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MSG Abdul Mohamed

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

SMNRC 35 Phase II

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Operation Iraqi Freedom, OIF-I, 15/03/2003 – 02/28/2004

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### Abstract

This paper describes some events during my previous two deployments; the first one Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF I), and the other Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF IV). I have listed the events in chronological order as much as possible. I have addressed significant topics on: NCO leadership, the role and integration of the National Guard and Army Reserve with the Active Component, and interaction with the Iraqi Police forces.

It was December 2002, four months after Release from Active Duty (REFRAD) from Operation Noble Eagle and my Company received notification to prepare for mobilization in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This did not come to me as a surprise, as a matter of fact, after redeploying from Noble Eagle, I cleaned and repacked all my gear right away just as a precaution. While deployed to Fort Lewis Washington in support of Noble Eagle, The U.S Armed forces were already engaged in Combat operations in Afghanistan.

In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was being defiant with the United Nation Inspection team and could not be trusted anymore. Patience was wearing thin throughout the world and the news media was painting a picture that war in Iraq was inevitable. It was not a question of if, but when.

I was a Platoon Sergeant in an Army National Guard Military Police Company. This mission was going to be different from the previous mission (Operation Noble Eagle), where the company was tasked to provide Law and Order on an active duty state side base. This time, however, we would face an enemy that had nothing to lose. They knew this would be the end of their reign, and we were prepared to face an enemy that had their backs against the wall and was ready to fight to the end. We expected the worst. The possibility of some of us not coming home was lingering in the minds of all our leaders.

As a Desert Storm Veteran, a lot of the younger NCO's would come and ask questions about combat, they were curious about my cultural background as well. I was very happy to share my experiences and cultural background since it was reassuring and created a sense of unity within our NCO Corps.

I always looked forward to the challenges of being deployed. The idea that my Guard unit would be called up for war or national defense, was a farfetched thought.

We were sent to Ft Lewis WA for 60 days to train up for the mission. Training consisted of checkpoint security procedures, vehicle searches, cultural awareness training, Soldier care classes for NCOs, weapon safety, and other classes that were deemed necessary for our mission. The most significant thing during the Pre-Mobilization was that the leadership established itself. The Company had a very strong First Sergeant; He took over the Company a few months prior to mobilization. He set the rules and established himself as our leader. The training was geared for a detention mission; every member of the unit went through the training, regardless of what their Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) was.

We were all eager to get the training completed and get on to the theater of operation to do our job.

The NCOs on the mission did an excellent job making sure the Soldiers completed and instructed their warrior tasks. Physical Fitness Training (PT) was a major concern. We started off slow and towards the end we were conducting PT 4-5 times per week, and we had remedial PT for those Soldiers that needed it. Our First Sergeant made sure each team leader and squad leader spent time with members of their team, and got to know them both professionally and personally.

As the Company Maintenance NCO, my task was to get all the Company rolling stock ready and up to 10/20 standards prior to deployment. My section consisted of myself, one Sergeant, who was my assistant and the recovery NCOIC, two mechanics and a ULLS-G Clerk.

Once in Kuwait we had to wait for our equipment to arrive. A lot of downtime but the NCO's once again came through, knowing the risks ahead. We kept up the training, especially the cultural awareness, weapons and convoy operations.

A week prior to movement north from Kuwait, our mission changed from detention operations to Law and Order and we were attached to the Marines.

We convoyed 460 miles to Karbala where we were received by the Marines. We set up operations and took on the streets of Karbala. The Marines were happy to see us on ground.

Living accommodations were not the best, and Mother Nature in Iraq was not as forgiving as her sister in sunny California. Temperatures during the day ranged from 100-120, but complaints were minimal. We did the best with what we had. The First Sergeant worked diligently to acquire some air conditioners which made life a little better and displayed his care for Soldiers.

In September 2003 we received orders to move to Baghdad. Our replacement was a company from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Surprisingly, our replacement Company Commander rejected the idea of having a left seat right seat ride and wanted our Guard unit out as quickly as possible so she could take over the mission. I found this to be arrogant on her part, just because we were a Guard unit; the 101<sup>st</sup> was in town and did not need a Guard unit to show them what right looked like. Soon enough, this would turn out to be a devastating hard lesson learned. The First Sergeant was hit by shrapnel from a hand grenade, the Battalion Commander was killed, and a Staff Sergeant, Private First Class and a translator were seriously wounded.

When it was all said and done, we accomplished the mission we were assigned. No life lost which to me is the most important accomplishment and brought honor upon the Army, the National Guard, and ourselves as professional Soldiers. Active duty units need to realize that we are in this fight together; we learn from each other and should respect each other. Most of the Soldiers on the mission received awards ranging from Army Achievement Medals, Army Accommodation Medals, Bronze Star and a couple received Purple Hearts for injuries sustained by direct enemy actions.

