

Deploying as a Brigade S-4 1

DEPLOYING AS A BRIGADE S-4 DURING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Deploying as a Brigade S-4 during Operation Iraqi Freedom

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Abstract

I am writing my personal experience paper on my deployment to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom with the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team as their Brigade S-4 NCOIC. I served as their Brigade S-4 from 12 December 2004 till 1 June 2006. My duties and responsibilities were very challenging due to the fact that 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade deployed with approximately 4,000 soldiers. We also had several units from other states join us for this deployment.

### The Train up at FT. Stewart, Georgia

The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was called up to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom for a one year mission in Iraq. The 48<sup>th</sup> BCT was at Fort Stewart, Georgia for approximately six months worth of mobilization training. As the Brigade S-4 I was encountering all kinds of challenges within the Logistics field. I was getting soldiers as fill-ins from Individual Ready Reserve and other states to fill the shortages of certain critical MOS's. As they came to us they didn't have all of their clothing issues or TA-50. We also had one unit and two Battalions to join us in this deployment. We had an Infantry Battalion from Puerto Rico, another Infantry Battalion from Illinois and a Signal unit from Maryland. Once these outside units joined us at Fort Stewart we had over 4,000 soldiers deploying.

One of the major challenges I encountered was managing the life support for such a big Brigade. The space was getting limited at Fort Stewart and we had to send some units off to other military installations for training. This caused a lot of juggling of life support requirements between installations. My knowledge and experiences of my previous supply assignments helped me accept these new challenges with a positive attitude. In the supply field we have to manage all classes of supply. We were so big in numbers and we required a lot of extra funding when it came to all of our needs, such as life support, individual/unit equipment and PEO Soldier RFI Issues.

48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was the first to get fielded with the new ACU uniform for deployment to Iraq by the PEO Soldier. This was a very big event for us. The uniforms didn't stand up well to the NTC Training and by the time we left to Iraq some of the soldiers were in need of new uniforms. This caused major issues since we weren't able to start ordering in

country till 60-90 days in. There was a write up in The Army Times in regards to all of the issues we were encountering with the ACU uniforms. We got a lot of publicity. The main issue was that the ACU uniform was not holding up to the camp laundry service being provided. They were using excessive heat temperatures to dry the clothes and this caused the ACU uniforms to shrink and the velcro to become unsown. The uniforms were coming apart and as the comments went to higher up the improvement was being done on the ACU Uniforms. One of the improvements was that they started doing the double seams on the pants and pockets. ACU material changed to a more durable one and didn't feel as thin. We had reporters embedded with us to capture all of the events and track our whole movement from Georgia to Iraq and back to Georgia. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade took on all of the missions and challenges with a very positive attitude and we did well on our deployment.

#### 48<sup>th</sup> BCT makes it to IRAQ

Once we got in country the challenges got even harder. The 48<sup>th</sup> BCT was split up by Battalions and it seemed like we were spread out at all four corners of Iraq. In Baghdad I had to house the Brigade in tents due to the amount of soldiers that we had. I had to try and keep unit integrity and gender and rank which made it very hard being that the tent space was also limited. We conducted our Logistics meetings three times a week and sometimes four due to the great demand of life support requirements. This was the only way I could get the right information and capture all of the upcoming events and fix any problems that my battalions and units were encountering. We had to push all of this information and more to our higher headquarters which at the time was 13<sup>th</sup> COSCOM

our Divisional command. It was tough trying to get the right numbers and requirements from the Battalions S-4 NCOIC because the missions would change daily along with the sand storms and other weather issues. It was just impossible to plan something and actually execute it the first time around.

Our soldiers were going outside the wire constantly conducting security missions and building new Fob's and escorting KBR trucks down to the MSR. The areas of responsibility that we had were very dangerous and we started losing some of our soldiers. We lost approximately 28 soldiers to the dangerous missions that we were conducting and a large number of wounded soldiers who will be disabled for life. The first four soldiers that we lost was a very devastating experience for me. It was in Camp Striker, Baghdad and once the news came to the TOC that we had a crew of four killed by an IED and that really hit home. We all got a reality check because at first we were conducting business as usual and once we settled in and started working the area and doing shifts it got to be a routine.

