

Contemporary Operations Study Team

A project of the Combat Studies Institute, the Contemporary Operations Study Team researches and writes a history of and archives firsthand accounts from US Army personnel and personnel from other American, Coalition, and international organizations who planned, participated in, or supported the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Interview with *Colonel David A. Ceniti*

This interview was originally given on 30 June 2016. I have since revisited my responses to describe the scope of the battalion's mission and what was accomplished better. To honor all those who served in the battalion, this updated narrative provides a more detailed summary of our shared experience at COB Adder. The battalion made logistics history in 2011 and this updated narrative captures some of that history. The original 2016 interview format is unchanged except for the revised responses.

Support Victory!

COL David Ceniti

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Abstract

In this interview, Colonel David A. Ceniti discusses his service as the Battalion Commander of the 749th CSSB (Combat Sustainment Support Battalion) – the Goldminers – a unit of the California Army National Guard during its deployment in support of Operation New Dawn from November 2010 to November 2011. The battalion was stationed at COB Adder and its mission was extensive. The 749th CSSB was responsible for the distribution HUB which included the multiclass supply support activity (SSA) and central receiving and shipping point (CRSP) which supported US forces within US Division-South (USD-S).

The battalion also performed local/line haul transportation operations carrying multiclass cargo to and from COBs throughout USD-S and beyond. The battalion also operated an ASP, a CLI storage facility, a CLIII(P) distribution site as well as a shipping container operation. Additionally, the battalion provided field maintenance for all local 4th Sustainment Brigade units as well as Army, Air Force, and installation activities on COB Adder. Lastly, the battalion was tasked with a large multi-class re-disposition operation ISO the strategic re-posturing of equipment and responsible drawdown of forces plan. The battalion accomplished this with mobile and fixed materiel redistribution teams (MRTs). The MRTs assisted the various COBs and brigades to determine property disposition of materiel, supplies, equipment and vehicles which had accumulated over 9 years of conflict. This process expedited the collection and evacuation of unserviceable materiel while recovering an estimated \$55M of serviceable materiel which was returned to the Army supply system.

Colonel Ceniti's plan upon initial deployment was to conduct an effective RIP/TOA, assume all sustainment mission sets without any disruption, team build with new units, and set the example to gain the confidence of our supported units and the chain of command.

Some of the concerns and challenges he discusses involve convoy operations, maintenance, and behavioral health resiliency. Colonel Ceniti also highlights initiatives in these areas as major accomplishments such as the Convoy Commander Academy and the QA/QC (quality assurance/quality control) lanes.

Colonel Ceniti lists four logistics implications that future Army sustainment leaders should consider. One of these is SSA operations, a competency which needs to be retained in the force structure and not entirely contracted out.

Interview with *Colonel David A. Ceniti*

30 June 2016 (Updated 17 April 2020)



This is an interview with Colonel David A. Ceniti (DC) on his experiences in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Mr. Kevin Mulberger (KM) from the Iraq Expeditionary Sustainment Operations Team at the US Army Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is conducting the interview. The IESO Team is currently compiling a collection of historical materials and interviews covering the period October 2002 through December 2011 for use in preparing the US Army Press' publication meant to capture Army sustainment efforts for OIF. The interview date 30 June 2016, and this is an unclassified (telephonic) interview.

KM: Sir, I just want to remind you that this is an unclassified interview. If I ever ask you anything that might be classified, either please answer in unclassified terms or simply say you are not able to answer. Please introduce yourself with your rank and your full name.

DC: I'm Colonel David A. Ceniti, California Army National Guard. Im currently the Deputy Chief of Staff-G4 (General Staff Logistics) for the California Army National Guard. I served as the Battalion Commander for the 749th CSSB, the "Goldminer Battalion," for three years from February of 2010 until March of 2013. I led the battalion through its deployment to Iraq during Operation NEW DAWN (OND) from November 2010 to November 2011.

KM: When you arrived, did you conduct a relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA) with another commander or unit?

DC: Yes, after a short period of acclimation, we started a two-week RIP/TOA with the 110th CSSB, Georgia Army National Guard, Lieutenant Colonel Scheideler commanding. My intent was to conduct an effective RIP/TOA by assuming all sustainment mission sets without any disruption, start team building with the companies and make a great impression on the chain of command thus establishing their confidence in their new battalion headquarters. We assumed the mission on 12 January 2011. That's the RIP/TOA on the front side.

KM: Did you do a RIP/TOA on the back side?

