

Running head: Bulldog

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Abstract

This personal experience paper will cover my deployment as a First Sergeant for a National Guard tank company. I will cover key events and the lessons learned during my deployment during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) II & III. The events that I will cover are what I consider to be the keys to a very successful deployment.

Being a member of the National Guard and receiving a phone call that your unit is on alert for a state mission is something that you can expect to happen. Getting a call and that your unit has been alerted for mobilization for deployment to Iraq is something completely different. Since 1990 the United States had fought a war in the middle east (Desert Storm) and a couple of smaller engagements and with the size of the active Army, there were very few guard units that were called up for mobilization to a combat zone. During the first few months of OIF, the brigade that my battalion was assigned to was alerted to attend a Soldier Readiness Exercise (SRP) to determine the number of Soldiers that can mobilize. After 5 days of SRP, we were told to stand down and revert back our yearly training calendar and continue training. Six months latter we were alerted once again and we flew to Fort Lewis, WA to join the brigade and start our mobilization training. Once there, we learned that only one Tank Company would be taking their tanks to Iraq and conduct operations while mounted. B co 1st BN, 185th AR, was selected as the Armor Company, based off of our tank gunnery scores and our overall evaluation from the previously annual training evaluation. The Soldiers would have to not only have to complete the pre-deployment training, but also all the tank crew gunnery skills training, simulation training, and tank tables 1-12 prior to deployment. This meant that the Soldiers would have very little down time, but they knew that the company's goal was to be successful at both task.

Unit morale was at an all-time high for those three months at Ft. Lewis. I based a lot our strengths on the fact that a majority of the senior NCO's and some of the officer's were combat veterans of Desert Storm. We would pass on our experience from that war to the younger Soldiers to better help them understand what would or would not happen. After a three week rotation at Fort Irwin, we deployed Kuwait to draw tracks, ammo, and confirm our zero's of our assigned weapons. Two days prior to us moving to our new FOB in Iraq, there was a change of

mission and soon found out that would be part of a task force that was being formed at LSA Anaconda. Once there at LSA Anaconda we linked up with Task Force Tacoma and started our RIP with the unit we were replacing. After 10 days of left seat / right seat time with the departing unit, we assumed our area of responsibility (AOR) and started the process of meeting the sheiks and mayors of the towns in our sector.

Life on LSA Anaconda soon fell into a rhythm of daily patrols going out, route recons, and setting up snap traffic control points (TCP) to catch insurgents, and weapons. Another success story was that during all of our patrols, not one patrol left on the same time or that we always took the same routes. Of the four IED ambushes that were set-up along our routes, all four were spotted before we entered the kill zone. LSA Anaconda took its fair share of rocket and mortar attacks that were launch from another brigades AOR. There was a influx of construction that was going on the base, There was the standard PX, 4 dining facilities, a pool, 4 phone trailers and a movie theater. With that many Soldiers and Airmen working on the base, morale welfare and recreation (MWR) is a big thing, my unit was only 1 of three units that were based there and who patrolled outside the base. I would have the base commander complain that the tanks were going to fast on the roads on the base, with the help of the local MP unit; I was able get a radar gun and show him that the tanks were in fact going the speed limit. It was that he had never seen a 68 ton vehicle move at 25mph and yes, because of its size; it looks like they are moving faster than 25mph. During our time on Anaconda, we never fired a round in anger; A lot of the locals that we detained during our raids and other operations, would see the tanks or would hear the tanks; they just stopped what they were doing and give up. During OIF II & III, there were not that many armored and mechanized units in Iraq and those that had tracks were on a short list. We would soon find out how short the list was.

We knew that the first open elections in Iraq were going to happen sometime during our rotation, when it was going to happen was another thing. Task Force Tacoma was ordered to send one tank platoon to Mosul in 5 hours and the rest of the task force would follow them in the next 24 hours. What took us 8 months to set-up in Anaconda; we tore down and packed in less than 24 hours for our move north. The first of the transporters showed up to load our first platoon two hours after we had received word that they were going to Mosul and the NCO's did an outstanding job ensuring that their Soldiers were packed and ready and that their tanks were loaded and ready. Twenty-four hours later the rest of the company was packed and on their way to Mosul. One of the highlights of the move came the day after we had arrived in Mosul and the Task Force commander was impressed that we were the only unit to pack and bring all of their equipment. The other units had left critical weapon systems and equipment back at LSA Anaconda and could not start their patrols until the items were brought forward. The NCO's made this movement a success; at no time during the move did I interfere in their work. They made it happen. The main reason for moving the unit to Mosul was to augment the Stryker BDE. The unit's main job was to recon 20 purpose polling sites, for which only 2 would be selected as the actual polling sites. We did this for 2 weeks to throw off the insurgents that may be watching us. The day of the elections was a very busy day; we had a tank platoon at each polling site to provide security only at the sites. The third tank platoon was on Quick Reaction Force (QFR) duty and to provide security for the ballots from the polling sites to where they would be counted. Of the 10 polling sites in Mosul; we had 2 to 3 times the number of voters at our sites, word had spread that there were tanks at two of the sites and the voters would drive from across the city just to vote at these sites. The Governor and the city Mayor of Mosul also had cast their vote at our two sites. The weather that day was cold and rainy and the Iraqi people stood out

in the rain for hours just to cast their vote, there was one Iraqi woman that was 9 months pregnant and had stood outside for hours to cast her first ever election, minutes after she voted she went into labor. The medic's moved her into my M113 and we transported her to the hospital where she had the baby, which was the biggest excitement of the day. Over the next few days we continued to conduct patrols in our area and Task Force Tacoma was order back to LSA Anaconda minus one Tank Company.

The Stryker BDE requested that we stay behind and then soon we were attached to 1st BN, 24th IN for the duration of our time in Mosul. After meeting with the command team of "Deuce Four" they were surprised at what a Tank Company brings to the fight and how much support that we require for day to day operations. Deuce Four had wanted to break up the company and spread the company among the battalion. The commander and I reassured them that if the company was kept together, we could be more productive with the small support slice that we had attached to our unit. For the next two months we had minor contact with the enemy as we soon found out that we were the first tank unit in Mosul and that the enemy was still stumped on how engage tanks. When we would move to where a unit was in contact, as soon as we showed up the shooting would stop. Up until then, the unit had been in Iraq for 10 months and still no major contact. On the last day of the last patrol in Mosul with Deuce Four, second platoon was on patrol and was ambushed by insurgents. The ambush happened in the city and they were attacked from three sides, the platoon returned fire only when targets were positively identified. Soon the rest of the company and one Stryker company showed up and we supported second platoon to help them break contact with enemy and at the same time fix the enemy. Five hours latter the battle was over, one tank had been hit by an RPG and was still in the fight; 52 insurgents had been killed during the battle. We would latter find out after the battle that cell phone intercepts

from the insurgents; that they were calling for resupply of RPG's and additional fighters during fight. The next day we loaded up the tanks and headed back to LSA Anaconda to turn in our tanks and other equipment to the unit that was relieving us. B co 1st BN, 185th AR would return home with all its Soldiers that it deployed with; it would also be awarded the Army Valorous Unit Award for its time in Mosul.