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Personal Experience Paper

Deployment Phases for Wartime Mission

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### Abstract

When America was attacked on 11 September 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom in Kandahar, Afghanistan (OEF-A) was formed to fight the war on global terrorism. To support the fight, my deployment to OEF-A with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division Task Force (TF) Devil took place in 2002-2003. The mission was to replace TF Panther already in theatre, with minimum interruption to ongoing operations. In preparation for the transition leadership focused on pre-deployment, deployment and redeployment phases and training. The concentration on deployment specific areas ultimately lead to a confident, well prepared force, ready to fight and win in any given situation. My personal experiences will provide insight on how the effectiveness of training greatly impacted the successful outcome of the mission.

## Personal Background

My career as a Soldier began on 10 September 1987, with my enlistment in the United States Army as an Infantryman (11B). The completion of Basic Training and Advanced Initial Training soon followed with my first assignment to 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Charlie Company (C Co), 4-502<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion, Berlin Brigade in Germany as a member of the weapons squad and Team Leader for 1<sup>st</sup> Squad. During my tenure, extensive training on the tactics and techniques of light infantry fighting in Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT), rural environments and cold weather training was performed. Additionally I participated in training exercises conducted in the major training areas of West Germany such as Grafenvier, Wildflicken, Badtolz, and Hornzfelt. The training received as a member of the Berlin Brigade has proven to be an advantage for the progression of my Army career.

After serving four years in Berlin, a decision was made to change my career field (reclassify) to what is formally known today as a Human Resource Manager (42A). As a Human Resource Manager for the last 15 years, I have served under several commands holding different positions across the Army spectrum. Fortunate assignments to Commander in Chief (CINC) level commands, Forces Command (FORSCOM), and Training and Doctrine (TRADOC) command is an important part of my military background. Positions I've held over the years, to list a few, were Personnel Staff NCO (PSNCO), Personnel Sergeant (Battalion S-1 NCOIC), Operation NCO (Joint Staff), Detachment Sergeant, First Sergeant and G-1 Sergeants Major. I've attended all of the noncommissioned officer enlisted schools to include; the Army's Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC), Basic Non-Commission Officer Course (BNCOC), Advance Non-Commission Officer Course (ANCOC) and First Sergeant. Other courses attended worth noting are the Master Fitness, Jump Master, Dragon Master, and Air Assault courses and it

does not stop there. Currently, I'm attending the Sergeants Major Academy and recently made the selection list for the rank of Sergeants Major in August 2006. After 19 years of service the continuous growth and knowledge gained as a Soldier has greatly influences the successful path of my Army career.

#### Unit/Organization Background

When called to deploy to OEF-A, my unit assignment was Alpha Company (A Co), 82<sup>nd</sup> Paratrooper Support Battalion (PSB), Fort Bragg, North Carolina, garrison command. A Co's garrison mission at the time was to provide Personnel Services and Support (PSS) to the Division in the areas of Electronic Military Personnel Office (EMILPO), Enlisted Records, Identification (ID) Cards, Out-processing, Soldier Readiness Processing, and Manifesting. The same mission extended to the war zone with added PSS functions to include; casualty, levy, noncommission officer evaluation reports (NCOER)/officer evaluation report (OER) NCOER/OER processing, and promotions. To perform the mission a twenty-five to thirty-five member team would be joined together from sister companies to deploy as the Alpha-Forward Areas Support Team (A-FAST). Once in theatre, A-FAST learned the mission encompassed even more functions, which created some challenges. All functions were proficiently dealt with to best of the team's capabilities because of readiness due to excellent training. The leadership of A Co, 82<sup>nd</sup> PSB did an outstanding job joining together one of the most highly effective teams to execute the mission for the deployment. To read more about the unit's history see Appendix A.

