

The Defense of Jisr Al Doreaa



Michael L. Burgoyne

Albert J. Marckwardt

PREFACE

This is another type of war new in its intensity, ancient in its origins- war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins; war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him...it requires in those situations where we must counter it...a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.

-President John F. Kennedy 1962

The advent of the War on Terror and the evolution of guerilla tactics into a decisive form of warfare in its urban and rural forms have impacted the way western forces conduct warfare. The US deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan have created a plethora of lessons learned and adjustments to doctrine. However, harking back to officer training and the simple but effective “Defense of Duffer’s Drift” by E.D. Swinton we believe that this short story will be of value to any young officer or small unit leader engaged in the complexities of counterinsurgency warfare.

The following story embodies the recollection of things done and undone in Iraq between 2003 and 2008. We hope that this fictional example will promote the application of the critical fundamentals of counterinsurgency and prevent their absence due to ignorance, arrogance, or misunderstanding. As the forces of liberal democracy continue to face the challenge of radical extremists, it is hoped that this simple text will provide a basis for additional study and discussion on counterinsurgency tactics.

Captain Michael L. Burgoyne

Captain Albert J. Marckwardt

PROLOGUE

I had just completed the Basic Officers Course and after a brief moment at home station was on my way to meet my unit in Kuwait as it prepared to move north into Iraq. I despise flying and as the chartered flight lifted off from the United States I took two sleeping pills and drifted into an uncomfortable sleep. As my story unfolds you will see that I endured 6 nightmarish dreams during the flight. In a strange circumstance I was faced with the same mission, troops and terrain in each dream but without continued knowledge of the situation. In the following pages I have separated each dream into a separate chapter. In each dream I receive the same mission from my commander and in each dream I try my best to succeed. At the conclusion of each dream I was able to develop critical lessons from my successes and failures. These lessons were the only recollections I retained between dreams and served to guide me on my next attempt. In the end these lessons produced success and when I awoke I recalled them all in detail.

- 2LT Arnold Smith

THE FIRST DREAM

Thus one who excels at warfare first establishes himself in a position where he cannot be defeated while not losing any opportunity to defeat the enemy.

-Sun Tzu

I walked into the Commander's room on the Forward Operating Base and eagerly received my mission briefing. The commander, Captain Jones was a hard nosed man with previous combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He wasted no time and rattled off the details of my mission.

“Arnold, you have a tough mission. I need you to establish a combat out post over-watching this pontoon bridge at Jisr Al Doreaa.”



1st Platoon Area of Operations and Outpost

He pointed to a small line crossing a river on the satellite imagery.

“You will control your area of operations including the village of Al Doreaa from your Combat Outpost and prevent Anti Iraqi Forces from moving across the bridge from the East to the West. The Troop and I will continue our operations from the FOB and support may be a good distance from your position. I’m going to plus you up with the mortar men as additional dismounts and a couple of guys from headquarters; I think you’ll need some extra manpower down there. Do you have any questions?”

I was excited to take on the challenge, visions of Silver Stars and General Officer adulation swirled about my head. “No problem Sir!” I stated with as much bravado as I could muster. “I’ll show that village who’s in charge and put those terrorists in their place!” Confidence has always served me well, and I was ready after my ROTC and Officer Basic.

The Commander smiled somewhat uneasily I think, and asked “do you need anything else for the operation?”

I mentally ran through my assets. I had a daunting array of firepower and personnel; five M1114 armored Highly Mobile Multi-Wheeled Vehicles with .50 Caliber Machine guns and MK 19 automatic grenade launchers, three M3 Cavalry Fighting Vehicles with their 25mm chain guns, countless M4 rifles, and a couple of M240 machine guns. I had thirty highly trained cavalry scouts and Non-Commissioned Officers. I couldn’t think of anything else worth bringing, besides it would take some time to get packed up and moving. “No Sir, we’re good to go.”

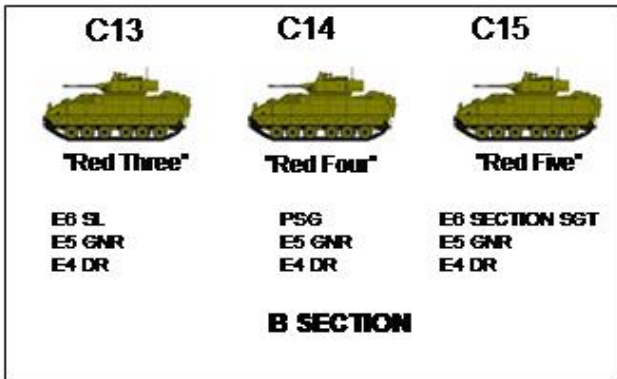
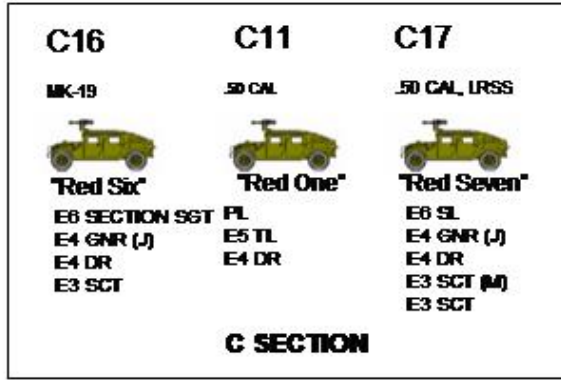
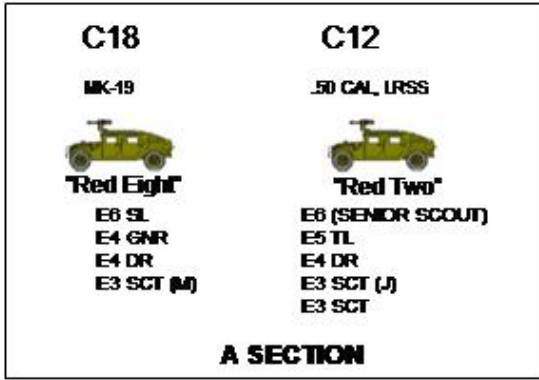
“Okay, when can you be ready to move” he asked.

“We will be on the move within 3 hours” I calmly stated.

The Commander handed me the recent intelligence summaries from the area and some satellite imagery with graphics.

While the Platoon prepared to move I looked over the intelligence and it appeared that Al Doreaa was not particularly dangerous with the typical Improvised Explosive Device attacks and small arms ambushes along major routes. It also appeared that US presence in the area had been extremely limited as

Red Platoon Task Organization



(J) = Javelin gunner
 (M) = Marksman (M16A4)

Attachments
 9 x 11C Mortarmen
 2 x 19D Scouts from HQ Plt

of the last year so detailed recent information was largely lacking. The surrounding population was small, around 500 people and predominantly Sunni Muslim. "No major threats there; should be a cake walk" I thought.

The satellite imagery delineated my zone with a blue line that cut across the rural village and the surrounding farms. A blue triangle was placed over a small government building near the bridge that was to be my outpost. It seemed like a good spot and I moved out to my vehicle to finish preparations.

I grabbed up my section sergeants and briefed a quick order before the Pre-Combat Inspections. I was proud of myself for working through the troop leading procedures just like I had learned in school. We rehearsed the movement and occupation plan and then lined up for SP.

As we moved into zone I took the opportunity to observe the lay of the land from the hatch of my

Cavalry Fighting Vehicle. Along the river dense foliage and reeds severely restricted observations and fields of fire; outside of the river banks fields of crops stretched out along the horizon broken by more reeds shooting up from canals that chaotically cut a web of impassible trenches into the ground. Al Doreaa was a large cluster of homes surrounded by farms. The buildings were largely mud brick huts of poor construction with some more sturdy concrete and rebar homes and shops. Children initially seemed eager to look at our CFVs and trucks but were quickly whisked inside by their mothers. A number of males gave us hard stares as we rolled by. “Go ahead take a shot, tough guy” I thought. I was eager to get in a fight and earn my Combat Action Badge. As I war-gamed a valiant firefight in my head I was brought back to the task at hand by Red 2 my senior scout.

“Red 1, Red 2, we’re at the COP” the radio crackled.

“Roger, Occupy”

We stopped the track and I dismounted to check out our new home. The main building was either an old police checkpoint or army position; it had been gutted by looters and graffiti covered the walls; it



The Outpost

would do just fine. The building was concrete with a flat roof typical of the region. A tall concrete block wall surrounded the yard and it stretched back to the bank of the river where the yard over-watched the bridge. There were three large rooms that we could use for sleeping and the concrete block construction offered good cover from small arms fire. The sun was beginning to set on the West side of the river and I realized that it had been a long day jumping through our asses to get down here. I tried to think of my next move. My leader book from the Scout Leaders Course was full of old high-intensity conflict doctrine and checklists. "They'd be of no use here...this was a new kind of war the old rules don't apply. The days of a dug in tank defense were over. Besides what kind of insurgent force would take on a couple of Bradleys and a bunch of American troops?" I thought. Yep, I decided that I would take care of Soldiers and get as much rest as possible, they had worked hard to pack their gear and move out here. I called over the Platoon Sergeant and instructed him

"Sergeant, we'll man two Brads tonight, two men per Bradley, have them overwatch the roads and the bridge. Go ahead and make the rest plan, we'll get hot tomorrow on the mission."

"Roger Sir" he replied and he moved out to organize the men.

The cots were set up and the MREs came out. I sat down with my section sergeants in the cool night air and we began a game of spades on a table of MRE boxes. Red 5 and I were trouncing the Platoon Sergeant and Red 2 when a call came over the hand held MBTR radio

"Red 1 this is Red 4 golf...I've got two locals here and I think they want to talk to you."

I threw on my gear and went out to the road where two people were standing in the headlights of the Bradley. As I got closer I made out two men wearing "man-dresses." "I'll never understand why they wear those things" I murmured to myself as I approached them. One man was tall and thin and the other was somewhat short and fairly fat. When they saw me they began frantically gesturing and babbling in Arabic. I couldn't understand a word they were saying. I tried to catch on to what they were saying it looked important the stumpy man was clearly scared and kept pointing at my rifle and waving his hands yelling "BOOM, BOOM, BOOM." The man started crying and the bean pole started looking at me

angrily asking “Mutargem? Mutargem?”

After about fifteen minutes I had had enough and told them to leave with a shushing motion of the hand. When they didn't move and kept talking I raised my voice and yelled.

“ENOUGH! GET OUT OF HERE!”

I grabbed my rifle pulling it to the low ready. They took the hint and walked back toward the village quickly disappearing into the shadows.

By the time I got back inside the game was broken up and most of the guys were already asleep. I was surprised to see that most of them were outside on their cots or on the roof. I guess the house had trapped the hot air inside and guys figured it was more comfortable to sleep outside in the cool night air. I agreed with their assessment, stripped off my gear and laid down on my cot. I drifted off to sleep staring at the stars and imagining the glories of combat ahead.

I awoke when my body hit the ground; debris still flying through the air. My ears were ringing and everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. Dirt, rocks, sand, concrete and ash were pelting me. I strained to focus and slowly regained my senses, I looked toward the road and all I could see was a billowing and growing cloud of black smoke obscuring the early morning sun. I looked around and the rest of the men were as stunned as I was staring blankly at the smoke and debris; most of them half naked from their slumber. One of the men ran to me from the gate and yelled out his contact report.

“Sir, a car...was hauling ass...drove right by us... and blew up next to 18...it's on fire sir and 14's turret was damaged.”

I grabbed him by the shoulders “calm down man. Do we have any casualt...” I was interrupted by a blast of air and steel that threw me off my feet.

Pain shot through my arm as I looked up from the ground. I watched as five more mortar rounds crashed into our position. The men scrambled to don their body armor and seek cover but many were torn to pieces by the shards of metal that sung through the compound. The barrage stopped and I got to my feet, blood was streaming down my arm as I slung my armor on and moved out to help my Platoon. I

ran to the gate first only to find 18 on fire with 25mm rounds cooking off in the back. The charred remains of a sedan barely recognizable as a car frame lay next to the Bradley. 14 was in bad shape, the engine block had impacted the gun barrel and the ISU sight. "I would need to man the other vehicles to get some security out" I thought. Just as I began to get a handle on the situation I heard the chatter of machine gun fire on the West side of the compound followed by the popping of M4s.

