

Personal Experience Paper

Managing Loss of Life in Operation Iraqi Freedom

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The purpose of this essay is to discuss the personal emotional aspects of the death of a soldier, interpreter, or Iraqi counterpart. I will site several examples of the unit dealing with death and what the responsibilities of the unit and chain of command are. I will use personal experience and the Army's FM 3-21.5 as a model to show the mechanisms the Army recommends the unit utilizes to use tradition to honor the fallen and reduce the emotional burden of the unit. I will show the mission of Special Forces in Iraqi to provide the reader with the understanding of the integration with Iraqi SOF soldiers and interpreters.

First I will break down the mission of the Special Forces as it relates to Iraqi Freedom and the War on Terror (WOT). To describe the unclassified version of the Special Forces mission is challenging, but first is Foreign Internal Defense (FID) partnered with the aspect of combat advising, and intelligence. In the counterinsurgency model, which is the Special Forces forte, the Special Forces team is manned to establish a based camp with insurgents and conduct operations against the local government. The ultimate intent is for the insurgency to overthrow the government and establish a new form of governing. The FID mission is for the Special Forces team to partner with an element of the host nation government of a country and train them in an aspect of warfare. Normally the training is from basic to advanced skills and from regular host nation units to host nation Special Operations Forces (SOF).

The FID mission in Iraq is unique, however is doctrinally sound. The Special Forces was never designed to train a whole Army of a Nation. The Special Forces structure are not resourced for a mission of that magnitude. The Special Forces is manned and resourced to train a segment of the host nation army, not the army as a

whole. In Iraq the average Company Commander of a conventional unit may think that Special Forces should train all the Iraqi counterparts in his particular area of operations. However that responsibility remains a mission of the US Army, specifically the MiTT or BiTT teams, while the Special Forces teams are focused on the Iraq SOF elements. The Iraqi SOF elements are fragmented, composed of Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF), Iraqi Counter Terrorist Forces (ICTF), Iraqi Army (IA) scout platoons, and Iraqi Police elements of the Emergency Response Unit, ERU and provincial Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) elements. So the Special Forces team resources training and equipment, instructs the training through an interpreter, plans the mission, preps the Iraqi operators, and combat advises the Iraqi SOF on missions. During the combat advising phase the team accompanies the force on the target and provides enablers, such as ISR, close air support (CAS), air MEDEVAC, and command and control.

Army manual FM 3-21.5 discusses the protocol for unit responsibilities after losing a soldier. It discusses the proper way to render honors to our fallen brethren. For Special Forces Soldiers task an escort officer, normally someone of equal rank. The unit conducts a memorial forward in theatre, one with the rear detachment for the family. The unit provides at the memorial a set of desert boots, M-4 with bayonet, a MITCH helmet, set of identification tags, and a memorial photo. The unit SGM announces roll call, we conduct a firing detail salute, and a bugler plays taps. (source info 1, FM 3-21.5) The unit also assigns a casualty assistance officer to assist the family with all the paperwork and benefits. The unit also assists at the funeral with someone giving a payer and speech. All of these honors help the unit and family bring closure to the tragedy.

For one of our Iraqi SOF warriors the unit will hold a combined memorial with the Iraqi ISOF soldiers and Special Forces soldiers. Normally the Iraqi Commander and Special Forces Commander will provide eulogies of the fallen. The unit attempts to honor both countries by playing both the US and Iraqi national anthems. The Iraqi SGM also announces roll call. We attempt to display the unity of effort with both US and Iraqi groups. The Special Forces have access to monies which are given as condolences to the Iraqi family.

When the Special Forces suffer the loss of an attachments we make every effort as a unit to provide the same honors as a operator. The example I use is from Operation Iraqi Freedom III and involves one of our interpreters. In Special Forces we have three kinds of interpreters, CAT I, CAT II, and CAT III. The CAT I is a local Iraqi working for the US government without a security clearance. The CAT II is a US citizen, Iraqi born interpreter with a secret clearance, and the CAT III is the same except for a top secret clearance. The personal experience I will discuss involves an interpreter who I will refer to as Moe. Moe was a CAT II interpreter from Maryland who left Morocco when he was about 11 years old. Moe had a little girl, Hanna, was divorced (Joanie) and remarried to a recent wife, Karen. Moe worked for Operational Detachment Alpha-052 (ODA 052) which operated in the Diyala province, about 60 kilometers north of Baghdad. The area for ODA 052 was near the Iranian border and worked out of the KMTB Iraqi military school, located 15 kilometers east of Balad Ruz. Moe's job involved both interpreting for classified debriefs of Iraqis working for the Special Forces team and interpreting for the Special Forces trainers working with the Iraqi Scouts at

KMTB. Moe was working with the Special Forces teams from 5th SFG(A) and 10th SFG(A) for about three years.

