

**Testimony of  
First Sergeant Gerald G. Neill, Jr.  
Before the  
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations  
May 11, 2004**

I would like to begin my testimony with a silent moment recognizing the loss of life of our service members in Iraq. I want to particularly recognize Staff Sergeant Richard S. Eaton Jr. of B Company, 323<sup>rd</sup> MI Battalion, U.S. Army Reserves. He was my solder and my friend.

Chairman Shays, other members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before this Oversight Hearing on Combating Terrorism: Training and Equipment Reserve Component Forces. I am here as a service member with 30 years combined service in the U.S. Army, the National Guard, and the U.S. Army Reserves. I am here just returning from Iraq as the First Sergeant for B Company, 323<sup>rd</sup> Military Intelligence Battalion, which is currently located at Ft. George G. Meade, Maryland. I am here in hopes that we can improve training and thereby improve performance and survivability on the battlefield.

I have been a first sergeant since 1985 and have experience in team building, unit building and training. I am a First Sergeant who is also a Counter Intelligence Agent. I have been a CI agent since 1983. I have many years of experience working sources for information in my military role as well as my civilian profession as a member of the Metropolitan Police Department, here in Washington, D.C.. In the past I have been a Court Narcotics Expert, Gun Recovery Expert, as well as an affiant or co-affiant on over several hundred narcotics and gun search warrants. I am a police officer who likes to take information, develop it, and then take action on it. I am that same type of solder/senior NCO.

Let me say that I took what I consider the best trained, best qualified, highly motivated solders any nation can offer to war. They all did outstanding jobs and I am proud of them. Additionally I know that they are proud of themselves and their service to our great nation.

Soldiers come to units either fully qualified or as will trains. Generally qualified solders are younger and come straight from basic training and MOS training. Will trains generally are older solders that come from other units with other MOS skills and possess the desire and ability to become qualified in their new units and in their new MOS. Units need both groups of solders to meet mission requirements. Will train solders bring to their new units previous MOS skills that can be called upon to carry them through times and events when support is not available. Soldiers with infantry training, motor mechanics, supply, drill sergeants, communications, and civilian street police experience are excellent pluses to any team. In the field, in tense situations, they are the ones who step up to carry the team to safety and to assist in accomplishing the mission.

We have a shortage of Warrant Officers who are the Officer Team leaders. It is my belief that this shortage could be filled directly from the senior NCO ranks where soldiers are forced out of the Army because of age, time in grade, and time in service.

I believe that Soldiers fight as they train and that every Army trains for the next war based on lessons learned in the last war. If we accept this then we must look at training in two parts:

1. Pre-mobilization that is, Basic Training, Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) training, Leadership development, and Unit training.

2. Mobilization training.

### **Pre-mobilization**

Current training schools and soldier development courses do a good job in making and developing today's soldier. There is nothing wrong with our Basic Training, MOS Training, and Leadership Training. Where we have problems is in unit training. Units have 12 weekends a year and two weeks annual training to take trained soldiers and forge them into teams. These teams may deploy in either tactical or non-tactical roles. Six Soldiers make a team. Too often, weekend training and annual training time is used up in administrative functions or other distractions. This seriously cuts into time and energy needed for unit mission training.

A major problem for us was vehicle care and use requirements that take up one quarter of a drill weekend. This stated time allotment would more than double if driving time requirements were followed to the letter of the regulation. Our unit and every unit in the Army would be a motor unit, and driving vehicles would be the weekend accomplishment. The way that Commands avoid this requirement is to turn the vehicles into motor storage shops. Consequently, our vehicles were stored in a post storage area and only drawn out maybe once or twice a year. The drawing of vehicles and weekend training were major events on training schedules and usually were planned as field exercises or range training.

As you may know radios are mounted in vehicles. Since we did have possession of our vehicles, our radios could remain mounted in them without compromising their security. Our radios are encrypted devices that must always be secured. The radios cannot be easily mounted in the vehicles. It takes several hours and technical expertise to accomplish this task. Additionally, locking bars required to secure the radios after mounting them seem to be in short supply which further complicates the radio mounting issue.

While we had soldiers who could set radios to working frequencies this could not be done with all of our radios and by all of our soldiers. Reliable radio communication was a major problem for us in Iraq. While active duty units came into theater with satellite phones and could use them for communications, we had none. We had great soldiers and teams, but did not have adequate availability of equipment nor services to install radios and maintain radios on the company level. Many years ago motor sections, supply sections and communications sections were all moved from intelligence companies and sent to battalion level organization where their staffing was reduced and became ineffective. Maybe it is time to look at bringing them back to individual companies.