As I walked back inside I saw the platoon firing into the southwest side of the compound. Green tracers were raking the compound from the corner and I saw masked men pouring through a gap in the wall where it met the water. I heard the loud crack and zing of rounds and felt chips of the wall behind me bounce off my helmet. I quickly ducked and ran toward the building. The yard was filled with wounded or dead Soldiers. Blood and pieces of flesh were everywhere and the smoke from the burning vehicles by the gate made it hard to breathe. The remainder of the Platoon was falling back to the house and was setting in there. I dove inside the front door of the cement building chased by a hail of AK47 fire. Inside, the medic was working on five wounded men; one was missing a leg. I got a hold of the manpack we had been using for radio checks and called for help. I could only hope that the antenna wire hadn't been cut in the attack.

"Any station this net, any station this net, this is Red 1 we're under attack! We're under attack!" An unintelligible blast of squelch was all that came back across. I hoped that the message got through but I couldn't be sure. I counted ten men left inside the building all shooting from the windows and doors, some of them were wounded.

We began to run low on ammunition when the shooting suddenly stopped and the AIF began to break contact and move back out of the compound. I heard the steady whomping sounds of the Apaches before I saw them come into view, circling the compound. The medic began working on my arm and while I waited for the MEDEVAC I contemplated this most unfortunate situation.

We had lost 15 men killed in action, one man died of wounds, and four seriously wounded. We lost two M3s and the majority of our other vehicles were damaged. The AIF had only two killed.

After much deliberation I determined the following lessons from the debacle, which were then burned into my memory by the searing pain of my injury.

1. Security is the number one priority. Units must maintain 360 degree security no matter what the situation.

2. The fundamentals still apply. Counter-insurgency operations and low intensity conflict do not negate the value of systems that are time tested in countless conflicts. Employing the fundamentals of defense, the seven steps of engagement area development, and priorities of work are critical to establishing an outpost.

As these lessons were etched into my soul I found myself somehow drifting into another dream.

THE SECOND DREAM

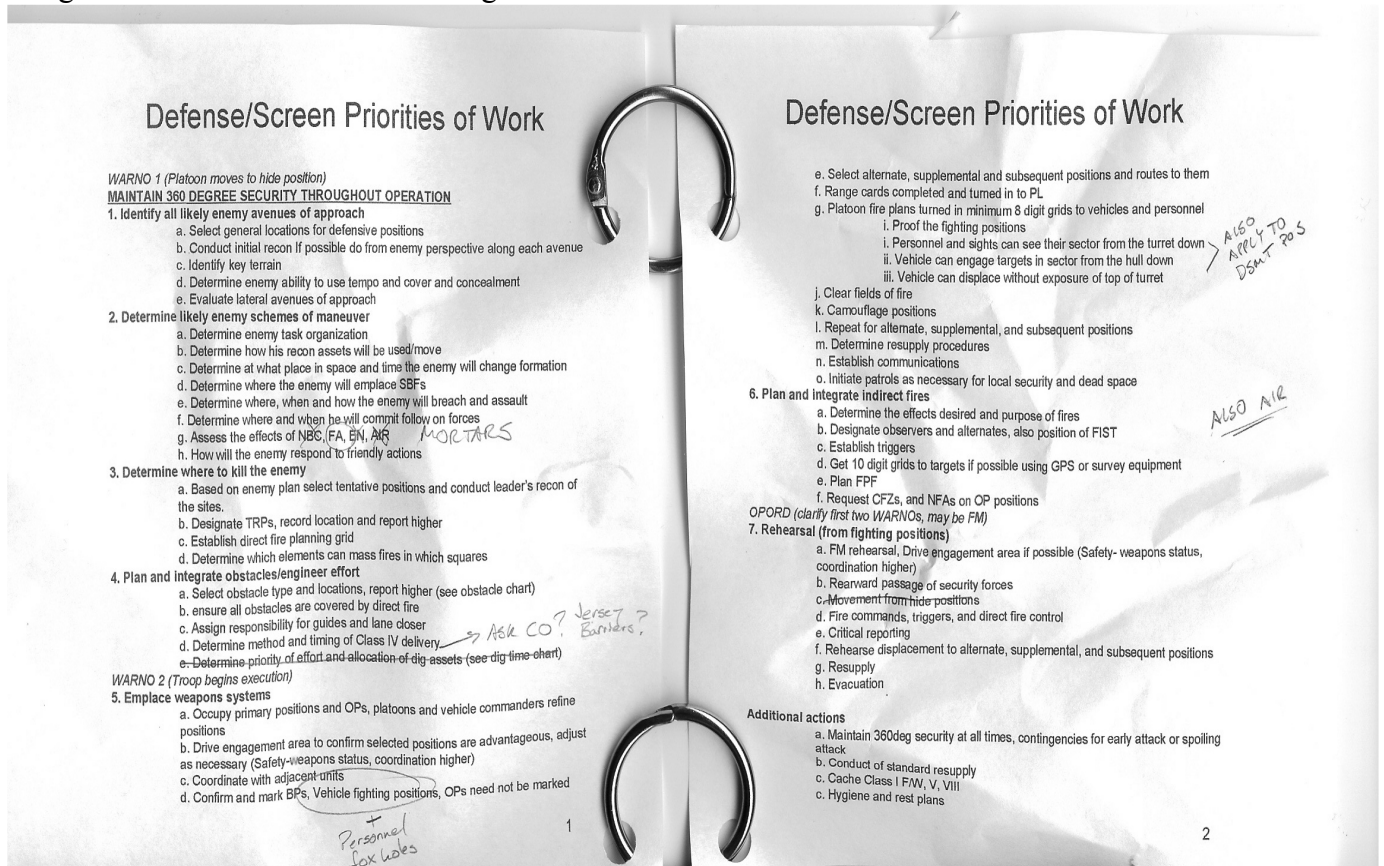
Never pick a fight with people who buy ink by the barrel.

- President William J. Clinton

Adapt yourself to the things among which your lot has been cast and love sincerely the fellow creatures with whom destiny has ordained that you shall live.

- Marcus Aurelius

I again found myself back in the Commander's room receiving my brief. I listened intently focused on correcting my gross failures of the last dream and applying the lessons I derived from my mistakes. I issued another warning order and as before I did my pre-combat inspections. This time however, I went and reviewed my leader-book. I examined the defensive priorities of work that I had built during the Basic Course. At first I was a little confused at how my SOP would work, I mean it was designed for a linear armor defense against the Soviet hoard. But as I looked it over I found that it was



applicable to my current problem; it just needed to be adjusted to the mission and terrain.

I adjusted the enemy effects as I would need to focus on mortar attacks rather than chemical, air, or field artillery; the insurgents didn't have those capabilities. The engineers and obstacles made no sense when I pictured the Maginot line but as I looked at the satellite imagery I realized that I would need obstacle material to reinforce the outpost and our positions around it. Obstacle material would also be useful to slow down vehicle borne improvised explosive devices trying to get to the Bradleys. I made sure to focus not just on battle positions or vehicle fighting positions but also on our dismounted positions as this would be a perimeter defense. I knew that the rules of engagement limited my indirect fire assets so I couldn't expect to get 155mm artillery support without the Division Commander's approval; I focused instead on how I could use air to support me.



Obstacle Plan

Armed with this analysis I went back to the Commander and made some requests. After some discussion and a couple calls to Squadron, I managed to get one HEMTT cargo truck with 5000 sandbags, 4 short concrete jersey barriers, and 100 rolls of concertina wire. In addition, I learned that attack aviation was set for troops in contact and would be on a 15 minute string if we needed them. The Commander also

recommended that I pass on any graphics to the XO for the pilots.

Armed with my trusty SOP and a HEMTT full of Class IV I left the gate bound for the outpost with the same ample forces as the first dream. When we arrived at the outpost I reached into my bag and pulled out my leader-book and began ticking off the priorities of work. I looked at the terrain and quickly sketched out the likely enemy avenues of approach. I had the obvious roads Route Adams moved from the South-East to the North-West to the North of the outpost and Route Truman crossed the bridge and intersected Route Adams at the corner of the outpost. Additionally, I identified some dismounted approaches using the cover from the dense foliage by the river. I also got on the ground and determined the best way for AIF to attack the outpost was with a dismounted attack along the river or a VBIED strike along the roads. They would need a support by fire to cross the roads or to fix us while they breached the wall; they could even do this from across the river.



Enemy Situation Template

Based on my recon of the enemy's options and the lay of the land I laid out the platoon direct fire plan. I figured the best place to kill the bad guys was as they crossed the roads or in our obstacles. I showed the platoon sergeant where the obstacles were going to be emplaced. We would need to reinforce the outer wall with concertina wire and pull wire all the way down to the river. In addition we would need wire outside the perimeter on the other side of the roads and the canal to the North to fix the enemy for our direct fires. The cement barricades would be placed at the intersection and along avenue of approach two. Finally we would use our sandbags to reinforce the building and cover the windows as well as build bunkers for our machine gun positions.



Platoon Fire Plan

While the obstacles were being emplaced I ensured that we manned our Bradleys pulling security the entire time. I then finalized the positions. Two dug in and sandbagged bunkers would cover the Southern approaches and the opposite side of the river. One machine gun position would be emplaced on the roof to cover the north-west. Two Bradleys would set on the main road and one Bradley would simultaneously block the main gate and cover the Eastern approaches. The commo sergeant ran wire to all of the positions and established a command and control node in the main building with both FM and wire communication between all positions.

As the day began to wane into the evening I went out one last time to check the defenses from the enemy's perspective. It seemed pretty imposing to me and I called on the radio as I moved to ensure that we had obtained overlapping fires throughout the perimeter. The Platoon Sergeant kept the men working all night filling sandbags and improving positions; the guard rotation was demanding but was workable. I finally allowed myself to drift off to sleep confident that I had done everything I could to establish the defense and that we would continue to improve the position.

Stand To was at 0530 and the entire platoon was up and manning the perimeter. I remember my grizzly NCO instructor at ROTC telling me "the Indians attack at dawn...that's why we do Stand To." Well by 0600 they hadn't attacked so I shaved had a quick breakfast and trooped the line. I walked each position and quizzed the Soldiers on their sectors and their TRPs. When I reached the Bradleys I had an interesting conversation with one of the vehicle commanders.

He asked "Hey sir, when can we shoot at vehicles? We've been letting 'em roll by so far."

I was more than a little frustrated I didn't want a VBIED getting through the perimeter.

"Look, nothing gets through here, nothing, just turn them around and if they don't stop engage them, remember those VBIEDs are deadly!" I said.

"Roger sir"

The day wore on and the men cut down reeds and foliage to clear fields of fire. We finished up the bunkers and the reinforcement of the building. Night fell and the guard shifts flowed through the night. The only shots fired were from the Bradleys shooting off some cars trying to move down Route Adams or across the bridge. When morning came again with another uneventful Stand To I was confident that we were one nut that was too tough to crack.

“I guess the AIF know who not to mess with...and I thought this would be a fight down here” I boasted to the platoon sergeant.

While walking the line I heard a shot and initially I thought it was the Bradleys again, but it sounded louder and more distant...then the screaming started.

“MEDIC! MEDIC!”

I ran to the cries and was startled by a burst from the M240 on top of the building. As I reached the building I found the medic staring over the body of one of my privates. He was pale and at first seemed to be sleeping or unconscious. Then on closer inspection I noticed a small hole just under his ear and a pool of blood and matter that was gathering on the opposite side of his Kevlar. The medic just knelt beside him in silence and said a prayer. Everyone inside the house ran out and was shocked at the sight of their friend. The Platoon Sergeant took control and covered his body with a poncho liner.

“Man your positions!” he growled.

They scattered. I grabbed the closest man and asked what had happened.

“He was going up on the roof for his shift when he got hit” he blurted out.

I needed to get a handle on the situation so I tepidly climbed up to the roof. My heart was thumping loudly in my ears as I made my way up. I dove into the bunker happy to be alive and asked the men what they were shooting at. They said that they thought the shot came from TRP 2 a farm house to the North-West. It didn't make much sense to me because his wound looked like the shot had come from the South-East. I had heard stories about snipers before and I wasn't about to let my Soldier die for nothing. “ Better to be sure” I thought. I called over the net to the other positions.

“Engage all possible sniper locations!”

Red 2 came back “Sir, including the farm houses?”

“Yep, ALL possible sniper hide sites!” I blasted back.