DC: Yes, and that's an interesting story. We did a RIP/TOA, but not with the unit scheduled to replace us. Throughout the latter half of the deployment, we coordinated our RIP/TOA with the 728th CSSB, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, Lieutenant Colonel Dugan commanding. Our RIP/TOA was well planned. When their ADVON arrived at Camp Buhering, my staff began coordination with their XO. While the main body of their unit was flying to Kuwait, I received a phone call from BG Cornett informing me that the 728th CSSB would be "off-ramped" and another battalion would be replacing us. This decision I assumed was made due to the draw-down of forces at the time. I heard a couple weeks later that the 728th was not sent home and was

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assigned to the 230th Sustainment Brigade at Camp Arifjan. Later, COL Kirklin, Cdr, 4th SB, informed me the 275th CSSB, a USAR unit, Lieutenant Colonel Houston, commanding, would be replacing us. The 275th CSSB just completed its mission at COB Liberty following the closure of USD-Central. They arrived in early October and our staffs immediately began the RIP/TOA process. We conducted the RIP/TOA ceremony on or about 20 Oct and I officially handed the mission off to LTC Houston. The 749th then departed COB Adder in three increments over the next three days arriving at Camp Virginia, Kuwait and finally departing theater on 2 November 2011.

KM: The 749th's mission and operations – what was your actual mission?

DC: The battalion's mission was extensive. The 749th was responsible for the distribution HUB which included a very large multi-class SSA and CRSP which supported all US forces within USD-S. The battalion also performed local and line haul transportation operations carrying multi-class cargo to and from COBs throughout USD-S. The battalion also operated the corps ASP, CLI storage facility, CLIIP distribution and ran a large shipping container operation. Additionally, the battalion provided field maintenance for all local 4th Sustainment Brigade units as well as Army, Air Force, and installation activities on COB Adder. Lastly, the battalion was responsible for a large multi-class redistribution operation ISO the strategic re-posturing of equipment and responsible drawdown of forces plan. Sustainment operations were steady state for the first few months however, as the drawdown took shape, operations and missions changed to sustaining the force while concurrently closing down the COB, moving materiel out of country and preparing the battalion to move, while concurrently reducing the size of the battalion's mission sets. Logistically, you could say it was OIF 1 in reverse.

KM: What were your lines of operation and effort?

DC: The battalion had several lines of effort (LOE) and supporting lines of operation (LOO). LOE #1 was our supply and distribution mission which was handled primarily by the 565th QM Company, KBR, the battalion SPO, Det 1, 8th OD Company as well as teams attached from the other companies. The supply company and its KBR contractors served as the southern HUB of the supply chain. It included a very large, indoor-outdoor multi-class supply support activity (SSA) which handled CLII, IIP, VII, and IX supply. Co-located with the SSA was the Central Receiving and Shipping Point (CRSP) which received and transloaded cargoes from supply convoys from Kuwait and loaded convoys supplying units within USD-S. Additionally, the 565th QM Company ran a large empty shipping container supply point, a CLI storage site (which was the theater reserve stocks of MREs), and the CLIII retail point (KBR run) at the COB Adder convoy lanes. This LOE also included the unit's water purification mission which was a KBR contract to operate a water purification plant. The water purification plant provided bottled water for everyone in USD-S and I think possibly at one point, the entire IJOA. The plant had the reputation of having the most purified water in the world. The 565th also managed the bottled water supply point which was the storage site for the bottled water packaged at the plant. The next line of operation was the ammunition supply point (ASP) which served as a corps level ASP, operated by Det 1, 8th OD Company. The next supply LOO involved the fixed and mobile Material Redisposition Teams (MRTs). They were key components to the strategic re-posturing of equipment and responsible drawdown plan. The battalion's support operations S&S team

