

**Not Classified**

Running Head: OIF-II

Operation Iraqi Freedom II (OIF-II)

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OIF-II, Baghdad, Iraq - 12/02/2003 - 06/15/2005

63Z5M - First Sergeant, HHC 4<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade

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## OIF II

As part of the Global War on Terrorism, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division was called upon to support operations in Iraq during OIF II from April 2003 until April 2004. I reported to HHC 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 28 October 2003. I received IRT training for a week. On 2 December 2003, I flew into Kuwait. On 5 Dec 2003, I linked up with the HHC 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team at Baghdad International Airport. I did not know what my mission would be. On the day I arrived I met the brigade CSM and the first thing he asked me is do you want to be a first sergeant and I accepted. The unit conducted combat operations. I took a few days to get to know the noncommissioned officer and Soldiers who I would be working with. The hardest thing for me was for soldiers to adjust to my leadership style after they had been under the care of another first sergeant. The brigade Commander assured me that the change was needed. I found myself as 63Z Light Wheel vehicle Mechanic leading an aviation company. HHC 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division has been redesignated as the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team 1ID in Fort Riley Kansas.

Operation Iraqi Freedom II

The 4<sup>th</sup> brigade combat team was deployed for 6 months before I arrived. It was the only Aviation asset at Baghdad International Airport. It all started for me when the brigade CSM made me aware that I would be taking over HHC 4<sup>th</sup> brigade as the new 1SG. I attended a week long course and mission related training which made me aware of what to expect during my deployment. I assumed duties on 18 December 2003 as the first sergeant of HHC. As the first sergeant of HHC I knew it was my responsibility to ensure soldiers and leaders continue to train and execute all missions given without loss of life or injury. As the 1SG of HHC I had a tough task. Most of the units were Aviators, pilots, and aviation support personnel. Soldiers in the unit ran a 24-hour operation with 12-hour shifts with 1 day off a week. Combat Service Support soldiers such as mechanics, cooks, comms, medics, and NBC personnel did other missions such as convoys operation, service support for TOC operation, Butler Range support and various other jobs in order to keep the life support system going in BIAP. In order for me to get to know 163 service men and women, I had to come up with a plan. The unit had no PT program, so I implemented a program that every soldier can participate in. I had PT formation twice a day. PT was 90 minutes before each 12-hour shift. I must say, the PT scores improved quickly. Aviation and staff soldiers worked 12 shifts with one day a week off. Combat service support soldiers conducted convoys operation for the entire Forward Operating Base. Anytime anyone had a mission and needed support the company responded. While at BIAP rocket attacks accrued daily. After several narrow escapes, the TF Commander implemented some counter measures. All lights were off during night hours. This reduced the number of rocket attacks.

During the deployment, we continued to train. The company commander and I took 38 soldiers to Butler Range for convoy live fire as well as night fire. During the exercise, the soldiers gained a lot of knowledge. They fired all weapons systems and qualified on each of them. When we

returned to our FOB the soldiers had more confidence in their weapons. In February 2004 the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 25<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment came to BIAP to replace the 4<sup>th</sup> brigade. The units conducted joint operations in support of the ground operation in the Baghdad area. We coexisted together and the 4<sup>th</sup> brigade trained them on the battle task for the mission. When the 25<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment moved to camp Taji our unit mission was coming to an end. During the month of March as the unit continued to prepare for redeployment the mortar attacks began to increase. The insurgents were targeting our sleep areas. Ninety percent of the soldiers on BIAP were sleeping in tents. The advance party, which consists of 20 soldiers, deployed back to the central region. The forwarding party redeployed back to Kuwait to set up redeployment operation.

In April 2004, the rest of the brigade prepared to leave Iraq. We received convoy briefs and my company convoy was the first one scheduled to roll back to Kuwait. The convoy was scheduled to move at 0100. Soldiers began to mount their vehicles. As I sat and waited for the radio transmission to move my convoy, I never got the word. The leadership and the soldiers began to wonder what was going on. After 3 hours of waiting, the brigade commander called a leaders meeting. We received notice that the convoys would be delayed for a few hours. A few hours turned into days. The TF commander had a meeting two days later to announce that the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division was extended for 90 days. The next few days would be challenging for the leadership. We had no security, or sleep areas because we were going to turn BIAP back over to the Iraqis. A few soldiers had to get their weapons taken because things began to get out of control. Things began to settle down after the unit got reestablished, the soldiers got their sleep areas, and knowing what the mission was going to be was important. The senior leaders decided that more air coverage was needed and in wide areas for the region. Soldiers began to accept that

and were ready to get back to work, complete the mission and return to home station. The NCOs did a great job motivated soldiers and giving them a sense of direction. The soldiers that deployed back to Germany and Kuwait had to return to Iraq. The next three months we set up task force around and in different regions to support the Aviation mission. The unit received a new mission. We had to transport prisoners from BIAP to Labrum Prison daily. In July 2004, the unit began the redeployment phase for the second time. This time the Division was successful in redeploying back to central region. By the first week in August, all of the soldiers were home with their families and love ones. The soldiers received a warm welcome from the Hanau community. After the reintegration phase was over, soldiers were allowed to take block leave. Everyone returned back safely and the unit returns back to the training cycle. In conclusion, if it were not for the great noncommissioned officer and soldiers this deployment would not have been a success. They showed a high level of commitment and dedication to the unit and our nation. Eighty five percent of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division stayed in theater for 15 months. In my 20 years military service in many different deployments I have never seen such a great group professional. I don't serve the entire 15 months, but for 8 months with 163 boots on ground, I can truly say I am Proud to Serve.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The 1<sup>st</sup> Armored division took away some very valuable lessons from a 15 month operation. After the extension, the unit had to establish a new ROE because the mission changed. Never underestimate the enemy. The Task Force commander decided to turn off all lights in the theater

of operation. Vehicle and aviation maintenance was a very important part of the accomplishment of the mission.