

Running Head: Team Assassin in Kuwait

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### Abstract

This paper will discuss what I, as first Sergeant, experienced while Assassin Company was deployed to Kuwait. I will describe the company when I first assumed responsibility. Then I will describe how, with the aid of the commander, we improved the training and morale of our Soldiers. I will then describe the situations that led the brigade to remain in Kuwait for six months, and how the commander and I dealt with the uncertainty of this situation. I will also describe how we were able to balance training the company, and keeping it combat ready, while not burning the Soldiers out resulting in a decrease in our Soldiers morale.

I was assigned as First Sergeant for A company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, Baumholder, Germany on 24 July 2005. The company had some leadership and training issues prior to me taking command, so the morale of the company was not high. A new company commander had been assigned about a month before I arrived, so the company had brand new senior leaders five months before being scheduled to deploy to Iraq.

I have been very fortunate with the company commanders I have had since I have been a First Sergeant, they have all been tactically competent and listen to my advice. I have had great working relationships with all my company commanders, which was not only crucial for our working relationship, it was also crucial to the Soldiers of the company. My company commander's combat experience came from being on the Brigade Staff, so he looked to me for guidance since I had already been in combat as a first sergeant. So between the two of us we were well rounded in our combat experience, which would prove very important in the upcoming months.

I took over the company from one of the platoon sergeants who was filling in until I arrived. He was doing as good a job as he could, but the company was pretty much treading water and I needed to take it to the next level. When I took over the company it wasn't completely out of control, it was pretty much just treading water. There were systems in place, I just needed to beef them up some and then enforce them. The company Executive Officer had been in the company for about two months prior to me and the commander arriving, and he was slowly digging the company out of its maintenance hole that had been dug since the company was last in Iraq. All these activities were being done with continuous training and preparation for the upcoming deployment.

Towards the end of August the battalion went to Grafenwohr for gunnery and then to the Joint Multinational Training Center (JMTC). The company had done its first rotation at Grafenwohr and JMTC in April and had performed very poorly. The stigma of that performance was hanging over the Company, and was a major reason for the low morale. So for the upcoming rotation all eyes were on us. Forty percent of the company had some type of combat experience, with most of that coming from the junior enlisted ranks. Of my three platoon sergeants only one had seen combat, one just came out of the school house, and one was a light fighter with no mechanized experience. They were all good NCOs who cared about their Soldiers and understood the importance of the training we were going through. Our gunnery and training center rotation went very well and the company was seen as being back on track and ready for combat.

The next month and a half would be spent shipping equipment to Kuwait, taking leave, and dealing with rumors. The last we were told was that we were going to be attached to the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN division and be given an area of operation in Northern Iraq. About a week before getting on the plane we found out that the 101<sup>st</sup> didn't want us, and we weren't even sure if we would deploy. Through all this swirling of uncertainty we loaded the plane on 17 Nov and went to Kuwait. Upon landing in Kuwait we started the fourteen day certification required of units before deploying up North to Iraq. This is when we started hearing several different types of rumors. One would be that the entire brigade would stay in Kuwait and be the theatre reserve, another was that two task forces would be shipped back to Germany, with one task force staying in Kuwait as the reserve the entire time. Still another had the task forces rotating from Germany to Kuwait in three month increments. So there was a lot of uncertainty going on about what our mission would exactly be. This news was not received well by all the Soldiers. The Soldiers had

been training for over a year to be deployed to Iraq and now they were hearing we might possibly stay in Kuwait for an undetermined amount of time, or might even go home.

This was welcome news to me because I wouldn't have to worry about my Soldiers being killed by I.E.D.s or snipers, and I'd be able to sleep easier at night. Other Soldiers saw this as a missed opportunity to be in combat and to be able to get the ribbons and medals they didn't have. Once we received the official order that we would remain in Kuwait as the theatre reserve a lot of questions remained to be answered. The camp was made as a transition stop for units to get their equipment, re-certify on their weapon systems, and then head north. The camp and its officials were not prepared for a Brigade to stay for an indefinite period of time. On top of this, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was due to arrive about two weeks after us so space would be in short supply.

