

Influencing Morale By Accomplishment

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Abstract

This paper describes key ideology, troop leadership, motivation, and use of equipment to promote high morale within a platoon element which resulted in high morale and a successful deployment during OIF. I have, where possible, described key events, procedures, and policies that were used to direct and influence Soldiers resulting in one of the most successful deployments I have seen or heard of.

Influencing Morale By Accomplishment

With the onset of the War on Terrorism, and the invasion of Iraq, Reserve units have been called upon to support the war effort in masses never seen before. One of the problems facing reserve forces is the ability to field one hundred percent of personnel and equipment of a company. In reading this, one may think fielding a company with one hundred percent should be easy. One hundred percent means filling each Mission Task Organization and Equipment (MTOE) slot with qualified Soldiers. What happens is Reserve Soldiers from other units will be involuntarily “cross-leveled” to fill a units missing qualified Soldiers slots. That is what happened to me when I was “cross-leveled” to a company that was half way through pre deployment to Iraq with about fifty percent ratio of cross leveled Soldiers. The company that I was “cross-leveled” to was the 266th Ordnance Company, from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. I was to be the 2nd Platoon’s Platoon Sergeant, and we had four weeks before we would deploy to Kuwait to perform our mission.

You need to know “cross-leveling” to understand the morale challenges that leadership can encounter. There is low morale due to the newness of the unit. Soldiers do not know their leaders, nor one another. Soldiers can become isolated within their units because they do not know anyone or their leadership. When deploying to a combat environment, Soldiers want to have a sense that everything is going to be OK, that their survivability is top priority, and when units are massively cross-leveled, that sense of belonging, and survivability does not exist. Some of the challenges I immediately faced was that I was foreign to the command as was my Lieutenant. My Lieutenant was from Louisiana, I was from Wisconsin, I had section leaders from the Midwest, but my platoon

and company were from Puerto Rico. Prior to me showing up in our mobilization station, which was Camp Santiago, Puerto Rico, one of the Soldiers had contacted me and said if you get involuntarily transferred to us, do everything you can not to come. There was a lack of structure, mistrust, lack of equipment, and some of the worst conditions at a mobilization site. The morale of the platoon was low, and I understood that the command and I had a huge task ahead of us to ensure the mission was accomplished, that the Soldiers were taken care of, and that we all had to make it back home following deployment.

Upon my arrival, I had four weeks to organize and plan what we wanted to do, and I had to catch up with the rest of the company on my pre-mobilization tasks. What I did was enforce structure of the sections within the platoons, defined tasks that each sections would be responsible for, made a duty roster for them to follow and ensure that duties were accomplished on a daily basis. I had them start doing pre combat checks on each other to ensure everyone had what they needed for the deployment, and to see what kind of gear we could “cross-level” between us to make us whole. I gave a Non-Commissioned Officer Development Program (NCODP) class on the structure of an Ordnance platoon. We ensured that every Soldier knew his or her place and job within the platoon. Key positions not in the platoon MTOE were identified, such as a supply sergeant, movement NCO, etc. and additional duties were distributed to competent NCOs.

We arrived in Kuwait on February 28th, 2004 and within two weeks were given our mission orders. Our company would split up into three locations to support the First Armored Division (1AD) turn-in of ammunition and to run the Ammunition Supply Point

(ASP) in Balad, Iraq. My platoon was given the task of going to Al Taji, Iraq to receive ammunition from 1AD. This mission was to last approximately one month. Upon completion we would join our company in Balad to run the ASP. We were to convoy to Al Taji with our organic vehicles, and we would be responsible for our own defense and loading of our equipment.

We immediately tasked our sections with organizing their equipment per MTOE for the movement. Every section was required to inventory their equipment, have shortage annexes missing items, and prepare a load plan. The headquarter section was required to get supplies such as armor, extra engine belts, and other items needed for the convoy to Al Taji. The Maintenance Section would attach armor; welding whatever was needed to the vehicles. An Ammunition Ordnance Company has a lot of equipment, and you could start to see the section leaders' wheels turning when we started laying out the plan. All sections started racing each other to accomplish tasks. Once a task was accomplished they would help out one another, racing the other platoons in the company. Cohesion was building, tasks were being accomplished, and morale was improving. We were keeping them busy with meaningful tasks, we had a well defined structure in place, we had a defined schedule, and we were requiring them to fulfill tasks on a daily basis. Tasks were being accomplished, morale was improving.

We deployed to Al Taji on a two day journey from Kuwait, stopping at Camp Cedar II, and Baghdad International Airport. We encountered three improvised explosive devices on the way, none of them detonated, we waited for them to be cleared and moved on. Our platoon traveled with the third platoon; our biggest weapons in the convoy were

five M249 Squad Automatic Weapons (SAW). We parted ways with the third platoon in Baghdad, as they had a separate mission, and we continued to Al Taji.

Al Taji, in the beginning of 2004 was a blown up shell of a base. The runway was used to park vehicles, and the only power came from generators located outside of buildings. There was a lot to improve on the living conditions.

We were given a place to live that was about 300 meters from the fence line. Our home was an old Iraqi administration building that contained 8 rooms; enough for our 44 Soldiers. The area needed many improvements. My initial reaction was to build security for the platoon's Soldiers, and to get a work schedule together to start receiving ammunition from 1AD.

We prepared our work schedule and linked up with our new Battalion which would support us.

