

Lessons Learned From Convoy Operations in Iraq

CPT Rolando Perez (Note: The following has been edited for website approval)

Convoy operations are combat operations for combat service support (CSS) units currently deployed to Iraq. During *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, CSS units quickly found out that logistics package (LOGPAC) convoys became primary targets for attack. Leaders must be ready to react to any possible threat. To ensure the success of a convoy mission, leaders need to follow all the established basic procedures, pay attention to details and learn from mistakes.

From the beginning of April 2003 to the end of July 2004, LOGPAC convoys were going out of the gate in every direction. The Regimental Support Squadron was supporting more than 5,000 Soldiers in Iraq, including the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment and its attached units. Spread over a complex area of operations, the Regimental Support Squadron mission started in the city of Baghdad and later moved to a wider area that included the cities of Al Kut, Ad Diwaniyah, An Najaf and their surroundings.

The Regimental Support Squadron's direct support (DS) mission included picking up all classes of supply, transporting these supplies to the processing centers and then redistributing them to the different forward operating bases supporting the combat efforts of the maneuver elements. Managing this DS mission required coordination in great detail and extensive preparation to ensure the safety of Soldiers. Successful mission accomplishment required the participation of every leader at all levels of the chain of command.

Before the fight, Soldiers and equipment must be ready for battle. The readiness process begins with following basic procedures, most already established in standing operating procedures or developed as a result of combat lessons learned on a day-to-day basis.

Pre-convoy Procedures

Before a mission, all Soldiers need to report to the vehicle staging area at least two hours before the convoy departs. The Regimental Support Squadron found that two hours gave enough time to react to any personnel, maintenance and communication shortfalls. It also allowed time for conducting roll call and accountability for sensitive items during this time.

The convoy's noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) checked for current vehicle dispatches, ensured performance of preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS), conducted communication checks (Frequency Modulation and Military Tracking System) within the convoy's vehicles and with

the tactical operations center (TOC), and also made sure of enough recovery assets. The convoy itself must be able to recover any disabled vehicles. Remember, every convoy that can “self-recover” does not need to be stuck on the side of the road exposed to the enemy while waiting for a wrecker.

Another recommendation is for the convoy to take spare tires and additional tools to save time in the recovery of broken vehicles. It is strongly recommend taking a hydraulic jack instead of the time-consuming type of jack that is standard issue with the high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle. Be aware that time can either be the convoy’s ally or worst enemy once out of the gate. Fast recovery of disabled vehicles will keep Soldiers safe. This recommendation also gets Soldiers to their destination and off the roads as soon as possible.

The convoy commander prepares a plan, receives the intelligence brief of the route from the S2 (Intelligence Officer) and then conducts a convoy briefing. The commander’s convoy briefing must include the mission objective, the primary and alternate routes, the enemy situation and, more important, rehearsals. Do not take convoy rehearsals lightly; rehearsals must become routine. Remember, reduced reaction time because of rehearsals will make the difference between an accident on the road and smooth convoy travel to and from the destination. It is advised to rehearse leaving the front gate, actions on contact, vehicle breakdown procedures, actions on blocked routes and, more important, the nearest locations for casualty evacuation.

Convoy Operations

The security of the convoy and the ability to destroy any threat relies on the convoy’s “gun trucks.” When the Regimental Support Squadron first started conducting operations, two gun trucks were used for each convoy. As the number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Iraq and attacks on convoys increased, the number of gun trucks was increased to four. Using four gun trucks allowed better command and control of the convoy and more flexibility. This flexibility allowed better performance in a convoy and generated new battle drills, such as the “Block and Run.”

The “Block and Run” battle drill is used to screen for IEDs on the road and to deal with traffic. With four gun trucks, two designated as “jump trucks” screened 300 to 400 meters ahead for IEDs while clearing traffic for the convoy. The other two gun trucks remained with the convoy, one in the front and one in the rear to secure the convoy formation.

When blocking traffic, the “jump trucks” must be synchronized with each key point along the convoy’s route. As each “jump truck” approaches an off-ramp, an intersection or a choke point, the truck commander (passenger in the front seat with the driver) dismounted and used arm signals to hold up traffic. At the same

time, the gunner protects the truck commander by pointing a crew-served weapon toward the traffic. The driver of the “jump truck” maintains communication with the convoy’s lead vehicle, specifying the situation at the “jump truck’s” location and also waiting for instructions on when to move to the next choke point or traffic intersection.

