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The last thing a Company Commander expects following the Captain's Career Course is to take command of his company, then immediately remove the most experienced and talented leaders and quickly deploy them on an advisor team to Afghanistan. Even more unexpected is to leave your company behind while you lead a 12 man team in Afghanistan advising a battalion-sized (Kandak) element, at an echelon of leadership above any of your own experiences. The Brigade I was assigned to, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault), Task Force Strike, was one of the first BCTs to get assigned this mission set. This article will describe how A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Special Troops Battalion, approached this mission from the initial stage of training through the Relief-in-Place (RIP), in order to provide future advisor teams with some expectation management and lessons learned. Based on the evidence of our deployment, I will make a recommendation about what the focus of advisors should look like in order to be successful in today's Afghanistan.

### **INITIALLY**

Initially, the first whiff of the mission smelled terrible and as a new Company Commander three months into my mission I was a bit disheartened. I wondered why the "Big Army" was going to turn my

Company Command into advising a group of Afghan Soldiers? Don't these guys in the Pentagon understand what happens at the Soldier level when you have not just a transition of leadership, but a depletion of leadership? The new mission would take all of my Platoon Sergeants and above out of their green tab positions, an event that would end up having a negative impact on the behavior of my lower-enlisted Soldiers. However, the mission must be accomplished, so we all handed the reins to our next in line leaders and started up an intense training cycle with our new Advisor teams (later called Security Force Advise and Assist Teams). The initial objective was simply to learn to work together in a tactical environment while meeting all of the minimum pre-deployment requirements set forth by the Army.

As we all arrived back from holiday leave the excitement began, but so did the confusion, as everyone was uncertain as to who to go to for the normal garrison issues and who to take marching orders from. This was a very stressful time for the entire Chain of Command, leading to a lot of one-way conversations. I could see everyone up and down the chain of command stressed to the maximum while trying to accomplish a lot in a minimal amount of time.

### **TRAIN-UP**

The train-up consisted of two months of hustling through all the required pre-deployment training: qualifying on your assigned weapon, treating a casualty, Close Quarters Marksmanship, conducting familiarization fire with all the weapons we were taking down range, calling for fire through use of Close Combat Air support, and a comprehensive Situational Training Exercise (STX). That doesn't include the 120 hours of classroom training that took place ranging from insider threat to learning about Harris Radio Systems. With all this accomplished, we packed up our belongings and headed for the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), which almost seemed like a relief. Yes, JRTC a relief.

During the bus ride from Fort Campbell, KY to Fort Polk, LA, both my team and I read through all the required reading Brigade and Battalion had been pushing down on us for the last two months, and for a moment it felt like I could concentrate on the mission. We arrived to Fort Polk, LA and began the 162<sup>nd</sup> Brigade's Tigerland Advisor Academy. No one really knew what to expect since this was a very new mission, and the last time we had heard about anything like this was the Military Transition Teams that were trained at Fort Riley and sent over to Iraq. The Advisor Academy was very well done, consisting of language training, cultural training, practice KLEs with retired ANA, and what our role would be on the battlefield as per FM 3-07.1. We would learn in-depth that "security force assistance is the unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host-nation or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority." As advisors we would use a mutually developed bond of trust to provide our counterparts with expert opinions, advice and counsel. The distinctive feature is that the recipient is responsible for making the decision while the advisor provides only advice. Basically, we learned that we were in some form or fashion deploying to be the ANA's Observer/Controller.

As we headed to "the box" for our rotation, we did not really know what to expect or how we would be tactically employed by the Battle Space Owner (BSO) from 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. The JRTC Staff arranged the advising mission as best as they could considering the challenges associated with a change of mission. My 12 man team advised approximately eight ANA Soldiers and four ANA Staff

Officers that were in fact all young US Soldiers from Geronimo who really didn't grasp what it meant to be a staff (to their credit, they tried very hard). We taught a few classes to our counterparts, and were used by the BSO as more of a surgical force on objectives. My team of advisors probably learned the most from watching what the O/Cs did and how they talked over their O/C net. I believe more would have been accomplished if our tasks had been to participate in STX lanes for battle drill refinement, then advise the BCT through Force-on-Force.

