

ATSS-MH (870)

MEMORANDUM FOR Commandant, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas 79918-8002

SUBJECT: Access Agreement for Personal Experience Papers

1. I, Sam Emibel Virella, have submitted a Personal Experience Paper to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives regarding events and experiences from my participation in OIF that may be of historical significance to the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

2. I understand the manuscript and attached documents will be accessioned into the historical holdings of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives and will belong to the United States Government to be used in any manner deemed in the best interests of the United States Army as determined by the Chief of Military History or his representative. I also understand that I may retain a copy for my own use subject to classification restrictions.

3. I hereby expressly and voluntarily relinquish all rights and interest in the paper to the United States Army with the following caveat/exception:

() None
() Other:

I understand that the information in this paper may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and therefore, may be releasable to the public contrary to my wishes. I further understand that, within the limits of the law, the United States Army will attempt to honor the restrictions I have requested to be placed on this material.

Date: 14 Sep 10

Printed Name: Emibel Virella, Sam

Signature: Emibel Virella

Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

Printed Name/Date: _____

Signature: _____

USASMA FORM 7273-R, APR 06

Running head: Lessons learned in support of operations OEF, and OIF

Lessons learned in support of operations OEF, and OIF

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Unclassified

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Abstract

This paper describes the lessons I learned in my supporting role as a Senior Human Resources Non-commissioned Officer assigned to the 65th Regional Support Command in Puerto Rico since September 11, 2001, and also my experiences as a the G1 SGM assigned to the 3rd PERSCOM, Detachment 10, Mississippi, as a cross leveled Soldier for deployment purpose.

This paper will narrate my experiences from a supporting role stand-point, it will give the reader a clear view, of how important for those Soldiers in the sand box that support is. The morning of September 11, 2001 was just like any other at Fort Buchanan, PR; nothing out of the ordinary was taking place. We did Physical Training early morning and returned to work as usual by 0800. I was assigned to the 65th RRC, as the Senior Human Resources NCO within the G1 section. As a civilian I was also the Human Resources Officer, (HRO) for the command. I was responsible for the personnel readiness and training requirements of over 4,000 Soldiers including TPU and AGR Soldiers. At 0900 the G1 full time personnel was beginning to assemble in the conference room for our staff meeting; COL Sarraga (G1), MAJ Rivera, the assistant HRO, and I, were the first to arrive. We still had a few minutes, so we carry on with our conversation and started to discuss the work plan for the day, such as pending actions, and the idea of conducting a G1 Workshop for the next fiscal year. As it is customary of all directorates conference rooms, there was a television set turned on with CNN news showing; something happened with one of the World Trade Center twin towers, not sure what; everyone was silenced. Mr. Isaac, the command Executive Officer (CXO) and COL Colon, Chief, Individual Training, arrived, and 1LT McQuinney, the Command's Provost Marshall. We were still waiting on the rest of the staff, SFC Santiago, Senior Human Resources NCO (AGR) and his staff. It appeared to be an accident, a plane hit the tower. Mr. Isaac asks me if any of my family members works in the area, and I gave him a negative reply, however, my best friend is a commuter; she travels through the Subway in the World Trade Center. Suddenly, another plane

hits the second tower, we cannot believe our eyes. Mr. Isaac immediately stands up and, orders us to assemble the rest of his staff, in his words “we’ve been attacked, I’m calling the General, we are going to War”! COL Sarraga, MAJ Rivera and I looked at each other, we were in shock. In my fifteen years of military service it was the first time I felt scare. In just few seconds a lot of images and thoughts came to my mind; my Soldiers, my family, my friends, my coworkers. We didn’t have to go anywhere, by then, the rest of the staff had arrived and we just waited for Mr. Isaac and the rest of the Staff to return with further instructions. Shortly after the second plane hit, the first tower fell, we just sat there and watched the entire event develop; I saw tears rolling down MAJ Rivera’s face while I contained my own; I had to remain strong and think faster, I knew that a big mission was coming; to protect our freedom and the Constitution of the United States, but in my mind the only and most important mission that I foresee at that moment was prepare and train our Soldiers to go to war and taking care of their families left behind. I could not show a sign of weakness, we are going to war!

1LT McQuinney left en-route to USARSO Provost Marshall Office for post evacuation instructions. All non-essential personnel were sent home, and only key designated personnel remain. The threat level was raised, activities on the installation seized, including food facilities. The Community Club was designated as the only activity permitted to service key essential personnel with established hours of operations. USARSO, Fort Buchanan Garrison, and the 65th RRC stood up EOC operations immediately. I was immediately directed to start military orders the next day to be in charge of other 20 activated TPU Soldiers in support of the operations; everything happened so fast! As we are standing up the EOC, SFC Santiago, the G1 NCOIC

comes in and immediately begins to prepare the room; I was impressed. SFC Santiago is a Battle Staff Course graduate; it was obvious he had knowledge I lacked. He prepared the charts; the room became a “war room” and he did it. I asked him questions on everything he was doing, at that time I realized that every Senior NCO must attend the Battle Staff course in order to be better prepared to work in a war time environment and be able to accomplish a war time mission. Our Soldiers deserve to have well prepared leaders.