The “jump trucks” also clears traffic for the convoy and provide leaders with warnings to slow down the convoy, while they clear a lane through the civilian traffic on Iraq’s roadways. Drivers have to use every possible signal - from beeping a vehicle’s horn to yelling and giving hand and arm signals to local nationals to move aside. As a last resort, gun trucks guide civilian vehicles off the road if necessary. After “jump trucks” begin clearing traffic, close the distance between them and the lead vehicle to avoid civilian vehicles taking up any open space and getting mixed with military convoy vehicles. The goal is to allow a fluid movement of the convoy and never to stop. A stopped convoy is immediately vulnerable to an attack. With time, the crews on gun trucks become experienced and efficient with blocking traffic for the convoy.

Post-convoy Procedures

After return to the convoy’s compound, the convoy commander is required to go to the TOC and close out the mission with the S3 (Operations Officer). The commander also is debriefed by the S2 and provides the S2 with any new information observed about the enemy while traveling in the convoy. The convoy commander reports to the materiel management center (MMC) and the support operations officer (SPO). Both the MMC and the SPO need information about any commodities brought back and any logistical information found out during the mission. The convoy commander then returns to his unit to brief the unit commander and conducts an after action review. This information flow among the convoy commander, S3, S2, MMC, SPO and unit commander allows establishing new convoy procedures based on the lessons learned that day.

The convoy NCOIC ensures after-action PMCS of the convoy vehicles. The NCOIC also ensures that Soldiers conduct maintenance of all weapons, especially the crew-served weapons. The Iraqi desert environment will damage weapons with sand, dust and heat. This was learned the hard way by having weapons malfunction. The problem was solved by making sure that all crew-served weapons on the convoy were cleaned, PMCS was performed and all functions were checked before storing weapons in the arms room.

Crew-served weapons on gun trucks provide force protection to the convoy. More important, crew-served weapons serve as a show of force to deter possible attackers. Remember, convoy protection is all about perception. If the enemy perceives that a convoy is capable of defeating an ambush, the enemy will be less likely to attack the convoy.

In conclusion, the enemy during *Operation Iraqi Freedom* can be unpredictable. However, following these procedures for convoy operations can eliminate some of the controllable variables on the road. Eliminating these controllable variables gives convoys an edge in defeating the enemy, safeguarding Soldiers and accomplishing the CSS mission. Reinforcement of basic procedures allows convoy commanders to be aggressive leaders, able to react at any situation without hesitation.

Tips for Convoy Planning and Operations

CPT Christopher M. Neal

During *Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003*, offensive operations took the 26th Forward Support Battalion (FSB), 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division over 750 kilometers of hostile enemy territory from Camp Virginia in Kuwait, to Baghdad International Airport in Iraq, and to the final destination of Fallujah, Iraq. From my vantage point as assistant S3 (Operations Officer)/battle captain, I will discuss the key preparations of our convoys before "crossing the berm," precombat checks/precombat inspections (PCC/PCI), coordination with the Field Artillery and brigade tactical operations center (TOC), and our actions at our final destination.

Recommendations From Experience

What the 26th FSB learned in Iraq can assist future support officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) planning for convoy operations, as well as convoy defense. In no way are any of the topics I discuss an absolute or a standing operating procedure (SOP). I hope that whoever reads this article will learn something to add to the unit's SOP or implement in the unit. Most of my experience was during offensive operations. I further hope that individuals/units will implement information from this article into the current stability and support operations (SASO) in Iraq.

Fortunately, the 26th FSB had six months of training time in Kuwait before the start of offensive operations in Iraq. In Kuwait, Soldiers trained on areas beneficial during the offense. (*Operation Iraqi Freedom* began 29 Mar 03 with coalition air strikes, and President George W. Bush declared an end to combat operations on 1 May 03.)

