front gate. The meal was great, and a good time was had by all. It was a nice gesture by the village and it showed all of us that we may have made a difference.

Conclusion

While assigned and deployed with the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Battalion to Operation Enduring Freedom, I had the opportunity to experience situations and events that I could never replicate. I developed friendships and a bond with NCOs that I still carry with me to this day. As a TF, we did good things for the people of Afghanistan and the people of that province. We had a hand in the rebuilding of a country that had struggled for decades and been ravaged by war since early times. Nobody knows if Afghanistan will ever be able to grow and develop into a prosperous country, but I know that I was part of an effort to bring structure to a country that has accepted war as a way of life.

The Soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery went to Afghanistan expecting to serve as a unified field artillery battery. When they arrived, they discovered the battery would be split into three mini batteries of two guns each. MSG Dwalyn Dasher, serving as a platoon sergeant, served as senior artillery adviser for the command of task force (TF) Wolfhound. He and his men fired artillery support for the infantry, sustained 24-hour operations, and performed a variety of tasks, including guard duty.

Task Force Wolfhound Steel Rain

MSG Dwalyn E. Dasher

Forward Operating Base Orgun-E, Afghanistan, 03/28/2004 – 03/23/2005

Bravo Battery Platoon Sergeant, Task Force Wolfhound

Background

After a stint in the Navy, I joined the Army on March 27, 1989. The Army became more than a job after I learned that physical training, ruck marches, grass-drills and all other rigorous training were a normal routine. I held numerous positions ranging from Cannoneer Number One to Artillery Howitzer Section Chief at Fort Riley, Kansas, and Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. During my tour in Hawaii, I was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery (FA). After many anticipated months, 3rd Battalion 7th FA came down on orders to deploy to Afghanistan. I already had orders to be an Active Component-Reserve Component (ACRC) trainer at Fort Stewart, Georgia, and knew that the question to stay and deploy would be coming my way. As my battalion CSM looked at me from his glasses, with eyes of empathy, I knew that this conversation had everything to do with me giving up my assignment and deploying with the unit.

This would become a major turning point in my career as a NCO. Challenging my skills, this deployment would bring my leadership skills to another level. With the help of 23 other Soldiers, we would be the driving force behind a successful deployment and redeployment to Afghanistan. My learning curve and experience level from the lessons learned would change my Soldiers and me forever.

Pre-deployment

Around the beginning of 2003, 3/7 FA received vocal orders that they would be deploying to Afghanistan. Ramped up and raring to go, Bravo Battery 3/7 was given the assignment to be a part of 3/7 FA to push out to Afghanistan and support the Global War on Terrorism. Already assigned to 3/7 FA, Bravo Battery was to deploy as a complete unit and defend the war by firing artillery in support of the infantry. We were a typical light artillery battery with six Howitzers, one commander, one 1SG, and a headquarters platoon. This was a

new fight, unlike Iraq at the time, which was a high casualty war. The war in Afghanistan war was something new. We had no idea what to expect, and a lot of training was set up and done based on lessons learned from others who had deployed. The Vietnam era was the last major deployment for Hawaii; for the next year, we would undertake numerous training missions to the Pohakuloa Training Area and the National Training Center. Everyone had to qualify expert during the small arms ranges. Meeting the mission meant we had to be issued countless 5.56 rounds to experience the realism of firing in war. This proved that more training would come into play to certify everyone on the M119A2 Howitzer. S-3 immediately issued an operation order to conduct Howitzer section certifications in conjunction with the gunner's test. The physical training that we implemented included wearing the improved ballistic armor, ensuring that every Soldier was physically fit.

After a large amount of gunnery training and physical fitness, my platoon was ready; all six gun sections could fire 10 rounds nonstop within 30-50 meters of the target. The issuance of new equipment, uniforms, and the latest gear commenced immediately. Everything we owned could easily blend in with the desert exterior. We had no idea that all the training together as an artillery battery would end with us splitting. By the time the official orders came down in March of 2004, 3rd Battalion 7th FA was ready to deploy.

Deployment

On March 28, 2004, 357 Soldiers loaded a jumbo jet and deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan. Kandahar Airfield (KAF) was one of the main staging areas to get equipped and set up before going out to different forward operating bases (FOBs), combat outposts (COP), or joint security stations. After we landed in Afghanistan and received our incoming brief, a holding tent awaited us for the night.

My main job was maintaining my men; which was approximately 40 personnel. The next day there was a meeting with my commander, first sergeant (1SG), and executive officer to discuss the next plan of action. I was shocked to hear that we would not be leaving together. Our unit, which originally operated with six guns, split into three mini firing batteries.

The news came as a complete shock to everyone but, as good units do, we dealt with the change the best way we knew how. Each battery would have to operate on its own with minimum personnel. This was something we were not prepared for nor trained. Higher headquarters had planned a complete battery split up into four-man, fire-direction center crews and five-man gun sections. The commander explained to me that I had the mission with two guns and 24 Soldiers at FOB Orgun-E, where the TF Wolfhound's Command and Control

(C2) would be set up. Trying to be a good Soldier and NCO I saluted the flagpole, moved out, and kept my opinion to myself; we had only 48 hours to reset and regroup before going our separate ways. Every Soldier was briefed on the 1/3-2/3 rule and put into action for the next 48 hours of operation. We overcame the decision from higher by using non-military occupation specialist (MOS) specific Soldiers and training them to do jobs as thirteen bravos and thirteen deltas. Our nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) Soldier became a cannoneer number one and our supply sergeant had to give up his job and cover down on computing data to send to the Howitzers for fire missions.

Three CH-47 helicopters and 48 hours later, 23 Soldiers and I landed at FOB Orgun-E. My job was to be the senior artillery adviser for TF Wolfhounds, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Piatt and CSM Yates. Our task was to fire artillery in support of the infantry and to sustain all tasking as well as guard duty, while maintaining 24-hour operations, all of this done with bare minimum personnel.

I did not know what to expect, the Soldiers that deployed with me consisted of one fire direction officer, four staff sergeants (SSG), four sergeants (SGT) and 14 E-4s and below. This was a time when the Army was in its transition phase into a more modular fighting force and being artillery attached to the infantry had the same difficulties as if we were in our own unit. The infantry treated us as equals, always guaranteeing that we had all the resources for the mission. As we moved further into the deployment and used the Howitzers less, our mission set shifted to patrols in the city. The NCOs of my unit quickly transformed from Howitzer section chiefs to infantry squad leaders with a team of Soldiers. This was something new for all of us since we had never conducted missions outside the FOB and only trained with an artillery mindset. I remember getting the lieutenant (LT), briefing him first, and then bringing in the troops for a brief. I explained to them that we had another mission and like any task, we were going to make it happen to the best of our ability. No sooner than we were given the mission, 23 Soldiers had taken it and implemented everything that they learned from others and on-the-job training, and made it their own.

Each day became a battle drill: get up, eat chow, prep the vehicles, and standby for the convoy brief. The missions out in the town of Orgun-E were simple enough, it was more of a show of force, stopping often to talk to the villagers and build a rapport. As we began to get closer to the end of the deployment, my biggest challenge became complacency. They did accomplish all the missions above the expected standard and they started chomping at the bit for something new to do.

I had to think of new and exciting ways to keep them on their toes. I began

implementing study halls; every NCO had to know the Creed of the NCO, and every Soldier had to know the Soldier's Creed verbatim. This, coupled with the out of wire missions, physical fitness training, M16 ranges, village bazaar guard duty, and perimeter guard kept the Soldiers on track for the remainder of the deployment. This was my first deployment, and I had no idea that redeployment was such a major task.

Redeployment

With the thrill of going home biting at their ankles, the Soldiers were ready to do whatever mission came down to get them out of the FOB sooner, or so they thought. As the sun melted the snow and the desert sand turned into slush and mud, the effort to move all of our gear out of the area of operations was becoming more complicated. Every unit had a certain amount of 20-foot military vans. The NCOs of the unit fabricated a trailer with chains to get the equipment moved from the living area to the staging area with no hiccups. Since we had to maintain firing capability on the objectives, moving out was going to be a major challenge.

The new unit was air assaulted in and we started doing our routine transition briefs and battle hand-off. The incoming unit did not have the same mission that we had and would not be performing missions outside the FOB. Their focus would be FOB security and the continuing support of terrain denial missions. For seven days, we conducted a relief in place (RIP) with the incoming unit. Every day more of their Soldiers would come in and ours would anxiously leave with haste. We did numerous briefs to get the incoming unit up to speed and passed on all the lessons learned over the last twelve months. The fire direction officer and I would be two of the last people to leave. Once we arrived back at Kandahar, we met up with the remainder of the battery, who we had not seen for 12 long months. Seventy-two hours and many debriefs later we were on an aircraft back to Kuwait for out-processing and a swift return to the United States. This would be the most challenging moment in my military career.

Lessons Learned

We were all grateful to be returning home safe. One thing I and the rest of the NCOs learned during the deployment was to always expect the unexpected, follow doctrine, tactics techniques and procedures, and lessons learned which would make for a better deployment. My leadership, patience, and mental capacities sharpened; every Soldier that deployed performed exceptionally. All Soldiers and leaders understood that the rigorous, efficient, and methodical training as an artillery unit made it easier to transition into non-traditional missions.

Join task force operations are a major part of modern military operations. 1SG Jessie Tyson served as the HHC First Sergeant of Task Force Lightning. His work with Sailors, Airmen, and Marines required him to learn about many aspects of the other service branches. In the end, he believed that this gained him the ability to see the big picture of what we were trying to accomplish as a fighting force.

Task Force Lightning Joint Operations

1SG Jessie L. Tyson

1SG, HHC, Task Force Lightning, 02/28/2005-02/25/2006

Deployment

On a cold winter day, February 28, 2005, my wife and children drove me to Caserma Elderly in Vicenza, Italy, to depart for Afghanistan for the next 12 months. My wife was fine until I received the instructions to depart in 15 minutes. As I was leaving the company area, I could see my wife's eyes beginning to water with tears starting to flow down her face. Seeing her in this condition was extremely tough on me as well, because we have never been apart for more than three months at a time. When I approached the buses, I learned we would be moving to Aviano Airbase in Italy, and onward to Bagram Airfield (BAF) in Afghanistan.

When I arrived at the terminal at Aviano Airbase, Italy, I was in deep thought about my family, wondering would I ever see them again; my family has given up so much to support my career. I knew at the end of the day they were all that I had and were the ones who truly cared. Just as I was getting deeper in thought, an announcement came over the intercom that our aircraft landed. In my paratrooper mindset, I was hoping it was a C-17 Globemaster because I had never flown on one or jumped from it while in flight; however, the old reliable C-130 Hercules showed up on the runway. We sat in the terminal waiting for about two hours and finally departed Italy on the first leg of the flight to Manas Airbase, Kyrgyzstan, the planned stop before arriving at BAF.

Once I arrived at Manas, my stay lasted three days before departing the airbase. When I arrived, it was zero dark thirty at BAF. Not knowing what to think, this was very new to me, I had never deployed to a combat zone and I had been on active duty for 17 years. Fortunately Soldiers were there taking care of Soldiers.

I had arrived at my duty station for the next 12 months with mixed emotions about everything, because this was the first time I would meet my company as the first sergeant (1SG). I entered the terminal and someone called my name,

“First sergeant 1SG Tyson.” I looked around and saw sergeant first class (SFC) Wyatt and sergeant (SGT) Jenks were there to receive me. While waiting on my bags, we began to talk about the company setup and issues that were already on the table, I said, “Guys, wait until tomorrow when I have had some sleep.” SFC Wyatt informed me that I would be meeting with the battalion commander and the battalion command sergeant major (CSM) at 0600 hours Zulu. The battalion commander was a former commander of mine from the Headquarters, 44th Signal Battalion, Sullivan Barracks, Mannheim, Germany, where I was a platoon sergeant. While standing and talking about the unit, an NCO yelled, “Everyone who has just arrived, grab your bags and follow me to the briefing room.” For about an hour we received an in-processing briefing on pay and entitlements, which was very helpful. Once the briefing was over, I was off to my living quarters, which were called “b-huts.” I was very happy to see a real bed with a mattress because at this point, I was dead exhausted but ready to start my mission and remove some of the unknowns.

The next morning I met the battalion commander and battalion CSM, who gave me their command philosophy, mission, and their “dos and don’ts.” After meeting with the battalion command team, I was able to get the company team together to go over our mission for the next 12 months or until the mission was complete. Headquarters, Headquarters Company (HHC), TF Lightning had their basic headquarters mission to support all of the line companies with their administrative duties, and processing all personnel actions. HHC, TF Lightning now had a tactical mission as well, which was very new because of a new system called traffic terminals. These traffic terminals were to be fielded in the company area, on the ground, and by civilians in a three-week time frame before going out to the FOBs throughout Afghanistan.

The equipment was going to support the Forward Operating Base (FOB) commanders with secure internet protocol, non-secure internet protocol, secure voice internet protocol, and voice-over internet protocol. This fielding was no different from others except it would take place in the combat zone on new equipment with no prior training in a hot area of operation. The company with the mission to train us on these new systems was Data Path. Data Path honored their contract and we received the basic hands-on training on the ins and outs of the equipment. As the 1SG, the primary trainer responsible for beans, bullets and training, I was not satisfied with the training we had received from Data Path. I needed to know in the comfort of my mind that my Soldiers, going into harm’s way, had every possible advantage and tool in their kit bags, so I coerced Data Path to provide additional training and tools. Initially, the company stated that the additional training was not in their contract, but they eventually did it anyway. Along with those terminals, there were also two Phoenix Satellite terminals, which were used for contin-

gency operations and redundancy in the network to ensure no single point of failure. After having the challenge of new equipment with more to come, things were just getting started.

The Change

My company started to change and had become very unique to me now consisting of not just Soldiers, but sailors, airmen and Marines. I, as the 1SG, was now out of my comfort zone with all of the other branches of service working as one unit to accomplish the mission. Thinking to myself, I said, "I wish the services were the same across the armed forces," but if that were the case, I wouldn't have learned as much as I did. Now I had communicators from all branches of service all over the battlefield that required different needs, but different only in the aspect of branch of service. One example was promotions. This required me to do some research and get knowledgeable on each promotion system and requirements because they all are a little, or in some cases, a lot different. Our organization had changed; it became a learning experience, lessons learned, and so much more for the company and me. The experience forced me to change my thinking from just the Army way of life to a joint mentality. I knew this was a joint environment, but seeing the different services working hand-in-hand and working to accomplish the same mission really took form under the small umbrella of HHC, TF Lightning in the summer of 2005. This allowed us to see the bigger picture of what we were trying to accomplish as a fighting force.

Our Joint Future U.S. Armed Forces

I would advise all future SGMs and 1SGs to take this to heart because I believe the concept of working closely together under one umbrella will be the future of how we train and go to war. After all the talk about transformation, I received firsthand experience seeing something I had never seen before: all branches at the company level. I emphasized to future SGMs and 1SGs to learn from your counterparts' experiences; this is the future and this is now. Having the Marine communicators, who were not only communicators, but true warriors with a wealth of experience and training to provide was a force multiplier. With the Army adopting a warrior first concept, it truly came to life with the outstanding combative training the Marines provided, giving us another weapon or tool on the battlefield as a unit. The airmen and sailors were great technicians, very knowledgeable of the communications systems, and knew the ins and outs. The Soldiers were the trainers, educating all of the other branches of service on the Traffic Terminal and getting the communicator in the fight. The company was doing great; we all learned from each other and the mission was going very well. We had all of the confidence in the world in each other's ability to adapt and accomplish the mission. HHC, TF Lightning was a team, a unit; we were one entity on one accord.

On October 8, 2005, Pakistan had an earthquake registering 7.6 magnitude, injuring 75,000 people and HHC, TF Lightning was called upon once again to provide humanitarian assistance in the region. Having orders to support the earthquake relief with only four months left in country and not having lost a sailor, Marine, airmen or Soldier, I was uneasy about the mission. Going to Pakistan, in my mind, was an unsafe place for Americans and coalition forces. I never verbally spoke of my inner feelings about this to anyone. I looked at myself and said, "I support and defend democracy," this was an order to get airmen, sailors, Marines, Soldiers, and equipment ready to execute a mission just like all of the other missions.

This wasn't the first humanitarian assistance mission we had done, but I felt this would be the most dangerous. As the 1SG, I trained and prayed for the sailors, airmen Marines, and Soldiers when they were out on missions. Sometimes I was there with them, other times I was in spirit only. I would call and check what the mission dictated, or if my mind was on them, just to see if everything was going well because these were my warriors. I was charged with these duties and responsibilities as the 1SG. I had to ensure the unit was always ready both physically and mentally, as well as having the right equipment to go on a moment's notice. I accomplished this with the help of many NCOs who stood willing and ready to do the job at hand, both day and night.

Conclusion

HHC, TF Lightning completed all of their missions, and it was time to return home to family and loved ones. This was a happy time, but I quickly reminded everyone to remain focused, that the mission was not complete until we all returned home safely. The book, the "1SG's Deployment Experience to Afghanistan" was an amazing tool that I will always remember and carry it in my kit bag. They were great, performing their missions with motivation about what they bring to the table. I was truly engaged at the tactical and the strategic level and I gained a wealth of knowledge as the 1SG, which I could never have received from a book. I can now truly say that I am the 1SG, the "father" of the company with the wisdom, knowledge, and combat experience to train my unit for years to come.

In the rugged terrain of Afghanistan, supply routes are of major concern. 1SG Patrick Fatuesi and the Soldiers of Able Company established a main supply route (MSR) from FOB Sweeny to the city of Qalat. This proved valuable to the Army and the local population. In doing so, Able Company encountered IEDs and engaged the Taliban.

FOB Sweeney

1SG Patrick F. Fatuesi

Zabul Province, Afghanistan, 04/15/2005-04/15/2006

Able Co 1SG, 2-503D, Task Force "Rock"

Pre-Deployment

I was a newly minted 1SG responsible for the health and welfare of more than 130 combat paratroopers. The composition included a captain (CPT), five lieutenants (LTs), four sergeants first class (SFCs), 16 staff sergeants (SSGs), 32 sergeants (SGTs) and a myriad of specialists and privates. Combat veterans and new Soldiers straight from jump school, all meshed into a common cause. An explosive combination, considering the demographic differences and social background included with each individual. The company leadership could address this separately in any number of forums available in-house or by an outside agency. But the best way to focus a group, in my experience, was to give them a purpose; a singular purpose that is sacred to all. The purpose of an organization such as this is to impose the will of the country through any and all means possible. War can be a purpose, but the end state needs to be brought through peaceful means.

It has been said war can bring all differences to the forefront. The company never had any issues to address per se, but this does not mean they are nonexistent, even in an elite unit such as an Airborne Infantry Company. We are still a direct reflection of our own society. The company commander, a former NCO, who went to the right schools, the right trainings, and was associated with, and led by, the right people, spawned a training plan that was both challenging and audacious. As I remember, more than 75 percent of the veterans, from the prior deployment, chose to either reenlist just to stay in this particular company or extend to remain in the company through an in-place consecutive overseas tour. To me, this was a complete surprise. Typically, Soldiers will squander their time in units and then choose to accept a permanent change of station. It was a blessing and a good news story to lead an organization of this caliber which possessed an inherent self-confidence. I have never been in an organization this dedicated to itself. This would then be the core of our company: the veterans teaching the new paratroopers about a concept which they have only vaguely been taught in basic training, but now must literally implement into their daily lives. An esprit

de corps fostered on the grounds of honor and trust can have lasting effects from the leadership down to the lowest denominator. It was interesting to witness a unit grow from a group of young minds and spirits to an instrument of the nation ready to impose the common will of the people.

As each plan manifests, it is critiqued by the executive officer, the company commander and me, but is always centered on the intent. Some platoons will move to a training area for days, reporting through a makeshift “company tactical operations center” for decentralized operations. These could include a simple foot march up a 5,000-foot mountainside, a simulated movement to contact for 25 kilometers, or just a three-day and night land navigation course. All these are to teach the platoons a sense of mobility and individuality. This sense of owning one’s destiny is empowering to young leaders. This is also the essence of the fight in theater. The training was challenging physically as well as emotionally.

All the individual and collective training would ultimately culminate in the brigade displacing its staff to Hohenfels, Germany, for a major maneuver exercise dubbed a “mission readiness exercise.” This could be considered the grading period for the unit to certify its skills as a fighting unit. This would be a pass or fail critique so the unit could then deploy. From gunnery to maneuver, to governing and interaction, to makeshift locals, all the ingredients were there to simulate a continuously mutating environment we all encounter in theater. Superimposed were the “cultural awareness” training for Afghanistan. Numerous briefs were attended, and above all, the experts kept pressing the notion of an environment which was very mature. In particular, this created within me a euphoria of an easy mission that would come back to haunt me in the latter days of the deployment and beyond. We came through with minor scratches but those will heal without any major surgeries, unlike the emotional scars that may takes years to heal.

The next obstacle would be to condition the psychology of the paratroopers to both accept the realities of the very austere environment to which we were to deploy and live. This was accomplished through numerous visits by the behavioral health department of the post, supported by the Chaplains cell and the substance abuse personnel. Their job was to screen the potential weak links and notify the chain of command, hopefully, this could defer any potential disaster waiting to occur or mitigate the symptoms through intervention. If it was up to these agencies exclusively, I truly believe they would flag a majority of Able Company. No one goes through what these young paratroopers go through daily without being scarred for life. The symptoms are systemic, but not as acute for the veterans. The new paratroopers, though, will warrant a diligent supervision. Finally, the last piece would be for coping with separation anxiety. This is addressed partially through the

quality of time given off. The comradeship established through the bonding process during training, realistically, and an ownership attitude all my veterans exhibited toward the new Soldiers.

Deployment

We deployed under a very watchful Family Readiness Group. Every paratrooper had a loved one present to send them off. We did the normal “hurry up and wait” routine at the company formation area while waiting for transportation to the airport. The order of movement into country was Able Company first, and then the rest of the battalion’s companies to follow suit. Because of size and location of the area we were to take over, it was the only logical flow sequence. Deploying into Afghanistan during the latter part of the winter, progressing into to the spring, brought some respite to the unit we were to relieve. As was forecasted by Intel the fighting season would be upon us soon. We deployed straight from Italy into Afghanistan with no layover in between. This afforded us the opportunity to conduct a relief in place (RIP) operation with the outgoing company with little or no disruption. During the past year, harsh conditions during the initial onset of winter in the countryside claimed some lives for some of the local population in our area of operations (AO). It was a sobering reality check to think that any human society would lose any of their own to hunger and weather conditions. This was also compounded by the fact that American forces were no more than a couple of kilometers away. This brought to mind a lingering respect for Mother Nature. Though this could be an obstacle, this mindset did not hinder our commitment to the mission.

Our first patrol pushed out three days after we arrived into Forward Operating Base (FOB) Sweeney, an isolated base named after Special Forces Soldier Paul Sweeney who was killed in action on October 30, 2003. The FOB itself is nestled right in the middle of a valley, next to the village of Shinkay, with excellent fields of view in all directions and strategically located half way between Qalat and the border of Pakistan. Using Sweeney as the company base, two platoons conducted their RIP operations with their counter parts from the 25th Infantry Division. The platoons then maintained satellite observation posts in their respective areas, north and south from Sweeney, and about four to six hours each way by Humvee. This enabled them to interact with the leadership and population of that area. This affords them the opportunity to provide medical and logistical support and establish a rapport for mutual security with the Afghan National Police (ANP) in those sectors. Once the RIP was complete, the platoons maintained static positions from their satellite posts for two weeks at a time, running operations together with their ANP counterparts. A rotation from the satellite posts to Sweeney occurs almost every two weeks, but is mostly sporadic for security purposes.

The inaccessibility of our company location from any other support was made even more severe by the existence of mountains to the west. The only approach was through a pass called “The Daub” pass. Historically, this pass becomes an impassible barrier during the winter. Having this pass cleared would become an extremely positive project for the force if a main supply route (MSR) could be established from the city of Qalat to FOB Sweeney. Not only would it benefit the force but it would also benefit the population. Access to a metropolitan area during peak winter benefits all, and especially, during extreme weather conditions. Critical to the overall success is how we as American Soldiers conduct ourselves and interact with the local population. With an MSR, in the process of coming through the pass, the information operations campaign would get a jump start to the positive side.

The next couple of weeks were a blur. The company began settling in to a battle rhythm and earnestly focusing on the patrols out to the border. Each platoon focused on their respective sectors and engaged the local leadership through meetings and projects. We were still mindful of the fighting season creeping up—we thought we were prepared.

During one of the earliest patrols toward the border, one of our platoons was struck by an improvised explosive device (IED). This was within 20 kilometers of the FOB. The commander and I were in the FOB when we received the initial report. As with any event, we always had a plan to address it with contingencies in place. The incoming reports were sporadic at best because of the nature of the strike, and it sounded like it was getting tense. The platoon heading toward the border was one vehicle down and its paratroopers out of action. They had secured the site and were asking for further instructions. The Tactical Operations Center (TOC) notified higher headquarters and requested the explosive ordinance team be dispatched to the site. The commander and I pushed out to their location with an Operation Detachment-Alpha (ODA) team medic.

Once we arrived, I observed a platoon in the midst of agony. This was the first time a majority of them had experienced a tragedy of this kind. They at least secured the site at the strong points. Even the platoon sergeant was at a loss for words. Only the tears in his eyes, as well as mine, spoke of the deep suffering we both felt. As best as humanly possible, we picked through the pieces, secured any sensitive items and equipments, completed the site survey, and returned to the FOB. Once there, we followed protocols for this kind of event and executed. We lost one of ours that day. He was the youngest paratrooper in the company. When they were packing his belongings, I visited the platoon. I went to where his bunk was and stood there for close to an hour—I broke down in tears. This was a sobering experience, but it was far from over.

During the following months we completed the MSR from Qalat to FOB Sweeney. All the local populations were pleased and welcomed the completion of this major endeavor. We continued to run two-week patrols, or more, experiencing numerous encounters with the anti-coalition forces. Some were acute and others were close. All-in-all we kept a guarded sense of security. The fighting season was almost closed before we incurred another tragedy.

In October during a combat patrol, we again met “Mr. Taliban.” The operation was a sweep from one village to another. After an all-day flounce from one village to another, we decided to stop by one more compound. We found ourselves in the center of a firefight. The hour was late and the sun was down. One of my teams swept through a nearby orchard field and was subsequently engaged. Before they could kill all, they were met with grenades. They fought through and destroyed all they encountered, but incurred a casualty. I moved up to their location and secured the site. My radiotelephone officer was with me, and I positioned him at a strong point. The medic started working on the casualty but to no avail. We scrambled for medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) birds, but they were too late. This was the longest encounter we had so far because it took us all night to clear, secure, and complete the patrol. By daybreak, another of my platoons linked up with us and assisted in the operation. In the end, we transported five prisoners, killed two, and suffered one casualty. As in all things, we still had a lot to do.

The following months we stayed active with more combat patrols and more projects for the villages in our AO. We continued to be aggressive in our operations, not letting anything deter us. When we deployed back to our home station I truly believed we made a difference in the country. We did not lose any more paratroopers but came home with some regret, and definitely a sense of loss.

Conclusion

As a company ISG it was up to me to train and mentor my platoon sergeants and platoon leaders. We took the time and did the necessary ramp up. Realistic training is the key. Training hard is also a key, but it should be balanced with compassion shown through actions. Knowing the Soldiers strengths and limitations goes a long way.

Afghanistan is a harsh country. We can still accomplish a lot if we take our time and do it right. An understanding of the culture where deployed will pay huge dividends in the long run. Our pre-deployment training must include all levels and all cells. Synchronizing all your assets to respond to any possibility is a must; from close air support (CAS) to your Soldiers. Any contingencies you can think of will not be enough.

In a guerilla war, it is often hard to tell friend from foe. Vigilance on the part of Soldiers in every situation and quick action often saves lives and thwarts the enemy. In attempting to help, in what SSG Michael Espejo, Jr., thought was an ally, his vigilance and quick action prevented the situation from turning deadly.

Quick Thinking Saves Lives

Staff Sergeant Michael Espejo, Jr.

Vignette

On September 27, 2007, an act of goodwill by Staff Sergeant (SSG) Michael Espejo led to the elimination of a major threat and spared countless lives. SSG Espejo, of the 66th MP Company, was returning from a combat patrol with his squad and two Army civilians when they arrived at the scene of a burning vehicle in a busy town, prematurely detonated by an improvised explosive device. Nearby, a man in Afghan National Police gear struggled to recover from the blast.

SSG Espejo assisted the man while others in the squad secured medical supplies for him. As he helped the man to his feet, Espejo felt something suspicious underneath the man's clothes on his chest and torso. Espejo also saw exposed wires coming from the man's sleeves leading to a small device in the palm of his hand. Recognizing the signs of an insurgent suicide bomber, Espejo immediately took cover and ordered the man to raise his hands.

"I saw that after multiple warnings, he was trying to hit the switch," Espejo said, "and that's when I decided to neutralize him." Espejo fired his weapon and killed the would-be suicide bomber instantly.

In doing so, Espejo saved his own life as well as his squad and villagers in the vicinity. An explosive ordnance disposal team spent hours defusing the bomb with the assistance of a robot designed for precisely that reason. The team remarked that it was the largest bomb they had ever seen strapped to a person.

"Sergeant Espejo's actions perfectly capture the essence, the prototype of an American Soldier in a counterinsurgency," Lt. Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr. said of Espejo. "Sergeant Espejo noticed an apparent friend, an ally, wounded on the side of the road and in need. Just as he would do for any American Soldier, Sergeant Espejo moved to that individual to provide aid and protection, demonstrating a willingness to trust and take risks." When Espejo recognized the threat, he adeptly changed roles from friend to combatant, a crucial element in a counterinsurgency fight.

Based on the following articles: "MP's actions in Afghanistan save lives, earn Silver Star," by Don Kramer, Fort Lewis Northwest Guardian; and U.S. Army Faces of Strength, <http://www.army.mil/FacesOfStrength>.

Operating with an Afghan National Army platoon, the men of Alpha 336 served as a blocking force for Task Force Aegis, near Kandahar. Alpha 336 and the Soldiers of the ANA encountered heavy enemy fire. During the following 23-day operation, they killed more than 500 Taliban with indirect fire and at least 20 in direct fire.

Operation Detachment-Alpha 336 in Operation Medusa

MSG James A. Caldwell

Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, 08/26/2006-09/21-2006

Preparation and Planning Phase

The preparation phase began at Fort Bragg, N. C., and consisted of combat oriented training events from May 2006 until August 2006. The pre-mission training for 1st Battalion and Charlie Company was decentralized and my Operation Detachment-Alpha (ODA) developed an eight-week training program of its own to prepare for the upcoming combat operations in Afghanistan. ODA 336 based our training on the recent combat operations since we had just returned from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) six months prior. The majority of the training was based on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on vehicle-mounted operations, and that drove the development of scenario lanes involving driver down, gunner down, vehicle down, cross load vehicles, and medical treatment of casualties. We used the Ground Mobility Vehicle (GMV) in order to perform all of our SOPs. The ODA performed a two-week training program on call for fire, mortar operations, marksmanship ranges, and fire direction control operations, which enhanced the ODA survivability skills. With some newly assigned team members, I decided to keep the SOPs simple and had the ODA rehearse them repeatedly until I felt that every reaction to every situation became a natural reaction.