The roar of the machine guns echoed across the farm land as 7.62 rounds sung through the flimsy farm houses and skipped through the surrounding fields in a “mad minute” that reminded me of the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie Predator. When I was satisfied I called “Cease Fire” over the net. After the shooting I spoke to the machine gunner again.

“So what else did you see?”

He replied that he had seen a guy run out of the building toward town but that when his friend had been shot he dropped the gun and tried to help him. There was no one out to cut him off so I guess that guy got away... or maybe we were lucky and got him in one of the houses. Then the cries started again; this time they were Iraqi and female, they were coming from the farm house to the East. I slid down the ladder to the ground and organized a five man patrol to go to the farm house. I brought the medic just in case we had casualties. As we pushed out the main gate I immediately saw what had happened. A young woman and was clutching her young son about five or six years old in her arms. His left arm was a shredded stump from the elbow down. His chest was mangled and drenched in blood, bits of shattered bone rising up from gaping exit wounds caused by 7.62 bullets. Her entire body was drenched in blood, her cries were not really cries; that wouldn't do it justice. They were animal noises guttural and piercing filled with anguish and disbelief. The medic tried to look at the child, why I'm not sure, he was clearly dead. She dropped her shell of a boy and screamed striking out at the medic and then collapsing at her son's corpse. We moved on into her house and found the rest of the family. Her husband, two daughters, and an old woman all torn to pieces by our machine gun fire. There was no rifle, no shell casing, no sign of the AIF. I returned to the woman and tried to speak to her but she could only weep and yell in Arabic. I was trying to decipher what she was saying when a flurry of shots rang out from the road followed by screeching tires and a loud crash.

My patrol and I abandoned the woman and ran toward the street.

Red 5 squawked over the radio; “This is Red 5, engaged one civilian vehicle trying to run the position.”

As we moved up toward the vehicle we saw one man in the driver seat clearly dead, his head canoed by a 5.56 round through the forehead. Within the bullet ridden vehicle, another man was moaning in the passenger seat. We cautiously stalked up to the vehicle looking for signs of explosives. I made my way to the passenger side and found a middle aged man wearing a suit gripping his left arm which was bleeding profusely. We pulled him from the car and the medic began working on him. One of my Soldiers brought me the dead man’s wallet, inside were several identification cards. The one I quickly focused on was the one in English and Arabic, it said

MEMBER PROVINCIAL COUNSEL

At this point my day really started to get difficult.

“Red 1 this is Red 2, I’ve got a group of people coming from town and some of them have cameras. I think they may be media.”

“Just what I needed media at this mess” I thought. As they came up I met them at the barricades. Their cameras were already rolling it was a CNN crew with a woman who I knew I had seen on TV before in Africa or some other hot spot. I introduced myself and the questions started.

“What happened here Lieutenant?”

“Look I have no time for this right now; I’m in the middle of a situation!” I was not going to be intimidated and I was busy.

“Who was shot here today? Was someone shot?”

“Yes Ma’am, we have been in a firefight with some enemy snipers today” I quipped.

She and her crew moved to the peppered vehicle and to my surprise began speaking to the man who was wounded. She spoke fluent Arabic and was able to get the full story from him. She related to me that the man was the assistant to a provincial counsel member; they had been driving to Baghdad and came upon

the checkpoint where they were engaged without warning.

“Do you have signs to warn people of an approaching checkpoint?” She asked.

“No.”

“What about warning shots, were they fired?”

“No, but I can tell you that I have taken every measure to protect my Soldiers, these men could have been suicide bombers” I smartly stated. “These men should have been more careful.”

At this point the bloodsoaked woman came onto the road and screamed at the cameras. Another conversation in Arabic and the news crew was at the farm house. I continued to follow sheepishly behind.

“What about this!? What did these people do?” The reporter was almost crying herself as she asked the questions.

“I don’t know” I stammered “we thought they might be snipers so we engaged the house. I lost a soldier today but I guess no one cares! This mission is hopeless! I hate this place as much as anyone else.”

When she did her stand up it was with the perforated car behind her she started by saying “out of control US forces have yet again used unrestrained force in Iraq and the Iraqis continue to pay the price. This time a provincial council member is dead, his assistant wounded when negotiating one of the most dangerous things in Iraq...a US checkpoint. At nearly the same time a family is devastated by US machine gun fire. All while the leader of US forces on the scene acts without conscience or prudence.”

While contemplating how this would look on my officer evaluation report I was called by a guy at the gate.

“Hey sir, CO wants you on the radio and I think he’s pissed!”

I walked inside and got on the radio, the CO was already on the road I could tell from the sound of the hand mike.

“Red 1 this is Apache 6, I am on my way down there now! Why haven’t you been up on the net!”

“Roger sir, I’ve had some problems down here.”

“Yeah roger! Look guy just sit tight I’m coming into your zone now...” and he cut off.

A loud boom shook the air around the outpost and the machine gun position on the roof yelled out.

“Looks like a convoy just hit an IED to the North-West!”

I frantically called over the net “Apache 6 this is Red 1...Apache 6 this is Red 1 over.”

Finally he came back across. “Red 1 this is Apache 6, you are done! Sit tight you are relieved as soon as I get to your position.”

As I sunk down in my chair by the radio awaiting my relief for cause I thought about what I had done this time to fail. The defense of the outpost seemed perfect but somehow other events had gotten out of control. I arrived at the following lessons as tears began to run down my cheeks first for my dead soldier and then for the civilians we had killed.

3. Providing good security is a must but having a fortress mentality without patrolling outside leaves you open to attack. You can't fulfill the mission from inside a fortified position.

4. The enemy will change his strategy based on your capabilities. Be prepared for how the enemy will adapt to your actions.

5. Counter-sniper considerations must be taken into account when establishing an outpost. Sniper screens, counter sniper teams, and counter-sniper battle drills must be implemented.

6. Escalation of force and rules of engagement protect Soldiers by allowing them to engage quickly when it's necessary and to avoid wounding or killing innocent civilians. Briefing and enforcing rules of engagement is critical to mission accomplishment.

7. The media provides an opportunity to spread a positive message or to display a terrible example to the world. Soldiers and leaders must be prepared to tell a positive story to the press or put the best most respectful face on a bad story.

As the CO pulled up and began to yell, his profanity blended into colors and a swirling mix of sounds as I began my third dream armed with new lessons.

THE THIRD DREAM

“It is never wise to let the enemy get used to a certain form of warfare; it is necessary to vary constantly the places, the hours, and the forms of operations.”

- Ernesto Che Guevara

Guerilla Warfare 1961

Once again I received my orders briefing and conducted my preparation intent this time to accomplish my mission. This time however, I took the time to reread my escalation of force and rules of engagement. The principles outlined in the SOP were

- 1. Soldiers always have the right to defend themselves*
- 2. If the situation allows use graduated force including non-lethal means before using lethal force*
- 3. You don't have to go through all the steps if deadly force is deemed necessary.*

The graduated response followed some simple and easy to remember steps that I then briefed my Soldiers on prior to leaving the FOB.

Shout- A verbal warning or gesture

Show- Display your weapon and intent to use it

Shove- Physically detain or restrain

Shoot- Warning shot first then shots to kill

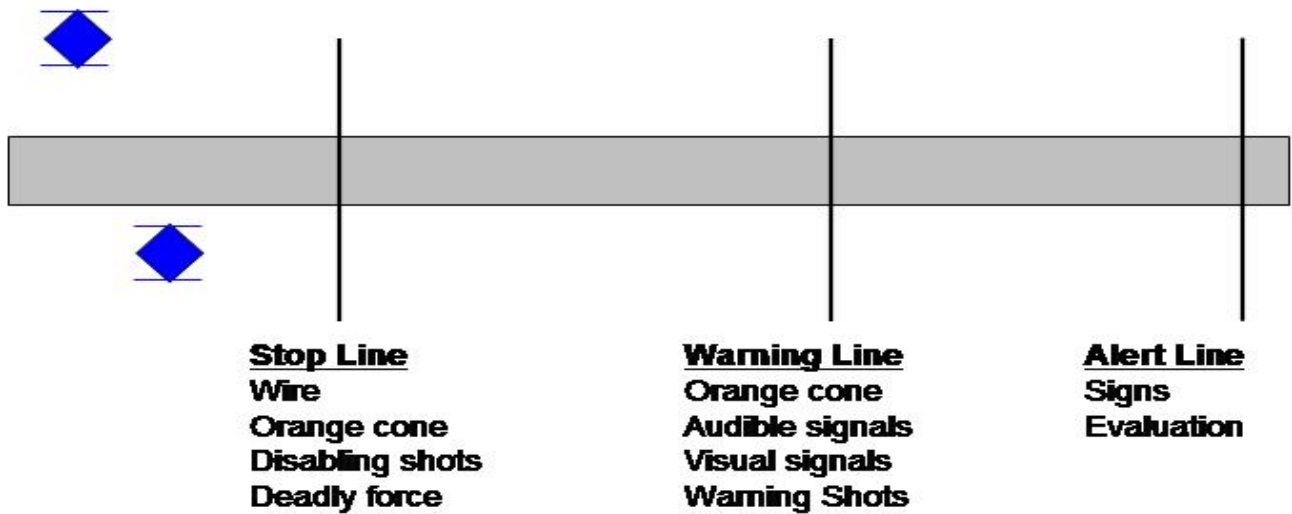
After the briefing I thought about how I could apply the ROE to my Bradley positions on the road.

I went back to the SOP and found the traffic control point diagram.

Based on the diagram I made a quick list for the XO including laser pointers, spotlights, warning signs and orange cones which he was able to issue to me just prior to movement.

Movement to the outpost was uneventful and I established my defense as I had before, meticulously going through my priorities of work. The Soldiers worked to fortify their positions and the guard roster was implemented. I added additional defensive measures to protect the outpost from sniper activity. We

Traffic Control Point Diagram



emplaced our camouflage netting over all of the positions including the Bradley turrets. I had my squad designated marksman establish a counter sniper position on the roof of the outpost with his upgraded M16A4 with ACOG optic. I also went through the positions and determined the most likely sniper hide sites; those sites were then briefed to the Soldiers on duty and added to the range cards for constant observation.

Out front on the route I inspected our new rules of engagement friendly TCP. Red 5 back briefed me on his EOF steps.

“Sir, out around 350 meters I’ve got the signs set up. Not sure exactly what they say but I think they will let the Hajis know there is a checkpoint ahead. After that we have an orange cone for the warning line with a yellow flag and yellow chem light. If they are still moving fast we have the spotlights you gave us and the laser pointers.”

He shined the green laser down the street, it was surprisingly visible even in the early dusk. “At that point Sir, if they’re still coming they will hit the jersey barriers and we will fire warning shots followed by shots to disable. And if they hit this cone” he pointed to the orange cone with a red flag and

chemlight “we will take them out.”

It was pretty close to the diagram and I was happy with the set up.

“Remember Sergeant you need to determine hostile intent it’s not just about the steps” I reminded him. “If you determine a VBIED is coming at your alert line you’ve got to engage. But at the same time if a school bus full of nuns is failing to stop, don’t vaporize it with the 25.”

“Roger Sir, I briefed my guys. Follow the steps and hostile intent. Nothing to worry about here Sir, we’ll pass it on to the next shifts as they come on.”

Finally, I developed a dismounted patrol schedule from the outpost to clear potential sniper positions and prevent IEDs from being emplaced on our route. The patrols would leave every four hours and would rotate between squads additionally, to simplify the operation I gave the patrols the same detailed route and instructions. They would first move North and check the road for IEDs and then move through the South side of the village followed by a check of possible sniper sites on the East side of the outpost. “There won’t be any sniper or IED activity on my watch” I thought. The Platoon Sergeant adjusted the guard roster and patrols began as nightfall came. As I drifted off to sleep I was confident in my well fortified position and my new patrol scheme no doubt this time I would be successful.

The next day the priorities of work continued and the outpost continued to solidify into a strong point. The RTO briefed me on the night’s activities. Apparently one patrol at 0200 had come up on three personnel by the road and then lost contact with them running into the town. On the side of the road they had found a shovel and a small hole.

“That’s one IED that won’t be going off today” I boasted.