First, I will emphasize the importance of map reading and the use of a satellite Global Positioning System (GPS). It is crucial that everyone knows how to use a GPS, as well as how to read a map, when moving over extended lines of communications (LOCs). If your unit is short on this military equipment – as was the 26th FSB - have your battalion S4 (Logistics Officer) coordinate for the purchase of civilian GPSs. In the desert, these devices will prevent your units from getting lost, aid in medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) operations, as well as aid in reporting breakdowns and giving general situation reports (SITREPs). If your unit is short on maps, ensure that each vehicle in your convoy has a strip map to your next destination with grid coordinates for each checkpoint. I was surprised by comments about GPSs when one of the FSBs from 1st Armored Division relieved us. Soldiers said they were told not to use civilian GPSs because they were afraid that the satellites would not function while they were

traveling from Kuwait to Baghdad. They could have greatly benefited from the use of GPSs, according to their battalion commander.

Emphasize Convoy Defense

Secondly, I want to emphasize convoy defense, as well as convoy operations at night. It is crucial that Soldiers train on "react to ambush" before offensive and SASO operations. I propose that support units at any Army training center (National Training Center, Joint Readiness Training Center or Combat Maneuver Training Center) not only conduct a brigade support area (BSA) live fire exercise (LFX), but also include a convoy LFX. It is my understanding that these training centers are implementing this LFX into their rotations. A convoy LFX would train soldiers how to fight while in a convoy and how to maneuver quickly out of the kill zone. This LFX training would enhance the survivability of support units and also give units the confidence of knowing what to do in case of convoy ambush.

I also suggest that when any convoy moves out – at a minimum – the Soldiers need at least two crew-served weapons or squad automatic weapons (SAWs) with each convoy. Convoys need these crew-served weapons both for shock value (making an enemy think twice about attacking a convoy) and for adequate firepower against an attacking enemy. Crew-served weapons training (M2, MK19) and even M249 training and qualification should be increased and trained heavily before deployment to Southwest Asia.

Also, units should have an SOP for Soldiers in moving convoys to orient their weapons outside their respective windows (with the exception of the driver). Again, this SOP makes convoys less susceptible to ambush and shows confidence - Soldiers ready for action if the need arises. Moving at night is one of the toughest tasks for a convoy traveling over hostile terrain during offensive operations.

Night Travel Suggestions

All personnel in a convoy should have night vision goggles, at least the driver and any passenger in the front seat. Training at home station, as well as at any Army training center, should emphasize and train vigorously on the use of night vision goggles when preparing for offensive operations. Another suggestion for night travel by convoys: ensure that your battalion S4 or brigade S4 orders head harnesses for night vision goggles in order to free up hands during movement. When we finally arrived at our final destination at Baghdad International Airport, I took a walk to our supply company's makeshift motor pool. When I looked at all of our 5,000-gallon fuel tankers, I noticed that all our M818 (prime movers) for these fuel tankers had smashed front grills or broken windshields or missing side rearview mirrors. I concluded that some of this damage happened because of driver fatigue, but I also suspect that this was because the exhausted Soldiers were not wearing their night vision goggles but instead were trying to drive by

looking at the vehicles in front of their vehicles' blackout drive lights. Soldiers must be trained at night to feel comfortable driving with their night vision goggles.

Before each convoy moves out, the convoy commander must conduct a safety briefing along with PCC/PCI. The following list of the minimum requirements before vehicles move by convoy to a new location is not all-inclusive, just some recommendations to add to the unit's convoy SOP for both offensive and SASO operations:

- Strip maps with checkpoints issued to all vehicles (with six-digit grids as a minimum).
- Battle book check by key leaders, operations orders, maps and/or an all source analysis system (ASAS) light printout of the area.
- Enforced intervals between all vehicles.
- Adequate fuel on hand for all vehicles.
- Adequate recovery equipment for each vehicle, such as tow bars, chains, wreckers, cables and shovels to get out of sand.
- GPS for each vehicle (military or civilian GPS devices), minimum front and rear "Air guards" to observe bridges overhead, watch out for chokepoints, watch out for improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines and potential ambush sites.
- Night vision goggles with head/helmet harnesses on hand for each vehicle
- Vehicles with crew-served weapons in the convoy.
- Vehicles with FM communications in the convoy.
- Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services (PMCS) before operations
- Standard safety briefing.
- Actions to take if a vehicle breaks down.
- Rehearsal of reactions to ambushes, IEDs and land mines, and to sniper and artillery/mortar attacks.
- Casualty evacuation (CASEVAC)/MEDEVAC rehearsal.
- A check with battalion S2 (Intelligence Officer) on possible enemy locations, threats and actions within the past 24-48 hours.
- Avoidance of chokepoints, if at all possible.
- A sensitive items check.
- Hardening of vehicles by using items such as sandbags and makeshift fabrication of armor.