I wanted every ODA member to possess the ability to make an instant decision on what each individual should perform in order to keep themselves and everyone alive. With weekly intelligence updates during the preparation phase, I was able to tailor the ODA training to the latest developments in the enemy's tactics and procedures. During the end of the preparation phase, 1st Battalion informed the ODA that we might be involved in Operation Medusa as soon as we arrived into theater. With that information, we developed a plan based on the information we knew at the time concerning Operation Medusa. With little time left, some of the planning phase began at Fort Bragg before we departed theater. An ODA abbreviated mission analysis was performed based on current information concerning the operation. Upon completion of the mission analysis, we produced our warning order and all of the assets needed in order to conduct

the mission. We departed Fort Bragg and as soon as we departed the tarmac area of Kandahar Airfield (KAF) in Afghanistan and entered the Special Operations Task Force 31-Afghanistan base, the planning phase continued with an operation order detailing our involvement of Operation Medusa. The ODA received an operations order brief from the company commander and instantly began to develop courses of action for the operation. A course of action was selected and final preparations began for the execution phase.

Execution Phase

The execution phase began September 1, 2006, after all of the courses of action were developed and one was selected. After the order was produced and disseminated around August 25, 2006, the ODA immediately began to rehearse and prepare on a short notice for the execution phase of the operation. The mission was initially only supposed to last three days but actually lasted 23 days. An Afghan National Army (ANA) platoon was attached to the ODA, which complicated the situation somewhat, since there was little time to integrate the added platoon.

The basis of the mission was to provide a blocking force and secure the southern flank of Task Force (TF) Aegis, while TF Aegis advanced to the southwest along Highway 1 from Kandahar. The ODA departed with all elements south along Highway 4 toward Spin Buldak in a move to deceive the enemy in the actual direction we were going during the hours of darkness. With a ruse in place, we went east into the desert area off Highway 4 and headed south in order to again deceive the enemy in the real direction we were headed. In GMVs and non-tactical vehicles (Ford Rangers) we came across a huge challenge of getting the vehicles repeatedly stuck in the sand. We were briefed, surprising enough, by the battalion S-2 that the desert would be traversable by the vehicles with little trouble. After traversing west and out of sight of the enemy we turned north and started to check out some areas of interest along the southern edge of the objective area.

We received notice that TF Aegis hit several improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and which severely disabled their vehicles, making them non-operational for advancement. Based on this information, we received a fragmentary order and immediately developed a plan in order to secure a major tactical hill (Sperwan Ghar) just south of TF Aegis in order to block and interdict Taliban reinforcements coming up from the south. The ODA with the nested Afghan National Army (ANA) platoon began to move north in order to take control of Sperwan Ghar hilltop. In route to the hilltop, we entered a village and were instantly engaged by enemy forces where we found ourselves in a U-shaped ambush. After returning fire, the ODA regrouped and drove out of the ambush back to a secure position two thousand meters

away. The next day the ODA reentered the objective area and engaged the enemy for several hours.

During that engagement, one of the GMVs ran over an IED during the operation and a member of another ODA was severely injured and evacuated medically. Soon after the hilltop was taken, a fragmentary order was issued and plans were developed in order to assist TF Aegis operations to secure the surrounding area. After securing the hilltop and surrounding areas, we received information that a large enemy force was developing south of our position in the Argendab River bed. This route was a major enemy resupply route originating in Pakistan and went north through the valley and into Helmand Province. The ODA was directed to secure and provide a blocking position about 5,000 meters west of the Spwerwan Ghar in a grape-house compound. After several hours of setting up a dismounted defensive position in a grape house, we came to realize that an enemy force of about 200 men was approaching our area. They were attempting to reinforce their comrades to the northeast.

After relaying this information and visually sighting the numbers of the enemy force, we were instructed to stand our ground and close air support (CAS) would be directed to our position in order to support our defensive position. The Taliban force decisively engaged the ODA, and we soon figured out that we were outnumbered ten-to-one. Close air support appeared about 20 minutes into the engagement and executed several gun runs enabling the ODA to form back at the GMVs with reinforcements. The ODA returned to Sperwan Ghar after the area was searched and cleared. We began to establish a tactical operations center (TOC) on top of Sperwan Ghar and requested resupplies to be air dropped. Intelligence reports concerning the enemy situation were received at the TOC stating that a muster of enemy forces was starting to gather and was attempting to come up the valley. This information enabled the ODA to be deployed again to the northwest in order to set up another blocking position for the offensive operation that TF Aegis was to begin the next day. C-2/87 Infantry was also instructed to follow us and help secure a large village that was across the riverbed northwest of our blocking position. With no contact by enemy forces, the ODA was instructed to set up checkpoints along the river bed with C-2/87 Infantry in order to prevent enemy forces from moving freely across the countryside.

Many engagements occurred during the 23-day operation with more than 500 Taliban killed by indirect fire and at least 20 killed by direct fire. A total of 10 Special Forces Soldiers and one ANA Soldier were wounded during the operation.

Retrograde Phase

The retrograde phase began on September 21, 2006, after we reached our

limit of advance. The enemy forces were severely punished and were in a retreat posture. The AOs were secure and the battalion commander decided to recall the ODA back to the special operations task force-area (SOTF-A) at KAF and begin our refit posture. The ODA initially dropped off the GMVs to have them serviced and change out most of our weapon systems. We then submitted our resupply request and took a much needed couple days off. Upon completion, the ODA developed a concept of operation in order to depart the SOTF-A area. The ODA would return to our original FOB of Camp Maholic just south of KAF and began to develop combat missions for the surrounding area.

Conclusion

The success of the operation was based on the repeated rehearsals and the confidence of each ODA member being able to adapt to all of the ever-changing situations. The experience in foreign internal defense training enabled the ODA to become a combat force multiplier using the ANA forces. With all of the planning and mission analysis, the ODA successfully prevented the Taliban forces from forming an attack on the city of Kandahar. This allowed the local populace to regain control of the surrounding villages from the Taliban forces, which enabled them to take control of their own countryside.

SGM Jerry Edwards served as part of a Mobile Training Team for the Afghan Border Patrol (ABP). The mission of his unit was not only as mentors and trainers, but they also provided aid and fostered good relationships with members of the Afghan Border Patrol and the local community. In accomplishing this, they also came to the aid of any local checkpoint that came under attack. This he believes impressed the ABP and the local population more than anything.

Mobile Training Teams

SGM Jerry Edwards

Afghanistan, 01/23/2007 - 01/25/2008

TOC/S-3 NCOIC, CJTF Phoenix VI, 1st/16th Infantry Brigade

Background

In July 2006, I was serving at Fort Jackson, S. C., in the 2nd Battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment as the Battalion S-3 Operations NCOIC. One morning, while checking my Army Knowledge Online (AKO) e-mail, I opened a message from the Department of the Army (DA), which stated that I was going to deploy with the 1/16 Infantry Brigade as a member of a Mobile Training Team (MTT). My instructions were to report to Fort Riley, KS, in October 2006. Upon reporting to Fort Riley I would train for three months with the other team members. I met my team.

Upon meeting them, I was a bit surprised to learn that the team consisted of 18 members, all senior officers and NCOs. There was one major (MAJ), one sergeant major (SGM), one master sergeant (MSG), six captains (CPTs), and nine sergeants first class (SFCs). Training at Fort Riley with my 18th Team Members was challenging, and the pace was very fast; we had only three months to bond as a team, learn our roles, and to master the mission requirements that were expected of us. Weapons training, language training, vehicles, convoy operations, along with other training was even more challenging due to the severe weather conditions that year in Kansas.

Several team members had experience in Afghanistan and their contributions to the preparations were significant. The training we went through at Fort Riley, along with the cohesion of the team, greatly enhanced our confidence in each other. We were ready to go, and on January 22, 2007, we departed to Camp Doha, Kuwait. The next day, we began our time in theater, thoroughly prepared to conduct our mission.

Getting There: Arriving and Change of Mission

Once on the ground at Camp Doha, Kuwait, the processing phase began and

took about a week. While in-processing, we eagerly awaited assignment instructions. During this week, our training would continually refine the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) that we became familiar with in Kansas. Once we knew where we were going to be operating, we hastily made final preparations. Early the next morning, after a somewhat frustrating contraband shakedown, we departed for our destination – Kandahar Airfield (KAF) in Afghanistan.

Upon arriving at Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan, my team met an officer from the 205th Brigade, who would serve as a convoy leader in the journey to KAF. After arriving, we accounted for all of our team gear and found a place to bed down for the night. The next morning all team members went to a briefing location and met the 205th Infantry Brigade commander and command sergeant major (CSM). When complete, my team received change of mission orders. Rather than serving as Afghanistan Military Training and Mentors, we were to serve as Afghan Border Police (ABP) Training and Mentors. This was not good news, as we had not received training in this mission. We had no choice in the matter, however, and met this news with optimism and professionalism. The mission would continue.

With these new orders, the team began final preparations for our mission further south than originally anticipated. There was a lot of confusion over which team member would handle the different parts of this mission and the task of assigning roles began. The root of our problem addressing this lied in the fact that up until the change of mission, all of our training focused on a completely different mission. Preparations continued with what little time we had left dedicated to training and refitting.

Wake up Call: The First IED

After five days of refitting with vehicles, weapons, and other supplies, as well as finalizing our tactical approach to our mission, we left KAF. The drive to our forward operating base (FOB) took just over an hour over road conditions that surprised me; roads took on a new meaning, as these were just narrow, bumpy trails across the desert. We constantly watched for improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the enemy. We made it safely to our destination without incident, except for just prior to arriving at the Forward Operating Base (FOB); we saw the aftermath of an IED strike involving a local teenager who tragically lost his life after taking a little used trail just off the FOB. This got our attention, as most of us were unprepared to see a child's body in such a terrible condition.

After arriving at the FOB, the Special Forces unit commander and members of his team, who were in control of the FOB, greeted us with a lot of information. The briefings and orientations lasted all of that day and well into the evening. One of the most important briefings given was about the security of the

FOB, which was one of our primary tasks. This would eventually entail working with the local Afghan work force, which was responsible for performing numerous tasks and manual labor at the FOB. The Afghan civilian work force could have as many as 150 workers on any given day, which did not include the FOB Afghan Guard Force members. This immediately, somehow, became a responsibility of our team. With all briefings and tours of the FOB completed, and with the team settled in and covered down on our areas of responsibility, we began organizing our tasks. The list of tasks was quite long, and included making hourly checks on the tower guards, radio watch, and overseeing the security of the civilian workers in the morning when they arrived and in the evening when they departed.

In just a few days after arriving, the team made contact with local Afghan Border Patrol commander. With this initial “meet and greet” completed with the ABP Commander and his second in command, the team officer in charge (OIC) set up a meeting in order for the team to meet his officers, NCOs and as many of his men as possible. This would facilitate dialogue and help the two entities in becoming a cohesive team, with them understanding our mentorship and assistance role.

Our mission, as a whole, was as mentors and trainers, but we also had to provide them with whatever aid we had in order to foster good relationships with them and the Afghan people that lived in the village right outside the FOB. One of the team’s primary duties was to be a quick reactionary force (QRF), tasked to come to their aid whenever one of their checkpoints came under attack. It was this element of our mission that I feel had the most positive impact on not only the ABP, but also the people. Our outlook was surprising to them, since apparently their other mobile training teams (MTTs) in the region were not as responsive. They could not believe how quickly we responded to their calls for assistance, and to see us, as Americans, so willing to put our lives on the line for them was hard for them to believe.

Allies at the Lowest Level: How We Helped

If we as a team had done nothing else, other than come to their aid when called during our stay, it would have been more than enough. However, during the team’s 12-month mission, not only did we come to their aid when their checkpoints came under attack, we tried to go beyond the minimum requirements. Some checkpoints were more than 350 miles away from the FOB along the Afghanistan and Pakistan border, and we still responded to their needs. In engagements, it is obvious that the attack was long over when we arrived, but we still would provide help with whatever medical aid possible, including air evacuation. Other things we provided to the ABP were training on command and control (C2), property accountability, marksmanship, guard duty for their

checkpoints, and on all levels of basic first aid. We did this while also providing whatever aid necessary to the local villages in the form of food, water, clothes, and medical support.

Lessons Learned

If not for the training and level of skill displayed by the team's senior officers and NCOs, more ABP would have lost their lives on our watch. In addition, if not for the training and skill of the team members, some of us may not have made it back. The team performed missions day and night along the Afghanistan and Pakistan border, looking in on checkpoints to give the ABP whatever support we could to help them better defend their areas of responsibility. In return, this also aided us in protecting and defending the FOB in which we lived. The team would develop relationships with the ABP that not only made the Afghan life better and safer, but also did the same for us. Because of the fact that we were able to work together as a team with the Afghans, all of my team came home.

I highly encourage all Soldiers to always keep an open mind upon receipt of deployment orders, and throughout the process of deploying, performing your mission, and redeploying. From the very beginning to the end of my mission, everything that could change did in some way. If our team would have known that we were not going to be trainers and mentors for the Afghan military, then we as a team could have better prepared ourselves for that mission.

Conclusion

Being a part of a MTT, with 18 senior officers and NCOs deployed to Afghanistan from January 2007 to January 2008 is something that I will remember and hold close to my heart long after I have departed the military. As senior officers and NCOs, we may not ever be able to control things that are above us; however, we can control that which is at our level and below. Senior officers and NCOs are the ones who will make the difference in this ever-changing Army. To do this, we must be culturally sensitive, and actually put forth the effort to do the mission assigned to us, even when it is not clear, and even if it changes at any point in time.

1SG Gregory Weekly helped create Delta Battery. Then he guided the process of turning that newly formed battery into an infantry unit. He ensured the units success by choosing the best squad leaders in the battalion for the new battery. They then trained the Soldiers in individual, squad, and platoon training. When they deployed during the harsh Afghani winter, the battery proved a strong, cohesive combat unit.

Transition of the Death Dealers: Transforming from Artillery to Infantry

1SG Gregory S. Weekley

08/2006-04/2007

1SG, Delta Battery, 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment

Receipt of the Mission

The 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery received a mission in August 2006 to transform from an artillery battalion to an infantry unit for a deployment to Afghanistan. I was serving as the interim battalion command sergeant major (CSM) when we received the order for Afghanistan. The mission required an infantry company to deploy as a security force within 90 days to support task force (TF) Phoenix. My battalion was not at full strength and the required numbers needed to deploy was very large. My battalion commander decided to send each artillery battery as a large infantry platoon. This seemed easy at first, but we had four artillery batteries and required to have five infantry platoons. So, where did we get the fifth artillery battery or infantry platoon? The brigade commander directed that all units within the brigade would send Soldiers to meet our requirement. The next big question was who was going to command it? It was decided that a young captain from the battalion S-3 section would be perfect for the job. He served previously in Afghanistan and was very motivated about assuming command. I was also told that a CSM was going to be assigned very quickly and that I would serve as the first sergeant (1SG) for this new unit.

Formation and Training

The battery commander and I looked at the personnel requirements based on an infantry platoon and made plans on how to fill each of the key positions. The entire battalion was going to serve in positions that were normally one grade below the rank they currently held. I knew that the most important positions were going to be the squad leader positions. Since I was still the battalion CSM, I selected the best three sergeants first class (SFCs) from the Headquarters Battery to serve as my squad leaders. I came to the conclusion that since I placed those SFCs in headquarters from the beginning, it was within my authority to move them again. The battalion commander agreed this was a good idea and that I would need a strong foundation from which to build the unit.

Now that a strong, solid core of leadership was in place, it was time to fill the remaining personnel shortages. I started my first personnel selections from within the battalion. Each of the other four batteries had remaining personnel from their deployment roster. Obviously, each battery selected their best Soldiers and put the remaining names on an availability roster. This roster was consolidated throughout the battalion and mostly contained the names of personnel who had long histories of disciplinary problems or severe physical limitations. Since we were deploying as light infantry, I made the decision that I could work with disciplinary issues easier than severe physical limitations. I selected nearly 30 Soldiers from this roster, but I was still short of personnel for the mission.

To fill my remaining personnel shortages, the brigade commander had each battalion develop their own availability rosters and ordered that available personnel would report to the brigade conference room. Once again, each battalion kept their best Soldiers and submitted the names of Soldiers with disciplinary issues and severe physical limitations. I went to the brigade conference room and interviewed the majority of them. Using the same selection process as before, I selected the remaining members for my unit. Now that we established Delta Battery, an activation ceremony was held. Delta Battery was the newest battery in the battalion and the only Delta Battery on Fort Sill. We needed a motto that would symbolize the motley crew of warriors that we brought together. My battery commander came up with the motto of “The Death Dealers.” It sounded perfect and the Soldiers loved it.

The Death Dealers came from three different battalions and consisted of Soldiers from 12 different military occupational specialties (MOSs). Transitioning the unit into infantrymen was going to be a challenging process. I started the training process by having one of my squad leaders teach tactics directly from Field Manual 7-8 (*Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*). We began with individual training and progressed through squad training to platoon collective training. After we started making huge strides in progress with platoon collective training, we started focusing on additional training. This training included advanced marksmanship, communications, combat lifesaver, and much more. My commander and I sought assistance from the Department of Public Works (DPW) on Fort Sill to use abandoned buildings for cordon and search procedures.

Although military training was proving to be a huge success, military discipline was a tougher obstacle to overcome. Many Soldiers truly felt that they were a part of a family, but several Soldiers were trying hard to retain their rebellious ways. I told the squad leaders to be firm, but fair. My squad leaders and I spent many long hours after work personally supervising Soldiers on extra duty and corrective training. After nearly two months, their will to continue dis-

playing negative behavior, in even the hardest cases, broke. The unit was now the most cohesive and disciplined of any unit that I saw in the military.

Whether it was rifle marksmanship, patrolling, or physical training, the Death Dealers trained longer and harder than anyone else. This training proved evident during three major events. First, during a scheduled Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation in September 2006, Delta Battery received commendations on its readiness and received the highest evaluations by the cadre. Second, within 10 weeks of its activation, Delta Battery was awarded the coveted Silver Streamer for physical excellence during the brigade's fitness challenge. We were only the second unit out of nearly 34 battery-sized units to accomplish this feat. Third, Delta Battery displayed such a superior performance during the mission readiness exercise it was ordered the unit would serve in a location detached from the battalion during combat operations. This mission would place Delta Battery under the operational control of a different unit at a remote location near the outskirts of Kabul; called Camp Cobra, Darulaman Garrison.

Mission Execution

The battalion deployed on November 26, 2006. The first stop was at Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan. The weather was severe and snowing heavily. The battalion commander received orders that Delta Battery had to depart for Afghanistan first because we were needed immediately at Camp Cobra. We flew into Bagram Airfield (BAF) and were transported via open trucks to Camp Phoenix in Kabul. After a quick 48-hours in-processing session and ammunition issue, Delta Battery was again transported by open truck, this time to Camp Cobra. We shadowed the unit we were replacing for three days and my battery commander declared that the relief in place/transfer of authority was complete. Delta Battery was now under the direct operational control of the Darulaman Garrison Commander. The rest of our parent battalion was stationed at Camp Phoenix and under the control of the Oklahoma National Guard.

The weather was harsh, sometimes snowing a foot a day, but the Death Dealers performed admirably. The Soldiers executed a variety of complex and hazardous missions. We supported the Navy's medical personnel by providing security during medical treatment of Afghan civilians and local schools. We provided convoy escort security for every logistics convoy that left the camp and augmented the Military Transition Teams on several missions. The Soldiers also assisted the area Special Forces Team by providing perimeter security during many of their missions and served as gunners in their vehicles during reconnaissance patrols. The highlight of the Soldiers' many missions was the joint missions with the United States Marines Military Transition Teams. The Marines frequently requested personnel support in guarding their furthest outpost.

That location contained a huge cache of old Soviet armor. Although we passed several improvised explosive devices (IEDs) while in convoys, none detonated against us and we suffered no casualties throughout the deployment. The NCOs of Delta Battery did an outstanding job taking care of their subordinates in every situation imaginable. Even in a hostile environment, my NCOs ensured their Soldiers received concurrent training on weapons, doctrine, and physical training. During Christmas 2006, the battery's NCOs volunteered without waiver to assume duties in various guard positions throughout the day so the younger Soldiers could celebrate the holiday. I was never prouder than sitting in an open guard tower in freezing weather, watching the young Soldiers playing tackle football in two feet of snow and enjoying their Christmas away from home. Indeed, we were more than an ordinary unit—we were a family.

The mission was exciting and the Soldiers were maturing both personally and professionally at a fast rate. After nearly two and a half months in theater, my battalion received another set of deployment orders. This set of orders was for the Horn of Africa and it had a higher priority than the deployment we were in currently. Knowing this, our request for an extension in Afghanistan was denied and plans for our immediate redeployment were developed.

Redeployment and Deactivation

An infantry unit from the South Carolina National Guard relieved Delta Battery. We departed for Camp Phoenix near the end of February 2007. One week later, we redeployed back to Fort Sill. We took two weeks of post-deployment leave and Delta Battery was deactivated. My battery commander went on to take command of the battalion's Headquarters Battery and I assumed responsibility of Charlie Battery. Although no unit initially wanted the Soldiers that were in my unit, I did everything within my power to take as many of them with me to Charlie Battery.

During the short span of six months that Delta Battery was activated, the Soldiers had many personal achievements. Delta Battery began with nine Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) failures, seven personnel on the overweight program, and five personnel flagged from favorable actions. When we deactivated, we only had one chronic fitness test failure; everyone made the weight control standards and no one was flagged from favorable actions. Additionally, we had 12 Soldiers reenlist in theater and 10 Soldiers pass their respective promotion boards.

Conclusion

My deployment with Delta Battery was short and not filled with medals for heroism, but it still remains the highlight of my career. I served in an organization that faced the challenge of taking a large group of Soldiers with disciplinary

and other negative issues, and transforming them into an elite unit that anyone would be proud to belong. Some leaders in today's Army are too quick to dismiss a Soldier for one negative aspect or another, but Delta Battery proved that you can still make an outstanding Soldier out of a disciplinary case if you provide the right leadership. Not every leadership decision that I made during those six months may be agreed or sanctioned, but the outcome speaks for itself. If you give your time and dedication, you can turn even the worst Soldier into an outstanding warrior!

1SG Chad Utz served as an Embedded Tactical Trainer with the Afghan National Army. In May 2008, Taliban activity increased in Zabul province. His work centers around his experiences in training the Afghan Soldiers on how to respond to improvised explosive devices.

First Contact in Afghanistan

1SG Chad A. Utz

OEF, Afghanistan, 05/18/2008

2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 205th Corp, Qalat, Afghanistan

First Contact

I was stationed at Fort Jackson, S.C., as the first sergeant (1SG) of Echo Company, 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment for a Basic Training Company. At Fort Jackson, I met one of the most influential NCOs in my career, command sergeant major (CSM) Watson. He pushed me to be a better 1SG and a better senior NCO. The focus at Fort Jackson was to train Soldiers to be better at problem solving, changing the paradigm of the Army from technicians to tacticians. We focused on the big five: shooting, first aid, communication, physical fitness, and discipline. I volunteered for an Embedded Tactical Trainer (ETT) mission in Afghanistan, and was reassigned to Fort Riley, KS, for training. I felt being an ETT was the best way for me to demonstrate my belief in small unit operations and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations as a way to defeat terrorism. Training lasted three months at Fort Riley. I arrived in Afghanistan in March 2008, and soon observed the winter weather was affecting the people and the land.

On May 18, 2008, in the Zabul province of southeast Afghanistan, the Taliban struck us first. Out of five battalions in the sector, four battalions came in contact, all about the same time and all receiving casualties. I was helping Master Sergeant (MSG) Weaver, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Harrison, and an interpreter, assigned to Combat Outpost (COB) Massoud near Qalat, load equipment and supplies. COB Massoud is a joint COB with the Rumanian Army. The U.S. and ANA left on a joint patrol at about 1000 hours en route to COB Massoud from Forward Operating Base (FOB) Apache. There is only one route out to COB Massoud, a dusty and dirt-packed road with many culverts. We had not seen much action and the local populace seemed to be fairly supportive, and so we allowed ourselves to be lulled by the inaction. Six members of our team, mainly the headquarters mentors, were called out on a quick reaction force (QRF) for an improvised explosive device (IED) strike in our sector. The Afghan National Army (ANA) knew about the strike and informed the U.S. ETTs. The ANA launched their QRF first.

The first report stated the company team hit an IED, which was nothing new

for this team. Just 10 days prior the same team had hit an IED causing minor damages to the vehicle and some minor injuries. As the team leader and I were getting the initial reports, the rest of the team was preparing the vehicle for the mission. From FOB Apache we could see the smoke from the burning vehicle. We had to travel the same road as the company team and the ANA QRF in order to get to them. After 15 minutes on the road we passed the ANA QRF; 100 meters or so after passing them another IED was found. We marked it and reported it back to the Brigade Headquarters. After finding the two IEDs and having the initial IED strike on the same route, we decided to travel cross-country. The terrain in some places was impassable and our trip was very slow going. It was difficult seeing the vehicle burning and not being able to get there. Once we were on location, the ANA and ANP were already securing the blast site. We had to stop about 300 meters away due to the restrictive terrain. In the last few minutes of maneuvering to the IED site, the team leader was on the radio preparing us mentally that everyone had been killed. Finally, at the site, our medic, a Navy corpsman, and I dismounted to search for survivors.

As we dismounted you could hear the rounds flying through the air. The corpsman asked if we were being shot at or if the ANA was shooting at something. I said "No, and keep moving." The vehicle was on fire and munitions were cooking off. ETT teams carry double, if not more than the unit basic load due to the small numbers we operated in, so a lot of the ammunition was going off. The ANA and ANP were flagging us down. We found one wounded American Soldier and two killed in action (KIA): a Soldier and an interpreter. After finding the wounded Soldier, the medic took over and started treatment. I ran back to the vehicles to give the team leader information, so he could call in the 9-line MEDEVAC (medical evacuation) request and to pick up medical supplies for evacuation. In our sector the average time for a medical evacuation was 80 minutes. We changed the earlier request to a 9-line air MEDEVAC request and a close air support (CAS) request. The close air support got there within 10 minutes.

The CAS, a French Mirage, flew a show of force pass only once, since others in the sector were in direct fire contact. We were told the air MEDEVAC was en route and I requested a dangerously close pick up to the blast site due to the terrain and moving the causality. I informed the ANA what was going to happen, but I needed their help to secure the area. The ANA Soldiers and NCOs performed magnificently clearing the area of all personnel in a one square kilometer area.

After waiting and having many issues with the air MEDEVAC, such as the format change to the 9-line air MEDEVAC request and aircraft down due to maintenance, we decided a ground evacuation was quicker as there was a

major FOB nearby. Not having ground medic transport available, we had to do some creative thinking. The terrain was rough and unforgiving as we carried the wounded U.S. Soldier over deep river banks for 300 meters or more. We only had six U.S. Soldiers at the time, so we had asked the ANA to help us. The ANA NCOs were the first to step up and help us carry the wounded U.S. Soldier. We told the ANA to secure the site, since the vehicle was still on fire and ammunition was still exploding, and to wait for U.S. support from our 5th Battalion for personnel and equipment recovery.

We took an ANA 7-ton cargo vehicle to transport the injured Soldier. The wounded Soldier, the medic and other ANA Soldiers loaded up in the back of the 7-ton while the other two U.S. vehicles pulled security en route to the FOB. Since we already knew that more IEDs had been found on the route back we traveled cross-country doing only about 5 to 10 miles per hour to avoid another IED strike. It took almost two hours to conduct the ground evacuation back to the FOB. Once back at the FOB, the Soldier was air evacuated to Kandahar and later to Germany for the injuries he suffered. The Soldier, an NCO, who was wounded, returned back to duty a month or so later and was able to finish his deployment with the team. Approximately five days after the incident there was a memorial service for those killed. I was tasked to conduct the “Last Role Call.” That was the hardest and most emotional moment in my military career. We later dedicated the conference room at FOB Apache to MSG Davy Weaver.

Lesson Learned

Many lessons were learned from this IED strike and the recovery mission. As an embedded training team (ETT), creative thinking is a must. Our operating procedures on how to mitigate the risk to IEDs, air MEDEVAC procedures, and load plans need to be fluid. We decided to minimize the risk of IED strikes by traveling cross-country and to take different routes every time we were in that area. Missions become longer, six to eight hours, versus the 45 minutes it took in the past by using the roads. Another lesson learned was about air MEDEVAC procedures. Since it takes about 80 minutes to get the air MEDEVAC on location, ground evacuation became the primary. However, ground medical transport is not allotted to the ETTs, so we decided that an ANA medical evacuation platoon was to go on every QRF mission to provide this support. Requests for air MEDEVAC were also changed to enhance the response time bringing it down to about 60 minutes. The last and most important lesson learned was the load planning. After that day, we reduced the amount of ammunition carried to one unit basic load and changed the location of the ammunition being stored. Now the majority of the ammunition and pyrotechnics were placed in the cargo area and not the passenger area, thus allowing the blast doors to take the majority of the blast. This lesson on ammunition storage saved my crew and me when our vehicle hit an IED about a month later.

During his second deployment to Afghanistan, SSG Matthew Matlock and his unit came under heavy attack by Taliban forces. His experience and valor ensured that he and the Soldiers of his squad survived.

“Valor and Gallantry in Combat”

Staff Sergeant Matthew Matlock

Vignette

On November 30, 2009, Staff Sergeant Matthew Matlock, C Company, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment was awarded the Silver Star Medal for heroism that saved the lives of several fellow Soldiers in the Paktika Province of Afghanistan.

Eighteen months earlier, in June 2008, Matlock’s courageous actions were sparked by a roadside ambush. “We were on our way back to Orgun-E from our last mission,” Matlock recalled. “We were getting ready to go home.” Just a few miles from its destination, the patrol drove into enemy fighters who attacked Matlock’s patrol with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades. “Everything broke loose. We kept trying to push through, but they targeted our truck with rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and disabled it,” he said. “They just kept hitting us, until finally the truck caught on fire, and I had to get everybody out of there.”

An RPG struck an external fuel tank, sending flames and shrapnel inside, seriously wounding three Soldiers from Matlock’s squad. Under direct fire and wounded himself, Matlock evacuated his injured comrades and treated them with first aid. He fired back and directed his squad to shoot at enemy positions, but RPGs poured in, sending hot metal fragments through the air. Each time, Matlock used his body to shield fellow Soldiers, receiving shrapnel wounds in the process.

“You don’t really think about anything else except getting your guys out of there. That was all that was going through my head – these guys are going to make it home. I made sure of that,” Matlock said.