My biggest take-away was that in order to be successful as a team, I needed 12 extraverts that could speak clearly, foster relationships, buy into the mission, and could tactically protect the group at each point from the 1 o'clock to the 12 o'clock position. By the end of our rotation I knew what personnel changes needed to be made, and I made them within the limits placed on me by my command. But overall I had a great team, and I knew I was ready to deploy with them.

### **The Deployment**



We named our 12 man element "Team Beast," from Alpha Company, Sapper Beast back at Fort Campbell, KY. We packed up after a nice two week block leave following JRTC and headed for Afghanistan. We were told by our Division Commander, Major General McConville, prior to leaving that we were the "A-Team" going in to

help our country transition the responsibility for security in Afghanistan to the Afghan National Security Forces. At this point, I was still not sold on the mission we were going to be a part of, but I also knew that you can never choose the mission the Army gives you; you can only do your best to accomplish that mission. In candid fashion, this was preached to Team Beast, and everyone was on board with the initial 60 day campaign plan. The key tasks laid out from the start were simple: 1) provide full-time focused attention on our counterparts; 2) develop a genuine relationship; 3) create a plan based off your initial assessment – just remember to apply Afghan solutions to ensure the way forward was "Afghan Sustainable;" 4) understand their systems and advise the ANA to coordinate and use their outside entities (i.e. the Operations and Coordination Center-Provincial, Afghan Uniformed Police, Afghan Border Police and Afghan Local Police); 5) integrate coalition enablers to prevent catastrophic failure.

Team Beast arrived to COP Fortress after approximately two weeks of travel and conducting reception, staging and onward integration (RSOI). The Major with whom we conducted our relief in place had been sent by the BSO Brigade to lay the groundwork for our relationship with our counterparts and, finally, we were hard at work like we all wanted to be.

### **Building Rapport**

Trust is the key to any good relationship and unfortunately can't be built overnight, especially in the Middle East. From the start we got to know them as people, we were honest and direct about issues and gained their trust and loyalty on the battlefield through partnered operations. However, the relationship did not start very easily. The kandak had just received a new Commander who seemed to be somewhat of a sycophant, but then I remembered my first 30 days of command and how I didn't really say much either until my Soldiers got to know me and trust me as their Commander. The Commander ended up being a great addition to the kandak once he got to know his men and his advisors.

Initially, as advisors we were only asked to help provide bottled water, Chigo and generator parts, and it seemed like that was all we were good for to the ANA. I thought to myself this is going to be a great deployment, fetching stuff for our counterparts to get them to want to work with us, but as a team we stuck to our guns and remembered what we were there to do. TM Beast was there to advise, assist and train the CS Kandak to increase their operational effectiveness and allow them to take the lead in enabling their Brigade; meanwhile holding the gains made by the combined team. It only took a couple rounds of chai drinking and breaking bread with our counterparts and the next thing we knew we were standing in front of the Kandak formation getting introduced to all the Soldiers. The Commander explained how fortunate they were to have us there to assist them as we transition the security in Afghanistan back to the ANSF. He got it. The Company Advisors were making terrific headway with their counterparts at the Company (Toulay) levels with mission planning, conducting maintenance, coaching various types of training, encouraging religious and education classes, or sharing risk on missions. Through this we saw the Kandak's command climate and attitude toward us change before our eyes.



### **Initial Basic Approach**

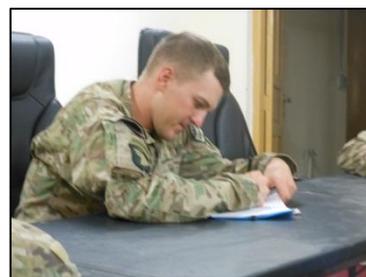
Team Beast used the War Fighting Functions to assist the Kandak Leadership and Staff in solving its own problems; specifically in the Mission Command, Enabler, and Sustainment lines of effort. We started very simple with a Personnel Asset Inventory (PAI) every US Army Commander does before he takes command. This assisted us in creating a picture filled tashkil (MTOE) that became a working project for the entire deployment. Eventually, the Kandak's Companies saw the importance of platoon, squad and team level integrity while the Kandak Commander started to see his capabilities and how he could affect the fight. Next, we were able to help the Kandak Staff establish a basic battle rhythm. This included a Commander's Update Brief every Sunday and Tuesday, a Kandak Accountability formation every Monday and Wednesday, and maintenance on Thursday. From there the Company Advisors were able to kick it into high gear developing "train the trainer" programs. The idea is that we build up the



