

Kurt Kagels, 1st Sergeant, 18Z, HSC 2nd Bn. 1st SFG(A)

1st SFG HSC Afghanistan OEF-A Sep 04-Jul 05

20 September 2006

United States Sergeants Major Academy

Class 57

HSC First Sergeant

Abstract

In the fall of 2004, 2nd Battalion 1st Special Forces Group deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom. The Battalion performed its role running firebases, occupying border control points, and running combat operations with indigenous forces. The headquarters and Service Company (HSC) provided all the support for the forward deployed A Detachments' and B detachments'. During this deployment, HSC also moved the battalion in to and out of theater. The pre-mission training did not prepare the NCOs' of HSC for the tasks and situations they faced in Afghanistan. During this deployment, NCOs' and Soldiers adapted and worked with indigenous peoples, foreign Soldiers, sister services, and Army personnel to complete the mission. As the First Sergeant of HSC 2nd I had the honor to supervise the company as it deployed, supported, and redeployed 2nd Battalion 1st Special Forces Group during its' difficult mission in Afghanistan.

I became the First Sergeant of HSC 2nd Bn. 1st SFG(A) in December of 2003. Prior to my job, as the HSC First Sergeant I held the position of a Team Sergeant of a Special Forces A Detachment. During my time as Team Sergeant the team deployed on various exercises and missions for 14 months of a 26 month period. Although this was busy schedule, my experience of deploying, conducting missions, and redeploying on A teams and in Special Forces made these deployments a tremendous success. HSC deployed as a company twice on two JCS exercises that were also highly successful. We deployed as a company to JRTC in preparation for Operation Enduring Freedom. On this rotation to JRTC, the company learned how to succeed at Ft. Polk but was not able to train on many of the tasks that would help them in Afghanistan. HSC received attachments from the Group Support Company consisting of food service, weapons repair, ammunition, and The Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment. Two local training exercises in the Fort Lewis area proved more beneficial to HSC in preparing for operations in theater. The training conducted on these exercises consisted of live fire convoy operations, section operations, and AOB support. After these exercises, HSC was confident and ready.

HSC planned to use 13 C-17 aircraft to deploy the battalion to Afghanistan. The Group Support Company could not perform the mission to load 2nd battalion out. HSC reacted to learn heavy equipment and coordination skills needed to accomplish the load out. The Ammunition Sergeant, the Motor Sergeant, and I coordinated for billeting, staging areas, temporary living quarters, civilian transportation, ammo storage areas, and training areas. The battalion began to arrive in phased deployment with one sometimes two planes a day. The only difficulty encountered during this time was the lack of a heavy forklift and the ammunition storage facility. The battalion planned and deployed

with all the training ammunition. The storage facility, even though they learned the ammo was coming did not prepare for its arrival. The Ammunition NCO was able to coordinate for a safe place to store and load the ammunition. The receiving and forward deploying of the A teams and the AOBs took about 15 days. HSC was able to settle down to basic support operations.

HSC performed its mission mostly by air. The Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment was made into the battalion air movement section. Rotary wing assets transported all personnel and supplies with exception of fuel and food. NCOs and Soldiers worked with aviation units on a daily bases on daily basis which ensured all the essential supplies reached the firebases. This relationship worked so well that other units stated to depend on HSC to move supplies for them. The NCOs and Soldiers of the Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment logged so many flight hours that they received the Air Medal. In late December 2004, a series of storms shut down all rotary wing operations over Afghanistan for 10 days. However, two firebases desperately needed a re-supply of food and water. Riggers, Soldiers, and aircrews worked tirelessly to affect two aerial re-supply operations. HSC continuously improved the facilities at the FOB. Soldiers and NCOs learned how to operate heavy equipment and coordinate with other Army units to improve the quality of life. NCOs supervised and learned the systems in country which the day-to-day operation of the Battalion more efficient. Turn around time for down weapons and vehicles decreased considerably. HSC worked together with outside units to get the equipment, fuel, ammunition, and food to the end users efficiently.

