

**UNCLASSIFIED**

Personal Experience Paper

FOB Blickenstaff (Mosul, Iraq 03-04)

MSG Stanley J. Sobiech Jr., 11Z, C co 1<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> INF, 2<sup>nd</sup> ID

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Abstract

This paper covers my six months in Mosul, Iraq as a First Sergeant of Comanche Company 1<sup>st</sup> BN 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, the first Stryker Brigade to deploy into combat environment. It starts, from when the company received the order to occupy a FOB next to the Tigris River. To the occupation of it and the modifications and the development of new SOPs, the contacts that tested those SOPs to the departure of the Company from the FOB.

## Comanche Company 1-23 Infantry

From the start Comanche Company, received the majority of the most challenging missions while deployed to Iraq in 2003 - 2004. The mission was to patrol the most heavily populated and congested area of Mosul. Areas patrolled were from bridge one to bridge five by the Tigris River and a section of the city that was known as "Old Town," due to it being the oldest part of the city. The streets in "Old Town" were too narrow for the Strykers to maneuver so dismounted patrols were conducted to maintain presence and to establish control. The company occupied a small Forward Operating Base (FOB). We named the FOB, Blickenstaff after a soldier that had died during a mission in Samara. The Battalion Commander wanted to be located with us to assist the city's Mayor Cell. Comanche Company was the only company size FOB in the city from the second infantry division. Thus, their story begins.

Blickenstaff was not a large FOB for it was approximately 150 meters by 150 meters and it only had fifteen buildings on it. As First Sergeant, I immediately mapped out the compound in detail by Platoon so we could occupy the compound fast. Before we moved out of FOB Morez, every soldier in the Company knew where he was going to be living for the next six months. The compound was located next to the Tigris River by bridge number one and strategically it was very defensible. Each Infantry platoon had their own building for the soldiers. The barracks were all the exact same size and could hold about 40 men. Battalion Headquarters that consisted of the S2, S3, TAC, TOC, and attached slice units occupied two larger main buildings. We had our own three-man mechanic crew to maintain and fix the vehicles. The FOB also had the Battalion's Field Feeding Team (FFT) with the Containerized Kitchen (CK). The NCOIC, SFC Steven put together an outstanding dining facility that we enjoyed daily for breakfast and dinner. Comanche Company Headquarters building housed not only headquarters personnel but

also the company mortars, fire support, and snipers section. Eventually a gym was built next to the building to help with physical training and to improve morale.

Each platoon building also had a day room with a television that received the Armed Forces Network (AFN). The day rooms were cozy with a couch for the men to relax on. In the Company day room there was also an Internet cafe' that had about fifteen computers for the men to use to check email or chat with family and friends. The day rooms were one of the best things that I had done for the company. Every Platoon had an X-box and LAN lines ran from building to building for X-box competitions. We had several X-box teams in the company and moral was high. We also had a small Iraqi store that ran by a highly trusted Iraqi Official. He sold Hiji (pirated movies) and all sorts of computer supplies.

My Mobile Gun System (MGS) section also had their own buildings, one for the Platoon and one for the leaders. The Infantry Leaders were in the safest and most secure building in the compound. It was located next to the main entrance wall that had two rows of Texas Barriers going down it. There were two machine gun towers overlooking that side of the compound. Each Platoon Leader and Platoon Sergeant had their own room. Squad Leaders all lived together along with some of the senior team leaders. Each platoon bay had two air conditioning units to help keep it cool for the 34 to 36 men sleeping in the Platoon bays.

To keep moral up, we built a volleyball area and a horseshoe pit. I also established several smoking areas. At night, when the men had time, they would sit out under the tree and SGT Apel would play his guitar for hours. This all gave the men an outlet to release any pent up energy.

Upon assuming the FOB, the first priority was to improve the fighting positions. There were six positions in which sandbags were filled and placed all around the positions to include

overhead coverage. The sandbags provided 18 inches or more protection for the soldiers.

Crews served weapons placed in each of the six positions with an AT-4 at the side. A Stryker were placed at each gate and by the wall near the water by the mayor's cell for further protection.

