

Running Head: TROOP LEADING PROCEDURES, A KEY TO SUCCESS

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SFOR 7, Bosnia, 15 FEB 01 – 15 OCT 01

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20 September 2006

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In August of 1998, I was assigned to Eagle Troop, 2nd Squadron, 3Rd Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Carson, Colorado, as a mortar section sergeant. Prior to this assignment, I had always been in light airborne infantry units. I was somewhat surprised to find that the unit had a high degree of esprit de corps. I was to find out that they took being a cavalry trooper very seriously. Early in January of 1999 we received notification that we were going to be deploying to Bosnia for SFOR 7 in support of peace keeping operations. We were going to be the first active Army unit to deploy with a National Guard Unit serving as our higher headquarters. Our division headquarters was the 49th Texas National Guard. There were some consolidations and reorganizations within our squadron as well. Typically each troop has a mortar section assigned, all the mortar sections moved to HHT, I was the platoon sergeant of the mortar platoon. 1LT Williams, a field artillery officer was our platoon leader. I looked forward to the opportunity of being the platoon sergeant. Due to personnel shortages I was directed to interview and select Soldiers, MOS immaterial, who volunteered to deploy from other squadrons in the regiment. In total, I had 32 Soldiers from across the regiment consisting of three different MOSs.

Peace keeping operations, out of all our Soldiers, none of us had any prior experience in this kind of operation. In fact the majority had never deployed anywhere and those who had were veterans of Just Cause, Desert Shield, and Desert Storm these were totally the opposite of peacekeeping operations. Not the type of mission that we were going to be conducting. The main tasks that we were going to be conducting were presence patrols, convoy escort, traffic control points, and route recons. We quickly realized that we needed to learn as much as

possible about peacekeeping operations. Understanding the rules of engagement (ROE) would be critical to our success or failure.

Training is the most important thing that we do, the saying repeated to every Soldier when he joins the Army is true, more sweat in training, less blood in war. Early in my career one of the most important lessons I learned was the importance of conducting Troop Leading Procedures. Through experience over the years I found that rehearsals are one of the most important keys to success. Rehearsals were and continue to be in everything we do, from pre-jump training to crew and battle drills. As a young drill sergeant, my first sergeant was always saying, “ the best plan will fail if not rehearsed, the worst plan will work if it is well rehearsed.”

I felt our squadron staff did an excellent job of planning our predeployment training. We started training first at the individual, then platoon, and finally the squadron level. Probably the most important factor to our success was that the training was well resourced. Starting with platoon training, STX lanes were set up for us to run our platoons through. We executed those tasks that we would be doing in theater. These lanes were realistic, for example, each lane was controlled by an assigned observer/controller, all of the OPFOR were Spanish speakers requiring us to use interrupters, civilians vehicles were used to conduct vehicle searches, all personnel wore MILES gear, when dealing with the media we were filmed. This film was played back during the ARRs. At the completion of each lane ARR sites were set up over-looking the lane. This training far surpassed any other training that we conducted at the Troop or Squadron level. The reason for this was because as we advanced to the next level of training the resources for platoons became less and less. The focus was on the command and control at the higher levels of command. Being in a platoon with the squadron under the control of the 49th Texas Guard was of no consequence. It did not have an effect on us in the least.

The first task to take place once in country was conducting our right-seat-rides to become familiar with our AOR. We had to conduct joint inventories with the out-going unit. After conducting the inventories we held a platoon AAR. Several good things came out of this AAR that were to have a lasting effect on how we wanted to conduct business. A few things that we observed was a lack of maintenance. When doing the ammunition count, there were several 50 caliber ammunition cans full of water, ice and rust. The ammunition was in unserviceable condition. The belts could not even be laid out flat. Of the six vehicles we signed for four had deadline deficiencies. I don't mention this to sing our praises or condemn the out-going unit, only to show that these were the deficiencies that my Soldiers observed. I asked several of them what they thought this was a result of; their conclusion was that the unit had become complacent. I agreed, we decided that our goal was to fight compliancy, several times over the next seven months anytime I saw standards slipping, all I had to do was remind them of the change over inspection and they would tighten up their shot group. One last thing to mention about the change over was something I found to be surprising. I would like to remark that one of the biggest motivators for the Soldiers was getting their barracks assignments, it amazed me how much each Soldier felt more secure in having a place to call his own. Giving each of them an area to hang pictures, cards, and letters really increased the Soldiers motivation and a sense of belonging.

I want to say up front, that any success my platoon had was not due to any one person. The key to our success was doing the right things, backwards planning, conducting the necessary inspections, rehearsing... a lot, and staying informed of changes. All of the SSGs were senior, I had complete confidence in all of their abilities to be able to fill in at anytime, and despite their difference in leadership styles they all came together to work as a team. If limited to one

defining factor of our success it would be we always followed the five-paragraph operations order, with special emphasis on conducting rehearsals and following set timelines. Once our Soldiers understood the standard, daily operations went off without any problems. The best example that I can give of this would be the conduct of Pre-combat Inspections. Conducted in the following manner, pre-combat inspections started 30 minutes prior to rolling out on the mission, the platoon leader or I would conduct the inspection. We required them to form up by squads in front of their vehicles. We would inspect all weapons, go over weapons status, check the vehicles and load plans, question them on the ROE, and the mission. We felt the most important thing was that a Soldier never went on a mission without knowing the five Ws...who, what, when, where, and why. The squad leaders understood this and I cannot recall ever having a Soldier not being able to tell me his mission.

The most important lesson that I took away with me from my deployment to Bosnia was the importance of troop leading procedures. Some of the tasks stood out as being critical to the success of any mission, issuing complete operation orders, conducting rehearsals, pre-combat inspections and pre-combat checks are the real money makers.

After I returned from Bosnia my next assignment was as an observer/controller at the Combat Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany. This gave me an opportunity to share my experiences and lessons learned with other Soldiers. The most rewarding experience from my deployment to Bosnia came a few years later. I remember going to my office a couple of months after Baghdad fell; I had received an email from one of my former Soldiers. Specialist Kinney, now Sergeant Kinney had emailed to thank me for “making” them do all those “stupid” rehearsals and inspections. He said that he made his Soldiers do those same things and that it instilled confidence not only in his Soldiers but kept him focused as a leader. Seeing young

Soldiers develop into professional noncommissioned officers is what it is all about. The passing on of those skills and lessons learned to others. Just prior to coming to USASMA, I ran into Staff Sergeant Kinney, he was attending BNCOC and then was going to finish up his time as a recruiter. SSG Kinney is a young motivated competent leader, when it comes time for me to hang up my hat and call it a day, I am confident that the Army will continue to “roll-a-long” with other noncommissioned officers leading our Army.