#### Operational/Tactical Situation

The tactical situation leading up to and during the deployment was an environment of stable conditions. TF Devil and its rear support elements operations base and office spaces were located at Kandahar Airport, see Appendix B for images. The airport was located in the middle

of nowhere with the nearest city about fifteen to fifty miles away making potential threats easily detectible from a safe distance. The Romanian Army forces and strategically placed minefields around the compound provided the security for the airport. Some threats to Soldiers working on the compound were minefields left in place after the takeover of the airport and undiscovered mines that would emerge from the ground after a heavy rain storm. Other serious threat encountered on the compound during the first three months were accidental discharges of weapons by fellow Soldiers. Initially, accidental discharges were happening at an alarming rate of one to two every month causing severe injuries. The causes of the accidents were Soldiers failing to properly clear weapons before reentering the compound and/or before cleaning their weapons. To prevent these accidents guidelines were implemented requiring clearing pits for weapons at every facility and sleep area on the compound. The TF Command resolved the issue quickly and effectively minimizing further accidents. The most imminent threat to Soldiers took place at the Forward Observation Base, where Taliban insurgents constantly fired on the Soldiers daily. It was a dangerous situation, but the Soldiers handled the conditions extremely well because of the first rate training received prior to deployment. Overall, the tactical situation did not hinder the ability of the Soldiers to perform at the highest level of competence in the hostile environment.

#### Deployment Phases for Wartime Mission

Throughout the United States military history, the focus on training in peacetimes for wartime missions has always been the foundation for how service members would perform and execute during war. It still holds true today and was validated during my deployment to OEF-A with TF Devil from 2002 to 2003. When America was attacked on 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush called upon the American military to fight a war against global

terrorism. Prepared, trained, and ready to fight, thousands of 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division's Paratroopers deployed to Afghanistan and the Central Command Area of Responsibility to support combat operations; see Appendix C for map of country. In June 2002 the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne's TF Panther, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade (Bde), comprised of elements from the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) and other 82<sup>nd</sup> units including Bravo-Forward Area Support Team (B-FAST), deployed to support OEF-A. In January 2003, TF Devil, 1<sup>st</sup> Bde, comprised of the 504th PIR and other 82<sup>nd</sup> units including A-FAST received orders to replace TF Panther. In preparation for the transition A-FAST utilized everyday military training coupled with pre-deployment training to effectively support the division's mission while combating terrorism.

#### Pre-deployment Phase

In May 2002, while serving as the First Sergeant for A Co, 82<sup>nd</sup> PSB, a notification was received informing A-FAST of an upcoming deployment to OEF-A in December 2002. Upon notification of pending orders, the Commander and I developed a comprehensive training plan and schedule to ensure the objectives of the mission would be met. The mission was to replace B-FAST, already in theatre apart of TF Panther by, continuing to provide PSS and financial operations management to TF Devil. The pre-deployment phase was designated as the first part of the scheduled training and began immediately. The pre-deployment phase was considered to be the most critical part of the training process, because the skills learned during this phase would determine the success or failure of the mission overall.

The pre-deployment training was conducted in three stages called team building, tactical, and technical exercises. In the team building stage, members of A-FAST were pulled together from A Co, B Co, and C Co of the PSB to begin a bonding process between Soldiers. A Family

Readiness Group (FRG) was established to create a family support mechanism. The FRG provided an interaction link to establish a good support system for spouses, family members and significant others left behind. Several social events were conducted with the theme in mind to get “Soldiers” to communicate with each other and to feel out individual personalities, personal experiences, and backgrounds. Physical training was also conducted together daily as a team to build esprit-décor and to actively engage in readiness. The team building stage was ongoing although the training moved on to the tactical stage.

During the tactical stage, training focused on the tactical aspects surrounding the deployment environment, because of the unique circumstances of the war zone. The war zone consisted of urban and rural environments requiring special training. For this reason, the training focused on the basic infantry tactics from individual level training culminating with large scale combined team training. For brevity, only some of the tactical training conducted is listed to provide an idea of what was covered. The training covered areas in first aid procedures, NBC, weapons proficiency, small unit battle drills, movement techniques while dismounted, convoy operations, mine identification/operations, urban and MOUT training, road marches, and airborne operations. The tactical stage created a foundation to carry out the mission at the highest level of proficiency and reinforced the skills needed for survival in a hostile environment.