The missions that Comanche Company was tasked with were FOB security, Sergeant of the Guard (SOG), mounted and dismounted patrols, company squad size quick reaction force (QRF), battalion platoon size QRF, counter mortar and improvised explosive devise (IED) ambushes and night OPs at various key positions of the city.

#### New Comanche SOPs

As Comanche Company First Sergeant, it was becoming apparent to me that new SOPs were needed because of the missions that we were tasked with. With help from the S-2, we worked together to establish an SOP (Cco 1-23INF 2003) for the compound and the SOG. Other SOPs include company and battalion QRF SOP's (Cco 1-23INF 2003), radio watch SOP and several other smaller SOPs. The most important SOP that I put together, was after going on a dismounted patrol with one of the squads. It became apparent that the standard dis-mounted patrolling technique was not working. The men were too far apart and could not support each other if the streets were full of people. The markets were especially crowded and made for a dangerous situation. Upon returning from a dismounted patrol with the men, I called a meeting with the platoon sergeants and we established our own SOP for patrolling the city (Cco 1-23INF 2003). Each platoon rotated patrols daily. During the dismounted patrols, the men walked approximately 2 kilometers a day. Due to the new SOP, I feel that we were never targeted for drive by shootings because the squads posture and readiness of force. (see attachment 1)

A mounted SOP was also needed. The Stryker Vehicles needed to be maintained and ready to roll in a moments notice. I created an SOP (Cco 1-23INF 2003) that put the vehicles in

order and assigned every man in a Stryker a duty and a responsibility. This SOP enabled the company to identify three IEDs and effectively engage targets before they could do any damage. (see attachment 2) I also wrote an Observation Post (OP) SOP (Cco 1-23INF 2003). Our OPs consisted of a squad with a squad-designated marksman (SDM) and a 240B. The Company Sniper section would go to main OP that maintained surveillance of high payoff targets.

The next SOP that I established was a Traffic Control Point (TCP). The battalion SOP (1<sup>ST</sup> BN 23<sup>RD</sup> INF 2003) was not designed for a squad. However, while in Iraq it was necessary for squads to conduct flash TCPs, which is why a new SOP was established (see attachment 3). Comanche Company kept the city of Mosul in check by doing everything possible to deter the insurgents in the area.

On April 9, 2004, the company's SOPs were tested. The city of Mosul erupted into turmoil. There were at least twelve car bombs reported and several Iraq Police Stations were under attack. A car bomb exploded only 200 meters from Blickenstaff's rear gate. Surprisingly, there were no attacks on our compound. The battalion commander gave Comanche Company orders to stay in the compound and let the Iraqi National Guard (ING) and Iraqi police handle the situation. After four hours of shooting, the city went quiet. At this time, the battalion commander instructed us to occupy our five observation posts in the city of Mosul. While in route, second squad of second platoon was ambushed by about twenty-five insurgents. They immediately took cover and returned fire. During the altercation, Sgt Hanson's body armor became hooked on a garbage dumpster and he could not get free. SPC Miller took it upon himself to save Sgt Hanson's life. SPC Miller ran towards Sgt Hanson and laid down suppressing fire allowing Sgt Hanson time to free himself. SPC Miller was the only individual that received a silver star with V device for his bravery under fire. As soon as we received the

report of the ambush, we immediately lunched our Battalion QRF; that consisted of three Infantry Variant Stryker (IAV) and one Mobile Gun System (MGS) with about 50 men. The contact was only two blocks away and response time was four minuets. The ambush was down an ally, which actually worked to our advantage. The MGS fired the first TOW Missile ever fired in a city environment there. The TOW Missile took out an RPG team that had been firing several rockets at them. Third Platoon maneuvered its squads into position and returned fire. The firefight lasted about 30 minutes. In the end, fifteen insurgents were killed and Comanche Company had no loss of personnel or equipment. The dead laid in the streets for an entire day until the city officials finally collected them. We knew they were insurgents because the bodies were not claimed from the streets.

