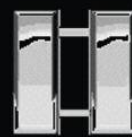




CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



By: Company-level Leaders
For: Company-level Leaders

Combined Task Force Dragoon Kandahar, Afghanistan

The Vilseck, Germany-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan, from July 2013 through April 2014, serving under the 4th Infantry Division Headquarters. The unit arrived in grueling 120-degree heat at the height of the fighting season and took over the battle space previously covered by two brigades. Although the regiment's leaders shared the same overall mission, the specific tasks each leader performed varied widely from

unit to unit. For example, some leaders advised Afghan National Security Forces leaders, some had a counter-rocket mission to ensure Kandahar Airfield remained secure, others provided in-extremis reaction forces, and still others ensured mobility or moved supplies along key routes. The following stories provide a glimpse into the experiences of 2nd Cavalry Regiment leaders during their recent deployment.

1st Lt. T.J. Snukis

Platoon Leader, Killer Troop, 3/2 CR & HHB/Fires Squadron

The call comes in with the constant static ping that you instantly associate with radio traffic: "QRF, this is BDOC, you have a mission. Send RED-6 to the TOC and begin prep to roll, SP in one hour." Eyes open. Boots on. Gulp water. Grab pistol and radio. Run. My "off day" just switched "on."

Receive the mission. "TF Hell QRF secures HLZ for President Karzai landing vicinity [grid coordinate in Kandahar City] NLT [date] in order to ensure safety of ISAF helo crews." My internal speedometer is spiking. There are 50 things running through my mind simultaneously. Issue a quick warning order. Steps 3, 4, 5.

Finally, we're out the gate, still refining the plan over the radio—talking the route and determining "actions on." There are many unknowns, but my men and I are confident. East out of the gate; bear south into the city. That distinct Third-World-country smell flows into my vehicle through the gunner's hatch while the setting sun throws long rays into my ballistic windows. And we roll into the heart of the city. Their president is arriving in just over an hour, which is why there are Afghan Uniformed Police in full force on the streets. Traffic circle. Stop.

Static ping: "Six, this is two, AUP road block, and they aren't letting us through." We hadn't expected the AUP to have this tight of a hold on the city. Many thoughts begin and end in an instant.

"Two, this is six, roger. We will dismount and figure it out." Zero hesitation. My squad leader is on the street before I can even disconnect from my headset. I trust him, and he trusts me. I unlock my door and heave against its weight. In

one motion, I grab my weapon and climb down, departing the relative safety of the M-ATV. Heads turn and eyes focus on us as we stride over to the checkpoint. "*A salam alaikum*. Who is the commander here?" My linguist translates as we go back and forth. English to Pashto, Pashto to English—a dance in cultural understanding. The checkpoint commander postures. I answer back. We both have a mission to accomplish, and they appear at odds. I manage to convince him to



The 2nd Cavalry Regiment motto, displayed on the unit patch, is French for "Always Ready."



Photographed at Forward Operating Base Lindsey in Kandahar Province, Outlaw Troop, 4th Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, commanded by Capt. Ryan Yaun (in dark hat at center), served in Afghanistan from July 2013 through April 2014.

let us through, and we continue down the road. Wash, rinse, repeat.

After four checkpoints, with stress in my chest building, we finally get to the HLZ. We discover then that the president's secret service is already securing the LZ, and they don't want us there—that is, unless it gets dark and the president ends up flying on ISAF air, which requires ISAF forces to secure the LZ. We wait. Just as the last rays of light begin to fade to dark, we see three MI-17s flying low over the city. We aren't going to be needed after all. No rounds fired. No bloodshed. Some say routine. I say successful. Our constant exercises in adaptability pay off for the umpteenth time. The trust my platoon holds with each other is beautiful, a palpable force that can get us through anything.

Return to base via a different route. Park the vehicles, drop kit and jump straight into the AAR. What was supposed to happen? What did happen? What did we do well? What can we do better? Comments are made. Notes are taken. "What do I always say the word of the day is?"