Matlock, a seasoned veteran of the Global War on Terrorism, first deployed to Iraq in 2003. He later deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 and a second time in 2007, which was when his patrol was hit. He credits his survival to a combination of training and instinct. Matlock returned to Afghanistan a third time in December 2009. The young volunteers filling the ranks, knowing they will be sent into harm’s way, constantly inspire him.

Based on the article, “Airborne NCO Awarded Silver Star Medal for Heroism in Afghanistan”, NCO Journal, January 2010. Rick Scavetta, U.S. Army Africa.

The helicopter has impacted Army operations since Vietnam. Fast, highly mobile and able to concentrate vast quantities of firepower, helicopters often prove the difference in success or failure of an operation. 1SG Lepharis Baker recalls Objective Sidewinder, a critical part of Operation Commando Flood.

Operation Commando Flood

1SG Lepharis A. Baker

Objective Sidewinder, OEF IX, 02/19/2008 - 02/20/2008

1SG, B/5 101st, Task Force Eagle Assault

The Mission Implementation

On February 18, 2008, Task Force (TF) Eagle completed their last rehearsals before executing Operation Commando Flood. The TF attended briefings and used a large sand table to have a clear picture of the objective area. The mission was to capture a high value target in the Helmand Province area, on February 19, 2008. It required a total of seven UH-60L Blackhawks, four OH-58 D helicopters, two CH-47 Chinooks, and two HH-60 Air Force helicopters with mini guns, an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle for surveillance and a C-130 specter gunship for overhead cover. There were two ODA team members each with the Afghan National Army (ANA) on the six UH-60L Blackhawks and CH-47 Chinooks. The last UH-60L Blackhawk carried 11 Soldiers from F Company 5th Battalion Pathfinders. Two UH-60L Blackhawks would serve as the Aerial Reaction Force (ARF) #1 and #2. ARF #1's mission was to transport the ODA with the ANA to provide casualty evacuation, ground interdiction for support and command and control (C2) with one HH-60 Air Force helicopter. ARF #2's mission was to transport the Pathfinders for search, rescue and recovery with one HH-60 Air Force helicopter. The four OH-58 Ds would provide close air support (CAS) for the ground troops. The mission for the five UH-60L Blackhawks and the two CH-47 Chinooks was to assault on Objective Sidewinder at 0020 hours on February 20, 2008. After Objective Sidewinder was secured the extraction portion of the mission would be executed.

Mission Execution

At 1950 hours on February 19, 2008, Operation Commando Flood was four hours away from execution. One of my crew chiefs from ARF #2 could not fly on the helicopter due to an illness four hours before mission execution. I decided to volunteer and replace the Soldier as a crew chief and gunner. All the helicopters took off in chinks of four at 2350 hours, five minutes apart. I received my mission brief once we reached the staging area for fuel and formation line up, at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Bastion. While waiting in the staging area for takeoff time, ARF #1 started having communication problems. It was imperative the C2 helicopter had working radios. The battalion

commander exited his helicopter and replaced the copilot in ARF #2. All the helicopters completed refueling and repositioned in a staggered right formation. After the battalion commander received his last intelligence report from S-3 the mission was executed. The two OH-58 Ds took off heading toward Objective Sidewinder followed by five UH-60L Blackhawks and two CH-47 Chinooks. The route time was approximately 30 minutes to Objective Sidewinder. The five UH-60L Blackhawks and two CH-47 Chinooks dropped off their passengers and headed to FOB Bastion to wait for the extraction call. ARF #1 with the HH-60 Air force helicopter and the other two OH-58 Ds took off, heading for Objective Sidewinder. ARF #2 and the other HH-60 Air Force helicopter remained on the ground; they would relieve ARF #1 after one hour on the objective.

Action on Objective

We entered Objective Sidewinder at approximately 0207 hours on February 20, 2008. ARF #1's mission was to fly on the outer ring five-to-seven kilometers away from the main objective and provide C2. We were flying on the east side of Objective Sidewinder and conducting our third orbit. We began to receive concentrated small arms fire from the nine o'clock position. I relayed to the pilot to break right; no sooner had I spoken, the gunner on the right side relayed to the pilot to break left. Two rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) were fired from multiple points of origin. One of the RPGs passed within 50 feet of our helicopter from the two o'clock position, causing the helicopter to shutter abruptly as we banked hard left to break contact. The second RPG passed over our helicopter from the five o'clock position. Without hesitation, I called out to the pilots, taking fire from the left side and began suppressing the enemy with my 240D machine gun. Then, the HH-60 Air Force helicopter began firing its mini-guns. While our helicopter was still under heavy concentrated small arms fire and maneuvering abruptly, I maintained my composure and continued to engage the enemy in multiple positions over the course of 15 minutes. The ODA chalk leader began lazing targets, and I continued to suppress the enemy resulting in a large number of wounded and one confirmed kill.

The battalion commander called for one OH-58 D for assistance while the other one continued to cover the ground troops. As soon as the OH-58 D entered our sector he was engaged with concentrated small arms fire, and was shot down, but managed to land safely in enemy territory. ARF #1 and the HH-60 Air Force helicopter returned to FOB Bastion to refuel and rearm. ARF #2 and flight priority shifted to search, rescue and recovery of the downed OH-58 D. ARF #2 quickly spotted the downed helicopter and landed next to it, offloading the F Company pathfinders for security. The OH-58 D helicopter had bullet holes throughout the airframe, but they were able to fly back to FOB Bastion. The Pathfinders were extracted and carried on with the original mission. ARF #1 with the HH-60 Air Force helicopter relieved ARF #2 and flight. During the

outer ring flight, we remained to the north, south and west of the objective to avoid the threat area. At 0445 hours, we received RPGs and concentrated small arms fire from two different locations. We did not engage, due to the enemy's distance. Objective Sidewinder's mission was completed and we returned to Kandahar.

The Conclusion

Operation Commando Flood was a success due to the adaptability, courage and selfless service of the Soldiers from TF Eagle Assault, ODA and the ANA. We all returned to base with no one killed or injured during this operation. There was one OH-58 D damaged. On May 15, 2008, I received an Air Medal with Valor and a Combat Action Badge for my actions on the objective.

In an effort to attain supplies and escort an ANA Company back to camp, SGM Clifford Lo, along with Special Forces and ANA Soldiers, conducted a Combat Readiness Patrol. Near a village, they encountered strong Taliban small arms and RPG fire. Quick action, resulting from years of training, served SGM Lo well.

Civil Affairs and the Importance of Training

SGM Clifford Lo

492nd Civil Affairs Battalion, 321st Civil Affairs Brigade, 11/27/09

Due to recent heavy insurgent activities in our Area of Operation (AO), our ground resupply line was nonexistent. No truck driver would want to drive the eight hours to and from our nearest base. The area had been having multiple issues in the past few weeks—all from the insurgents' ever-improving ambushes. Some of the local district police had been killed in our AO and the rest had fled.

On October 27, 2009, I participated as a rear gunner with Team 335 along with about 25 Afghan National Army (ANA) Soldiers. The vehicles used by the teams were modified open bed Humvees that had multiple crew serve weapon systems mounted. Our objective was to conduct a combat readiness patrol to rendezvous with and escort a replacement ANA Company along with some much-needed supplies back to our camp.

About an hour south of the firebase, we picked up radio traffic just before a village. A few minutes prior, we had just stopped to look for a radio that the ANA had lost from a previous battle a few days ago. By scanning radio traffic, we could hear the enemy talking back and forth to each other, "There're four ANA Soldiers looking for something, and one of them is in the river," as they informed each other of our location. As the interpreter repeated what was said over the radio, we heard, "There are four ANA trucks and three American trucks!" We knew they were close and were watching us. Without any luck finding the radio, we moved on.

We knew the roads were too dangerous, so we drove through the village by way of a shallow dried up riverbed at a relatively quick pace. Speed, at times, may provide security, but the lack of a road made traveling more than 30 miles per hour nearly impossible. A few minutes later, as we neared the end of the village, one of the ANA Ford Ranger trucks broke down.

The Humvee I was riding in pulled up next to the stopped vehicle to check it out, while the rest of our small convoy halted in place. With cornfields to our

right and a ridgeline on our left, our Humvee was over 150 meters away from the other two Humvees; nevertheless, all vehicles provided a hasty 360-degree perimeter.

There was still a lot of radio traffic from the insurgents. Everyone assumed that the enemy might be close and possibly less than a few hundred meters away hiding in the cornfields. The Special Forces commander decided to send out a small patrol of ANA Soldiers to give us a better perimeter defense, but before the ANA could even get up to the field, gunshots started echoing. The two rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) ripped past, missing our Humvee and exploding against the mountainside. We began to engage our hidden enemies with a wrath of firepower. A few incoming AK-47 semi-automatic rifle rounds were hitting our truck, while others ricocheted off the dirt around us. Our entire crew began firing. My “fight or flight” instinct kicked in as my previous training took over. I looked over at the gunner in the turret next to me to gain a bearing as to where the rounds were coming from. I started firing my 240B machine gun to lay down suppressive fire over the cornfield, attempting to keep the shooters’ heads down. If they cannot get a fix on our position, it would make it more difficult for them to fire their RPGs in our direction.

Soon another RPG missed us and the some rounds broke the sound barrier next to my head. Even though our vehicle had ballistic panels, a few rounds managed to slam all the way through. I felt shrapnel hitting my thigh. I thought I had been hit in the leg. The Special Forces interpreter – Jawid, whom I was standing next to, also thought his leg was hit. I took a quick look down at my legs to see if they were still there and if I was bleeding. Whew! No blood! As I looked back at Jawid, we both had that “in trouble” look on our faces. Bullets continued to rain down all around our vehicle, and then an incoming round hit the turret, keeping it from turning. The main gunner had to jump off to reposition himself. He simultaneously yelled for the Gustof as he gained better cover to the rear of the truck. I quickly ripped the Gustof from its mount behind my seat and thrust it off to him. As I got back on the machine gun to lay down more lead, I could see even more movements in the field and between buildings. The main gunner yelled, “Where are the Gustof rounds?!” As I turned to hand off the Gustof rounds, I yelled at the interpreter to get off the truck, “You better get off and get cover!” Luckily, he listened, because without the main gun working in unison with mine, the rounds were coming in hotter and heavier.

I knew I was in trouble as I got back on the machine gun again. I could hear rounds whizzing by my head. All I could think of at the time was the four-letter word. I continued to send a few more bursts of rounds down range. For probably about a minute, which felt like an hour, my mind and body were in a zone. I could hear my rapid irregular breathing in conjunction with the machine

gun chambering as it fired off each round. My vision also became tunneled and everything around blurred as I zeroed in on each of my targets. I felt like I was looking through the opposite end of a peephole with my mind blocking out other noises. It was all about me, and that moving target.

As I reloaded, I noticed I was having a difficult time maneuvering the can of ammunition. I struggled to pull back the machine gun's charging handle. It was then that I noticed the blood on my right arm. I had been shot in the arm. Once my brain registered my injury, I snapped out of my zone and everything cleared, as if I came out of a long dark tunnel.

The next few minutes are still a mystery to me. The last thing I remember was that I yelled, "I'm hit!" As I turned, I must have fallen off the back of the truck because I felt an impact on my head. When I came to, I was right behind one of our embedded trainers, U.S. Soldiers who train and mentor the ANA, and the vehicle was more than 25 meters away.

We made our way back to the truck and someone assisted me into the front seat. The enemy now occupied everyone by fighting from two different directions. I watched helplessly as rounds skipped off the dirt just inches from the vehicle. I tried applying self-aid without any success. My first aid kit was fastened to the side of my interceptor body armor underneath my right arm. I had no trouble gaining access to it during training, but I never thought about trying to reach it with just one hand. It proved to be a challenge, because reaching across your body with the opposite arm is hard enough, let alone doing it while you are wearing bulky body armor. I finally got out my bandage, but the other difficult task was to put it on with one hand. I tried and tried, but it was hopeless.

During a lull in the battle, the Special Forces medic was able to triage and bandaged me up. Luckily for me, by looking at the injury, he was able to determine that the bullet went through my biceps and triceps, and most likely missed the bone. Nevertheless, the firefight was not over. With regained confidence, I crawled and squeezed across to the driver's seat and was able to assist in maneuvering and repositioning our bullet riddled truck. I could hear the U.S. Air Force's Joint Terminal Controller (JTAC) announce "the bird is en route." The exchange of gunfire finally slowed. The enemy must have known an airstrike was imminent, because not long after, I could hear the roar of the A-10 Warthog approaching. At that moment, it was the most beautiful sound anyone could have asked for. I lost track of time, but the fight, as we later found out, was more than 40 minutes. The JTAC directed the A-10 to targets as it fired its 30mm cannons dangerously close (friendly forces within six hundred meters of the target) to our position. After a few passes, all was quiet.

With the area deemed safe, the helicopter was finally able to land for my

evacuation. An injured ANA Soldier and I were swiftly put into the chopper where the Special Forces doctor anxiously awaited. After a quick dose of morphine, I was painless and happy as a lark when we landed at FOB Tarin Kowt.

All vehicles sustained multiple gunshot damage. My vehicle sustained two shot-out tires, a rear passenger window that was shot out and multiple hits on the turret's metal shield, just to name a few. The unmerciful bullets did not even spare our radio antennas. However, the most memorable was the one round that cracked the butt stock of my machine gun, which probably saved my neck or shoulder. Overall, the total count was more than 29 hits on my vehicle alone.

Continuity and reinforcing through repetitions are integral to the training process. Reloading should become muscle memory, just like firing and clearing a weapon. Soldiers should train to perform different unforeseeable tasks to improve one's survivability. Either hand should be able to access the First Aid pouch. One should practice and be proficient to conduct all tasks with one hand. Most importantly, one must stay fluid, adapt quickly, and overcome.

National Guard Special Forces units often deploy to react to a variety of situations. Although SGM William Schwarz and his company had deployed four times since September 11, 2001, the deployment to Afghanistan was the first time the entire battalion had deployed together in combat.

A Difficult Deployment

SGM William D. Schwarz

OEF, 09/19/2008 - 09/18/2009

Advanced Operations SGM, a/2/19th SFG(A)

While deployed to Afghanistan recently, I served as an Advanced Operational Base sergeant major (SGM) as part of Special Operations Task Force-92 (SOTF-92). My training consisted of basic rank appropriate courses throughout my career in addition to normal Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) courses. Aside from being a jumpmaster and a graduate of the Special Forces Qualification Course, I hold no glamorous certifications associated with Special Forces. My schooling focused on skills necessary to make my operational detachments self-sufficient, self-deployable, and mobile. I had the opportunity to lead elements at such training events as rotations to the NTC and the JRTC, as well as Joint Combined Exercises for Training to Kenya and Oman. I have also participated in a foreign exchange to the United Kingdom.

My current unit has deployed individual teams to Kosovo and Haiti, prior to September 11, 2001. Since 9/11, the company mobilized as a separate company both to Kuwait and Kosovo. During its deployment to Iraq, the company was assigned to 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group (SFG). The most recent deployment to Afghanistan was the first time the whole battalion mobilized as an organic unit. Of the 11 key leader positions within the unit, only four of those personnel had been in their respective positions during combat deployment. Of the remaining positions, six were in their current positions two years prior following the last deployment, and one position was filled by a leader from another company. I count as the 11th leader, who was relieved for inefficiency during pre-mission training and replaced by a person of a lesser grade.

The battalion worked together before on many National Training Center (NTC) and Joint Readiness Training Center rotations. Following the events of 9/11 the battalion was slated to go on the initial invasion into Afghanistan as part of 5th SFG. For many years, 2/19 SFG had a habitual working and training relationship with 5th SFG. As the unit was preparing to load out, 19th SFG announced the battalion would not go as a whole. The group commander (presumably) decided it would be more beneficial to send one company each from all three of its subordinate battalions. 2/19 SFG would provide the Headquarters,

Support Company, and C Company organic to West Virginia. The other companies would come from Utah and Colorado, 1st and 5th Battalions respectively. The 19th Group commander felt the war would be short and it would be better to spread the combat experience among several units.

This decision to send a battalion “task force,” so to speak, instead of an organic battalion has affected this unit and the National Guard Special Forces for seven years. Up until this unit’s rotation in 2008-2009, National Guard Special Forces units have not deployed as full battalions. At least one company from each battalion is mobilized separately for another mission. Although my company has deployed four times since 9/11 (our sister company, Bravo Company of the Ohio National Guard also deployed four times, and the battalion three times), this is the first time in seven years since the war began that the battalion will deploy to combat together.

Following federal mobilization, the companies began movement from West Virginia, Ohio, and Rhode Island to Mobilization Station Atterbury. From the onset, it was clear this location would not favor the Rhode Island-based Alpha Company. The close proximity of Ohio and West Virginia to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, allowed these states to ship much of their equipment via internal state assets and their Soldiers via bus or privately owned vehicles. Rhode Island Soldiers flew via military aircraft to Columbus, Indiana. The ability of Ohio and West Virginia companies to reach back to their states and have items sent forward or to send Soldiers back to retrieve items was not available to Rhode Island and they made do with what they had.

The geographic isolation of Rhode Island to Indiana also greatly affected morale. The ability for the Soldiers of the nearby states to get home on weekend passes was not available to the Rhode Island contingent. Within four weeks of arriving at the mobilization station an unplanned four-day weekend occurred. Out of the blue, a safety brief was given on a Thursday afternoon followed by the departures of B, C, Support, and Headquarters Companies for home. The Rhode Island Soldiers were left stunned. Some attempted to make airline reservations but at \$1,200 per ticket on short notice; many decided to remain at the mobilization station. Morale plummeted for Alpha Company. This was just the beginning.

After four weeks at Camp Atterbury, the battalion moved to Hawthorne, NV, for the bulk of its pre-mission training. A key piece of the training plan fell through. What was planned as a three-line company rotation among three different training sites evolved into a one-company NTC rotation with associated training. One company, Charlie Company (West Virginia), would remain there for the duration of the two-month train up. Bravo (Ohio) and Alpha (Rhode Is-

land) would rotate through the Tier One Advanced Off-Road Driving Course in Reno, NV. When not in Reno the companies would be housed at the High Desert Special Operations Company (HDSOC) compound, a civilian-run business providing training to the military. HDSOC facilitated training, but wasn't contracted to provide the actual instruction. The intent was to house one company at HDSOC with the other company either at Tier One two hours north in Reno, or one hour north at Fallon Naval Air Station, thus only having one company at HDSOC. Training at Fallon fell through and now two companies were housed at HDSOC. The addition of another company at this compound meant teams no longer had planning bays and workspaces suitable for the number of people and the type of planning that needed to occur.

Bravo Company got the short end of the stick early on at Hawthorne. Upon arriving in Nevada, Alpha Company split off and headed to Tier One for 10 days of training. Bravo Company bused down to Hawthorne for 10 days of dedicated range time. The battalion's equipment didn't close on Hawthorne until at least seven days after Bravo Company's arrival. For seven days Bravo sat idle with only a carry-on bag and rucksack from their plane ride. The battalion trained at Hawthorne for about six weeks. Following training, the battalion flew back to Camp Atterbury a few days before Thanksgiving. Once again Alpha Company got the short end of the stick. The battalion's equipment would not arrive back for a week or so and the battalion was released for the holiday. While the Ohio and West Virginia Soldiers were driving home, Rhode Island Soldiers were scrambling to arrange flights home on short notice and high prices. Following the battalion's return from Thanksgiving break, a couple more weeks of training took place before the scenario played itself out again at Christmas.

During the course of Christmas leave, one of the Operational Detachment-A (ODA) commanders received word from the in-country ODA that he was to conduct relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA), which closed their compound and they reported back to their SOTF for redeployment. Their compound was not to be used for our rotation. The chain of command had been unaware, up to at least battalion level and possibly beyond. Our incoming ODA, it was explained, was needed for another high visibility mission. This particular mission was late in developing as most of the detachment sat idle for three months of a seven-month rotation. Morale on this ODA declined further. Situations similar to this began to play out for the company. The detachment that was co-located with the company headquarters also did not have a mission.

Unable to conduct activities without a partnered host nation force, they went looking for a mission. Traveling back to the previously closed compound, the ODA went to make contacts and reestablish a presence. Reoccupying the compound, the ODA then set about trying to find a partner force. As they were

building relations, they were ordered to relocate to another regional command (RC) and establish operations. In doing so they determined there was no partner force there either, and remained at their present location and continued to build rapport in search of a mission. A partner force found and with training progressing, they were again directed to relocate. This was to be their fourth location and fifth move since being in country. In the latter quarter of the seven-month deployment, the ODA began construction on their new compound. They occupied a small portion of a larger base still under construction. Essentially, by the time these two detachments were established, it was time to pack up and redeploy.

Two other detachments of the company fell in on well-established bases with long-standing partnered host nation forces. The first four months in country went pretty much as planned with the detachments providing training and accompanying the host nation on combat patrols. Halfway through their time in country these detachments were directed to relocate to other areas, build new facilities, and link up with new-partnered forces. As these detachments started to perform their site surveys and establish contacts, they found no groundwork had been done to support the decision to go into these new areas. The teams returned to their previous locations and continued as before. As time for redeployment grew near and RIP/TOA was about to take place, these teams were again sent back to new areas to reposition equipment for the incoming unit and to establish new host nation contacts. The result was equipment scattered among two detachment locations for each of the ODAs as well as the main base in Bagram. Inventories became difficult, as movement about country was not easy.

Redeployment was a nightmare. Detachments did not pass through the company headquarters on the way out of country. The phased redeployment meant the company would never form as a whole company until six months after the first man left theater and three months after the last Soldier demobilized. Four months following the return of the last Soldier, the last of the company's equipment arrived at home station and was being accounted for.

During this time, I was the company sergeant major (SGM). My company was part of a SOTF, one of two in theater. The company's ODAs were supposed to have been conducting training with partnered host nation forces, of which there were too few to assign each ODA. The company was spread out among three of the five RCs into which the country was divided. Overall, the company responded well and performed the mission assigned. Morale, however, was at an all-time low. This was due in part to a shift in focus from pre-mission training to deployment. Combat patrols were not possible without a partnered force. The organization was told not to worry about

infrastructure yet; in many cases the infrastructure at the locations the ODAs were sent to, did not exist and ODAs were forced to build out of necessity.

One task assigned to the unit was groundbreaking. Though this task was performed by one of my unit's ODAs, this ODA at the time was working under a different company headquarters for no logical reason. The task was to stand up a new pilot program. The detachment's warrant officer was the central figure of this tasking. The initial class was deemed a success. Subsequent classes fell short of the mark, as recruiting locals to participate in the training dwindled.

Doctrinally we did not perform as an Airfield Operations Battalion (AOB) should have. Due to the lack of availability of aircraft, the distances involved, and the established logistical systems, the AOB provided little support to its deployed detachments. All support came directly from the SOTF or higher. The flow of information often bypassed the AOB, especially regarding logistical and property issues.

The largest problem encountered during pre-mission training and deployment was movement of personnel and equipment. Many individuals handled pieces of the movements. What was lacking was one overall person in charge of the movement plan of the battalion. Also lacking was the concept of tactical movement rather than a commercial shipping/mailling mentality. To say anything was resolved regarding movement would be incorrect. The final movement from the mobilization station back to home station was another disaster. The commander, operations sergeant, and I brought up key points in the redeployment plan three months before execution began as to why this would not work for our unit. These points were largely ignored. The capstone event was the movement from Indiana to Rhode Island with much of the gear becoming soaked due to movement in heavy rains along the interstate. The method of shipping was an issue brought forward months before and the results presented themselves as we anticipated.

The largest success of the deployment was that everyone returned with only one wounded in action. This individual returned to duty the same day. Six individuals earned valor awards during the deployment, not that this is a measure of success, but rather an attribute to the quality of the individuals in the unit. Placed into center stage, another individual was nominated for a prestigious leadership award. Through this individual's hard work, one particular mission became a success within the broad mission of the Combined Joint Task Force.

The largest lesson learned was that it is very difficult to overcome a state versus state mentality and unite as one solitary battalion. While the unit has

seen this play out at smaller training events, the state in which the headquarters resides receives the funding and doesn't evenly distribute funds, equipment, and training opportunities between states where its companies reside. This was never as apparent as it was during this year of being together. It took months to obtain the latest issue of personal equipment and clothing for individuals, largely in part because support personnel from the parent organization's state were wearing the items intended for the Soldiers out performing missions. At this time, my unit cannot outfit new members because the battalion quota has been reached. It has been very difficult to make higher headquarters understand this. How can a battalion reach its quota when company stands in formation not outfitted like the rest?

Reserve component and active duty integration was very good. ODAs from the Guard were assigned to National Guard AOBs and vice versa. In some cases there were a few outliers but that could be seen even in organic units. There was nothing out of the ordinary with regards to integration. Interoperability was not an issue as our Guard units were trained on the same equipment and went through the same pre-mission training as the active duty detachments.

As far as NCOs participating, it is very difficult to single them out as this unit is run by NCOs. The NCOs are everywhere. The rank structure is greater than in other units and the experience parallels that. Often when one may struggle, there are others there to help him out or set him straight. There is one NCO whom the unit could never do without, he is a central figure by rank and position; it is hard to imagine anyone in his place performing to the level this individual performed on a daily basis. The Soldier juggles multiple tasks, mentors, plans, and coordinates all aspects of the unit's daily business. Often the first to deploy and the last to return, he is ingrained in everything the unit accomplishes in between. It is difficult to imagine the unit without him directing traffic.

Disappointing to see are some of the younger NCOs. Many are being promoted with the bare minimum of time in service and time in grade. This is not, in and of itself, a bad thing; however, many lack the experiences to make them well-rounded and knowledgeable NCOs. We are the product of our society, the sense of entitlement to rank without paying any dues or doing any time is disheartening. I think it would help to return to our previous schooling requirements of having Basic NCO Courses (BNCOC) for promotion to staff sergeant and Advanced NCO Courses (ANCOC) for promotion to sergeant first class. Additionally, in our organization, because of its unique rank structure, we see Soldiers come up through their careers never having been in a leadership position until they are promoted to master sergeant. This is far too late in their careers to lead Soldiers for the first

time. While a few Soldiers will seek out leadership opportunities elsewhere, some don't, as leaving the organization and returning seems detrimental to advancement.

The largest lesson I learned is the need for individual companies to be more closely aligned with active duty battalions. The battalion spread over three states rarely has the opportunity to train as a battalion with many commitments requiring only single detachments coming from one state. Coming together once every three years for a combat mission or training center rotation is not enough for the battalion to work as a whole.

SUPPORT STORIES

Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation builders as well as warriors. They must be prepared to help reestablish institutions and local security forces and assist in rebuilding infrastructure and basic services.

US Army Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency

From the earliest days of the Afghan War, providing assistance to the Afghan government and the Afghan people constituted a major part of the war effort. The Medical Civic Assistance Program (MEDCAP), Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) and a number of projects to build the nation's infrastructure were seen as critical elements for the development of the Afghan state. In the years that followed the creation of Embedded Training Teams, Agribusiness Development Teams, Human Terrain Teams, and other similar programs sought to further assist, not only the government, but the people of Afghanistan.

Given the mission to provide a Medical Civic Assistance Program (MEDCAP) to a village 11 hours from Bagram Airfield, MSG Armando Torres and his platoon requisitioned the needed supplies and headed toward their objective. They found the Afghan heat difficult to withstand. However, when they arrived at the village, they discovered the long journey well worthwhile.

A Convoy to a Medical Civic Assistance Program

MSG Armando L. Torres

HHC 2/505 PIR, 82nd ABN DIV, Medical Platoon Sergeant

Pre-deployment

In January of 2002 my unit, 2/505 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, was identified to deploy within 12 months into Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). My career path consisted of medical positions such as team leader, squad leader, evacuation NCO, and medical treatment NCO. On the day of our deployment, I had been the platoon sergeant for more than 12 months. Many of the line medics that made up my platoon were young and most had been assigned to me within the last two months prior to our departure. We had been planning and training for almost everything, anticipating the worse that war had to offer. We deployed on January 13, 2003, with a medical platoon strength of 23 personnel. We spent our first week in Kandahar, Afghanistan, subsequently moving to our more permanent residence of Bagram Airfield (BAF), Afghanistan.

Our Mission

On June 2003, our battalion received a mission to execute a Medical Civic Assistance Program (MEDCAP) for a village situated southeast approximately 11 hours away by convoy. Prior to this, the medical platoon element attached to the HHC had not been involved in many missions situated outside of BAF. Once we received the warning order, we began developing a plan of action to prepare the platoon. My platoon leader and I identified that our purpose for this particular mission was to provide medical assistance to the local population in order to develop a relationship between the villages within that area for possible follow-up tactical operations. A basic analysis of the mission told us that we had to gather medical supplies to support an estimated 100 to 200 Afghan civilians. We had already been in country for about five months, so we had a good estimate on what medications we needed. We anticipated seeing dermatological issues, intestinal problems, muscular, and skeletal injuries.

We had approximately two weeks to acquire what we needed for the mission. The way the process worked in theater for our unit was that we placed an order via landline to our supporting medical logistics company situated in

Kandahar. The problems we had in the past were communicating what we wanted and the quantities we needed. The Army system has many items with the same nomenclature but different national stock numbers, which causes confusion when ordering supplies. Because of our timeline being very short, we could not afford to have any delays related to communication issues. We had developed a contingency plan for supplies that we could not receive in time for the MEDCAP. Throughout our deployment we had formed a relationship with a Special Operations Force (SOF) unit at base camp. They had the ability to attain supplies more quickly than we could, so ensuring that we had them available for support could be key to having the needed supplies to provide the assistance to the local villages.

Because we were an infantry battalion, we did not have any females organic to our unit, so we had to request them for additional support. There was an aviation unit available to us that had two females prepared to support the mission. I had not had the opportunity to work with them, so I was not confident that they had the skills to work independently. Given the country culture, and the fact that no males would be able to provide medical care to any of the females in the village, which included the male physicians we had organic to us, the female medics had to be able to medically screen and propose a medical diagnosis to the attending physician for his approval. To ensure that all of the medics who were there to support the mission were prepared, I established a series of medical blocks of instruction, focusing on medical screening and identifying injuries and diseases likely to be seen.

As we continued our preparation, we identified significant constraints to accomplishing our mission once we set foot on ground. The major constraint was we were only a Level One echelon of care; we didn't have any specialty diagnosis equipment such as X-ray machine and lab capabilities, so we had to use the subjective information presented to us. This would be significant if there were recent injuries and specialty care that could decide life or limb. Another constraint was that we did not have the capabilities to carry any tents to provide privacy or protection from the elements as we provided care. We made the decision that we would request a covered area and something separate for the female portion of the medical screening. Another constraint that would hamper us was there would only be three interpreters with us on the mission. Things to keep in mind were that the medical portion was not the only event going on, as there would be civil affair activities needing interpreter assistance also. The only terrain and weather consideration we were skeptical of was the sweltering heat and possible sand storms.

