

Running Head: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE PAPER

Personal Experience Paper

MSG James A. Thomas

Operation Restore Hope, Panama, December 13, 2004 thru 14 February 2005

92Y2P, Budget NCO, HHC, 2nd Battalion 505th PIR



30 August 2006

Class 57

Abstract

In this paper, I will discuss the ability of the 82nd Airborne Division to deploy combat ready forces to any location around the world and defeat the enemy within 18 hours. I will also give some insight to the tremendous amount of responsibility placed on junior non-commissioned Officers (NCOs) serving in the division. The 82nd Airborne Division is known as the All American/Guard of Honor Division. It is also known as the fast train. As a young NCO, you either got on that train or you were left at the station. I will cover events leading to the short notice deployment along with what took place once we arrived in Panama in support of Operation Restore Hope.

Operation Restore Hope

I was assigned to HHC, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Brigade Parachute Infantry Regiment of the Army's rapid deployment forces. I served in the S4 Section as the battalion budget NCO and assistant S4 NCO. I was responsible for managing the entire battalion budget expenditures. The battalion executive officer counted on me a junior NCO to manage the budget with zero deficiencies.

The months leading up to our deployment to Panama was very busy first, we spent two weeks locked into a holding area awaiting a combat jump onto the island of Haiti. Secondly, we deployed to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk LA for 30 days.

As the OPTEMPO continued to increase, I was given more responsibility. I was required to inspect Soldier's equipment for deployment, inspect the section's vehicle load plan and ensure that it was loaded and staged once we assumed mission cycle. During the accomplishment of these tasks I had very little supervision from my NCOIC. He was working other S4 issues.

By 10 December 2004, our equipment was packed, staged, and ready for mission. During mission cycle we would pay more attention to world affairs. We used the news coverage to predict the likely hood of a real world deployment. There was nothing in the news that even hinted at my unit being alerted.

All of this changed on Sunday 12 December 1994. One of my Soldiers called me and said that his friend on staff duty received a call from the brigade staff duty and informed him to alert the battalion staff. I placed a call my supervisor. He stated that he had not

heard anything. We were both surprised and tried to figure out what was going on in the news. Within the next 30 minutes both he and I received a call from the battalion that we needed to report to work within the next hour for a meeting with the division G4 reference a deployment to Central America. Once I reached the battalion area, my NCOIC gave me further details on the possible deployment. My NCOIC, the battalion executive officer (XO) and I attended the G4 meeting at the Division Headquarters. We were tasked to draw riot control equipment, pepper spray, and tents from the contingency warehouse on Fort Bragg. From this point, I was required to quarry each company for a list of supplies and equipment needed for their deployment to a tropical area. I supervised my Soldiers in compiling these lists and dropping requisitions to the supply support activity. I was also tasked to draw of 800 sets of complete riot control equipment. This included the physical count, storage and transportation of this equipment not only to the battalion area but also to the airfield for transporting to the Area of Operation (AOR).

By that Sunday evening I had accomplished each task given to ensure that each unit had what was needed for the deployment. Once again many of these tasks was accomplished with me and a detail of Soldiers without direct supervision.

After several hours of hard work, we were released that Sunday evening to do any final preparations for an extended stay away from home. I was instructed to report to work by 0500 the following morning. I had no idea that at 0600 the following morning I would be on a C141 transport plane in rout to Panama.

Due to my ability to handle many tasks as a junior NCO, my chain of command decided to send me as part of a six-man advance party to coordinate infrastructure for the rest of the battalion that would arrive in the country by 2300 hrs.

After a three-hour flight I arrived in Panama. After going to customs and immigrations my next task was to acquire two areas for my battalion. One area was a sleeping area. The other area had to be large enough to stage our equipment arriving from our home station. I accomplished this working directly with the task force personnel on site to lay out areas for each of the five companies. I identified an area that we could use as a motor pool and equipment holding area. I used resources on ground to coordinate a late dinner meal for my battalion once they landed in country. I was just really tired by that Monday evening not to mention that there was a sixty-degree difference between Fort Bragg NC and the country of Panama.

Over the next few days we were briefed on our exact mission in Panama, three days before we were activated three of the Cuban refugee camps located in Panama had rioted and caused several injuries to US service members providing security at the camps. Thousands of dollars of equipment placed inside the camps as comfort items were destroyed; fires were set to large tents as in an attempt to force the guards to open the locked gates of the camp.

In preparation to assume the duties of camp security force, which by fare was the worst of the five camps, we underwent several hours of intense riot training learning techniques to protect ourselves during actions inside of the camps.

Besides taking part in the riot training, I along with other members of the S4 was required to continue to coordinate support for the battalion, we had to establish accounts with the local supply support activities.

We continued to plan for the units move from Howard Air Force Base to camp five near the Canal Zone where we would perform camp security and logistical support to the camp. After a week on Howard it was time for the move to camp five. We packed up the S4 and the transportation sections and moved to the new location. Once at the new location we were responsible for coordinating the set up of each company area. The rest of the battalion did not arrive on site for another two days. I made the decision that we would ensure that the company areas were established prior to our area being set up. This meant that for three days my Soldiers and I were required to sleep in connex insert boxes. The boxes were turned over on their sides with mosquito nets draped over the sides for protection from insects. As the senior logistics representative on site, I made the decision to ensure that the rest of the unit was settled before we took care of ourselves.

Over the next four months, we continued to provide logistical support to the entire battalion. Many of the things that we did for the battalion was far beyond the necessary call of duty, things like acquiring sports equipment and organizing sporting events.

During this deployment, my battalion commander and executive office lost all respect and confidence in the captain serving as the S4 officer. I was told by the XO that he did not have a clue as to what was going on with the unit nor the section and that if it was not for me and my NCOIC the S4 section could not perform its mission. This was a shock to me, as a young NCO, to hear this coming from one of the senior officers in the battalion about another officer.

During the deployment, I had the opportunity to participate in numerous show of force missions inside of the camp. I must say that this was a true learning experience for me. I was able to do something other than supply functions in support of the battalion.

This deployment gave me realization as to how members of my unit counted on me to support the unit's operational mission. My battalion commander gave my Soldiers and me many accolades for our hard work and dedication in support of the operation. Before our redeployment to Fort Bragg the Joint Commander gave me joint service medal for the numerous amounts of supplies that we gave to the families located in camp five.

Most of the task that I was given while preparing for and during this exercise I conducted them with out supervision. At the time I did not see it as being any thing extraordinary. In the unit, that I was assigned to it was the duty of the NCO to take charge and make things happen to accomplish any mission. The NCOs that took a chance on me was what made me the NCO that I am today. Today our junior NCOs tend not to want the responsibilities that come with being an NCO. Many of them find it hard to make that first critical transition from specialist to sergeant. Many of these NCOs have no desire to lead. Many just want to concentrate on their piece of the pie.

Some leaders are born, and some are trained and groomed as leaders. Others just do not understand the concept of leading.

Reference:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S. 82nd Airborne Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._82nd_Airborne_Division), 30 Aug 2006

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/82abn.htm>, 30 Aug 2006