

# Frontline – Lessons Learned

In the last month I have been to MANY places - In each event, the center of focus was current and future events and requirements in Iraq. While I have now many CD's of data and tools as well as pages and pages of notes, I can sum up the salient points that apply to \* ALL\* Soldiers, from the lowest, greenest, and most removed-from-doorkicking private to the top officers and NCO, to the meanest doorkicker on the block:

## The Enemy:

- The enemy is ANYTHING that prevents us from coming home on our own power and intact.
- IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) are the #1 killer of troops.
- IEDs are not "incidents", but the primary means of contact. It is an "ambush", and whether a "far ambush" (blow it from a distance and run) or a "near ambush" (blow the shot and have small arms fire with close-quarters marksmanship needed), regardless, it is not a random event. The enemy is patient, plans their attack, goes through all the recon and planning we do, and then targets who they hit.
- The #2 killer is TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS!!! Everyone must keep this in mind. The up-armored HUMVEES turn and brake way differently, and are prone to tipping. "COMBAT DRIVING" means know your vehicle, use it as a weapons platform AND a weapon as needed, and be able move and communicate at all times... it does NOT mean "drive like the Dukes of Hazzard". As the CSM of the Army said, "Drive like NASCAR"... know you vehicle, keep the distances and speeds YOU need to be safe, and if needed, get under the opposition and put them into the wall. NOTE TO ALL: It is a \* bad\* idea to put your most junior people in as drivers and gunners, at least to do it all the time. Train them. We all need to be proficient with driving AND being a gunner AND using all the comms available AND navigating using \* MAPS\* and GPS .
- The #3 Killer: Failure to execute proper and FAST first responder duties. The difference between life and death is measured in seconds if someone is bleeding out. As just one example, if you get a tourniquet on someone in time, they live. If not, they die. Again, EVERYONE has to know this... .the designated "combat life saver" may be the one hit. It used to be they barred officers from CLS courses as "if the officer is busy doing this, they aren't doing their primary job". That has changed. Standardize where the vehicle response bag is. Have recovery drills, mounted and dismounted. Have MEDEVAC plans, to include if you have to lay people flat. The time

to figure out how to change a tire, how to open a vehicle and clear the people AND sensitive items, how to cross load people is NOT while RPG are criss-crossing your area.

- The AIF (Anti-Iraqi Forces) are adaptive, intelligent, and will kill any number of civilians, to include using kids as bait, in the hopes of getting just one Coalition troop. By the same token, they are being driven to these extreme means precisely because public support for AIF activities is dropping (the majority of help, in fact, come from Iraqi civilians and Iraqi forces). The AIF will do anything to take away progress and betterment of the Iraqi people, because anything good is seen as supporting the legitimate government and makes the AIF look less powerful. From everything I've heard from those in country, things are getting better, and it has resulted in more foreign fighters coming in and less and less Iraqis supporting these attacks or the causes claimed.
- Be aware, the PIRA (Provisional Irish Republic Army), FARC (the Columbian drug/leftist terrorists), and Chechnyans are many of the primary "expert" trainers for the AIF, and have been caught both in Iraq and neighboring countries teaching organization and tactical skills. There are others out there, too, that are not Arab and are actively supporting the AIF. Don't think someone is "OK" just because they aren't muslim. Do not fall into a trap thinking this is a religious or racial war - that is what the demagogues on both sides want to cloak this in. It is a struggle for power and money.

There are media, most notably Al Jazeera but also others, that are coordinated by the terrorists and are in place for attacks. Almost all attacks are videotaped. They do not air all of the many, many failed attacks or ones where the Coalition clearly dominates the battle, but they are filming and use them for training if they can't use it for propaganda. They don't have media that films all and airs the bad and the good... the only stuff the enemy-oriented media shows is what benefits them. They even film their training programs, such as mock-ups of raids and kidnappings. We saw lots of footage from captured videos at the conferences. Never assume anyone with a camera is friendly - this does NOT mean they are enemy and can be shot, but it DOES mean to be wary, to keep the security cordon so they cannot capture images of sensitive items or record voice traffic that they can use (such as getting current pro-words or the "handles" of units or individuals.) Be professional, but remember OPSEC at all times, as you are watched and recorded at all times.