The morning of the mission was much anticipated as we had been preparing for weeks to load vehicles and head down the road. Based on the opera-

tions order, we were told that we would be departing at around 0300 down a secured Main Supply Route. The intent of leaving so early was to beat the anticipated intense heat we anticipated. Prior to our departure, we participated in a convoy brief preparing us for actions to take while traveling in the large element of vehicles. Shortly thereafter, we started movement. The first few hours were very long; we started early and we didn't get much sleep since we were anxious to begin our adventure. The road was a secondary road that was not maintained well but was a hard surface; we were grateful for that. As we made our way to Jalalabad the trail was lined with shacks that locals called homes. Many of them had padlocks on them to keep out vandals, but because the terrain was so barren, you could always see the owner nearby seemingly squatting in the middle of the desert passing time. We had anticipated the heat, but we had not anticipated the amount of heat that was expelled from underneath the engine cover in the M997 Ambulance we were driving in. As the night became day the heat within the driving compartment amplified to a point where it was literally unbearable. Luckily, the travel was slow and we had many stops due to the congested roads in many parts of the route. Prior to ending up at our destination, we would be stopping overnight in Jalalabad to refuel and rest for the last four hours of our trip.

This was the most civilization we had seen since our deployment into Afghanistan. Once our part of the convoy made it into the city I recall a lot of traffic congestion, which made my driver and I very nervous as it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep the vehicle in front of us in sight. There were a lot of motorized scooters and bicycles moving throughout the traffic making maneuvering very difficult. The pedestrians had no fear of the motor traffic as they walked up and down the streets within and throughout the moving vehicles. We finally weaved our way to the compound where we would be bedding down for the night. Our first day of convoy operations brought a few lessons learned that we would address for the remainder of the mission. Because of the immense heat, the first decision made was to reduce the amount of clothing we had on, so we removed our desert camouflage uniform blouses. Another decision we had to make was, given that a majority of the vehicles in the convoy were made of soft shell, we would remove the doors to provide better circulation (not something that many units in Afghanistan and Iraq would do today). The remainder of the route was much like the first portion, just shorter.

The village elders had already been informed of our anticipated arrival. As we made it closer, we could see the people coming out of their homes to welcome us. It took a little while to sort out where we would be setting up; once identified, we began the process of pulling out tables and medical supplies. The lines began setting up in front of the medics. As we anticipated, the medical care of the female villagers began to cause turmoil. The village elder did not

want his females examined by anyone, stating that only the males could receive medical care. The civil affairs team tried to convince him that it was essential that we provide care to all of the citizens, regardless of gender. It was also explained that we had female medics to provide private medical care, as long as a secure and close location was provided. The elder refused, and subsequently he was given an ultimatum that we would depart immediately if it was not allowed. Because of their leader's decision, the civil affairs team began to announce over the intercom to the other citizens why we were about to discontinue the mission.

It took about an hour for the reality of our threats to set in as we began to tear down the operation without having seen a single patient. The elder decided to grant us our wish and the MEDCAP commenced. We treated more than 90 patients during the course of two hours, and found that we were well prepared. Due to the harsh environmental factors, the majority of patient complaints came from dermatological issues. In the end, the village received much needed medical attention, the organization built community support and trust, and our medics were provided with an experience that instilled medical confidence and a compassion for the Afghan population.

Lessons Learned

Each mission or training exercise that I have ever been a part of has provided events that elicited lessons to improve on or sustain. The events leading up to the convoy, the convoy, and the execution of the MEDCAP provided the following:

1. We learned that we must take into account the weather conditions for every part of the mission, not just the mission-execution portion.
2. We learned that having different courses of action was critical to mission support as we did have supplies that were not provided by our supporting unit, which caused us to use our available resources.
3. We learned that it was critical to remain vigilant throughout the mission. Each phase we encountered civilian situations that could have become hostile or aggressive.
4. As the language barrier posed significant constraints to medical care, we learned that it was important to ensure that communication was clear and available, as it was a key element during the pre-execution phase, convoy operations, and during the medical evaluations.

The training a unit receives is not always the training they will need when they get to a combat area. 1SG Waylon Long and his unit deployed to Afghanistan and found themselves operating an outdoor facility for 300 detainees—something they were not trained to do. They adapted and performed the mission to the best of their abilities.

The Creation of a Project Company

1SG Waylon T. Long

Operation Enduring Freedom V & VI, 12/27/2004 – 12/23/2005

Platoon Sergeant, Operations Sergeant and 1SG

Career Introduction

As a Military Police officer in the United States Army for more than 20 years, there have been quite a lot of lessons learned from the past. While serving in the Army, there have been numerous challenges and opportunities to serve in different positions. The positions I have served in during a 20-year period include: gunner, team leader, squad leader, section sergeant, cell NCOIC, platoon sergeant, and culminating as first sergeant (1SG). After performing these varied positions, there has only been one assignment during my career that has provided me with constant lament over what occurred. The unit, the 202nd Military Police (MP) Guard Company, would soon prove to be much more a burden on myself and the Soldiers assigned to it than a typical functioning organization with a mission.

After completion of an assignment in Korea in early 2004, I received orders to report to Fort Eustis, VA. After arriving at Fort Eustis in June of 2004, my assignment was to report to a newly organized unit standing up. The information I received by the brigade command sergeant major (CSM) was the 202nd MP Guard Company was a newly formed detainee company. Further information revealed this unit was forming under the auspices of better detainee security needed in a theatre of operation within our Army. Once arriving at 202nd MP Guard Company, a discovery was made that revealed this unit to be completely disorganized with little direction, even with a wartime mission pending.

Complexities of Training and Certification

Immediately, upon discovering the complex role of our unit, its mission, and extremely short timeline, thoughts shifted to how unrealistic this decision was. Concerns were immediate: had anyone actually used doctrine to create our unit, used past historical data, or by chance used the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) to come up with this apparently disastrous plan? Soon enough, there were indicators of why this decision was a poor choice, and why it would be a failure upon its inception.

The first obstacle that appeared for the 202nd MP Guard Company was our garrison mission at the time. The transportation brigade in charge of us continued to charge us with maintaining a road mission on the installation until the end of August 2004. When asked about training, information was relayed to the platoon sergeants, such as myself, that training needed to occur while the MPs were not working the road. The blame was not entirely upon the transportation brigade or the battalion we were assigned to, but more so toward the garrison command who demanded our unit continue performing its road mission.

By the time September 2004 came about, our unit finally began to train for the assigned detainee mission, with a three-month timeline to meet validation. By this time, however, our unit had only 20 percent of its assigned equipment, with no vehicles to commute to and from training sites and the installation. Again, this is a unit assigned under a transportation brigade; the transportation to training areas continued to be an issue all the way up to our departure date. Our unit's NCOs were eventually tasked to construct, by hand, a detainee facility to use for training and validation. This may seem as a good idea; however, our higher headquarters never received information from down range about the type of facility or the number of detainees we were to take charge. Our unit ended up constructing a makeshift indoor facility to conduct training and validation. In the end, our unit completed validation in condemned buildings on Fort Eustis, VA, and had to ask its Soldiers to use their privately owned vehicles for training purposes.

Departing for Assigned Missions

Validation was eventually conducted and monitored by the 716th MP Battalion, Fort Campbell, KY. The 716th MP Battalion was to be our higher headquarters upon arrival in theater, but that never occurred. Upon being validated, our unit was assigned its departure date of December 27, 2004. Upon arriving in Afghanistan in early January 2005, our unit was assigned directly under the 25th Infantry Division in support of a combined joint task force (CJTF). After spending 24 hours establishing our AO, our mission began.

The shock of our mission finally hit us on our first day at the detainee facility. Our mission entailed operating a detainee facility in Kandahar that was outdoors, containing more than 300 detainees. Our unit was overwhelmed immediately by the requirements to operate a facility that large, not to mention that the unit had never trained to perform this mission outdoors. Even though the mission was the same in name, there were so many more variables in operating a facility this large outside. Our Soldiers endured this mission, completing it to the best of their abilities. In only three months, however, our unit was assigned the mission of moving all 300 detainees to

a newly constructed indoor facility. Once again, a mission for which we had neither trained nor prepared.

After serving only six months in Kandahar, our unit received a movement order from the forgotten 716th MP Battalion, now our newly assigned higher headquarters. The 202nd MP Guard Company was to move all detainees, its equipment, and personnel to Bagram for a newly assigned mission. In only one week, the 202nd MP Guard Company accomplished this mission, moving all assigned detainees, personnel, and equipment to Bagram. Global Jihad (2006) cited that on July 11, 2005, a group of senior Taliban and al-Qaeda detainees managed to escape Bagram Jail. Upon arriving in Bagram, our unit spent seven days searching for those escaped detainees to no avail—this would forever change our mission and our future.

After continued search for the escaped detainees, the 202nd MP Guard Company finally received its new mission. Our unit was to perform perimeter security for BAF for the next six months. In addition to this mission, there were eight Soldiers detailed out to perform protective services missions for the commanding general (GEN), and another 20 Soldiers to continue performing detainee missions in the Bagram Detainee Facility. In the end, our unit was torn in different directions, given numerous missions unrelated for what we trained, and passed around as though we belonged to no higher headquarters.

Upon redeployment to Fort Eustis, our unit was immediately re-designated from the 202nd MP Guard Company to simply the 202nd MP Company. The unit's new mission was going to serve as a typical MP Company. Eventually, all MP guard companies within the Army were re-designated within a span of only two years. The idea of creating MP guard units within the Army simply because of pending allegations due to events at Abu Ghraib, may have proved to be a poor decision. Training was insufficient; there was not enough historical data available, and once again, the Army reacted as opposed to being proactive.

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from this experience was to never assume that all units will be similar to those you have always been assigned. Newly assigned units with newly assigned missions seem to be the most challenging within our Army. There was never any reference material from which to gauge our actions, and there were no units willing to assist us in our build-up. Another lesson learned is that if I am ever in a position to have input on the construction of a new unit and new mission, I will ensure that the unit is staffed from above with the same MOS. The transportation brigade did a great job on areas that were familiar to them, but when it came to what MPs require, they were lost. This must be something in today's Army that cannot continue to occur.

Years of training prepared MSG David Berlinguet for a combat deployment and assured that he performed his duties proficiently. However, when rocket attacks and suicide bombings occur, they create stress for any Soldier. When MSG David Berlinguet arrived in Afghanistan, he realized that he needed to relieve the stress and set about dealing with it in a particular way.

Stress in Combat

MSG David J. Berlinguet

OEF VII, FOB Salerno, Afghanistan, 2005

TOC NCOIC, 1-183rd ATK Helicopter BN

My unit received activation orders to deploy to Afghanistan in October 2005. We were assigned to the 10th Mountain Aviation Brigade for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) VII. We were called TF Talon. We had a little more than 400 Soldiers in the unit. Since my unit was a National Guard unit, we had to report to Fort Hood, TX, for six months of training up to our deployment. We had to conduct one week of lanes training, hand-to-hand combat training, and a series of Soldier tasks to include weapons qualification. For two weeks, we also had to conduct battalion level staff training at Fort Rucker, AL. The start of stress for me began from the day I said goodbye to my family and friends .

I was sent to Afghanistan with the advance party two weeks early. We spent two days in Kuwait just south of Iraq, three days in Tajikistan and one week at Bagram Airfield (BAF). At Bagram, we received the brigade commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs). We were briefed on what to expect at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Salerno. We continued on to FOB Salerno, also called "Rocket City." During my first three hours of the second day on my new FOB, we received a rocket attack that lasted three hours.

Our first mission at the FOB with our outgoing unit was to complete relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA) in less than a month. The unit we were replacing was a company-sized unit. My unit was a battalion-sized unit. This created a challenge for my unit because we were five times the size of the unit we were replacing. This added to the logistical issues and stress. We lived in tents for a while, and later we moved into improved housing. Within a week of our battalion arriving at FOB Salerno, we received another rocket attack.

I was assigned to the tactical operations center (TOC) as the noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC). I designated five teams that consisted of one Battle NCO and three Soldiers on each team. We had issues in our unit like all units before us. We were assigned additional duties like tower guard duty at three different towers on the perimeter. Rocket attacks and suicide bombings continued throughout our time on FOB Salerno. Then the casualties from both

sides started arriving at the FOB hospital. Wolf Red with a blood type would be announced over the loud speaker. “WOLF RED OSCAR, WOLF RED OSCAR” (this meant everyone available with O-Positive blood that was available to report to the hospital to give blood). When you heard the loudspeaker, it usually meant something bad had happened or was in the process of happening. The hospital was a very hectic place at times, everyone running around accomplishing their assigned tasks.

Years of training had prepared me for a deployment in combat. I was tactically and technically proficient in four different military occupational specialties (MOSSs). I had already been on another deployment a year and a half earlier for a peacekeeping operation in Bosnia/Herzegovina. This time it was different, however.

I quickly realized I needed a switch, a mechanism, a release, or something that would help me cope with stress. This came in the form of remembering a place where my family has a cabin in Lowman, ID. My family and I would fish, hunt, ride motorcycles, tell stories around the campfire, and play the old time player piano. You see it in the movies, you hear your Soldiers constantly talking about back home or another unit they were in. I wanted a place to get out of the Army, get out of theater and our cabin was it.

Being a tactical operations center NCOIC I was tasked to assign teams to conduct operations on other FOBs. These teams would be deployed to areas of the battlefield to conduct TOC operations when aviation assets were needed. I went with almost every team to help them get set up and functioning.

As I moved around the battlefield in Afghanistan I felt lost when I would arrive at a new FOB. I tried to relate the places I traveled to, to a place from back home in Idaho: FOB Orgun-E reminded me of Lowman; Jalalabad Airfield (JAF) reminded me of Riggins; and FOB Qalat reminded me of southern Idaho. I spent many hours in the TOC helping my Soldiers deal with fatigue or problems they were having with personnel issues or even something going on back home. I was able to release my own stress by going back to my hooch room and thinking about my family and places I had visited with them in my home state.

My job in the TOC was making sure my Battle NCOs and Soldiers were meeting the CCIRs. My additional duties included scheduling of shifts, leave, passes, and operational control of my Soldiers to other FOBs to support battles happening in other areas of responsibility (AORs). My Soldiers would transfer to other FOBs for a month at a time. I always worried about how they were doing and if they were safe.

Soldiers were talking about getting American flags and carrying them in

their rucks as they moved around the battlefield. I purchased five flags from the post exchange (PX) on FOB Salerno. I had received a mission to go to another FOB in less than 12 hours. I returned to my hooch and laid the flags on my bunk. I thought of whom I was going to carry these flags for. I wanted them to mean something to me and to the people I was going to give them. I'm not talking just during my deployment, but before I left on this adventure to serve my country. The decision was easy. I decided my wife and kids, mom, my mother and father-in-law, my father-in-law's mother and father, and my sister-in-law's mom and dad. These people supported my career for the last 20 years. They supported me with care packages and letters from home. They always made me feel connected to home and family.

My stress release became those flags. They represented the Soldiers I served with, the people, places, and the reasons I was serving my country. Freedom does come with a price. The unit I was assigned to, 10th Mountain, lost many Soldiers, some that I had met in passing or had conversations with. Personally, in my family, I missed my 16-year-old daughter getting her first car. My 14-year-old daughter had completed driver's education. My 18-year-old son started his first year of Optimist football. I missed my wife, family and friends.

But I had another family to take care of while I was deployed. I was responsible for 22 Soldiers' lives. We all leaned on each other when times were tough. During the deployment, Soldiers lost family and friends. A Soldier's child would be in the hospital. The S-1 would receive Red Cross messages at all hours. Soldiers would come to me asking for help and guidance. Another day a Soldier might receive a "Dear John" letter. My point is that as NCOs we carry a lot of problems and issues on our shoulders. As an NCO you have to be strong, you have to keep it together. We are all human and all have the same emotions.

Upon returning from Afghanistan, I went to the VA hospital and received a Post-Deployment Health Risk Assessment. I complained of back pain from the battle armor we carried to having acid reflux. Upon completing my exams, the VA doctor told me I had an ulcer. I thought I handled the stress in combat just fine—my body didn't think so. For 24 months I received medication for my ulcer.

After a few months back in the States, I was promoted to first sergeant (1SG) and assigned to HHC 1/183 Aviation Attack Helicopter Battalion. My company had 98 Soldiers assigned. In the two and a half years as the 1SG, my commander and I dealt with five suicide attempts, four driving under the influence (DUIs) offenses, and many absent without leave (AWOLs) infractions. I quickly realized some of these Soldiers that had been deployed with me, and

they were possibly suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. The signs were all there: seclusion, irritation, and cutting on themselves.

I have learned everyone has a different way of handling or dealing with stress. I now know the Army does care; they provide counseling, medical care, and emergency services to combat veterans. Soldiers rely on religion, family, others, and even hobbies to manage or relieve their stress. No way is the right way as long as Soldiers have a method of dealing with stress. I personally do not think Soldiers in combat would have done things differently to deal with stress. I hope that combat veterans share their experiences with Soldiers before, during and after their next deployment. You never know what your Soldiers are going through, or what they are thinking unless you communicate with them personally or through your subordinates in your chain of command. When talking to your Soldiers never take, "I'm fine," for an answer. Ask them about family. "How is your day? What are your plans when you get home?" These are simple questions. They let your Soldiers know you care, and they just might open issues that they may need help with.

We cannot be effective leaders without our Soldiers being tactically, technically, physically, and mentally fit. As NCOs in the United States Army, we have a duty and an obligation take care of our Soldiers. In order to do this, we have to understand and know the resources available to help our Soldiers when they are in a time of need for help. The resources I am talking about are the people that work at Veterans Affairs or stress management, located on the FOB. Stress is part of life but more importantly part of being deployed.

In early May 2006, the crew of Colossal 31, part of a Chinook Company, set off on a routine mission to transport Soldiers. The mission required landing on a mountain top, amid a number of trees. It was a fatal mission and MSG Stanley Schmidt believes the failure resulted from the insufficient training of the crew.

The Crash of Colossal 31

**1SG Stanley Todd Schmidt
OEF VII, 12/07/2005 - 02/07/2007
1SG, B Company, 3/10 GSAB**

Building a General Support Aviation Battalion

It was March 2005 and I was the first sergeant (1SG) for B Company, 3/10 General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB). It was my job to train Soldiers and prepare the battalion for activation on June 10, 2005. The battalion was deploying for combat operations in Afghanistan within six months of activation. It was a tremendous challenge.

This was my first experience of standing up a new combat unit. It seemed strange that the commander and sergeant major (SGM) did not arrive until three weeks before the battalion was scheduled to activate. It was only logical to me that the Army provided the Soldiers, equipment, and facilities prior to the activation of a new battalion. I was shocked to find very few resources to build the unit. We would be receiving more than 50 aircraft soon, and we were missing a hangar. I did not have office space, phones, computers or printers. I searched for tools and equipment to conduct maintenance and training, but that also was missing. Our budget was being strictly managed. We were supposed to get a large portion of our equipment once we deployed to theater, but I needed it immediately to equip and train the unit. I expected entirely too much from the Army. Our battalion was given a small hangar to share with a MEDEVAC company that had eight UH-1s. We would eventually receive 12 CH-47s and 24 UH-60s. The hangar can park up to four UH-60s or two CH-47s. There was not enough office space, so I shared my office with the maintenance company commander and 1SG. We all did whatever it took to complete the mission, like using our personal computers, printers and phones for work. There were still no flyable aircraft so we were not training Soldiers.

Soldiers started trickling in during the first month and we struggled to find them a place to live. It was fairly easy to assign Soldiers to their appropriate section, but the big problem was they had no place to work. Even if the Soldiers had a place to work, we had no tools or equipment to train with. In a little more than two months, the battalion grew from 60 Soldiers to about 500. The

majority of the Soldiers were straight out of their advanced individual training (AIT). Every 1SG had become highly concerned. We needed trained and experienced Soldiers that worked as a battle team and we only had six months before we deployed to Afghanistan.

Building a Chinook Company

The battalion was activated on June 10, 2005. We now had a command sergeant major so I changed my focus from the battalion to my Chinook Company of 72 Soldiers. We had received only eight of our 12 aircraft by the end of June. All eight aircraft required heavy maintenance and various modifications. The real problem was that we only had three crews certified to fly. That means I could only fly three birds at a time. A flight instructor or flight engineer is progressed from a crew chief, and that requires time, maturity and experience. There was heavy pressure from battalion and brigade to sign crew chiefs off in only 30 hours when it normally takes about 1,000 hours. I call this “pencil whipping.” My Soldiers were afraid to fly with each other. My superiors argued that if you throw Soldiers into the fire and give them more responsibility they will rise to the occasion. The pilots were just as inexperienced, which created a recipe for disaster. The pencil whipping continued and little attention was given to quality training. The attitude was that Soldiers will learn everything in combat.

Our workspace improved in August when we relocated into another hangar of a unit that recently deployed to Iraq. This movement alone was a logistical nightmare, and it brought all training and maintenance to a halt. I did see a marked improvement in the quality of training once my company settled into a sufficient hangar. Our biggest problem now was that we could not keep our aircraft from breaking. It was the beginning of December and we still could only fly four of the 12 aircraft with trained crews. In desperation, our commander arranged for my entire company to deploy to Fort Rucker, AL, to train on their aircraft. I was amazed at how many crew chiefs and pilots got certified in just two weeks of pencil-whipped training. On paper, we appeared ready for combat. In our hearts and minds, we were still afraid to fly with each other.

Operation Enduring Freedom

The entire Chinook Company arrived at BAF by the third week in January 2006. Most of our flights were at night. Only a few of our crew members had experience flying at night with night vision goggles. The Soldiers rose to the occasion and I was almost convinced that throwing Soldiers into combat missions may be the best way to train and get experience. The Chinook Company quickly accumulated record-breaking flight hours, hauling tons of equipment, and transporting hundreds of

passengers. Our motto was that we always have room for one more passenger. No mission was ever allowed to be refused.

A routine mission to transport Soldiers was given to Colossal 31 in early May 2006. This was not an offensive mission nor was there a high risk of being attacked. Based on these facts, I was confident we would be able to negotiate changes to mission requirements if needed. We assigned a fairly strong crew to Colossal 31. The right seat pilot with outstanding judgment was very experienced. The left seat pilot was a rookie but eager to learn. The flight engineer was experienced but had spent the last few years teaching at the schoolhouse. The other three crew members started their flight training just before the deployment.

The crew had almost three days to plan the mission. The routine transport mission quickly developed many concerns with high risk. The crew experience was mitigated the best we could for a night landing. The landing zone was on a mountain at the top of a steep cliff. Colossal 31 would have to back in between two trees and conduct a two-wheeled landing for about three minutes while the passengers boarded the plane. The infantry unit commander would neither negotiate nor accept an alternate landing zone. The mission was accepted with the agreement that the trees would be cut down before the landing. The pilot was so concerned that he overflew the landing zone to conduct reconnaissance the day before the mission. He decided that the mission would be challenging even with the trees removed, but it could be done.

I was called to the TOC at about two in the morning. There had been an accident. The trees did not get cut down and the aircraft had only inches to maneuver. The aircraft commander asked his crew if they wanted to abort the mission or attempt to land. The crew saw the waiting infantry Soldiers lying on the ground and scattered across the mountaintop waiting to board. The crew decision was unanimous to make an attempt. The infantry unit started to board as soon as the wheels touched down on the precipice. The commander hurried to the cockpit and insisted on sitting in the jump seat. Setting up the jump seat requires assistance that would have distracted at least one crew member from his job. This alone could have caused the accident. A bump to a pilot's arm while trying to maintain a two-wheeled landing with only inches in clearance could have been disastrous. A total of four infantry Soldiers boarded Colossal 31 before the rear blades struck a tree. The rear rotor system collapsed and immediately sent Colossal 31 into a back-flip. Most of the aircraft disintegrated on impact, killing all passengers. The crash investigation found that the crash was due to an inexperienced crew and suggested that the flight engineer had somehow failed in his duties. The only conclusion from the investigation that I agree with is that part relating to insufficient training of the crew. I

remember how the crew members were afraid to fly with each other prior to the deployment. However, I assessed that all crew members were competent by the time the crash of Colossal 31 took place on May 5, 2006. It was also my experience that most accidents are avoidable and that the gains should far outweigh the risks.

Conclusion

Colossal 31 crashed because Army leadership failed to provide appropriate training and resources with realistic risk management. The Army could have done many things differently to make sure the General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB) was successful. I feel strongly that new units should be built from the top down and not from the bottom up. Once a unit is equipped and trained, it should progress aggressively into the team-building phase. The activation of this battalion was not based on any Army doctrine that I am familiar with. The GSAB would have been better prepared if it had been given appropriate buildings, reliable equipment, and trained personnel. The Chinook Company returned from its second combat tour and the company's hangar was still not complete. There were no offices, no bathrooms, and no running water—it had been four years since the GSABs activation. A Soldier must receive the resources for success to include quality training. It is pointless to give a Soldier a rifle and fail to give him the bullets with which to do his job. Both resources and the quality of training have declined since the beginning of the war on terror. Mission requirements have diminished our resources and stretched our fighting forces thin. Leaders and commanders seldom set priorities, so subordinate leaders choose their own priorities and ignore others. In order to meet time and pressure, leaders choose to lower standards, pencil whip, and take shortcuts. The Army used to train Soldiers to crawl, walk, and then run. Today's training does not build a team. Training is seldom hands-on and it is often a slideshow without any practical exercise. Soldiers go from a crawl in basic training to a full sprint in combat. The attitude is becoming that Soldiers will learn everything in combat. It is time to get back to the basics. A trained Soldier is proud, confident, and highly likely to reenlist.

Warfare in the 20th Century became a matter of total war, influencing every segment of society in order to achieve success. In fighting a guerilla war it is often necessary to look for new and innovative ways to achieve success. To succeed in a counterinsurgency environment, one must understand the people they are supporting and help those people lead better lives. For these reasons, the Army developed The Human Terrain Teams and the Agribusiness Development Teams. These are innovations that assist in the efforts of every Soldier. The Human Terrain Team helps the Army understand the local population and make choices that will be viewed favorably by them. The Agribusiness Development Team concentrates efforts on accomplishments that will help the majority of the local population.

HUMAN TERRAIN AND AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TEAMS

The importance of understanding local customs, value systems and many other aspects of the local population is critical in fighting any counterinsurgency. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the local populations are diverse groups with different languages, thoughts and beliefs. In order for commanders to understand the different cultures, the Army has employed the Human Terrain Teams.

The Human Terrain Team consists of five-to-nine personnel, with social science and operational backgrounds that are deployed to support field commanders. They allow the commander to understand the socio-cultural environment of local populations in his area. The team provides advice and opportunities to commanders and their staffs by building strong relationships with the local community.

Each team includes a team leader, at least one social scientist, a research manager, and a human terrain analyst with specific local knowledge and local language skills. Teams also ensure they have at least one female to allow access to the female population.

The Human Terrain Teams overlap rotations of combat brigades to allow for the transfer of local-area knowledge from one commander to the next. This helps maintain momentum during unit relief or the transfer of responsibility. (Handbook, No. 09-21 Commander's Guide Employing a Human Terrain Team.)

The state of Missouri took the lead in developing Agribusiness Development Teams. They created the 935th Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) of the Missouri National Guard. Then the combination of the Missouri Farm

Bureau, the University of Missouri, and the National Guard Bureau provided pre-deployment training to the selected Soldiers.

There are two main goals for the ADTs, increase agriculture jobs and income, and increase Afghans' confidence in their government. The first goal contained three objectives: increase agriculture production; increase linkage between farmers, markets, credit, and trade corridors; and rehabilitate watersheds and improve irrigation infrastructure. The second sought to use technical assistance to increase the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock's ability to deliver services and promote private sector and farmer associations. This would allow the Afghan government to promote the increase of Afghan commodities in both the intra-national and international markets. (Handbook, No. 10-10, Agribusiness Development Teams in Afghanistan.)

It is often difficult when one moves into a new position and then deploys soon after. MSG Lynn Ratley learned to deal with the situation and overcome a number of obstacles in serving a Chief Medical NCO. In the end, MSG Ratley would work with Soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines.

Medical Challenges of Today's NCO

MSG Lynn E. Ratley

OEF, 12/2006 – 03/2008

Chief Medical NCO, 101st Airborne

At the end of my tour in Germany as the first sergeant (1SG) for A Company, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, I received orders in August 2006 to report to the surgeon section of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C. Two weeks after reporting to the 82nd Replacement Company at Fort Bragg, I arrived at the division surgeon's office eager to see what was in store for me. The first person I saw was one of my former Soldiers. He was now a sergeant first class (SFC). He was very excited to have me in the section. The next person that I met was a master sergeant (MSG) that I was stationed with in 2004 in Germany. I was excited to see him as he was senior to me, had already attended the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, and furthermore, he had been somewhat of a mentor for me while we were assigned together in Germany. After an hour or so of talking about the good old days, I asked to be introduced to the sergeant major (SGM) of the section. Now that I think about it, there was some hesitation by him to introduce me to her. He tried to keep me to himself. Once I was introduced to the SGM, she did not seem too interested in meeting me and had a very confusing demeanor. The next few days were filled with me trying to get answers from someone on exactly what my responsibilities were within the office. One of the SFCs in the office tried his best to explain to me what my role would be. It was very hard trying to lock the MSG and SGM down in order to have one of them explain my role to me. At his point, I had blended into the section the best way possible, working with the operations officer who was a four-year captain (CPT), but was a graduate of the 70H course (operations officer). She was very helpful in ensuring that I knew as much as she did about the operations section there.

After being in the section for two weeks, I was told that we were deploying to Afghanistan in December or January in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). I felt pretty confident about the deployment because I knew I had two more senior NCOs to help me out. I had no idea of exactly what my specific role was going to be within the section, but felt confident because I was a good NCO; I lived the Army Values and knew how to take care of Soldiers while accomplishing the mission. As an NCO, those were things that have

been drilled into my head. I had not come in contact with the lieutenant colonel (LTC) in charge of the section very much. He did acknowledge me in one of the meetings, but it seemed as more of a formality than an actual welcome to the section. Approximately 90 days prior to the deployment, the MSG and the SGM got into a huge power struggle and personality conflict that resulted in the two of them using medical reasons to get out of the deployment. So guess who was now in charge?

Preparing For Deployment

After getting over the initial shock, I did what I have done, and been trained to do, my entire career. I took charge of the section and started getting us ready to deploy. I assumed the position of the Chief Medical NCO forward. No problem! In preparing for the deployment, we had several mission requirements to meet for the company. I started attending all the meetings ensuring that we complied with all of the training requirements to include an Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). We continued to prepare for the deployment, conducting inventories, packing equipment, and preparing families.

Arrival in Theater

Of course, I put myself on the manifest to go into theater with the advanced party, so that I could get in and ensure that everything was prepared for the rest of the staff's arrival. I was welcomed into theater by the operations NCO from the 101st Airborne Division. He too was a MSG and seemed very knowledgeable. He showed me everything that he did as the Chief Medical NCO, and I trained myself and one of the SFCs on all of the computer programs and reports that were required to be sent to higher and lower echelons. For a week, while waiting for the others, whose flights were delayed, we were able to learn as much as possible. Everything was in order upon the arrival of the rest of the staff. All they had to do was sign for the keys to their quarters, set up their desks and go to work. I took them on a tour of the base, showed them all of the essential spots and procedures for internet setup, mail and laundry.

