

ATSS-MH (870)

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

SUBJECT: Access Agreement for Personal Experience Papers

1. I, Christopher S. Lanham, have submitted a Personal Experience Paper to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives regarding events and experiences from my participation in OIF 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:

None
 Other:

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: 17 March 2011

Printed Name: LANHAM CHRISTOPHER J.

Signature: 

Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

Printed Name/Date: Montes Moron 19 April

Signature: 

USASMA FORM 7273-R, APR 06

Road to Sergeant Major

SGM Christopher S. Lanham

United States Sergeants Major Academy

USASMA-NRC-36

MOS 13Z

OIF Forward Operating Base Cropper, 10/03/2006 – 01/23/2008

03/15/2011

Unclassified

Operations Sergeant, Battery C, 2/138th Fires Brigade

Abstract

In deciding the topic for this paper I found it a difficult decision to pick just one experience from my 26 year career. So, I decided to write about events that led to my eventual current assignment and promotion to Sergeant Major. Most of these events are centered around my deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom from October 2006 thru January 2008 to include pre-deployment operations at Fort Dix, NJ. I have not listed many specific incident or dates, but have listed some specific duties that gave me experience to succeed in my current position. I must admit that this was a position I was not prepared for. I was suddenly

Before deploying to Iraq, I had served in many capacities with many duty positions and in several different units. My career began in March 1985 with the Kentucky National Guard, Service Battery 1/623rd out of Springfield, KY, my hometown. I became full-time with the National Guard in February of 1988 and was transferred to Bravo Company of the 103rd. I have served with the 135th AVN, the 2/138th FA, and now in my current assignment with the 138th Fires Brigade all units out of Kentucky. Upon receiving a Warning Order for deployment In 2006 my assignment at the time was as a Platoon Sergeant and Readiness NCO with Battery C 2/138th Field Artillery out of Bardstown, Kentucky, where I currently reside.

When our mission was confirmed as a Security Force mission from the Warning Order and a DMD was received it was clear to our Higher Command that the unit did not have numbers to support this mission. Two units from the Battalion, Battery C 2/138th and Service Battery 2/138th were merged to meet the mission requirements with the guidon of Battery C going forward. The DMD allowed for two E8 positions, a First Sergeant and an Operations Sergeant. But, because the two units were merging there were already two E8s to fill these positions.

During the Soldier Readiness Processing it was determined one of those E8s was non-deployable due to an existing medical condition. Since I was the top E7 on the promotion list I was GWOT promoted to E8 as the Operations NCO to fill the vacant position.

I must admit that this was a position I was not prepared for. I was suddenly faced with duties and responsibilities for which I had never received training nor experienced in my career. My duties as a Readiness NCO, for which had served as for more than ten years was a benefit and helpful, but this was an entirely separate mission from the Field Artillery training I was

accustomed too. Even though I had been involved in Mission Development Mission Planning process on many occasions it had never been at the level I suddenly faced. During the training received during pre-mobilization at Fort Dix, I was given such tasks as developing an Operation Order from scratch instead of executing them. As the unit went through SECFOR training I was being trained on how to run an Operations Cell. I was blessed with an experienced Commander who was well versed in FM 5-0 and the installation provided excellent training. I also had very professional NCOs and Soldiers as my staff in the Operation Cell. During our final validation exercise the OIC made comments that this was the best run Tactical Operation Center she has witnessed since she in charge of the process. Our training, hard work, and dedication paid off and I felt my “team” was more than prepared to deploy to theater.

Task Force Battery C 2/138th landed in Kuwait on 31 January 2007 after a longer than expected stay at Fort Dix. After only a brief stay we proceeded to Baghdad, Iraq where we would be the Critical Site Security Force for Forward Operating Base Cropper near the Baghdad International Airport. As our C-130 was landing in BIAP the pilot was forced to make evasive maneuvers as the Airport was being mortared while we were landing. This was when I first realized my own mortality and that I might not ever leave this place alive. It was a wild ride to say the least, but we landed safely and intact.

To familiarize those reading this paper on FOB Cropper I must give it some brief history. FOB Cropper is an internment facility for Detainees who are awaiting trial by the Iraqi Government for crimes they had been accused of committing. It was established after the incidents of Abu Ghraib. It was a multi-national installation and with Soldiers from all US Military Forces and Soldiers from many other Countries. The FOB for the most part was self

Sustaining except it did not have a Dining Facility.