The response comes in unison: "Adaptability!!"

Capt. Ryan Yaun

Commander, Outlaw Troop, 4/2 CR

The enemy attacked Kandahar Airfield with rockets multiple times during our first month on the ground. As a result, Outlaw Troop's mission changed from SECFOR to preventing those attacks. And it was no small mission: For a decade, indirect-fire attacks have been a regular occurrence that previous units struggled to prevent.

My first thought was that I needed to come up with a solution to the problem set and give it to my platoon leaders to execute. Once I realized and got over the fact that I didn't have "the answer," I decentralized, beginning with getting my platoons out on patrol in order to develop situational understanding of the terrain and the people surrounding KAF. Simultaneously, I energized our COIST NCO, a smart 13F extremely knowledgeable in the capabilities of the 107 mm rocket that was being launched at KAF. He conducted historical analysis of rocket attacks and accessed intelligence sys-

CompanyCommand Glossary

13F: Fire Support Specialist (Field Artillery MOS)
AAR: After Action Review
ANA: Afghan National Army
AUP: Afghan Uniformed Police
BDOC: Base Defense Operations Center
BFT: Blue Force Tracker
BN: Battalion
CABT: Combined Arms Breach Team
CCA: Close Combat Aviation
COIST: Company Intelligence Support Team
CR: Cavalry Regiment
EOD: Explosive Ordnance Detachment
FOB: Forward Operating Base
GFC: Ground Force Commander
HHB: Headquarters and Headquarters Battery
HLZ: Helicopter Landing Zone
IED: Improvised Explosive Device
ISAF: International Security Assistance Force
ISR: Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
KAF: Kandahar Airfield
LZ: Landing Zone
M-ATV: MRAP All Terrain Vehicle
MI-17: Russian-made "Hip" Helicopter
NLT: No Later Than
PTDS: Persistent Threat Detection System
QRF: Quick Reaction Force
RCP: Route Clearance Patrol
RC-South: Regional Command-South
RED-6: Leader of 1st Platoon
S-3: Operations Officer
SECFOR: Security Forces
SIGINT: Signals Intelligence
SP: Start Point
TF: Task Force
TOC: Tactical Operations Center

tems to learn about the enemy. Instead of controlling things or having “the answers,” my crucial role became facilitating conversations between my COIST NCO and the platoon-level leaders who were quickly becoming the gurus on the areas they patrolled. This shift from a controlling leadership style to a Mission-Command style set the conditions for us to succeed. I pressed my subordinates to think and to figure out the problem that was too complex for any one of us to crack on our own, and it was they who came up with innovative solutions that led to several breakthroughs.

What emerged was a set of criteria that the enemy had to have in order to conduct their attacks. We developed a field-classification data sheet that focused our reconnaissance efforts. What began as a “finding a needle in a haystack” mission began to feel doable. We began to “see” differently, and our efforts were rewarded with the first-ever discovery of a rocket cache in the vicinity of KAF. My platoons found three different caches, which resulted in five rockets being taken off of the battlefield. Over time, we reduced indirect-fire attacks on KAF by 80 percent, and there hasn’t been a rocket attack on KAF for over 120 days and counting.

Staff Sgt. Christopher Bowen, USAF

Explosive Ordnance Disposal Craftsman

A thunder resounds deep within my chest, and a deafening crack rebounds off the surrounding mountaintops. A loud cheer and celebration follow as I inhale the sweet smell and taste of explosives. A friendly hand claps my back. It’s Lt. Mahmood, the 22-year-old Afghan EOD chief who has just led us in a joint disposal operation—a capstone exercise solidifying our EOD brotherhood and firmly establishing his competence and effectiveness as the Kandahar Police EOD leader.

