

Command Sergeant Major's Corner

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TRANSITION TEAMS AND THE NCO

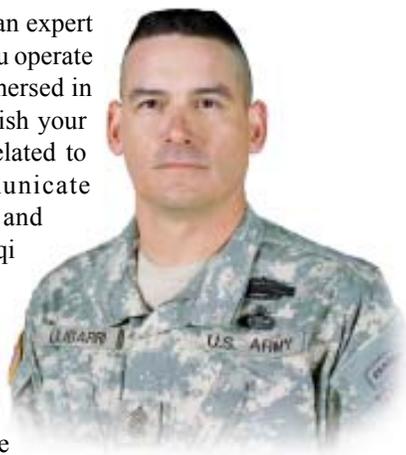
We have all seen these Soldiers, in Iraq or Afghanistan, operating alone and unafraid closely with the Iraqi or Afghan security forces. They are on the streets of Baghdad, at remote combat outposts and everywhere in between. The NCOs and officers who compose our military transition teams (MiTTs) are accomplishing what is probably our most important mission — to create Iraqi and Afghan security forces who can, in the words of Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno "... fight and win, sustain themselves, who will take ownership of their duties, and understand the concepts of duty to a democratic nation."

Once an NCO has completed two to three years as a leader in the operational force at his current skill level, it is hard to think of a more challenging or rewarding assignment than to be assigned as a military transition team member. The support of our operational forces to the Iraqi Army (IA) or Afghan National Army (ANA) is extremely important and it helps build the collective confidence of those forces; however, transition teams get "in the weeds" each and every day, to bolster the confidence of the IA/ANA soldiers in their own leaders. This effect is, arguably, one of their most important functions because it will translate into lethality towards our common enemy and it will also increase the Iraqi citizens' confidence in their own forces' ability to provide for their security.

All transition team members currently complete a five-phase, approximately 85-day training program, which includes extensive and intensive language, cultural, and tactical training. A portion of the training is conducted in Iraq or Afghanistan so the team can acclimate to the environment and meet their host nation counterparts. Initially, NCOs will be assigned to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division and conduct a permanent change of station to Fort Riley, Kansas. Like most other assignments this is a three-year tour, one year of which Soldiers can expect to be in Iraq or Afghanistan. Another option is to PCS directly to Kuwait, after a two-month temporary duty (TDY) period at Fort Riley. If NCOs are afforded the second option, they may be able to arrange a Home-base Advanced Assignment Preference (HAAP) assignment and move their family to that location. Another consideration is the three-month train-up period at Fort Riley, followed by shorter train-up periods in Kuwait and Iraq, prior to beginning their 12-month period as a transition team member.

Your experience as a transition team member will enhance your professional development in a number of ways, many of which you will transmit to Soldiers under your charge in the future. You

will become somewhat of an expert in the respective culture you operate in because you will be immersed in it. Your ability to accomplish your mission will be directly related to your ability to communicate effectively both verbally and nonverbally with your Iraqi or Afghani comrades; therefore, I encourage you to become as proficient as possible in the language. Always remember that one of your goals should be



to ensure Iraqi leaders and soldiers are perceived as competent and professional by their own people. There will come a day when our presence is minimal and the only way they will continue to secure their nation is for our counterparts to be confident in their ability to lead their soldiers and for those soldiers to be confident in their own ability to conduct combat operations. Once they achieve this goal, the citizens of Iraq and Afghanistan will gain confidence in their own troops' ability to secure their respective countries.

One common concern for NCOs is whether assignment to a transition team will affect their next opportunity for promotion. I will not speculate on what future promotion panels will or will not hold important; however, the Chief of Infantry has made it clear in his guidance to promotion panels that transition team duty is favorable, and promotion panels should not discriminate against NCOs who have served on them. For example, if a first sergeant has served for one year in a first sergeant position and is placed on a transition team for a year, he should be considered to have met the leadership requirements expected of him for promotion to sergeant major.

Whether you volunteer or are selected for duty on a transition team, it is important to remember it is a priority for our Army. The challenge will be great; however, the rewards will be even greater because you will make a difference at the tactical level — every day. Although your primary influence is at the tactical level, transition team members must always remember their actions can also have strategic implications. You will undoubtedly grow personally and professionally from your experience and become an even better Infantry leader than you already are.

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