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Formation / Deployment of a New Infantry Company in the 4th UA of the 3ID

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Abstract

The time had finally come and I was getting the job that every senior Noncommissioned Officer desires the most, First Sergeant. I was leaving the fine world of Observer/Controller and heading to the 3rd Infantry Division. After talking to all the Brigade Sergeants Major of the Division, I was finally going to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, a newly formed Unit of Action in the division. Alpha company was a brand new infantry company in an armor battalion but it was going to work out. The chain of command is established and Soldiers are coming in. Time will fly by; we will only have 9 months to go from no personnel to “boots on the ground” in Iraq. The first fully manned and equipped Unit of Action infantry company in the 3rd Infantry Division, Alpha Company 4-64 Armor Task Force. “APACHES”

My duty position in Alpha 4-64 was that of the Senior Infantry Sergeant, First Sergeant. We were the first unit to start transformation from Brigade Combat Teams to Unit of Action. Preparation for deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom III 04-06 was the key order of business. To start there was no equipment, no Soldiers, and no operational headquarters. With the company chain of command in place, the “Apaches” would soon rise to be the best company in the task force.

Task force structure is usually either infantry or armor heavy. With the formation of a unit of action task force, we became more familiar with our sister MOS capabilities. Having a Battalion Commander that is a different combat arms field can put a little worrying into your daily activities. On the flip side of that, having a Battalion Commander that is will to listen to the experienced infantry leadership is a plus. The type of learning environment fostered by the commander made for a unit that anyone would be proud to be a part of. This is the type of unit that I was part of. Infantrymen historically have a rivalry with the armor community. I was proud to be able to fight with this “Armor Unit”.

We were tasked with building a new rifle company from ground up, starting only with an empty classroom (company headquarters) and 2 desks. Train up and then finally secure the largest sector that one task force had responsibility for in Baghdad drop. Build-up is slow starting with Soldiers and weapons, building steam daily. It helped us build a fighting unit the way that we wanted it to turnout. We did not have a lot of bad habits built in the company from other commanders, we were the first.

In combat, doctrinal lessons that we had trained with in the Mission Readiness Excursion and unit train-up, changed daily. The biggest deployment problems faced were that of Battle

Hand off. Once in country, we would battle hand off “relief in place” with 2 different units in 2 different sectors. Diplomats (Iraqi Diplomats) made operations in country the most difficult. These were the people that we were trying to help, and sometimes they were the ones that needed a bullet. What helped us during deployment in these times was following current ROE and always staying professional.

Starting with new Soldiers, a lot of them coming straight out of basic training, and watching them grow up to become combat veterans was one of the greatest accomplishments of my tour as a first sergeant in combat. Soldiers became leaders, leaders became greater leaders and everyone grew together. I went to Iraq hurt, not being able to accomplish all I wanted to do over there, was the down side of my tour. Unlike a First Sergeant should be (looking after everyone’s back), I seemed to always have someone “literally” watching my back. My Soldiers always wanted to take care of me.

One of the most important lessons learned was the fact that you have to be very flexible. The mission will change constantly. Your enemy will change tactics. The entire environment will change. To stay ahead of these changes, flexibility will be a daily challenge. Be flexible or you will fall behind. While building a new organization, things are not always going to go the way you would hope them to. You must always remain flexible in everything that you are tiring to accomplish. You may not always know or understand the entire situation.

Most of the operations in Iraq are run at squad or platoon level. I would estimate that 75% are squad level, ran by a young Staff Sergeant. The rest are at platoon and company level. We really rely on these your NCOs to be professional and responsible. The types of operations that these young leaders are accomplishing are missions that in the past a young captain would not have had to do. Dealing with village leaders and sometimes diplomats were an everyday

event. This action just goes to show that the type of leaders we have in this great Army can accomplish any mission. These junior NCOs grow up really fast. They take this responsibility really serious.

Being one of the largest Task forces in the area, the integration of Reserve, National Guard, Foreign services and local National military forces was a key to our success. The Tennessee National Guard was an extremely professional and well disciplined unit. It would be hard to say the same thing for the California National guard. The unit that we worked with that was the most surprising was a unit from the country of Georgia. For most of my military career, I had train to fight against the units of the Warsaw Pack. Once in Iraq, I found out I would be serving next to some of those same Soldiers. They were a unit different than we had ever worked with before. They were professional and knew that they also had a specific job to accomplish. The Iraqi Army was very new and had a long way to go to be able to protect (without the help of US Forces) the people of Iraq.

New equipment was coming in very quick, even in Iraq. We would receive little training but the training we did receive was a very high caliber. The most difficult piece of equipment just happened to be a piece of MTOE equipment (M2A2 BFVs). Very little time was spent on this piece of equipment till we were in country. Soldiers love weapons and optics, this equipment was no problem to get trained on.

Battle-hand-off went very smooth during our relief in place. You will always get a group of people that “know it all” and you will have a very difficult time telling them the correct way to do things, even if you have been conducting operations for the last year. These units will learn, sometimes the hard way that experience knows best. Changing positions with two different units

in two different areas of operation can be difficult. As units get smaller, your areas of operations are going to become larger.

I truly believe that the overall accomplishment of the mission was outstanding. Our entire area of operation was totally different from day one. You could see it in the eyes of the children playing soccer on the street, people shopping in the markets, and the diplomats coming thru the check points. Starting out on one of the most dangerous streets in Baghdad, Haifa Street, your level of anxiety stayed at full alert. By the time of “mid-tour” things were totally different. We still had to maintain a high level of security while on patrol, but it was common to stop and play soccer with the local kids. Kids loved to come out and ask for and get candy from the Soldiers. IEDs were still a big factor, but at least now the locals would let the Soldiers know if something was out of place.

The best way to prepare Soldiers for operation in country is to training them on the entire Warrior Task List. Each Soldier has to be a warrior no matter the MOS. If the unit truly knows the area of operation and mission that they will be tasked, that will definitely enhance the type of training conduct. The number one battle drill is (React to Near Ambush) this is due to the number of IED attacks.

Seeing many different things happen during our operations, many different Soldiers stick in your mind. One such incident happened to a young tank commander that was in a VBIED attack. The VBIED exploded literally 20 feet in front of his tank. Scrap-metal struck him in his neck and chest and I was so amazed at how calm he remained during the entire EVAC process. The training that this Soldier had received and the confidence he had in his leadership and the entire process impressed me.

With the combat rotations coming so fast, we are growing Soldiers at the highest rate seen. Is this an effective way to make NCOs? They do have combat experience but what about the everyday experience of dealing with soldiers? Our young leaders will return to garrison after the rotation. We have most of our problems in the garrison environment. With a little more experience (not to include combat) we will maintain great young leaders. We have the best caliber of Soldiers the military has ever seen, promotions will come with experience. Not all need the promotion just because they meet the “time-in-serve” requirements.

Conclusion

Going from “zeros” to “heros”, Apache Company will go down in the history of the 3Rd Infantry Division. Starting with only 6 Soldiers of the command section to a company team consisting of infantry platoon, tank platoon, and support elements patrolling one of the most dangerous sectors in central Baghdad is a direct reflection to the caliber of Soldiers in the military. Give us a mission, minimum resources and we will execute. This statement can go along with any of our great units of the United States Army.