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2

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Personal for:
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10th March 2005*Dear Brigadier,***REPUTATION AND OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

1. Thank you for your letter of 2 March. I shall attempt to provide you with as full a perspective on the subject as I can, but will restrict my comments to my own Battalion's experience of Operation TELIC 2, June to November 2003, and the pre-deployment period.
2. Was our PDT adequate for the 3 block war? No. The delay in formally warning us for TELIC 2, exacerbated by Op FRESCO preventing us from conducting properly resourced training was, with hindsight, a significant factor. Prior to that, the experience of the training year, being broken-up to support others' training at BATUS, Op FRESCO and the generally frantic tempo of brigade activity, took its toll on our aspirations for junior NCO in-barracks training and education. In the 5 weeks from warning to deployment, we instituted an extended working day (routinely 0600-1800). This allowed the Battalion to cover the mandated pre-deployment training (including LOAC and PW handling) and my insistence on language and cultural awareness training, theatre-specific IS/COIN training, vehicle preparation and the host of other essential preparatory tasks required. Whilst I am sure that all soldiers took part in LOAC and PW handling training, I am aware that such were the competing priorities, there was little time for the reinforcement of such lessons.
3. Late formal warning meant that we had to construct our pre-deployment training plan without OPTAG's input. OPTAG were finally tasked to support our training once we had embarked on our own programme and so they came to the party late and with their own time pressure caused by having to train 4 major units in less than 3 weeks, when other training 'immovables' had already been programmed.

1

RESTRICTED – PERSONAL FOR

RESTRICTED – PERSONAL FOR

4. Were orders in theatre clear? Yes, as far as they went. The rules for the handling of potential internees emerged from Division and were adopted with some success. Prior to the Baha Mousa death we had interned approximately 70 Iraqis without complaint from the Theatre Internment Facility. We were also visited by the ICRC's senior Basra representative, who pronounced himself satisfied with our procedures and, more importantly for me, our **attitude**.

5. Late formal warning (and therefore a lack of priority for courses) prevented us from getting anyone trained in tactical questioning. This proved to be a serious shortfall as we were always beholden to brigade-provided TQ trained personnel and therefore the basic principles of the process remained something of a 'black art'. The brigade-provided TQ officer or senior NCO would set the rules for 'conditioning' any potential internee prior to questioning and, prior to Baha Mousa, hoods, hand-cuffs and stress positions did feature in the conditioning process.

6. Did our officers behave to the highest standards? I think so. Why can I not be more sure? Because, despite my best efforts, I could not be at every incident. My company commanders knew that I was passionate about helping the Iraqi people and maintaining the highest professional standards and, in every other facet of the operation, they followed my lead in spades; I therefore have no reason to think that in the case of the routine treatment of Iraqi civilians, their approach was any different. Young officers were placed in extraordinarily stressful leadership situations and they generally delivered great results.

7. I am aware of one instance when a company commander sensed an ugly situation developing and he gripped it on the spot: After a particularly bad bricking, a vehicle top cover sentry received a nasty head wound. The company conducted a follow-up operation to arrest the suspects. Once back in camp, the company commander went to check the detainees where he found several of the wounded soldier's multiple present, clearly contemplating their next move. The company commander saw or sensed the anger and immediately sent the men away. He subsequently spent time explaining to them how their intention to exact revenge would have been totally wrong, counter-productive and very costly to them personally. Thereafter he discussed the potential incident with his own O'Group to ensure that his views were reinforced and that lessons were learned. His handling was, in my view, absolutely correct.

8. My key point is that I do not believe that abuse of Iraqi civilians was widespread. There were bound to be moments when frustration, temperature (over 58 degrees Celsius for much of our tour), lack of sleep and provocation got the better of otherwise professional troops, but these instances were rare and abuse was not tolerated. I took the approach that we (the officers) should almost over-react at the first instance of soldiers' over-stepping the mark in order to make the point. An example:

I insisted that all soldiers could greet, thank and bid farewell in Arabic prior to deployment. The purpose of the tour was constantly re-iterated as being 'to help the people of Basra'. In the first month I received a report that an Iraqi civilian working at Basra Palace had been treated disrespectfully at a 1 QLR VCP. Irrespective of the validity of the complaint, I left my evening conference audience in no doubt as to the seriousness with which I viewed such a complaint. The next day (and variously throughout the rest of the tour), I conducted 'market research' on my soldiers' performance at VCPs and other operations, by stopping cars once past the VCP and asking occupants if they had been treated properly, politely and in Arabic. I encouraged my company commanders to do the same.