In May 2005, I redeployed to Baghdad Iraq. I was now at the Brigade Headquarters and received a promotion to Master Sergeant soon after mobilization. The unit began the deployment highly motivated; Soldiers were both eager and anxious to get the mission started. Due to limited Military Police Brigades in the Army, the unit was stood up for the purpose of deploying to Iraq; the majority of the Soldiers came from different units throughout California to round out the personnel requirements for the Brigade.

I was the Brigade Senior Maintenance Sergeant and I knew what to expect in Iraq. The mission was to train and mentor Iraqi Police Services. I soon found out that my counterpart I was replacing was a good friend of mine; we had worked together on previous deployments. This made my life a lot easier in terms of what to expect. During the initial mobilization training phase, the Senior NCOs worked very closely with the Junior NCOs and the enlisted regardless of which section the Soldier belonged to. Soldier accountability was engraved into everyone's train of thought. The unit was at

Fort Hood for four months; we had a longer train up time because the unit was just stood up and being a Brigade Headquarters, additional training was required.

September 24 2005, the main body flew out to Kuwait, once we arrived, the advance party that had been there for a week, had laid on additional training such as drivers familiarization, weapons qualification/confirmation, and more cultural briefings.

Then after four and a half months we flew into Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). Everyone was nervous and full of adrenaline. We began the RIP TOA process with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Brigade. We worked long hours and were outside the wire almost every day assisting the Iraqi Police.

Prior to convoying, Pre combat checks, pre combat inspections were always done to ensure we were ready if enemy contact was made. We had a company dedicated to the brigade providing Personal Security Details (PSD). Our team had a Military Police squad from the Arizona Army National Guard; who were later replaced by Soldiers from the Oklahoma Army National Guard that was converted to MPs. The unit from Arizona had been in Iraq 6 months prior to our arrival. We learned a lot about movement outside of the wire. They had outstanding NCOs that knew their Soldiers very well. I was impressed with the leadership and courage that these young men and women displayed.

I and the other 2 Master Sergeants provided oversight of the training, but the NCOs did an excellent job preparing the incoming PSD team. The three of us Master Sergeants worked with the Iraqi Police Generals to establish a functional maintenance and a logistics program that would support the police program. We had weekly meetings with key leaders of the Iraqi Police concerning their progress. We also had weekly

meetings with the Multi National Forces Iraq (MNF-I) staff officers in charge of the Iraqi Police Program.

There were numerous challenges throughout Iraq with their police departments. Corruption within the Iraqi Police departments was rampant, the Sunni/Shia conflicts and differences was rooted deep within the Iraqi police; Most of the supplies initially distributed to the Iraqi Police were simply given out with no records showing anyone receiving anything.

Dealing with the Iraqi counterpart required a tremendous amount of patience, one thing that most of us realized when dealing with our counterparts was getting information or action from them, was like pulling teeth. We joked around saying if our counterparts moved any slower, they would be going backwards. Later into the deployment, I came to realize how important it was to get to know them, gain their trust and respect. Once they trusted you, they opened up to you and would even go as far as sharing their personal life.

My counterpart was an automotive engineer; Saad Abdel Basit was his name. Saad had family in Baghdad. He was always worried about them and would move them around, living with other family members. He was one of the smartest guys I dealt with, who I had gained his trust. He would chuckle when I referred to him as Engineer Saad.

One Monday morning I visited Engineer Saad, and had asked him for some information since it had been a few weeks and he had not delivered. I was frustrated and demanded the information. He looked at me and asked me what I had for dinner and breakfast. I lashed back and said what does that have to do with anything I asked? He then asked me if I realized that there was a curfew during the weekend he could not go to the market so him and his family only had bread and water the whole weekend, not to

mention the temperature was in the 100's and power was off for most of the weekend. I sat back, realized what I had just said. I asked him to forgive me for not being considerate.

The concept that I realized from these back to back years of mobilization/deployment, is that the experience I gained in my previous combat tours and deployment was valuable not just to me, but the Soldiers and Non Commissioned officers I shared with. It helped the unit stay focused, vigilant, and aggressive when we needed to be, and always showcased a hard target.

NCOs equipped with the right leadership could do their job and do it well. Whether it being integrated with the Air Force, the active army component or the Iraqi security forces, the National Guard soldiers, NCOs in particular, performed with exception.

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, MSG Abdul Mohamed, 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 April 10

Printed Name: MOHAMED, ABDUL

Signature: Abdul Mohamed

Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

Printed Name/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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