Confident that I was on the right track I decided to lead from the front and go out on the next patrol. We stepped off from the outpost at 0900 and moved out on my route. We traversed the West side of the outpost first moving at a five meter interval. The weight of my vest pulled on my shoulders, it weighed about 40 pounds. I was proud of my kit I had two large ammo pouches in the front with six 30 round magazines, a couple of frag grenades in small pouches, a large first aid pouch on my left side with

a new Israeli bandage, a civilian GPS on my left shoulder, and a big Silver Trident knife on my right hip. I kept my right shoulder clear so I could easily bring my M4 rifle to bear on any insurgents. My rifle was covered in accessories with a PEQ15 laser sight, ACOG sight, and a sure fire flashlight. As the sweat began to pour down my neck I was thankful to be wearing the new ACH kevlar helmet, the pads were much more comfortable than the old helmet band.

I was delicately moving through the reeds when we came upon the farm house to the West of the outpost. The farm house was a two story concrete framed house with brick and mortar walls, its windows were either broken or missing and its stucco was sporadically present, most of it chipped off and worn by time.

An old Iraqi man was standing out front, his eyes were a wrinkled mass of skin swollen nearly shut by the sun, his weathered face and gnarled hands made clear to anyone that saw him that he was no stranger to working outside. As we approached I saw a small girl peering out from one of the lower windows of the house who was whisked away by the black form of a woman in a full chador. I walked up and waved to the man making sure to keep my right hand on my weapon; I remembered from ROTC that hand and arm signals should be done with your non-firing hand.

“Good morning, how are you?” I cheerfully asked.

He smiled and nodded.

“Have you seen any terrorists?” I asked intently.

He continued to smile and nod. I looked back at my RTO and he gave me a shrug. Then the old man took me by the hand and babbling something in Arabic pulled me toward the side of his house to a hole in the ground. I was ecstatic, “finally a cache site, the commander will be happy about this” I imagined. But once I looked inside I saw some kind of irrigation pump in a sad state of disrepair. The old man looked at me and clapped his hands together sliding them apart over and over signaling what I think was that the pump was broken.

“Sorry, can’t help with that sir, but do you know where the bad guys are?”

He just looked at me with an empty stare.

“Well, thanks for your time, let us know if you see anything” I said running out of patience.

We continued our patrol as the day began to heat up. We skirted the main road diligently looking for signs of IED emplacements, and then moved into the village. I could smell the goats and sheep in nearby pens and the stench of raw sewage draining down shallow trenches on the sides of the small dirt road. Most of the buildings were mud brick with thatch roofs, most were augmented with random pieces of tin metal sheets, plastic, and other building materials. People moved between houses and seemed not to pay any attention to us; a couple of young men, about 16 or 17 years old, at a small shop gave us a hard stare as we passed.

As we made our way toward our turn back South two men came out of the courtyard of one of the nicer homes in the town. One man was wearing a flowing white robe with a white headdress and the other was wearing a pair of grey slacks and a white shirt. They approached our patrol with smiles on their faces. I met them in the road and they grasped my hand eagerly shaking it and saying something in Arabic.

“Good morning, how are you gentlemen, I’m Lieutenant Smith I am here to help.”

They looked at me and quickly blurted something in Arabic. I again was lost, maybe they had something to tell me but I had no idea what it was. Mindful of snipers I gestured to them to move back inside the courtyard and we moved inside. Once inside they both produced identification, the man in the white robe’s was in Arabic so that didn’t help but the other man’s said

MAYOR AL DOREAA TOWN

I nodded and said “Mayor? Mayor?” pointing at him.

He smiled and yelped “Naam, naam.”

I looked at the other man and shrugged my shoulders “no Arabic” I sheepishly said. He looked about and then pointed behind me in the air. I looked and saw the minaret of the village mosque.

“Oh, you’re the imam?” I said.

He nodded and smiled. At this point the mayor whispered to me in Arabic and all I could do is nod.

He looked at me in frustration and began making hand gestures I couldn't make out. I knew these men had something important to tell me but this was hopeless. After about ten minutes they grew as frustrated as I did with the game of charades we were playing.

"I must be going, it has been nice speaking with you gentlemen" I said and we continued our move. They watched us walk off and returned to the house. As we left the village the afternoon call to prayer echoed across the town from the mosque.

We finished up the patrol and I was happy to drop my sweat stained gear onto the floor. The inside of the outpost was hotter than the outside but I had made it mandatory that personnel sleep under cover and only remove their gear inside. It was worth the stagnant air to get out of the body armor. I lay down on my cot and thought through the day I wondered what the men in the village had wanted to say to me.

The evening went by without incident, patrols continued every four hours along my designated route and it appeared that I had cracked the code on controlling the zone with no IEDs or attacks for twenty four hours. As I walked the line before bed I was impressed with our positions; range cards at every post, hardened with sandbags and covered with camo netting. The Bradley positions looked great and the TCPs were well marked with chemlights. As I approached the first Bradley I was able to observe them go through the procedures on a civilian vehicle. The vehicle approached and then slowed after the sign. The vehicle commander shone the laser at the windshield and the vehicle stopped and turned around, without a shot fired. I went back to my rack and fell asleep with happy visions of quick promotions in my future. "Counter-insurgency wasn't that hard after all" I thought.

I was getting ready for Stand To the following morning; when I heard an explosion in the distance followed by bursts of automatic fire. Over the radio I heard Red 6 come across "CONTACT! CONTACT!" with the BRRRAP of machine gun fire and pop of M4s in the background.

I ran to the Bradleys and told the Platoon Sergeant while in route to replace them with HMMWVs, I was going to help my guys. I climbed up into the second Bradley and yelled to Red 3 to prepare to move. Luckily the Bradleys were already REDCON 1 for Stand To and we were moving in less than 30 seconds.

As we weaved through the jersey barriers the firing ceased.

“Red 6 this is Red 1!” I yelled into the mike.

“Red 6 this is Red 1!”

No response.

There was some black smoke coming from the south side of the town and we rushed to the site. As we entered the village I saw men in black ski masks fleeing north with AKs and an RPK machine gun. I slewed the turret right and yelled.

“TROOPS RIGHT!”

The gunner hollered back “GOT EM!”

“FIRE!”

The coax coughed out a burst of 7.62, one of the men tumbled end over end like a rag doll as the bullets ripped through his torso. Red 3 was scanning to the West and I was pulled away from the contact by his voice over the radio.

“Red 1, Red 3 I’ve got friendlies on the ground to our front I think we have some wounded.”

The insurgents grabbed their bloody comrade and disappeared behind a mud wall moving deeper into the north side of the village. I scanned back left and saw what Red 7 was talking about. On the ground in the middle of the street were nine Soldiers, two of them were writhing in the dirt clutching at their wounds. I decided the insurgents would have to wait and moved to help my men. We set the Bradleys on either side of the carnage I got out with the dismounts to help. Red 7 called the platoon sergeant and the medic was on the way in another convoy along with air support for troops in contact.

When I got on the ground it was clear to me what had happened. The bodies of my nine men lay strewn about in pools of blood and stained brown earth. Judging by the scorch marks on the ground and the unidentifiable remains around them an RPG struck the patrol first. The shell casings lying all around made it clear that they were attacked from multiple directions. They were ambushed and the enemy had been ready for them,

they couldn't have picked a better spot; they had nowhere to go between a mud brick wall and a set of shops; the same shops where I saw those two kids staring me down. I shuddered for a moment in selfish relief "this could have been me" I thought. I had walked down this same road not twelve hours ago. That's when it hit me those same kids had seen all the patrols come by every four hours for the last day and a half. I was pulled back to the task at hand by the screams of the wounded men and the hammering beat of Apache helicopters coming onto the scene. As I treated the wounded and listened to their cries the following lessons formed in my brain built upon the anguish of my failure.

8. Do not set patterns. Vary routes, times, and tactics to avoid being targeted by the enemy.

9. Language skills are critical for gaining information on the enemy and coordinating with host nation allies.

As I was engulfed by the blowing cloud of dust from the MEDEVAC bird I felt the day slip away and found myself in another dream.

THE FOURTH DREAM

It is only undisciplined troops who make the people their enemies and who, like the fish out of its native element, cannot live.

- Mao Tse-tung

On Guerrilla Warfare 1937

In the main, however, we sought to carry out operations in a way that minimized the chances of creating more enemies than we captured or killed. The idea was to try to end each day with fewer enemies than we had when it started.

- General David H. Petraeus

Observations from Soldiering in Iraq

Military Review January 2006

Mission preparation went much the same as it had before with the exception of a new request I made to the Commander for two interpreters. He was able to provide me with two contracted Iraqi interpreters and also handed me a short list of Arabic phrases that the Soldiers should learn and keep with them. After completing my mission brief and ROE brief I left the FOB again with my EOF kit, defensive barrier material, and interpreters confident in my ability to find success this time bolstered by nine lessons from the previous dreams.

Occupation of the outpost went like clockwork and I made an adjustment to the patrol plan. I gave the patrols named areas of interest to observe but varied their SP times and told them to alter their routes and directions of travel. I also shifted to setting observation post positions for short periods while on patrol to break up patterns and the look of our missions. Each patrol would have an interpreter to talk to the locals and gain information on the zone.

I awoke the next morning and prepared for an afternoon patrol. I linked up with the section and I met our interpreter for the first time. He was dressed in desert pattern fatigues and wore Iraqi style body armor with a bulky square plate. He had a scruffy face that wasn't quite a beard, a black bandanna covered his head, and he wore weight lifting gloves with no fingers. His eyes were covered by dark sunglasses used to hide his identity. He introduced himself in a heavy accent.

“My name is Mohammed Sir; I will be your interpreter.”

“Great Mohammed it's good to be working with you. We'll be talking to the locals today to try to get some intel on the insurgents in the area.”

I gave him a quick tour of our compound and told him to meet back up with us after lunch to conduct our mission. I asked him where he was from and he told me he was from Al Doreaa. I gave him a complete brief on our mission; I wanted him to understand exactly what we were doing so that he could help communicate my message to the local populace. I was excited about having an interpreter, I felt confident that we would gain a lot of intelligence from the community, especially considering his already developed knowledge of the area.

That afternoon we moved out and exited the main gate on patrol. We weaved our way through the reeds to the Northwest of the out post and came upon the farmhouse with the withered Iraqi farmer. I approached him with Mohammed close behind.

I gave my best “salaam ‘aleikum” and held out my hand to the farmer.

He answered “aliekum assalaam” and shook my hand tentatively.

“How are you” I inquired.

He timidly spoke and Mohammed translated.

“He is very well, he would like to know why you are here.”

“I'm here to secure the area. Do you know of any bad guys in the area?”

“I don't know anything...it is not safe to talk please go away” the man stammered.

“Why isn't it safe to talk?”

“Since you took over the base I see people at night. I am a simple farmer and I just want to grow my vegetables” he replied.

Mohammed whispered to me “sir, I think this man...he is very poor and afraid. Many Iraqis are scared and if they speak with Americans they may be killed.”

“Tell him I understand but I would like to hear more about the people moving at night. Ask him if he will tell one of my patrols next time he sees someone on his farm.”

Mohammed quickly spoke in Arabic and the man bowed his head for a moment in thought before answering.

“I will tell you...but please do not come here in the open to talk to me. If you must come do so after dark so my neighbors will not think I am working with the Americans.”

“Shukran” I replied in my best Arabic and after shaking hands we moved out on our patrol toward Al Doreaa.

We entered the town and moved down the dusty streets. Mohammed shared pleasantries with the locals and waved to people as we passed. At the corner, we were met by two men one in a pair of slacks with a white shirt and the other with a long white robe and headdress.

“Salaam ‘aleikum” I confidently stated and reached to shake their hands.

The man in the robe shook my hand demurely and smiled. The man in the slacks shook my hand and smiled widely chanting.

“Ahlan wa sahlam!” he said loudly. Then to my great surprise leaned forward and kissed my cheek. As he swung his head around to get the other side of my face I pulled back in revulsion hollering out.

“WHOA!”

The man was clearly shocked by my actions and Mohammed whispered to me quickly.

“Sir, sir, this is common in our culture, men kiss each others cheeks.”

He then turned to the man had a short conversation in Arabic and then turned to me.

“Sir, I told him you meant no disrespect. He is Mr. Hussein the mayor of the village and is a counsel member for the Qada. The other man is the town Imam. Mr. Hussein has invited you into his home...this one right here” he pointed to the concrete framed house with a high mud brick wall around the perimeter.

“Okay, absolutely let’s see if he knows where the terrorists are!”

We walked in the courtyard of the house. Inside were a small green lawn and a small but well kept home with a small porch. A Kia minivan was parked under an awning on the side of the home. We followed the men inside into a large room. The room was plastered with posters of headless men and angry looking guys in turbans. I asked Muhammed “Who are the people in these pictures?”

