

ATSS-DAS

MEMORANDUM FOR Commandant, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas 79918-8002

SUBJECT: Access Agreement for release of Student writing assignment Personal Experience Paper
Paper.

1. I, MSG Jason K Washburn, submitted a (PEP) Paper to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives regarding events and experiences that may be of historical significance to the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

2. I understand the manuscript and attached documents will be accessioned into the historical holdings of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives and will belong to the United States Government to be used in any manner deemed in the best interests of the United States Army as determined by the Chief of Military History or his representative. I also understand that I may retain a copy for my own use subject to classification restrictions.

3. I hereby expressly and voluntarily relinquish all rights and interest in the paper to the United States Army with the following caveat/exception:

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4. I understand that the information in this paper may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and therefore, may be releasable to the public contrary to my wishes. I further understand that, within the limits of the law, the United States Army will attempt to honor the restrictions I have requested to be placed on this material.

Date: 3 Dec 10Student Printed Name: Jason K WashburnSignature:

Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

SGA Printed Name/Date: JASON BURFORD 07 Dec 10Signature:

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Personal Experience Paper

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Class 61

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Abstract

This paper describes some of the incidents and the lessons learned while I was deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF 05-07). During 2007, I was deployed to Taji, Iraq. It is one of the largest Forward Operating Bases (FOB) in Iraq. It is approximately 35 kilometers north of Baghdad and thirty kilometers south of Balaad on highway 1 or “Route Tampa”. During that time I worked on a Military Transition Team (MiTT) with the 9th Division of the Iraqi Army. I was later promoted to First Sergeant and took charge of D Company (Tanks) 1-66 Armor, 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. During both of those assignments I worked very closely with imbedded MiTT Teams and our Iraqi counter parts. I learned that it was a very difficult task due the cultural differences and trust issues among the Iraqi Army Soldiers.

Deploying to Camp Taji and relieving 1st Armored Division

After completing Reception, Staging, Integration and Onward movement (RSOI) at Camp New York in Kuwait my brigade and battalion moved north and occupied Camp Taji relieving elements of the 1st Armored Division (1AD) out of Germany. During that time I was a Sergeant First Class promotable and worked as the Operations Sergeant for 1-66 Armor Battalion, 1st Brigade, and 4th Infantry Division. While we conducted left-seat/right-seat ride with 1AD my battalion fell in on the headquarters of the battalion that we were replacing. This made my job kind of easy as far as setting up the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) since it was already done.

After a couple of weeks the relief of 1st Armored Division was completed and my battalion began to conduct combat operations and stability and support operations in the area. During this time I worked in the TOC and assisted and supervised in the day-to-day operations of the battle staff. Additionally, I was working closely with my supervisor, the battalion Operations Sergeant Major. For the next few weeks I did my job and continued to learn our area of operations. Eight kilometers north on Route Tampa was the town of Mushada (pop. 300-500). About twenty kilometers east of Mushada on Route Coyote was the town of Taramiya (pop. 1500-2000). There was additionally a water treatment plant in our area and an old ammunition factory. Our battalion's main mission was the security of a twenty kilometer stretch of Route Tampa. It was basically the part between Camp Taji and north of Mushada.

Getting assigned to a MiTT team

Camp Taji was split in half. One side was the American side and the other side was the Iraqi 9th Armored Division which had imbedded MiTT Teams in each brigade. Even though the

MiTT Teams were not 4ID organic they still fell under the command of the 1st BDE, 4ID Brigade Commander as he was the combatant commander for the FOB. After working in the battalion TOC and facilitating daily operations a brigade level tasking came down for a Sergeant First Class or above and several junior enlisted along with combat vehicles to augment the MiTT teams in their mission to train and work with our Iraqi counter parts as part of the support and stability operation process. I filled that job and took charge of 1BDE's Soldiers and started to work with the MiTT team on the Iraqi side of the post. This was a very interesting and exiting experience for me. I was told that I would do that job only until a First Sergeant position opened up somewhere in the brigade, as I was promotable to First Sergeant / Master Sergeant.

Working in an Iraqi Headquarters

I reported to the 1st BDE, 9th Armored Division MiTT team as an augmentee advisor. After being briefed by the SGM that was in charge of the team I was told that I would work in the Iraqi Brigade TOC and advise them on TOC operation – specifically on how to battle track. The first thing I noticed was that our imbedded MiTT Team had been “piecemealed” from all over the Army just weeks before. They were linked up at Ft. Leavenworth and then trained for only a couple of weeks and then deployed as advisors to a foreign nation. This was one of the things that I learned very quickly. MiTT Teams need and should be established as kind of a “life-cycle” unit and train for a year together to ensure all members understand their jobs and what the mission actually is. I then understood why we were augmenting them with 4ID Soldiers because they were very un-organized and many of them seemed very in-experienced. Additionally, MiTT Team members should be chosen very specifically with “the best man for the job” idea in mind when choosing. Several of the MiTT Team members had not even deployed once and were even

junior in rank. Since then I believe the Army has identified this problem and implemented a solution.