When scheduling the platoon for work, the Section Chiefs were in charge of their Soldiers to ensure they were at the proper locations and on time. Our sections consisted of a HQ Section, Rough Terrain Forklift Section, Tech Support Section, Ammunition Transfer Point Section, and a Maintenance Section. Every Section has a defined purpose; and equipment to support them.

We established a twenty-four hour Charge of Quarters (CQ) to serve as a central point to get information, leave information, set up our phones and radio communication, and ensure that someone was watching our area all of the time. Through supply, we got HESCO barriers and completely surrounded our area. We created a well defined fortress that established our secure living area. All the sections had their defined rooms within our compound. Equipment was parked by sections with keys being maintained at the CQ

office. We established an Officer Duty Log in which every significant event (mortar attacks, visits from other units, etc.) was to be documented. Whenever a Soldier left the compound, they were required to check out through CQ. This log allowed us to quickly locate Soldiers during attacks, and ensure we had 100% accountability.

The insurgency increased dramatically the first month we were in Al Taji, and IAD was extended, which extended our mission.

Our radio call sign was “Big Deuce” for the 2nd Platoon, 266th Ordnance Company. Our Soldiers really took to our call sign. One of them created a template with the two of spades, and started marking “our things” with the symbol. These were all cohesive building elements of our unit. We were well defined, and the Soldiers felt like a plan was in place that was worth executing. Again, we were accomplishing many tasks and our morale was improving.

There were several opportunities on Al Taji for our platoon to assist. Al Taji is partly an Iraqi ASP. There were several warehouses with old mortar rounds and rockets. A civilian contractor company was tasked with the classification, removal and destruction of these rounds. From our observations, they were hindered with equipment problems and could use some Ordnance help. The contractor was under the realm of our Area Support Group and an operation was created that stated that our platoon would assist in the classification, removal, and destruction of the Iraqi Ammunition. Around the same time, we discovered an unexploded projectile within our compound. We called the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit to clear the area.

This was the first step to building a relationship with the EOD Company. Being that we were Ammunition Specialist (89B), and they were Explosive Ordnance Disposal

Specialist (89D), there is some commonality to our roles. The EOD company was extremely busy, and had some missions in which they needed heavy equipment to move bombs and other explosives. We had the equipment and the expertise for moving the explosives, so another task through an operation order was created for us to assist EOD in the clearing of Al Taji, and an associated Iraqi ASP that was outside of the wire and down the MSR.

The 1st Cavalry Division replaced the major command at Al Taji. Being that Al Taji was the logistics location for the 1st Cavalry Division and that Al Taji became a major helicopter base, it was natural for the Cavalry's Ammunition Chief to request the tasking of our platoon to assist in moving ammunition around the theater for 1st Cavalry via air. This sealed our stay in Al Taji until we were replaced.

We were gaining recognition around base as a "can do" platoon. With our equipment and our vast talents from the civilian world, we were being asked by our battalion to assist in tasks for improving the area. As others were asking for money to improve their areas, we were improving our own. Our maintenance platoon modified our PLS systems by adding a U-verse attachment so that we could use dump truck attachments that the Engineering units had. We were able to haul gravel and improve our parking and driving areas. We created our own MWR tent, complete with two satellite receivers. We were constantly improving our area, and did not use the inability to procure funds for contractors to stop us.

About two-thirds through our deployment, the Inspector General (IG) arrived at our unit to do a survey. He told the Lieutenant and me that all of our Soldiers are being moved to the chapel and separated so that they could do an inquiry to our deployment.

After the inquiry, he would come back and talk to us. Upon the completion of the hour long inquiry, the IG came back to us to report on what he had found. He stated that he had taken all of the NCOs into a separate room, to talk to them. When asked, the Soldiers reported that they had no issues. He then asked them on a scale of one to ten, where do they rate their morale is at. He stated, "they said eight." He then explained that he did the same with the Specialist and below. Again he asked the question, "on a scale of one to ten, ten being the best, where do you rate your morale?" The Specialists and below also came back with an eight. The IG stated that neither group had had the chance to talk to each other, so having them pick the same number was rare. To further make this unique, he stated, "In Iraq, the average number that I get from Soldiers is a three or a four. So whatever you are doing, keep doing it." The Lieutenant and I smiled and said, "They blow up ammunition everyday, and are gainfully employed. They are having the time of their lives."

On a daily basis we handled ammunition for the 1st Cavalry Division through night missions on Chinook Helicopters, loaded out Iraqi ammunition on trucks for hauling to a remote location for destruction, and performed recovery and destruction of Iraqi Ammunition. We were also given tasks to support offensive operations in Fallujah, and Najaf. We sent our Ammunition Transfer Point (ATP) Section plus four other Soldiers and equipment to the offensive operations.

There was very little idle time. We ensured that per the schedule Soldiers would get a day off every week and a half. Depending on the missions being performed, we rotated approximately three Soldiers a day through the "time-off" program.

Keeping morale up is a leader's task. I do not think we did anything special during this deployment except ensure that every Soldier had a purpose, looked out for the best interests of the Soldiers, and did what we were supposed to do... win the wars of the United States, no matter what our jobs entailed.

Every Soldier wants a sense of purpose when deployed to a combat environment. It is essential to the Soldier's morale that their leaders employ them with meaningful and fulfilling duties. Giving your Soldiers a purpose gives them something to accomplish. Through accomplishment, Soldiers' morale will improve providing leaders and units with a highly motivated fighting force that will find the means to accomplish the missions that are presented to them.