

Running Head: PREPARATION FOR DEPLOYMENT

Preparation For Deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom II

MSG Anthony A. Herrera

Train-up, Fort Bragg, NC, 12/23/2002 – 12/15/2003

31B5PS2, Operation Sergeant, 21st Military Police Company (Airborne)



21 September 2006

USASMA, Class #57

NOTIFICATION

On 23 December 2002, the 21st Military Police Company (Airborne) walked off a civilian chartered airplane returning from a successful deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The unit fell under 3rd Brigade, 82d Airborne Division for the deployment to Afghanistan but upon our return fell back under the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne) while at Fort Bragg, NC. My duty position was the junior Operation Sergeant for the unit consisting of 179 paratroopers. As I walked off the airplane, I assisted the First Sergeant with organizing the Soldiers into formation. The Brigade Commander met us at the bottom of the airplane and took our Company Commander aside to brief him on something. I continued to look in the direction of the conversation and I could tell by my commander's body language it was something that was going to affect the unit. As we began to march towards the pack sheds for the welcome home ceremony the commander told me to get all the leadership together after the ceremony so the Brigade Commander could talk to us. Once the ceremony was over I told all the key leadership to meet on the other side of the pack shed in 15 minute for a meeting. I walked over to the other side to identify the meeting place and the Brigade Commander and Command Sergeant Major were already there. I could tell by their facial expressions that they were going to tell us something about another deployment. As I walked up to them I said "Where are we going now?" and they responded with "Iraq". I immediately knew that if they wanted to talk to us now that we were leaving soon. I stood there quietly looking at the ground numb waiting for the leadership to all arrive. The leadership arrived and the Brigade Commander started to tell us that the 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne), the 65th Military Police Company (Airborne), and the 108th Military Police Company (Airborne) were deploying in March to support the invasion of Iraq. He then told us that we were going to Iraq as

a possible follow on force but he did not know the time frame. The Company Commander immediately told us that this would not interfere with our block leave or reintegration phase. He also told us not talk about this information to the Soldiers so they could enjoy their leave with their families. The first sergeant instructed all NCOs to get their Soldiers through the reintegration phase so we could start our block leave without any distracters. The meeting broke up and all the platoon sergeants started to ask me several questions. I reinforced the chain of command's guidance and told them to concentrate on getting through the next few days first so we could enjoy our leave. We started our block leave on schedule without any further discussion on the upcoming deployment.

Plan of Action

I knew that I would be the Senior Operation Sergeant for the unit when I returned from block leave so I came back a week early to start gathering answers for questions I knew the leadership would ask. I began the process by identifying issues that would affect the unit immediately. I identified the following issues:

Incoming Commander within 45 days

Incoming First Sergeant within 60 days

All four Platoon Leaders were rotating out of the unit within 90 days

Two of the four platoon sergeants were moving out of the unit within 90 days.

One of the platoon sergeants staying in the unit was going to ANCOC in July.

The entire Operation Cell was leaving except for me.

A Change of Command Inventory with equipment still in transit from Afghanistan.

60 Soldiers scheduled to PCS or ETS.

50 Soldiers schedule for NCOES schooling from April through November.

15 Soldiers scheduled to PCS enroute to Drill Sergeant School and Recruiting School.

How the Installation Support for Law Enforcement was going to affect us.

The Timeline to deploy was still unknown.

Knowing that the unit was getting a new commander and first sergeant within the next few months, I started to prepare slides to brief them on the status of the unit. I developed the slides to show the unit's current status and what it will look like in the next 90 days when we began to lose Soldiers. I wanted to give the chain of command the most up to date information so I could receive their guidance and end state for the unit's training plan. I created three spreadsheets for the Commander and First Sergeant to help them track things. The first spreadsheet I created showed the time frame when Soldiers would start leaving the unit for PCS, ETS, Drill Sergeant School, and Recruiting School. The second spreadsheet showed the 50 Soldiers scheduled for NCOES schooling and when they would leave and return back to the unit. The third spreadsheet showed all the M&TOE position by rank so the incoming first sergeant knew what and when replacement Soldiers were needed. These spreadsheets turned out to be a valuable tool because it allowed me to focus on other areas and reduced the amount of questions from the chain of command. The new Commander and First Sergeant were coming from the Brigade Staff so they had already identified the replacement platoon sergeants and met with the new platoon leaders. They had their report dates and knew their experience level so this allowed me to focus on getting the operation cell up and operational. The entire operation cell was leaving except for me which was a big concern. I immediately recommended to the First Sergeant that the senior platoon sergeant be the other operation sergeant for the unit. I knew from the recent