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managed both MRTs. The MRTs assisted the various COBs and brigades to determine property disposition of materiel, supplies, equipment and vehicles which had accumulated over 9 years of conflict. This process expedited the collection and evacuation of unserviceable materiel while recovering an estimated \$55M of serviceable materiel which was returned to the Army supply system. The first MRT was established on COB Adder. Known as the Fixed MRT, this team (led by CW2 Pana) performed property disposition of all types of FOI materiel and other equipment on COB Adder. They determined what went back into the supply system and what when to DRMO. They also coordinated the movement of materiel south to AMC equipemtn receiving points in Kuwait. This operation ran 24/7. The fixed MRT mission was highly successful, and the mobile Materiel Redisposition Teams (MRTs) were a spin-off of the fixed MRT to replicate this function on other COBs. These mobile MRTs would prove their strategic worth as they were key to expediting the disposition of Army materiel, equipment, and vehicles from all over Iraq and coordinating its shipment to AMC in Kuwait. The mobile MRTs determined disposition of serviceable (re-entry into supply system) and unserviceable (turn-in to DRMO/Evac) materiel found on installation (FOI). By mid-tour we had three mobile MRTs stood up. One MRT worked COBs Delta, Echo, and Gary Owen; the second MRT went to Al Asad, and the third MRT to COB Kalsu. These teams were comprised of soldiers from the Bn HQs, the 565th QM Co and the other companies. The next LOE had to do with supply and services which was also the responsibility of the 565th QM company. They along with KBR contractor augmentation, they ran the CLIIP supply point (gases, oils, lubricants, batteries, acetylene tanks etc), the HAZWASTE collection point, and the recycle/scrap collection point. The next LOE was our transportation mission which fell on the 319th and 941st Trans companies, which provided line haul cargo carrying capability with 120 M915s and M872 40ft trailers. The 15th and 68th Trans companies drove both M915s and Heavy Equipment Transporters (HETs). We had 98 HETs in the fleet. Key to this LOE was the convoy commander's academy, the QA/QC lanes and the convoy preparation at the Wrangler Dome. LOE #4 was field maintenance which was the responsibility of the 632d FMC and later the 1729th FMCs. They provided direct support maintenance support to all 4th SB units and to COB Adder. The unit also operated a MST on COB Adder which ran 24/7. It provided maintenance to theater convoys passing through or RONing at COB Adder on their way to and from Kuwait. Both maintenance companies did a remarkable job keeping the battalion's fleet of M915s and HETs running. They also kept the battalion's OR rate consistently over 93%. The last LOE was force protection. This included two platoons attached to the 163d CAB to provide convoy escort for our convoys. This LOE also included installation security support and behavioral health resiliency.

KM: Can you discuss your plan upon your initial deployment?

DC: My intent upon initial deployment, was to conduct an effective RIP/TOA with the 110th CSSB, assume all sustainment mission sets without disruption, team build with our units; and set the example to gain the confidence of the units we supported and our chain of command who at this time was 224 SB and 301 ESC. I wanted everyone to know we showed up to get the job done. The staff was razor sharp, well trained, and motivated with a lot of deployment experience. Over half of the headquarters had been to Iraq before. My command sergeant major, CSM Vaka was on his fifth deployment.

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KM: Were there any circumstances that caused you to change your plan after you got over there?

DC: Yes, during the RIP/TOA we discovered the battalion's mission was much larger than we had anticipated. I was also surprised by a company sized KBR contractor force within the battalion. We also anticipated and prepared for a much greater role in convoy planning and escort. A PDSS (Pre-deployment Site Survey) would have been invaluable to our pre-mob training. At that time however, battalions were not authorized a PDSS. Regardless, we fell in on the mission, made the adjustments as appropriate, and got the job done.

KM: What were some of your major concerns?

DC: I assume you mean during the RIP/TOA? My first big concern was finding a new Support Operations Officer. I entered Iraq without a SPO. My SPO at the time was MAJ Chamberlain. An outstanding officer and leader, he was essentially on loan to us for several months as he had accepted a T10 tour and transferred out while we were at Ft Hood. I was unsuccessful in finding a replacement but COL Costanza, Commander, 224SB, offered MAJ Osowski, who at the time was the Brigade's LNO at the 301st Sustainment Command and he was willing to do another year with us. I gladly accepted. My other big concern at the time was how convoy operations were being conducted.

KM: What was your command and operational relationship with 310th ESC?

DC: Due to unit rotations, the battalion was under two sustainment brigades and two sustainment commands during the deployment. Regarding the command relationship, during the first 1/3d of our deployment, the task organization was 749th CSSB, 224th Sustainment Brigade, 301st Sustainment Command. For the remaining 2/3d's of the deployment, the task organization was 749th CSSB, 4th Sustainment Brigade, 310th Sustainment Command. Although the 310th moved to Kuwait in August 2011 to better position themselves to command and control operations, the task org was unchanged. The 4th SB and 749th CSSB missions continued. COL Kirklin, Cdr, 4SB was my rater, and BG Cornett was my senior rater during this period of the deployment. Its important to say we teamed very well with 4th Sustainment Brigade (Wranglers). We also had a good working relationship and the 310th ESC.

KM: Can you discuss the location, mission, and operations of your subordinate elements?