Afghan NCO Corps, thus empowering the backbone of their formations. This gave the NCOs a chance to get in front of their Soldiers and teach them with confidence which in turn earned their Soldiers respect. The next step was to get the Toulays to somehow conduct an inventory without us being the ones counting the equipment; so we focused on the importance of it at every level throughout the chain of command. Soon enough the Kandak was conducting layouts, sensitive item inventories, inquiring how to get broken weapons fixed versus getting their chigos fixed, cleaning up their work areas, and getting key boxes organized. A pride factor was started and became prevalent on future missions.

### **Leading the Company from “Half a World Away”**

While myself and the leadership of Alpha Company were forward deployed, 90% of the remaining Soldiers were left under the care of junior leadership to persevere through the remaining Soldier issues and train to be proficient at the team and squad level. I was told in my initial counseling that Commanders do four things for their unit: provide a vision; establish a healthy command climate; make decisions; and lead by example through crisis situations. At first I considered this a crisis situation that I would need to provide a vision for because I knew there would be confusion at the lower levels of the organization if I didn't. I would have to accept the fact that I would leave Company into our Junior Leaders hands and they would run with my weighty, yet attainable training guidance. Fortunately, my 1SG and I had a great leader team that we could leave behind and ensure the Company moved from point A to point B along the continuum with unity of effort and pride all the while managing the Soldier issues and keeping us informed down range. The training guidance went along the lines of getting Soldiers to schools to develop them as leaders and improving their military resume for their next mission or position inadvertently helping the Company as well. Also, take advantage of this time and conduct three major training events (where the train-up to the event is at least three weeks so all conditions are set) while I'm gone: a Team/Squad Level Live Fire Exercise, a Squad Level Air Assault and a host a Fort Campbell Sapper Stakes Competition. My intent was that these big ticket events would give our Soldiers and Leaders something to aim for and not the daily hurry-up and wait Army that we have been a victim of for the past 10 years with year on, year off deployments; while still accomplishing the Strike guidance to be able to continue with a 'running start' at the PLT level when leaders returned. The Company superbly continued the mission under the reigns of a keen junior leadership team and



minimal guidance because I knew I was not going to be able to make the everyday small ticket decisions from Afghanistan with another mission on my plate. Bottom line is that you must trust the men you're leaving in charge and let them lead a company like a garrison company and not a Rear-Detachment; while keeping a pulse and applying pressure when required.

### **Losing the Partner Force- Picking up the Battlespace Integrator Mission**

Halfway through the deployment our US Partner Force, Chosen Company, 2-12 Infantry Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> BCT, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was pulled from us, leaving us with a much smaller footprint and almost hamstrung to the COP.

The first thing I could recall was a Senior Leader telling me that the brass was slowly taking us out of the fight whether we thought so or not. With all the tactical directives and requirements you must follow just to put a patrol on the road his guidance was turning out to be true. In losing the partner force, my team of advisors had to step it up in all aspects of the mission. We took over all the contracts, force protection, and clearance of fires. Additionally, I had Command and Control of our PLT sized SECFOR element and sustainment enablers. This allowed for Team Beast to increasingly adopt a supporting and advisory role IAW the SFA model; thus making Team Beast the first true “Advisor Battle Space Integrator (BSI)” and a test bed for our 1/101 replacements on how we conducted business in Kunar Province and whether the model supported a BSI SFAAT. The space created allowed the Team to confidently confirm that 4/2/201 was capable of leading operations with the ISAF partnering/advisor force withdrawn to COP Fortress and receiving the same results on all fronts as both a battle space owner and enabler.