Theater Operations

Once everyone was aboard and the left seat, right seat ride with the outgoing surgeon's office was over, we all participated in the TOA. Things started getting hectic as the LTC and the deputy surgeon wanted to revamp the way everything was done. Despite the fact that there was a system in place, they wanted to create their own procedures and reports. They wanted to fix something that was not broken. For me, things were starting to go well. I was attending the command sergeant majors (CSM's) senior NCO meeting that involved all of the E-9s in the division staff and surrounding units. I was respected for the position I was in. These meetings consisted of who had what police call area, guard duty responsibilities, uniform policies, and so on. There was no talk about the battle or the current operations.

On the other hand, in the surgeon's office, I was treated as a junior enlisted. I was very caught up in the normal NCO duties, which I felt comfortable doing. When the section would sit down for the military decision making process (MDMP), I would always put my opinion in. However, not knowing the correct procedures and ideology of MDMP, I would get frustrated because they were taking so long to come up with a course of action, and in my mind, I already knew the best course of action. I would tend to focus on the normal NCO leadership things. I just tried to make sure that everyone had what they needed to accomplish their mission, because that's what I knew. Because of this shortcoming and the fact that the LTC in charge and I had different understandings of the role of the enlisted in the staff, there was not a very good working relationship between he and I. As a result of my "lack of knowledge" and the ongoing leadership conflicts between the LTC and I, the SGM decided she would deploy and take over things. It was decided that I would be moved to another position.

Continued Operations

I was then assigned to International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) Headquarters, as the 1SG for the U.S. National Support Element. There I reported directly to the ISAF commander (a four-star general) and the CSM. I was responsible for all of the U.S. forces assigned to the FOB. These forces consisted of approximately 200 U.S. Army (active and reserve), 100 airmen, 50 sailors, and 20 Marines. Their ranks ranged from E-1 to O-6. During my tenure, I had an Army major, a Navy captain, and an Army lieutenant colonel as my commanders. In this position, I faced new challenges as I had never worked with sister services except the Air Force. I had to learn their ranks, procedures and their regulations. I also faced the challenge of dealing with other nations. On the ISAF compound, there were 32 different nations. The ISAF CSM was so impressed with my leadership abilities that he requested that I attend all of his meetings with the regional CSMs, which included my own CSM from the 82nd Airborne Division. This deployment reassured me that I was a good NCO and possessed the qualities of a leader, but identified that I still didn't have all of the knowledge needed to compete in this ever-changing and growing Army.

Conclusion

The way that the Army is transforming requires that today's NCO be more flexible, more knowledgeable and more versatile than in the past. You no longer meet the bar by just being technically and tactically proficient in your particular MOS. You must be well educated on a broad spectrum of operations. I hope the new Noncommissioned Officer Education System will prepare NCOs for those challenging positions.

Sergeant, then PFC Monica Brown, served as a medic in support of the 82nd Airborne. When a vehicle in her convoy struck an IED and small arms fire raged all around, she did not hesitate to perform her duty and save the lives of a number of Soldiers.

Treating Medical Trauma in Combat

Sergeant Monica Brown

Vignette

In April 2007, Private First Class (PFC) Monica Brown was travelling with a four-vehicle convoy in the Paktika Province of Afghanistan. PFC Brown, from Lake Jackson, TX, was serving as a medic from the 82nd Airborne Division's 782nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team. Out on a routine, several-day security patrol of the remote Jani Khail district, her four-vehicle convoy turned into a rocky riverbed to continue the patrol. Enemy insurgent forces were known to place improvised explosive devices (IEDs) along the Army's main routes, so patrolling in dry riverbeds was often safer for convoys.

On that cool spring evening, one of the Humvees drove over a pressure plate mine, exploding it and injuring the five Soldiers inside. PFC Brown recalls that she did not have time to be scared, and her training instinctively kicked in. With little regard for her own safety, she immediately ran to the front of the convoy to help her injured comrades, all of whom she considered friends. Because of the IED ambush, ammunition within the crippled Humvee began to explode, shooting out flames and shrapnel at her and the wounded, two of whom were critically injured.

At that same moment, the convoy was engaged by small arms fire from several directions. Knowing the risks involved, Brown and her platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Jose Santos, moved the injured 500 yards to cover while calling for air support and a medical evacuation (MEDEVAC). PFC Brown began trauma treatment and fit two of the injured with hypothermia kits. At this point, insurgent forces had begun to mortar the convoy. With rockets and shrapnel flying all around her, PFC Brown several times shielded the injured Soldiers with her own body. Her platoon sergeant had managed to bring one of the other Humvees forward to shield Brown and the immobile Soldiers from enemy fire, where they continued to treat wounds and await MEDEVAC, returning fire from a mounted gun when able.

She then directed other Soldiers to help by holding intravenous bags and assisting her in preparing the casualties for evacuation. After what seemed like an eternity, Brown said, the attackers finally began retreating, and she was able to perform more thorough aid procedures before the helicopter finally arrived

to transport the casualties to safety. Two hours after the initial attack, everything was over. In the darkness, Brown recalled standing in a field, knee-deep in grass, her only source of light coming from her red headlight, trying to piece together the events that had just taken place.

“Looking back, it was just a blur of noise and movement,” Brown said. “What just happened? Did I do everything right? It was a hard thing to think about. I realized that everything I had done during the attack was just rote memory. Kudos to my chain of command for that. I know with training, like I was given, any medic would have done the same in my position.”

All five injured Soldiers survived the experience and are back in uniform today. For her heroic actions, PFC Brown, now a sergeant, was awarded the Silver Star, just the second female to receive the award since World War II. “Those are my buddies, my team on the battlefield. I did what I did because that’s what I was trained to do,” she said upon receiving the Silver Star from then-Vice President Dick Cheney.

Based on the reports and interviews taken from the U.S. Army’s Faces of Strength: <http://www.army.mil/facesofstrength/FOS-features.html>

When 1SG Stephen Hansen found himself assigned as the First Sergeant of the 189th MP Company in Guantanamo, he found the mission was larger than he had ever imagined. Though he had twenty years of experience, he had never seen such a large number of detainees “simply waiting for time to pass and doing nothing constructive.”

Detainee Operations

1SG Stephen J. Hansen

OEF, 06/10/2006 – 05/20/2007

1SG, 189th MP Company, 525th MP Battalion

First Experience with Detainee Operations

The mission of the Joint Task Force (JTF) Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, is to provide safe, humane, transparent, and secure treatment of some of the world’s most dangerous detainees in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The JTF Guantanamo Bay also conducts intelligence operations to provide critical information to those in the field, conducting operations in OEF and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). In March 2006, I received notification from my headquarters that I was on assignment to Guantanamo Bay (GTMO), Cuba, with a report date of June 2006. I was being assigned to the 525th MP Battalion in support of OEF. The 525th MP Battalion’s mission was to provide support to the JTF Guantanamo Bay, through the Joint Detention Group, Guantanamo Bay. The 525th provided Soldiers to maintain security, custody and control of Camp V and Camp Echo.

I was not able to obtain much information about the specific operations at GTMO, but I was notified by the Joint Detention Group command sergeant major (CSM) that I would be the first sergeant (1SG) for one of the MP Companies. He related that my Soldiers would be conducting correctional custody of detainees. The CSM was not able to give me much more information than that, due to the secret nature of the mission of the command. Most of what the CSM told me was the good weather and the free golfing that was available for me. I had heard rumors about this assignment, but I tried not to form biased opinions before seeing the duty personally. I would, however, have a chance to see detainee operations for myself prior to my assignment in Cuba. I was notified about a week later that I would be on an assessment team with Coalition Forces Land Component Command, looking at detainee operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. I knew that this would give me a good indicator as to the type of duty I would be facing in Cuba.

During my assessment of the detainee operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, I learned that this mission was much larger than I had ever imagined. I had been

working corrections for about 20 years, and had never seen such a large amount of detainees that were simply waiting for time to pass and not doing anything constructive, except praying. In Army corrections, there is considerable interaction between prisoners and correctional staff, but I noticed the communication between detainees and correctional staff was extremely limited. Most conversations between detainees and staff were with the intelligence command personnel. There were several tedious rules that the correctional staff had to follow, or the detainees would become extremely unruly. This was clearly driven by the media's coverage of the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib Prison. There was also no one-on-one contact between detainees and staff, which was completely opposite from Army corrections. All detainees were considered maximum security and would require full restraints and two-to-three escorts per detainee when outside of their cell. My time spent on this assessment team made me clearly understand the seriousness, difficulty, and long duration that the military would play in detainee operations.

I was notified that I would only be allowed to arrive on the island on a Monday or every other Saturday when I began my transition to Cuba. I did not think much of this but would understand later that this was due to the tight control over everything and everyone that entered or exited the island. I completed my preparations for my tour in Cuba after I returned from Iraq in April 2006. This would prove to be the most memorable tour I would have during my long military career.

On June 9, 2006, I departed Kansas City International Airport en route to Jacksonville Naval Air Station, FL. My connecting flight to GTMO was not scheduled to depart until June 10. When I arrived at the airfield for my flight, we were all in military uniform, except for a few family dependants, contractors and several service members returning from leave to temporary duty. The flight to Cuba was not too long, so I decided not to change. The flight from Jacksonville to GTMO was only about three hours. The approach into GTMO airstrip was unique, because the aircraft was required to make a sharp turn to avoid Cuban airspace and to make its approach to the only runway. You could tell that some people were a bit disturbed by the aircraft's movements, but with all the unique flying I did in Iraq, it really did not faze me.

The plane sat on the tarmac for a long while before a Navy sailor entered the plane and gave instructions to all newly assigned personnel. We would be required to in-process the island headquarters before being released to our new command. I knew I was in for a long day. The in-processing was not difficult, but took about two hours because of the amount of personnel that were coming in that day. We were required to sign several documents that restricted our communication about specific missions at GTMO and a statement that notified

us not take photographs of several key locations on the Naval Station. It seemed that the command at GTMO enforced restrictions on photography more than the commands in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My friend greeted me at the airfield and transported me to my quarters. I was pleased to see that I would be sharing a two-bedroom, family home with another senior NCO. I was relieved to get settled into my quarters and was anxious to get acquainted with my new position and Soldiers. It was a Saturday, so I would have to wait a couple more days.

On Monday morning my predecessor picked me up. We arrived at the unit headquarters, which was a small building, made of 2x4s and plywood. My desk was located in the middle of the unit orderly room. I knew I would have to make quick adjustments to what appeared to be a chaotic unit. The 1SG immediately took me to the detention facility where my Soldiers were working.

My first arrival in the Camp V facility gave me a clear understanding that our Soldiers in the Army are the most professional Soldiers I have ever worked with. I will later discuss the basis for my conclusion. The Camp noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) was Sergeant First Class (SFC) Rich. I was extremely impressed with SFC Rich's knowledge on the day-to-day operations of the camp and his specific knowledge of each detainee in his camp.

All detainees were listed as maximum custody in Camp V. This was unusual for me to see this, considering that I am accustomed to working in a prison that offers several levels of security. The United States Disciplinary Barracks (USDB) offers five levels of security, which include maximum, medium, medium inside only, minimum, and trustee custodies. The reason for these different custody levels is twofold. One is to offer prisoners the ability to strive for some level of freedom, while still being locked up in prison. The other reason is to simplify operations of the facility. The bottom line is that it takes less staff to manage minimum custody prisoners than it does to manage maximum custody prisoners.

In the USDB the majority of prisoners have the desire to follow rules and live in peace, even in a confined atmosphere. Prisoners at the USDB are sentenced and know how long they will be in prison. Whether they believe this to be good or bad, they do know their sentence. The detainees at Camp V did not know what their sentence will be, or even if they would be sentenced. Some of these detainees may have played some role in fighting against the United States. The possibly innocent detainees, and those not knowing their sentence or future, find no reason to fully cooperate with the correctional staff at Camp V.

I worked many years at the USDB. One position I performed was as the NCOIC of the Special Housing Unit, which confined the facility's maximum custody prisoners. This was the hardest position for staff to work; the facility's most volatile prisoners were housed in this area. Special training was required for all staff to work in this housing unit. As I walked through the camp's housing areas, I met with my Soldiers. Some of the Soldiers I knew from previous assignments at other facilities. In some cases, I met with Soldiers that were experiencing corrections for the first time. Watching the Soldiers complete their daily missions, I could clearly see that standard operating procedures from the USDB had been brought to Camp V, with some variations to accommodate detainees.

The hard work and attention to detail displayed by my Soldiers impressed me. There was required safety gear and specific guidelines my Soldiers had to follow when handling detainees' property. My Soldiers expertly performed these duties daily. All this said, it was not the hard work and attention to detail that impressed me the most. It was the mental abuse that the detainees put my Soldiers through during a typical 12-hour shift. I remember seeing a young female Soldier that I knew from the USDB. She was simply attempting to give the detainee his lunch, but for no reason, the detainee decided that he needed to attack this young Soldier personally with the most vulgar language I have ever heard. I remember seeing the tears in her eyes and I could only imagine what was going through her mind. This truly gave me another outlook on what our Soldiers put themselves through while defending our country.

I took over as 1SG for the 189th MP Company on June 20, 2006. Immediately, I started receiving reports from my battalion S-3 that some of my Soldiers had been recorded making inappropriate comments toward detainees in the camp in retaliation to remarks and insults hurled at them by the detainees. I discovered that when Camp V was built, the plans included a high-tech surveillance system, which recorded everything my Soldiers said and did in the camp. I could only assume that this system was placed to assist in intelligence. Still, it was extremely hard to look a Soldier in the eye and tell them they were wrong for cursing at a detainee after the detainee had put them through a 12-hour shift of mental abuse. Soldiers generally took the high road and did not give in to the detainee's attempt to mentally wear them down. It is Soldiers like this that give the military and our country a good name. Soldiers that gave in to this constant mental abuse from detainees must be dealt with swiftly, because only one incident that leaks out through the press or other means could cause grave danger for the nation and our troops.

It was not only my Soldiers that I witnessed serving their country faithfully, but Navy Sailors as well. All Sailors received extensive training prior to work-

ing with detainees, just like the Army Soldiers. The difference with the Navy was that most of them had never worked with prisoners or detainee operation before in their life. Some had a little experience in civilian or military corrections but most had engaged in this profession for the first time. Some of the Navy sailors had it harder than the Army Soldiers. Sailors that worked in Camp Delta had no air conditioned buildings. In Cuba, the weather can be more than 100 degrees and extremely humid. This made the working conditions sometimes unbearable.

Leaving Cuba after my one-year tour was not very difficult mentally, but was somewhat hard, because every person leaving the island was subject to a detailed search of all electronic equipment. I was required to turn in my laptop, XBOX 360, PlayStation, iPod, CDs, thumb drives, and digital camera to the S-2, two weeks prior to leaving the island. This was to ensure that I was not taking any secret information off the island.

My experience with detainee operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Cuba gave me a greater appreciation for our Soldiers and sailors. I learned the mission of detainee operations would not disappear anytime soon. My Soldiers and I would need to stay up-to-date in our training in both military corrections and detainee operations. As I flew from the island on May 19, 2007, I reflected back to the dedication to duty both the sailors and my Soldiers displayed. It has made me appreciate even more what our Soldiers endure for our nation. It has made me more compassionate for my Soldiers' mistakes; I know that one day they will or may have already experienced the mental abuse of detainees, either in Cuba, Afghanistan or Iraq. To me, they are all heroes.

During 2008, many of the problems of working with a coalition came to the surface. Greater emphasis on the war in Iraq, and a lack of unity in vision of the coalition partners made success in Afghanistan difficult. SGM Patrick Viljanen, points out some of the difficulties in dealing with coalition partners.

Afghan Regional Security Integration Command 2008

SGM Patrik K. Viljanen
OEF, 2008

In Western Afghanistan in 2008, it was apparent that the United States (U.S.) had drastically under-resourced efforts and relied too heavily on International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) to contribute meaningfully to bring about security and national stability in Afghanistan. This was due to the higher profile of the Iraq War and the surge in Iraq, as well as greater security issues at the time in the south and east of Afghanistan. However, even with the problems of ISAF and U.S. under-resourcing, U.S. service members' efforts in western Afghanistan contributed immensely in the building of the Afghan Security Forces.

Background

In 2008, Afghanistan was divided into four primary regional commands (RCs): North, South, East, and West, corresponding to how the Afghan government organized itself along political and security regions. Each RC was controlled by an ISAF nation. The East was led by the U.S., the North by the Germans, the South by the British and Canadians, and the West by the Italians and the Spanish. The RCs owned the battle space, and all had a contingent of other, smaller ISAF nations.

In each RC, there was a U.S.-led O-6 command called the Afghan Regional Security Integration Command (ARSIC). The ARSICs were under the command of Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Phoenix, an O-7 National Guard Command out of Kabul. This was an administrative command, which reported to the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A), which was an active duty two-star command in charge of rebuilding the security of Afghanistan. So technically, the U.S. ARSIC worked for an Italian Brigadier General who was the RC commander. In reality, U.S. ARSIC ran the show, constantly mentoring the Italians as much as the Afghans. From the beginning, the command and control (C2) structure of the RC, CSTC-A, CJTF Phoenix, and the ARSIC proved difficult and confusing. These problems have just recently beginning to be fixed.

Continued on Page 111

ILLUSTRATIONS

“As President, my greatest responsibility is to protect the American people. We are not in Afghanistan to control that country or to dictate its future. We are in Afghanistan to confront a common enemy that threatens the United States, our friends and allies, and the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan who have suffered the most at the hands of violent extremists.

So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future. That is the goal that must be achieved. That is a cause that could not be more just. And to the terrorists who oppose us, my message is the same: we will defeat you.”

President Barrack Obama, in an address on A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Washington, D.C., March 27, 2009



By Spc. Kristina L. Gupton

Sgt. Natanisha Hershberger, a Supply Sgt. with the 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade Joint Net Operations Control, helps an elderly Afghan woman to her appointment at the Egyptian Hospital, Parwan province, Afghanistan. Hershberger and other volunteers of Operation Care visit the hospital to help pass out donated clothes, shoes and bags of food to patients from local villages.



U.S. Air Force photo By Tech. Sgt. Joe Laws

Sgt. Derick Eaddy, with Provincial Reconstruction Team Kapisa, teaches a handshake to a young Afghan boy during a mission to inspect a newly completed bridge in the Surobi district of Afghanistan. The PRT's mission is to stabilize the region by enabling local governments to care for, educate, employ and protect their people through the construction of basic infrastructure and mentorship.



By Staff Sgt. Michael L. Casteel

Soldiers from Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment move into position to support Afghan National police who are moving in to apprehend a suspect during a cordon and search of Pana, Afghanistan.



By Pfc. Micah E. Clare

Two U.S. Army snipers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division provide overwatch security for locals during a town meeting in Dey Yak, Afghanistan.



By Staff Sgt. Ave Pele

St. Paul, Minn. native, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Nick McLaughlin, Tactical Psyop Team Leader 1322, 319th Tactical Psyop Detachment, 13th Psychology Operation Battalion, Ardenhills, Minn., explains to a Alikheyl villager how to utilize the medicine he is offering him, during a good neighbor operation; Laghman province.



Soldiers from Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, 4th Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team walk across the Titin River while on a foot patrol in the Titin Valley of the Nuristan province of Afghanistan.

By Staff Sgt. Isaac A. Graham

Sgt 1st Class Vili Schwenke, Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team security forces member, establishes communications during a mission by using the tactical satellite in Nawur, Afghanistan.

U.S. Air Force photo by
Tech. Sgt. James May III





By Staff Sgt. Gary A. Witte

Staff Sgt. Glenn K. Luce of Midwest City, Okla., a squad leader with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force No Slack, moves into the village of Spinkay in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar province just prior to his unit being attacked. One U.S. Army Soldier was wounded during the insurgent attack, which included the use of mortars, small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades against International Security Assistance and Afghan National Security Forces.



By U.S. Army Sgt. Matthew C. Moeller

Afghan National Security Forces and U.S. Army Soldiers medically evacuate an insurgent who was wounded after attacking coalition forces during Operation Mountain Fire, in the Nuristan province.



By Spc. Matthew Leary

Cpl. Bryan R. Boender points out something suspicious on the horizon to Army Pfc. Timothy M. Mailliard while the two are out on patrol in the Andar District of Ghazni province of Afghanistan. Boender and Mailliard are part of the 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.



By Staff Sgt. Justin Holley

Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Kahler, left, supervises and provides security for Pfc. Jonathan Ayers and Adam Hamby while they emplace an M240 machine gun as part of a fighting position in the mountains of Afghanistan's Kunar province. The soldiers are from 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment.



U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Katherine Roling

Left to right, security force members U.S. Army Sgt. James Miller from Spartanburg, S.C., and U.S. Army Sgt. Jeremy Moore from Simpsonville, S.C., conduct a foot patrol in Ghazni City. Both soldiers are with the South Carolina National Guard and provide security for the Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Nathanael Callon

Sgt. David Lane, a team leader assigned to Provincial Reconstruction Team Zabul, and an Afghan National Army soldier provide security for a shura near Forward Operating Base Bullard, Shah Joy District, Zabul province. PRT Zabul supports and facilitates the legitimacy of the Afghan national and local governments through regional reconstruction, security and stability of the province.



By Spc. Matthew Freire

Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, wait for the CH-47 Chinook helicopter to land so they can depart from an air-assault mission to search Khost province, Afghanistan, during Operation Champion Sword. Afghan National Security Forces and International Security Assistance Forces teamed up for the joint operation focusing on specific militant targets and safe havens within Sabari and Terezai districts of the province in eastern Afghanistan.



By Sgt. Matthew C. Moeller

A Soldier calls for an airstrike on the hills surrounding Barge Matal, during Operation Mountain Fire in Afghanistan's eastern Nuristan province. Afghan National Security Forces and International Security Assistance Forces battled with insurgent forces in the late afternoon, after quickly securing the village's key areas early in the morning.



By Staff Sgt. Andrew Smith

Soldiers from Bulldog Troop, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment carry a bag filled with food and water that will sustain them while on a multi-day mission near Sar Howza, Paktika province, Afghanistan. The Soldiers will hide the re-supply bag until they return to gather and distribute the contents before moving to a different location.



By Pfc. Roy Mercon

Staff Sgt. Johnathan Boos, Company A, 1st squadron, 172nd Cavalry Regiment, discusses a possible well site with the Malik (village elder), of the village of Qaleh-Ye Mirza Jalal. Soldiers with Company A conducted two key leader engagements and a presence patrol in the villages of Bajawri and Qaleh-Ye Mirza Jalal.



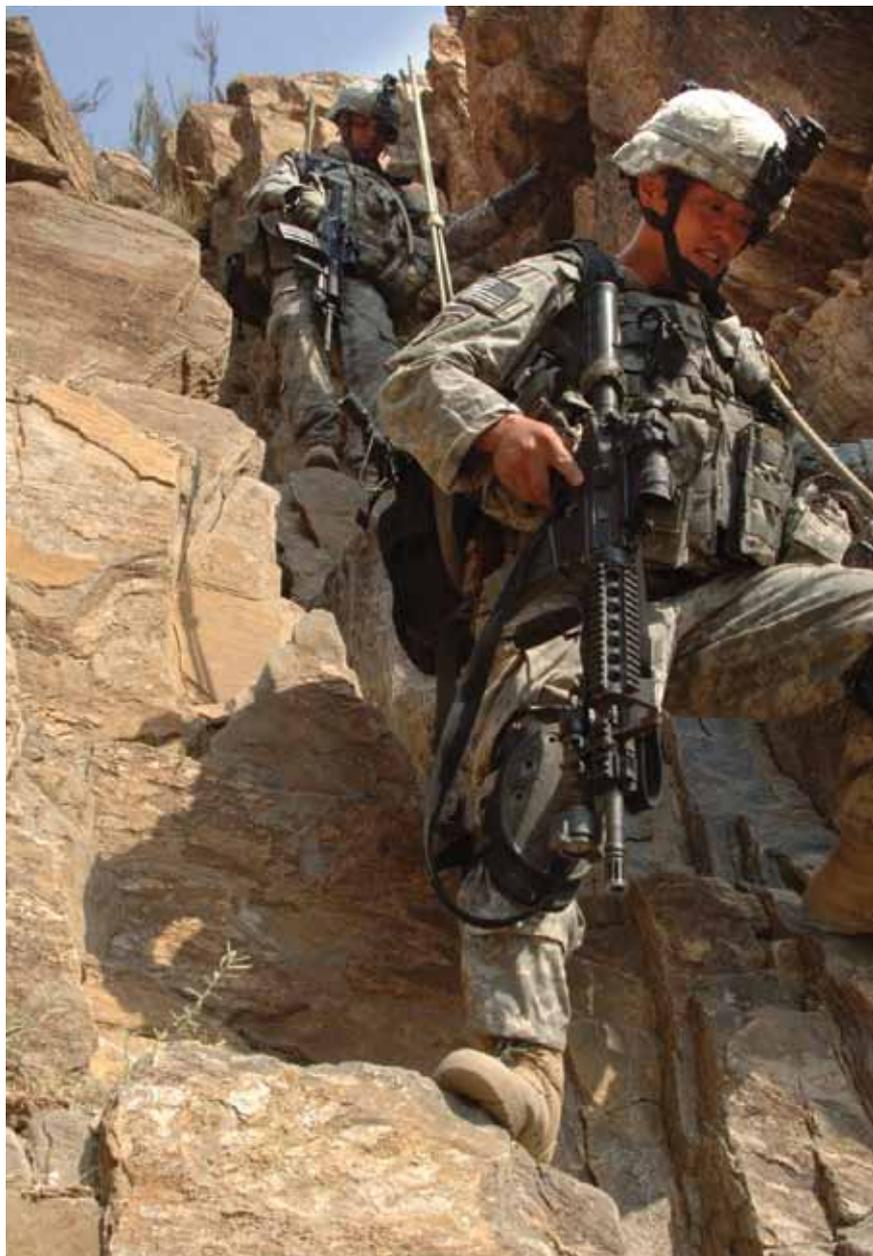
By Sg1. Prentice C. Martin-Bowen

Soldiers discuss terrain features on the map near Orgun-E, Patika province, Afghanistan.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Francisco V. Goved II

Soldiers with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 17th Regiment unload humanitarian aid for distribution to the town of Rajan Kala, Afghanistan. Charlie Company used their Stryker armored vehicles to move the humanitarian aid from the Joint District Community Center to the town of Rajan Kala, Kandahar province.



By Staff Sgt. Isaac A. Graham

Sgt. Brendan Johnson and Staff Sgt. Adam Werner, from Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, 4th Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, walk down a hill while on a foot patrol in the Titin Valley of the Nuristan province of Afghanistan.



By Fred W. Baker III

Two U.S. Army Soldiers walk their vehicle through the muddy paths of Forward Operating Base Airborne south of Kabul, Afghanistan. The soldiers, assigned to the 10th Mountain Division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team and part of Task Force Spartan, took control of the base last month.



Sgt. Brandon Fletcher, from Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, clears a wheat field during a cordon and search conducted with the Afghan National police in the village of Nani, Ghazni province, Afghanistan.

By Staff Sgt. Michael L. Casteel



By Capt. Chris G. Neeley

Staff Sgt. Gregory VanArtsdalen of Greer, S.C., 1-178th Field Artillery Battalion, South Carolina Army National Guard, provides security outside the Laghman Governor's Center in downtown Mehtar Lam, Afghanistan. VanArtsdalen served on the security force for the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Laghman province.



By Spc Albert L. Kelley

Cpl. Joshua A. Poindexter, with 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, 630th Military Police Company, Task Force Spartan, shakes hands with young villagers after helping pass out donated school supplies in the Behsood District of Nangarhar province.



By Sgt. Brandon Aird; 173rd ABCT Public Affairs

Command Sgt. Maj. Victor Pedraza, command sergeant major of 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), looks at possible enemy positions during Operation Saray Has near Forward Operating Base Naray, Afghanistan.



By Pfc. Cameron Boyd

Staff Sgt. Joshua Lyon from Greensboro, NC., places a shape charge to remove a debris blocking the Nawa Pass, Konar province, Afghanistan.



By Capt. Anthony Deiss

Staff Sgt. Albert Price, 1st Battalion, 101st Field Artillery Regiment, Massachusetts Army National Guard, directs assistance from an Afghan National Army Soldier to gather supplies during a humanitarian aid drop for displaced families in the Mosahi District, south of Kabul, Afghanistan.



Sgt. John Rhodus of Farmington Hills, Mich., 3rd Platoon gunner, A Battery, 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, Task Force Balls, lines up the reticule pattern in his sight on his aiming reference. Task Force Balls fired 30 rounds and were credited with 10 estimated killed in action in support of operations conducted by Task Force Iron Grey in eastern Afghanistan's Laghman province.

Courtesy photo



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Ave I. Pele

Sgt. Eddie Fields of Pocatigo, S.C., provides security for fellow Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team members as they conduct a good neighbor mission in the village of Chemechati, Laghman province, Afghanistan.



U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Katherine Roling

Sgt. James Miller, a security force member from Spartanburg, S.C., gains higher ground for a security watch on an Afghan National Police vehicle at the ANP Headquarters in Ghazni City. Miller was providing security after a foot patrol from the Governor's Compound while the Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team spoke with the intelligence chief and the new chief of police in Ghazni.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. James May

Sgt 1st Class Vili Schwenke, Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team security forces member, scans the area for possible threats in Nawur, Afghanistan. Schwenke and other security force members provide security during missions. Schwenke is originally from Myrtle Beach, S.C. and is deployed to Ghazni, Afghanistan.



By Sgt. Grant Matthes

Sgt. Darrell W. Coffman, Company C, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, VSAT facility noncommissioned officer in charge (top), and Sgt. William M. Hemingway, Company C, HHB, 101st Airborne Division, TT (traffic terminal) and SIPR point of presence and reset technician, troubleshoot a problem with an SPOP.



By Spc Albert L. Kelley

Staff Sgt. Nicole Olcott, of Daytona Beach, Fla., a flight missions planner with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Lighthorse, passes out school supplies to children in an Internally Displaced Persons Camp in the Beshood District of eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. The two boxes of school supplies came from the Matthew Freeman Foundation, the Adopt-A-Soldier program and Olcott's own non-profit organization, Operation New Start.



U.S. Air Force photo by Sgt. Nathan Lipscomb

Sgt. Greg Locklear of Ft. Bragg, N.C., a generator mechanic with the Battery B, 3rd Battalion, 321st Field Artillery, hands out toys donated by a child in the United States to local construction workers in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar province.



U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Tristan Hinderliter

Cpl. Jimmy Self (left), Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team Security Forces Soldier, U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Rachel Davenport (center), Laghman PRT public affairs officer, and U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Nikolia Saunders (right), Laghman PRT medic, hand out Beanie Babies to Afghan children during a good neighbor visit to Chemechati, Afghanistan.