deployments that he was ready to assume the role and would be a tremendous asset for the unit. The First Sergeant agreed and approved the move effective immediately. The next positions that I needed to fill were the two Battle Staff NCOs. The Battle Staff NCOs were coming from other units within the Battalion and would move into those positions within the first 30 days of us returning from block leave. I knew from previous experience that the operation cell was the brains of the unit and it needed to work smoothly in order for the unit to accomplish the mission. Once we completed filling those positions I began to develop a tasking spreadsheet to track who was responsible for what mission. I knew I needed more information before I developed the Company's Long Range calendar so I met with the Battalion S-3 Sergeant Major. I requested a copy of the Battalion Long Range Calendar, a spreadsheet showing all the major installation support missions, and a spreadsheet for all our airborne operations. This information would allow me to develop a Company Long Range Calendar and prevent me from scheduling training on dates that I knew was going to cause conflict. The Battalion S-3 Sergeant Major told me that he was staying behind to be the rear Command Sergeant Major for the Battalion once they deployed to Iraq (Personal Communication, SGM Kevin Noland, 13 February 2003). He also provided me the following guidance:

Incoming Soldiers would be slow.

We had to share the law enforcement duties with the other MP Company.

We would have at least two Airborne Operations per month.

Equipment would be limited for use and assets would have to come from Brigade.

Post support tasks will interfere with our training so plan around them.

Brigade sent a request to push back our deployment for the end of the year.

Plan our training out to December but have key training events identified.

TRAINING PLAN

I developed a Long Range Training calendar based off all the information I received from the Battalion S-3. Once I identified all the Post Support Missions and Airborne Operations for the rest of the year, I was able to see what dates were available to develop a training plan for the commander. I also identified the dates when our equipment would arrive back from Afghanistan so I blocked off those dates on the long range calendar also. The Battalion S-3 tasked us with providing Law Enforcement duties starting in April. I immediately developed a plan to move all the Soldiers identified to leave the unit into the headquarters platoon so we could use them first for the law enforcement tasking. This reduced the numbers of Soldiers scheduled to deploy from missing training and allowed us a little flexibility with our training plan. The battalion provided us with a tool known as the pre-deployment matrix. The matrix served as an excellent tool for us to identify a timeline and accomplish mandatory training. It also provided all the critical tasks to complete prior to deployments. I conducted a class on the pre-deployment matrix to the Operations Cell, Commanders, First Sergeant, Platoon Leaders, Platoon Sergeants, and Air Movement NCOs to provide a better understanding of the sequence in which to prepare the unit to deploy. Based off the commander's guidance, I schedule a company Field Training Exercise (FTX) at the end of the year to evaluate the unit's status before deploying. I also scheduled a platoon FTX in July and one in November to track the progress of the platoon leadership on tracking and reporting procedures. I scheduled four five-day Squad Lane Training Exercises (STX), two platoons per STX. The STX guidance was to create the training around the tasks we

believed would be the most likely missions conducted throughout the deployment. We identified the following training areas:

Conduct a cordon and search.

Establish a hasty check point.

Establish a forward collection point.

Process Enemy Prisoner of War (EPW) or Person under Control (PUC).

React to a hasty ambush.

Provide convoy security and VIP security.

React to a mine strike and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) strike.

Request Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC).

Call for Fire.

Secure a critical asset (respond to a downed CF aircraft).

In addition, we started exercising patrol base weapons clearing procedures and muzzle awareness during all training events. The STX also served as our team certification program. We conducted our FTXs and STXs with Observer Controllers coming from inside the company. In some cases senior NCOs were not available from within the company, which slowed the training process down. To overcome this all resources within the Battalion or Brigade were used to provide Observer Controllers. This allowed for Platoon Sergeants to train with their platoons. In addition, this allowed operations personnel the opportunity to train on Tactical Operation Center (TOC) operations, battle tracking and sending reports. This provided the operation cell with developing a battle rhythm format. I developed a plan for range density for all assigned weapons

and crew serve weapons by breaking it down into three phases. The first phase consisted of basic marksmanship qualifications. We removed all specialized equipments and optics. I had the company focus on battle sight zeroing and the basic fundamentals of firing techniques for individual and crew served weapons. These allow the NCOs to bond with their Soldiers and the Soldiers to learn to trust their NCOs competence. The second phase consisted of firing their weapons with their specialized equipment and optics. I scheduled several ranges in this phase so the confidence level for each Soldier was developed. The third phase consisted of transitional firing and situations. I focused on exposing the teams on shoot and don't shoot situations, reloading under firing, communication under stress, and fire control. The company commander's goal was to have 100% of the unit qualified on their assigned weapon and 100% exposed to transitional fire techniques. I also developed a Convoy Live Fire (CLF) range through the use of range 74 on Fort Bragg. I coordinated with range control personnel, the battalion staff, and other military police units to get their input about their experience with conducting a CLF range. I used their comments and created a realistic training event by focusing on scenarios that involved the military police squads and headquarters personnel working together and independently. I created a convoy escort mission, a logistical convoy, a MSR security mission, and area security mission. These scenarios increased the confidence level and experience for low density Soldiers and military police teams. It also expanded on our ability to communicate among fighting teams during an engagement and provided a better understanding on the tactics we would use during our deployment. I schedule the use of the Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT) facility to expose the Soldiers on clearing and fighting in built up areas. I used the crawl, walk, and run method of training to schedule the use of this facility and ensure they were provided sufficient time to train. The guidance to observer