The first question was our living conditions; we were still living in tents with each tent holding around sixty five to seventy soldiers each. Camp officials told us that the tents could hold seventy Soldiers but the reality was that we were living like sardines. This could become a health issue because we were in the middle of winter and if one Soldier got sick it could sweep through all the tents and affect the entire company. We were told by camp officials that they would move us into trailers as soon as the 4<sup>th</sup> ID was completely cleared out. This never happened because 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade from 1AD was due in January so they postponed our move until after they left. We eventually moved into trailers around the first week in February. Training was another area that needed to be addressed. Since we were going to be on the camp for a long period of time, we needed to conduct training so we wouldn't lose our fighting edge. Range control officials on the camp had already coordinated ranges for transitioning units so now our operations staff had to inject us into the range schedule so that we could have use of the ranges.

This was not as easy as it seems. Range control and the battalion staff bumped heads quite often because sometimes when we would go out to one of the ranges a transitioning unit would already be there, or would show up after we arrived, and we would have to give the range up because they had priority. Since no other unit had been assigned the mission of theatre reserve before, the brigade felt compelled to institute measures of ensuring our readiness to deploy up north within seventy two hours.

Once the call came from Iraq that a task force was needed, within seventy two hours that task force had to be rolling up north. The question was what type of task force would be needed and where. The other issue was that since this was an unknown should the battalions stay pure with their own elements, or should they maintain their task force integrity. The decision made was that the brigade would stay in task force formations where they would live and train as such, and each task force would rotate its training cycle using the system of red, amber, and yellow. The red task force would be packed up and ready to go, the amber task force would be free to train, and the yellow task force would pick up any tasking that came from camp officials or brigade. Throughout this cycle each task force would go through an alert sequence to test its, and the brigades, ability to get the task force, within the time standard, up to Iraq. The toughest job I had was keeping my Soldiers morale up during this uncertain time.

I, with the help of my commander, had brought the morale of the company from the low of being ashamed of being in "Assassin" Company, to the high of being proud of themselves and being proud of being a part of a quality unit. When we found out that we would be remaining in Kuwait for an indefinite period of time the Soldiers were pretty upset. They believed that since they and their families sacrificed so much over the past year to get ready to go to Iraq that now they felt cheated. They also felt if we aren't going to Iraq why be here at all, why not go back to

Baumholder, at least then they could be with their families. What made matters worse was that this was happening over Christmas and New Years. The Soldiers understood, prior to the deployment, that they would be in Iraq over the Holidays and resigned themselves to that fact. But now everything changed and they, and their families, couldn't understand the chain of commands logic of maintaining the unit in Kuwait. So the commander and I had to work through these issues to keep the company, not only combat ready, but emotionally ready as well.

The battalion staff, once we received the order that we would be theatre reserve, thought it best that the Soldiers should be conducting some type of training seven days a week. They figured that since there were no training distracters in Kuwait, like those we had back in Germany, why not take advantage of it. This was the first fight that the commander and I had with the staff. We knew that we had to maintain our Soldiers level of readiness; however, we didn't need to be training every second of the day and every day of the week. After all we just finished training at JMRG and gotten the stamp of approval that we were ready to go to Iraq, why start a level one all over again? It was a fine line that the commander and I had to walk to keep the morale of the company high, so we used common sense in our training. Like one of my old commanders told me, "We are a garrison Army at war". This was to prove itself in Kuwait. The task force started having training meetings, command and staff briefings, and daily battle update briefs. The commander and I were in meetings at least six times a week. To prevent our Soldiers from getting mentally drained, and morale of the company taking a nose dive we scheduled ranges no more that twice a week. We used all assets that were available to us from the post and we walked the fine line of training to much and not training enough. I think we did a good job because while other units were having problems with their Soldiers, and having a lot of

UCMJ actions we were doing pretty well. We only had a couple of UCMJ actions, all handled at the company level, so I think the course the commander and I took with the company paid off.

In looking back at the six months that Assassin Company was in Kuwait I think the commander and I did pretty well in the way we led the company through that uncertain time. Through active communication with each other and our Soldiers we were able to maintain the company's readiness, discipline, and morale. Three weeks after I flew from Kuwait back to Germany the brigade received its order to move up to Iraq.