By Pfc. Cameron Boyd

Staff Sgt. Jay Lloyd from Columbia, S.C., replaces C4 to remove fallen boulders blocking the Nawa Pass, Konar province, Afghanistan.



By Spc. Daniel Love

A special operations force Soldier, assigned to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan, fires on a Taliban fighting position during an afternoon battle in the Sangin District of Helmand Province.



By Spc. Justin French

Staff Sgt. Johnson coaches an Afghan National Police officer as he fires a rocket-propelled grenade launcher during a skills assessment mission on a range in Beshud, Nangarhar province, Afghanistan.



By Staff Sgt. Whitney Hughes

Sgt. Corey Marchegiani, a cavalry scout with Troop B, 1st Squadron, 172nd Cavalry Regiment, shows an Afghan National Police officer how to use the laser sight on his rifle in Pul-e-Sayad, Afghanistan. Marchegiani, a Hoosick Falls, N.Y., native, and other members of his platoon visited the district center in Pul-e-Sayad to continue work with the ANP as the Sept. elections approached.



By Staff Sgt. Joshua Gipe

Staff Sgt. Michael Kaman helps secure an area along the Pech River during a meeting between key leaders in the Kunar province of Afghanistan. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss local development projects that are a combined effort of the Coalition-led Asadabad Provincial Reconstruction Team and local contractors. Kaman is attached to the 1st Battalion, 102nd Infantry Regiment, Connecticut National Guard.



Courtesy photo

Army Cpl. Joseph Hinojosa and Spc. Brandi Morales of the 10th Mountain Division's 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, enjoy the company of a crowd of young Afghan boys and girls at the Prozah Habida Balkhi Girls School in the Dehdadi District near Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Soldiers of the 1st BSTB are assisting the community in building more classroom facilities for the younger students.

By Staff Sgt. Isaac A. Graham

U.S. Army Soldiers from Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, 4th Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team walk across the Titin River while on a foot patrol in the Titin Valley of the Nuristan province of Afghanistan.



“As commander in chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.

I do not make this decision lightly. I opposed the war in Iraq precisely because I believe that we must exercise restraint in the use of military force, and always consider the long-term consequences of our actions. We have been at war for eight years, at enormous cost in lives and resources. Years of debate over Iraq and terrorism have left our unity on national security issues in tatters, and created a highly polarized and partisan backdrop for this effort. And having just experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the American people are understandably focused on rebuilding our economy and putting people to work here at home.

Most of all, I know that this decision asks even more of you — a military that, along with your families, has already borne the heaviest of all burdens. As president, I have signed a letter of condolence to the family of each American who gives their life in these wars. I have read the letters from the parents and spouses of those who deployed. I have visited our courageous wounded warriors at Walter Reed. I have traveled to Dover to meet the flag-draped caskets of 18 Americans returning home to their final resting place. I see firsthand the terrible wages of war. If I did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, I would gladly order every single one of our troops home tomorrow.

So no — I do not make this decision lightly. I make this decision because I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan... This danger will only grow if the region slides backwards, and al Qaeda can operate with impunity. We must keep the pressure on al Qaeda, and to do that, we must increase the stability and capacity of our partners in the region.

Of course, this burden is not ours alone to bear. This is not just America’s war. Since 9/11, al Qaeda’s safe havens have been the source of attacks against London and Amman and Bali. The people and governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan are endangered. And the stakes are even higher within a nuclear-armed Pakistan, because we know that al Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that they would use them.

These facts compel us to act along with our friends and allies. Our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.”

President Barack Obama in an address Dec. 1, 2009, at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, about the future of the U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan.

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The ARSIC's mission was to train and mentor the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in order to provide for the security of the Afghan people. The ARSICs trained the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan Border Patrol (ABP), and the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP). They did this in order to work themselves out of a job in the hopes that the Afghans would build some sense of a national identity, and so the security forces would work toward the greater good for the people of Afghanistan. The ARSICs provided embedded training teams (ETTs) for the ANA, and Police Mentor Teams (PMTs) for the ANP, ABP, and ANCOP. The ISAF version of an ETT was an Operational Mentoring Liaison Team (OMLT), and they were primarily assigned to combat support and Combat Support Services Afghan Kandaks (battalions). In addition to the OMLTs, PMTs, and ETTs, there was mentoring of key ANSF commanders and staff personnel by both U.S. and ISAF personnel from the Kandak to the Corps level. The idea was that if you were, for example, the U.S. Judge Advocate General, S-4, CSM, or Chief of Staff, you dedicated part of what little time you had to working with an Afghan counterpart. This was one of the great successes of ARSIC-West.

Lack of Cohesive and Coordinated COIN Strategy

Tactically and operationally, U.S. efforts in Western Afghanistan in 2008 made significant progress. Strategically, there was an over-dependence on the ISAF nations, which produced limited results.

Italy, Spain, and Lithuania had Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in three out of the four provinces of Western Afghanistan. The Afghan government and security forces, the U.S. ARSIC, SOF, Marine Corps, ISAF, PRTs, United Nations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) lacked any coordinated effort. Even within the ARSIC, approximately one-third of the service members were Navy or Air Force, who were operationally controlled by their respective services' commanders in Kabul, and not the ARSIC commander. Each service had their own caveats, and was limited to mostly administrative duties on larger FOBs. The exception was the Navy corpsmen and physician's assistants, who performed admirably and saved many lives in incredibly austere conditions. Squashing inter-service rivalry was part of the command sergeant major (CSM's) job description. Additionally, there were U.S. Marines and SOFs active in the West. These elements' coordination and cooperation with the RC or ARSIC was limited. This often led to a conflicted battle space, competing interests, and little C2.

It may be an overused axiom, but in a joint, combined COIN environment, U.S. leaders must truly be diplomats in uniform. When working and negotiating with Afghan civilians, politicians, police, and Army from multiple ISAF nations (whose interests aren't necessarily aligned with yours), all having inter-service frictions, NGOs, and contractors, sometimes the force of personalities is what holds things together. This was especially true in C2 structure of western Afghanistan where our NCOs in particular made relationships at the Soldier level in order to gain the needed cooperation to carry out the mission.

Lack of U.S. Resources

The ARSIC was severely short on manpower and its authorized strength to accomplish its mission. This was felt in all aspects from the staff sections to the ETTs and PMTs. Resourcing had to be constantly re-missioned in order to make minimum manning requirements. Police or Army units were “uncovered” in order to re-mission resources, not because of any advancement by the Afghans. U.S. forces were lucky to have a heavy squad-sized element on combat patrols with their ANSF counterparts in incredibly remote and isolated areas. There were no Joint Terminal Air Controllers (JTACs), let alone Joint Forward Observers. In the beginning of 2008, it took up to six hours to get U.S. casualties to a Level II hospital. U.S. forces made due with very limited resources time, and time again, and they accomplished the mission despite overwhelming odds and without support.

A major impediment was the forced dependence on ISAF for combat multipliers, including close combat support attack helicopters, casualty assistance (CAS), medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), and rotary and fixed wing assets for logistical support and mobility. They had very limited blade hours and aircraft to support a very large dispersed and isolated battle space.

Post Script

Since leaving Afghanistan in January 2008, many positive shifts have occurred, including a U.S. troop surge, a new U.S. commander, restructuring of the C2 of U.S. and ISAF forces, and the appointment of a special Afghanistan Envoy. The drawdown in Iraq has enabled a surge of U.S. troops to Afghanistan and the re-mission of critical U.S. resources.

U.S. service members deserve to have reliable, timely MEDEVAC. In the future, there needs to be a standard by military planners that a U.S. service member can get to a Level II hospital within two to three hours by MEDEVAC. U.S. MEDEVAC assets have recently been deployed in western Afghanistan and will no doubt save many lives. .

The mobile training team/embedded training team concept has recently

gone away, as have ARSIC-West and CJTF Phoenix. Traditionally task-organized units are replacing them. Mentoring and partnering missions need to be left to conventionally task-organized units with clear lines of C2 and access to U.S. force multipliers. MTTs and ETTs made of individual service members piecemealed together and given a “shake and bake” military adviser training program may have worked in the past as a holding action in Afghanistan, but it is not an effective strategy to be counted on in the future.

The incredible progress made in bringing security to western Afghanistan in 2008, despite huge odds, is a great credit to U.S. service members who served there. Underequipped, undermanned, and given a near impossible mission in one of the most remote and austere places on earth, they proved once again that the U.S. service members will always put mission first and never accept defeat.

Supplying a number of forward operating bases with ammunition, food, water, and other need resources, in a nation with few good roads, is a major challenge. When the Taliban ambushes these convoys with RPGs and small arms fire, the challenge becomes even greater. 1SG Tramell Finch defines the “low cost, low altitude” tactics developed by his unit to overcome the problem.

Low Cost, Low Altitude

1SG Tramell Finch

OEF, Afghanistan, 2008

1SG, B Company, 782nd MSB

I was selected by the command sergeant major (CSM) of the 782nd Main Support Battalion, to become the first sergeant (1SG) of Bravo Company 782nd Main Support Battalion. My duties as a 1SG for the Field Maintenance Company within the 4th Brigade Combat Team were supporting the 18-hour, no-notice strategic response capability of the 82nd Airborne Division.

On December 18, 2007, our battalion received notice that we were on orders to deploy to Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Our mission was to supply logistics from Bagram Airfield (BAF) all the way to the southern portion of Afghanistan to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Salerno. Once our battalion received this mission, the battalion commander brought the entire leadership in to discuss our mission. During this time a lot of the leaders questioned our higher headquarters on the mission. The staff came together to do a mission analysis to figure out how the brigade was going to accomplish this mission; the vehicles they railroaded over here were too large to fit on the rough and narrow rugged terrain roads.

All of the 1SGs had to do a “troop to task” to ensure this mission could happen. We had to ensure that there were enough paratroopers in the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 88M (truck drivers) to ride in each vehicle. We were under strength in 88M, and the mission couldn’t be executed. We had to come up with a driver’s training class to cross train the 11B (infantry) that are attached to our battalion as truck drivers. The battalion commander of the infantry battalion didn’t like this concept.

We put together a convoy of 10 vehicles, which contained a driver, assistant driver and a gunner. All vehicles were equipped with the Duke System; a jamming device which intercepts any improvised explosive devices (IEDs) the convoy may encounter.

The convoy commander had to ensure we had all of the right equipment and assigned paratroopers; if we didn't have the right numbers we couldn't conduct the mission. Once the leadership validated our numbers, we went straight into the training phase, which included the pre-combat checks.

The pre-combat checks were to ensure that all vehicles were equipped with the right gear for the mission. After completion of our checks, we went straight into troop leading procedures. The procedures were the initial receipt of our mission from higher headquarters. Our convoy commander and key leaders received the battalion mission. Once we received the mission, we provided higher headquarters with our capabilities. All six convoy commanders issued their warning order. In that warning order we made sure that we coordinated for support along the dangerous routes just in case our convoy encountered an IED. Completion of the warning order from the convoy commander ensured that all paratroopers in the convoy knew the rules of engagement on the battlefield.

We were briefed that we would leave BAF at 0400 en route to the different FOBs along our supply routes to FOB Salerno. When our convoy was traveling on our supply route, we encountered some Taliban fighters who had shot rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) at us. In our convoy we were carrying ammunition, food, water, and a container with AK-47s to FOB Kushman. The RPGs hit the truck that was carrying the ammo but it bounced off the truck and did not damage it. However, the vehicle that was carrying the AK-47s was destroyed.

The reason why we were getting hit so much was that the Taliban fighters knew when we were leaving; while we were en route, the convoy commander changed the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), and the attacks didn't happen as often. That is how we resolved our problem. When traveling down these supply routes every day, the leadership found out we were putting our paratroopers at risk. Therefore, we had to come up with another way to supply logistics to the FOBs across the area of operations.

The jumpmaster came up with a way to supply logistics on the battlefield with minimal casualties. The name of this system is called Low Cost, Low Altitude (LCLA). The type of aircraft that was used can carry a six-door bundle and a jumpmaster team. The training we conducted before we were able to employ this system was a lot of rigging classes. We also had to identify all jumpmasters within 782nd Main Support Battalion. All of our jumpmasters had to know how to rig a door bundle and make sure that you have the right weight and height of the door bundle. It was very important that you rig the correct weight, because if didn't, you would not be able to put the door bundle onto the aircraft.

The validation process ensured proper exit of a door bundle using the jumpmaster team. We had to fly across the drop zone ensuring that the door bundle was hooked up to the anchor line cable, inspect the load, and give the 30 seconds time warning. The jumpmaster team and I had to push the bundle out. When we were going through our training the jumpmasters discovered it was too hard to push the door bundles out of the aircraft, so we had to develop a roller system to make it easier to push them out.

Sergeant Wencil, an NCO in charge of the welding section, did a great job developing this roller system. My unit's primary objective was to provide logistics support using a system that we developed by establishing and rigging small loads consisting of small arms to support units without any operational pause.

We delivered more than 800,000 pounds of supplies of all classes to 21 drop zones and FOBs in Regional Commands (RCs) East and South, using the LCLA delivery system. We dropped in excess of 1,000 bundles, all essential to the sustainment of both isolated garrisons and patrols on the move. We provided small airdrops for resupply operations and provided flexibility to maneuver commanders to conduct extended operations outside of their FOBs. By achieving drop-accuracy measured in mere meters from the marked point of impact on the drop zone, and often inside of the defense works of the FOBs, our LCLA team lessened the exposure of recovery teams to enemy observation and fire; therefore, increasing survivability and maintaining constant pressure on anti-coalition militias. LCLA was not a small task, as the pilots were executing evasive maneuvers to conceal their approach to the drop zone at low level and reacting to small arms fire on their egress can be very dangerous.

On one occasion our jumpmaster team had the duty to do a resupply mission using LCLA for Fox Company, 1st of 508th Infantry Battalion. Once the team exited the door bundle, we noticed that our aircraft got hit. The bells were going off in the aircraft that let the jumpmaster team know to be prepared for an emergency landing. Once the pilots landed safely, the crew had to get out and pull security around the aircraft until the quick reaction force (QRF) came.

It took about an hour before the QRF arrived at our location. When they arrived, they made sure that all of the crew was safely out of the aircraft. I was responsible for the pilot, the co-pilot, and three paratroopers.

The commanding general and the division CSM of the 82nd Airborne Division came down to FOB Salerno to award our jumpmaster team the Air Medal for our performance while conducting LCLA duties in combat. The NCOs performed well. It was time for our brigade to begin to transit out

of theater. Our brigade commander called the primary staff in to talk about accountability of equipment. His instructions were that there would not be any units leaving theater without accounting for all of their hand-receipted equipment. Once the process began, the brigade staff found four battalions were missing a large amount of equipment. The command initiated a report of survey on the equipment.

The company commanders who were missing the equipment had to have an office call with the brigade commander to find out if there was a monthly inventory being conducted. The guidance the brigade commander gave was that if you have equipment, ensure you get all unaccounted equipment to your S-4s so the equipment can be logged on a shortage annex, so it can be ordered.

All missing equipment was validated by the brigade S-4; now it was time to conduct a smooth transfer of authority to the 101st Air Assault Division. What I took away from this deployment was to always do a 10-percent inventory of your equipment each month and always have an open mind to learn.

As HHC, First Sergeant, 1SG Steven Odom performed all the normal duties of a first sergeant and had added responsibilities. These included serving as the mayor of Camp Albert, managing the housing for 213 Soldiers, supervising the dining facilities and all food service personnel, and supervising 79 local nationals employed by the Task Force. He relied on the professionalism of his NCOs to succeed.

A First Sergeant at Camp Albert

1SG Steven D. Odom

Afghanistan, 12/24/2006-02/18/2008

1SG, HHC 10th Combat Aviation Brigade

Pre-Deployment Training

Upon receipt of our mission, my commander and I began to plan our pre-deployment training. Pre-deployment training consists of small arms ranges, crew-served weapons ranges, convoy training, as well as convoy live fires. Prior to all small arms ranges, all Soldiers were cycled through the Engagement Skills Trainer. This served as a great asset in preparation for small arms ranges. We also used the virtual convoy trainer to enhance all Soldiers' exposure to convoy operations.

During the pre-deployment phase we were also responsible for conducting Soldier Readiness Processing to ensure our Soldiers' medical and personal issues were in order. During readiness processing, Soldiers updated their wills, powers of attorney, and their Service Member's Group Life Insurance and Record of Emergency Data (DD-93). All Soldiers received vaccinations and any other medical readiness requirements. It was the responsibility of the command to ensure that all Soldiers had properly prepared their families for the hardship of a long separation. The Family Readiness Group plays an important role in a successful deployment. Without their support, Soldiers are unable to focus on their mission.

Upon completion of pre-deployment training all Soldiers should be one 100 percent qualified to deploy downrange. Soldiers are the most valuable asset the Army has. It is our job as leaders to ensure they are prepared to perform their duties without any distractions. Once all pre-deployment training was accomplished, Soldiers were given the opportunity to take block leave and prepare for the deployment.

Deployment

On December 24, 2006, the Advanced Echelon (ADVON) began our trip to Bagram, Afghanistan. It took about three days to complete our journey. When

we arrived, the ground was covered with snow and ice, and it was about 14 degrees below zero. The 10th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) was eagerly awaiting our arrival. The 26 personnel on the ADVON all began to do their battle handover in preparation for a Transfer of Authority (TOA). As the headquarters, headquarters company first sergeant (HHC 1SG), it was my duty to assume responsibility as the 1SG of Camp Albert. I began my battle handover with 1SG Addington of HHC 10th CAB. Serving as the 1SG of Camp Albert consisted of many additional duties. First was the responsibility of managing all housing within the camp. Second was the supervision of 79 local nationals that were employed by the task force (TF) to conduct numerous sanitation and construction projects throughout the camp. It was also the responsibility of the HHC 10th CAB 1SG to oversee the dining facility operations. All food service personnel were assigned to a HHC for the duration of the deployment.

On January 6, 2007, my commander and the remainder of the main body arrived. The TOA was completed on January 8, 2007, and we began to conduct operations. TF Pegasus assumed command of all aviation assets within the theater.

The biggest challenge I faced while serving as the 1SG of Camp Albert was the shortage of living space available. 10th CAB's TF consisted of 213 Soldiers, less than TF Pegasus. It was my responsibility to oversee the conversion of all b-huts to expand the camp capacity to accommodate all TF Soldiers. With the assistance of the local nationals employed by our TF, this mission was accomplished in four days. The camp capacity was at 1,411 beds, allowing all Soldiers a private living space.

In addition to being responsible for housing, I was also responsible for the management and operation of Pegasus Gym. The gym was located at Camp Albert and was a 24-hour operation. Soldiers were supplied from throughout the TF, and my unit was responsible to oversee the operation. Throughout our 14 months, we completely remodeled the building and upgraded all the gym equipment to Hammer Strength and Nautalist.

My commander and I were also responsible for the normal operations within our company such as S-1 Administrative Section, S-2 Security and Intelligence Section, S-3 Operations Section, S-4 Logistics Section, S-6 Communications and Automations Section, Public Affairs Section, Retention, Equal Opportunity (EO) Section, and Legal. All staff sections assigned to my company were incredible. The NCOs and officers in charge of all our sections were the most professional I've had the privilege of serving within my 17 years of service.

All sections assigned to our company had different responsibilities, none more important than the other, but all necessary to accomplish our wartime mis-

sion. The S-1 section was responsible for processing Personnel Status Reports daily. Additionally, their duties included processing awards, NCO Evaluation Reports, and Officer Evaluation Reports. They were also responsible for processing any administrative requests received within our TF. The S-2 section was responsible for all intelligence gathering and dissemination throughout the TF. The S-2 was also responsible for all security issues ranging from clearances to TOC badges and anything in between. The S-3 Operations Section consisted of many different subsections and was the largest section in my company with the largest mission. They were responsible for all plans and orders, tasking, airspace deconfliction, fire support, medical operations, chemical biological radiological nuclear, and battle field management. S-4 was responsible for command supply discipline, facilities, logistical support, and property management. The S-6 section was responsible for all communications and automation equipment assigned to headquarters. They were also responsible for the Joint Network Node and Command Post Node equipment. The public affairs section, Equal Opportunity section, retention section and the legal offices duties were all self-explanatory, and even though they were not primary staff, their roles in the deployment were just as important.

As the HHC ISG, another responsibility my job entailed was to develop and supervise a Quick Reactionary Force (QRF). The QRF was responsible for the protection of more than 1,400 personnel and millions of dollars worth of equipment. The QRF would serve as the security element until all TF units could assume their assigned areas of responsibility. An additional task for the QRF was to clear 151 buildings in response to any indirect or direct fire incidents, ensuring all personnel moved to the safety of bunkers.

HHC CAB was also responsible for the operation of the best dining facility on Bagram Airfield (BAF). All 54 food service specialists assigned to the brigade were attached to my company for the deployment. Our dining facility was the only Soldier-run and maintained dining facility on BAF. It received recognition numerous times for the high quality of rations prepared by the Soldiers assigned. The dining facility contributed directly to the high morale within our TF.

Once battle rhythms were established, all sections conducted sustainment operations throughout the remainder of the deployment. Our mission as an aviation TF in Afghanistan varied from day to day. Our battalions were responsible for reconnaissance operations, route security, resupply routes, air assault missions, and deliberate operations. All missions were successfully conducted and resulted in an overall successful deployment to and from theater.

On January 4, 2008, the first elements of 101st CAB's ADVON arrived in Bagram. We began to prepare our equipment for redeployment and develop a

plan for battle handovers. The TOA to 101st CAB was January 18, 2008. On or about January 20, the first main body began its redeployment. The redeployment route was from BAF to Manas with a three-day layover and then on to Fort Bragg, N.C..

Post-Deployment

The post-deployment process began with a Soldier reception at Fort Bragg. Upon arriving at Bragg, Soldiers received a briefing and a reception ceremony. After the reception ceremony was complete, the Soldiers turned in all sensitive items and were released for 72 hours. Upon their return, the Soldiers reported for duty and began all post-deployment requirements to include reception and reintegration training, financial settlements, and numerous briefings from different support agencies. The reception and reintegration process is designed to be completed within a 10-day period. Upon completion of reception and reintegration, the Soldiers were put on block leave for a period of 15-to-30 days. Once the block leave was over the inventory and reset of all equipment began.

Conclusion

Serving as the 1SG of HHC 82nd CAB in OEF was the highlight of my career. I was always told that there was no better job in the Army than to be a 1SG. I honestly believe that my experiences while serving in Afghanistan with my company taught me more than the experiences of my entire career combined. There were many lessons learned to take away from my deployment. The most important would have to be the makeup of my ADVON. Putting the right people on the ground first is of the upmost importance.

MSG Aaron Miller, Jr., became an Individual Augmentee to a Joint Task Force. These assignments are commonplace in today's Army, especially when the Army seeks to assist the Afghan National Army. As MSG Miller discovered, some things like acronyms came easy. Other things stunned him at first, like working with other allied services to develop courses for the Afghan National Army.

Serving as an Individual Augmentee

MSG Aaron Miller, Jr.

Kabul Military Training Center, Afghanistan 2008-2009

Before I get into the deployment itself, I want to discuss the events leading up to the deployment such as the post preparation and training. First of all, Individual Augmentees (IAs) are tasked through their battalion, which in turn are tasked from brigade or Post. IAs are used to backfill positions within Joint Task Forces (JTFs) or multinational forces. Battalion then looks for personnel who meet the prerequisites and who are available to fill the requirements. Once identified as a possible candidate to fill the position, IAs are then formally contacted through AKO of the upcoming assignment and the requirements.

After receiving the tasking, I immediately started doing my research into what was needed in order to prepare for the assignment. The very first thing that I realized was that this assignment required a Top Secret clearance, which meant I would have to contact the brigade security officer to start the investigation process. This was accomplished fairly easily through the help of the brigade and post security officers and electronic questionnaires for investigations processing, which allows you to complete the questionnaire online, saving time and resources.

The next step was to schedule an appointment to attend the Contiguous United States Replacement Center (CRC) in Fort Benning, GA. The CRC serves two purposes: first to certify deploying service members and civilians in basic areas such as espionage, basic infantry movement techniques, weapons issue and qualification, first aid, and medical screenings. CRC is a weeklong process. It starts on Sunday and culminates on Friday with the rotational flight out to Kuwait. The entire process seemed much easier than previous deployments because of the fact most of the training is online, and I was alone without any Soldiers or additional equipment to worry about. I just had my weapon and the items I was issued. I have to admit, although, this seemed easier; it also seemed wrong. As an NCO you are dedicated to leading and taking care of Soldiers, so in a way I felt alone and uncomfortable without them.

I began to miss the trust and bonds you develop between yourself and your subordinates during pre-deployment training. At times, I longed for the ability to look left and right and know that the people there had my back, and that they are trained in their basic warrior tasks and drills.

As we loaded the plane, I began to notice the fact that there were actually more civilians than Soldiers on the plane, some armed with weapons, but mostly armed with whatever skill sets they were hired for. The doors closed and the plane began the 13-hour journey to Kuwait. I wondered what was in store for me over the next year. After stops in Maine and Germany, we finally arrived in Kuwait.

Exiting the plane, I quickly realized this deployment would not be what I imagined. We were quickly escorted to awaiting buses that took us from the airport to Ali Al- Salem Logistical Staging Area where we would be in-processed into theater. Upon arriving Ali Al-Salem, we were broken down into two groups: Iraq and Afghanistan. We received some short briefings concerning the “do’s and don’ts,” while processing through the sustainment area.

We were assigned tents and told to be back at the main headquarters tent at 0600 for accountability and to register for a Space A flight into Afghanistan. I unfortunately repeated this process over the next four days because I was constantly bumped from flights due to flight priorities for Soldiers returning from mid-tour leave or from flights being cancelled. After four days I was finally manifested for a flight to Bagram Airfield (BAF), Afghanistan.

Travel from Kuwait to Afghanistan was about four hours by C-17. Upon arrival we were met by the CSTC-Afghanistan liaison who informed those of us going to Camp Eggers that transportation would not be available for two days. Most of the next two days I spent sleeping and working out trying to get acclimated to the extreme heat and altitude.

Finally, the day arrived that I view as the start of one of the most unique experiences of my military career. When the convoy arrived, we were quickly reminded that we are going into a combat zone. As the convoy commander began to brief I could not help but notice that the members of his convoy team were from all different branches of the military: Soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. “What had I gotten myself in to?” I asked myself not knowing that this was just the beginning of what was to become my first Joint Operations experience. As we traveled along the main supply route (MSR), I have to admit I was skeptical about the security of the convoy because it was in the hands of such a diverse group. However, it became more

and more evident to me this was how we were fighting. Even more surprising is that I started to feel quite comfortable by the time we arrived at Camp Eggers.

Camp Eggers was a small compound comprised of safe houses surrounded by a wall. We were immediately rushed to the dining facility where they saved some food for us; it was late and they had already closed. After eating, we were told to report to the J-1 to start in processing. "The J-1?" I thought. "What in the world is the J-1?" I quickly realized that it was the same as the S-1 or personnel administration center that I was accustomed to. Again, I had fallen victim to the Joint Operations concept. After completing what seemed like miles of paperwork, we were assigned temporary rooms and told to be back at 0900 the next morning to start in-processing. As I began to leave, I was stopped by the noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC); she told me that the command sergeant major (CSM) wanted her to inform him when I arrived in order to interview me for a new position.

After waiting for what seemed hours, finally the time came to see the CSM. After some formal greetings, he began to explain the role and mission of the unit. He said CSTC-A is a joint task force (JTF) commanded by an Army two-star general. However, the staff is comprised of members from each branch of the U.S. Armed Services as well as members from the Coalition Forces. The primary mission is to advise, train, and mentor the Afghan national Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) through professional military education and force development. This is done by tying each section with a counterpart from the Afghan Army. For example, the G-1 would mentor the Afghan G-1 or its equivalent. In some cases this is done by partnering Afghan Soldiers with civilian counterparts who specialize in particular areas.

Although this sounded like a recipe for disaster, it actually functioned quite efficiently. Every office is comprised of combined services and has a civilian counterpart, which provides continuity because of the high turnover rate of service members, who are normally on six- to 12-month rotations. Another dynamic piece of the organization was, besides the security forces element, the entire command is made up of IAs, to include the coalition counterparts. This requires the individual IA to be not only knowledgeable in his or her particular field but also flexible enough to perform a variety of roles.

As the CSTC-A CSM, one of his primary missions was the mentoring the Afghan Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). He said in order to help in that development process he wanted to stand up two new Senior NCO Development Courses (first sergeants and sergeants major). He informed me that he had already reviewed my Enlisted Record Brief in an effort to deter-

mine if I was the right person for the job. At the end of our conversation, he confirmed my selection and told me to spend the next couple of days getting settled and learning my way around.

I walked away with my first lesson on being an IA—be flexible. Besides, look at me, I spent my entire career as an infantryman and now I'm being tasked with standing up new courses for the Afghan Army. As I stated earlier, my primary mission was to develop ISG and SGM courses for the Afghan Army. This would be a monumental task because it would be the framework for the ANA noncommissioned officer education system (NCOES), a huge step in the development of the ANA NCO Corps. This course would change the way officers viewed the NCOs and the roles they play throughout the ANA. At this point all I had was the mission and the will to make it happen, no points of instruction, no classrooms, just make it happen.

I was a bit stunned by the amount of trust and responsibility the CSM had given me, and the amount of trust the commander had placed in the hands of the CSM. With my primary source of advice and information coming from the CSTC-A Development sergeant major (SGM), we set out to design and build the ANA Sergeants Major Course.

We began by using the Systems Approach to Training . The next step was to get feedback from the NCOs embedded out in the field as to what the ANA SGMs needed in order to perform their duties. Most of the feedback we received related to basic tasks, map reading, first aid, safety and weapons. All of these things sounded crazy at the SGM level, but that was my first lesson in how culture plays a part in the mission. The ANA was not at the same level of proficiency as our Army nor did they think or fight the same. Another key factor was literacy and experience, with the exception of the SMA most only had about two to five years of service, and what we determined was a level one education. In addition, there were no formal NCOES in place to train and educate them at the junior level. We determined that input from Afghan leadership would be critical in order to design the courses to meet the demands of the ANA. This was one of the biggest challenges throughout the development process; I referred to it as thinking outside the box. As NCOs, we are taught doctrine and we teach that doctrine to our Soldiers, which becomes embedded in us, so much so that when we are placed in a situation such as this, it becomes difficult for us to think of any other way to accomplish the mission.

This sometimes caused problems between the advisors. To resolve these problems, we met weekly to discuss any issues or concerns. These meetings included all of the key players: the course developers; the British advisors because they were in charge of the junior level courses like team leader, squad leader and

platoon sergeant; Military Professional Resource Inc., because they mentored the officers and taught the Officers Pre-Command and Battle Staff Courses; and of course, the Afghan SMA. We determined that the curriculum needed to train senior NCOs on duties and responsibilities. It also needed to contain the history of the ANA, and the task and purpose of each branch, like the defense, justice and interior ministries and how they affect each other. We also wanted to give him a foundation of knowledge in key basic tasks. In addition to this curriculum, we added 180 hours of literacy training in English, writing, basic computer operations, and math.