“ This one here” he pointed to the headless man “is Husayn Ibn Ali the martyr of the Shia sect of Islam. And here this is Muktada Al Sadr he is a very powerful Shia cleric.”

“Thanks” I said and I wondered if that information was worth remembering.

There was no furniture only a giant rug and several pillows. In the corner of the room a woman stood all covered up in black. As we moved into the room I approached her trying to acknowledge her presence with a salaam ‘aleikum and a hearty handshake. But as I reached to shake her hand, she immediately pulled away. My interpreter stepped between us and said, “You are dishonoring their women, you cannot speak directly to them.” Mr. Hussein hastily ushered the woman out of the room and turned back to me with a look of disbelief. He regained his composure, motioned for us to sit and yelled back into the house.

“Chai! Chai!”

I told the patrol to stay outside except for a couple guys to watch my back and I plopped myself down on a pillow. My gear was cumbersome and difficult to sit in so I kicked out my legs and laid down in an ‘L’ with my back leaning against the wall. I wanted to take my helmet off but my radio headset was attached to it so I kept it on. Mohammed sat down next to me and crossed his legs underneath him. The mayor and the Imam sat down across from us and after settling took a brief look at me. The Imam looked at me

sternly and pointed while he spoke to Mohammed. Mohammed looked somewhat cowed as he spoke and reached over to me.

“Sir, you mustn’t put the soles of your feet toward an Iraqi this is insulting.”

Sure I thought but they weren’t wearing 40 pounds of gear. I shot the Imam a sarcastic smile and crossed my legs with some difficulty.

I was about to ask where the terrorists were when a boy came into the room with a tray of small glasses. I was initially surprised that we would be doing shots of whiskey this early in the day when the boy handed me a glass. It was burning hot and there was a mound of sugar at the bottom. I watched as Mohammed stirred his glass with a diminutive spoon and then sipped on the beverage.

I leaned over to him and asked “what is this stuff? It’s boiling hot...do they realize it’s like 100 degrees outside?”

Mohammed was confused “Sir, this is chai it is what Iraqis drink.”

I shrugged my shoulders and took a swig burning my tongue. I had never really liked sweets and it was too hot to drink this stuff. I put the glass down. The mayor looked concerned

“You don’t like the Chai?”

“No, no it’s too hot outside for chai” I said.

He frowned and quickly changed the subject “What is your name, where are you from?”

“My name is Lieutenant Smith. I’m here to provide security.” I wasn’t about to tell him anything about myself.

“Very good then, I have lived here my whole life. I have two daughters and a young son.” He said.

“That’s fascinating, but I only need to know about the insurgents in the area. Who is planting the IEDs?” Mohammed looked concerned as he listened to me and then translated.

This caused another flurry of Arabic between the two men and Mohammed. Once again Mohammed leaned over to me and whispered.

“Sir, our way is to speak first together as men so we know about the person we are dealing with.

After this then we speak about business. How can he trust you if you will not speak with him as a person and not just a Soldier?”

I was pondering this pearl of wisdom when I noticed the boy was bringing in some food on a large platter.

“We were just to have lunch, you will be our guests” the mayor said with a smile.

I looked at the platter and was more than just a little surprised to see half of a sheep’s head staring back at me with what was left of a boiled eyeball. There was some kind of broth as well as rice and flatbread. Mohammed and the two men reached in and began grabbing pieces of meat from the cheek of the sheep and mixing it with the rice and bread. I was somewhat disgusted watching their fingers going from the plate to their mouths, the slurping and sucking sounds were atrocious and animal like. I tried to hold off on eating by asking a question.

“So how is the town? Do you need anything here?” The mayor looked up and grinned with food still in his teeth.

“You Americans have been here for years now. It’s promise after promise. I need many things...clean water, power that stays on, a working clinic with supplies. But I know you will not give me any of these things. My own daughter has been very sick for a week and we cannot treat her because there is no clinic. Let us just eat so you will not have to lie to me with promises.”

While the mayor was speaking I realized that I might need to take some notes from this meeting. I managed with some difficulty to retrieve my notebook from my cargo pocket and was fumbling with the paper and pencil. When I finally got organized Mohammed chimed in “Sir, you must eat they will be offended.”

I was not about to eat a sheep head so I reached out to get some bread and some rice. The Imam grimaced and in a whining exclamation stood and pointed.

Mohammed tried to translate “sir, he is offended. He asks why you know nothing of their culture. You eat with your offensive hand, disrespect them with the soles of your feet and assault their women”

The Imam yelled something at the mayor and stomped out of the room. The mayor sat and looked at me across the floor.

I said “perhaps it’s best that we go.”

“Perhaps” the mayor said and with that he ushered us out of the room and out to the gate.

“This meeting didn’t go well either I’m doing something wrong or these people just aren’t friendly” I thought. In any case I had made no progress despite my interpreter. “These damn Iraqis must all be hostile.” As I had these thoughts running through my mind I heard the sound of small arms fire in the distance near the out post.

The radio crackled “Contact, sniper TRP 2! OP 6, Engaging!”

We picked up a double time and rushed back toward the out post.

“OP 5 contact dismounts OP 6 they're coming your way”

“I’ve got em”

The sound of 25 mm fire ripped through the air followed by the thuds of the high explosive rounds.

“This is Red 1, SITREP!” I yelled into the radio.

The firing abated as we approached the out post.

“Red 1, Red 4, looks like we have engaged and destroyed one sniper vicinity TRP 2 and three or four dismounts vicinity TRP 3.”

“Roger my dismounted section is moving toward TRP 4. I’ll move to TRP 2 and see if I can clear the area. Have another patrol clear the other contact.”

“Roger that.”

We bounded up to the farmhouse moving in fire teams.

“OP 6 do you have eyes on us?” I whispered into the radio.

The counter-sniper squad designated marksman responded “Roger that 1. I’ve got you. Be advised I engaged one individual second story window.”

We moved up to the house, the farmer and his family were nowhere to be found. We stacked up on the wall and I passed forward a signal to breach by squeezing the man in front of me on the thigh. The four men rushed forward and kicked open the flimsy metal door. We rushed in clearing the lower room in a matter of seconds. My heart pounded as I swept my rifle across the room stepping smoothly through the room to positions of dominance. I remember my old ROTC instructor telling me “slow is smooth and smooth is fast.” He was a delta operator before he came to teach cadets and he was damn right. The section moved like water not frantic or choppy but smoothly between rooms methodically clearing their sectors for enemy. The section split up and moved up the stairs leaving two men to hold the lower level. Shouts of “CLEAR” echoed through the second floor followed by the section sergeant.

“Sir, we’ve got one dead guy up here.”

I walked up the stairs and immediately saw the man on the floor. Blood had pooled under him and he was lying across a small table, his rifle an SVD with a scope was still aimed at the outpost with his head against the stock. He might as well have been alive and preparing to shoot except for a small dark hole just to the inside of his right eye and a rather large flap of skin, skull and hair hanging grotesquely from the back of his head.

As we marked the building with a wolf tail I called up the OP. “OP 6 this is Red 1 good shot you got a sniper up here.”

“Roger that” he responded.

My use of a counter-sniper position had worked out. The enemy sniper might have taken one of my guys out but instead OP 6 had observed the glint from his scope and sent one round of match grade 5.56 from the M16A4 squad designated marksman weapon into his skull and won the engagement. We bagged the dead AIF in a poncho and brought back his weapon to the out post. I also took some pictures of the scene. Maybe the S2 could use some of this info I thought.

When I reached the outpost the platoon sergeant briefed me on the other engagement. It seemed that the Bradley on the TCP had spotted the movement initially and then passed the target to the Bradley

at the gate.

The AIF tried to get in position to fire off RPGs and an RPK but after just couple rounds they were cut to pieces by the 25mm. I was excited that all our hard work on counter sniper and defensive fortifications had worked out but I was frustrated that despite trying to talk to the locals I was still seeing attacks. I was sick of being shot at and attacked by these people. "Who the hell did they think they were? Well if they wouldn't listen to me than maybe we just need to root them out house by house" I theorized.

I called over the Platoon Sergeant "we're going to cordon and search every house on the south side of that village. I'm going to show them what happens when the outpost gets attacked! Figure out a minimal manning plan for the out post and put together an element for tonight at 0200."

I yelled for my interpreter, so that he could prepare for the mission, it was important that all the locals understand my message. After a brief scan around the main building I began to worry. The Platoon Sergeant made a lap around the outpost and reported back to me. "Sir, one of the guys spotted him running into town when we got attacked." Apparently he had been pacing around the outpost as if taking measurements of the outpost earlier during the day and another Soldier claimed that he saw him pass a note to some young Iraqi guy on the street during the patrol. We had been lucky because we avoided setting patterns and changed our switch out times while he was outside the wire with me. I became enraged with the possibility that the interpreter had been gathering intelligence on us and assisting the enemy. I sat down in the main building rested up for the evening.

At 0200 we set out. The outpost was minimally manned with the mortarmen and a section of Bradleys. I had two HMMWVs travel with the dismounted element for crew served weapon support. My plan was simple, we would start in the East and end in the West clearing all of the houses and hopefully catching the bastards that had been supporting the attacks from yesterday. I gave instructions to the team leaders to make sure people felt the pinch of what happens when they harbor insurgents. I wanted these houses turned upside down.

My men started on the first house which had a gate and a wall around its front yard. We used the

HMMWV to smash the gate in and then rushed into the yard to the home. The team used the shotgun to do a ballistic breach on the door. They then rushed into the house. I waited outside for command and control and watched as one of my NCOs drug a skinny middle aged man out of the house in his night shirt with his hands zip tied behind his back. He was thrown to the ground and I noticed that his nose was bleeding. When I heard "CLEAR" come back out the front door I stepped inside. In the first room there were three young girls huddled in the corner with their mother; they were all screaming. My Soldiers were in the process of searching the house the mattresses were overturned, drawers were dumped out of dressers, and furniture was shattered. I went outside to find that the skinny man was being questioned by one of my NCOs and our second interpreter.

"We know that you know who is doing these things! Tell us now!" he yelled.

The man was crying and stammering; he had lost all his dignity. For a brief second I wondered how I would feel if I had been pulled out of my house in the middle of the night and humiliated in front of my family. But it was a fleeting thought besides he probable knew the terrorists who had been attacking us.

We went through ten houses in much the same way. In our wake we left broken doors and gates with houses torn apart. On the last house the breach went in again this time we used a demolition breach and I felt the concussion of the charge. The metal door blasted inward and swung violently on its hinges. As we entered the house we found an old man lying on the floor by the door. He was bleeding and covered with small wounds caused by metal shards blasted into the room from the charge. I brought the medic forward and we treated him. I stepped back outside, the sight of the bleeding old man had turned my stomach. I called for the platoon sergeant and we went over the numbers as the sun came up. We had searched 11 houses, found 8 poorly maintained AK 47s one per house which was authorized for self defense, we zip cuffed and questioned 26 military aged men from 16 to 45 years old, and we found one house with a picture of Saddam in an old school textbook. As the sun came up I wondered if this operation had been worthwhile. I called it and we returned to the outpost.

The next day was uneventful with no sign of enemy activity but then it seemed that everything changed. We began to take contact everyday. Patrols began taking direct fire contact, the out post received mortar fire once or twice a night, and we engaged two VBIEDs at the checkpoints. We identified IEDs on the route and killed some AIF emplacing them but some IEDs managed to go off on our resupply convoys. We weathered the attacks and performed well because of my previous lessons but I couldn't help thinking that something had gone wrong.

A few weeks later the Commander arrived on a visit and had a fairly one sided discussion with me.

“Do you know that you have increased attacks down here by 75% Lieutenant?”

I gulped and felt a burning in my gut “no.”

“Well it's true and your men can't sustain this level of contact forever. I'm replacing you with white platoon. The Squadron Commander is very concerned with your methods down here. The provincial governor has specifically asked him about our activities in Al Doreaa. Pack up and prepare to RIP with white by tomorrow morning” he ordered.

I was crushed. How could I have failed when I hadn't taken a single casualty and defeated countless engagements? I pondered my actions as I packed my rucksack and I derived the following lessons.

10. Cultural awareness is necessary to gain the trust and confidence of the local population.

Negotiations must be planned and rehearsed to ensure success with local leaders.