I recommend that potential convoy commanders/NCOs in charge (NCOICs) have a checklist readily available to them so they can see whether or not their convoy is ready to go. It is critical that NCOs conduct PCC for all their soldiers in the convoy before movement and that the convoy commander with the NCOIC of the convoy conduct the PCI before all movements. I know that during war

everyone is tired and stressed out, but these checks are critical to the survival of Soldiers in a convoy. Conduct PCC/PCI, and enforce PCC/PCI.

One way to improve survivability of convoys while moving in the offense is to realize what the Field Artillery and most brigade TOCs have to offer. The standard Field Artillery battalion has Q36 radar. The Q36 radar can track enemy artillery and mortar fire from the exact location where the enemy fired and, in essence, provide counter-battery fire to destroy the enemy's artillery/mortar. Support battalions must coordinate with the Field Artillery battalion S3 for additional Q36 radar coverage for a convoy's movement, if possible. During *Operation Iraqi Freedom* in 2003, this Q36 coverage was tremendously helpful in covering the brigade movement through a chokepoint. The enemy was using mortars to disrupt the brigade's movement, but the Q36 radar tracked the location of the enemy's mortars and provided counter-battery fire to destroy them. This enabled the brigade to get through this chokepoint. This action can be applied to convoy operations. The battalion S3s ensure that adequate Q36 radar coverage is available and provided.

Urban Counter-Battery Fire

However, during SASO counter-battery fire could cause issues in an urban environment in a city such as Baghdad because the firing could cause civilian casualties. Additionally, Field Artillery units may designate certain areas as "No Fire Areas." This is worth checking into because of reports of enemy combatants using mortars to attack friendly positions throughout Iraq.

Also, most brigade TOCs will have the vehicle tracking system called JSTARS (Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System). This JSTARS can track the location of large concentrations of vehicles. During offensive operations in Iraq, the brigade used FM communications to inform us of large amounts of "JSTARS Hits" or the locations of heavy concentrations of vehicles. The brigade distributed grid coordinates of the possible locations of large enemy concentrations. This is critical information for leaders and convoy commanders who make decisions about changing plans for convoy movement and establishing safe routes for the convoy. Coordination by battalion S3s with the brigade S3 is critical to convoy route planning. Also, the respective S3s may have information not relevant to their needs, but highly critical information that a convoy commander needs to know. Battle captains must be proactive in gathering information so that the commander or the convoy commander can make the right decisions, and make adjustments to potential locations as necessary.

When we finally reached Baghdad International Airport, "major hostilities" of the war had concluded. Thus, offensive operations officially were over in Iraq. We started to conduct SASO, but Soldier support requirements remained as well as

the use of convoys. I want to emphasize that some of my suggestions are derived from my experiences at this time. These suggestions should be enforced whenever an element or convoy leaves base camp.

I want to emphasize that each convoy commander or NCOIC needs to check in - in person - with the battalion TOC. While there, the battle captain or NCOIC should brief the convoy commander on events within the last 24-48 hours including potential ambush sites and previous IED locations, when to expect the convoy back, and the route the convoy plans to take. This also is the time to see if crew-served weapons are available, find out friendly locations, and conduct a communications check with the battalion TOC. This may seem like micromanagement, but - trust me - this is critical to the survivability of the convoy when the vehicles leave the base camp.

Keep Convoys to a Minimum

Convoys must be kept to a minimum, if at all possible. While driving in an urban environment, a convoy should move out with at least two crew-served weapons vehicles, no matter how small the convoy. As a matter of fact, the crew-served weapons became so critical in the 26th FSB that the battalion S3 personnel tracked all vehicle-mounted, crew-served weapons and crews and also assigned them to convoys that were moving out. Needless to say, coordination before movement with the support operations officer who tasked most of the convoys was critical.