Once this was complete, the next task was to create the learning environment. We began to write the points of instruction and lesson plans. This was a difficult process because of the difference in language translation. To aid in the process, we incorporated Afghan NCOs into our team to translate the material, and to serve as the cadre for the course.

In the end, we were able to give the ANA new Senior NCO Development Courses that were functional and tailored to grow with the NCO Corps. With the help of some outstanding NCOs and former NCOs we were able to stand up the academy, which ran its first pilot course in June 2009.

The lessons I learned from this deployment far outweigh anything I had ever done in my military career. I learned that in order to be successful in today's fight; it was critical to think outside of the box. The doctrine that worked in one situation may not work for another. I also learned that culture plays an important role in the planning process. You cannot force your ideas on other nations; instead, incorporate their ideas and values into every aspect of the planning process. This will not only help in the mentoring process, it will also give them a sense of ownership. Training has to be adaptive and creative, and not always rely on what worked before or what you think is right. Put personal differences aside and focus on the greater good of the mission. Incorporate all of the players in the planning process; this will ensure each piece has a buy-in, and will prevent ideas and thoughts from being overlooked, which will pay off when it comes to asking for support.

Overall, this was a great mission. It was my first experience working in a JTF, but it was one of my greatest accomplishments. This deployment taught me that the Army no longer fights one dimensionally but as a multinational operation that utilizes every asset to accomplish the mission. It has also broadened my knowledge of the sister services and what each one of them brings to the fight.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the need to build strong and able national security forces is viewed as a key measure of the success of American efforts. Therefore, the creation of Embedded Training Teams to teach Afghan National Security Forces has become critical to the entire war effort. SGM Lee Baleme served in Iraq in a similar role. When he received orders to Afghanistan, he understood fully that his efforts were a large part of creating a stable Afghanistan.

Validation Team Training and the Counterinsurgency

**SGM Lee C. Baleme
09/05/2008 – 09/27/2008**

Personal Background

My first real experience with counterinsurgency (COIN) started in 2003. I was deployed with the 1st Squadron, 10th U.S. Cavalry in Iraq as a first sergeant (1SG) with Bravo Company. However, having served predominately as a light or airborne Soldier throughout my career, the learning curve was high. I did gain some experience as I was assigned to 1/10 Cavalry a year or so earlier than this deployment. Though I never studied COIN prior to 2003, my commanders had. We conducted security operations while getting to know the people first. Then, we began to conduct quick-fix projects as we started to develop border patrol and police programs while recruiting for those programs in the two cities and villages in our footprint. Following that, we began the training for the above programs while focusing on infrastructure development and repair. I personally oversaw the development of many schools, a courthouse, police station, fire station, bank, border patrol stations and lookouts, and a few other projects. We held city and village council meetings with the Sunni and Shia Arab local leaders, along with the Kurdish leaders. We barely began to build their capacity to govern, manage, build, and educate when we were removed from the region.

Following my promotion to sergeant major (SGM) in November 2007, I was stationed in Afghanistan as an embedded training team (ETT) member. I, along with 46 others, were selected to be part of the Validation Training Team (VTT), whose purpose was to assist regional commanders in Afghanistan with the facilitation of formal evaluations of the Afghan National Army (ANA) for the submission of those findings to higher headquarters. I served on the team that covered down on the ANA command and doctrinal side of the Afghan Ministry of Defense. As our teams' efforts were slowing due to Afghan bureaucracy, I took on the role of COIN Academy SGM to assist in the development of the academy. I taught week-long courses in strategic and operational COIN to small

groups of all ISAF, along with Afghan security forces. My focus was the Central Region, in and around Kabul AO. I taught at the Kabul Military Academy, the ANP Headquarters, as well as the ANA version of the Officer Candidate School. I continued to assist the VTT on local and regional area evaluations when needed.

Unit and Organizational Background

The VTT is a select group of professional Soldiers made up of staff personnel from staff sergeant (SSG) to SGM and from captain (CPT) to colonel (COL). The VTT mission is to embed with local ETTs and facilitate both the formal and informal evaluation and assessment of the ANA. The team collects, analyzes, packages, and reports data through the CSTC-A to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The data is gained by being embedded on the ground during real-world missions conducted solely by the ANA. The data collected is based on U.S. and ANA doctrine.

Operation and Operational Situation

The request came from the 201st ANA Corps ETT commander to conduct a commander and staff assessment and evaluation of the 2nd Brigade ANA commander and his staff. We were also to visit subordinate ANA Kandaks and Afghan battalions to perform assessments as we deemed necessary. The team consisted of SGM Martin Roy, the team chief; MSG Marc Jenson; SSG Albert Hannum; our interpreter, Waheed; and myself. We were assigned one up-armored Humvee with a 50-caliber machine gun, plenty of ammunition to support an hour or so of heavy firefighting for all weapons, and plenty of water and chow.

Preparation for the Trip

Upon notification of the trip, the team rallied on Camp Phoenix in Kabul to put our plan together. The plan was very flexible as far as the timeline so we had plenty of room for any issues that would arise. We gathered our validation training team (VTT)-required assessments and validation paperwork, computers with digital copies of that paperwork, all the requisite doctrinal references, and established a timeline for our movement. We were to depart Camp Phoenix on September 5, 2008, to begin our movement toward Jalalabad.

In addition to the VTT assessment, I was to conduct a COIN assessment of the areas and commands I visited. This was a limited assessment that answered some very basic questions. My mission upon returning to the COIN training center was to develop a more comprehensive list of questions to determine the validity and effectiveness of COIN operations in that particular AO. I sat with the Counterinsurgency Training Center-Afghanistan (CTC-A) director and assistant director, COL John Agoglia and LTC Trent Scott (Australia), to capture their

directives and end state of this mission. I'm ready to go!

The Initial Movement

SSG Hannum and I both lived on a small compound, Camp Julien, made up of 24 people on the southwest side of Kabul. This is the location of the CTC located on the Darulaman Afghan Army Base, near the old kings' and queens' palaces. A convoy was assembled on September 4 to move SSG Hannum and me to Camp Phoenix, located on the eastern side of Kabul. Once we arrived and loaded our gear on our Humvee, we convoyed with the CTC-A convoy to Camp Blackhorse, further on the eastern side of Kabul, to spend the night. Once there we linked up with the 2nd ANA brigade ETT logistics element to stage for the following morning. At approximately 0800 on September 5, we began our convoy east on the main road toward Jalalabad. Along the way we had a logistics stopover on the lower side of the Sarobi Dam where a small group of ETT Soldiers have a combat outpost (COP) established. After lunch we fueled our vehicles and made our way, stopping about halfway to inspect and assess an area of a brand new COP, COP China, along the main highway. We arrived in Jalalabad at about 1830 that same evening, experiencing no enemy contact. Our resting place was Camp Hughie.

Getting to and Establishing Operations in Jalalabad

We started our in-processing by reporting to the camp "mayor's" office run by the U.S. Navy. Yes, that's right...the U.S. Navy! A Lieutenant Commander and a Senior Chief Petty Officer were in charge of the camp security, logistics, housing, and operations all together, and they performed their mission very well. They were very organized.

Camp Hughie is the home to a good number of logistics Soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, most of which were assigned either directly to the ETT or the brigade staff and support for the ETT, which is assigned to the 2nd Brigade ANA headquarters. 2nd Brigade headquarters is located just outside the Camp Hughie compound within walking distance, all on a secure compound. The following morning after breakfast we proceeded to the ANA brigade headquarters to introduce ourselves to both the ETT staff and then to the ANA command and staff. My impression of the ANA Brigade Commander mentor, Marine LTC Terlizzi, was that they were well in control of the staff effort to support the 2nd ANA Brigade and its operations in their AO. Their AO was huge! The ANA Brigade CSM was being mentored by two U.S. Army CSMs, both of whom were National Guard and doing very well. As I understand it, if you are to be a Kandak, brigade, corps, or higher CSM, you had to be able to speak some English and have had some formal schooling.

From September 7 to September 12, we painstakingly conducted our formal

interviews of the entire ANA 2nd Brigade command and staff, and after talking at length with the ETT staff, we came to some very disturbing conclusions. The most disturbing was that the ANA Brigade Commander was not the professional commander some thought. Nonetheless, the information we gathered from him and the staff was discussed directly with the ETT team leader, LTC Terlizzi, who already suspected as much and was happy for the outside observation. We consolidated our initial assessment and prepared for another trip out to Asadabad to visit the 1st Kandak in their AO. We would return to this headquarters to ask a few more questions that came up from members of higher commands, as to the conduct of said ANA commander.

The results of that assessment would be rolled up into the overall brigade assessment and dispatched directly to the ANA 201st Corps ETT Commander and the VTT team leader. While there in Jalalabad, we had the opportunity to visit the U.S. airfield in Jalalabad as well as one of the key meeting places for the missing Osama Bin Laden.

Movement to and Settling in Asadabad

The brigade ETT team leader and CSM were eager to get out to the Asadabad area of operations (AO). We convoyed with them on September 13 to Camp Fiaz, right on the mouth of the Pech and Kunar Rivers and Pech Valley—a beautiful and dangerous place often referred to as “Enemy Central.” Camp Fiaz is the log base for maintenance and medical support for the ANA. Of course, there were U.S. personnel there too. It was the only location away from Kabul at that time, which had dental service for ANA. Camp Fiaz rests in the heart of Asadabad in the Kunar Province, one of the provinces bordering the country of Pakistan. We were acquainted with the site and refueled at another undisclosed U.S. location, and moved onto our final eastern destination, Camp Joyce. Camp Joyce is the home for the 2nd Brigade, 1st ANA Kandak minus. This meant that one of the Kandak’s companies if forward deployed. And they were! An ANA company was forward deployed with a platoon from D Company 1/26 Infantry, who was also stationed there at Camp Joyce. D Company secured the FOB and partnered with the 1st Kandak in planning and conducting missions in their AO.

We met with the ANA Kandak commander, CSM, and their staff and were quite impressed with their knowledge of COIN and their conduct of commanding and operating in that AO. The ANA commander was by far the best Afghan commander I met throughout my tenure in Afghanistan. We sat through a few of his meetings and witnessed a few formations where he demonstrated that he truly cared for the Soldiers and was a competent infantry commander. We also met with the Delta Company commander, CPT David and his 1SG.

I spent just short of a week with Delta Company 1/26 Infantry, from Sep-

tember 13 to September 17, during which I developed a good rapport with CPT Davis and his 1SG. Their unit was collocated with the 1st Kandak ETT there on the Forward Operating Base (FOB). I found a mutually supportive professional working relationship between these two elements and the ANA Kandak. CPT Davis made a great effort to conduct COIN operations but had been more engaged in kinetic operations on a daily basis. His unit was separated by some distance, as two platoons and another platoon occupy their own separate COPs. CPT Davis was educated in COIN doctrine and wanted to be more methodical in his execution. The unit's mission was to seek out individuals through company-sized groups of insurgent fighters within his vast AO, and they were very busy doing just that.

Occasionally, he had the opportunity to conduct information operations and humanitarian assistance operations to build rapport and gather intelligence; he had been mildly successful. Mildly successful meaning the conduct of these missions was not bringing in any great information to produce intelligence to conduct operations.

CPT Davis also had the mission to watch over the Afghan Border Patrol (ABP) in his AO. In doing so, he discovered there was a border dispute between the ABP and the Pakistani Frontier Corps. A few attempts to bring the situation to a close failed, so it was decided that he and the S-3 from the 1-26 Infantry, accompanied by me and a few others to provide security, would address this issue personally at the border. The location was the Afghan-Pakistan border crossing at Nawa Pass. While there, the ABP and the Pakistani military commanders got together with the 1/226th Infantry S-3 and CPT Davis and surveyed the site in question. Once finished, they agreed to a line on the ground to where they could each erect their border patrol stations without conflict. After the weather cleared a little bit, we all flew back to Camp Joyce and had dinner. During the time we spent at Camp Joyce, we received rockets twice into and around the FOB, totaling five rockets. The rockets came from a long distance away in the mountains near the border of Pakistan. No injuries, luckily!

The realization hit me, 1st Kandak was much further along in their developmental process than most others due to their eagerness to perform well, along with the quality mentorship provided by the local ETT. There were three other reasons they were successful in their development: 1) the local Coalition company commander had his unit understand, plan, prepare, and execute combat operations with the ANA/ANP/ABP; 2) it was a hotbed of insurgent and criminal activity, which had become a forcing function to perform; and 3) the Kandak commander had been a commander for about five years.

Following our interviews with the Kandak commander, his staff, and two of

his commanders, we compiled a very positive report recommending a very high rating.

The Return to Jalalabad and the Assessment

We moved from Asadabad back to Jalalabad on September 18 to finish our assessment of the brigade headquarters. Upon review, I had made some assessments of my own: ANA Commanders at all levels were aware of the importance of establishing and maintaining relations with the local populace, and providing needed infrastructure upgrades and development. They also understand the need to kill or capture insurgents. There was little organic emphasis on gathering information for intelligence operations. When information was gathered, it was passed to the S-2 where there was no analysis conducted, and what little information was gathered, was passed to the S-3 or the operations officer to determine its value. The majority of the operations in the Kunar Province are kinetic in nature with humanitarian assistance missions used to bolster local ANA/ANP/ABP confidence. ANA SGMs across the board have a limited understanding of COIN doctrine, and are focused primarily on training, FOBs and kinetic operations. They are, to Afghan standards, fairly well educated and maintain a very good rapport with their commanders. ANA SGTs take orders from senior officers and make good attempts at taking responsibility in light of the fact that their execution is neither wholly accepted and appreciated nor trusted at all. Regarding the latter, those officers who were trained predominantly by or served under the Soviets, more often than not, do not trust NCOs; they see them as a threat to their position and authority. On the other hand, young, recently trained or recently promoted officers see the value of their presence and have learned to empower their NCOs. SGTs understand little about the conduct of full spectrum of COIN operations, and are purely offensive, and kinetically focused. Soldiers, as a whole, are minions and are sheer executors of higher headquarters' orders.

Returning to Kabul

From September 18 to September 25, we completed our assessment of the brigade headquarters and prepared our equipment for our return back to Camp Julien. On the morning of September 26 we made our way back to Kabul, stopping only to fuel and eat at COP China. Upon our return, we briefed the VTT team chief, COL Baer, on our findings and arranged for our convoy back to Camp Julien. Once back, I reflected on some observations, insights and lessons learned.

1. Coalition forces in the provinces I visited were executing the tasks that commanders directed. The anti-Afghan forces and insurgents occupied only the areas that the ANA and Coalition forces allowed. In most areas in the Kunar province, anti-Afghan/anti-Coalition forces

are struggling to gain, much less maintain, ground – save the high and extremely difficult to traverse terrain.

2. VTT validation at the brigade and Kandak level is a grand opportunity to get the pulse of the unit with respect to COIN operations. The VTT validation and assessment checklists are divided up amongst the assessment crew, and the evaluation gets underway. One has as much time as needed to accomplish the requisite tasks. Once the interviews are complete, the assessment team chief on the ground compiles the data on a master checklist, and a rough final draft is reviewed and critiqued by the VTT assessment team chief and the ETT team chief. If there are discrepancies, they are worked out on the spot and the assessment is finalized. The final assessment is completed and the assessed unit commander is formally briefed by the assessment team and the ETT team chief.
3. After using the VTT assessment and validation checklist on those units, it's apparent that the motive of the assessment is to take a look at the unit as a whole and determine if the unit is capable of very general garrison, logistical and basic military operations within the capability of the ANA. Very, very little of the assessment is dedicated to a COIN mission focus. The checklist subsequently was massaged to reflect the overall conduct of what should be their primary mission, which is to conduct COIN operations, both lethal and non-lethal. I believe their COIN focus could be observed through their commander's mission and intent statement. We may also begin to understand how they're conducting COIN operations through the operations orders written by the S-3 or operations officer. These portholes into the construct of their missions at the planning level will cast the necessary light to make assumptions about the focus of the units' efforts toward COIN operations.
4. In the initial development of the "COIN Interview and Questionnaire" for regional instructors at CTC-A I failed to realize some critical points that must be asked when interviewing both Coalition units and ANSF, for example: "What is the unit's mission and the Commander's intent?" These are prime indicators of the direction the unit commander will take their units with respect to COIN.
5. Make contact with the Human Terrain Team (HTT) in the AOR to gain fidelity of the population and their issues. They are a wealth of knowledge.

6. When I inquired about an ASCOPE (Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, Events) to the different unit commanders and staffs, not one had completed, much less started, a detailed ASCOPE of their respective AO.
7. The push for a better COIN understanding is lacking. From my perspective, many U.S. Army NCOs have never read Field Manual 3-24 (*Tactics in Counterinsurgency*) and have little understanding of the operational environment with respect to COIN doctrine. NCOs across the board from Corporal (CPL) to SGM are still stuck in the Cold War mindset. This mindset allows for NCOs to disengage from the local populace and ignore the very fundamentals of COIN. This is disconcerting. NCOs are the tip of the spear in this type of warfare. It is absolutely imperative that, at the very least, U.S. NCOs are trained during their attendance at our NCOES, other Coalition force NCOs notwithstanding! Then, theater CTCs in both Iraq and Afghanistan must be made available for SGTs and above to gain the regional perspective needed to be successful in their COIN endeavors.

Tactical Human Intelligence (HUMINT) collection teams perform the task of developing and running human intelligence sources and their corresponding networks. Most serve in general support roles; however, others work in direct support roles to assist Commanders with intelligence gathering efforts. HUMINT operations often lead to the discovery of IEDs and the killing or capturing of high value targets.

Intelligence Operations in Afghanistan

CSM Lane B. Wayment

OEF, 02/2008 – 02/2009

CSM, 142nd Military Intelligence Battalion

In the early spring of 2007, our battalion, the 142nd Military Intelligence Battalion, was busily preparing for a two-week long brigade exercise that we were hosting. We had been hearing some rumblings of a possible deployment to Iraq and viewed the exercise as a great way to prepare for what may lie ahead. At the time, I was serving as a company first sergeant (1SG), but knew I was slated to take over the battalion CSM position, so I was keenly interested in the direction the battalion was headed.

It seemed that the rumor mill was going full speed and each week brought a new version of what our mission might be and what the possible timeline was. The speculation brought about a substantial amount of angst among the troops who were already spun up for the exercise. June finally arrived and the exercise began. It turned out to be a great success and helped build the confidence of our Soldiers and their abilities to accomplish specific military intelligence tasks.

The 142nd Military Intelligence Battalion had deployed before at the very beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom and ended up doing an ad hoc mission: serving with the Iraq Survey Group looking for weapons of mass destruction. The nature of that mission did not allow our Soldiers to fully use their military intelligence skills, but rather, were relegated to miscellaneous functions supporting the search for weapons of mass destruction. With this previous deployment experience in the back of everyone's mind one can begin to appreciate the anxiety of the unknown we were facing. The ongoing speculation and rumors only exacerbated the situation.

As July 2007 rolled around, we were finally given the alert we had all been anticipating, but the details of the mission caught us all completely off guard. The more we learned of what we were being asked to do the more excited we became. We weren't going to Iraq after all, but, rather, our destination was Afghanistan to serve under the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) as the military

intelligence battalion for the theater of operations. More specifically, we were going to be attached for administrative control to the 101st Airborne Division's combat aviation brigade, which was calling itself Task Force (TF) Destiny.

This was all good news for us and we began to establish and build relationships with the aviation brigade as well as with the downrange unit we were to replace: the 202nd Military Intelligence Battalion, TF Deuce, and we were hungry for information and details about the mission. I was put into the battalion command sergeant major (CSM) position and established ties with my TF Deuce counterpart. The battalion command element made a trip out to Fort Campbell, KY, to get to know key members of the 101st Airborne Division that we would be directly working with.

The challenge for us at this time was to get so many of our Soldiers into some specialized schools and complete some specific training to prepare them to accomplish the many varied aspects of the mission we were being asked to take over. There were special certifications, for example, to establish and run human intelligence sources beyond the level we were anticipating. Additionally, the mix of skills wasn't entirely what we'd expected. We were very short on 25 Career Management Field series Soldiers to take care of our computer automation and networking tasks. We were also short many of the specific kinds of intelligence analysts we needed, which required many of our current analysts to cross-train into other areas of expertise.

These unexpected requirements placed a great burden on the school system and on our Soldiers who were required to spend extraordinary amounts of time away from their homes and their families just prior to a yearlong deployment. The great Soldiers, NCOs, and families of the battalion handled all this with aplomb and accomplished their training and tasks spectacularly.

We were fortunate to have approximately nine months between the time we received the alert to the time we had to report to our mobilization station. This was a vast improvement over the five days notice we received for our mobilization to Iraq some three and a half years earlier. We were required, and very much desired, to complete as much pre-deployment training as possible to reduce the amount of time we would have to spend at our mobilization station. This pre-deployment training included the warrior tasks and battle drills as well as individual and collective military occupational specialty (MOS) tasks. Increased pre-deployment funding allowed us to accomplish much of this training by setting aside the month prior to our deployment as a home-station training event put on largely by the Special Forces unit at our home state. During this time, we were able to validate a large portion of our pre-deployment training requirements, with the assistance of First Army observers and validating person-

nel. This training also served to greatly build Soldiers' confidence in their abilities, and in the trust and abilities they had in each other.

The mobilization station we reported to for training was Fort Lewis, WA. We went to great lengths to coordinate our arrival and the training we would require, once there. We had heard of reserve component units getting hung up at their mobilization stations for extended periods of time, and having to go through training that wasn't relevant or applicable to their unit's mission. We wanted to make every effort to avoid this same thing happening to us. To accomplish this, we had invited the First Army trainers to attend and validate our pre-mobilization training and coordinated our efforts with Fort Lewis. We had been assured that our training at Fort Lewis would be tailored to our specific needs and that we wouldn't be required to revalidate tasks we had already accomplished at home station. Regrettably, this didn't turn out to be the case at all. Despite our best efforts it seemed that Fort Lewis and First Army were determined to put us into this cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all program to train us to deploy to Afghanistan. We were astonished to find that our home station pre-mobilization training was largely dismissed. Additionally, the training seemed to be very Iraq-centric, with little thought to the fact there are vast differences between the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We were baffled and dismayed.

As part of the command team, we tried diligently to put a positive spin on our training at Fort Lewis. We shared our command philosophy with each company in the battalion and emphasized the value of looking for win-win solutions to every problem. We looked for the positive and the value added to our abilities because of our Fort Lewis training. We also maintained, during this time, a close relationship with TF Deuce and had frequent video teleconference sessions with them. They were very helpful and provided a great deal of insight into what we could expect upon our arrival in Afghanistan. We also maintained frequent contact with the combat aviation brigade to which we would be assigned. These contacts gave us the feeling that we were being set up for success as much as possible and that we could make a positive difference in Afghanistan. Morale seemed to suffer because of the Fort Lewis experience, but we persisted and we were encouraged by our relationship with TF Deuce and TF Destiny; again, we became excited for what lie ahead. We were thrilled at the prospect of being a part of the Screaming Eagles.

The word put out by the 101st Airborne Division was that their philosophy was to fall in on the unit we would be replacing, using the same manning structure and array on the battlefield in the same manner. We were not to make changes to that structure until we had had the mission for about 60 days. This made perfect sense to us, for we thought to second-guess the commander on the ground was not a wise course of action. If, after 60 days or so, we felt the

mission could be better accomplished by arraying ourselves differently, then we were free to do so. Consequently, our battle handoff with TF Deuce went fairly well. We were disposed to learn as much from them as possible and to trust their judgment that the way they were executing the mission was the best they knew how.

Our battalion's mission was to be an in-lieu-of solution for a battlefield surveillance battalion. We were designated as TF Wasatch because of the striking similarities between the mountains of the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan and the Wasatch Mountains of our home state of Utah. The Battlefield Surveillance Battalion construct was a fairly recent occurrence and, consequently, there weren't many of them around to fulfill the mission requirements that were out there at the time. The 142nd Military Intelligence Battalion was principally a linguist battalion and its manning and structure were aligned as such. The Soldiers of the battalion demonstrated great ability to adapt themselves, and to be flexible enough to learn new skill sets and apply themselves in ways they had never done before. The different facets of the mission included signals intelligence assets, human intelligence (HUMINT) assets, as well as analysts of varying specialties.

The battalion's signals intelligence assets took on the missions of manning the Regional Operations Cryptologic Center, manning several remote collection outposts, as well as running a variety of Low-Level Voice Intercept (LLVI) teams. Personnel took the signals collected from around the theater, using many different techniques, and analyzed the content of these collections for intelligence value. This effort included using many linguists to transcribe and translate the collected signals, analysts to make sense of the intercepts, and workflow managers to keep it all running smoothly. The reports produced from this effort helped combatant commanders make informed and timely decisions concerning what targets to pursue and what threats existed in the battle space. These reports led to the kill or capture of hundreds of targets, many of which were considered high value. The valiant efforts of the cryptologic center personnel resulted in a several-fold increase in the number of reports produced; but of greater importance than the number of reports produced, was the quality and usefulness of the reports they produced. These Soldiers distinguished themselves for having great ingenuity and ability. Many of these personnel had years of experience prosecuting targets and analyzing collection in the counter-narcotics world, which translated well to the world of counterinsurgency (COIN) collection operations.

The TF Wasatch Soldiers, assigned to man and maintain the remote collection sites, found themselves in lonely and often harsh environments. These sites scooped up vast amounts of enemy signals that were transmitted back to the cryptologic center for processing. We rotated Soldiers through these difficult assignments in an effort to avoid burning out any one Soldier.

The members of the LLVI teams were often placed in situations of great risk. These teams had several missions that tested the flexibility and adaptability of these extraordinary Soldiers. One of their missions was to covertly place themselves on ridge tops near enemy positions to collect transmissions and relay the content of these transmissions to local commanders. Often, enemy positions were discovered and artillery rounds could be called in on those positions. Staying in these mountaintop hideouts for weeks in such austere conditions showed the true mettle of these great Soldiers. Another of the LLVI missions was to go to different locations and perform a signals survey of the area. They determined what kind of enemy communications could be intercepted at any one place and help determine if a remote collection facility would have any value being placed there. These small teams had other capabilities that wouldn't be appropriate to discuss in this forum, but which greatly contributed to protecting friendly forces and bringing destruction to those that would do them harm.

The TF Wasatch HUMINT assets took on the missions of interrogators, counterintelligence agents, and tactical HUMINT collection teams. One of the TF Wasatch companies was tasked to conduct the interrogations of the captured insurgents at the Bagram and Kandahar detention facilities. Associated with this effort were analysts who, along with the interrogators, comprised "Tiger Teams." These Tiger Teams would pool their resources and expertise to exploit the information obtained through interrogations and produce reports leading to the kill or capture of hundreds of insurgents. As required, these teams would move to remote locations with combat arms Soldiers to conduct tactical questioning of detained individuals. This effort gave ground commanders access to immediate intelligence rather than waiting for intelligence reports to make their way through the bureaucratic process. These fine interrogators were face-to-face with the enemy each and every day. The Soldiers and NCOs in this effort proved remarkable in every way in an intense and highly scrutinized endeavor.

The way counterintelligence was being conducted in Afghanistan upon our arrival there was far out of line with U.S. Army doctrine. The purpose and function of counterintelligence had been lost and those teams were operating on shaky ground, both legally and effectively. Our counterintelligence teams took over the missions and ran them in accordance with the 101st Airborne Division's guidance to fall in on the departing unit as constituted. But, as quickly as was possible, given that guidance, our counterintelligence teams revamped the mission to make it more doctrinally sound. They turned most of the sources that had been developed by the previous teams over to the tactical HUMINT collection teams. These counterintelligence teams began to concentrate on identifying and neutralizing the threats around the U.S. bases located at Bagram, Salerno and Jalalabad. Part of this effort was to educate American and other friendly forces on the threats that existed and the signs and signatures of enemy-intelli-

gence-collection efforts. These counterintelligence teams would also travel to small forward operating bases (FOBs) and outposts to conduct feints and other deception operations with the intention of identifying enemy threats from within the various posts. They would scrutinize local worker access policies and procedures, and produce threat assessments based on their findings and observations.

Tactical HUMINT collection teams had the very complex tasks of developing and running human intelligence sources and their corresponding networks. The members of these teams observed relaxed grooming standards and appearances to lessen the attention called to them while mingling with the local populace. This relaxed grooming standard presented many challenges when dealing with and identifying with other U.S. forces. The policy also paid great dividends when working with the local males because of the cultural importance Afghans place on a man's ability to grow a beard. In their culture, a man who can't grow a beard isn't regarded or esteemed as a man, but rather as a boy and childish. Additionally, the lack of a uniform on our tactical HUMINT team members placed great doubt in the minds of the sources they worked with as to which organization they belonged. This doubt could be leveraged to obtain otherwise unobtainable information. This perceived distancing from traditional U.S. Army forces made the sources feel more comfortable and willing to divulge valuable information. The downside to the relaxed grooming standard was the discord it created between the tactical HUMINT teams and other U.S. forces who did not understand the need or benefit of the unusual dress and grooming of these Soldiers.

Our TF Wasatch tactical HUMINT teams operated on FOBs and combat outposts throughout all of RC East and in parts of RC South. Most were in general support roles, but some were in direct support roles to assist local ground commanders with their intelligence gathering efforts. I had the privilege of travelling to each of the locations where our teams were assigned and observe how they conducted their missions. These teams were immensely successful when compared to their predecessors, and they were highly sought after by combatant commanders. They were able to develop source networks and report the information obtained from these networks to advance the COIN efforts in their areas of operation. The information they developed led to the discovery of many improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the kill or capture of many high value targets.

In sharp contrast to our experience with TF Deuce and the battle handoff that we conducted with them, our replacement unit, the 636th Military Intelligence Battalion, seemed to have no desire to learn what information we had for them. They made very little effort to establish a relationship with us or attempt to discover what we knew. The more we found out about them the more we

learned that they had intentions of taking over the mission with a completely different organization than what we had. They had no illusions or desire to follow the 101st Airborne Division's guidance and, in fact, had begun to liaise with the 82nd Airborne Division that was to eventually replace the 101st in Afghanistan. We had never encountered such arrogant and difficult people to work with in all of our experiences from either Iraq or Afghanistan. Our hopes of a smooth, productive, and orderly battle handoff were dashed. As elements of our replacements began to arrive and conduct their respective RIPs with the various teams, it became apparent that the problem with that battalion was their leadership, not the Soldiers and NCOs taking care of business. The RIPs at the team and company levels seemed to go pretty well, but the tension and awkwardness at the battalion level was palpable. It was bittersweet when early Spring 2009 finally rolled around and we turned the mission over to our replacements. We didn't feel terribly comfortable about the future of the intelligence mission in Afghanistan, in spite of our very best efforts.