DC: Yes, the CSSB was task organized to include four companies and one detachment plus contractor augmentation. The battalion task organization was a mix of active, guard and reserve units. The initial strength of the battalion was about 783 Soldiers and 148 contractors. The strength increased later with bigger units. Each company except the HHC (Headquarters and Headquarters Company) rotated out and was replaced during the deployment. I conducted a RIP/TOA ceremony for each of these companies. Each of these units was stationed at COB Adder. The first task organization included the HHC, 749th CSSB, Benicia, California, Captain Hendren commanding; the 565th Quartermaster (QM) Company from Ft Hood, Captain Sparks commanding. The 319th Transportation Company, USAR, from Augusta, Georgia, Captain Sison commanding. The 15th Transportation Company, active duty, from Fort Sill, Captain Jelks

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commanding. The 632d Maintenance Company, active duty, from Fort Stewart, Captain Pena commanding, and Det 1, 8th Ordnance Company, from Ft Bragg, 1LT Beagle commanding. Plus all the KBR (Kellogg, Brown and Root) and other contractors running mission sets within the battalion. As I mentioned, all these units rotated out and were replaced. The 319th Transportation Company was replaced in March by the 941st Transportation Company, a USAR unit from Charleston, South Carolina, Captain Willie commanding. The 15th Trans Company was replaced in June by the 68th Transportation Company, an active-duty unit, from Fort Bliss, Captain Olson commanding. The 632d Maintenance Company was replaced in July by the 1729th Maintenance Company, Maryland Army National Guard, from, Havre de Grace, Maryland, First Lieutenant Forsyth commanding. The 565th QM Company was replaced in September by the 305th QM Company from Ft Campbell, CPT Williams commanding. This unit was already in Iraq, stationed in Balad and was moved to COB Adder when they finished their mission there. Det 1, 8th Ordnance company was replaced in September by Det 1, 24th Ordnance Company, Ft Stewart, 1LT Lydic commanding. Additionally, we had mobile MRTs at Al Asad, COB Kalsu and the another MRT which supported COBs Gary Owen, Delta, Echo, and Basra.

KM: What were some of your major challenges?

DC: The biggest challenge was building the Goldminer team as each unit came to us as an attachment from another battalion or brigade or component. These companies had strong loyalties to the organizations they came from. They came with different standards, different SOPs and various experiences. Regardless, we all came together as one Goldminer team. Ensuring proper safety measures were in place at work sites across the battalion was another major challenge. Nine soldiers were seriously injured during our deployment and were evacuated from theater. The leadership throughout the battalion continually doubled down on safety to ensure proper risk assessment/management and supervision was in place. Additionally, there were always force protection challenges to mitigate for convoys operations as IED and EFP risks were always a concern. The battalion's only KIA during the deployment was a Soldier from the 632d Maintenance company killed by an IED while providing convoy escort duty. Additional challenges included myriads of logistics problems which I could talk about at length, but we overcame those as logisticians, turning challenges into victories.

KM: What were some of your major accomplishments?

DC: The battalion achieved a great deal, however, there are some key accomplishments which must be mentioned here. First, is the success of the three mobile MRTs and the fixed MRT on COB Adder. What the MRTs did is one of the battalion's most significant accomplishments as the MRT mission had strategic impact directly affecting the overall drawdown timeline. The COBs had accumulated mountains of material over the years and deploying the mobile MRTs to the other COBs in USD-S enabled us to perform disposition at the COB thus expediting the process so materiel could be directly shipped to AMC/Kuwait instead of the MRT site at COB Adder. The amount of time this saved cannot be calculated. It should also be noted the MRT concept grew from cleaning out a single yard of containers full of FOI materiel into a key component of the retrograde mission. Additionally, the fixed MRT site on COB Adder was a major operation and accomplishment. When we started the fixed MRT mission in early 2011, production stood at about three containers a week. Through leadership, good planning, and

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manpower, we improved disposition processing upwards to 40 to 45 containers per week. By October, we processed 736 40-foot containers of FOI materiel. The fixed site alone recovered \$55M of materiel which was put back in the supply system. CW2 Pana was the OIC of the fixed MRT site and did a remarkable job managing that operation. The MRTs not only processed supplies and materiel they also handled vehicles. Over 5000 tactical and non-tactical vehicles were processed for turn-in and transported to the CRSP at COB Adder enroute to Kuwait.

The next major accomplishment was the logistics convoy commander's (LCC) academy which I created to improve convoy operations. MSG Hilyer and MSG Rae, 749th SPO, took on this responsibility and did a remarkable job. They created a 10-day training course which trained E6 convoy commanders as well as lieutenants on convoy commander TTPs. They graduated 83 convoy commanders who put their new skills to work, set a new standard for convoy operations in theater. Additionally, to improve convoy operations, we established a 72-96 hour convoy planning cycle for the logistical convoy prep which improved overall convoy operations substantially. The LCC was later rolled up into the 4SBs Wrangler Dome, which was the location where convoy commanders conducted convoy rehearsals with 163d CAB. I should also mention, the bde/bn CSMs were key in making this a success story. Also of note, the battalion's convoys traveled all over USD-S and occasionally into USD-C and N. Im tracking the battalion completed 158 convoys, traveling over 700,000 miles during the deployment, but I think the real number is much, much higher.

