

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, Kenneth D. Horst, have submitted a Personal Experience Paper to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives regarding events and experiences from my participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom (9-11) 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: 01 November 2010

Printed Name: Kenneth D. Horst

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

Printed Name/Date: Larry McDaniel 16 NOV 10

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

USASMA FORM 7273-R, APR 06

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From a Learning Curve to a Straight Line

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Inclusive Dates: 02/03/2009 to 12/19/2009

Operation: OIF 09/11

Date Written: 15SEP10

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Abstract

In February 2009, the 628th Aviation Support Battalion (628th ASB) was called into active duty in support of operation Iraqi Freedom 09-11 (OIF 09-11). The mission of the ASB was to provide dedicated logistical support for the 28th Combat Aviation Brigade (28th CAB) through the full spectrum of operations. One of the sections in the ASB is the Support Operations Section (SPO) which provided centralized and automated command and control (C2), and planning for all support distribution management operations within the battalion. It also coordinated with the logistics operators in the areas supply, maintenance (air and ground), medical, mortuary affairs, property book and movement control for the support of all units assigned or attached to the CAB. This paper describes some of the events and lessons learned by the SPO of the 628th ASB during the deployment.

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Introduction

The 628th ASB mission was to mobilize and relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA) with the 834th ASB stationed at Joint Base Balad (JBB), Iraq. The ASB operations at JBB had been in place for several years. The support and supply channels were well established and working well. In addition to the operation at JBB, the 628th ASB would also take over forward logistics element (FLE) operation in Contingency Operating Base (COB) Adder in Tallil, Iraq. The FLE was supporting one of the CAB's Air Battalions at that location. Everything in the beginning seemed simple enough... "If is not broke do not fix it"! We were to take over the fox hole and continue to make improvements and changes as the ongoing mission dictated. The 628th ASB SPO sections mission was to provide sustainment support for the 28th CAB and it's down trace battalions and attached units. The SPO section coordinated and provided technical supervision of supply support activities (SSA), Class III (bulk) and base area refuel point (BARP) operations and forward area refuel operations (FARP), Class V operations, mortuary affairs operations, Class VII operations, property book management, Class I (water) and supplementals, supply accountability operations, maintenance support (air and ground), combat service support automation management section (CSSAMO) and movement control of all ground equipment. The section had seven officers and thirty-six non commissioned officers (NCOs) assigned to provide the management of both the internal and external support. This would be the first time for most of these soldiers to work at this level or in their assigned positions. The Support Operation Officer and I knew with the inexperience personnel assigned that we would

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have a big learning curve to overcome. After interviewing and meeting our Soldiers, we felt that they would have the time to learn their jobs and that it would not have an impact on the mission. There appeared to be a good learning curve for us to work within to train them. But in a very short time this would all change and the learning curve would go from a curve to a straight line!

Personal Background

At the time of my assignment as the NCOIC of the 628th ASB Support Operations Section, I had served in the military for over twenty six years and in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard for twenty years. I served in numerous MTOE positions such as Aviation Ground Support NCO, Motor Sergeant for Air Traffic Support, Mortuary Affairs NCO, Ground Maintenance SPO NCO, General Supply Platoon Sergeant, Operations Sergeant for an Area Support Group (ASG), and First Sergeant for a Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) ASG. I served in a Company, Battalion, and Brigade Headquarters. I had six years experience as a support operations NCO with the 628th ASB. This was my third deployment as a National Guardsmen. I was deployed in support of Operation Joint Forge, Bosnia and in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 07-09 (OIF 07-09). The last deployment was less than year from this deployment and I was stationed at Joint Base Balad (JBB), Iraq as the First sergeant of HHC, 213th ASG.

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Individual Assignment

In January 2009, I was asked to redeploy with the 628th ASB as the non commissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) of the SPO section. I had left the 628th ASB two years earlier for an assignment and deployment with the 213th ASG and had returned just six months earlier from Iraq. The command needed an NCO that had experience in support operations and aviation maintenance back ground. My assignment as the NCOIC of SPO was to supervise and train thirty six support operations NCO's. Upon arriving I was tasked with evaluating the overall level of experience in the section and to assist the SPO in developing a plan on training the section. One of my primary tasks was to develop a strong team of logistic NCOs to support the 628th ASB mission of supporting the 28th CAB. The pre deployment training that had taken place at home station was focus more on warrior task training and not on technical training. The group of NCOs assigned to the section had a lot of experience in their individual areas of expertise but none in a support operation cell or at battalion staff level. All the other Soldiers were newly assigned or had transferred into the section for deployment. The Support Operations Officer was assigned just a few months before me and was a quartermaster officer with seventeen years experience. We were scheduled to mobilize at Fort Sill, OK. We would receive the balance of the warrior task training and also conduct a Mission Rehearsal Exercise (MRE) and an Aviation Training Exercise (ATX) at Fort Rucker, AL prior to leaving for Iraq. The support operation sections would be supporting the CAB Headquarters, three aviation air battalions, a medical evacuation company (MEDEVAC) and the ASB itself. We had a long learning

