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### Military Training Teams in Iraq

I deployed to Iraq with the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry in August of 2005. I was serving as the Headquarters Headquarters Company (HHC) First Sergeant. I had been with the battalion for two years, and had deployed with them to Afghanistan in 2003. 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade assigned each of its Infantry Battalions Military Training Team (MiTT) responsibility. Our mission was to assist the Iraqi Army (IA) tactically, logistically, and administratively reach an independent operating status.

My battalion determined that they wanted to form Ad Hoc teams under HHC control; I felt that this violated the principles of employing teams and would affect command and control. Battalion overruled my concerns and published a plan where each company would furnish a set number of soldiers and NCOs; we determined that four teams of ten men each would be sufficient. A Captain and a Sergeant First Class or senior Staff Sergeant would lead each team; two junior NCOs would serve as truck commanders; six junior enlisted Soldiers would provide the heavy lifting for the team. Two companies provided standard Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTO&E) Rifle Squads. The other two companies sent forward composite squads drawn equally from each of their platoons. The results were predictable and readily apparent. The teams formed from MTO&E squads had fewer problems in discipline, execution, and teamwork. The teams composed of the composite squads had issues ranging from uniform discipline to tactical execution failures; and they required a significant period of time (90 days) to go through a team building process. The composite teams eventually reached the same level of proficiency as the other two teams.

The battalion equipped the four MiTT teams in a similarly haphazard fashion. We were required to pull vehicles and crew served weapons from across the task force. This unwieldy system complicated accountability procedures and produced uncertainty that assets would be available. The Battalion Commander stated that the "Military Training Teams are the battalion's main effort. Our primary mission is facilitating the IA in assuming our battle space" (LTC Kevin Brown personal communication August 2005). I quickly realized that this was the equivalent of the Dallas Cowboys offering to help the Pittsburgh Steelers play the super bowl for them. The statements were merely politically correct sound bites. We were required to not only fight for every asset we asked for but we had to constantly validate and justify the combat power we already possessed. The MiTT was never treated as an equal before peers in the dog eat dog world of resource management. The MiTT did more with less during the entire deployment than any other element within the battalion. I computed at one point that the four teams were putting in approximately 5000 man-hours a week. The average Rifle Platoon's workload averaged about 3000 man-hours per week. These figures were the only argument, which prevented the MiTT from being reduced to reallocate combat power to other areas in the battalion.

The battalion was posted to Camp LIBERTY adjacent to Baghdad International Airport. Our battle space was eastern Abu Ghraib. Abu Ghraib is a system of inter-connected villages, which form a suburb community in western Baghdad. The battalions entire patrol area was quite small only about 40 miles square. Abu Ghraib itself had been a center of military industry. Coalition destruction of these facilities during the early part of the war left the area an economically depressed wasteland. The entire area suffered from high unemployment and

meager infrastructure. This with the presence of Main Supply Route SWORD bisecting the Area of responsibility east to west provided a fertile breeding ground and a target rich environment for insurgent operations. The Abu Ghraib area had four Iraqi Police (IP) stations and the IA base located at the old Muthana helicopter airfield.

The IA battalion we were assigned was formed in the primarily Shia area of Babylon. The battalion was organized around four Rifle Companies and one Headquarters Service Company. Each Rifle Company was divided into four Rifle Platoons while the Headquarters Service Company was divided into traditional staff and specialties sections. The battalion was equipped with soviet era small arms AK-47s, RPKs, and PKMs. They were restricted from having medium mortars, RPGs, and heavy machine-guns. These restrictions were due partly because of the IA's low standard of training, and partly in that we suspected that 30 percent of the IA battalion was either active insurgents, had been formerly insurgents, or had insurgent sympathies.

The battalion's level of training was inconsistent. The majority of the officers and senior NCOs had served in the old army under Saddam Hussein. Fewer than 20 percent of the junior enlisted and junior NCOs had any formal military training. Those who did had attended the two-week basic course at Taji. There was no technical training for medics, radiomen, mechanics, or drivers; and no leadership training for NCOs and junior officers. The battalion was reported as marginally capable but in actuality was only minimally capable of performing the simplest of Infantry tasks.

The MiTT teams began active patrolling with the IA within one week of entering country. We had to form bonds of trust and credibility with our IA counterparts while we were still forming Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Tactics Techniques and Procedures

(TTPs). Our operational timeline was compressed due to the upcoming Iraqi Constitutional Referendum and the Iraqi General Elections. American commanders were determined that these two events would have a completely Iraqi face. I viewed this as a politically driven decision to showcase on world media the progress being made with Iraqi security forces, but one that did not take into consideration the IAs shortcomings. The MiTT pulled double duty not only executing daily tactical patrols with the IA but also training our counterparts to plan for, resource, and execute sensitive site security operations. The Commander determined we would backstop the IA during these two operations. Essentially a minimum MiTT presence was to be posted at each polling site within Abu Ghraib. Two MiTT members would be placed with a radio at each polling site with an Iraqi platoon. No Coalition Force vehicles were allowed at the polling sites so the American team would be completely isolated in the event of attack. I felt that I had a personal responsibility to share the risks with my men. I spent three days with my Corporal and 40 Iraqi soldiers at a polling site. Although there were no instances of violence in the Abu Ghraib district during either operation it was a tense situation.

