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SPECIAL WARFARE EDUCATION GROUP (AIRBORNE)
UNITED STATES ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA 28310

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

AOJK-EDG

10 AUG 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Letter to support leniency for SSG Robert Bales.

1. This letter is intended to share information and background to the type of man and Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) that SSG Robert Bales was leading up to the deployment to Afghanistan in November 2011. Through my personal and professional interactions with SSG Bales I know that he is the best NCO that I have had the honor to work with and I have never found another Soldier, enlisted or officer, who cares more about the safety and well being of the men under his care than SSG Bales consistently demonstrated. As the Executive Officer of Bravo Company (B CO), 2-3 IN I was able to see the pride and skill SSG Bales had as a Platoon Sergeant training his Platoon for combat, and I also witnessed the crushing abandonment when he was ceremoniously removed as Platoon Sergeant with the arrival of an NCO of higher rank. I was also on hand as the Headquarters, Headquarters Company (HHC) XO to see 2-3 IN scattered across Afghanistan in support of Village Stability Operations (VSO) and create an environment where SSG Bales was in a position where his organizational chain of command was separated and largely absent from any support that SSG Bales might need or request. It is a combination of SSG Bales' determination to take care of Soldiers, coupled with his lack of support from his chain of command that can begin to paint the picture of what might have led SSG Bales to feel compelled to take actions into his own hands and commit the acts of violence in Belombai. My insights cannot erase the actions that SSG Bales admits to have committed, but it can provide a backdrop to help us understand how a man on his fourth deployment with the same unit got to the point where he felt his final and only course of action was to take actions into his own hands.

2. Although I first met SSG Bales at Fort Lewis in July 2009 when I was visiting my brother, CPT Luthur Beazley IV, my first professional interactions of substance came when I became the Executive Officer (XO) of Bravo Company, 2-3 IN at the end of February 2011. I already knew SSG Bales, socially, and I was excited to have him as a Platoon Sergeant in B CO. Following the redeployment from Iraq, 2-3 IN saw the exit of many NCOs whom had been in the battalion through the previous Iraq deployments. It seemed that the Army had finally caught up with 3-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team and was forcing the hand of many NCOs to leave the unit. This led to a plummeting of the knowledge base of NCOs that had fought and maneuvered Strykers in combat. It also meant that a number of E-7 Platoon Sergeants disappeared from the ranks without backfills. For most companies it meant starting from ground zero teaching leaders before teaching Soldiers, but B CO lucked out having SSG Bales in our ranks to share his vast knowledge and experiences of what it took to live and fight out of a Stryker.

3. Despite being an E-6 in an E-7 slot, SSG Bales brought his years of combat experience to B CO and was able to provide guidance and wisdom at all levels of the company and through the training process it became abundantly clear that he was an expert at his job and leagues ahead of many of his E-7 Platoon Sergeant peers. When the battalion held Platoon Execution Evaluations (PLT EXEVALs), countless graders and other leaders in the battalion told me that SSG Bales had put together an amazing team of NCOs and the platoon was one of the most tactically sound platoons in the Battalion, despite having a clueless Platoon Leader. As the XO I was aware of the skill SSG Bales brought to the training as well as the burden his Platoon Leader was to the platoon. However, I also saw SSG Bales as an NCO that was not going to let one weak officer diminish the training value PLT EXEVALs was going to have for the Soldiers in his platoon. SSG Bales always wanted his guys focused and ready so that if the unit were ever to deploy, again, his men would be ready for combat. It was this type of focus and seriousness that

made me proud of SSG Bales in how he trained and lead his Soldiers. He always wanted them to be well trained because he knew from experience that the better trained a Soldier was the more likely they were to survive actual combat.

4. It was in Yakima Training Center that B CO received the first word that we would be deploying to Afghanistan in a matter of months and I distinctly remember the seriousness and concern SSG Bales had regarding another deployment. For many of the officers, like myself and other leaders in the battalion, a peaceful and fairly uneventful deployment to Iraq was the only combat we knew. However, for SSG Bales, and only a handful of remaining NCOs that had deployed multiple times with the unit, he knew an entirely different type of combat. It was a war of 36-hour firefights and having to clean the body parts of friends and Soldiers out of blown up Strykers. I remember SSG Bales trying to convey the seriousness we needed to take into the training leading up to the deployment. He shared stories from his experiences in the Battle of Najaf and the complexities of a battle with over 200 enemy KIA and 400 detainees. There was a sense of urgency in SSG Bales to have those around him understand that the combat he had seen in early deployments was something our unit would most likely see in Afghanistan. For those of us around SSG Bales in B CO, we valued his experience and pushed hard to ensure we trained for real combat. However, I could see a wearying concern in SSG Bales that the unit and battalion as a whole were not taking the upcoming deployment seriously enough.