Weapons' training at my reserve unit was completely inadequate. Prior to this unit's deployment, most of the soldiers had not qualified at a weapons range for several years due to a shortage of ammo. In the context of war, this is unacceptable. Soldiers need multiple training opportunities at the weapons range every year in order to familiarize and hone critical survival skills needed in combat. Although the entire unit was required to qualify with weapons at the mobilization station at Ft. Dix, this last minute weapons training only marginally prepared soldiers to carry and effectively use their weapons. Additionally there was no opportunity to cross-train soldiers on various weapons systems at the mobilization station due to ammo shortages. This was key later, when the handguns carried by most agents proved inadequate against the AK-47 assault rifle. The company later trained its soldiers on the M16 and AK-47 since the handguns were only useful at close range enemy fire. Weapons cross training and foreign weapons familiarization are key to survival in a tactical combat environment.

Equipment shortages were extremely problematic. Although this unit was perhaps the best equipped Reserve MI Battalion deployed in the Iraqi Theater, other sister MI units came to war with virtually nothing. This placed these soldiers at risk and placed an additional burden on scarce resources from the Active Duty Army units in theater. No MI unit, section, or team, should be allowed to deploy to a combat zone without weapons, body armor, vehicles, tentage, communications, or power generation sets.

Extremely short call up and mobilization times further impacted supply and equipment problems wasting many valuable hours spent conducting inventory, packing, unpacking, re-inventorying, many, many times. Most of this repeated inventory of equipment would have been reduced if supply sergeants and supply sections were adequate at the company level. They are not staffed to take the lead in this area, and this caused major problems throughout the deployment. Soldiers deployed without insect protection measures, bug juice, and insect netting needed to endure harsh environments. Many soldiers were bitten and fell ill when preventive measures were known and not provided.

## **Mobilization**

We were the prisoners of Fort Dix. Initial activation brought us to the mobilization site at Ft. Dix, where active duty Army soldiers could leave post and where, as Army Reservists, we could not. This was a bitter pill to swallow and many soldiers still speak of it. With only four days notice they were activated and after four days at Ft. Meade, soldiers did not have time to adequately prepare for what turned into a 14 month deployment. It simply did not make sense to soldiers that draftee soldiers from previous wars were not locked down and that they, soldiers who were volunteers, were locked down. They point to this experience and say that this is one of the reasons they will not be activated again. It is my belief that the two months activation period at Ft. Dix was entirely too long. Most of the training was good, as it was designed for individual, teams, and units, but it did not test personnel and equipment, as equipment was being shipped to theater.

Unit sponsorship was nonexistent. Step children receive better care from their sponsors than we did from our war-trace unit, the 513<sup>th</sup> MI Brigade. Before deployment to theater we were told that our sponsoring unit, the 513<sup>th</sup> MI, was a professional organization and was waiting and prepared for us in theater. We had a mission and we knew what that mission was. When we arrived in theater we found that the 513th was waiting, but they were not waiting for us. The commander for the 513th told all of us

that they were not expecting all of the units that arrived and did not have jobs for us. The 513<sup>th</sup> was the unit that had all of the equipment, but did not want to share or acquire any for us. We set up training and training schedules to fill our day, but quite frankly spent six hours out of an eight-hour work day in chow lines.

A bit of investigation revealed that the 513<sup>th</sup> had 2500 MI soldiers attached to it. 250 of them were CI agents. It was easy to see that we were not wanted or needed. We were detached from our battalion several times and sent to other battalions on what were called “made up missions”.

Morale Calls are required by Army Regulation, but my unit did not make a call until they were in the country some 11 days. Morale calls let family and friends know that the soldier arrived in country safely and lets the soldier know that their family is safe in their absence. My soldiers had no means to make the calls and yet we saw soldiers from the 513<sup>th</sup> on satellites all day long calling home. Additionally every soldier wanted to know the latest war news. The 513<sup>th</sup> had several tents set up with satellite TVs for that purpose, but while their soldiers could watch the news with no limit, our companies one representative was thrown out of the tent.

The best training we received was “action on contact” training from the 221<sup>st</sup> Georgia National Guard. This training consisted of soldier combat drills conducted in our vehicles in desert conditions, not the cold weather training we received at Ft. Dix, but in real theater environment. We set up our vehicles as they set up theirs, mounting our M-60 machine guns, lining the bottoms of our vehicles with sand bags, and were fully prepared minus communication equipment to assume our mission.

We moved into Iraq focused and ready to handle whatever we encountered and more importantly we “looked” ready. As our missions changed we remained focused and it was “game on” every time we moved out of our camps and into our communities to perform our missions. We cross trained on each others weapons, took each others vehicle assignments, and vehicle movement roles, as well as picked up additional weapons and ammo, since our battalion refused to authorize drawing of our own authorized basic ammo load. Members of our Battalion Staff began to call us the Bandit Company as we acquired what we needed to operate. We liked the name.