The battalion re-deployed in three weeks time. HSC began the planning two months before the first aircraft took off for home. The Air Force set the pace for actual flight schedule. The schedule was sporadic due to the lack of aircraft at that time. HSC mastered the in place systems to ease the way for re-deployment. The Motor Sergeant and I coordinated with and supervised the customs, air cargo, and heavy equipment agencies to get the battalion's equipment home in orderly fashion. The Motor Sergeant and the Soldiers of the Service Detachment worked to ensure these assets were at the right place at the time. The Air Force planned their aircraft poorly causing a two-day delay in the HSC re-deployment. HSC discovered the problem; Air Force load planners shipped two extra vehicles to Ft. Lewis. The vehicles left in country were too heavy to fly on one plane. The Air Force load planners had to order another aircraft to move the rest of the vehicles. The Battalion Commander, Battalion Sergeant Major, Company Commander, and I were the last ones out of the country.

My individual situational response to mission objectives is broken down to networking and depending on myself. I found that networking with other Army units and civilian contracted services paid off with big dividends during all aspects of the mission. Without building these relationships, I faced the possibility of falling short of mission objectives. The NCOs and Soldiers depended on me to ensure their quality of life, work, and re-deployment was up to standard. I learned that the only person ensuring these things for me was me. The officers and Battalion Command Sergeant Major had to worry about A-teams and operations. This proved true when planning and coordinating for re-deployment. I gained a new confidence in my ability to operate independently to accomplish essential tasks.

The NCO experience during the mission is broken down into dependency on each other, learning of new skills, and the impact individual performance on the big picture. The NCOs of HSC worked in different sections and had very little interaction with each other in the rear. NCOs had to interface and work with each other more closely during the mission in Afghanistan. HSC NCOs became dependent on one another to accomplish tasks. NCOs learned new skills that they did not train for to complete many missions. NCOs learned to work with aircraft, operate heavy equipment, and interface with indigenous peoples, which ensured mission completion. During the course of the operation, NCOs could see the impact of their work on the country of Afghanistan. This led to a feeling of pride within the unit as the operation ended. This feeling of pride continued when HSC returned to Ft. Lewis and is still exists.

HSC learned two doctrinal lessons that would improve the company's effectiveness. The first lesson is the ability of the Group Support Company to deploy and re-deploy the battalion from home station. The Group Support Company did not have the personnel to complete their mission. HSC had to work to get ourselves into and out of country. The main lesson here is to retain the internal capability to deploy and recover the battalion. The second lesson is base defense and convoy operations. All attacks on the base came from indirect fire. The main mission of the base defense forces in this situation consist of damage control, casualty assistance, and accountability. Personnel can train these skills in country (with exception of medical training). Convoy operations are a perishable skill. HSC NCOs and Soldiers continuously found themselves conducting convoys throughout the theater. HSC personnel must train regularly in live fire convoy operations.

The largest success story of the operation was the ability to work with and improve the helicopter supply system. Once in country I designated the Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment as the “Air Operations Detachment”. This group of six NCOs operated all air movement for the Battalion in Afghanistan. These NCOs invented a cargo and personnel manifesting system that greatly increased productivity. This system became so successful that the battalion began to move personnel and cargo for the United States Marine Corp, Army, and Air Force units within theater. This success story will always stay with me with a sense pride that we were able to support so many people.

One of the largest lessons learned I took from this deployment was the lack of heavy equipment and heavy equipment operators. During every day operations, we always seemed to be short one heavy forklift or Bobcat. Special Forces battalions need to procure at least one heavy forklift (six or the 10-Ton variety) and get them in theater on the first aircraft. The First Sergeant must sign up for an Air Force GDSS account is another lesson I have learned from this deployment. The GDSS system tracks all Air Force cargo aircraft worldwide. The First Sergeant can track all the incoming and outgoing aircraft that has the unit’s personnel and equipment.

The overall performance of the company during this deployment was outstanding. The Soldiers and the NCOs adapted to new missions and did not miss a detail. During the entire mission new situations arose that required exceptional abilities. An NCO who wishes to succeed will learn how to operate heavy equipment, load helicopters, track aircraft, move personnel, and adapt to any situation arises. It has been my experience that this is what every NCO needs to succeed in Afghanistan.