The OP SOP was tested also on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2004, when some Iraqi's come out of a mosque carrying RPG's. One of our snipers, SPC Furman, took a 400 meter shot killing two insurgents and wounding another. The mounted SOP was tested in June during a night resupply mission when an IED exploded between two Strykers wounding CPL Gurnsey. A piece of shrapnel the size of a quarter went through his helmet and lodged into his head. The vehicles were following the SOP and the IED missed the intended target.

#### Comanche Hardships and Camaraderie

Comanche Company stayed in Blickenstaff for a total of six months. The Company executed over 300 raids, Closed down a flummox cells and captured several Iraqi terrorists. My men walked the longest distances in the Brigade, averaging about one to two kilometers a day. With all the strenuous activity and heat, we never had a single heat casualty. Other challenges included the attempts to capture/kill the mad mortar man, who would pull up and launch a few rounds at the compound or the men that were trying to emplace IED's at night. We executed

over 150 ambushes trying to kill them, we also conducted mounted patrols around the city and in the area's were a Stryker could go. In all, I would say that we did everything possible to keep the city of Mosul safe during our six months at Blickenstaff. As First Sergeant, I believe I did everything possible to make the life in Comanche Company the best that I could. I loved my men like any father should and if you talk to anyone from Comanche Company 1-23 today they would tell you that they are proud of their accomplishment while at FOB Blickenstaff in Mosul, Iraq. Most are willing to go back there again. We were the best that we could ever be and I brought all my boys home safe with me.

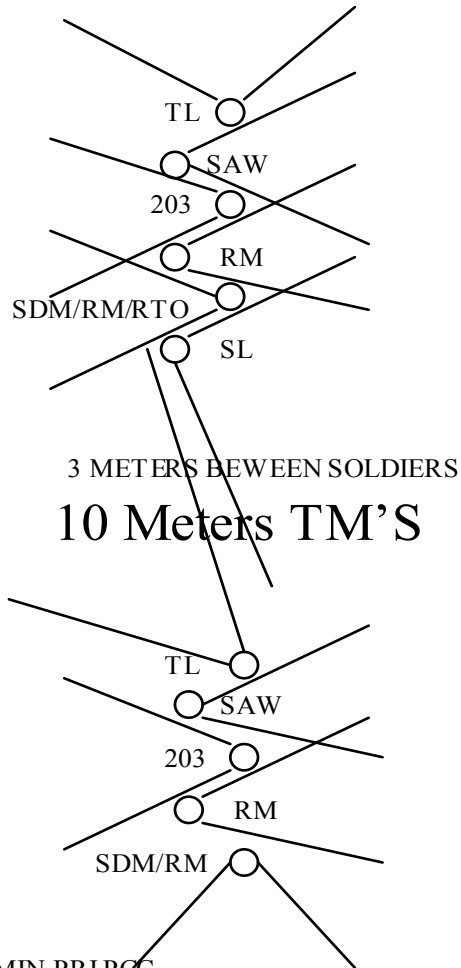
References

Comanche Company 1<sup>ST</sup> Battalion 23<sup>RD</sup> Infantry 2003-2004 Standard Operating Procedures