11. Do not needlessly divulge operational information to people without proper clearances, and do not make it easy for the enemy to gather intelligence on your operations.

12. Win early victories. Have a plan to show good faith and authority with the population within your area of responsibility.

13. Avoid knee jerk reactions and base your actions on good intelligence. Striking out at the population blindly is playing into the insurgent's plan and can only further alienate the people.

The counter-insurgent should seek to make no new enemies.

These epiphanies poured into my head and as I shoved my toiletry kit into the top of my rucksack I found myself pushing open the CO's door and into another dream.

THE FIFTH DREAM

Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is.

- T.E. Lawrence

The Arab Bulletin, August 20, 1917

Once again I found myself receiving the mission briefing. It went much the same as it had before and I left his office after requesting interpreters, barrier material and EOF kits. This time I also requested 50 humanitarian aid bags to hand out to the local population as a sign of good will. I figured that was a quick way to show our intentions were good. I took the time to review some basic cultural information from my Iraq Country Handbook in preparation for my meetings with the population in zone. Once again I inspected the Platoon, reviewed the ROE and made sure language cards were distributed.

We moved down to the out post and established our defense and patrols. I inspected all the positions and then took some time to go over my meetings for tomorrow with Mohammed. Concerned about maintaining good operational security, I first asked Mohammed if he had a cell phone and he said he did. I explained to him that he would only be able to use it once a day and he would have to sign for it from my CP every time he used it. I also informed him that he would always have to stay with us at the outpost and would not be allowed to leave unescorted. He said he understood the need for the measures and with that we rehearsed basic customs and courtesies as well as the flow that should be followed when meeting with the local leadership. I also selected one of my Soldiers, SPC Wilson a street smart guy from Philadelphia, to act as my note taker and second set of eyes for the meeting. I figured he would be able to keep better notes since he wouldn't have to talk and he would be able to catch things I may miss.

In the morning I embarked out on patrol with a section of men and Mohammed. Our meeting with

the farmer went much the same as it had before and we continued on into Al Doreaa. We encountered the Mayor and the Imam outside of the Mayor's house and I immediately began what I had rehearsed the night prior.

“Salaam ‘aleikum” I said and extended my hand.

“Aliekum assalaam” both men responded and shook my hand.

“Ismi mulazim Smith” I said. They introduced themselves and invited us inside the house.

Once inside I removed my helmet and ballistic glasses and told my RTO to monitor the radio and let me know if something urgent happened. The mayor motioned for me to sit down so Mohammed, Wilson and I sat down in the large meeting room. I paid close attention to my feet and my posture. Despite some discomfort I managed to keep the soles of my feet facing in an inoffensive position.

Mohammed had recommended that I start any meeting with small talk.

“It is an honor to meet you gentlemen. You have a lovely village.” Mohammed translated and I continued “I have a river like this back home. I used to fish every summer when I was a kid.”

The mayor smiled widely and responded “it is glorious that you are here. Thank you for all that you do. Yes the village is very nice I have lived here my whole life. Have you ever had Iraqi fish?”

“No, I have never had the pleasure.”

“One day you will come here and I will have this fish for you.”

At this point a boy came from the back room with a plate of chai. I plucked a hot glass from the tray and placed it in front of me on the floor. I stirred the mound of sugar at the bottom into the liquid. For a moment I wondered if they used river water to make the tea but remembering my preparation with Mohammed I said “shukran” and took a sip of the chai. It really wasn't that bad although I would have preferred an iced cappuccino given the 100 degree weather.

I sipped the chai and the Imam asked me “do you have children Lieutenant.”

I refrained from a joke about illegitimate children and answered “I do not, I am not yet married but I hope to one day have a family. My sister has two children and I care for them often.”

With that I pulled out a picture of my niece and nephew. The mayor and the imam seemed excited to see the picture.

“I have four children” the mayor said “one boy and two girls.”

“That is very good.” I paused to take a sip of chai. “How is the village? Is it safe here for your family?”

“The village is in very bad condition we have no running water and electricity goes on and off. We have no clinic here and I cannot even care for my own family. My youngest daughter has been sick for a week but it is dangerous to go to Baghdad for the hospital.”

The Imam simply nodded his head in agreement.

“Listen, you Americans have come here with many promises and I have seen nothing.”

I was about to tell him about how I was going to be different when the food came in. The chai boy and a teenage boy brought in a large tin platter and placed it in the center of the floor. A layer of rice covered the plate and cuts of lamb still on the bone lay on top of it; the meat seemed greenish or a gray white in places from being boiled instead of grilled. In the center of the plate was a split lamb’s head with both eyes boiled to a white haze. I shuddered at the sight of the sheep head staring at me but I reached out with my right hand and ate enough of the vile creature to appease my hosts. The meat was chewy and somewhat slimy because of the method of cooking but it wasn’t too bad. Once the food was finished I excused myself.

“Thank you gentlemen, I’m afraid that I have to get back to the out post.”

Everyone rose and I shook hands as I made my way to the door. The mayor dove in for a pair of kisses but I was ready for it and met him with a couple of my own. “When in Rome” I thought to myself. As I felt his unshaven cheek brush against mine with the smell of cheap cologne I realized I could “win an early victory.”

“Is your daughter here sir? I asked.

“She is in the house...why do you ask?”

I called for the medic; he had been rotating onto a couple of patrols and he happened to be with this section. Doc came up to the door and I told him that the mayor's daughter was sick and any help we could provide would set us up for success in the town.

"I have a medic with me. Can we look at your daughter and see if we can help her?"

The mayor's face lit up and he quickly ran into the house. After a short time he returned with a small girl walking behind him. She was wearing a blue night shirt with a light blue scarf covering her head.

The medic approached her and I asked the mayor "he will need to touch her is this okay?"

"Of course, he is a doctor yes?"

"He is a medic."

Doc asked what the problem was and Mohammed asked the girl. She showed doc two large boils about half the size of a golf ball on her leg. Doc took her temperature and checked her vitals. He whispered to me that he would need to drain the boils and that she would need antibiotics for her fever. I told Mohammed to explain to the mayor what would be necessary and the mayor agreed. He held down his daughter on the floor of the main room as doc wiped down the boils with alcohol. He then pulled out a scalpel and made a small incision in the first boil. He squeezed it firmly and yellow and white fluid drained out from the wound. The little girl was bravely enduring the procedure but was now crying openly. Doc moved on to the second boil and repeated the incision and drainage. Finally doc covered the wounds with antiseptic cream and bandaged them.

"They will need to change these bandages every night" doc said as he handed a small stack of bandages and tape to the mayor. "I'll need to check up on her in a couple of days."

I informed the mayor "we'll come back soon to check on her. I enjoyed our meeting today."

"Thank you, thank you so much!"

With that we made our way out of the house and back toward the outpost. As we moved we came upon a group of SUVs near the school. The SUVs appeared to be armored and looked like the ones VIPs

use to travel around in Baghdad. We approached them to investigate and spotted a group of American civilians and a couple of Soldiers. The civilians were wearing slender body armor and had vests that looked more appropriate for fishing. Two of the men had pads of paper and were taking notes. They turned to us as we reached their position.

“Afternoon gentlemen, I’m Lieutenant Smith I’m in charge of this area.”

The oldest man in the group with salt and pepper gray hair answered for the group. “I’m Bill White, we work with USAID. We’re here to look at the schools and the town’s water systems.”

“Well I didn’t know anything about that. Do you have any security?” I didn’t see much. They were either cowboys or morons traveling around like that.

“We have a couple of rifles in the trucks. Is this area that dangerous I was told it was under control?”

“It’s under control all right; because we’re here controlling it. But, I wouldn’t go tooling around without security in Al Doreaa.” I proudly lectured.

“We’ll we need to complete this work here. Can you secure us until we’re complete?”

I thought it over. The guys were tired and the rest plan was at max efficiency to maintain security at the outpost and run patrols. These yahoos had come here unannounced and unafraid expecting us to provide them with security...forget it.

“Sorry, no can do, I’m maxed out right now and don’t have the combat power to support you. I recommend you guys roll out of here and come back with a security package next time.”

“Okay, well I guess we’ll have to but, these projects won’t be ready for submission and we won’t make it back out here for another month.”

“No sweat, I’ve got this place under control and I’m working projects with my Squadron.” I said succinctly.

Mr. White signaled to his group to mount back up and they quickly moved south down to the hardball road and then towards Baghdad. We also moved out, walking back to our outpost.

That evening I sat down with Mohammed, Wilson and the patrol leaders to go over the patrols from the day.

“I think it went well today with the town leadership” I started.

“Sir, I think you made an impact. I can’t believe you ate that goat head!” Wilson added.

“If Hussein is really in charge he cannot be trusted. He must know who is conducting attacks near this village. I think he knows” said Mohammed.

“That’s right. And that’s exactly why I need him on my side. If he knows the insurgents then maybe he can control them. We’ll go back and check on his daughter tomorrow.”

Red 2 chimed in “The HA bags worked great Sir, I was pretty popular walking through the village. I used the other terp to talk to a couple of old guys near the center of town. They told me that the town used to be very peaceful but people come into town from outside and conduct attacks.”



“I had the same kind of thing sir” said Red 5. “I had a guy tell me that the south side of town is dangerous at night.”

It was all pretty vague but it was a start. I was contemplating our next move when the blast of the mortars disturbed my thoughts. The wizz and crash of the 60 mm rounds impacting around the outpost was tremendous. We had rehearsed the actions on mortar attack so the platoon took cover and moved to the closest position to prepare for a complex attack. The RTO on duty contacted Troop and put in an immediate request for troops in contact AH-64 support.

The platoon dove into their hardened positions or into vehicles according to plan but PVT Jones wasn't so lucky. He was running to help man the southwest machine gun when the round landed just to his right side. He disappeared into a cloud of flying dirt and a flash of light. I ran to him with another man and found him lying on the ground. We each grabbed a shoulder and dragged him back to the cover of the main building. I watched in horror as his legs stayed behind while we pulled him, his two bloody torn stumps dragging on the dirt. The jagged shrapnel had taken both of his legs above the knees. When we reached the inside of the building behind cover I began applying a tourniquet to his left leg and then to his right.

Then the man that was with me just slumped over on the ground next to me with his head in his hands shaking back and forth in gentle sobs. I looked up and turned to Jones' face. He was lifeless with his eyes open but not seeing. A black feeling hovered over the whole room; the feeling of one's own mortality in the very obvious example of another. The last humiliation, a disgusting end to the beautiful thing called life. The explosions stopped and the dust began to settle. I looked at myself in the dimly lit room. I was covered in dust and blood my hands striped with dirt and dark red stains from Jones' wounds. My lungs were heaving in and out trying to exhale the smells of dirt, carnage and cordite. I was sorry for Jones but more than that I was becoming angry.

I felt a burning, frantic almost animal anger. I wanted to kill them all and I could do it. My mind was racing “That damn village knew exactly who was conducting attacks in this zone. They knew who

was conducting attacks in this zone. They knew who killed Jones! They were probably celebrating like children who had gotten over on their parents. Well I would show them who was I charge!” Just then I remembered something “ ‘striking out at the population blindly is playing into the insurgent’s plan’ if I tear through that town I will have done what they want and I will create more enemies.” As I processed this paradox the rest of the platoon was beginning to come by the body.

One man said “we should kill em all. Just unload the 25mm into the town.”

Another “Fuck these people, God damn animals.”

I knew this was going to be tough. I went to my ruck and pulled out a towel to wash off my face. I told the platoon sergeant to bring all the section sergeants in.

This is what I told them. “Alright guys so you all know we lost Jones tonight. No one did anything wrong he was just unlucky and that’s what happens. Now the men are going to want blood. I want blood. But we can’t give in to it; we cannot blindly go after every Iraqi in zone. We will get the men who did this but it will take patience and determination. If we hurt the wrong people we will have created more enemies. Tell everyone that we will follow the ROE and we will treat the locals with respect and tell them that I promise we will find these men and make them pay.” They didn’t like what I said but they respected it and they understood it.

That night a Blackhawk was dispatched with an Apache in support. A group of us carried the body in a black body bag from the outpost to the LZ. He was loaded into the helicopter and as they took Jones’ body away the platoon saluted from their positions. I struggled to keep steady in the rotor wash as the bird lifted off and disappeared into the night sky.

The next day I went to see Mr. Hussein again. We walked in and Doc checked on his little girl again. I sat down and he sat across from me.

