

**Running head: COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES**

**Communications Issues leading into**

**Operation Iraqi Freedom**

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### **Abstract**

With numerous combatant and eyewitness experiences, it is important to ensure the Commander on the ground is supplied with the right information to give him a clear picture of future operations on the battlefield. This paper examines some of the unnecessary mishaps that happened during the buildup and well into the execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Because units did not have enough time to get ready for their deployment to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, there were numerous signs that Company Commanders were not relaying the proper numbers and statuses to the Battalion Commanders. This caused unnecessary equipment and personnel to be shipped to the Middle-East just prior to the largest military operation in history.

## **Main Body**

The goal of the United States military is to defend our nation against all enemies both foreign and domestic. This sometimes means we have to take the fight to the enemy. There are numerous plans that have to go into place prior to the Soldiers and equipment deploying to the foreign country. Numerous mission briefs are put together to brief the battlefield commanders on how the troops and equipment are to deploy and arrive to their mission objective.

The Commander needs to have an accurate and honest assessment for his subordinate commanders on what the situation on the battlefield is.

While assigned as a First Sergeant in Saudi Arabia on the second anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> bombings, I had the very unique opportunity to participate and observe the military buildup prior to the commencement of the second Gulf War.

I was assigned to the 580<sup>th</sup> Signal Company under the 54<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion during my entire tenure in the region. My company's mission was to install, operate, and maintain tactical and strategic communications to the War fighters once they initially deployed into the theater. While this was a very big task, we had the necessary personnel and equipment within our battalion's assets to effectively manage our mission. My company personnel was the first company to establish the Video Telecommunications Conference (VTC) from Camp Arifjan, Kuwait to the Pentagon, The Horn of Africa and the. These were groundbreaking issues because the Camp Arifjan VTC facility was brand new and its systems needed to be tweaked prior to bringing it up on line. I know my Battalion was successful in its mission due to the fact that we received praise and awards for our efforts.

In October 2002, there was a Video Telecommunications Conference (VTC) between the 54<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion in Saudi Arabia and the Signal 11<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The purpose of this conference was to establish if there was a need to put personnel under operation control (OPCON) to the 54<sup>th</sup>. My Company Commander and I attended the VTC along with the Battalion Commander and the Command Sergeant Major. We clearly established that the Battalion was up to the challenge of satisfy our wartime mission. The Brigade Commander asked a question that would change the whole operation tempo of the Battalion as a whole. The question was “Is there anything we can do for you?” The battalion commander simply said “not at this time sir.” The next thing the Brigade Commander stated that he was going to be to the Area of Operation (AOR) to visit the Soldiers and to talk with the General. As far as we could tell, all went well with the conference and we continued on with the mission. My Company also had personnel in Afghanistan at the time establishing the strategic communications infrastructure (SCI) on Bagram Air Base. I was tasked to go to the AOR with the Battalion Executive Officer (XO) to determine if we could pull back some personnel after meeting with the Platoon Sergeant and Platoon leader on the ground. The proposed five day trip turned into an eleven day extravaganza. When it was all said and done, the XO and I made the recommendation to the Battalion Commander that he should take the Brigade Commander up on his offer and ask for two platoon size elements to come to Saudi to help offset the missions in Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Iraq.

The Brigade Commander came to Saudi a week later and we briefed him on the situation. He was very receptive to our recommendations and told us we would get everything we requested. The entire chain of command thought that was a little too easy, but

we did not question the motives. When the Brigade Commander returned to Arizona, he has his XO contact the battalion on a regular basis to coordinate the living arrangements for the sixty to 75 personnel that would be arriving in the AOR within the next 45 days.

The coordination went smoothly and we were on track to have 100 personnel OPCON to the Battalion with no foreseeable problems. Then the unthinkable happened. Fourteen days prior to the personnel arriving, we were told that there was a two company size elements deploying to the AOR. We were told that the situation has changed and that we were not privy to the information within our own AOR. After the Battalion Commander called back to the Brigade, we knew the battle had been lost. We prepared for the influx of additional personnel. I knew this would be a serious shortfall because there was not enough resources in the area to support those number of personnel.

The Noncommissioned Officers in my unit played a pivotal role in ensuring the personnel were received and integrated into the organizational structure. I was deployed to Kuwait with two of my Platoon Sergeants when they OPCON personnel arrived in the AOR. We greeted the advance party at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait prior to them departing to Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia.

One thing to mention is that in order to come over to the AOR, Commanders reported to the Brigade Commander that their units were ready to deploy. What was not mentioned to my chain of command were the numerous Soldiers that had profiles, were overweight, and pending chapters who came along for the ride. My since they were OPCON, we had to pick the personnel up on my companies daily status reports.

There was a miscommunication with the equipment that was brought to the AOR. We did not have compatible systems to tie into their systems so the equipment stayed parked

outside the Ammunition Holding Area (AHA) in Kuwait. Remember that initially, all equipment and personnel had to be driven into Bagdad. There was absolutely no reason to take something that did not work into the fight. Plus, the lack of interoperability of that equipment resulted in lost man hours. We had our Communication and Electronics (C&E) personnel try to bridge the gap between the equipment because individuals wanted the equipment to be used since all the money was spent to have it flown over on military aircraft.

### **Lessons Learned**

Overall when the mission “Mission Complete” was declared in May 2003, most of the OPCON individuals redeployed back to their home station. We received numerous awards and decorations for our ingenuity and patience during the deployment.

There was no need to do a battle handoff because we were on the ground before and after the OPCON personnel had arrived and departed.

I feel it would have been a much smoother operation and numerous resources would have been spared if the higher ups would have listened to the Soldiers who were on the ground in the trenches. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

The bottom line is that this would all have been avoided if commanders would just have had the intestinal fortitude to tell the commander the truth. Too many resources were wasted due to the fact of individuals telling the commander what he wanted to hear.