Even with the advent of Force XXI and Objective Force technology, the Army will always need convoy commanders who have the leadership ability to do the right things necessary for survival of their Soldiers. Officers and NCOs who are convoy commanders must train their Soldiers how to survive and accomplish the mission in a hostile environment. Convoys coming under attack in Iraq are continually in the news. The convoy is the most vulnerable part of Army operations in a hostile environment. In this age of worldwide deployments during the war on terrorism, units must train intently on convoy operations and recognize the importance of convoys in mission completion while always protecting Soldiers – be proactive instead of reactive.

Insight from a USMC First Sergeant on the War in Iraq

This series of emails between an officer and one of his former NCO is long read, but it captures a First Sergeant's perspective on taking (and taking care of) young Marines into combat, and is the essence of superb NCO leadership. As he says, he focused on "the little things," little things that I would add probably saved lives and enabled this unit to come back with all hands. He even pays the Army a compliment, albeit a little left-handed. Our nation is blessed to have military leaders like this...and we have many more out there just like him...in all services.

FROM THE WARLORDS

A note from one of my former First Sergeants with a Battalion that just pulled out of Iraq and is sailing home after 10 months at Sea and Iraq as part of 24 MEU (Marine expeditionary units). This should be mandatory reading for every NCO, SNCO, and Officer in the Army and Marine Corps. I had earlier asked the First Sergeant to make me a list of what he thought were the most critical AAR items immediately upon his return to the ship. This is a fine piece of work and definitely an infantryman's perspective written less than 48 hours after leaving Iraq.

Sent: Saturday, April 26, 2003 6:27 PM
Subject: RE: FROM THE WARLORDS

Sir, without making a big formal list at this time.

Start a sleep plan before you go ashore and ensure your Marines sleep. No vehicle accidents because we made Marines sleep.

SAPIE Plates in the flacks. Yes they are heavy but worked.

Forced hydration works.

"Stand to" morning and evening no matter what. Plan around these events if you can.

MOLLIE (pack) LBV (load bearing vest) is **NOT GOOD**. We put all of our gear on the flak jacket.

Know how to read and do everything off a 1:100,000 map or even LAT Long.

Global Positioning System (GPS): GPS does work. Use check points. We made maps of towns and routes by hand. Several NAMs going to LCpl's who drew copies of maps and routes at all hours. Great work!

Field Hygiene: Marines got sick. Some pretty bad. Look at your Marines daily if you can. Ask questions. Marines will not tell you they are sick until they go down hard. They are a proud bunch.

First Aid: Know first aid. Make it a top training event. Get medical supplies and put them in each vehicle. We used an ammo can with pressure dressings and IV's. Teach your Marines how to give IV's.

Logistics: Logistics drove operations. Ask the 4 before you do any event. We made some long moves, as long as 15 hours on the road at a time. Plan your supplies. Fuel was the key more than water. There is always room for some chow.

Night Vision Goggles: NVG's work. Use them. All night devices worked great. Batteries can be an issue. Plan!

Combat load: A combat load is heavy on the Marines and the vehicles. Take only what you need.

Fire Support: Always plan fire support. We held a major road intersection in the middle of nowhere. We used Mortars as security and out of the blue we needed Mortar fire. Plan for it. Lay guns in all four directions for a "360 coverage". Plan on call targets. Plan for and use illum.

Training: Training in combat? You bet. Talk through it, walk through it. Use sticks and rocks. Get the Cpl up there to brief what is going on. He knows more than most. Immediate action drills for everything.

MOPP Gear: MOPP gear is hot. Plan for it. Marines wore nothing under the MOPP gear to stay cool. Do NBC drills. Do NBC drills while driving.

Convoy Operations: Study Convoy operations. If you have CAAT, JAV, or LAR put them in charge and have them run the convoy. You may be senior but they know how to do this and this lets commanders worry about the bigger picture. Brief your convoys. Never "just drive away". Give each vehicle a number, from 1 to the very end.

