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Personal Experiences during a Deployment to Afghanistan

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18Z 2nd Battalion 7th Special Forces Group

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Abstract

This personal experience paper was prepared to historically document my first deployment to Afghanistan as a member of 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group. During this deployment, I served as the Operation Sergeant, Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 763. These experiences include operations to support Operational Detachment Bravo (ODB) 760, and support of the Battalion Headquarters Operational Detachment Charlie (ODC) 72. All events depicted herein took place in Southern Afghanistan during the period of September 2002 to April 2003.

Personal, Unit, Organizational, and Situational Background

Personal Background

I entered the Army in 1985. I attended One Station Unit Infantry training (OSUT) Ft. Benning, GA at Harmony Church. After graduation from basic training I was sent to Germany, and assigned to the 2nd 4th Infantry in Nue Ulm, Germany. While assigned in Germany, my unit had the responsibility of guarding the Pershing missiles. While stationed in Germany I attended Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS). Upon successful completion of SFAS, I departed Germany in route to Fort Benning, Georgia to attend Basic Airborne School. I then attended the Special Forces Qualification Course where I was trained as an 18B Special Forces Weapon Sergeant. Upon completion of the Special Forces Qualification Course I was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, Fort Davis, Panama. My assignment to 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group on 02 January 1990, was during Operation Just Cause. On 23 June 1993 I then completed a permanent change of station (PCS) to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana. While at JRTC I served as Special Forces Observer Controller (OC) from June 93 to Jul 94. I then changed duty positions to the Exercise Support Group (ESG), where I was in charge of all out station activities involving special operations forces. In April of 1996 I once again was ordered to PCS to Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group. From April 1996 to September 2001 I was assigned as 18F, Special Forces Intelligent Sergeant on ODA 755, and 756. In September of 2001 I assumed duty as the Operations Sergeant, 18Z of ODA 763.

Unit Background

This would be the first deployment to Afghanistan for 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group. However there was some operational experience on the staff prior to the deployment. The Battalion CSM, had served with both 5th and 3rd Group in Afghanistan. The commander though a veteran of Just Cause, had some experience in Afghanistan as member of the CJSOTF. The battalion S3 also had some operational experience while assigned to the CJSOTF. All company leadership and ODA leadership however had never been to or participated in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

Operational Situation

2nd Battalion 7th Special Forces was relieving 3rd Special Forces Group at Kandahar Air Field (KAF). The relief of 3rd Special Group would consist of the relief of the Forward Operational Base (FOB), three ODBs, and numerous ODAs spread out over southern Afghanistan in separate fire bases. ODA 763 and ODA 764 would assume command of fire base Shkin in the south. Fire Base Shkin was located seven and one half kilometers west of the Pakistani border. Fire base Shkin was bordered to the north by fire base Lawara and to the west by ODB 760 located at Ogunee. Fire base Shkin was a key asset in the region to limit or impede the movement of enemy forces across the Pakistani border. The Pakistani border was a great concern in the area due to the trafficking of arms and personnel from Pakistan into Afghanistan. Also of concern was the safe haven that Pakistan afforded enemy troops if and when they broke contact with US forces.

Tactical Situation

The tactical situation for ODA 763 during this time generally consisted of combat patrols along the Pakistani border, presence patrols, operations to collect information, Civil Affairs projects, and combat operations from intelligence collected by the fire base or operations passed down from the CJSOTF or FOB 72. All operations were conducted in conjunction with elements of the Afghan National Army (ANA), which consisted of 126 personnel, members of the 82nd, usually a scout platoon plus and other governmental agencies (OGA). Fire base Shkin conducted activities with 2 ODAs, 82nd scout platoon (+), ANA, and OGA, or some representation from each of these elements. Support was provided with coordination through ODB 760, FOB 72, and CJSOTF.

Detailed Description of my Experiences

Movement to the Area of Operations

Movement for ODA 763 and ODA 764 to the operational area and fire base Shkin was conducted in two phases. First phases consisted of each ODA sending 2 personnel each to conduct link up operations with 3rd Special Forces ODAs located at fire base Shkin. These individuals would do an operational orientation of the area as well as sign for all logistical items located at the fire base. Second phase of the movement was a three day convoy from Khandahar to fire base Shkin through the combat theater. The combat convoy through Afghanistan consisted of 3 vehicles each from ODAs 763 and 764, 7 host nation trucks loaded down with supplies and equipment needed to conduct base camp construction and logistical support for the fire base.

One of the most important lessons for me during the deployment phase was the integration of host nation personnel in combat operations. It was the utmost of importance that

the entire convoy arrives at fire base Shkin complete. Three days of combat patrolling through intense terrain with 5 vehicles that where at best functional vehicles was a major concern for us.

One vehicle breaking down or becoming operationally ineffective would mean possible splitting the element into two elements or spending an extra few days in hostile areas, with no dedicated air support.

Support for Operations

Logistics

ODA 763 and ODA 764 logistical was received in three manners. Non-sensitive supplies were generally delivered by truck from Kandahar to the base camp. These truck shipments would arrive at fire base Shkin unescorted, carrying food and drinks. Sensitive items, supplies equipment, ammunition, and fresh fruits and vegetables were generally flown to fire base Shkin through two flights. First flight was air support out of Khandahar through FOB 72. Second form of support was air support out of Bahgram from the CJSOTF. These air support flight was commonly referred to as “rings”. Fire base Shkin received two rings of support do to the 82nd scout platoon being located at fire base Shkin with the two ODAs. The third and final means of support was local purchase on the economy through the OGA. The OGA funded a logistics cell that would go to Pakistan to purchase food and fuel for the fire base.

Combat Support Operations

Fire base Shkin was located in close proximity of the Pakistani border in the southern part of Afghanistan. Fire base Shkin was located seven and one half kilometers from the Pakistani border. This allowed good observation and control of all enemy traffic that crossed from Pakistani into Afghanistan. Because the border of Pakistan in this region was so porous, enemy movement was unimpeded without fire base Shkin. Do to the porous borders and enemy activity, combat patrol where a daily activity at fire base Shkin. Both the ODA and 82nd ran multiple combat patrols daily. Both mounted and dismounted patrols where run twice a day. During limited visibility both mounted and dismounted patrols where conducted.

The other combat operation included intelligence collection operation in support of combat operations. These operation included Shira meetings located at the Pakistani border or the Shkin bazaar. Of a major concern was the lack of an Afghani border check point along the main MSR and lack of Police force at Shkin bazaar. Do to the lack of these two elements enemy elements moved back and forth across the Pakistani border unimpeded.