Only six months prior, any IED in Kandahar City required ISAF or Afghan Army assets. Mahmood, fresh out of EOD training, was not yet trusted by his leaders. The 2nd Cavalry Regiment team advising the police set up a demonstration showcasing Mahmood’s skills. The idea worked! Once the police senior leaders saw for themselves what he was capable of, they immediately put him to work finding and reducing IEDs across the city. It was a remarkable shift in capability for the Kandahar City police, a shift that began over a year earlier when previous advisors helped get Mahmood into the extremely challenging EOD qualification course.

When my Air Force EOD team arrived and took the mission to partner with Mahmood, we sought to build on what previous advisors had done. I was instantly impressed and humbled by Mahmood’s “IEDs destroyed” numbers—numbers that rivaled my own. We treated him as a peer with whom

Having deployed with Stryker brigades to Iraq and Afghanistan, and having spent a year in Afghanistan as a squadron commander in the 2nd Cavalry Regiment from 2010 to 2011, I was not surprised by the extraordinary adaptability and agility of our junior leaders. As the regimental commander during our 2013–14 deployment to southern Afghanistan, I was privileged to witness the phenomenal leadership, innovation and sense of purpose our young leaders displayed on a daily basis. Successful national elections in April were a result of the tremendous synergy created by the men and women of the regiment, our fellow ISAF partners, and the Afghan National Security Forces with whom we served. As has been the case for the unit’s 178-year history, the 2nd Cavalry Regiment was able to rely on the superb initiative of the American Soldier and the leaders at every echelon. Regardless of the situation, now or in the future, that is one constant that few of our adversaries can match.

*—Col. D.A. Sims, 77th Colonel of the Regiment,
2nd Cavalry Regiment*

we exchanged professional knowledge and worked to become more effective. Whether it was how to use and maintain equipment, find and safely dispose of IEDs, or collect evidence to identify and prosecute insurgents, we rolled up our sleeves together and advanced our capabilities.

As we depart Kandahar, I feel pride in what Mahmood has accomplished. He has expanded from one team to three and is reducing about 30 IEDs a week. He has a vision, supported by his leadership, to have qualified teams in each of the 17 districts across Kandahar. I have no doubt that he will



Soldiers of 2nd Cavalry Regiment patrol in Kandahar in armored Stryker vehicles.

accomplish his goals. Somewhere right now, I can see him in my mind's eye setting up a perfect shot, and I can still hear him yell in Pashto, "Fire in the hole!"

1st. Lt. Andrew Maisano

Assistant S-3, Regimental Support BN, 2CR

On my first deployment with 2nd Cavalry Regiment in 2011, my mission was platoon-level route clearance in Zabul Province, just to the northeast of Kandahar. My platoon was constantly operating independently in an extremely dangerous environment. For the current deployment, we radically shifted how we operate. Instead of decentralized, independent route-clearance patrols that operated with limited external support or situational awareness, every patrol this deployment is a company-level, combined-arms operation. In fact, route clearance has been stricken from the vernacular, and the more doctrinally correct term, *breach*, is our reality. Each combined-arms breach team mission is led by a maneuver commander who serves as the ground-force commander. The GFC controls an engineer platoon, a maneuver platoon and an EOD team, which total approximately 13 vehicles and 70 personnel. Additionally, he controls ISR ranging from armed predators to shadows or PTDS and an organic SIGINT capability, electronic warfare aircraft, CCA and Fires (they bring either 120 mm or 60 mm mortars on every mission).

Partway into the deployment, I moved from troop executive officer to squadron assistant S-3, and I undertook responsibility for helping to plan and support all the CABT missions. Our mission is to provide assured mobility in Kandahar Province. With no battle space or organic ISR assets, we were forced to change the scope of work for the TOC from supporting a distribution troop with a maximum of one to two platoon-level patrols per day to supporting the operations of infantry and engineer troops that required dedicated ISR for every mission. The TOC changed to be more

dynamic and proactive to ensure that our patrols received the support they needed.