On the night we lost Moe, the team was working with their Iraqi Scouts and a battalion from the 5th Iraqi Army. They were conducting a air mobile mission into Turki Village, south of Balad Ruz about 20 kilometers. The team was prosecuting an IED cell associated with Ansar al-Sunna, which was working the main MSR running east and west from Baquba and the Iranian border. Moe was linked up with a squirter control element led by the ODA-052 Team Sergeant, MSG Brown. The squirter control element consisted of one platoon of 2nd Bn, 5th IA. As the operation developed the AC-130 gunship providing security for the rotary wing air package, consisting of two MH-53's and two MH-60. The AC-130 observed two unknowns fleeing the target house as the air package delivered the assault force. The squirter control aircraft was sent to interdict the two unknowns. As the element landed, MSG Brown called the AC-130 to have the aircraft vector the element to the two unknowns. As the AC-130 relayed information to the squirter team, MSG Brown got the Iraqi soldiers online with himself and Moe walking behind the element. As the squirter control team walked up on the hiding unknowns, one of the Iraqi soldiers gave commands to the two hiding unknowns. One of the unknown Iraqis attempted to run and one of the Iraqi soldiers struck the unknown Iraqi with his weapon. At the angle of the weapon, with a slapping motion against the unknown Iraqi target his finger discharged his weapon and sent a bullet behind the element and struck Moe in the head. The event was catastrophic and killed Moe instantly.

The unit notified Titan Corporation who then notified his family. We full Moe out of FOB Warhorse under the hero flight, where the helicopter which picks up the body flies a pattern over the HLZ with the spot light on. As the Company Sergeant Major, I had the team write a letter to Moe's daughter, Hanna to help them deal with the loss. I had our mechanic change the seat where Moe was ground evac'd and left blood and brain residue in the vehicle. The Company put a keepsake box together for Moe's daughter, Hanna. In the box was the letters to his family from the team, Moe's team hat and personal effects, and our unit coin. We sent this box to Moe's ex-wife, Joanie to present to his daughter when she is old enough. Below is an excerpt from the poem "The Thirteenth Warrior" written by MSG Brown for Moe's daughter's keepsake box.

"We had a sunrise service for Moe on the morning of May 9, 2006 and not a tear was shed from the Team but only smiles and happy thoughts of the man whom we had grown to know and love, a man who always chose the hard right over the easy wrong, the man who always brought a smile to our face with his contagious laughter, a man who never joined the military yet was one of the greatest warriors we have ever known. Moe you are this Team's 13th Warrior and will NEVER be forgotten. Moe, I kneeled down with you in that open field as you took your last breath on this earth and as I looked up into the clear and star filled sky, I saw the heavens open up and welcome you onto your new team and the missions yet to come. Know that you had an impact on many lives that you touched and that your loss on this earth will be felt for a very long time, but your memories remain with us forever." (source info 3, MSG Brown)

Not only is the box a healing venue for the team, but a healing and enlightenment gift to Moe's daughter, Hanna when she becomes of age. Our headquarters element also

held a memorial for the rest of the unit, in Moe's honor. When I think of Moe, I realize that so many have given their lives to make Iraq better, Conventional Forces, Special Forces operators, US and Iraqi interpreters, and Iraqi ISOF soldiers. When I hear or read the quote, "all gave some and some gave all", I see the faces of friends and brothers I have lost.

In closing the FM 3-21.5 covering Military honors to the fallen has set the make for tradition, honor, and the healing of our units. The personal aspects that each and every unit puts forth during the memorials and at the funerals, sets the example for honoring our fallen. The things we do for the families will keep the respect of the military community and give the family lasting memories. As senior leaders we are responsible for the traditions of honoring our fallen, and providing the families with closure.

Sources Cited

1. US Army. (July 2003) FM 3-21.5, Drill and Ceremonies, Chapter 14 Funerals
2. Army Regulation. (22 January 2001) AR 638-2; Care and Disposition of Remains and Disposition of Personal Effects; Chapter 15 – Interment Flag, page 63
3. The Thirteenth Warrior. (12 May 2006). MSG Gordon Brown, written for the death of Moe, Balad Ruz, Iraq