Our redeployment through Manas, Kyrgyzstan to Fort Lewis went as well as could be expected. We were on our way home and felt as if we could endure just about anything at that point. It was easy to be able to look back with a great sense of pride and accomplishment at what our TF Wasatch Soldiers had achieved. Unlike our previous deployment to Iraq, this deployment had a well-defined mission and one in which you could see and measure the good that had been accomplished. You could count the bad guys taken out, the weapons caches discovered, or the IEDs dismantled and the lives saved because of our efforts. We had seen much and endured much, but were stronger and better for it. More importantly, we felt that the Afghans, the citizens of the United States, and the denizens of the world were better off for it. We were satisfied that we had given it our all—we had left it all on the battlefields of Afghanistan.

As a part of the Wyoming Army National Guard, SGM Harold Pafford served as part of an Embedded Training Team (ETT) assisting in the training of the Afghan National Police. He and his 16-man team arrived in Afghanistan hoping to stay together. However, they were split into two to three person teams and sent to a number of forward operating bases (FOB). He arrived at FOB Gardez and found himself as part of a 12-man team working at the provincial level with the Afghan National Police (ANP).

Training the Afghan National Army

SGM Harold J. Pafford

OEF, 05/26/2008 – 05/23/2009

Team NCOIC, PMT-P, Paktya Providence Gardez, Afghanistan

I began my military career on April 26, 1986, at the Military Entrance Processing Station in Denver, CO. I enlisted into the active Army while I was a senior in high school in the delayed entry program. I felt by enlisting, the Army would give me the tools to be successful in life.

I spent three years as a National Guard recruiter making quota every year, putting 72 Soldiers in the Army in my three years. After my three years as a recruiter, I became the Eastern Area noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) for recruiting and had seven recruiters under me with a team mission of 168 enlistments each year. After my fourth year as area NCOIC, I volunteered for a tour to Afghanistan. I believed that as a leader you should always lead from the front; never ask your Soldiers to do something you are not willing to do or have not done yourself.

On May 26, 2008, I had my orders to report to Fort Riley, KS, for mobilization as part of an embedded training team (ETT) for the Afghan National Army (ANA). It started with Phase I in-processing, which covered medical, dental, finance, records, and briefings. This process took about three days of the training schedule. Phase II consisted of language classes and counterinsurgency (COIN) classes, which was two weeks of training in a classroom environment. We had instructors who were civilians, contracted from Afghanistan to come and teach us the language of Afghanistan and about the culture of Afghanistan. It is very hard to do COIN operations in a country if you don't understand the culture and cannot communicate with its people. I thought this phase of the training was one of the most important phases next to the medical training we received at Fort Riley. Phase III consisted of convoy operations, medical, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), weapons ranges, communications, and driver training. After all three phases, we were sent to Fort Irwin, CA, for a rotation with the 25th Infantry Division from Alaska who would be

arriving in Afghanistan three months into our deployment.

While at Fort Irwin, we ran Mounted Combat Patrols (MCP), Forward Operating Base (FOB) operations, traffic control points, and route clearing procedures. It was nice to train for the operations we would be conducting during our deployment to Afghanistan. Interacting with the role players from Afghanistan and Iraq that were contracted to help us train at Fort Irwin was very helpful and made the training as realistic as possible. After completion of the training at Fort Irwin, we were sent back to Fort Riley to prepare for our deployment to Afghanistan.

We arrived in Afghanistan on August 26 at Camp Phoenix in Kabul. This was our first stop for in-processing. Again, we received a brief medical exam and were given shots before being sent to our Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), where we would spend our nine months, boots on the ground deployment in Afghanistan. We arrived as a 16-man embedded training team (ETT) hoping to stay together as a team. From Camp Phoenix we were sent by CH-47 to FOB Lightning in Eastern Afghanistan for our in-processing into our area of operation (AO). We spent a total of five days at FOB Lightning, where, to our surprise, our 16-Soldier team, all from the Wyoming Army National Guard, was split up into two- to-three-person teams to be sent out to combat outposts (COPs). At first, a lot of the Soldiers on the team were upset about the fact that we were being split up, but we all knew we had a mission to accomplish and that is what we needed to focus on. I and two other Soldiers were sent to FOB Gardez in Eastern Afghanistan to be part of a 12-man police mentor team (PMT) working at the provincial level with the Afghan National Police (ANP). The first few days on the ground were very stressful doing the left seat, right seat ride with the Soldiers we were replacing. Getting to know the AO and tactics, techniques, procedures (TTPs) of the team we were replacing was very demanding in a combat environment.

We had to help the ANP establish a staff, like the staff and chain of command the Army uses. What we did was set up the provincial headquarters with a battalion staff commander, executive officer, and command sergeant major (CSM). S-1 to S-4 were assigned mentors from our team in each position. Our team chief, a MJR, was assigned to mentor the commander. I, as NCOIC, mentored the CSM. Our captain (CPT) mentored the executive officer. We also had a Chief Warrant Officer (CW3), who was a logistics guy, mentoring the S-4. I also mentored the S-1, and two other SSGs on the team mentored the S-2 and the S-3. That left the rest of the team to pull security while we performed our duties as mentors at the provincial headquarters building. The team also had to conduct a number of other missions: traffic control points, cordon and search, drug burns, construction of police checkpoints, and MCPs around our AO with

the ANP. As the PMT, we had three district teams that we controlled, and twice a month we traveled to each district location. At times, it was rough; at times, we were ambushed on several occasions and hit several improvised explosive devices (IEDs) along the way. A month into our deployment we lost four Soldiers from our district team. One was our CPT from Wyoming, who we lost when we hit an IED. That really hit the team hard. Some Soldiers never wanted to leave the FOB after that, but as the senior NCO, I let them know that was more of a reason to get out and take the fight to the enemy. We conducted more than 150 MCPs, built several police checks, and I believe, made Afghanistan a better place for the people who live there.

We returned from Afghanistan back to Fort Riley on May 23, where we went through demobilization, and the last phase of our deployment before returning home to our families. During the final phase, we turned in all equipment, weapons, gear, bags, and night sights. After turning in all equipment, we out-processed: medical, dental, and the personnel stations. This was a very painless process. Fort Riley was a very good mobilization station through which to process. The officers, NCOs, and Soldiers were very professional in the way they conducted business. After we completed our out-processing, the Wyoming Air National Guard picked us up in a C-130 and flew us back to Cheyenne, WY, where our families were waiting on us. It was a long awaited reunion for all of us.

Upon returning to my Active Guard Reserve position back in Wyoming, I was promoted to the rank of sergeant major (SGM) and was offered the operations job for the state. My whole career with the Wyoming Army National Guard has been in recruiting, so the change was very good for my career and for me as a SGM to see the big picture on how operations are run within the state organization. I'm looking forward to the challenge of a new position, but most of all, I'm looking forward to taking care of the Soldiers in the Wyoming Army National Guard.

In the past 23 years of my military career, this has been the best experience of my life, next to my children being born. My career in the military has done a lot of things not only for me but also for my family. My wife and I have been married for 23 years, so she has had the experience right alongside me the entire way. The Army and the Army National Guard has been like a family to me. It has given my family and me many great opportunities: being able to travel and see the world, medical benefits, a home that we own, and most of all, the benefits for my kids and wife to attend college. I have never regretted joining the military. I always wanted to serve my country and make a good life for my family and the military has done just that.

One of the major challenges facing ISG Gerald Sallila was the lack of adequate housing for his troops. The lack of qualified Afghan locals who could build a proper facility resulted in his troops spending their deployment in transient tents—poor quality tents. However, ISG Sallila and his men overcame such obstacles and developed a critical Aviation Task Force (ATF) footprint in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

Aviation Task Force Occupation

ISG Gerald Sallila

OEF, January 1, 2008 to January 4, 2009

ISG, HHT 2-17 Cavalry, 101st Airborne

Mission Development

The 101st Combat Aviation Brigade Commander tasked Task Force (TF) Out Front to establish an Aviation Task Force (ATF) footprint at Jalalabad, Afghanistan, to conduct combat operations in support of the 173rd Infantry Brigade, which was conducting combat operations in eastern Afghanistan. Once the mission was given, TF Out Front sent members of their organization to Jalalabad on a pre-deployment site survey approximately 120 days prior to the actual boots on the ground date. These members toured Jalalabad for three days, and then returned to Fort Campbell, KY, and briefed the brigade commander on what requirements were lacking in order to establish an ATF successfully to support the 173rd Infantry Brigade.

Mission Implementation

Once the brigade commander reviewed the four requirements the pre-deployment site survey team recommended, it was a waiting game for a couple of weeks to determine which of those requirements the Army would actually fund. One of the requirements was the establishment of two hardened buildings, one building to serve as the Tactical Operations Center (TOC), and the other building to serve as the Air Lines of Communication (ALOC) and communications workplace.

Another requirement was the establishment of 80 wooden buildings, which would serve as the living quarters for the Soldiers of TF Out Front as well as the Command Posts for each troop/company. There was also a requirement to set up three large clamshell hangars in order to conduct aviation maintenance. Lastly, there was a requirement to outfit the TF with automations equipment, since we were directed to leave one hundred percent of our automations equipment at home station. All of these requirements were viewed as necessary, and our brigade commander briefed us that the Army would in fact fund these requirements to assist us in establishing an Aviation Task Force (ATF) at Jalalabad.

Proof of Concept

Approximately 60 days prior to the boots on the ground date, TF Out Front sent five members of their organization to Jalalabad to start receiving containers that were shipped early. We were to report back to the TF commander on the progress of the creation of the hardened buildings, the barracks, the clamshell hangars, and the automations equipment. The progress reports sent were not very encouraging to the TF leadership. The automations requirement was the only one actually being worked. The actual building of any structures was put on hold because of the lack of qualified Afghan workers. As the deployment date quickly approached and no further construction was being done on the structures, the TF commander called a meeting with our troop commander and I. He directed us to come up with a plan of action of where to place the TOC and ALOC, as well as our recommendations to conduct aviation maintenance, and where we would provide living quarters for the Soldiers of TF Out Front.

Formalizing the Plan

Immediately after the meeting with the TF commander, my commander and I went to work on these three priorities. My commander took on the TOC and ALOC action first, and I focused on the living quarters actions. We spoke to the D Troop commander about the lack of structures available to conduct aircraft maintenance, and asked him to formalize a plan to present to the TF commander on where aircraft maintenance could be conducted. The D Troop commander agreed to this request and he went to work on this action.

My commander contacted the 173rd Infantry Brigade Executive Officer about our need for a TOC and ALOC. The 173rd Infantry Brigade was willing to relocate some of their staff sections to provide our TF with a hardened building for our TOC, but they could not accommodate the ALOC request. I spoke to the first sergeant (1SG) of Headquarters, Headquarters Company (HHC), 173rd Infantry Brigade and informed him of our living-quarters problem. The 1SG informed me that there were plenty of transient tents available and ready for our TF to occupy temporarily until the quarters were completed. The D Troop commander proposed that the motor pool section give up their maintenance tents in order to conduct aircraft phase maintenance until the clamshells were erected and ready to occupy. After we formalized our plans of action, we scheduled a meeting to brief our TF commander on each item.

The TF commander was pleased with our efforts and agreed to the recommendations we proposed. Although he agreed to these plans of action, the last comment the TF commander said to us was that these plans of action better be temporary and only last at the most for two months. After that comment, my troop commander and I knew that once we set foot in Jalalabad, our work would

not stop until these structures were built and our TF had adequate work areas and living quarters.

Occupation Process

On January 14, 2008, I arrived at Jalalabad, Afghanistan. As I walked about the Forward Operating Base (FOB), I happened to notice that the transient living tents were in need of much repair. Many of the tents were dry-rotted as well as torn in numerous places. I thought to myself, “These can’t be the tents that our TF was scheduled to occupy for the next two months.” Well, after touring the base for the next 30 minutes, I did not see any more transient tents anywhere. Therefore, I made it my mission to find the FOB “mayor” (first sergeant) and discuss with him what arrangements we had in place to house the 550 Soldiers from TF Out Front.

After wandering about for approximately one hour, I finally found the FOB mayor’s office. The FOB mayor informed me that unfortunately those were in fact the tents our TF would occupy, but then he put me in a vehicle and we drove to an area where our new quarters were being built. The quarters were being erected at approximately two units per day, so that gave me some necessary relief. I estimated that in 45 days all the quarters would be built and ready to occupy. I left the FOB mayor and went to find my troop commander to brief him on the living area plans.

Once I located my troop commander and debriefed him on the living area plan, he then informed me that the TF TOC was ready and also that the motor pool personnel were erecting the maintenance tents to perform aircraft maintenance when necessary. The plan of action we briefed our TF commander was being implemented without any major obstacles; this brought a great sigh of relief to the commander and me.

Approximately 120 days prior to establishing an ATF footprint at Jalalabad, our TF identified four major areas of concern which we felt needed immediate attention to assist us with a successful occupation, as well as allowing us to quickly start up combat operations. Even though only one of the four identified areas were actually implemented, we had created alternate plans of action to ensure mission success by the time TF Out Front arrived at Jalalabad.

Our TF assembled its own crew of Soldiers to assist in the construction of all living areas, as well as construction of our TOC, ALOC and command posts. This team of Soldiers worked 14-hour shifts for their first three months at Jalalabad, constructing buildings so that our Task Force had adequate work areas as well as living quarters.

Lessons Learned

I have learned in my 19-year career that being away from the flagpole has both its benefits as well as its downfalls.

All the hard work definitely paid off for our TF. We kept our Soldiers so busy that there were hardly any conduct issues during the entire deployment. Our Soldiers were focused on not only completing their wartime mission, but they were also spending time assisting in the building of their living areas and establishing an ATF footprint from scratch.

My deployment to Jalalabad was definitely the most challenging, but I also believe it was the most rewarding deployment. The pride that each Soldier of TF Out Front displayed during the relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA) was extremely evident, as they showed off their pictures of how the TF initially operated only 11 months prior.

TF Out Front was recognized by the Army Aviation Leadership, and most notably, the TF was recognized by the Army Vice Chief of Staff, GEN Cody, for the outstanding work and effort the TF did in such a short time without any support to establish an ATF at Jalalabad. TF Out Front was also awarded the 2008 prestigious Ellis D. Parker Award, which is awarded on the Best Combat Aviation Unit of the Year. The award citation stated, “For not only the countless, outstanding combat operations they performed daily, but also for the ‘can-do’ attitude the Soldiers displayed as they were given less than desirable initial living and working conditions.”

Conclusion

As I look back and reflect on my combat deployments, I can definitely see that living and working conditions have an effect on overall morale, but I can also see that the hard work and pride that went into establishing an ATF footprint from scratch outweighed the initial low morale of the Soldiers of TF Out Front. I believe that as the Army continues to stay in a constant state of war fighting, we as senior leaders need to continue to find ways to improve our foxholes daily. In doing so, we will be passing to the future leaders of our Army something of great importance—Take Pride and Ownership over everything you are given a responsibility.

SGM Paul Bandurraga served as the Senior Enlisted Adviser for Joint Task Force Sword. The task force consisted of 24 Soldiers, two sailors, two Marines, and two airmen. They established their base at the Khyber Border Coordination Center (KBCC) and worked closely with the Pakistani Army. NCOs played a key role in the success of all aspects of the mission.

Joint Coordination Center Afghanistan

SGM Paul Bandurraga

OEF, 01/21/2009 – 08/14/2009

JTF SWORD, Senior Enlisted Advisor

In March 2006, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) told all of its components to provide a requirements cost estimate for personnel and equipment and have it back to USSOCOM within 180 days. U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) along with the rest of the components provided its requirements back to USSOCOM. USASOC was the only command that could provide this type of C2 element with a realistic time frame and at a low cost.

The reason I was called by the USASOC command sergeant major (CSM) was that I had served as the Joint Task Force (JTF)-510 Senior Enlisted Advisor for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Philippines and had joint experience as a sergeant major (SGM). When I accepted the leadership role for JTF Sword there were only four Soldiers in the JTF: a colonel (COL), two lieutenant colonels (LTCs), and me. We took a look at what USSOCOM was asking us to do and started building the JTF. The first thing we had to look at was what size this command and control (C2) element needed to be. This has been tried before to have a standing deployable headquarters, but it is too hard to do with a full up staff and equipment. The cost of manpower and equipment is enormous. We decided to build a small cadre of a joint trained staff of experts that would be ready to deploy very fast and with little cost to the command. The total number of Soldiers of the JTF became 31 joint billets: 24 Army, two Navy, two Marine, and two from the Air Force. The training for the JTF took almost 16 months before it became initial operational capable with individual training and collective training as a unit. Fully operational capable was completed in October 2008. The JTF had deployed on several Joint Chiefs of Staff exercises and real world missions for Special Operations Command Africa to achieve its fully operational capable. The JTF was now ready to take on any C2 mission it was given.

Mission

JTF Sword received its mission and started planning with the USSOCOM and Central Command (CENTCOM) staffs back in October 2008. It was determined that the JTF would need some augmentation from the other components:

intelligence personnel, air space planners, and a counterintelligence team. We tasked the other components for the augmentees and they had 96 hours to arrive at Fort Bragg for training and prepare for deployment. During the mission analysis for the Joint Coordination Center (JCC), it was determined that the best place for the JCC was a problem.

A small team was sent to Afghanistan to look for a suitable location for the JCC. During the post-deployment software support, the team visited a new location at the Khyber Pass near the Torkham Gate fire base. This seemed to be a great location for the JCC because there was a new facility being built at that location. At this location was the Khyber Border Coordination Center (KBCC) that was being used to resolve cross border disputes between the Pakistani Army and the Afghan Army. Also, the small number of new Soldiers would not bring a bunch of attention to that location.

The KBCC was manned by five U.S. Soldiers, six Pakistani and six Afghan officers that lived and worked at this location for a one-year rotation, or at least that was the plan at that time. This was the first of six locations along the border that were to be built over the next two years, depending on how well this KBCC worked out. The building had all the life support in place that we needed to sustain our mission on this side of the border. The senior ranking U.S. officer at the KBCC was a major and the senior ranking member of the JCC was a COL. This did not seem to be much of a problem at the time because the commander of the JCC mission now became the commander of the KBCC also.

This one issue became one of the biggest problems for the JCC while in theater. The JCC was accountable to Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) and the KBCC was accountable to U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, and tactical control was accountable to the 101st Airborne Division. This became a big problem with the battle space owner because he believed that he had control of the JCC, but the JCC answered directly to CENTCOM and the Joint Staff along with the Secretary of Defense. The battle space owner was in direct support of the JCC for care and feeding, and that was all; he did not even get to know what the JCC's mission was, which caused a bunch of issues between the two commanders. This kind of C2 is the issue that happened all over the area of responsibility (AOR).

Once the C2 issue was put to rest, it was time for the JCC to start doing its real mission of providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support to the Pakistani Army. It would seem that this would be easy for the U.S. and SOF Soldiers, but it is not as easy as it seems. There seemed to be a lot of distrust between the two countries and there are good reasons for that. We worked with the Pakistani officers more than with the Afghani officers because

our mission was to work with the Pakistan Army, not the host nation army. This was the only place or time that there was truly tripartite cooperation throughout the whole AOR. There were always trust issues between all three countries but we worked hard to put it all on the same playing field.

There were two expandable, secure, work trailers (mobile TOC) that we brought with us to run all the ISR feeds into our location, and then run the feed inside the JCC/KBCC joint operations center (JOC) location. The feeds were sanitized to make them relevant to “view only,” which means that the Pakistani and the Afghani could only view the video and could not capture the feeds. There were promises made at the top levels of our government to the Pakistani government that they would be able to see the feeds as well at the general headquarters building in Pakistan, but it was not ever completed by the time we left country. There was a big effort on our side to make this happen, but it is not easy to make happen with the communication equipment that the Pakistani government had. The U.S. government was working on a solution but it did not exist at this time. Equipment that is being used in the CENTCOM theater varies from command to command and surely did not exist for the host nation at this time; even if it did, they did not have the skills that it would take to understand or work the complex communication equipment.

When we arrived at the KBCC, the Pakistani officers that were assigned to the KBCC were two CPTs and two majors (MAJs). This quickly changed with the importance of the mission to the Pakistani government. They sent two COLs and four LTC's to run communications during the ISR missions back to Pakistani military headquarters; this seemed to work better because these officers had enough pull to make things happen during mission profiles. Before, the personnel at the KBCC could not make a decision without higher headquarters' approval, which took at least two to three hours. By the time this came back the intelligence was useless.

Airspace deconfliction was one of the big problems because cross border operations procedures did not exist. Upon initial JCC stand-up, U.S. Air Forces Central was unprepared to conduct Predator operations in Pakistani airspace. No written guidance was in place at the Air Operations Center or elsewhere. When the first mission was executed, the Predator operator had to contact Pakistani air traffic control upon crossing the border. The lack of formal guidance and procedures can potentially create a hazard to the flight safety for civilian as well as Pakistani military aircraft operating in the region.

Torkham Gate force protection issues were one of the big concerns for the JCC/KBCC. After conducting our threat vulnerability assessment, we believed the Torkham Gate area was not manned, resourced, or received the required

amount of emphasis deserving of the primary ground lines of communication border-crossing point into Afghanistan. There were no counterintelligence efforts within the KBCC confine and the physical security was lacking at best. We quickly set up a new base defense plan and started working my counterintelligence team assigned to the JCC along with SF intelligence and air support operations personnel to coordinate and identify threats and detect gaps in the force protection plan. Within 30 days we had identified seven personnel that were working on the base (host nation) that were having weekly, if not daily, contact with various members of the local Taliban leaders. We arrested some of them and used others to keep an eye on the local threat.

The success of the mission created its own problems with the media. Every time a U.S. Congressman or Senator was visiting the AOR, they wanted to see how the JCC/KBCC was working, and they had to have reporters with them. How the three countries were working together was one of the big success stories the Public Affairs Office wanted to get out to the media. We tried to show them how the three countries were working together to fight the terrorists and resolve border disputes, but somehow there was reporting back in the United States that we were the ones dropping bombs on the terrorist. This was not the truth, because the missions that we flew were ISR only; we did not have armed aircraft or authority to fire missiles.

Having a highly trained and very versatile unit and having all SOF personnel is great, but trying to replace those skills in a time of war is hard if not impossible and became some of the shortfalls of the mission. We were initially deployed for 90 days as a favor to CENTCOM to give them time to build its own JCC-type unit, but it took almost 180 days to backfill JTF SWORD and the top leadership positions ended up being filled by SOF personnel anyway. NCOs played a key role in all aspects of the mission. One of my master sergeants (MSGs) acted as the JOC SGM and another MSG was in charge of all intelligence collection products and dissemination to higher commands. The communications NCOs that were assigned to me were truly amazing; they had all communication equipment up and running within 48 hours of being on the ground and did not have any problems with any types of communication throughout the mission.

One thing that I did take notice of was the lack of combat skills that some of the other service's NCOs, Soldiers, airmen, and sailors have. If we are going to fight as a joint fighting force, we should all have the same basic skills when it comes to combat. It is sad when some of the Americans fighting do not have the skills it takes to defend themselves. The time that I had to spend on the range with these individuals was unsatisfactory. The training that they should receive before they are deployed must be changed. It is a must that they should all be

experts with their own weapon. When you are at least one hour away from the nearest fire base by air, you have to be able to defend yourself. The non-SOF personnel that were with me from the beginning were somewhat proficient and became an asset to the team in a short time. The problem that I observed came from the personnel who were coming to replace us. Some of them had never fired their weapon before coming into a combat zone. I am not talking about infantry Soldiers, I am talking about the guys who have been working on these big staffs and have not spent the time on the range. All the commanders at the four-star level want their personnel to get out of the rear and get down range, but before they do that, it is the responsibility of the senior NCOs in these commands to ensure that their people are ready to deploy. I know that as a staff NCO or officer it is hard to keep up with combat skills, but your life, and or someone else's life, may depend on how well you can react when the bad guys are at your wall in some remote fire base at the end of the world.

One of the biggest problems with the handoff of the mission was the equipment problems between units. Our JTF had its own organic equipment assigned to it. But when I try to turn over a mission to someone who comes to the fight with only personnel equipment, it is impossible to do. When you try to transition organic equipment from one unit to personnel that do not have a unit identification code or a property book, it is next to impossible. For us to leave behind this high dollar equipment the Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) had to send its property book manager to our location and change all equipment left behind to their book. We had to get approval from USASOC to leave the equipment behind with the lateral transfer document in hand. This is the biggest problem that a unit like ours will always have, and I don't know if it can be fixed. If we are going to start some kind of enduring mission anywhere in the world, the combatant commander's staff has to be prepared to acquire equipment that is necessary for the follow-up personnel. If the mission cannot be resourced during the military decision making process, then it must be identified and brought to the commander's attention as a mission stopper.

The last point that I would like to touch on is the use of the Reserve Component personnel as augmentees. As individuals, they can be used for critical gaps if they have the skill set that is missing or needed. All of the joint personnel that I had assigned to our JTF had the right skill sets that I needed for this mission. In your mission planning process, this is one of the critical areas to cover up front; you cannot wait to get into country and see what your gaps are. When you decide to use or ask for Reserve personnel, there are risks involved with the process: one is the timeframe that you are going to be deployed. When you ask for augmentation, the timeline should be laid out and the duration should be understood; because, when you are doing missions with no clear timeframe you must accept the risk that some of your personnel may

not be able to complete the mission with you. Can your unit absorb the loss or degradation to your mission? If you are going to use Reserve personnel, you have to get them to your location as soon as possible to ensure they are ready for deployment, understand what the standards are, and understand what is expected of them during the mission. I have nothing but good things to say about the Reserve personnel that I had assigned to our JTF; they were communication specialist NCOs from the Joint Communication Support Element stationed at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL. I would take them with our JTF any time on any mission, with no reservations.

CONCLUSION

American forces have fought in Afghanistan for nearly a decade. Great problems still remain to overcome for the United States and its allies. However, American and allied forces have overcome many obstacles by working within the Joint Operations framework. These stories tell how the American Noncommissioned Officer adapts to changing situations and leads his Soldiers through difficult times. The stories also depict an American noncommissioned officer who believes that training, regardless if it is an American Soldier or an Afghan Soldier, leads to success against even the most seasoned foe.

By developing Embedded Training Teams, Agribusiness Development Teams, Human Terrain Teams, and other programs, the Army has shown that innovation in wartime is not merely the advent of new technology. Noncommissioned officers have served key roles in developing and maintaining these programs. Further, they have provided the critical link in many of the programs implemented.

There are still many miles to the road ahead. Victory in Afghanistan will require the continued dedication and adaptability of all noncommissioned officers.

GLOSSARY/ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| ISG | First Sergeant |
| AAFES | Army and Air Force Exchange Services |
| ABP | Afghan Border Police |
| ACRC | Active Component/Reserve Component |
| ADVON | Advanced Echelon |
| AIT | Advanced Individual Training |
| AKO | Army Knowledge Online |
| ALOC | Air Lines of Communication |
| ANA | Afghan National Army |
| ANCOC | Advanced NCO Course |
| ANPOP | Afghan National Civil Order Police |
| ANP | Afghan National Police |
| ANSF | Afghan National Security Forces |
| AO | Area of Operation |
| AOB | Airfield Operations Battalion |
| APFT | Army Physical Fitness Test |
| ARF | Aerial Reaction Force |
| ARSIC | Afghan Regional Security Integration Command |
| ASCOPE | Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, Events |
| ATF | Aviation Task Force |
| AWOL | Absent Without Leave |
| BAF | Bagram Airfield |
| BNCOC | Basic NCO Course |
| C2 | Command and Control |
| CAB | Combat Aviation Brigade |
| CAS | Close Air Support |
| CENTCOM | Central Command |
| CCIR | Commanders Critical Information Requirements |
| CJTF | Combined Joint Task Force |
| COB | Contingency Operating Base |
| COIN | Counterinsurgency |
| COL | Colonel |
| COP | Combat Outpost |
| CPL | Corporal |
| CPT | Captain |
| CRC | CONUS Replacement Center |
| CSM | Command Sergeant Major |
| CSTC-A | Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan |
| CW3 | Chief Warrant Officer |
| DA | Department of the Army |
| DD-93 | Record of Emergency Data Form |

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| DMZ | Demilitarized Zone |
| DPW | Department of Public Works |
| EO | Equal Opportunity |
| ETT | Embedded Training Team |
| FA | Field Artillery |
| FOB | Forward Operating Base |
| GMV | Ground Mobility Vehicle |
| GSAB | General Support Aviation Battalion |
| HDSOC | High Desert Special Operations Company |
| HHC | Headquarters and Headquarters Company |
| HUMINT | Human Intelligence |
| IA | Individual Augmentees |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Forces |
| ISR | Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance |
| JAF | Jalalabad Airfield |
| JCC | Joint Coordination Center |
| JRTC | Joint Readiness Training Center |
| JTAC | Joint Terminal Air Controller |
| JTF | Joint Task Force |
| KAF | Kandahar Airfield |
| KBCC | Khyber Border Coordination Center |
| KIA | Killed in Action |
| LCLA | Low Cost Low Altitude |
| LLVI | Low-Level Voice Intercept |
| LT | Lieutenant |
| LTC | Lieutenant Colonel |
| MCP | Mounted Combat Patrols |
| MDMP | Military Decision Making Process |
| MEDCAP | Medical Civil Assistance Program |
| MJR | Major |
| MOS | Military Occupational Specialty |
| MP | Military Police |
| MSG | Master Sergeant |
| MSR | Main Supply Route |
| MTT | Mobile Training Team |
| MWR | Morale, Welfare, Recreation |
| NBC | Nuclear, Biological, Chemical |
| NCOES | NCO Education System |
| NCOIC | NCO in Charge |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NTC | National Training Center |
| ODA | Operation Detachment-Alpha |

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|----------------|--|
| ODB | Operation Detachment-Beta |
| OEF | Operation Enduring Freedom |
| OIC | Officer in Charge |
| OIF | Operation Iraqi Freedom |
| OMLT | Operational Mentoring Liaison Team |
| PMT | Police Mentor Teams |
| PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Teams |
| PTSD | Post Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| PX | Post Exchange |
| QRF | Quick Reactionary Force |
| RC | Regional Command |
| RIP | Relief in Place |
| RPG | Rocket Propelled Grenade |
| SFG | Special Forces Group |
| SGM | Sergeant Major |
| SGT | Sergeant |
| SOF | Special Operations Forces |
| SOP | Standard Operating Procedures |
| SOTF | Special Operations Task Force |
| SSG | Staff Sergeant |
| TOA | Transfer of Authority |
| TOC | Tactical Operations Center |
| TTP | Tactics, Techniques, Procedures |
| USDB | United States Disciplinary Barracks |
| USSOCOM | United States Special Operations Command |
| VTT | Validation Training Team |

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During the years following the collapse of the Taliban, the United States and its allies attempted to rebuild the Afghan nation and create an Afghan National Army. The Taliban and the few remaining al-Qaeda fighters turned to car bombs and improvised explosive devices to continue their struggle against the United States, NATO, and the Afghan government. Slowly, they attempted to regain some of their power, especially along the southern border with Pakistan. As the years progressed, the Afghan National Army took a larger role in fighting the Taliban. Many American Soldiers were sent to serve in embedded training teams, which helped train the Afghan Army and build an effective fighting force.



Product of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

