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Guarding the Gates

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Abstract

This paper describes the key events and lessons learned during my deployment on Operation Noble Eagle II stationed at Ft. Sill, OK and Ft. Carson, CO. The focusing of the paper is on the issues of mobilizing a unit and use of sustainment training for soldiers.

## Guarding the Gates

It was August of 2002 and our unit was starting to move to Ft. Sill in support of a Brigade level JANUS exercise when I and three other senior NCOs were told to report to the S3. Once in his office we were told that we will be mobilizing in September in support of Operation Noble Eagle II with duties in Dugway and Peblo, UT guarding chemical sites. My first thought was, why are we getting this kind of mission, this has nothing to do with Field Artillery. We spent the next three day supporting the JANUS exercise and asking the question, why are we not back at the units preparing for the mobilization.

Later that week the mission had changed, 280 Soldiers will be mobilized, with 180 Soldiers stationed at Ft. Sill, OK and 100 Soldiers stationed at Ft. Carson, CO. Ft. Sill was going to be our mobilization site.

We spent three days at Altus Air Force Base going thru SRP stations for medical, administrative, and logistics on all soldiers to determine if they were deployable. When we got to Ft. Sill we had to go thru the SRP process again. So everything that we spent three days doing on the first SRP was just duplicated again. This was the issue on every pre-mob task that we done. We did it again at the mob site.

During the SRP process Soldiers that had flag actions for failing the APFT or not meeting the HT/WT standards IAW AR 600-9 were removed by the state headquarters so that the Soldiers could be but on a mobilization order. Units just started promoting every soldier they could regardless if they met the standards, this later become

a huge mistake due to several moral issues as well as inexperienced leaders who had no business being in those positions.

I was part of the advance party group that arrived a week before the main body. We met with the DPTM folks at the mob site with our mob books and support requests and immediately received resistance on how we would entire active duty status as well as getting the training required to conduct our mission.

The Battalion arrived at Ft. Sill to enter active duty status and starting the post mobilization training which consisted of training on basic soldier skills and weapons qualification. This was training that was designed by the mob site and was not planned well. I felt that the mob site was not prepared for us and that they were just going thru the motion of scheduling the training. Logistics was always an issue; either transportation was late or didn't even arrive to take us to the training sites or the ranges. The billets that were issued to us were considered to be condemned, but yet the mob site felt it was adequate. After several days of cleaning and doing maintenance on the building we made do with what we were given.

After the post mob training was completed we started a right seat ride for three weeks with the unit that we are replacing. Finally training on what are mission will be for the next nine months "Guarding the Gates at Ft. Sill and Ft. Carson". This was not the mission any combat arms unit would want, but this was the mission that was handed to us. Like any mission, we did it with pride and professionalism.

During the mobilization my job was to build an AFATDS lab and set up sustainment training for the Battalions 13P and 13M Soldiers to include an FTX. The plan was to establish a twelve day training event consisting of three days in the lab on the AFTADS for the Fire Direction Crews. All others were training on section level tasks; seven days in the field conducting Platoon, Battery and Battalion level training with two days of maintenance. The plan was designed to have two batteries providing security for all the gates on the post, while the third battery would be in a training cycle or red cycle for a month. This allowed each battery a chance to conduct sustainment training every third month.

One plus being mobbed at Ft. Sill is that we still had our organic equipment stored at the Mobilization Assistance Training Equipment Site (MATES) and was able to draw it for the FTX portion of the training. If we would have been mobbed in another location this would not have been as much of a success for the Battalion.

The sustainment training became very crucial for the fact that we were not performing our wartime mission and those skill sets would have diminished while on the mobilization. Without the sustainment training we would have returned home broke and having to start training in the crawl phase. This would have set the Battalion back at least a year or more. The thought of that was unacceptable; we could not let that happen.

Not everyone agreed with the sustainment training at first, several battery commanders and 1SG felt that this was more than what the Soldiers could handle. They felt that when they were on their red cycle that was their time for their soldiers take leave

or what ever they wanted to do, but they didn't like the idea of the seven day FTX. This soon passed after they had completed the training and the FTX and saw that the Soldiers were motivated and like the change of pace and getting back on the equipment doing their FA mission.

The sustainment training was a huge success for the battalion, due to the Soldiers received more training during the mob than what we would have done normally in our IDT drill weekend and annual training during that year.

It gave commanders a chance to really evaluate their battery as well as maintaining crew certification with no disruption due to crew turbulence. During the training commanders were allowed one-to-four days for platoon and battery level training before having to go into battalion level. It also gave the crews a chance to live fire with the MLRS rockets.

The battalion was released from active duty on 28 June, 2003. The demobilization process took three days; then we were returned back to state control. When we returned the Brigade was going to their Annual Training and our Battalion commander had the option on whether he wanted the battalion to participate in the external evaluation during the brigades annual training. With all the training that we had been doing in the last nine months he was confident that the Battalion would have no issues with passing the evaluation.

When the evaluation was completed the battalion had received an excellent

rating. This was due to the success of the sustainment training.

In conclusion, not every unit will have the opportunity to conduct sustainment training while being on a deployment, especially those in Iraq or Afghanistan. This has been a major concern especial in the Field Artillery world due to you have sections chiefs that have never fired a round since they were SPC as a Cannon Crewmember. The skill sets for those soldiers that are performing a non MOS specific mission have diminished since the start of OIF/OEF.

If at all possible soldiers need to be afforded the chance to conduct sustainment training while on deployment when available. This will help reinforce the reset training that your soldiers will receive after returning from deployment. Some methods could be using computer based training aids to even just doing rock drills. Whatever the method, it's better than letting your soldiers lose those valuable skills.