

OPENING STATEMENT – LTC THOMAS W. SISINYAK

I am LTC Tom Sisinyak and I was the Battalion Commander of the 812th Transportation Battalion (MT) during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 2. The unit was mobilized to active duty on 11 DEC 03 (HSAD-Home Station Arrival Date) and moved to Fort Stewart, GA (MOBSTA –Mobilization Station) on 14 DEC 03 (MSAD-Mobilization Station Arrival Date). The unit validated in late January 2004 and arrived in Southwest Asia in support of OIF 2 on 13 FEB 04. The 812th completed its mission and redeployed to MOBSTA on 26 OCT 04.

The Battalion deployed with a downtrace of (5) medium truck transportation companies and (1) Trailer Transfer Detachment. The strength and composition of the Battalion fluctuated from (6) units to as many as (16) units during the deployment.

Upon arrival in theater, the Battalion was given (3) primary missions. The first mission was to provide medium truck transportation support to CFLCC and Corps units in both Kuwait and Iraq. The second mission was to occupy Camp Navistar and provide the command and control to the camp to include force protection. The third mission was to train selected Air Force units to become security escorts for convoys in the Corps area of operation.

Readiness

The overall readiness of the Battalion prior to deployment was C-1. The majority of the companies were also well prepared with the exception of the 227th Transportation Company. This unit was stripped (cross-leveled) of all 88Ms in support of OIF 1 and then the 227th was mobilized to active duty for OIF 2. Over 80% of its Soldiers were cross-leveled to the 227th to include the Commander and 1SG.

The impediments to readiness include the cross-level activity mentioned above. Also, many key staff officers and NCOs did not have proper formal training such as CAS3 and the Battle Staff NCO courses. If key staff officers had received formal staff training prior to deployment, then the wartime operations and TOC operations would have been significantly improved.

Post Mobilization

The post mobilization process adequately addressed unit deficiencies prior to deployment. However, a major “lesson learned” was that most Reserve and National Guard units need additional MDMP/TOC operations training to include more Warrior Task Training (WTT) prior to mobilization and a refresher during post mobilization. The MDMP/TOC/WTT training could culminate in a possible combat center training rotation prior to deployment to test effectiveness making it

part of the unit validation process. In addition, units are currently responsible for training on all WTT tasks during Battle Assemblies (BA's) and Annual Training (AT) during the training year. The Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs) should narrow the WTT focus to specific core WTT tasks to successfully mobilize, deploy and complete the unit mission. This focused WTT would allow units to streamline BA's and AT's providing a balanced approach to individual and collective training.

The mobilization station focused on basic Soldier skills with minimal time spent on collective training tasks such as convoy operations, convoy defense, IED and VBIED training, and TTP training. This type training is not only critical to transporters but to all units traversing the supply routes in SWA. Another great tool for collective training and validation that should be considered for units earmarked for deployment is the Virtual Combat Convoy Trainer (VCCT). The Battalion and several peacetime companies received this training after we redeployed and it would have significantly improved our operational readiness prior to deployment.

The post mobilization process, although adequate, was inflexible. The 812th was ready to fly a month before we actually deployed and this caused morale to drop waiting for lift into theater.

Morale and Retention

The biggest factor that had an adverse impact on morale and retention was the cross-leveling actions between units. It may be necessary but is very disruptive. The gaining and losing units struggle with cross-leveled Soldiers before, during and after mobilization. Cross-leveling makes it difficult to build unit cohesion and the end result is a disjointed unit that struggles completing their mission and carries over into areas such as family support, awards and UCMJ actions. Retention was and is an issue because cross-leveled Soldiers are displaced and struggle trying to fit into their new unit and fit back into their old unit resulting in these Soldiers deciding to retire feeling that they do not fit back into the program. Also, the redeploying units are being used as a pool whereas the new Soldiers to the unit that didn't deploy with their unit are being cross-leveled as fillers. The veterans of the unit are tasked with continuing the insurmountable mission and there is no opportunity for the senior Soldiers to bond with the newer Soldiers resulting in lack of continuity and bonding. The senior Soldiers become disgruntled and decide to retire because the unit is merely a shell of what it used to be.

Another big factor has impacted morale and retention is the current push to accomplish soldier readiness tasks such as dental exams, HIV testing, Urinalysis, and the various classes during BA's. Unfortunately, these tasks are taking priority over training as the priority. Soldiers want to train. Many of our BA's are administrative and the Soldiers get bored and disillusioned. Morale dips

and many become “no shows” and decide to retire. We should focus on training and make it the real priority. A solution to satisfying the administrative soldier readiness requirements is to consolidate these tasks over 1-2 BA's leaving the remainder of the year to actual training.

Training Days

The number of training days acceptable to Soldiers, families and employers will vary from Soldier to Soldier. Some Soldiers could spend many more days than the prescribed (39) and some struggle finding time for the (39) day annual requirement. The current (39) day allocation is adequate only if the administrative requirements can be streamlined and condensed allowing for maximum training for each unit. One option might be to have an annual “mini Soldier Readiness Processing” to capture these requirements.

Equipment

Equipment, or lack of, has become a training detractor for Reserve and National Guard units upon redeployment and reset. Most of the units under my command redeployed minus their mission equipment to include M998's, prime movers, trailers and SINCGARS. Most of this equipment was identified as stay behind equipment (SBE). It is very difficult to reset and start the training cycle again without the proper equipment. In addition, the equipment that did return to HOSTA typically needed major work/repair and in many cases stayed in AMSA's for over a year with the priority of work going to deploying units. A recommendation to fix this issue is to identify a Battalion set of equipment to leave in theater allowing units to train on their mission equipment at HOSTA before and after mobilization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the post mobilization process during my tenure was adequate and the opportunity, from my perspective, is at the unit level before mobilization. The current priority that must be changed is the administrative requirements priority. Training must be the priority and the support to accomplish this must be in place before units truly reset for future missions.