PERSONAL COMMENT: At the [expunged] conference there were seats for the LA Times and NY Times, with the reporters' names reserving their seats. There was salient, timely information being put out by the people who have been there for the people who are going - it was not a "press event". It did a great job of outlining the threat, outlining how the enemy has succeeded AND has been

defeated, and how we are doing better as where we need to improve... but the mainstream media couldn't bother to show up to deal with the military's (all services present) #1 event to deal with our biggest killer.

LESSON LEARNED: The media is not exercising the due diligence needed to report the full picture. This is consistent with my years in media relations (military and otherwise) as well as being a journalist on assignment where only a FEW will actually care enough to do their job instead of worrying about "consumers" (what they now call "readers"/ "viewers") and advertising. Therefore, realize you will not get the "boring" part of a given story, and "boring" often is the "good news". "If it bleeds, it leads" has been a media mantra for longer than I've been alive, but the perceived need to be "balanced" has been officially given up by many news agencies using "everyone does it" as an excuse.

How to defeat the enemy:

- There were 12,000 IED attacks in 2004. That is 12 thousand. IEDs are not an automatic fatality. Most miss. Even those that hit usually are not effective. There is a soldier in the 256 who has 18 IED hits to date (that they can figure... he doesn't brag and its the gunners and others that are trying to total up the hits), and not a scratch on him or his crew. There are those on IED Hunting teams that refuse to come off hunting duties and have had ZERO IED hits... they have been shot at, but ZERO hits on IEDS. LESSON LEARNED: IEDs are an inefficient way to attack.
- There are units that have spent their ENTIRE tour with soft-sided HUMVEES and have had far less IED hits than those in Up-Armored or fully armored vehicles. In fact, they had their doors off. Even today, Rangers and SF run around in bare vehicles and don't get attacked. The reason - the entire convoy was sharp, at the ready, and was able to visually detect IEDS, use aggressive driving to throw off timing of IEDs, and were obviously ready to return fire. They were NOT worth hitting. An up-armored conmo with everyone's head down and hiding is a much better target. ALL ARMOR CAN BE DEFEATED!!! There have been tanks as well as Strykers and Up-Armored HUMVEES (the M1114's) that have been hit and destroyed. Often (not always), its because they were complacent, they established patterns, they trusted their armor to save them, and otherwise they gave the enemy the means to predict their movements and the comfort (based on lack of alertness) to target them. LESSON LEARNED: If everyone is alert and in the right mindset, you're far less likely to be targeted, regardless of armor. Armor has often led to a false sense of security.
- Know your basic skills - shoot, move, communicate. Know how to fire all weapons. Know how to operate radios, do call for fire, call for MEDEVAC, call in IEDs, etc. Know how to drive, to include how to "push" friendly vehicles out of a the kill zone or move other vehicles out of the way (the

enemy uses junked cars as obstacles to channel movement). "Move" includes know how to change a tire like a NASCAR pit crew or how to execute a "bump" plan (the plan to stack extra people in a vehicle after losing a vehicle in the convoy.) For those that have travelled in a big city before... if you move out with a purpose and look like you know what you're doing, you're not an attractive target. If it looks like you are in charge of an area after an IED attack, they won't want to attack with small arms and lose everyone (as they often do... its why they usually just use IEDs unless people get lazy).

- Security at all times. If you are safeguarding a site, like an IED, do NOT spend time looking inwards at the IED. Look out, observe patterns and behavior. If just part of the perimeter gets lazy, that is where they will attack. If you're in the wire, know where your equipment is, know where shelters are, and know what the drill is in your area. Know what protection your ECM provide - they are highly effective and are forcing the enemy to move from 90% radio-controlled IEDs to other, less desirable means of initiation.
- Have brutally honest AAR after EVERY movement. There are no such things as "simple convoys", they are all combat patrols. So, even if there were zero hits, review your conduct. Did you follow a pattern from previous ops? What did everyone see in terms of changes to the terrain or people? Did your vehicle stay alert? The other ones? If you can keep each other sharp, avoid patterns, and constantly learn, it dramatically decreases your chance at being targeted. There is always room to improve, always something that slipped. Get after it.

There is a lot more, but we'll be getting a lot of this. Just trying to get everyone thinking that this all applies to everyone, regardless of rank and duty.