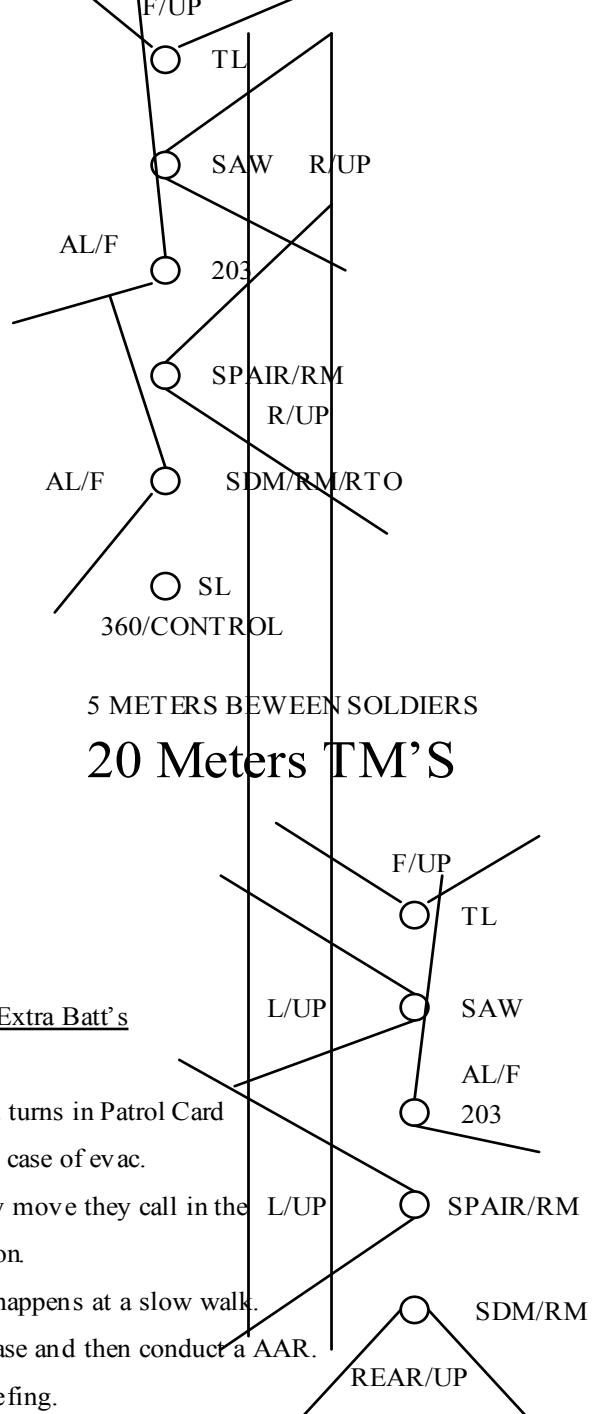
1<sup>ST</sup> Battalion 23<sup>RD</sup> Infantry "Tomahawks" 2003-2004 Standard Operating Procedures

Attachment 1

### CONGESTED AREA




### CITY BLOCK

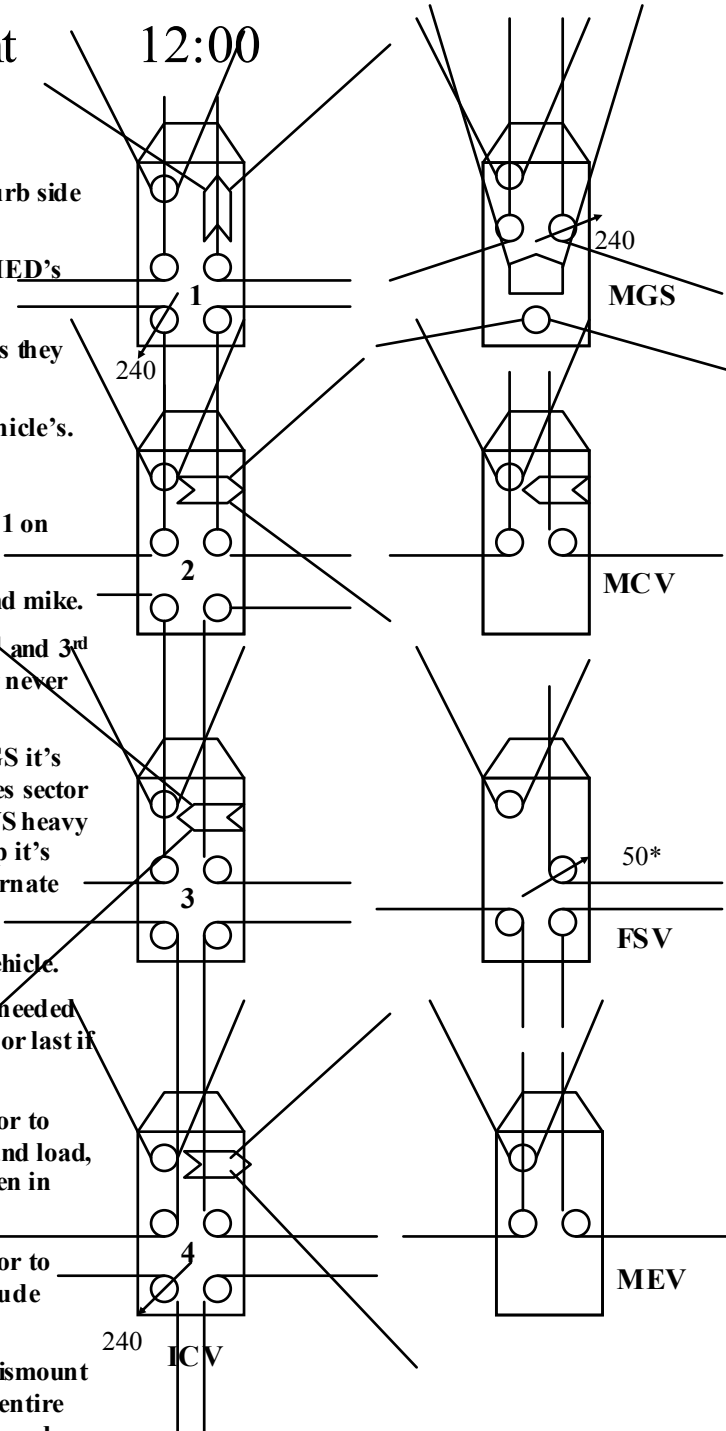


1. 30 MIN PRI PCC
  - o Asip o Shooter Uniform o Nod's o CLS Bag o Extra Batt's
  - o EPOW Kits o Full Camelbak o 210 Ammo
2. SQD LDR briefs base routes and Patrol's mission, and turns in Patrol Card w/5w's and risk assessment card, prior to departing in case of evac.
3. Prior to departing calls up departure report, and as they move they call in the check points along the way and the status of the mission.
4. Scan primary sector is #1, Threat 360\* is #2, and this happens at a slow walk.
5. When they return they call in the returning report to base and then conduct a AAR.
6. Once completed the AAR they report to base for debriefing.

Attachment 2

# Vehicle Movement

1. Primary sectors of fire.
2.  RWS sectors of fire.
3. Drivers scan for IED's on curb side and center of road.
4. SQD LDR and CV scan for IED's high and curb side.
5. Always have two rear guards they scan windows and roof tops.
6. 50 to 100 meters between vehicle's.
7. Speed 50 to 65 MPH.
8. Radio's 1 on Company and 1 on PLT.
9. 1 rear guard on CVC or hand mike.
10. MGS can be between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> vehicle or the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> but never first or last.
11. MCV is the same as the MGS it's RWS we pick up that vehicles sector of fire, MGS don't have RWS heavy weapons, they do not pick up it's sector of fire, only RWS alternate sectors of fire.
12. MEV is same as the MGS vehicle.
13. CMD-V and FSV can fill as needed but preferred not to be first or last if possible.
14. SQD LDR conduct PCC Prior to loading. all djismounts lock and load, air guards lock and load when in position.
15. Conduct commo check's prior to departing on all net's to include FBCB2.
16. SQD LDR upon returning dismount the vehicle and lines up the entire squad and crew for clearing and inspection.



Attachment 3

# SQUAD LEVEL Vehicle TCP

1. 1 Team responsible for security.
2. 1 Team responsible for search.
3. Every one is on the same side of the road if possible.
4. Search Team gives up saw gunner to security and security gives up M4 gunner to search Team.
5. Search Team grab the vehicle.
6. Search Team move all personal from the vehicle but the driver, he helps with the search.
7. M4 Security keeps rifle pointed at a low carry at the Driver and the Holding area, so they can shoot quick, if they try any thing always keep a clear sector of fire to engage with.
8. RTO near the SQD LDR keeps a log of the actions at the TCP.
9. If possible the Vapor Tracer is used in the search.
10. Searcher do a detailed search of personnel and the vehicle.
11. Report all findings to the base.