Capt. Craig Nelson

Commander, Lightning Troop, 3/2 CR

We deployed as the regimental reserve and expected to be the rifle company that the regimental commander called on when the bullets were flying. We trained hard, focused on "worst day" scenarios and had our soldiers prepared for a fight. After arriving in Afghanistan, however, we were repurposed into a combined-arms breach team, which had previously been an engineer-centric, route-clearance mission. My greatest challenge has been selling this mission to first-time deployers who expected Afghanistan to be the violent experience their leaders trained them for.

The concept of a CABT is about providing our engineer route-clearance patrols with the support that they should have had all along in Afghanistan. The RCPs had always been sent on missions that took them through remote places with minimal ISAF presence, and they had been expected to execute while operating completely on their own. As a combined-arms breach team, we bring one engineer platoon to breach obstacles and one rifle platoon to provide the security necessary for the engineers to do their job with no influence from the enemy. The entire formation has a maneuver company commander as the ground-force commander and is augmented with company-level assets such as mortars and snipers. When ideally employed, the rifle platoon maneuvers independent of the engineer platoon but in concert with it, with the overall goal of breaching obstacles on the assigned route. If we were to apply the breaching fundamentals, the rifle platoon would generally provide the suppression, security and, potentially, the obscuration.

I had an interesting experience with the Afghan National Army on one mission. While we were attempting to recover a broken-down Stryker in a very inconvenient part of Kandahar City, I got into a heated discussion with an ANA lieutenant who was frustrated by the congestion we were causing. In that discussion, I couldn't help being impressed by his assertiveness and overall determination to complete the mission that my broken-down Stryker was obstructing. On my previous deployments, I had not observed that kind of commitment.

1st Lt. Richard Espallat

**Platoon Leader, A Troop,
Regimental Support BN, 2CR**

I'm a platoon leader for Alpha Troop's convoy security team. To date, my platoon has completed over 75 missions all over RC-South, covering over 13,000 miles. My team has been to every significant piece of tactical infrastructure in Kandahar: Lindsey, Spin



Foot patrols allowed 2nd Cavalry soldiers to interact with local children.



A helicopter ferries Afghan President Hamid Karzai into Kandahar at dusk in May.

Boldak, Shur Andam, Walton, Bag-E-Pul, Pasab, Azi Zullah, Masum Ghar, Shoja, Zangabad and Frontenac. Our efforts in the Horn of Panjwai resulted in the successful retrograde and transfer of FOB Zangabad and FOB Shoja to the Afghan National Security Forces. It's been an amazing experience, and I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity in the Army as a young officer.

The deployment, however, almost started out with a catastrophe. It was my first mission leading a convoy in the Horn of Panjwai, a place about which we had heard nothing but horror stories of IEDs and the enemy. We missed a key turn and drove into one of the worst parts of Afghanistan. We eventually got turned around and were OK, but the hair on my neck rises just thinking about what could have happened. We were determined to learn from that situation, starting with the need to get back to the fundamentals of mounted land navigation instead of relying on technology like the BFT. The first measure we took was pace count utilizing our odometers. We also set up backstops by creating extra checkpoints near all of the intersections, and, finally, we used satellite imagery so that we could identify terrain features along the route.

During the deployment, we have often integrated local-national drivers and their vehicles into our logistics patrols. This creates unique challenges. At the very end of one particularly long overnight mission when our convoy was 1,500 meters outside our base, one of the local-national drivers fell asleep at the wheel and crashed his semi truck. My guys had been awake for almost 24 hours, and we were so close to being home. Yet, a moment like that is when you are most vulnerable to the enemy, who had used opportunities like vehicle accidents when Soldiers were static and bunched up to strike with suicide attackers.

My Soldiers rose to the occasion, immediately establishing security and moving to render aid to the wounded driver.

In fact, it was my gunner who entered the wrecked vehicle and found the driver, pulling him out of the truck so our medic could render aid. While we waited for recovery assets to come pick up the downed vehicle, we transported the casualty to the Afghan hospital and completed the mission. I'm proud of the grit and determination that my NCOs and Soldiers displayed that day.

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Art by Jody Harmon

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