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First Sergeant 1

RUNNING HEAD: First Sergeant; The Second Time Around!

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Abstract

I am submitting this personal experience paper as an archival document on my experience as the first sergeant of the 240th Quartermaster Supply Company, “The Rock is Rolling”, 71st Corps Support Battalion, 7th Corps Support Group, 3d Corps Support Command (COSCOM). It is my intention to enlighten you on the events and circumstances surrounding my second tour as first sergeant of whom I think is the finest organization in the COSCOM. It is my hope that sharing my experience with other Soldiers can help motivate young and upcoming quartermaster Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) as well as other NCOs who choose to follow my lead. I will note that this is an excellent idea to have all Sergeants Major create these personal experience papers and is probably one of the finest ideas in a long time introduced at the Sergeants Major Academy. This paper provides as a great venue for young Soldiers to utilize and take full advantage of for a long time to come!

Before I get into the body of my paper, I want to first state that it has been an absolute honor and privilege to serve in this uniform for the past 18 years of my adult life. There are countless experiences I have encountered in my time-in-service as a Soldier and I wouldn't trade one minute of that time shared. It has been a great ride thus far and I am living out a dream that as a young 18 year-old coming into the Army ashamed and embarrassed because my family could not afford to send me to college. Nonetheless, I have endured thus far and feel now in 20/20 hindsight that this was the best and most significant decision of my life.

What I would like to do is provide a chronological summation of the time I spent as the first sergeant of the 240th Quartermaster Supply Company, 7th Corps Support Group, 3rd Corps Support Command located in Bamberg, Germany. This would be my second tour as a first sergeant after serving 16 months as the first sergeant of Headquarters and Headquarters Company US Army North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). US Army NATO is a joint level headquarters company located in Naples, Italy in support of the Armed Forces South Battalion, Joint Forces Command.

First, I want to paint a picture of what my mindset was then (when leaving NATO) and how I came about getting the 240th First Sergeant (1SG) position. I was extremely ecstatic about becoming the 1SG of HHC USANATO because it was truly a dream come true. I never ever thought I would ever become an E-8 yet alone a first sergeant and all the responsibility that comes along with that position. Although I was fortunate to fall into this position as the first sergeant, I knew in the back of my mind that

I needed to be a first sergeant in a logistical or preferably quartermaster unit. I mention this because in the world of competition with my peers, I knew that in order for me to be competitive for promotion, I needed to have time as a first sergeant in a logistical unit. There are unwritten norms out there in the big Army world that says you need to be a first sergeant in a unit that supports your career management field. This concept does not always hold true, but is just about right for the most part. I would venture to say that there are more reasons for this than just promotion. For me, I look at it as an opportunity to share my knowledge and experience with young Soldiers coming up through the ranks as I have. This is a phenomenon that as a senior noncommissioned officer you cannot trade for anything. I get much satisfaction from providing insight and instruction to younger Soldiers and they are successful as a result of your instruction. This is comparable to a father to his children. After the father provides his guidance, he observes his kids executing from that guidance. I think this is the most gratifying thing you can do as a leader and senior noncommissioned officer.

In March 2004, I received reassignment instructions for Bamberg Germany with assignment to the 71st Corps Support Battalion. After doing some research as anyone does when being reassigned to a new organization, I found that the entire battalion was about to return from Iraq (March 10, 2004). I happen to have a Soldier graduating from the Primary Leadership Development Course (Now called Warrior Leader Course) at that time and I decided to conduct a reconnaissance of the unit following my Soldier's graduation because I had a little time on my hands while waiting on my flight back to Italy. I was able to get an appointment with the Command Sergeant Major and during our discussion I expressed to him that I really wanted to be a first sergeant, but he

expressed to me that he was not planning to place me in a first sergeant position. His plans were to make me the Support Operations Noncommissioned Officer In-Charge (NCOIC) in the battalion headquarters. It was disheartening for me, because I held the SPO NCOIC in a previous assignment. This really angered me because although I was already living a dream, I really wanted to take my career to another level.

I went back to Italy and spoke with my Battalion Command Sergeant Major (CSM) and informed her of what transpired during my visit and interview. I had a report date of April 2004 and was basically due to Germany almost immediately. After knowing what the CSM's intentions were, I thought really hard about this and for the first time in my career I was trying to do something different than what the Army had in store for me. My thinking was that if it were possible, I would try to stay in Naples and remain as a first sergeant and defer my assignment to Germany. As it turned out, I was able to do this with two consecutive involuntary extensions approved by my brigade commander each totaling 60 days. Inside, I did not feel comfortable about this because I felt guilty about not reporting at my assigned time. But, in the meantime, I was still enjoying the heck out of my assignment as the first sergeant.