RESTRICTED – PERSONAL FOR

9. To reinforce my view that abuse was not widespread, I offer the following: I and my company commanders had numerous meetings, formal and informal, with tribal, religious and local council leaders. These meetings were often 'full and frank' and we found the Iraqis were not shy about complaining. However none of these meetings raised complaints about soldiers beating or abusing locals. Local leaders were prepared to speak to us on their people's behalf about business matters, security issues, housing or infrastructure issues and I feel that had the need arisen they would equally have asked me to help solve soldier-led injustices.

10. In an isolated disciplinary incident, to further illustrate our clear intolerance of any form of mis-behaviour, I recall being told that a soldier had been caught by his company commander pocketing a small quantity of Iraqi Dinar during a search operation. I thought this sufficiently serious to insist on personally addressing all ranks in each company location later that same night, explaining in detail how such action could completely undermine our mission and the respect that Basra people seemed to have for us.

11. You asked for my personal views. I absolutely reject the notion that beating or abusing Iraqis could, in any circumstances, be justified and I am not about to be an apologist for abusers. However I think that key to this issue is the whole business of context. In terms of your remit under the heading 'Reputation and Operational Effectiveness', I would hope you are able to emphasise the vast body of evidence of the Army's restraint and discipline under quite extraordinary stress. The situation in Basra in the Summer of 2003 was beyond the ken of the vast majority of onlookers who now criticise the excesses of our soldiers on operations and call into question our leadership. The Times recently reported that some 1500 people died in the UK 'heatwave' of 2003, where temperatures occasionally reached 38.5 degrees – it never got that low at night for most of our tour. Take a British soldier, put him into helmet and body armour in 58/59 degrees and have hundreds of Iraqis throw bricks, petrol bombs and grenades at him and then marvel at his restraint in not opening fire (we didn't shoot a single rioter during the rather testing uprising of 9/10 Aug 03). Subject that same soldier to a life without routine, working 18-20 hours per day, unable to sleep during his 4 hours off because there is no air-conditioning, expose him to IEDs, a significant casualty/injury rate, continual yet random close proximity small arms fire, stones and bricks; the real question should then be, how on earth did the junior leadership get such a soldier to maintain his focus, work-rate and professionalism in such awful conditions for considerably less money than the firefighters he had so recently been standing-in for?

12. Add to that picture the demands I placed on my officers for change; we had to drive the operation forward, introduce a raft of security initiatives to stabilise a lawless city of 1.5 million (with 420 deployable soldiers), make good or ameliorate the deficiencies and consequences caused by the Coalition's complete failure to plan for or provide for the aftermath of the war, and you start to realise that officers were the busiest people on the tour. Factor-in the Iraqi psyche that only respects firm action and quickly takes liberties with any sign of weakness and indecision, and you may understand that soldiers were required to be bold, decisive and robust in order to survive when outnumbered and surrounded, as frequently happened. How does a single officer disperse a crowd of 200 with only 2 land rovers and 9 other ranks? By acting with discipline, robustness and courage, followed by soldiers who trust him. My view is that good leadership was much in evidence in 1 QLR, as no doubt elsewhere in UK units.

13. It may not be possible for your review to take account of the effects of overly-taut unit establishments, the ratio of tasks to available troops or the sense of extreme urgency we had to impose to try and wrest control from the criminals and insurgents. These factors led to multiples being led by sergeants or, in extremis, PSBC-trained corporals. Generally this worked well and

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junior leadership was excellent. One cannot rule out the possibility that a corporal-led multiple was less immune to the occasional breach of discipline. Similarly, in tackling this huge problem we depended on mission command, successfully practised on 2 TESEXes, to achieve more than was rightly possible with such a small force in a large city. Inherent in this battle-winning doctrine is the business of trust and understanding intent. My intent towards the citizens of Basra was unambiguous and my company and platoon commanders were all clear. In exercising mission command by necessity it is, *de facto*, not possible to supervise every action or reaction, a degree of trust, based on training, ethos and previously observed behaviour, is absolutely central to the British way of military operations.

14. Towards the end of our tour, the vast majority of the people of Basra, encountered on my many patrols, thanked us for restoring order, power and improving the police. I am convinced we were a force for good and that my soldiers were rightly very proud of what we achieved.

15. I hope that some of this rather lengthy piece is of use to you. I have given you my frank and unvarnished opinion in an attempt to give you a flavour of our tour. I would wish to be consulted before sections of this letter are quoted in any report.

Yours sincerely,