controllers was to take out key leaders and create injured Soldiers to reinforce the standing operating procedures for the unit on how to handle these types of situation and expose the unit's medics to realistic training under stressful situation. The training also made the NCOs decide on how and when to call for medical evacuations and fire support. Overall, the MOUT exercise paid off tremendously and had the biggest impact on the NCOs confidence level. The commander's guidance was to plan the unit's collective training events and allow the platoon leadership to train on the individual training during opportunity training. With the amount of time and availability of Soldiers, the training plan was a success.

Soldier Readiness Check (SRC) Processing

SRC identified Soldier issues that put them in a non-deployable status and became a war stopper for the unit. We had to be complete SRC 30 days out from the deployment date which made it very difficult to handle Soldiers issues before departure. Each platoon sergeant ensured their Soldiers completed as much of the SRC requirements prior to the units scheduled SRC block time. Platoon sergeants identified Soldiers who wore glasses and ensured they had two pairs of Army issue glasses and inserts for their masks. The company medics screen each Soldiers records to identify personnel who needed hearing test, HIV testing, medical exams, dental exams, and required immunization shots prior to our SRC date. The medics scheduled appointments during the morning hours and late afternoons to ensure Soldiers did not miss crucial training. Because of prior planning by platoon sergeants and the medics, the unit was able to process Soldiers through SRC at a much faster rate and reduce issues that could have prevented a Soldier from deploying.

Line Haul of Equipment

I tasked the Air Movement NCO to identify all the equipment needed to be lined hauled and to complete the DEL. I worked with the battalion staff to assist with the ordering of vehicles support and establishing the timeline for the departure of our equipment. I developed a packing list with leadership involvement and identified what personnel gear and unit equipment would be loaded in the containers first. I had the unit's Air Movement NCO supervise and create detailed packing list so we knew where and how everything was loaded into the containers. I developed a timeline to have all the equipment put into containers after the last training event which was prior to our scheduled block leave. This allowed us to have two solid weeks of available time to complete any loose ends before our departure once we returned from block leave. I used the rear detachment personnel to guard our equipment in the motor pool and escort the equipment to the loading docks. By using the rear detachment Soldiers, I was able to complete this mission without using Soldiers schedule to deploying during their block leave time.

Maps and Country Handbooks

A request for maps and country handbooks we requested approximately six months from deployment. This allowed the Battalion S-2 section enough time to gather all the required maps and handbooks needed for the unit. I also sent one of the battle NCOs to train on the falcon view program. The falcon view program was an automated program that allowed the printing and reviewing of all the maps in Iraq on a laptop computer. He then became the primary trainer for the unit and taught each leader how to operate the program so we could get map data that included 1:100,000, 1:50,000, 1:250,000 and one meter satellite imagery. The Country Handbook was another valuable tool that we issued to each Soldier. The command identified certain words and phases for each soldier to learn along with their cultural customs. The leadership included those phases into training and it became a daily inspection for the Soldiers.

Conclusion

As the Company's Operation Sergeant, I first developed a training plan for the unit on the concept we were leaving in a few months. After the Battalion S-3 Sergeant Major told me that we would not deploy until the end of the year, I knew I needed to focus on a year long training plan but my personal feelings kept telling me that we were leaving now. I learned through this experience to trust my leadership and focus on the training plan we eventually came up with. I learned a valuable lesson through this experience on my ability to not allow outside distracters to interfere with my thought process. I also learned that despite the brutal pace and over whelming training distracters, a unit needed to be flexible, agile, and focused in order to accomplish its mission. Overall, the unit performed all METL events with precision and never wavered despite working long hour. Even though we did not leave for Iraq as quickly as expected, we maximized our training time and built cohesive combat teams across the company. This training plan also allowed the leadership to focus on individual and collective training that would develop individual leaders and build strong confident leaders to the lowest level. After we completed the training plan, I knew we were ready for the year long deployment to Iraq and that we could handle any mission.