My assignment instructions still were valid and my battalion CSM received a call from the 71st CSM inquiring about my status. It is mid-September 2004 now and he is wondering where I am and why I have not reported to his unit. My CSM explained the situation to him and he also explained new information to both of us and informed us that he changed his mind and had intentions on placing me in the first sergeant position

because the unit I would be going to, received instructions to yet return back to Iraq after being back only five months. This changed things for all parties involved. I was going to get this position I had wanted for the longest and 71st was getting new leadership to this organization. When I asked when do I need to get there, his response was yesterday as the unit had already been training on the 140 warrior tasks and the other pre-deployment requirements. He told me that I had 10 days to get to Germany. Although this put a great strain on my family, I decided to report on time and my family stayed back in Italy a couple of weeks after me and basically cleared from there while I reported to Germany.

After arriving in Germany on Sunday, 3 October, 2004, We conducted a change of responsibility ceremony on Tuesday and I went with the unit to a certification exercise on Wednesday with my own TA-50 and yet to in process to the community. The train was already moving at a rapid pace, but this is what I wanted and asked for. The exercise lasted about 10 days and we returned the following week from the FTX. I recall a conversation with the CSM on that Monday morning of 4 October and him saying that these Soldiers need to know who their leader is going to be and that was the reason why I needed to be there so soon! As I began to get my “feet wet” I quickly noticed this battalion leadership was a strong one and really was about their business in doing everything with a sense of urgency. They had great reason to be I will say.

“The Rock” as the unit was affectionately called, was our nickname for “The Rock is Rolling”. It was a distinguished organization and its reputation preceded itself not only by word of mouth around the battalion, but also by its efforts during Operation Iraqi Freedom I. It was a unit battle tested and battle ready and was very close to being tested

in combat yet again. I considered myself lucky as I had already been a first sergeant before so I did not have to learn how to be a first sergeant, I only had to learn the way this unit worked within the battalion (battle rhythm, meetings, etc.). Ironically we were the only unit in the battalion in receipt of deployment instructions. In terms of remaining requirements for deployment certification was in a nutshell the deployment exercise (DEPEX), which was really the rail load, miscellaneous mandatory classes, block leave, household goods pick-up(HHG), rapid fielding initiative issue (RFI), and pov storage (POV) all in that order. We were on instructions to depart about one week prior to our latest arrival date.

As the beginning of November 2004 approached I began to hear rumors that I would have to attend the United States Army First Sergeants course via VTT on a last minute notice. My losing unit supposedly dropped this course, as they too were aware that I would be deploying soon. This would not be the case according to my Battalion CSM. His view was that you should never turn down or defer from a military course unless it is absolutely necessary. His instructions were for me to put my senior platoon sergeant in charge and go to attend that course. I attended the course under very short notice and graduated nearly a month later.

I returned back to the unit after completion of the first sergeant course, trained and ready to continue my new job. My commander was a very bright, energetic, and aggressive leader. He too had a magnificent reputation and it would prove to be all true as time passed. I do want to mention that he was expecting a new baby girl at the same time we were scheduled for deployment. The Soldiers in the 240th were a tough group of

Soldiers who held high standards and performed at a high standard always exceeding it in everything they did. They were very confident in everything they did and had an arrogance about them, but for whatever reason they were very separate on the inside and this would be my toughest task as the first sergeant.

December 2004 was here now and after the deployment exercise also know as the the railhead exercise, everyone was gearing towards block leave. 21 days later, block leave was over and it was on to the next task at hand, HHG, POV and RFI. These all were done relatively quickly and now it was time to wait for deployment departure instructions. We finally got the word and it was off to Ramstein Air Base, then on to Kuwait. We sent advance party personnel forward two weeks early and would link up with them once we arrived in Kuwait. Once in Kuwait, we shifted focus to recovering our equipment if it was already at the port and begin to prepare it for movement forward into Iraq either by convoy or by motor transport.

We would be assigned to the 169th Corps Support Battalion, under the 46th Corps Support Group, 1st Corps Support Command. The 169th is a National Guard unit from Olathe, Kansas under the 89th Regional Support Command. Requirements to move forward from Kuwait were to fully recover all equipment, conduct Convoy Live fire Exercise Training, and conduct Close Quarters Marksmanship training familiarization. We later conducted that training and would be postured to push forward a portion of our unit forward by convoy and another portion by air. We recovered all of our equipment with the exception of our bucket loader truck, so we decided to leave a few personnel back to look for that vehicle until found. Our target time to get to our Forward Operating

Base was at least by 2 February 2005. We arrived on the 31st of January. We touched base immediately with the unit we were replacing and the battalion command team the next morning and began our tenure at Log Base Seitz, Iraq (LBS). LBS was situated in the western portion of Iraq, about 4 miles from Fallujah and 1.5 miles from Abu Ghurayb prison. Our mission was to provide Class I, II, III(P), IV, VII, IX support to over 96 supported customers in the Baghdad Area of Responsibility. In addition to providing those commodity areas, we were also responsible for the second largest bulk fuel distribution yard in Iraq, with a capacity of 1.9 million gallons. We also had the capability of producing top quality drinking water for those same customers as well as providing disaster support for flooding. Keep this in mind, as it would become very necessary all too soon!

