

Support of Operation Joint Endeavor

Support of Operation Joint Endeavor

CSM Stephen M. Gee

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

SMNRC Class 35 Phase II

MOS 94E3H

Operation Joint Endeavor, 06/10/1996-03/03/1997

10/20/2009

Unclassified

Electronics Inspector/ Interim Acting Maintenance Control Sergeant

## Abstract

In December 1995, NATO supported with forces of the United States entered Bosnia in order to restore stability and order. After years of unrest, genocide committed against the people by Solomon Molosalvage and his regime, caused the international community finally took action. In early 1996, the National Guard Borough (NGB) was notified and request for support troops was made. In June 1996 I was mobilized and deployed to Germany in support of Operation Joint Endeavor. In this paper I will describes some of the key events and lessons learned during my deployment.

Rumors started around the end of March 1996 that a maintenance unit from New York State was slated to be activated and deployed in support of Operation Joint Endeavor and going to Bosnia. By the end of April of that year the official notification was made public, and the 133<sup>rd</sup> Non-Divisional Maintenance Company was scheduled for activation. This would be the first National Guard unit deployed since the Gulf war. Anticipation and anxiety was running rampant throughout the unit, as only a few members had been deployed for the Gulf war and even less had actual combat experience. Those that did were Vietnam veterans.

On 10 June 1996, the 133<sup>rd</sup> Maintenance Company was formally activated into Federal Service in support of Operation Joint Endeavor. The activation was for a nine-month period of time, with an end date of 3 March 1997. Our first stop was Fort Dix, New Jersey for mobilization training. The unit remained at Ft. Dix for three weeks, going through deployment training requirements. During this period of time we performed lanes training, received our certification and validation on weapons qualification and other mandatory training none of which prepared us for the operational mission we would undertake. In late June, or early July the unit departed Ft. Dix for Germany and then to Bosnia.

Once the unit arrived in Germany the situation changed for the unit, a second maintenance unit from Alabama had already arrived and was scheduled for duty in Bosnia. Discussions on the status of the two units commenced for a few days, with the final decision for the 133<sup>rd</sup> Maintenance Company remaining in Germany for the duration of the deployment. The Maintenance Company from Alabama went down range to provide maintenance support for the units in theater. The 133<sup>rd</sup> took up its new mission by providing maintenance support for seven (7) separate locations in central Germany, with the Headquarters stationed in Hanau. The unit consisted of the unit's main location, 5 mobile support teams (MST), a supply service activity

(SSA) collocated in Hanau, and one augmented special repair section. The augmented section was assigned the mission of repairing battle damaged equipment to 10/20 standard.

At the start of the mission in Germany, I was assigned as the Units' Electronics Inspector. This assignment only lasted for a few weeks, for I was detailed as the Interim Acting Maintenance Control Sergeant when the mission over powered the individual NCO assigned to the job. In Hanau Germany; the unit fell under the direct command of the 18<sup>th</sup> Core Support Battalion (CSB), then the 16<sup>th</sup> Core Support Group (CSG). We provided direct and general support to over individual 50 units, and provided secondary support to the MST's and the augmented repair section. In addition we provided support for two (2) separate commercial contractors of which the unit ultimately absorbed their missions.

As the mission shifted so did the outlook of the over all unit, realizing that we were no longer going Bosnia but rather would be a key maintenance support element in Germany. The senior staff, worked to establish the units taskforce for manning the seven (7) different locations became the principle task at hand. Since over 50% of all the soldiers serving in the unit were federal technicians' the maintenance mission would be relatively easy for the everyday mechanic. The supply personnel on the other hand; that had to operate the SSA activity would experience challenging issues; the operation was hampered with inexperienced soldiers and a system that continued to require upgrades and periodic outages. Federal technicians' are members of the National Guard that work fulltime maintaining military equipment, working in a supply activity, they primary work in their MOS.