Some convoys were big. We went from 1 to 75. Know the senior man in each vehicle. Know what is in you convoy. An avenger has FLIR. Use everything to your advantage. Forget call signs. Use the vehicle numbers. It worked!

Air on station: Plan to have no air on station. We had none. Plan for 81's hip shoots.

React Force: Plan for a react force for any major event. Have that reserve ready. We used it several times. CAAT, LAR, JAV, even 5 trucks of HQ type guys with SAWS is better than nothing.

Vehicle Recovery: Plan for vehicle recovery and brief it. Get more tow bars. Use tow straps. Spread you MT mechanics all over the BLT (battalion landing team). These guys saved us everyday.

VHF Communications: Know how to re-trans VHF comm and plan for it. We talked 65k with it. Know HF and use it.

Preventive Maintenance: PM everything as time permits. Our vehicles never ran better because the Marines did not want to get stuck on the side of the road. If a vehicle goes down in a convoy give them 5 minutes and after that tow it. If several go down,

plan for multiple tows. If the situation is bad, plan to grab mission type gear and radios and blow the vehicle. You can get another vehicle if it prevents a firefight.

Vehicle ID: Use panel markers, IR Chemlites and STROBES to ID your vehicles and positions. Saves lives.

Friendly lines: Know how to enter and exit friendly lines on foot and in vehicle. With and without comm. 3X2 with NVG's works.

Use the LEATHENECK to let friendly units know when fire is outgoing. This really applies to mortars. Marines get really jumpy when mortars start going off.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal: EOD is your friend. Don't blow enemy weapons on your own unless you have to. Mark it, get the grid and call EOD.

Medivac: Plan for medivac. On foot, vehicles and air. Don't count on the air. Look for LZ's (landing zones) at all times.

Mail: Get your Marines mail to them even if it means shooting your way to them with LAV's. They get mail and they will do anything for you.

Telephone: Use the SAT Phone. Forget the cost. Grab a few young Marines when you can and let them call home. That Marine could lead the entire Bn after he talks to his wife after a firefight.

Discipline: Never baby your Marines. Expect the world from them. Never back off. They want to show you they can do the job. When you think you need a SSgt to do the job, grab a Cpl or Sgt and he will do it better and faster.

NCOs: NCO's run the fight no matter how much you get on the radio. Sit back and listen to them. You might just learn something from them.

Light Armored Vehicle: LAV's rule the desert. Use them if you have them.

Big convoy on the hardball? At night? Turn the lights on and go fast as the slowest vehicle. Point a few dozen machineguns outboard and drive like hell. LAV's and 7 tons can do 65 at night on the hardball. Tell your Marines to stay off the roads at night. Convoys will go by on short notice. It's better to be going fast and being able to see than trying to have 75 vehicles going 20 MPH on NVG's.

Driving or Walking: Driving or walking ensure you are looking up, down, left and right at all times.

Weapon Cleaning: A clean weapon is a happy weapon. Plan for it. Inspect them.

Vehicles and Weapons: Strip everything off your vehicles that you don't need. Sandbag your vehicles. Carry as much ammo as you can. Strip high-back vehicles down. Hang the packs on the sides and get as many rifles pointing left and right as you can. Take the doors off everything except hardbacks and FAV's. Never let the a-driver attach the handset to his helmet strap. You need to be able to get out of the vehicle fast. Pistols **XXXX**. Bring and use every weapon. Shotguns are great at close ranges.

Digging of Holes: Dig holes, dig many of them. Use demo if you have to. Dig down at all cost. Can't dig down? Use as many sandbags as you can to build up.

Sectors of Fire: Look at your sectors of fire. This really applies at night. Even if it is only two guys with pistols you need to ensure full coverage.

Snipers: Use snipers. They saved us many times. Give them a mission and let them go.

Vehicle exits: If you have to stop and get out of the vehicles, find or make cover. Vehicles attract bullets.

Lights at night: We had no problem with Marines using lights at night because they did not use them at all. They will learn to do everything in total darkness.

Ground Guides: Even in combat you need to use ground guides around friendly units. Even if it is an emergency! We had no close calls because of this.

Classified Material: Everything you put on a map or write down is classified. Burn it when done.

