

First Sergeant Position

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Abstract

I would like to cover lessons learned and the challenges I dealt with daily during my period as a First Sergeant throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom III. I will discuss some key events and changes in Balad, Iraq, as well as a Soldier's quality of life.

Every deployment has matured me tremendously. From Desert Shield/Storm to this present operation, I was always included in the task organization, planning, and training events with the supported unit. When I received information that we were deploying in the spring of 2005, my mind got to wondering and thinking of my last deployment. I had deployed in this same battalion twice before, Operation Desert Shield/Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom I. I was already well accustomed with the techniques used for preparation. Superior leaders looked to me as the subject matter expert on numerous pre-deployment tasks. As I started my personal checklist for my unit, I looked throughout the battalion to view leaders, veterans, and those that had deployed with us in Operation Iraqi Freedom I.

Our mission was presented very vague and unclear initially. As I sat in several meetings, who we would support or who our higher headquarters would be was still a question. The warning order said expect clear guidance of who our higher headquarters will be very soon. Forces command just wanted to know numbers for two possible missions for the battalion. I remember we had veterans evenly spread throughout the battalion from the previous deployments therefore the knowledge and stability was there. The battalion S-3 section presented all mandatory training that would occur at home station and training that had to be offsite to meet FORSCOM standards.

While the leadership was planning, I had started mentally preparing my Soldiers for our next deployment. I had NCOPD with all my NCOs and explained my goals and vision leading up to our deployment. The NCOs had some suggestions and concerns prior to my starting the presentation. I started with where I felt our unit was currently at and what direction we needed to go in. The battalion had training for each unit individually

and collectively. Headquarters, the unit I was in charge of, had challenges daily considering I had the battalion leadership to train and care for also. Most Soldiers dealt with the daily mentioning of the upcoming deployment professionally but some did not take the news so well.

So with that said, the last day of every week, me and the NCOs would huddle together to identify and discuss issues from the past week. At the end of discussions my guidance weekly was that we all were on the same agenda with training and goals for expectations. At least once a month the organizational structure would change and this would be another challenge for me that I had to adapt to occasionally.

As time passed along our unit finally received correspondence from the unit who CENTCOM had identified as who we were going to replace. This gave up to date data and information of the current tactical situation in the area of operations (AOO), which we were to occupy.

As the leaders finished the mandatory training required before we were considered deployable, a higher echelon unit came in to validate all training was done and to standard. As stated earlier, with information coming from theatre, I would shift training guidance as the tactical situation changed and this always caused resistance from superiors and other leaders. As we met each required task, myself and other NCOs felt more comfortable with the Soldiers training and preparation for the type of mission leaders said that we would encounter. The battalion leadership presented challenging scenarios that provided different mindsets for the mission at hand.

For some officers and NCOs, certain missions were considered to be a different experience and that constantly made them think of new techniques to overcome

obstacles. A negative point I took notice to was the fact that we did not perform a Leaders Recon. This caused an uncertainty and some stress for myself and leaders alike. We had to rely on the unit we were replacing to ensure a descent reception and transition.

Finally, it was time to deploy. I felt we had all the proper systems in place and all soldiers deployed knew what was going on and expected of them. My last observation of pre-deployment training showed battle drills being done to perfection and settled my uncertainty.

If I had to pass on to others about a few lessons doctrinally, I would say I learned to be patient with solutions to challenges that you acquire. Each unit experiences problems during deployment. One problem in specific was how sensitive items were transported. The agency considered our method to not be secured properly. We adapted by giving several Soldiers another weapon instead of transporting the extra weapons we had in Tuff boxes. This was a quick solution but it caused a little more weight to several Soldiers.

As time passed and our unit received a change of mission, the Soldiers adapted, grasped, and performed each mission admirably. My biggest success story would be, like other leaders and units, was that we redeployed home with every Soldier that deployed with us. Another success story would be that three of my NCOs provided first aid to four wounded Soldiers due to a mortar attack in tent city where we were living. As for negative lessons, or things that we didn't so well, I would say there were several young female Soldiers in my unit and it was a challenge to get them to abide by the General Rule (1A) dictated by CENTCOM.

Our Soldiers participated in numerous settings and had different missions. There were advisors, escorts, and guards. Each role was unique in its own way. We had reservist assisting us during missions, and at one time Texas National Guard was our higher headquarters. We continued to find ways to improve our footprint. Logistics and the quality of life improved drastically. For transportation, as time went by, we received armored vehicles to enhance our protection. This was a commodity that was needed throughout the theatre of operations. Overall, this deployment was challenging and one to remember. We did force protection, escort security, security of the LSA, and trained some of the Iraqi people.

The missions were conducted beyond the acceptable standard set and we received accolades for the missions accomplished. For improvements for deployments, I would encourage Soldiers and leaders to stay focused and practice the new techniques presented to make your tour successful. Even today, we continue to focus on lessons learned as we fight traditionally and continue to deal with challenges as they arise. Working with our reserve and National Guard forces shows a commitment to us fighting this Global War on Terrorism.

In conclusion, we must constantly read and comprehend undated literature to make us smarter on the enemy and pass on lessons learned daily. Overall, the NCOs and Soldiers performed well and I was personally and professionally happy with this deployment.