The final stage of the pre-deployment training was the technical stage, which heavily concentrated on casualty reporting utilizing the Army Casualty Information Program System, promotions, DD Form 93 and Service Member Group Life Veteran’s (SGLV) benefits updating, ID cards & ID tags, manifesting, Enlisted Records Brief (ERB) updates, NCOERs/OERs processing, and finance operations. The training was hands-on and performance oriented with

instructions utilizing the by-the-number method to ensure comprehension by all team members. All human resource managers were cross-trained for competence in all of the functional areas listed above and all finance clerks were cross-trained within their specialized areas based on job duties and/or rank. Weekly updates were conducted between B-FAST in theater and A-FAST at home station to discuss issues and concerns with the functions above. The dialog allowed A-FAST to come up with solutions to fix and/or resolve issues prior to deployment. The Division's Personnel Operations directorate provided the validation for all Adjutant General Personnel and the Division's Finance Operation directorate validated the finance personnel. The different processes performed during the technical training stage made A-FAST more efficient and multifunctional. The combination of the team building, technical and tactical training performed during the pre-deployment phase set up the foundation allowing for the successful progression to the deployment phase.

### Deployment Phase

On 3 December 2002, A-FAST, an element of TF Devil, deployed to OEF-A. The pre-coordination with B-FAST provided a footprint for A-FAST to step into minimizing the interruption to ongoing operations. After completing a three day orientation of the local area, A-FAST conducted a two weeks turnover period with B-FAST and then assisted in the redeployment of B-FAST to the home base. The office/work spaces, refer to Appendix B for a visual, were located in the airport terminals of the Kandahar Airport, which was heavily damaged during the fighting in OEF-A. Immediately A-FAST began to upgrade the office spaces by repairing doors for security purposes, boarding-up windows to reduce the amount of dust entering the offices, and installing more Local Area Network (LAN) lines for software usage. By the end of the first month A-FAST was fully functional with the capabilities to meet

the needs of TF Devil and all of its elements. There was an intense transitional period between A-FAST and B-FAST during the deployment phase, but was well worth the effort, because it gave A-FAST the ability to move forward and meet the objectives of the mission with little disruption.

After A-FAST settled into the environment the next major step was to create a system to provide the necessary services Soldiers needed. The services required the issuance of ID cards/tags issuance, updating/sending NCOERs/OERs to the Enlisted Records and Evaluation Center (EREC), sending promotions requirements to the Department of the Army (DA), cutting promotion orders with digital signatures and then sending copies of the ERB to EREC. A system to process cash payments for up to eight hundred dollars depending on rank was also needed. Once the incorporation of the systems listed above was functional it drastically reduced the processing time of actions, because the old snail mail conventional mailing system was converted to an efficient automated process. The A-FAST hours of operations for services were twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Members of A-FAST worked in shifts to provide world class customer service to support Soldiers at any given moment.

Another significant task during the deployment phase was the updating over 2000 eligible Staff Sergeant and Sergeant First Class (SFC) ERBs for the SFC and Master Sergeant Centralized Promotion Boards. ERBs are used by DA Promotion Board members to determine the best noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) eligible for promotion. Processing the ERB actions were not a problem, but getting NCOs to come in to update their ERBs was difficult due to operational commitments. Although challenging, all qualified NCOs ERBs were updated in a timely manner affording the best opportunity for promotion. There were other important issues faced while in theatre such as; the timely submission of casualty reporting, the maintenance of

LAN connections, and the accountability of personnel. Although A-FAST was not responsible for these functions, the issues were dealt with to the best of given capabilities.