Once in Iraq we became part of the outer perimeter of a group of tankers who occupied a site which used to be a trash dump. We waited in the desert in tents and soldier made shelters for 30 days for a mission to start. During this waiting period many of my soldiers became heat casualties. At one point there illness exhausted the ability of the tankers aid station to support us and I had to send half of the unit to the hospital for treatment and recovery.

In August, some eight months after our activation we assumed the mission we were told would be ours when we first activated in January 2003. We replaced the Marine Corps intelligence units in Southern Iraq. They left us with much needed equipment that was not available to our organic MI chain of command, but which the Marines proved was needed to be successful in our operations. Both the 205<sup>th</sup> MI Battalion, and CJTF-7 refused to supply us with the equipment the Marines ultimately left us. Failure is not in their creed and they did not wish to see us fail. Kudos to the Marines. This equipment included non-tactical vehicles (NTVs), satellite telephones, phone cards, digital cameras, small GPS, and more weapons and ammo. Absent the short barreled MP4 Carbine, which was not available to our soldiers, the AK47 rifle without the stock was the best weapon available for inside the vehicle

movement to firing positions. Review of daily intelligence reports kept us current of enemy tactics. Movement in NTVs allowed us quicker traveling speeds than the 55-60 miles an hour the tactical vehicle could move at, and they did not alert the Iraqi citizens that we were coming as the motor sound of the NTV was much quieter than the tactical vehicles. We varied speeds on the highways, changed lanes as we approached bridges, and did not let anyone pass us once on the highway.

It is our job to know the enemy and it is their job to know us. We presented an appearance of a "battle ready" element. Every team had a heavy machine gun, as well as automatic rifles, handguns, and grenades. We looked at everyone who looked at us. We considered everyone a potential threat until we knew otherwise. What I learned as a policeman is to watch how people react to you as you drive into a bad neighborhood. If they run, or start moving quickly when they see you, that is a good sign that something is amiss. We pointed our weapons at people who we saw taking such action, and every time they saw us react to them, they stopped doing whatever they were about to do and paid full attention to us. We also waved to everyone, and they usually waved back. Our thought here was that if someone was waving at you they could not be shooting at you. These lessons should be taught to all soldiers coming into the theater of operations as standard operating procedures.

High preparation and full focus resulted in the safe returning of all of our soldiers' home from the CJTF-7 mission.

Soldiers purchased much of their own equipment. They purchased cell phones that we used for communications, clothing, bug spray, GPS systems, hand-held radios for in-between vehicles comms, office supplies, transformers, refrigerators, and coolers. Additionally, they paid for NTV vehicle repairs and purchased parts for maintenance, for which they were not reimbursed. Stated as an aside, we left an Iraq mechanic holding a \$1,100.00 bill for vehicle repairs, and I am not sure that the bill was ever paid. Our Battalion did not begin to support us until late October 2004. At one point they held our mail hostage. We could not get supplies, we could not get radios repaired, and if vehicles broke down we stopped using them or traded them off to local police chiefs. In terms of intelligence operations, Intelligence Contingency Funds were also not available to this unit until just prior to our redeployment home. This was unacceptable, as it significantly degraded our mission. Sources did provide information for a variety of reasons, but money was not available as an incentive. We also had issues with doctrine which would not allow us to task sources of information. We could suggest but not task. Sources do not need suggestions, they need direction. You ask them a question and tell them to come back with an answer. One final point with sources and I will be brief here. Sources provide information expecting to see action. If they do not see action, they lose faith in us and quit providing information. In a country where explosive devices litter the landscape, the best way to stop road-side bombing is to act on information provided by sources as to the old who, what, when, why, and how can I catch them questions.

In closing, we arrived as a unit and returned as a unit. We turned our mission over to soldiers who were back-filled into positions to make up a unit. We left them with some NTV vehicles, the digital cameras, the GPS, and our own hand-held radios, as well as two cell phones. We turned the remaining equipment we had back over to the Marines who were now returning to Iraq. We left our replacements with enough equipment to sustain operations for several months. In total we traveled some 30,000 miles between teams and cities in support of our teams. We fought for just about every living and

working space we had in Iraq and we left our replacements in improved living and working conditions. We were proud to serve our country and to accomplish our mission.

We were proud to serve our country and to accomplish our mission, but were frustrated by pre-mobilization issues with vehicles, equipment, supply, communications, weapons, and training prior to deployment, as well as a shortage of experienced Warrant Officers to lead the teams in the field. Once mobilized, these problems greatly hindered our performance, and exhausted our soldiers' strength and resolve, making them feel abused as well as abandoned. In spite of all of the obstacles, the soldiers excelled in the field. I tell you that it was hard to keep them motivated when they felt information they collected was not acted upon. In the end, we all felt we saved countless American and coalition forces lives, but believe that our efforts should have done more.