When we reached our new home we immediately began right seat left seat with the unit we were replacing, the 1/142nd out of Arkansas. I immediately began my duties as the Operations NCO and found the training at Fort Dix was extremely useful but made many adjustments to fit requirements from higher headquarters and to meet the situation. These adjustments were not a one time task as we continually adjusted due to new requirements or to mitigate a threat from a capable adversary.

Our mission as Critical Site Security consisted of many tasks from manning a outside wall to security of a CSH, and manning the 2 entry points to the FOB. I was charged with managing the troops to task roster and found it difficult to keep all our posts manned without over working Soldiers. This was just one of the duties I was tasked with as the Operations NCO, other duties consisted of operating ranges, resourcing requirements, programming Soldiers leave, and LNO duties with our higher headquarters. I also acted as the First Sergeant in his absence.

FOB Cropper saw many changes during our one year tour as we continued to make changes to improve security and were assigned additional tasks. During our deployment we saw the establishment of a new Interrogation facility, which our troops were tasked with security of detainees inside the facility. US forces began training Iraqi Correctional Officers for an eventual transformation of the Iraq Government taking over the facility, which wouldn't happen until 2010 long after our departure. Our task force provided security for this installation located inside the FOB. We trained Ugandan Soldiers to take over our security wall as part of this process. Training and interacting with multi-national forces was an interesting experience for a bunch of ole Kentucky Boys, and as you can imagine, I am sure it was interesting for them too.

As we came to the end of our deployment and began the right seat left seat with our replacements, Company C 103rd out of Rhode Island, our Soldiers has gone through a lot. I was confident we left the FOB in better shape than when we took it over. We left Iraq, thankfully, with all the Soldiers we brought standing on their own with no serious injuries. After a short stay in Kuwait, we returned to Fort Dix for our post deployment, and then our homes in late January of 2010. I must say, this was the longest period of my career.

As I transitioned from Title 10 back to Title 32 and resumed my duties as a Readiness NCO. I was faced with finding a full-time slot to match my rank, as the position I held only allowed for Sergeant First Class. Because I was GWOT promoted and according to the current policy I had one year, with a one year waiver, to find an E8 position or take an administrative reduction. Upon my return from deployment the Battalion Operations NCO was currently deployed with another unit. I was asked to take over his duties during his absence based on the my experience from my deployment in support of OIF. As it turns out this position required an E8. It was a just a few months later when the current NCO occupying this position announced his intent to retire upon returning from his deployment. Due to my performance and experience I was immediately moved permanently into the position, hence meeting my requirement to find an E8 position in the time allotted in accordance with current policy.

The time period for this move allowed me to meet requirements to be eligible for E9 under the Kentucky National Guard's Enlisted Promotion System. After board proceedings under this program and a Order of Merit list was published I was the top E8 on the list, however, no slots were vacant for E9 with no projected vacancies. At this time I was only a few months from being eligible for retirement and planned to do so since there didn't seem to be a chance to

make Sergeant Major.

During all this while I continued my duties as the Battalion Operation NCO, the state Human Resources Office held a 20 year retention board. One of the Senior NCOs who was not Retained from this board was our Brigades Operation Sergeant Major, currently acting as the Brigade Command Sergeant Major while deployed. This all meant that the position for the Brigade Operations Sergeant Major became vacant. As this position was not a Command position it was filled from the state's enlisted promotion system OML. After holding the rank of E7 for almost eleven years a chain of events set them in sequence and I was suddenly standing in front of a formation and being pinned to Sergeant Major with new duties and much more responsibility. I immediately enrolled into the Sergeants Major Academy and continue to serve as the Brigade Operations Sergeant Major. My responsibilities have already given me many rewarding experiences in such a short time.

I constantly push you Soldiers and NCOs to attend schools and prepare them for advancement. Opportunities for promotion at times come unexpected, if you are unprepared these opportunities may pass you by or find you overwhelmed.

My career has taken me through many challenges, and I am sure proposes may more to come. The chain events that led me to my current career path all came unexpectedly. I continue to further my education as I am currently pursuing my Bachelors degree.

It has been my experience that if you do not continue to better yourself and continue to learn and grow, you will at sometime in your career wonder why you have been sitting in the same path.