### Redeployment Phase

The third and final phase was redeployment, which covered the preparation for the move from the war zone to the home base. The focal point during this phase was the prevention of Soldiers complacency and a safe reentry into the home environment. Although, NCOs played a key role in the first two phases, the involvement in the redeployment phase was an even bigger role, because they ensured Soldiers remained diligent in order to stay safe and out of danger until the scheduled departure home. Preparing for the return home was a relatively simple process in terms of turning over equipment and facilities to the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Infantry Division the unit tasked to take TF Devil's place, but the actions required to prepare the Soldiers for reintegration was a little bit more complex. The most critical requirements were the mandatory briefings all Soldiers had to attend prior to returning to home base. The various briefings, to name a few, consisted of the Chaplain brief, Family Reintegration, Coping with Stress, Post Dramatic Stress Disorder and others. A-FAST supported this requirement by manifesting and tracking all Soldiers who had attended the briefings into a database utilized as a tool by the TF Commander to ensure compliance. The briefings were provided to help Soldiers shift from a dangerous environment back to a normalcy. Once the service members returned to the home base, they were slowly and cautiously integrated back into their original organizations to prevent readjustment issues.

### Conclusion

The deployment in support of OEF-A to fight the war on global terrorism was performed with excellence due to the training received and the execution of the training in the three

deployment phases. The Army's longstanding tradition of training during peacetime to prepare for wartime, joined with the three deployment specific phases generated a foundation for a successful and effective mission. It was the training above everything else before the call to fight that produced highly confident and competent Soldiers ready to fight and win under any circumstances of the battlefield.

### Lessons Learned

The lessons learned during the deployment were as follows: *Issue:* Cannot Deploy Personnel Units in entirety due to Home Station Responsibilities. Need R/C or contractors to backfill Positions. *Recommendation:* Allow doctrine to encompass more than strictly "how we fight." When it includes Garrison and non-warfighting functions, TOEs can be adjusted to ensure coverage of both.

*Issue:* Tasking and support requirements at the home station did not decrease once a unit was alerted for deployment. This hampered the quick and orderly movement of the unit and the prompt service to the remaining home station Soldier and families. *Recommendation:* Tasks for the units should focus on those they will need in the execution of their deployment mission, once the alert is sounded. A filter must be put in place to ensure the unit has the time required to make a rapid and orderly transition.

*Issue:* Composition of award boards must include representatives from all subsets: R/C, NG, females, and minorities. Some units with R/C soldiers assigned to them, did not include R/C representation on awards boards. *Recommendation:* The awards board, the body that makes recommendations to the commander, needs to reflect the grade structure, ethnicity, gender, and component of the command as much as possible.

## Appendix A

History of 82<sup>nd</sup> Soldier Support Battalion

The 82D Soldier Support Battalion (SSB) was restructured on 1 July 1998 from nine detachments to six companies: A Co and B Co provided personnel support, C Co provided finance support, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 82d Replacement Detachment, and the 82d Band Company. The restructuring initiative streamlined the command and control responsibilities of the commander and streamlined the support requirements of the staff. This force structure initiative impacted over a third of the Battalion's MTOE positions and the equipment associated with those positions and companies. Created multifunctional FAST Teams to provide Division Support to our line brigades. Each technical support company was aligned to a brigade task force to provide daily garrison support and during wartime operations. A Co supports 1st Bde; B Co supports 2nd Bde; C Co supports 3rd Bde. A 25-Paratrooper FAST Team deployed under the leadership of C Co with the 3d Bde TF to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). B FAST team deployed with 2d Bde TF to National Training Center (NTC). Most significantly, the 82d SSB is the first unit in the history of the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and FORSCOM to send a consolidated finance/AG team to the "Box" in support of a Bde TF. The 82d PSB (Airborne) was activated 18 July 1994 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. While assigned to the 18th Personnel Group (Airborne) it was subsequently attached to and provided direct support to the 82d Airborne Division. Upon activation the battalion provided the Division Commander with a single source for PSS, replacement, band, and postal operations.

Appendix B

Personal Photos of Kandahar Airport and Task Force Delta Office Space



Appendix C

Map of Afghanistan, June 2003



Base 802986AI (C00362) 6-03

Note. Map obtained from the following website provided below and the red star on the map marks the city where the compound was located.

[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/afghanistan\\_pol\\_2003.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_pol_2003.jpg)