5. It was leading up to our training at Fort Irwin, CA at the National Training Center (NTC) when I started to share some of SSG Bales' concerns about the battalion leadership not understanding the dynamic and dangerous threats the Soldiers of 2-3 IN were going to face in Afghanistan. Following the news from YTC that we were going to deploy, many of us wanted to focus on training to prepare for the deployment and our pending training at NTC. However, a majority of the company's time was taken by conducting layouts and inspections for the company Change of Command. Every day I was focused on resourcing training while also ensuring the company's property was inventoried and simultaneously prepared for deployment. SSG Bales was a vital ally and formidable adversary during this time because he was conflicted with the desire to execute a flawless change of command while also hyper focused on training his men for the deployment. I could see the stress and frustration that often turned into heated discussions with him trying to understand the need to conduct layouts when he would prefer giving his Soldiers more time on a range. It was hard to recognize what could have been early signs of combat stress and paranoia because I, too, shared some of his views and knew the best thing for our Soldiers would be to train. In hindsight I wish I could have recognized the stress and pushed SSG Bales to seek some help to talk to someone, but being overwhelmed myself I assumed SSG Bales was just being concerned for his men and wanting them to be well prepared, and for that I could not fault him. However, as much as we both wanted the Soldiers to be ready for the deployment, we knew we each had a job to do and did not deviate from the prescribed requirements set upon us by higher.

6. It was in August 2011 that B CO travelled to NTC where SSG Bales lost faith in the Battalion he had deployed with three times. Leading up to this loss of faith, SSG Bales had trained his platoon to a level that was unparalleled in the Battalion and I would not hesitate to say his platoon, with the addition of a new Platoon Leader, had become the most tactically and technically proficient platoon in our Battalion (if not the 3-2 SBCT). So it was with high hopes we entered "the Box" at NTC to conduct Force on Force operations and prepare for conducting Village Stability Operations. B CO was in the unique position to be isolated from the Battalion, and the company leadership felt like there was a unique opportunity to train the Soldiers for Village Stability Operations. However, several instances proved that the battalion was unable to support the company either tactically or logistically. During one operation in particular SSG Bales and his Platoon Leader lead a mission to rescue captured Soldiers, which was successful largely because of SSG Bales' ability to conduct tactical movements and still be able to transition into a friendly posture to work with the village leadership. Because of the relationship SSG Bales developed on the ground with the village leadership, a follow on Shura was scheduled at the company's base for the following morning. At the company level we were excited to have such a strong training event to highlight the dynamic need to be able to transition from fighting to talking in a tactical environment, and SSG Bales was the NCO leading the setup of the shura. However, the mood shifted when the battalion leadership decided to attend the shura and unwittingly disrupt the developing relationship between B CO and the surrounding locals. One incident was when the Battalion Commander showed up to attend the shura and instead of clearing his weapon in line with other Soldiers he shoved his weapon and helmet into SSG Bales' chest stating that he (Battalion Commander) didn't have time for protocol. SSG Bales remained

professional and did not say anything, but this example was one of many times that he was belittled and marginalized based off his rank, despite being the subject matter expert and the one in charge of coordinating the entire event. This neglect and arrogance of the developing tactical situation was only an isolated event that serves as an illustration of the lack of regard and concern the top three battalion leaders had and it struck a negative chord throughout the company as it exhibited a lack of a desire to understand the operational environment and the requirements of the Soldiers on the ground.

7. A similar incident during NTC that added to the frustration of SSG Bales toward the battalions' leadership not caring about the Soldiers was when the Battalion's Executive Officer stated that he would not send food to B CO until maintenance paperwork had been turned in to his office. This veiled threat from the Battalion was particularly offensive to a Platoon Sergeant like SSG Bales, because I knew of no other person in B CO that cared more about ensuring the Strykers were functioning than SSG Bales. Specifically, SSG Bales gave me his Tactical Standard Operating Procedures (TACSOP) from the 2006-07 deployment, which detailed the consumption rates and on hand requirements of all Classes of Supply for a Stryker Platoon in combat. In addition, SSG Bales' platoon conducted regular and documented maintenance on all equipment. However, because of the detached location of the company, providing paper copies of the maintenance records was impossible because the Logistics Patrol (LOGPAC) that was supposed to deliver requested classes of supply and collect paperwork consistently was unable to make it to the company's location. Yet, it did not bother SSG Bales that the Battalion failed to admit it had a broken logistics network that was mired in growing pains. Rather, it bothered SSG Bales that the Battalion would ever threaten withholding life-support to Soldiers in combat. Again, training for combat seemed more real to SSG Bales than the rest of those in the battalion, and he was deeply bothered that the unit was going to combat where men were going to be put in harms way while not knowing if he could count on the battalion to provide support.