“I cannot thank you enough for taking care of my daughter” he said through Mohammed.

“I would like to help the town like I have helped you daughter, but right now it is very dangerous here.”

He moved closer to me “I heard about the attack last night. I am very sorry. Was someone hurt?”

“I lost a Soldier last night.”

Now he whispered “I only want peace for this area. I like you just want to fish and spend time with my family. I know you have a good heart and you have cared for my family. I promise you that no one from this village did this thing last night.”

“Then who did it?” I asked trying to control my anger.

“Some young men in this village do not have jobs and can be persuaded to do things by outsiders. It is possible that some outsiders have come here to cause trouble.”

“Where can I find these men?”

He drew in even closer “near the main road there is a house with a blue gate near the end of the village” he pointed West.

“Can you show me which house exactly?” I asked.

He shook his head wildly “no,no,no. I have said enough this is very dangerous.”

We finished another round of chai and I returned to the out post. We took the long way and found three houses with blue gates by the road.

That night I sat down with the patrol leaders again. Red 2 started off.

“We didn’t find much but I talked to the old guys again and they said bad guys move around at night after midnight near the road. Sorry that doesn’t help much.”

Red 5 jumped in “well I’m not sure if this helps but a guy came up to us while we were on patrol today and said that men in one of the houses were storing weapons. He pointed out the third house from the end on the West side by the road.”

“Did it have a blue gate?”

“Yeah, yeah I think it did, now that I think about it. But we looked around and peeked over the fence. Didn’t see anything out of the ordinary and it didn’t look like anyone was home.”

“The mayor mentioned possible outsiders in a house on the West side with a blue gate. Let’s

establish an OP tonight over-watching that side of town. I want to know if we get any movement around this house. I want Alpha and Bravo section ready to hit the house if we get confirmation tonight.”

The RTO woke me around midnight.

“Sir the OP is reporting something on the south west side of town.”

I jumped up to the radio. “This is Red 1. Over”

“Roger, this is Red 7 I’ve got one sedan with 5 males entering building 3. They appear to be transferring items out of the trunk of the vehicle. Can’t confirm if its weapons or not” came the whispered reply.

It was go time, that was three sources and I had the house now.

“Get everyone up we’re going to hit the house.”

We stalked in under night vision goggles from the south. I was with the assault team and the Platoon Sergeant was with the inner cordon. The inner cordon scrolled across the road and moved into position to the west. We moved from shadow to shadow as we sprinted along the south side of the buildings toward the target building. I spotted the blue gate under the hazy yellow glow of an outdoor light. Red 7 called up as I lit up the door with an IR light

“Roger, that’s it!”

I gave Red 2 the thumbs up and he blitzed to the door with his 4 man stack. The RTO called back to the Bradleys and they began roaring down from the out post to the target house. The breach man cut the lock on the gate and Red 2’s team smoothly moved inside. I moved to the edge of the gate and heard the blast of the shotgun on the front door hinges. I moved into the courtyard as Red 2 pushed through the building. That’s when the shooting started. I heard a burst of AK fire followed by a flurry of M4 fire. I saw one man with an AK 47 climb out of one of the windows and race toward the back of the courtyard toward a walking gate which led to the dirt street behind the house. I took a shot at him but missed. He burst through the gate and was in the street behind the house. I took aim again only to see him jerk unnaturally from his head to his feet as chunks of flesh flew off of his slender body. The Platoon Sergeant

had opened up on him with the M240 and he was now lifeless lying on the dirt.

I called for Red 2 on the radio and got no response. The Bradleys were now right in position sealing off the site. I moved into the house at the low ready

“TWO MEN COMING IN!” I yelled. “RED 2 WHAT’S GOING ON?!”

“We’ve got it sir. Just a little trouble with the radio.”

The handheld MBTR radio had been smashed by an AK round. Inside three Iraqi men were sprawled on the floor with numerous puncture wounds from 5.56. One man seemed to be uninjured and was zip tied in the corner.

“Take a look at this sir”

He opened the door to an adjacent room. Inside was a 60mm mortar tube, rounds, an RPG launcher and a PKC.

“Looks like we got ‘em Sir.”

After the raid, success seemed to follow quickly. The days went by and our mission continued. I worked with the Commander to get a medical team down to the village and we treated most of the people. The mayor and I had dinner every week and made plans for future improvements. I coordinated for clean drinking water to be delivered every other day and we were well liked in the village. I had achieved success. The village and the area were secure and the people were conducting their lives in safety and security. It was about this time that I got the call on the radio.

“Red 1 this is 6. You’ve done great work down there and I need your combat power up North. That area has cooled down and we need the help up here. Have the platoon up here on the FOB by tomorrow.”

Of course I was a little caught off guard but I figured he was right. We weren’t getting any contact and it seemed like the mission down here was accomplished. I met with the mayor and let him know we were leaving. His face seemed like it lost its color and he almost looked through me. He’d be fine I thought and with that we rolled back to the FOB for our next mission.

Several days later, I was watching TV in the chow hall when I saw the footage on the news. I recognized the buildings and the bridge as the newscaster quickly summarized the scene.

“A small village on the outskirts of Baghdad was seized early this morning according to footage found on a radical Islamic website. Video on the site shows masked men moving freely through the town and the public execution of several men.”

The images flashed in front of me. Men in masks with Ak-47s were walking the streets and firing in the air in triumph. I saw the mayor and all the locals that we had developed as informants, their hands and feet tied behind their backs, on the street in front of his house with two masked men standing behind them. Everyone who helped us defeat the insurgents and improve security was lined up in a helpless pathetic heap before the boasting criminals. One man carried a pistol and put it against the mayor’s head...then the screen faded back to the newscaster. I turned back to my bowl of lucky charms and wondered how this could have happened. I had complete control of that area and everything had gone so well. I sat there in the air conditioned dining facility on the FOB for some time and then realized that I had missed a key element to ensure long lasting victory.

14. Counterinsurgency requires unity of effort between the military, non-governmental organizations, host nation government, and other elements of national power. Military efforts on their own cannot create enduring success.

15. Protecting established informants prevents them from being persecuted and ensures they can continue to positively impact their neighborhoods even after coalition forces leave.

16. Transition is primary! In order to achieve lasting success the security and government functions of your area of operations must be transferred to local security forces and local government officials.

The bits of cereal swirled about in the milk and I found myself swirling into yet another dream.

THE SIXTH DREAM

“You can always count on Americans to do the right thing- after they’ve tried everything else.”

- Winston Churchill

I entered the Commander’s office for a sixth time, armed with 16 lessons etched into my mind. I received the mission.

“Do you have any questions?” he asked.

“Sir, I have a few issues...I am concerned with the defense of the site. I would like additional barrier material, sniper screens, sandbags, wire, trip flares, and a couple of EOF kits to secure it.”

“No problem, talk to the XO he’ll get you the materials before you role.”

“Also Sir, if I am to secure this whole area including the town I will need interpreters to get intel from the locals. And, if I could get some additional medical supplies and humanitarian aid bags that might start things out on the right foot down there.”

“I’ll call Squadron and coordinate for two terps for your element. Pick up the HA bags from the FSO.” the commander replied.

“Sorry to seem needy Sir, but what is the situation with Iraqi Security Forces in the area?”

“The Iraqi 2nd Brigade has a Company that is paired with our Squadron’s battlespace. They are supposed to eventually take over the zone but right now they can barely tie their shoes.”

“What are the odds of getting some ISF help in my AO?”

The CO paused “I’ll see what I can do. I have a meeting with General Jassim later this week to coordinate patrols. But don’t get your hopes up.”

“Thanks sir, I’ll get the platoon moving.” I responded and left the office.

I spent some extra time on my order and pulled the platoon in for the operations order. I covered all the standard information and added some critical elements derived from my previous dreams. I described the rules of engagement and the escalation of force procedures in detail and tasked the sections

to rehearse the steps before we SPed. Additionally, I provided details on the specific tribes and cultural norms in the AO. I ended the briefing with a reminder.

“Gentlemen, we MUST gain the trust and confidence of the local population in order to win. The bad guys can’t survive without their active or passive support. Separating the insurgents from the population will be a frustrating and difficult task but it can be done. Our goal will be to make no enemies and end the day with fewer insurgents than we started with.”

We headed out of the FOB and established the out post for the sixth time. The barriers were emplaced; the cones, wire, and signs signaled to those on the roads they were approaching a US checkpoint. Sandbags were filled and the position was fortified. I walked the line and refined the defense clarifying sectors of fire and checking sector sketches. Patrols began shortly after the outpost was set in and I posted the platoon fire plan in the building next to the radios. I spent the evening rehearsing my meetings with the local town leadership with Mohammed the interpreter.

The RTO shook me awake at about 0500.

“Sir, patrol reports eight men in masks with weapons moving toward the outpost along the river to the East.”

I rattled myself awake and stumbled to the hand mike. “This is Red 1 Over.”

“Roger, this is Red 7 I’ve got dismounts moving toward your position along the river in sector B1. Break. I am currently set in OP just east of TRP 3. Over” Came the whispered reply from the radio.

“Roger that Red 7. Can you make it back into the perimeter? Over.”

“Negative, negative. Will be compromised if we move. Over.”

“Roger that Red 7. Go to ground vicinity TRP 3. Mark your position with IR strobe. Over.”

“Wilco.”

I turned to the RTO “Get on the horn to Troop we’re going to need attack aviation. Tell them troops in contact.”

The RTO moved to the other hand mike and I addressed the platoon

“All elements go to 100% security. AIF moving in B1.”

The positions responded in sequence and I moved to the cots waking up the men who were sleeping. I could feel the knot in my stomach clenching down with the anticipation of combat as I donned my body armor and Kevlar. I checked my weapon and locked and 30 round magazine of 5.56. I checked on the Brad at position 6 and reminded them about Red 7’s position. They were weapons hold, and would only be allowed to engage on order, in B2. I didn’t want any friendly fire incidents. Once I was sure they understood I moved to position 2. The position was manned by two of the mortarmen and was now reinforced by 3 more soldiers who had been sleeping but were now straining in the dull morning light to see their adversaries moving on their position. I was looking over the gun when I heard gun fire from the north.

The explosion was deafening and in the growing light I saw a plume of smoke and dust rising from the north side of the compound. I clutched the radio hand mike

“Position 4, SITREP! Position 4, SITREP!”

“Roger...one VBIED engaged and destroyed vicinity position 4”

“Do we have any friendly BDA over?”

“Negative, negative friendly BDA. We got it at the trigger line. No friendly casualties.”

“Roger, continue to maintain security. We will exploit the site after we deal with these dismounts.”

A hazy mist was hanging just above the river and a light haze covered the high reeds on the edge of the river. The team at position 2 was riveted to their sectors. I held the butstock of my rifle against my cheek and scanned with my ACOG. I saw a figure rise from the reeds and grass. He was dressed in black with a black ski mask covering his face. He had an RPG launcher over his right shoulder and he brought the system to bear on our position. My finger moved from the ready to the trigger as the illuminated triangle reticule of my ACOG covered his chest through the sight. Then I saw him lurch back; blood and bits of flesh erupted from his back. Two more shots rang out and another opening appeared in his chest followed by a chunk of his head flying apart. The SDM on the roof had engaged first. I adjusted my aim

and identified the rest of the group.

I fired a couple rounds as the rest of the position opened up. The M240B raked the enemy position. A brave few tried to return fire and a couple of shots wizzed passed our heads but they were quickly cut down. Under heavy fire four of them tried to break contact; three of them were torn to shreds as soon as they got up to move. The fourth man was able to dive into the reeds by the bank of the river and disappear to the East. I waved my hand across my face and yelled.

“CEASE FIRE! CEASE FIRE!”

I called over the platoon net. “All red elements we are now weapons hold on the East side, I say again weapons hold. Break. Red 7, Red 1 over.”

“This is Red 7” “Roger Red 7, we have one AIF moving from position 2 east through B1. Move to kill or capture over.”

“This is Red 7 roger moving.”

I started to get handle on the situation and check for casualties when the radio chimed in again.

“Red 1 this is Blumax 26 over”

“This is Red 1” I responded

“And roger Sir, Blumax 26 with a flight of two AH-64s entering your zone in approximately 5 minutes with 16 HELLFIRE, 38 Rockets, 1 hour 30 minutes station time, requesting friendly situation and task purpose.”

It was the aircraft coming on station.