Over all the 133<sup>rd</sup> maintenance company performed remarkably well given its first activation and deployment in its history. The initial response, received was one of what are you

doing here, too thank you. The overall perceived perceptiveness was that we were a group of misfits incapable of performing our mission. In reality; this was the furthest thing from the truth. By the end of our mission, we had reduced the open work order backlog from over 500 to less than 50. In addition, we absorbed two (2) separate commercial contractors' missions and completed them while saving the US Army over \$1,000,000. The augmented maintenance activity restored over 30 Vehicles to 10/20 Standards within an expenditure limit of \$500, and were returned to war stock. The overall mission was a learning experience for me and all the other NCOs, in that we finally executed missions to their completion with little interference from officers. NCOs performed NCO business, we were able to manage and supervise our soldiers in the completion of their military jobs. The officers performed officer business while causing little or no interference to overall operation.

Working in the maintenance control section of the unit during weekend drills, and during annual training provided me with a basic understanding of the Army's maintenance activities working, but failed to provide a true picture as what lied forward. Additional experience I brought from being a federal military technician helped. The real challenging and learning experience occurred when the direct interaction with the Active component and the National Guard Soldiers happened. Even though in Desert Shield, and Desert Storm large numbers of National Guard and Reservist were activated and deployed, the feeling was that we were still second rate elements to the Active component. This stereo type initial caused conflict between units. As the realization that our unit was capable and even surpassed expectations' the situation resolved its self. My personal learning experiences and challenges' became magnified from the moment I assumed the position of Maintenance control Sergeant.

Having to maintain constant communication with all of the remote locations, this in it self was a challenge. In addition being one of few that qualified to operate a military vehicle in Germany hampered operations even more. At least once every two weeks, I had to make visit to the remote locations given the distance of each unit, the process would take sometime three to four day. This in turn caused me to be out of the office more then I would realize. As situations arose, communication in the mid 1990 is not as it is today. Often a situation would arise, and I was unaware of it for hours and even sometimes a day or two. This in turn lead to indecision of my staff not sure of all the implications of a scenario, no decision would be made until I was contacted. Besides the required visits to the remote units, I would have to make supply runs to ERF (The Army Equipment Redistribution Facility); the drive each ways was almost 3 hours.

The differences between the Active Army maintenance and the National Guard systems played a major part in complicating the scenario. Working fulltime in the technician system, the maintenance support shop operated in a more relaxed format. The majority of personnel were on a first name bases, no mater of their military rank, everyone performed their jobs based off work positions. I soon learned that as the Maintenance Control Sergeant that I was responsible for the operations of the Unit. Making and maintain coordination with other support activities, attending all support operational meetings and briefing the Battalion and the Brigade support staff on the units' mission status.

Back in New York, we had a Material readiness section that was responsible for the interaction with various other support activities. The Maintenance Support Supervisor was responsible for briefing the higher Headquarters on all aspects of the shop's operation. One of the major shortfall for the unit as a hole was the lake of institutional training on the overall operational procedures for the maintenance and supply activity. Even through soldiers are MOS

Qualified, there is still that adjustment period, throwing a unit into full operation without proper train-up does cause some complications. This was overcome through long hours, rereading operational manuals and regulatory guidance.

As I was asked one day by the 18<sup>th</sup> CSB CSM, about the unit, I explained to that the average of the unit was in the mid 40's; a number of them are Vietnam veterans'. As that we may not be the best at soldiering skills, the unit makes up for in accomplishing the maintenance mission. He then went on to inform me that a soldier must be complete, able to perform their military tasks, as well as soldier, and know how to effectively perform in any situation. This I have incorporated into my personal philosophy of leadership. It is a different way of looking at Be, Know, Do.

As with any unit, we had soldiers that performed beyond expectation and those that did the least to get by. Some NCOs established good and open communication with the host units, allowing for their soldier to have fast integration in the new environment. All-in-all the units overall performance was well received both in Germany and back in New York State. As for the majority of NCOs' they learned and experienced the true meaning and authority that we hold in accomplishing missions. I personally believe that our NCO Corps, if provided with the information needed is totally capable of executing any and all missions.