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Operation Iraqi Freedom

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Class # 34

Student # 492

Unclassified

First Sergeant

This paper will cover some of the highlights and lowlights in Al Anbar Province while HHC 2-136 was conducting combat operations. The first phase will cover the first 3 months: April, May, and June 2006. The second phase will cover the next 2 months: July, and August 2006. The 3rd phase will cover the remainder of our to September 2006 thru July 2007. During the time I spent in Iraq, there were major changes in the way that combat actions were conducted, both by the US Forces and the AQI forces.

I was a Facilities Manager at a hotel in ST. Paul, MN. I had been in the hospitality industry for 14 years in 2005. I worked my way from shift Engineer to chief engineer with Hilton brand hotels. Leaving Hilton in 2001 to move to my current position at the Holiday Inn St. Paul. I had deployed once prior to this for 6 months. My military career began in May 1987 when I enlisted in the Army Reserve as an Infantryman. I went to Basic and AIT at Ft Benning Georgia in August of 1987. In February 1988 I enlisted in the Minnesota Army National Guard, Charlie Company 2-136 (M) Inf. I spent 21 years in 2-136 and held duty positions from Scout to First Sergeant.

I have been on state active duty twice. The first time was in 1997 to support the Red River Valley during the floods and again in 2001 supporting the same mission. I have deployed overseas twice also. I deployed in support of Operation Joint Forge in Bosnia Herzegovina from September 7th 2003 to April 1st 2004. During this deployment the company I was with deployed to Kosovo for 7 days during the riots in March of 2004. During this deployment I was the Scout Platoon Sergeant. We conducted SASO missions in 5 opstinas in and around Tuzla. My second deployment was as First Sergeant of HHC 2-136 Combined Arms Battalion. We deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from 6 September 2005 to 1 August 2007. During the train-up for this deployment we conducted a transformation from a Mechanized Infantry Battalion to a Combined Arms Battalion. The company commander on this deployment was the same commander that I had during the OJF deployment.

Phase I

When we arrived in Iraq, The unit we were replacing were conducting perimeter

security, ECP operations and patrolling the MSR's leading to the base. We had been attached to 1st Marine Logistics Group. The rest of our Brigade was conducting Combat Logistic Patrols throughout Iraq. We were route security and base security for 1MLG.

The company worked with a Marine Provisional Security Platoon of about 100 Marines. During this time we were running 8 hour route security patrols from base, down Fiesta, Lymon, and Long Island. There were groups along these routes that would emplace small IED's along the routes to disrupt the flow of supplies in and out of the base. During one of these Patrols, a Marine Logistics patrol was bringing supplies to the base and struck an IED on Route Long Island. It was our first contact with IED's. The truck that struck the IED was driven by a Third Country National (TCN). The convoy used explosives to destroy the truck and trailer and they continued on their way. We wanted to change the way that route security operation were run because we didn't believe that leaving the route unsecured for more than 3 hours at a time was a good idea.

We went through the chain to ask about changing the duration and intent of the patrols. We were told if we came up with a good plan and it was approved we could do it. The IED's that had been being emplaced were small and not causing much disruption to our activities. We were then notified that we would be pulled off of the Route security mission. We were now manning 24 hour QRF and if they were called to anything we stood up another complete QRF.

Phase II

During this time the MSR's that we used to patrol were becoming black in status. And the IED's we becoming much more frequent and larger in size. 1st MLG stated that we needed to return to our route security mission but that we must also continue the QRF

operation that we had been operating. We stated that we didn't have enough personnel to conduct all the missions that we had been given. To Accomplish this we had to leave towers that had overlapping fields of view empty and move those personnel to other missions. When we restarted the route security missions there was an average of 1.3 IED's per day on our routes. We implemented patrols that were 18 to 24 hours in length. We had 2 and sometimes 3 patrols in sector a one time. The way this worked out the Soldiers and Marines on patrols worked about every other day, giving them time to recover between patrols. With in 30 days the IED average dropped to .2 a day. The IED's that were emplaced were now 2-3 of either 120mm or 155mm high explosive rounds. To avoid complacency we rotated the missions given every month. The sections moved from route security to force protection to QRF. This I believe was a major factor in keeping all Soldiers and Marines focused on the task at hand. It also gave them a chance to move from a high op-tempo to a low op-tempo and back with only a short time between. During this time the patrols were now allowed to patrol through the village in our sector and make contact with the populace. They started out meeting children, because the adults wouldn't come out if the patrol was in the village.

Phase III

The changes that were put in place started to make a difference during this phase. The Villagers were now starting to talk with the patrols about what is going on in their village, why the patrols were here, and what the patrols could do for the people of our piece of Al Anbar. During this phase we were able to conduct medical missions to the villages in our sector and a few people chose to seek treatment from our medics. Each patrol more and more people would come to see what it was all about. A young girl had

been kidnapped from one of the villages and her father was wounded while he was trying to emplace an IED. We learned from him that he was emplacing the IED in order to get his daughter back from the people who took her. US forces were able to get the man's daughter back safely. When he returned to the village he told the story of how his daughter was returned to him. That was a huge turning point in the relations with the villages. They started to share with us how the "bad guys" operated in the area. In some of villages the people were starting to give names of those that worked with the bad guys. We built desks and replaced some of the broken windows in a school. They told us where there were weapons caches in the area and who was putting the weapons there. About 2 months into 2007 we started working with the Iraqi Army. This was because of a mosque bombing in a nearby town. The locals were tired of living in fear. They were telling anyone who would listen, who the bad guys were and where they could be found.

This was a very busy time with everything that was changing in the sector. The "Surge" was also happening at this time, which gave us more personnel to put in sector and work with the Iraqi army to improve the security of the sector. Our extension was very hard to accept. But I believe that it gave us 4 more months to use the knowledge and experience that we had gained and the trust that we had built with the local villagers to get to a level of security for the villages that hadn't been seen since before. The day that we did the last patrol in the villages the villagers and the Soldiers were both very sad. There were tears and smiles and hugs on both side.