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curve to get where we needed to be but I felt that we could get there if we focus on the basics and allowed them to learn their individual areas of operations during the RIP/TOE. I figured that once we arrived in theater it would be a few weeks before the 28th CABs mission would be fully operational. This would allow the Soldiers time to learn what they needed to know to keep us operational.

The Mob Station- Fort Sill, OK

Upon arriving at Ft Sill, the training plan was implemented. We spent the first two weeks complete warrior task training (WTT) and they started to prepare for the MRE. During the evening hours after the training day, the section was spending time researcher and studying their duty assignments. We would run them through current support operations scenarios that were coming out of Iraq from the unit we were going to replace. The MRE was scheduled three weeks into the training. We set up the support operation cell inside the battalion tactical operation center (TOC). The MRE was scheduled to operate for nine days with seven days around the clock operations. As the MRE started we had little play but we thought it would get better as it unfolded. By day two the SPO and I realized that they did not build much play into the MRE for the support operations section and logistical operations. It was more focused on aviation operations and mission development and control. The SPO had attended the two ATXs prior to the mobilization to FT Sill and informed me that in the ATX the support operation cell plays a role and that the Soldiers would get a chance to practice what they had

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been learning. The ATX took place in FT Rucker, Alabama because of funding and space the number of Soldiers scheduled to attain the ATX was reduced. The SPO section was cut down to four Soldiers attending not nearly enough to be of any great value to us. As a whole we did not gain a lot of technical skills from the MOB station or the MRE and ATX. We did grow a lot as a team and as a section. The biggest thing that the section learned during the mobilization platform was that working as a team allowed them to give the SPO best possible solution to a problem.

Arriving in Theater

I was assigned to the advance party (ADVON) for the Brigade. I took six support operation NCOs with me. The team consisted of the Class V NCOs, Movement Control NCOs, Aviation Maintenance NCO (AVIM NCO) and two CSSAMO NCOs. The Class V NCOs were to draw all the training and basic load ammunition for the brigade and move it to the ammo handling area (AHA). The CSSAMO NCOs were to help the brigade staff establish the communications for the TOC as well as conduct Standard Army Management Information Systems (STAMIS) testing to ensure that the systems all communicate and were functionally properly. The movement control NCOs and the AVIM NCO were scheduled to go with me to conduct port operations. The port operation team consisted of two teams; Ground Movement team and an Aviation Movement team. Port operation officer in charge was the SPO and the NCOIC was myself. Our job was to supervise the off loading of all the Brigade aircraft, ground equipment, and containers. The Aviation Movement team was to disembark and reassemble, flight test

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and fly all the aircraft from the port to Camp Buehring. Ground movement team was to disembark and account for all ground equipment and containers and ship them into the theater of operation. We had five days to reassemble 98 airframes and get them out of port. The teams worked around the clock. By day two the ground crew had account for all the ground equipment and containers and the air crew was close to flying the first six aircraft to Buehring. On the morning of day three, we received a call from Brigade headquarters at Buehring. Brigade informed us that the mission has changed and that we are to divert all ground convoys to COB Adder, Tallil Iraq. The movement control NCOs scrambled to get the convoy divert to the new location. Several of the Transportation Movement requests (TMR) needed resubmitted and this slowed down the process. The 28th CAB and the 628th ASB, the General Aviation Support Battalion (GASB) all were assigned to go COB Adder, Tallil, Iraq. There also would be a battalion to the north at Al Kut and one to the south in Al Basrah. This change would have a large impact on the logistical support of the brigade and its down trace battalions.