### **Advice for Future Advisors**

As in any deployment you find many things that work and don’t work. Along the Mission Command line of effort we found that our Kandak was doing an effective job on their own: conducting well-informed combined arms rehearsals; albeit last minute, conducting insightful Commander’s Update Briefs, and coordinating with external agencies without being told to do so. As a CS Kandak their job was to provide their Brigade with Engineers (survivability, countermobility and mobility support), Fire Support, and a Reconnaissance capability. Fortunately, the enabler partner forces were here to help us in this regard. They provided full-time trainers for all Fire Support elements, which are now capable of providing Indirect Fire support on pre-planned and on-call targets. The EOD Response element was partnered with a CF EOD Unit to train on properly neutralizing IEDs. So the Kandak was able to provide the enablers their BDE asked for while holding down two districts in the Kunar River Valley with their Sapper and Recon elements; equaling mission success or “Afghan good enough.” The thing we could not help them get right was logistics.



Either way my advice to SFAAT Advisors is very rudimentary:

- **Find parallels to our Army** - Find parallels of how the US Army does things and try to model that, but understand that it will be culturally different. Accept ‘sustainable’ and move on.
- **Understand the ANSF** – Use T.E. Lawrence’s 27 principles everyday and understand that these ANSF Soldiers, Police and Patrolmen are born warriors. They can move up mountains like a billy goat and have no issue in employing Infantry Tactics; it is a talent they innately have here being born into a war-torn country. You do not need to teach them this!



- **Develop their Backbone** - If you find yourself at the Kandak Level your Company Advisors need to be advocating literacy training and teaching them how to read a map so they can call for fire on the enemy. They are capable of learning and many of them actually enjoy

the attention. You should not be teaching them how to march or conduct physical training... remember time is of the essence and this should not be one of your priorities. These classes need to be taught to their Soldiers by their high-speed NCOs just as in our Army – two fold results – takes out the language barrier once the NCO is proficient and strengthens their NCO Corps.



➤ **It's People! Not Paperwork!** - My team came over here with the idea that we were going to solve their logistical issues by shadow tracking MOD-14s; not the case. You must look at the MOD-14 as an Operational Needs Statement versus a CL IX requisition through our SAMS-E box; it's a tougher process. It requires "human interaction" on the ANSF end in order to get their requisitions sourced, the part of the US Army I personally believe we are lacking in due to our advances in technology. Your job is to take them to the point of distribution and show them how important it is to get out there and know who to call or "beat up" in order to get what they need. Then your shadow tracking mechanism may come in a bit more handy and not have red all over it.

- **Soldiers First** - At the end of the day it is all about Leaders taking care of Soldiers just as in any organization. You need to make it a priority to work with the ANSF on how to provide decent facilities for their Soldiers, equipment that works, and a worthwhile mission. We always have the same questions: Why are the ANSF are not capable of running their own bases, why is there such a high AWOL rate, and why do we have insider attacks? I believe these questions are very simple to answer; we have not made it a priority to show levels below BDE and PHQ GSU what it takes to run a facility because we have been so focused "outside the wire." If their Soldiers are cared and provided for, the aforementioned issues will continue to decrease. On the contrary, if the Soldiers have a better life in their rural homes and then treated like cavemen when they join the ANSF; your product will be cavemen who don't necessarily want to be in the organization anymore.

## **Conclusion**

Our nation's leadership got advising and assisting right as we transition Afghanistan. In this case, a Security Force Advise and Assist Team came from a unit with a pre-established chain of command creating the competitive environment needed to make teams take ownership for the results of their counterparts. It also provided an effective O/C net where raters, senior raters and reviewers know their subordinates and can apply necessary amounts of pressure to get results. The Security Force Assistance model also created a unity of effort that is critical to the mission set when there can be many "hands in the pot," however it kept all efforts firing for effect on the same objectives. Looking back, I would happily do this mission again knowing what I know now. So if you're afforded the opportunity to lead such a critical team at a critical juncture in our nation's history... try to see the big picture and embrace it from the beginning.

