

Running Head: Army in Transition

The Army in Transition

SGM Eric G. Crabtree

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ABSTRACT

This personal experience paper will cover my observations of the 101st Airborne Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom one. The transformation to the Brigade Combat Team after redeployment, and the changing enemy and battle space experienced during Operation Iraqi Freedom phase three.

Operation Iraqi Freedom One

My personal experience paper will cover Operation Iraqi Freedom One, Operation Iraqi Freedom Three, and the 101st Airborne Divisions transformation afterward. I will begin my paper describing in detail, the squad and platoon fight. I will describe transformations that took place after our return. I will also include experiences during our return to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom Three.

I served as a rifle company first sergeant for C CO 2BN 187th IN, 101st Airborne Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom One (OIF1). I arrived at the company in October of 2002, soon after the company's return from an eight month tour in Afghanistan. The company had a tough reputation and had been the main effort company during Operation Anaconda in the early days of the Global War on Terrorism. We deployed to Iraq confident and ready to fight.

The 187 BCT operated in a huge battlespace. At times, squad and platoon leaders would be required to make decisions on their own or with quick FM conversation with higher command. In April 2003, 2nd BN pushed into southwest Baghdad, with the task to secure the university complex. This included the Museum of Antiquity and the Ministry of Finance which is the Iraqi equivalent to the U.S. Department of Treasury.

As the company progressed through the university complex, we received sporadic small arms fire from the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance had twin fifteen story towers which dominated our entire company battle space. My commander and I

were moving with separate platoons. I found him with first platoon, and I convinced him it was necessary to secure the Ministry of Finance before the enemy became further embedded. We ordered second platoon to seize the Ministry of Finance. I followed behind second platoon with the company senior medic. Charlie Company's second platoon secured the Ministry of Finance with just two squads. They took approximately sixty prisoners. The battle to secure the area took almost twelve hours. Our entire company had moved into this small fortress by the end of the day. This would be our company battle position for the next two months while conducting combat and security patrols in south Baghdad.

In June of 2003, 3rd BCT pushed north to Tal Afar, Iraq. Second BN was on the west flank in Sinjar, which is about twenty miles from the Syrian border. The BN area of operation was a huge expanse of desert about 2,700 square miles, with 80 miles bordering Syria. The company had limited vehicles and assets. We began platoon and section operations with the commander and me accompanying these patrols. The remainder of the company pulled camp security, trained, and worked on improving our sparse living conditions.

In September of 2003, third BCT of the 101st Airborne Division supervised local elections. These elections were some of the first of many free elections. Many tactics, techniques and procedures were developed from our experience. Each platoon leader had a specific village in our company battle space allowing the platoon leader to develop a report with the muqtar of that village. Each platoon leader received a tentative number of voters to expect from each village. We were all amazed at the thousands of people showing up to vote seemingly from nowhere. The smallest village had over 4,000 voters.

The platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders once again performed excellent without a shot fired all day. The platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders are some of the most experienced leaders our army has ever fielded. They are capable of executing complex operations with a simple task and purpose. These experienced junior leaders will be the BN and BCT CDRS and CSMS of the future.

Division Transformation

The 101st Airborne Division returned from OIF 1 in February and March of 2004. My company had been extremely blessed with only minor casualties, no deaths. In less than 90 days eighty percent of my squad leaders and platoon sergeants would be transferred from the 101st Airborne division.

In July of 2004, I moved to HHC 3rd BCT 1SG position. The company was about to begin transformation and would triple in size in a three month time frame. My learning curve was steep at this time; I quickly concluded many MOSs would be filling roles they never had before. The field grade officers did not yet understand their roles in this new organization. Do as much or more, minus an entire battalion was the main topic discussed during this summer in the BCT headquarters. The divisions went through three different configurations and Military Table of Organizations (MTOE) before settling in the current MTOE. It is my belief the BCT concept is an improvement over the old system. The habitual support/war fighter relationship is paying great dividends. I would maintain the Reconnaissance Surveillance and Target Acquisition (RSTA) squadron and bring back the third infantry battalion in future modifications. This would allow the combat service and support units to concentrate on their primary mission and not Forward Operating Base security, convoy escort and similar tasks.

I returned to Iraq for my third tour in August of 2005. I had made the SGM list the month prior and moved to be the operations SGM for 2nd BN 502nd. INF. I had limited experience in a staff position. I knew only one person personally in the entire BCT. I was definitely out of my comfort zone.

Operation Iraqi Freedom Three

The entire battle space in Iraq had changed drastically from when I had left in early 2004. Kellogg Brown and Root, provided excellent life support. Soldiers did not need to fill generators, control waste, or cook their own meals. Many of the small ankle biter tasks were gone; however, the troop to task seemed to continually increase even up until my departure in May of 2006. The anti Iraq Forces (AIF), in southwest Baghdad adapted quickly to U.S. order of battle. They knew and exploited unit boundaries, shot from mosques, intimidated local population. The AIF used the IRAQNA cell phone almost extensively and used modern tools like the internet and Google earth to adjust indirect fire. The AIF went through no vetting process before publishing their story on the internet. They were able to get their slant of a story out in about four to six hours after an event took place. Many of the AIF 2nd BN dealt with were nothing more than criminals from the old Iraq regime who found smuggling of weapons or transport of foreign fighters to be more profitable than selling drugs or alcohol.

2nd BN's primary mission was to provide a buffer zone south of the Baghdad International Airport. This was 2nd BN's primary mission, but not our only one and troop task would prove to be a constant struggle.

As operations sergeant major, my initial task was to transition a small wooden building into a state of the art Tactical Operations Center. We started the task with little

or no money due to our operational funds being delayed. After about two months of twenty hour days, manual labor, wiring in Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) feeds, secret (SIPR) accounts, learning CFLIC policies, as well as the 3RD Infantry Division; standard operating procedures. The TOC began to function well.

CONCLUSION

I served 2nd BN 502nd INF until May 2006. During that time we took 21 KIA's, and around 90 WIA's. The densely vegetated area southwest of Baghdad, known as the FYAs: Yusafya, Mumudya, and Sadr Ysafya. The mission to train the Iraqi army proved to be a tough challenge. Short on equipment, short on money, and completely lacking motivations is the best way to describe my experience with the Iraqi Army.

Looking back on our Army prior to September 11, 2001, we were in need of so many changes; many were not evident until we stepped into the twenty-first century battle space. One constant is our most precious asset, our Soldiers. We have asked more of our Soldiers in the past five years than I could imagine. I look at my own experience in my first years in the Army, there is no comparison. We have paid a heavy cost for this experience but I envision our Army twenty years from now, more lethal, more experienced, and flexible. The Army of the future will be more media savvy, and capable of managing information on a scale never before imagined.