I was informed of all of the KIA's because I had to make sure that the Mortuary Affairs Team would get dispatched to the right location and with the proper equipment. I went on the very first mission they had and after that I couldn't bear it. When you hear that four soldiers got killed by an IED you can't imagine what you will see. When I got there with the Mortuary Team I couldn't believe my eyes. To see what was left of those bodies and knowing that you had some interactions with these soldiers and now they are dead. It's hard to deal with picking up body parts and skin off the vehicles it's such an emotional rollercoaster. You have all kinds of feelings going through your mind and body

and soul. I had to make arrangements to have any vehicles involved in a KIA to be taken to another camp site as long as it wasn't the same location as to where the KIA soldier was from. If I didn't have another location and had to bring the vehicle back to the same camp site than we would have to cover the vehicle and have it towed away within 24 hours time. It was hard enough to lose the soldiers and to see the vehicles would make it even harder on the soldiers to adjust and it would bring the morale down even lower. This is one experience I will never forget and one that I learned so much from.

Once we started losing soldiers we had to work harder to build the communication among our soldiers going outside the wire on missions. It was important more than ever to stay focus and not allow the enemy to get the best of us. We all had to manage the anger, fear and insecurities we were feeling. We managed to survive the black cloud that came over us when we lost 11 Soldiers in a two week period. We had to stay strong because the missions kept on coming. This is the time that our NCO's really shined. All the senior leadership was being more alert and looking at any signs of stress, unusual behavior or being withdrawn. They went around talking and counseling the soldiers of their command to assure them that everything was okay and to stay focus on the missions in hand. As a result a stress tent was established for soldiers to go and get extra counseling. This was an awesome access to our solders in need.

Our last location was Tallil, Iraq and this was a logistical nightmare. We finally got to a location where we didn't have to stay in tent city any longer and were going to be housed in two-three man trailers. Once again the 48<sup>th</sup> BCT was split up into different locations. We had Battalions located in Anaconda in Balad, Camp Doha in Kuwait and

some in different FOB's. We had to stand up three Brigade S-4 cells to be able to support these locations while in the meantime we were getting ready to redeploy back to Georgia. We pulled very long hours and also had to deal with the anxiety of the soldiers because the time was getting closer to go home. This is the time when errors and accidents happen because we get careless.

Once we got to Tallil our Soldiers had better access to communicate with their loved ones back home and it seemed like it brought out more family problems. One of the lessons learned from this deployment was that we the Army National Guard should focus more on building our Family Support Groups. We should have the families come out to the armories and get them better informed about the activities and the training their loved ones are going to be going through. We learned that in some cases the soldier was already having issues at home and if we had recognized or offered some kind of counseling before deploying we would not have experienced so many problems while deployed.

One thing that the state of Georgia is now doing for our soldiers once they return from any deployment is that they go to a Strong Bonds Program where they have the couples come on a weekend to a very nice Hotel and they go through different types of counseling sessions. Once they are away from home and children and can focus only on themselves, they talk about how they feel and what they both experienced while away from each other. The sessions are run by our State Chaplain and his crew. The last day of the program which is Sunday they allow any couples who would like to renew their vows can do so. We actually have several couples renew their vows. The marriage break ups due to deployments was a fact we learned during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In summary the experience I learned and gained through the deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom was just invaluable to me. Nobody can say that they have been on a deployment and have come back as the same person they left. No matter if you were in dangerous situations or not. You still experience some type of combat stress or immeasurable situations. I took overseas a brigade of over 4,000 soldiers and was responsible for their life support, clearing all camp locations we occupied and was the last to leave to come back home. As a senior NCO you can either go to a job position and just fall right in behind the person you replaced and be in the idle mode or decide to make a difference. I choose to make a difference wherever I go and make good of all my experiences I have encountered on my way.