Our task organization was a National Guard headquarters company, with the remaining companies, two transportation companies (15th and 546th), a quartermaster company (240th), a maintenance company (598th), a laundry and bath company (157th) and a signal platoon detachment. LBS was known for being hit with indirect fire (IDF) very often so the first order of business for us was to be briefed on the indirect fire battle drill and be informed on where the bunkers were located. We were fortunate in many ways as we deployed with about 75% of the personnel that deployed during OIF I. Many of these Soldiers were NCOs in leadership positions so this added additional needed intermediate leadership. We were still trying to adjust to CLF techniques that we were introduced to for the first time while in Kuwait. These were not the tactics, techniques and procedures we trained on prior to deployment. This was important as it caused

confusion for our Soldiers. We were able to deconflict the confusion and get the Soldiers on one sheet of music and going in the right direction.

About a week later we conducted Transfer of Authority and the 308th Quartermaster Company moved on and the 240th assumed the mission. Our Soldiers were certainly up to the task. They began to take charge of their respective areas and quickly began to do what was necessary to make life better and work more efficiently. They were arrogant and cocky soldiers but had every right to be. It was natural for them. We had already been introduced to a number of IDF attacks from the very beginning on day 2 and numerous others after that and it was also rain season in Iraq and we began to get rain nonstop for a couple of days in a row. We fell in on a very old warehouse building that was reinforced with double roofing as a protection against IDF attacks. In fact all but one sleeping quarters on LBS had this feature. Reality set in as we conducted the TOA ceremonies and realized that just in the previous year, the 515th battalion had lost 14 Soldiers to numerous ways including IDF attacks. It was my prayer that none of our Soldiers would perish during the upcoming year.

As we began to get our feet on the ground, we began to take care of business, I noticed time began to fly and the days were running really close together and weeks and weeks were flying by. Soldiers were performing great and I think that even in battle our Soldiers were performing magnificently. Then came 3 April 2005. That night our barracks were hit with an 82mm rocket and injured 6 of our Soldiers sustaining shrapnel injuries, 2 very seriously and the others with substantial injuries. Luckily, all the Soldiers recovered nicely and went directly back into the fight. We received numerous other IDF

attacks, over 50 after it was all said and done, but I want to mention that the infantry battalion (2/22 IN) that were conducting patrols in our area did a magnificent job at showing and displaying force in the city on the streets and decreased the number of IDF attacks by half compared to the previous years activity.

What I want to do is recap on a very successful year and OIF III rotation in Iraq and mention some things I think are noteworthy and warrant mentioning to the general public. During our time there, we were able to get 14 soldiers to increase their GT scores through FAST courses, over 40% of our soldiers reenlisted while deployed, 1 Soldier selected for OCS, 1 Soldier selected for WOC, company PT average was 274 in spite of driving 20 minutes to a safe location for PT six days a week, 4 Soldiers were able to get their citizenship, the first sergeant was selected for attendance to the Sergeants Major Academy, 1 Soldier selected for promotion to master sergeant, 6 Soldiers promoted to staff sergeant, 3 Soldiers earned Foreign language proficiency and the list is far too long for me to continue. Eight of our Soldiers received purple hearts also

Before we knew it January was almost here and time to redeploy. Our replacement unit actually arrived earlier in theatre and we redeployed about two weeks earlier than expected. That is always a good thing! Our transfer of authority went extremely well as we were much better off in terms of BII and other equipment than our predecessors because we were able to take advantage of the supply system and get supplies in to support our effort. The transfer of authority went very well for us and we took approximately 6 or 7 days to fully complete the changeover and postured ourselves to redeploy.

After arriving back in central region, we were directed to conduct a 7-day reintegration period prior going on block leave. We executed this and 95% of the unit conducted block leave. Shortly after block leave we went on a company trip to the wonderful Edelweiss Resort and had a great time. Shortly following this we began frantic planning for the change of command. We executed a flawless change of command and began to integrate the new commander. This was also the time where we began to lose all of our Soldiers that were either getting out of the Army and departing to another duty station. This officially marked the breakup of the "original deployed unit". I planned to stay on as the first sergeant until early June and prepare to attend the Sergeants Major Academy. This did not happen and I remained in the job until two days prior to my departure from Germany enroute to El Paso.

I will close by saying that I discussed in chronological sequence the events and circumstances centered around pre-deployment, deployment and redeployment of OIF III and hope that you enjoyed hearing my story. I certainly enjoyed my time as the first sergeant of such a fine organization and will ever be mindful of the opportunity I had to influence young Soldiers. Nothing makes me more proud of the fact that all of my Soldiers returned from OIF III alive and with all of their limbs in tact. This is an absolute blessing given the fact that we are fighting such an unconventional enemy in this era. This is an enemy that will stoop to very lowest levels of audacity to cause chaos amongst American and Coalition Forces. I will always remember that no other time in my career was as rewarding as my time as a first sergeant!