

Running Head: TRANSFORMATION TO THE 2D COMBAT AVIATION BRIGADE

Transformation to the 2d Combat Aviation Brigade

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Transformation to the 2d Combat Aviation Brigade - June 16, 2005 – July 14, 2006

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Abstract

Transformation arrived for the aviation brigades in Korea on June 16, 2006 when the 17th Aviation Brigade cased its colors and the 6th Cavalry Regiment reflagged to become the 2d Multi-Functional Aviation Brigade (MFAB). A new era began for army aviation in Korea. The 2d MFAB experienced an additional transformation with a name change to the 2d Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB). My journey as the Operations Sergeant Major began on August 1, 2006. Two weeks later, the brigade conducted the first major training exercise, Ulchi Focus Lens. The brigade operated at a high operational tempo for the next 10 months. This paper recounts my experience as the first Operations Sergeant Major of the 2d Combat Aviation Brigade.

Context

My experience with operations began early in my career. I received initial training as an operations sergeant during my first assignment in Korea. I was a staff sergeant in B Co, 4-58th Aviation Regiment (ATS). This assignment lasted one year. The coordination of all the major training exercises in the company was my responsibility. In addition to conducting operations, I was also responsible for the day-to-day execution of training by ensuring all training resources were available.

After leaving Korea, my next duty station was Ft. Campbell, KY. I spent six months in operations until SFC Kenneth Russell replaced me in operations and training liaison. I moved to personnel administration center to provide leadership to a section without an NCO.

By 1997, I was on orders for Germany. I spent my first three years in Wiesbaden, Germany as a platoon sergeant in B Co, 3-58th Aviation Regiment (ATS). In 2000, the acting battalion command sergeant major asked me to move to Giebelstadt, Germany to serve as the battalion operations NCOIC. I served the next four years in HHC, 3-58th Avn Regt (ATS). As the operations NCOIC, I deployed the battalion through two major deployments, Victory Strike II (Poland) and Victory Strike III. I finished my last 2 ½ years as the first sergeant.

In 2004, I departed Germany and went back to Korea to serve as the Operations NCOIC for the 1-52^d Aviation Regiment. The unit was a helicopter battalion for the 17th Aviation Brigade. This battalion was highly engaged in Korea with VIP missions in addition to the normal aviation operations of a helicopter battalion. As the operations NCOIC, I was responsible for taskings, TDYs, schools, ammunition management, and

numerous miscellaneous missions that were the responsibility of the S-3 shop. This job was the prelude to the Brigade Operations Sergeant Major position I would assume in August 2005.

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The Activation Ceremony

On June 16, 2005, at 1100, Army Aviation in Korea changed forever. It was a hot summer morning. The battalions were formed on the tarmac awaiting the start of the rehearsal. It was a bittersweet day for many because units were combining to form a new aviation brigade. The brigade staffs of the 17th Aviation Brigade and the 6th Cavalry Brigade performed last minute changes to the ceremony. The 6th Cavalry Brigade was the lead element for planning the ceremony. The 6th Cavalry reflagged to become the newly formed 2d Combat Aviation Brigade at Camp Humphreys, Korea.

Rehearsal started at 0800 and the heat began to make its presence known. During rehearsal one of the company commanders passed out. He hit the pavement hard. The command stopped the rehearsal to take care of the Soldier. After 10 minutes, the medics determined he was alright and rehearsal resumed. He did not return to the formation because he was ill and the command did not want another episode during the ceremony. As the rehearsal progressed, there was anxiety in the air as the ceremony time approached. It was both an exciting and an ominous feeling going through my mind. I was assuming the role of the first Operations Sergeant Major for 6 battalions. My previous jobs seemed easy compared to what I was about to embark upon.

The ceremony began with a ladies and gentlemen. The crowd quieted because for many this was a new experience and we were curious about the conduct of the ceremony. The ceremony contained a lot of tradition. The rich histories of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, the 17th Aviation Brigade, and the 2d Aviation Regiment endured that day. The Soldiers dressed in uniforms from past to present was a fitting tribute to all

those who served. It was a proud moment to realize that I was part of this time-honored organization. I was watching my predecessor intently to gather any information that would help me with the assumption of my new role. The speeches were a little long, but COL Abramowitz gave a stirring speech. It was sad to watch HHC, 17th Aviation Brigade leave the field. I served in this brigade on my previous tour in Korea and returned to the brigade with this tour. The 17th Aviation Brigade holds a special place in my heart.