Mission Change- Logistical Impact

Once the port team arrived back at Camp Buehring we were pushed ahead to COB Adder to set up operations and prepare to receive the equipment that we had just spent the last week shipping from port. COB Adder had never had a CAB stationed there and was not prepared to support us. This created all kinds of logistical problems. There was not enough housing. The airfield was under construction and they were just finishing the CAB headquarters building that was built for a smaller size CAB. The airfield was not

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large enough to park all of the CAB aircraft on the same side as the maintenance hangers. The ammunition supply point (ASP) did not have the aircraft ammunitions on stock. One of the other major impacts was that the 628th ASB would have to RIP/TOA with the 834th ASB from separate locations. The RIP/TOA would provide very little help to us because those units operated out of a completely different location and had different missions. The other thing that had changed for the support operations section was the learning curve! It was gone we had gone from a curve to a straight line in a matter of hours. Everything that the SPO and I had planned on was gone . We had to establish logistical key points of contact for this base. We had to establish aircraft maintenance and ground maintenance. We had to take over the Class IX (air) SSA. The Class V section needed to work with the ASP to increase ammunitions required to support the CAB operations. We needed to take over the BARP at COB Adder and the other FARPs in MND-South. One of biggest task handed us was moving all 192 lines of TPE from JBB to COB Adder. This had to be done with two weeks before the 834th ASB left theater. In addition to that the Movement Control section had to continue to track the MTOE equipment that was shipped from the port. In addition to all of these moving pieces was that fact that we were working with a Sustainment Brigade that had never worked with an ASB before nor knew how to support one. The Brigade aviation missions started as soon as they had aircraft on the ground in COB Adder. This mission tempo greatly increased the need to get the ASB establish. The support operation section had lost its learning curve and now was learning on the move with no time for

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mistakes. The pressure was on and the inexperienced sections had nowhere to go but forward.

Lessons Learned

One of the first lessons learned from this mission was the ineffectiveness of the mission pre-deployment training at the mobilization training site. There was absolutely no emphasis placed on neither our individual jobs nor the opportunity to exercise them prior to Theater. Both the MRE and the ATX provided no opportunity for the combat service support cells personnel to practice and learn their jobs. We were depending on going into JBB an area that was well established and would allow are section the chance to learn their individual areas of operations. We never had a plan for possible mission change or a back-up plan for lack of training. You must also train as much as possible for the unexpected. The inexperience of our staff increased not only our risk factor but also other sections and units around us that we supported. Based on the lack of training we received we were forced to figure out problems during this deployment as we went along and on our own. It makes me wonder that after nine years we still are put soldiers in these types of situations. The training platform was to change through lessons learned and still amazes me that we are slow to incorporate these changes into our training platform. If you go to the Army's lesson learned site and start to read the things that were written several years ago about mobilizations platforms and read the more current ones you will find the same information.

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We stuck together and helped each other and got through the dark long days in the beginning and survived the challenges that were placed in front of us. My NCO's established logistical support channels quick and fast which allowed us to do our jobs for the CAB and helped them make mission. We developed continuity books prior to the end of tour for each different section within the SPO. These books helped our replacement unit from reinventing the wheel and gave them a quick reference for logistical problems they may encounter during their tour. I was very proud of Soldiers that I served with and supervised during this deployment. I am proud of what they overcame and the way they handled themselves when the pressure was on them. They went into this deployment with very little experience in support operations but they left with a lot more than logistical knowledge, they left as a team. A team when given a hard challenge did not buckle under but buckled down and drove forward. The overall success of the Support operations section was proven by some of the final mission numbers; over 1,100 high priority aviation parts expedited which led to over 25,000 flight hours flown, 2.5 billion pounds of cargo moved, over 60,000 passengers, moved over 900 lines of equipment, tracked over 10 million gallons of fuel, increased the number of supply lines in SSA from 2,000 to over 6,000, operated two other SSA within the theater and provide external support to three battalions from three different COBs across MND-South. Before we left COB Adder, we defiantly left our footprint in the sand.

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Some Solutions

Some of the solutions are very simple. Mobilization sites need to change as the situation changes in theater and tailor them to the specific missions. Soldiers deserve the specialized training before we send them into the theater of operations. If you want us to work as a team you need to train it as a team, together. Continuity books are very helpful and should be a command required item for outgoing units. The replacement unit has ten short days with you then they are in charge, the continuity books are like a security blanket you may not need but it is nice to have there.

Closing

I am very proud to have been part of the 628th support operations team that had to build the initial logistical support channels for the CAB at COB Adder. Countless hours of work went into establishing the CAB's and the ASB's footprint at COB Adder. We were a part of not only educating ourselves but also a sustainment brigade, the aviation brigade, the aviation battalions and many other logistical elements on COB Adder that had never worked with an aviation support battalion. Finally, during this period of modularity the Army needs to improve on the communication between the maneuver commands and the sustainment commands. They both need to be on the same sheet of music if the support elements are going to be there when they are needed. This communication not only makes sense, it will save lives.