My first mission was worked with the activation and mobilization of the 311th Mortuary Affairs Company and the 301 MP Company. The 311th company was mobilized to support the rescue and recovery task at the pentagon, the 301st was activated in support of security operations at Fort Buchanan. This exercise was a wake-up call for the command because it gave everyone a true picture of the units’ readiness posture. It was a learning experience for everybody, in the Army Reserve we do not activate or mobilize units frequently. We started to receive a lot of guidance and policies from our higher headquarters and First Army. Also, many Soldiers were not aware of their medical conditions, that means that a lot of them were found medically unfit and other were found non-deployables for any other reasons. In a short time of period and at last minute we found ourselves with the responsibility to find Soldiers with the skills required to mobilize and deploy in a very short period of time these units. The immediate challenge was to assemble a mobile team that will move to multiple locations to conduct SRPs for units activating for mobilization. There were no established guidelines on how to conduct these SRPs, therefore, we started from zero! I began making phone calls to other commands, found out who had

conducted SRPs, gathered as much information as possible and compiled it. Then I coordinated different kind of training for the G1 staff. While units continue to deploy written mobilization guidance were published such as: the Department of the Army Personnel Policy Guidance for Overseas Contingency and the United States Army Reserve Command (USARC) Citizen Warrior Message. Also a written guidance for redeployment procedures was published; the United States Army Reserve Command (USARC) Warrior Citizen Message. Since September 11, 2001 to 2006 a lot of my units deployed in support of Operations Noble Eagle, Endurance Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. We sent a lot of our Soldiers to other units in the states as cross leveled as tasked by our higher headquarters, USARC. For this reason, although my unit was a TDA unit that do not deploy I realized that my Soldiers could deploy as individual Soldiers. For this reason I started a training program in order to train them both tactically and technically. I wanted to make sure they were well prepared and ready to deploy any time and be able to accomplish the mission. I volunteered to deploy with one of the 65th RRC units or any other unit but due to my civilian job as the Human Resources Officer of the Command the commander, BG Rosado did not approved my request. It was really sad and frustrated for me to see a lot of my Soldiers, coworkers, friends and also my husband leaving while I stayed behind.

I continued with my strong desire of being deployed. Around February 2006 I received a phone called from one of my best friends, CPT Michael Gonzalez. He used to be assigned as AGR to the 448th En Bn back in 1999 where I was the battalion PSNCO. He told me he was stationed in USARC working in the mobilization/readiness section. He knew I was looking for a deployment reason why he contacted me. He informed me that the 3dr PERSCON was identified

for deployment around July 2006 timeframe and they need a lot of cross leveled Soldiers with personnel MOSs. Immediately I contacted some of my best Soldiers and asked them if they want to deploy with me. I called Mr. Isaac, my supervisor who called BG Rosado and finally they approved my deployment. On 7 July 2006 I departed to the home station at Mississippi with another three Soldiers; MAJ Rivera, SFC Santiago and SFC Rodriguez all of them AGRs.

We were excited but at the same time scare and nervous. We didn't know what to expect from a unit that we didn't know, with Soldiers from different culture, totally strangers. Also we know that we had the disadvantage of the language barrier because our first language is Spanish. We were afraid of being treated with discrimination because our Hispanic race, culture and language well marked accent. On 10 July 2006 we departed to the mobilization site at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin where we trained for two months. On 8 September 2006 we deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. I promoted to SGM in 6 June 2006, reason why I was assigned as the 3rd PERSCOM G1 SGM due to my vast experience in the personnel arena. I was in charge of 25 Soldiers. I was responsible for the personnel functions of the whole theater including Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait. I supervised the following personnel functions: strength management (DTAS, JPERSTAT), military awards, junior enlisted promotions, MEDPROS, R&R, Line of Duty Investigations (LOD), separations (early releases from active duty), replacement operations and casualty operations among other personnel actions. This has been the experience I ever had and that I will never forget. The 3rd PERSCON staff and Soldiers were professionals and they shows at all times a genuine respect for all cross level Soldiers. I redeployed on 5 October 2006 and since then my life changed and has never will be the same.

Conclusion

Training is what keeps our force ready to perform in a war time environment. But sometimes going back to the basics with our Soldiers is far more important than what we see on a daily basis. As leaders we must train the Soldiers to make sure they are proficient not only tactically but also in their MOSs. One of the biggest challenges I faced during the deployment was the lack of technical knowledge. Although I deployed with a unit specialized in the personnel arena it was amazing to find out that 80 percent of the Soldiers didn't know anything about their MOS duties. It is sad to say this but in the Army Reserve this happened a lot because we as leaders failed to take care of our Soldiers by not coaching, teaching and mentoring them. I'm ready for another deployment and my dream is to deploy with the Reserve Affairs.