The ceremony ended at approximately 1230 and the 2d Multi-Functional Aviation Brigade (MFAB) became the army's newest aviation brigade. It consisted of HHC, 2d MFAB (Warrior Knights), 1-2 Attack Aviation Regiment (Gunfighters), 3-6 Cavalry Regiment (Heavy Cav), 2-2 Aviation Regiment (Wildcards), 2-52 General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB) (Nightmare), 602d Aviation Support Battalion (ASB) (Warhorse), and 164 Air Traffic Services (ATS) (Guardian). By 1230, everyone was breathing a sigh of relief because the ceremony was complete.

Ulchi Focus Lens

From June 16 until August 1, I was not in the fight yet. I remained at K16 to assist 1-52 Aviation Regiment with re-stationing to Alaska. 1-52 Avn received the re-stationing directive in February and spent 6 months moving the battalion to Ft. Wainwright, Alaska. I did not accompany them because they were not authorized a Sergeant Major. The army promoted me to Sergeant Major February 1, 2005. I joined the 2d MFAB on August 1, 2005 in Camp Humphreys.

It was an interesting welcome. The month of July was a nightmare for the S-3 section. Temporary Duty Orders (TDYs), taskings, schools, and ammunition management had no systems in place. No one knew where to start organizing the

sections and bring the battalions online. When I arrived at work on August 1, The S-3, MAJ Michael Hosie, greeted me with a smile. I think he wanted to hug me because he kept repeating how happy he was to see me. I got the same response from the CPT Park, who was the OIC for TDYs, schools, and taskings prior to my arrival. The brigade was also in the process of preparing for Ulchi Focus Lens (UFL) and no one knew what to expect when the newly formed brigade deployed. UFL was only two weeks away. All of the subordinate battalions had their deployment orders, so the next challenge was getting them used to reporting to brigade. In addition, to this challenge, I had to create systems within the S-3 section for all the sections within my area of operations.

The S-3 section was starting over with a new crew with the exception of two captains, one major, two sergeants and a couple of privates. The S-3 section had to rely on the experience of the two sergeants, SGT Greenwalt and SGT Khordish, to ensure the section had all the equipment we needed to deploy to UFL. Sergeant First Class Ronald Harris was my TOC Boss. He was very good at organizing, attention to details, and leading Soldiers. He worked hard to guide the two sergeants in preparing for UFL. For the next two weeks, we spent numerous hours in the motor pool cleaning, prepping, and packing equipment for deployment.

August 16, 2005 arrived and we deployed. Deployment day was one of the worst days of my career. We deployed on the hottest day of the summer. By 1200, we were at heat category 5. During the convoy to the training site, the briefing van caught on fire. The vehicle was less than five miles from the training area. By this time, I was feeling horrible. I was drinking water and I hydrated days prior, so I could not understand why I felt bad. I left SFC Harris at the training site and I took my vehicle, driver, and two other

Soldiers back to the site where the briefing van broke down to check on PFC Desmaris and PFC Reynolds. As we drove up, there was smoke coming out of the vehicle. I instructed the Soldiers to raise the hood. The fire was smoldering and raising the hood fueled it. I started yelling for a fire extinguisher because we had a small fire going at this point. PFC Desmaris put the fire out and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. I went to sit in the vehicle because it was extremely hot and my head was pounding. After I ensured the Soldiers had water and food, we departed for the training site and left them there to wait for the wrecker to tow them the last five miles to the site.

Within the first 48 -72 hours of deploying, the medical personnel should conduct a mass casualty exercise. They got one without even planning it. We had one heat casualty after another. I became a casualty. Dr. Davenport requested they evacuate me to the rear because she could not get my core body temperature down. I was drinking water all day, but I had a virus caused degradation to my immune system. Day one set the tone for the rest of the exercise. It did not go well from that point forward. While I was in the rear recovering, MSG Fagan and SFC Harris returned to the rear twice looking for some equipment left in the rear. We never found the cover for the entranceway separating the access point and the TOC. I returned in time for the start of the exercise to take note of all the areas that needed work. We learned some very hard lessons during this exercise and there was nowhere to go but up.

We redeployed and went to work recovering from the mistakes of UFL. We immediately reorganized the equipment we deployed. The TOC was setup in the motor pool and each van underwent a complete reset. The first task was to rid our section of all the junk that accumulated over the years. We were too heavy when we deployed.

The unnecessary equipment consumed too much time during setup and recovery at the training site. The S-3 section also used Korean Nationals to assist in the setup and I wanted to train the shop to be self-sufficient. The S-3 section worked 12-16 hour days for about a month resetting the TOC.

Period Leading Up to Ulchi Focus Lens

Even though the TOC reset was important, I could not ignore the garrison mission. Emplacing new systems was a painful process. My Soldiers and I were working long hours to build the 2d CAB S-3 section. The S-3 section was operating with many systems appropriate for a brigade with two battalions. The workload was tripled now and I forced some changes upon the battalions which were functions belonging to the unit. For example, when Soldiers received TDY orders, the S-3 section coordinated for billeting. Billeting is a first line supervisor function. We gave the units the phone numbers of the billeting at Camp Casey and Yongsan and it was the first line supervisor's responsibility to coordinate for billeting. The S-3 went from managing approximately six hundred Soldiers to managing over three thousand Soldiers. SPC Blanton and SPC Desmaris did an outstanding staying on top of TDYs once we got our system in place. In most instances, they were proactive with 2ID when TDY dates were approaching.

While we were bringing the battalions online, we were also learning how the 2d Infantry Division (2ID) operated. There were numerous short suspenses from the division. The suspense was even shorter when we passed it to the battalions. The battalions did not respond well to short suspenses. The S-3 Soldiers spent many hours

making phone calls and sending emails requesting information to meet suspenses from division.

In early October, 2ID informed the brigade we would receive a command inspection in early December. We were also deploying to support the division's warfighter exercise in December. All I could do was roll-up my sleeves, take all the tasks, and assign them to individuals. SSG Michael Jones and SGT Angel Alvara were the only NCOs working in the inspected sections. Each NCO received several sections some which they delegated to the Soldiers responsible for those sections. They did an outstanding job in the two-month timeframe. We received 14 out 17 commendable ratings from the command inspection. SSG Jones received all commendable ratings and SGT Alvara received all commendable ratings except for two areas, those were satisfactory. MSG Fagan and CPT Park prepared the CBRN portion and received all commendable ratings despite losing all the records from previous years during the transformation. I was proud of my Soldiers.

One day I was bragging about the Soldiers to one of the NCOs. I told him how hard they work and never complain. The NCO started laughing and I asked why he was laughing. He said, "Sergeant Major, they complain, just not to your face." We both had a good laugh. During our end of day briefings, I often recognized the Soldiers for their hard work and dedication and informed them how much I appreciated them not complaining to my face. We all laughed. I let the Soldiers know I understood how tough it was working in the S-3 shop. I also reminded them how important each of them were to the brigade. The S-3 shop is the heart of any organization. Our subordinate organizations depend on the information and services we provide. If we do not do our

jobs, our subordinate organization would experience difficulty doing their missions. I think this instilled a sense of pride in each Soldier. PFC Daly would bring me memorandums and tell me I will not need my red pen because the document was error free. I always found something. If the mistakes were not serious, I would let it go to make him feel good about his work.

While we were going through a command inspection, the 2d CAB also completed the warfighter exercise. We deployed on the coldest day of the year. The convoy from Camp Humphreys to Camp Red Cloud took four hours. We did not depart until 1300 because of bad road conditions. Because of the distance to the field site, we were setting up the TOC at night. My Soldiers performed well. We placed safety first and accomplished the task without incident. I ensured Soldiers were going into the warming tents in rotations. Cold weather casualties were not an option on my watch.

Christmas Exodus was a welcome event. Since June, the brigade operated at a high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) and everyone was tired. I took leave. Once we returned from Christmas exodus, the OPTEMPO resumed. There were two more brigade battle drills to help the unit prepare for Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSO&I). RSO&I is the preparation exercise for UFL. We deployed the TOC and the exercise was a huge success. All the hard work and preparation by the Soldiers from the end of UFL 2005 to the beginning of RSO&I 2006 was evident during this exercise. COL Foreman did not have one negative comment about the TOC. I was so proud of my Soldiers. They deserved this recognition. We had finally gotten all the battalions online, but there were still some problems with getting information in a timely manner.

Gunnery

My last major exercise was the aerial gunnery. We deployed to Rodriguez Live Fire Complex. This was the capstone event in the tenure of COL Peter Foreman. We spent months preparing the brigade for deployment and synchronizing plans to conduct a joint live fire exercise. The Air Force, Marines, and Navy participated in this exercise in addition to army units outside of the brigade. There were two iterations performed. Not all the planning and hard work could prevent the thick fog bank from rolling in on the day of the live fire. The commander almost cancelled iteration one because of the fog. Iteration one happened about two hours later than the planned time, but iteration two was flawless in time and execution.

Conclusion

My tenure as the first operations sergeant major was the most challenging and rewarding assignment of my career. My Soldiers and my major were awesome. MAJ Hosie brought a lot of ideas and initiatives to the shop and it was my job to execute them. We were making the transition for the next team better than the transition we received. When I left, my Soldiers were competent in their assigned areas, preparing for the next deployment, and professional beyond their rank. I can say with 100% confidence that we left the 2d Combat Aviation Brigade S-3 Operations section better as a result of our team.