Trash: Burn your trash when you leave a position. Put it all in a fighting hole and put fuel on it and leave.

Call Signs: Remember all the call signs. Remember every net ID. Know the call signs and net IDs of higher units.

Other Units in Area: If other units are in the area but not part of your MEU ensure you can talk to them. Go through great pains to do this. It prevents accidents.

OC Spray: Kids were everywhere. Don't throw anything out of the vehicles. Bring OC spray, yes even to combat. Works great on dogs, kids and POWS.

Vehicle Checkpoint: Know how to do a real vehicle checkpoint. Stand off distance. Wire, obstacles, sandbags, dig holes. We used everything we could get our hands on. We used old cars for cover and used a forklift to move them. Cover your checkpoints with heavy fire. Know what to do if you suspect an IED on a vehicle or person. Marines are now experts at checking vehicles.

Know how to search a vehicle and people day and night.

Chaplain Services: Get the chaplain to your position even if you have to fight your way to him. We did Easter service after stand-to at 0300Z.

Briefings: Ensure you brief any attachments on everything that is going on. Nothing is too small to forget. Assign them holes.

Digging: No one has too much rank to dig.

Latrines: Plan for where you put your heads. It's a big deal with over 200 Marines in a matter of hours.

Communications: Talk to any units in the area. Ask questions. You will learn so much from them. Talk to the Army. They do good things also.

Extras: A can of dip, cigar, pack of smokes and a handshake go along way. A cup of coffee helps. Make a cup if you can and give half to a young Marine at stand-to and he will remember it.

Awareness: Watch your Marines eyes. They tell you everything. Look at your NCO's eyes and you know what is going on.

Radios: Buy a short wave radio and get the news. Write it down under a poncho at 0200. Get the baseball scores out to the Marines and you are a hero.

E-Mails: Have all the e-mail addresses of your Marine's wives. Get to any HHQ and send a blanket e-mail to all of them.

Shirts: It's OK to allow the Marines to take their blouse off if it is hot. Their skins get tough really fast. If it's really hot the can go around without blousing their boots.

Promote Marines: Promote your Marines on time if you can. We promoted a Marine in 81's to Merit SSgt in the field a few hours after a firefight. Can't begin to put a price on that.

Sleep: If nothing is going on make the junior Marines sleep and you watch the radios for a few hours.

License to Drive: Every Marine is a driver and should have a license. In Weapons Company, that needs to be every Marine from the CO down.

Short Count: Know what a "short count" is and demand you use them.

Letter Writing: Ensure your Marines write letters on anything they can get their hands on. MRE boxes work great. I put an ammo can on my vehicle for outgoing mail. Get the mail out. There is always a way. Pass it off to other units if you have to. Find a helo and give him your mail. Give him a can of dip to do it for you.

Range Cards: Know how to do a range card on a piece of MRE box. Use the GVS-5. We got a distance to everything. Get the word out. If you stop to fix a vehicle close to a town, get the distance to a few points and get the word out. You will hear Marines making adjustments on their sights. Only hits count. Know how to estimate range day and night.

Sir, sorry for going on and on but there is so much more. As a 1stSgt I only paid attention to the little things.

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Sent: Saturday, April 26, 2003 11:56 AM
Subject: RE: FROM THE WARLORDS

1st Sergeant, Welcome back. I tracked the Warlords closely during your stay in country, am proud of each and every one of you. Would very much enjoy hearing your thoughts and after action assessments as you sail home. You guys are probably very busy right now cleaning and packing up, and I know a First Sergeant's work is never done. Please pass on my congrats to the team for a job well done. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sent: Saturday, April 26, 2003 9:17 AM
Subject: FROM THE WARLORDS

Sir, the WARLORDS are back loading. We are brining every Marine and Sailor home. I can't even begin to say what an honor it was to serve beside those young Marines. They did everything asked of them and asked for more. True professionals --no stupid mistakes. No stupid safety issues -- Just good hard execution at the NCO level. I am not worthy to stand in the same formation with these men. They all grew several years older in a matter of weeks. As we sort this out I will send some pictures of the WARLORDS in action. Someone was looking out for us on this one. Weapons Company's new motto is "no one works harder".

Semper Fi, 1stSgt B