The MiTT teams not only assisted with tactical operations they also addressed the shortcomings in the IA formation. The battalion was deficient in the following areas, discipline, logistics, administration, and leadership. The IA's lack of discipline manifested itself through lack of uniformity, unexcused absences, police and upkeep of the battalion area, and most seriously negligent discharges (NDs). We addressed the discipline problem by empowering the IA chain of command. We encouraged leadership to punish soldiers who had NDs; this resulted in a drastic reduction of NDs and celebratory fire (from 50 a week to fewer than 10).

We mentored our counterparts to hold regular accountability formations docking soldier s a days

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pay for being absent. The platoon leadership also began inspecting uniforms and equipment during these formations holding soldiers financially liable for missing items. We insisted that the soldiers police the battalion area. The IA leadership and soldiers resisted this last item as they felt it was beneath their dignity as soldiers and men to pick up their own trash.

The battalion was challenged logistically. The primary causes of this were inefficiency and Arab fatalism. As an example the battalion failed to regularly monitor their fuel consumption, resulting in some patrols being cancelled due to lack of petrol. Small arms were not distributed equally to all companies some having 200 rifles some having 50. The companies did not have weapons assigned to individuals or have an accurate count of total weapons owned by the company. Many soldiers did not have the proper equipment or uniform items, although the battalion's supply officer (S-4) maintained a stockpile of the needed items. As a solution we literally forced the S-4 to issue the supplies and equipment he was hoarding. We assigned vehicles to each company and required each company to account for and maintain them. We developed and instituted working arms rooms in each company and required regular inspections of small arms for accountability. We assisted the IA motor sergeant in developing a vehicle maintenance system and a fuel monitoring system. The lack of an effective NCO Corps severely hampered our efforts in the logistical arena. The majority of Iraqi NCOs felt neither capable nor inclined to accept real responsibility, or to act in the absence of orders. They deferred to their officers in all matters and would not take action without direct instructions from an officer.

The areas of pay and promotion were critical administrative short falls. The pay system

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was unwieldy; and as Iraqi soldiers were paid in cash the system was open to possible abuse. The soldiers were often paid late, or not at all. I suspected that the soldiers' pay was being skimmed but no proof could be found for corruption. The promotion system was equally difficult to work with, resulting in all of the enlisted men being paid as Privates, and officers below the rank of Major being paid as Lieutenants. Both the pay and promotion systems were well above what we could personally affect as company MiTT teams. We mentored our Iraqi counterparts to maintain accurate strength reports and to file them according to regulations. We also assisted them with filing promotion selection rosters through the proper channels for approval. The problem was never fully solved during the entire 12 months that we worked with the IA.

The issue of leadership was perhaps the most critical affecting all the other shortfalls within the battalion; it was also the most difficult to address. We quickly realized that Arab culture did not promote self-criticism and any outside critiques even the most positive was coldly met or strenuously resisted. The inability to admit mistakes, the sense of entitlement associated with rank, and cultural deference to tribal standing greatly undermined the chain of command. The most glaring leadership failure occurred monthly at pay parade. The officers were paid first by order of rank, then the NCOs by order of seniority, and then the soldiers. As officers and NCOs received their money they would depart the battalion area. Each month had the same result 300 soldiers and only money to pay 250. Poor strength reporting was primarily to blame for the shortfall of pay; but the soldier's morale and motivation suffered. We tried every tactic to

reverse this and have soldiers paid first and then Sergeants and then the officers with the Battalion Commander being the last paid. The Iraqi's refused point blank to institute this

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system. IA leaders felt that their rank entitled them to comfort and luxury at the expense of their troopers. They did not feel inclined to share in hardship with the men. They were the first to sleep, the first to leave work, the first paid, and the first to eat. Officers and NCOs were not inclined to participate in training with their soldiers. They would have gladly let the American MiTT teams to train the soldiers in tactics and individual skills. We firmly put our foot down in this area and made it a condition that the leadership be present at all unit and individual training. Eventually we were able to turn individual training over to the Iraqi NCOs. My teams and I tried repeatedly to get the Iraqi leadership to value their soldiers and make their care and training a priority. We had some small success in this area but did not make the progress we had hoped we would.

We worked daily on these issues and many others. We patrolled with the IA, facilitated their training, and spent innumerable hours trying to create systems within their organization. We invested considerable effort in empowering IA NCOs. We established NCO training courses eventually run by Iraqi Sergeants. We assisted in getting specific individuals technical training offered by the Ministry of Defense. Moreover we established a reconnaissance and intelligence course for the battalion reconnaissance platoon.

I don't wish to sound overly critical of the Iraqi Army, I were sure if I were to read reports of the Continental Army of 1775 I would discover many similarities to my experiences in Iraq. I participated in four firefights with IA forces and never once witnessed a soldier not doing his duty. The individual Iraqi trooper was with out fail brave.

My frustration with the IA was more than compensated by my complete satisfaction with the performance of my MiTT teams. These teams operated independently in a decentralized

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environment. Our level of success would not have been possible without the NCO leadership within the MiTT. NCOs stepped up in every instance taking on far more responsibility than their pay grade warranted; these men stood as examples of professionalism, integrity, and competence for their Iraqi counterparts to emulate. These NCOs used inventiveness and initiative to accomplish a mission that they had not been trained to do. They served as trainers and mentors to help build a counterinsurgency force during an active conflict. All of the credit for our MiTT success goes directly to those dedicated NCOs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry.

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