The next major accomplishment was the establishment of the Quality Assurance/Quality Control lanes or QA/QC lanes as they were called. This was another solution to convoy issues on the MSRs. Vehicle breakdowns were a serious problem as they caused lengthy delays as well as a force protection issue on the road. The QA/QC lane became one of the required stops for a convoy during the 72-hour prep phase. While at the QA/QC lane, convoy commanders and senior NCOs along with maintenance personnel would conduct final PMCS and perform final PCC/PCIs. The QA/QC lane had an immediate effect on convoy operation as vehicle breakdowns decreased to almost zero which also improved morale of our truckers. It must also be noted, that MSG Rae and MSG Hillyer were key to making the QA/QC lanes a success story.

Another major accomplishment was implementation of resiliency programs. Over the course of the deployment, eleven companies were attached to the battalion, plus contractors. With that many people in the battalion, we were very fortunate that no one took their own life during the deployment. I attribute this to our resiliency programs, particularly the five-for-five program (a 4th SB product) and great company leadership. My outstanding chaplain (Cpt Durham) was a force multiplier who was out in the companies every day talking and helping Soldiers. I believe CH Durham got around the battalion more than I did.

Also significant to our mission was our water purification plant which was contracted to KBR. The plant produced over 3,000,000 bottles of water which were distributed by the battalion throughout USD-S.

This next accomplishment doesn't get much recognition and must be mentioned here. The 565th and later the 305th QM company as well as the KBR contractors, ran the SSA and CRSP yard operation 24-7/365 without fail. Within the SSA was an enormous indoor-outdoor CLIX

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warehouse with over 12,000 ASL lines storing \$17M of stocked parts. During the last three months of the deployment, the SSA team drew down the 12,000-line ASL to zero while still supporting units and shipping its CLIX stockage to Kuwait in October and November.

Another significant accomplishment was the battalion operational readiness (OR) rate. The maintainers consistently kept the OR rate over 93% in arguably one of the most austere environments. Considering our equipment at that point in time had been there for almost 10 years, wore out by the climate and wear and tear; our maintenance teams did a herculean effort to maintain that equipment. I can tell you a lot of engine packs were replaced in 2011. Also, of note our OR rate for our HETs was over 90 percent. It was informally said by AMC staff in Kuwait, that no unit previously had achieved an OR rate that high for HETS in anyone's memory. The ability to get parts was key. The efforts by the 4SB CLIX managers and the Deputy Commander to acquire parts when they were needed was an amazing accomplishment. They were tracking parts all the way to the boat at the Port of Shuaiba. The 1729th FMC kept us running as did their Allied Trade team which fabricated replacement armor for MRAPs and provided a wide range of services to every unit in USD-S.

KM: Our last chapter in the book covers sustainment implications that the Army should address prior to the next conflict – what implications do you believe we should include?

DC: I have four recommendations. First, its important the Army retains a competency in field SSA operations. Second, as the Army will rely on contractors in the next conflict. Therefore, we must better prepare our leaders in the roles and responsibilities of the contract officer representative (COR). Third, recommend a behavior health officer be added to the MTOE of the Sustainment Brigade and possibly a BHO augments at the battalion level during deployments. Lastly, consideration should be given to expanding the logistics OBC/AOC experience to include more on logistics operations, functions and capabilities at echelons above brigade (CSSB, sustainment brigade and sustainment commands). This could improve the effectiveness of sustainment in a future conflict. I think these four points are lessons learned from OND which may have implications in the next conflict.

KM: In conclusion, do you have any unclassified PowerPoint presentations or reports that you could share with us?

DC: Yes, a few, however, most of the useful presentations were lost when we redeployed.

KM: Okay sir. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we conclude?

DC: Yes, one final thought. The Goldminer battalion, 877 soldiers and 148 contractors strong, was the backbone of sustainment in Southern Iraq in 2011. The mission was accomplished by a mix of active, guard, and reserve logistics units who were always ready, professional and on time. I'd like to think we set the standard for logistics operations throughout the IJOA. The efforts of this battalion helped get the Army out of Iraq by the end of the year. To this day, I am exceedingly proud of every Soldier and civilian who served in the Goldminer battalion. Together we moved mountains and made logistics history.

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KM: Sir, thank you for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW

