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My Personal Experiences in National Guard Special Forces

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Abstract

This article is a summary of my OEF mobilization as a senior NCO in a National Guard Special Forces Company. I have been mobilized and deployed 3 times since September 11, 2002. Each time, the mission was in support of operations being conducted by a different active component Special Forces Group.

National Guard Special Forces Mobilizations and Deployments

This paper is about my role in the overseas combat deployment of my National Guard Special Forces team shortly after the attacks on our country on September 11, 2001. My company has deployed as a company 3 times since then. Each time, we were assigned to serve in the force structure of a different active component group. Each time presented unique organizational and logistical challenges. We responded well to each challenge. We were commended on our performance in both combat and peacetime deployments. The result has been the healthy growth of our unit in numbers and quality of new Special Forces (SF) soldiers over time. In my civilian job, I have over 17 years of sworn law enforcement experience as a Deputy Sheriff and as a police officer. My military training includes the Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat (SFAUC) course, the Advanced NCO Course (ANCOC), the Military Free fall Jumpmaster Course, a military human intelligence (HUMINT) course, and the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) as an 18B (Weapons Sergeant).

Chapter 1 – **Mobilization and Fort Bragg January – May 2002**

The first deployment was in January 2002, when we were a part of the Virginia Army National Guard. We were mobilized and assigned to the 3rd Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina I was assigned as an Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) Team Sergeant, the senior NCO on an SF Team. Our team, ODA 2084, was

a Military Free Fall team. I was fairly green for a Master Sergeant. There were several members of the team with more active duty deployments and experience than me.

The Virginia Army National Guard did not know what our future status would be upon return from Afghanistan. One NCO in our unit, another Team Sergeant, wrote in a book:

“The state guys wanted them to leave nothing behind, although they were not even sure if they wanted the team to come back to Ft A.P. Hill or not”(Anonymous, 2005, p. 56)

The Virginia Guard allowed moral and pay problems to affect the unit even prior to our deployment, and these issues persisted throughout. We were sent to Fort Bragg and assigned to the 3rd SFG. We found that we needed to be brought up to speed on radios and optics, and began drawing these. Initially, we were assigned to do Red Cycle details such as burials and demonstrations. This was not popular as the men felt we should instead be training for war. Then we were told we were going to set up a base in Africa.

Finally, we were reassigned from one battalion to another and sent to Afghanistan on short notice. Morale was much higher when we learned we were going to war.

Chapter 2 Operation Enduring Freedom and Afghanistan

We were assigned to the Combined Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). The tactical situation on our arrival at Bagram airfield was somewhat unsecure, and the scene was disorganized. The local population could

still walk through the perimeter and observe us in our tents. Ammo and demolitions and been left piled in mud huts by departing SF and SEAL teams, and needed to be organized and accounted for. We secured all this ammo and established a makeshift Ammo Supply Point (ASP). The Taliban had been driven from Afghanistan and were not an effective fighting force at the time. Many NCO's in our company were assigned to staff positions at the CJSOTF. This was not popular, as NCO's assigned to teams wanted to get into the fighting. My team was assigned to go along with 2 teams from the 3rd SFG and set up a firebase along the border with Pakistan. We packed 2 CH-47 helicopters completely full, and attached tactical vehicles via sling load and set up a new firebase. Soon we were under rocket attacks. We had meetings with the local population and conducted vehicular and foot patrols to search for enemy forces in the area.

During five months of continuous unconventional warfare combat and support operations, my team executed staff duties at the battalion level as well as direct action, reconnaissance, vehicular patrols, and resupply missions. I was awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal for service during this tour. I was selected to testify before congress in April 2003 in reference to reserve mobilization issues. My testimony can be found in the congressional record (4). We deployed to Afghanistan with no vehicles. We rented Toyota pickup trucks and attached machine gun mounts on them for operations. I also sent 2 NCO's to Germany to

draw us some surplus vehicles from DRMO. They obtained vehicles and trailers which we put into action during vehicle patrols out of Kandahar beginning in July 2002. We conducted battle handoff with a team from 7th SFG in October, 2002. Overall, our team performed very well. NCO's distinguished themselves by establishing living quarters in former Taliban mud structures in Kandahar and Bagram. They obtained surplus vehicles, shipped them to Kandahar with little guidance, modified them for desert patrol use with spray paint and hand tools. This mission was a groundbreaking experience for me and my team. We were the first 20th SFG team to go into combat as a team after September 11. We overcame pay problems, lack of support from the Virginia Army National Guard, and significant equipment problems. Our recommendations for improvements in the future tactical and technical training included adding tactical vehicles at the company level and sending our soldiers to the schools on how to drive and maintain them.

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