“Roger that Blumax I have one cav platoon at the outpost vic grid MR123456 and one team of nine personnel to our east we have had VBIED and small arms contact for the last 30 minutes.”

I was going to vector them in on our remaining contact in the East when I heard the mortars. The thud of the launch was clearly on the other side of the river.

“INCOMING!” I yelled in unison with what seemed like the whole platoon.

The first round landed in the middle of the compound.



I grabbed the radio “Blumax, Red 1 I have mortar contact south side of the river, mortar contact South side of the river!”

“Tally that. 5 personnel with mortars on South side. Engaging now with rockets.”

The first Apache roared down the line of the river at tree level and banked hard left over our position. A second Apache came at a higher angle. Wushhhha wushhha wussssha. A thin line of hazy smoke reached out from the aircraft to the ground. The thuds of the impacts caused the platoon to cheer wildly as we stood up from our positions to watch the action.

“3 enemy destroyed, going in for second run.”

The first Apache had come back around from the North and the steady thrap thrap thrap of the chain gun filled the air followed by explosions from the 30mm HE rounds on the mortar site.

“Red 1 this is Blumax 26 I have BDA 5 enemy personnel and one mortar system destroyed, what else do you have for us?”

“Roger that Blumax. Great work. Can you check our perimeter for any additional AIF. Be advised I have one nine man team looking for one AIF to the East along the river.”

“Roger that Red 1 checking your perimeter now.”

I ran to the building and met up with the Platoon Sergeant. We had zero casualties as of now and he already had a team preparing to recon the mortar site. I called Red 7 for a sitrep.

“Red 7 this is Red 1 SITREP over.”

“Roger Red 1, we have one detainee. Standby.”

I was happy about that and I went toward the Bradleys to check out the VBIED. I walked outside the compound and saw a burning hulk next to the orange cone marking the EOF trigger line for the Bradleys. I was about to congratulate the crews when the radio squelched again.

“Red 1 this is Red 7 we have one detainee with one AK 47. We are moving back to the outpost now.”

The Apaches came back up “Red 1 this is Blumax 26 we have negative contact along your perimeter. We have eyes on your element with the detainee. Over”

“Roger that I’m moving a team across the bridge to exploit the mortar site. Protect that element to enable site exploitation over.”

“This is Blumax 26 WILCO.”

I spotted Red 7 and his team crossing the road and entering the compound from the East. I went back inside to take a look at the detainee. He was covered in mud and the blood of his friends still covered his shirt and face. He was young maybe 20 years old with a baby face. His hands were zipcuffed behind his back and he looked more like a curfew violator than a terrorist. I had Red 7’s section drop there gear in the building and the mortarmen took over detainee watch. We cleaned off his face and worked on the detainee procedures. We took his picture, retinal scan, and fingerprints using our biometric device then Mohammed and I started to ask him questions.

“What is your name?”

“Mohammed Al Jabori” he answered softly.

“How many were with you?”

“Six” he said.

“Where are you from?”

“Al Doreaa”

“Why did you attack us?”

He didn't answer.

“Do you have a job?”

“No”

“Who told you to attack? Who is in charge of you?”

“Kassim...Kassim.”

“Who is Kassim?”

No answer.

“Who is Kassim?”

Mohammed jumped in “Sir, I don't think this guy he will tell you anything he knows he is in trouble. This guy is just a kid.”

“I understand Mohammed.” I said and with that I had the mortarmen take him out to the site of the attack. They took his picture with his AK 47 in front of the dead bodies of his fellow insurgents with the RPG and other weapons still lying on the ground. I figured this “money shot” would help with prosecution.

We completed site exploitation at both sites. The Squadron QRF composed of a platoon of four gun trucks and EOD arrived to help with the effort. We handed off the detainee and the data to the QRF for processing by the S2 shop. EOD checked out the VBIED and took pictures and shrapnel; we used a Bradley to push the VBIED carcass off the road. Once things were under control I figured this was a good opportunity to get back on my original plan and visit the local population. “Maybe some intel could

prevent more attacks in the future” I thought. I was preparing for the dismounted patrol when four Toyota pick ups full of Iraqi Soldiers pulled up to the outpost.



The Iraqi soldiers wore desert tan uniforms with the old chocolate chip pattern from desert storm. Most of them had body armor of one kind or another. They all carried AKs except for the man who walked up to me who only carried a pistol holstered on his hip.

“Hello, I am Lieutenant Habir I have been assigned to this post. Are you Lieutenant Smith?” he said in heavily accented English.

“Yes, I am. And I’m glad to see you.”

With that we sat down in the house and he gave me his unit status. He arrived with four Toyota trucks and 20 personnel all armed with AK-47s with 4 PKCs. He had a basic load of ammunition for his weapons and food was supposed to be picked up daily from a town north of our position. I brought Habir up to speed on the events of the morning and we designated an area for his forces to set up their gear and

park their vehicles. We also decided to integrate them into the defense after they had established themselves.

“I was about to go into town and meet the local leaders. Would you like to go with me?”

“Sure, sure, this is a good idea.” He replied.

We linked back in with my patrol and he grabbed two of his men and we walked out of the outpost toward Al Doreaa.

As we walked through town the Iraqi soldiers seemed at ease and spoke with the locals as we passed them near the small food stands. Habir was approached by a short man in a dirty dishdasha with a thick mustache, they shook hands heartily and kissed on the cheeks. Habir broke off his conversation and turned to me.

“This is my cousin Ahmed, he lives in this town.”

Ahmed reached out his hand to me as Habir introduced me in Arabic. Ahmed invited us to his home for chai and Habir accepted. The patrol moved North following Ahmed to his small house. We moved through the rusted metal gate and into the courtyard. We entered the front room of his house which was open with pillows and a large rug on the floor. We sat down and Ahmed went back to start the chai. Mohammed sat next to me and translated for me as Habir and Ahmed spoke to each other.

“How is your father?” Habir asked.

“He is well. And how is your family, they are well?” Responded Ahmed.

“Yes fine.”

“I didn’t expect to find you here, I thought you were in Baghdad. Al Doreaa is not a safe place.”

Ahmed now addressed us as well “I love the Americans, but some here in town have fought the occupation. Many have allowed this but now foreigners and criminals have made this place unsafe. People are tired of the violence and want peace.”

“I understand Ahmed and I am here to help. I am truly here to help Habir bring safety to the town” I pulled out my wallet with pictures of my Sister, niece, and nephew. “This is my family, I want nothing

more than to make this village safe and allow Iraqis to govern Iraqis.”

Ahmed nodded and then looked to the door. A man walked into the room Ahmed rose to greet him. The man introduced himself as Mr. Hussein the mayor of the village. Habir rattled off some small talk and the discussion turned to the state of the town.

Mr Hussein said “the town is in desperate need of medical care we need immunizations and a clinic; it is too hard to reach a hospital in Baghdad.”

“I may be able to help” I responded. “I have some medical supplies. Do you have a town doctor?”

“No we do not, this is a big problem”

“I will try to help.”

“I will believe it when it happens. I have had four years of promises.”

We finished our chai and rose to leave. Habir stayed inside with his cousin for several minutes as we moved outside. When he returned he pulled me aside

“Arnold, my cousin told me of big bad guy in town. He is willing to help us, tonight if we are ready.”

“Let’s look at what we have when we get back to the outpost” I responded.

We completed our patrol, Soldiers handed out HA bags and the IA spoke freely with the population.

Upon return to the outpost I had two pressing priorities: one was to find out how to get medical treatment to the town and the other was to consolidate the intel from today’s patrols. I thought through the medical request, I could use my medics and small package of medical supplies to treat the population or I could get Squadron to cough up a bigger team with the PA and Doc. Neither option met the lessons that were running through my head...I wondered how could I empower the local government and security forces as well as focus on transition. But I also had a need to win an early victory! I established a compromise and I was determined to put it into action. I tasked the RTO to work some details with the Squadron and briefed the medics.

Next I took on the intel issues. I pulled in the Squad leaders and brought in Habir to review the actions during the day.

The Platoon Sergeant started “Sir, we received some intel from higher while you were on patrol. It seems that when EOD went through the VBIED from this morning they found that the VIN was linked to a group of vehicles purchased in Syria and linked to other bombings. They gave us the name Kassim Fareed who apparently is the leader of the local Al Qaeda faction. Also looks like the guy we got this morning is singing and says Kassim lives near the Sunni mosque in Al Doreaa with a few body guards. Squadron has made him an HVT.”

Habir jumped in “my cousin also mentioned this name he says this ‘Kassim’ moved into the village two weeks ago and killed several villagers. He told me that he would show us the house tonight.”

“Looks like we have a date with Kassim tonight.”

“My element must execute this operation” stated Habir. “It is our country and we will capture this terrorist.”

“Okay, sounds good but we will provide your outer cordon and some additional firepower with the M3s.”

With that Habir and I completed our plan and set a 0400 hit time on the house.

At 0330 Habir and his men left the outpost and walked into town. They met with his cousin and quickly moved to a small house on the south side of town. I had a dismount team on the south side of the road and an M3 section moving into position to support when they entered the building. By 0405 they were exiting the building with four men in zip cuffs. Inside the house was a small cache of rifles and IED making material. I moved onto the site with the exploitation team and did the evidence collection on the site. One of the men was identified by Ahmed as Kassim Fareed. He and his men were then picked up by the Squadron QRF and moved back to the FOB for interrogation. The Iraqis had completed the raid successfully on their own and Kassim was off the street.

The day wasn't over though and after a brief recovery we were back in town to meet with the

mayor. We knocked on his gate and sat down in his home. I had rehearsed the meeting with Habir ahead of time and he began.

“I was able to work with the Americans to assist your village today. As you know we captured a major criminal in your village this morning but we know that you have been in evil’s grip and this is not your fault. The Americans have some supplies to treat 30 villagers today children and elderly only. But this will not truly help the town. I understand you do not have a doctor?”

“This is true we have no doctor.”

“I will need you to select one man from the town to be trained by the American medics. He will act as your town doctor. Also I have coordinated with the Health Ministry to have your town and possible clinic locations inspected.”

The mayor was ecstatic “thank you this is wonderful.”

“Finally I will need three names of men willing to be trained as police to keep the town safe. Initially we will train them and then they will attend the police academy.”

“You will have them today.”

We treated a small number of the population and were met with smiles and happiness from the villagers. The mayor personally selected those to be treated and the man who would be trained in medical care. The Iraqis handled the crowd control and easily managed the situation.

As time progressed we continued to assist Habir with projects and additional assets. He and his men developed a great relationship with the population and gained control of the terrain. The IP candidates received basic skills training at the outpost and were later sent to the academy. The mayor was linked in with the health ministry and was able to speak with his provincial leaders above him to coordinate for supplies. Al Doreaa had turned a corner. Iraqis conducted most of the patrolling with the platoon focused on night patrols and OPs. It was at this point that the CO came down to visit.

“You’ve done a great job here Smith. But it’s time to pack it up. We are headed to Haditha to support operations there. The IA are being given control of this AO.”

After we packed our gear and lined up to leave I spoke to Habir for the last time.

“Don’t worry about us. This is our fight and only we can win it. Thank you for your help we can take it from here.”

I smiled and climbed into my HMMWV it had been a success at least as much of a success as you can have in counter-insurgency. As we drove off I thought about how good the Silver Star would look on my uniform.

The thud of the wheels hitting the runway woke me from my slumber and as I shook off the ungodly effects of the sleeping pills I realized that I was only just now arriving in Kuwait.

ACRONYM LIST

AIF- Anti-Iraqi Forces

Bradley- Bradley Fighting Vehicle also M3 or CFV

CFV- Cavalry Fighting Vehicle

CO- Commanding Officer

COP- Combat Outpost

EOF- Escalation of Force

FOB- Forward Operating Base

HA- Humanitarian Assistance

HEMTT- Heavy Equipment Medium Truck Transport

HIC- High Intensity Conflict

HMMWV Highly Mobile Multi-Wheeled Vehicle

IED- Improvised Explosive Device

NAI- Named Area of Interest

NCO- Non-Commissioned Officer

MEDEVAC- Medical Evacuation

MRE- Meal Ready to Eat

PCC/PCI- Pre-Combat Checks and Inspections

PSG- Platoon Sergeant

ROE- Rules of Engagement

RTO- Radio Telephone Operator

SP- Start Point

TCP- Traffic Control Point

VBIED- Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device