At the beginning of my time working in the Iraqi brigade headquarters, I worked in what was similar to our S-3 (Operations). I was working very closely with Iraqi officers teaching them our basic ways of how we track battles and how we work in our headquarters. Sometimes I was the only American in the headquarters, which in the beginning made me a little nervous. The only other English speaking person was the interpreter. During this time I learned how difficult things can be with the language barrier. I also watched and learned a lot about the Iraqi culture and how very different they are from Americans. The whole time that I worked there the Iraqi key leaders at the headquarters always treated me with the utmost respect. I also learned about the animosity between the Sunni and the Shia during this time as the staff officers where both Sunni and Shia. They would argue regularly about a lot of the issues with the new Iraqi Army, which was also mixed with Sunni and Shia. One of the hardest things for me at this time was that it was very obvious that some of the Iraqi Soldiers did not like me and I thought that maybe some of them were insurgents.....that we were training. I informed my chain of command about this and they agreed but, there was no way to prove this. It made it very frustrating at times.

I continued my mission to assist and train the Iraqi brigade staff until April when I was promoted to First Sergeant and took over D Company in 1-66 Armor. The three months that I spent with Iraqi Army was extremely helpful to me and gave me the knowledge I needed when working with the Iraqi tank companies when my company was partnered with them for joint operations.

Assuming duties as a First Sergeant

Assuming duties as a First Sergeant for the first time was a little un-nerving. My background is that of a light scout (19D) and I took charge of a tank company, which I really didn't know much about on the inside. I spent most of my career in Headquarters Company Scout Platoons and in the airborne community. I was also assuming responsibility as a First Sergeant for very first time. Scouts (19D) and Tankers (19K) are both part of the armor force and merge at the rank of First Sergeant or Master Sergeant (19Z). I had served for short times before in the absence of other First Sergeants that I had in the past but, this was going to be my company. One of the lessons I learned in D Company was that after I was there for a couple of weeks I found that I was really a "fish out of water". I understood and executed my First Sergeant duties but, the technical side was very unfamiliar, which put me at a disadvantage.

The system that the Army has in the Armor Branch that Scouts and Tankers merge at the rank of 1SG/MSG and be extremely effective in each other's MOS is not true in my opinion. Everybody knows that every MOS in the Army kind of has its own mentality. Especially combat arms. I don't think this is the ideal system to merge at company level. I think that First Sergeants that take over a company not in their MOS have a technical disadvantage if they are dealing with one of the main combat platforms. Having this disadvantage can sometimes make it difficult when having to advise commanders, especially when it comes to capabilities. I adapted very quickly and was in constant learning-mode about "tanking" so I could be effective.

My company conducted combat operations daily. We were the main company that was in charge of providing route security on Route Tampa between Camp Taji and north of Mushada. Overall it was about a twenty kilometer stretch of road. Highway 1 or Route Tampa is the main highway that runs north to south in the entire country. It is the main supply route for not only

coalition forces but, for the Iraqi population. These conditions make the road a main target for insurgents to place improvised explosive devices (IEDs). During that deployment my company and many other coalition forces were hit by IEDs and small arms fire on a regular basis. My own supply convoy was hit several times with one of them hitting a fuel truck and burning it to the ground.

Conducting operations in conjunction with Iraqi forces

During the deployment we sometimes received other missions with our battle space besides the Main Supply Route (MSR - Tampa). Many times we conducted operations with elements of the Iraqi Army. This proved to be difficult as we are so much more technologically advanced and we really couldn't communicate. During this time we were slowly integrating new systems into the Iraqi Army. The lesson that we all learned here that some type of basic communication has to be in place if we are to conduct combined operations with a foreign country. Then there is the language barrier even if we had a way to communicate. Because of this most of the time we were operating independently in the same battle space. We would see them and vice-versa but, really no communication besides hand and arm signals or when we got on the ground and used interpreters. Then there was the idea that some of the Iraqi Army were actually insurgents because we started to get into engagements in areas that Iraqi Soldiers were previously at.

Iraqi Army not communicating threats

On several occasions in the area coalition forces would get hit in an area that Iraqi Forces were patrolling or sometimes were in an actual observation post (OP). On one occasion there was

an Iraqi OP that was in constant over watch area of a stretch of road that was constantly having IED attacks on US Forces. In May of 2007, one of my tanks was in this area that was supposed to be secured by Iraqi Forces and was hit by 600 lbs of home-made explosives planted in a culvert under the road. This explosion killed one of my Platoon Leaders and his loader. The Iraqi OP was less than 300 meters from the point of the explosion. In my opinion there was no way that the Iraqi OP did not see the IED being emplaced. This almost caused a serious confrontation with Iraqi Army personnel at the site of the explosion. The lesson I learned here was that no matter how much we train with the Iraqi Army that there will always be trust issues.

Conclusion

I learned a lot of valuable lessons during OIF 05-07. The biggest lesson learned was that it is an ever-changing environment when you are conducting combat operations in conjunction with stability and support operations. A lesson learned for the Army is that there will always be technological differences that will drastically effect joint operations and a basic tactical communication system has to be put into place prior to conducting joint operations. Finally, imbedded MiTT Teams should be formed in a life-cycle unit and be selected with “the best man for the job” mentality and not just thrown together if they are to be successful.