8. The thought of having to fight your own unit for supplies to keep vehicles operational and Soldiers fed was something that was completely unacceptable for SSG Bales, and it was following countless events like the previously mentioned events that SSG Bales approached me to voice his concerns. He was very vocal that he was frustrated with the leadership and he was worried that his men were going to die if the battalion leadership was in anyway responsible of supporting them. I tried to calm him down and reassure him that his men would be all right because he would be there for them. SSG Bales' response was one that struck me because he said, "No. Fuck this Battalion!" For me I understood his frustration with the leadership, but his comment stuck me on a deeper level because of his history with the unit and the fact that he had fought and bled next to so many other Soldiers in the Battalion. When he saw how shocked I was he reassured me that he still loved the unit, but he was just frustrated with the leadership and he was concerned that Soldiers were going to get killed in Afghanistan because the leadership was inexperienced and couldn't lead except to take care of themselves. I should have taken this more as a personal warning sign that SSG Bales was under a lot of stress, but instead I took it as a sign of where the morale was among the Soldiers in the Battalion. For someone that had been in unit for almost eight years and always championed the 2-3 IN history as one to be proud of, to turn around and say such a bold statement was alarming. The one hope that many of us in the unit had was that the Battalion would conduct a Command Climate Survey following NTC so that concerns could be heard and addressed before deployment; however, this never happened and the unit deployed without hearing the concerns of the leaders in the companies.

9. Following NTC many personnel changes happened in rapid succession that led to the literal dismantling of the strong team that B CO had become following NTC. CPT Matthew Woods, though just taking command before going to NTC, had proven to be a strong leader but he only had a few months as the commander. His 1SG was a very young E-7 whom had been recommended for removal at NTC by the Combat Trainers. However, shortly following the redeployment from NTC, I was tapped to move to HHC to be the new HHC XO, the senior Platoon Leader in B CO was moved to A CO to be the XO, and the next senior Platoon Leader in the company was slated to replace me as a XO, leaving SSG Bales' Platoon Leader as the Senior Platoon Leader in B CO with only 3 months as a Platoon Leader. In addition to the officer moves, two new E-7s arrived to the Battalion and were pushed down to B CO where SSG Bales and another E-6 Platoon Sergeant were told that they would be returning to their platoons that day as Squad Leaders because the E-7s had arrived to replace them as Platoon Sergeants. These moves left no part of the B CO intact from the team B CO had fought and trained at NTC, as either a Platoon Leader or Platoon Sergeant from every maneuver element had been replaced with someone

completely new to the company. Watching the dismantling of the company that SSG Bales had worked so hard to train and mentor in preparation for combat was something that I know weighed heavily on his mind, and I know he felt marginalized as a leader and someone that was such an expert in all that he did. I knew, and SSG Bales knew, that we were Soldiers and we had to take orders and drive on; but for SSG Bales it was particularly hard to remain in his Platoon as a Squad Leader and watch someone else take the reigns of responsibility of the Soldiers SSG Bales had developed so thoughtfully over the course of the previous year.

10. My interactions with SSG Bales following my moving to HHC were limited, but when I did see him I could tell he was not happy with what his role was leading into being for the deployment. He felt abandoned by the Battalion because they didn't seem to appreciate what he had done for the platoon. Specifically, it was frustrating to see his 1SG, an E-7 in an E-8 position, remain in position despite a poor performance at NTC and other E-8s able to fill the slot. It was also frustrating because when I had been the XO and the 1SG had been late for work or absent from the company, SSG Bales always defaulted into the 1SG position. Because of SSG Bales' maturity and knowledge on what needed to happen in order to take care of Soldiers, he was an even more effective 1SG and seasoned NCO than the sitting 1SG. Because of the way he was abandoned it was difficult for SSG Bales to feel comfortable going to the 1SG or the CSM that had overseen the entire movement of him out of the Platoon Sergeant slot.

11. The isolation from his leadership, in particular his NCO chain of command, went from emotional to physical when the unit got to Afghanistan. At a company level all the squads were spread across two different Special Operation Task Force (SOTF) Areas of Operation (AO). This put SSG Bales and his squad in a SOTF under the command of a different Special Operation Force Battalion leadership, while his own organizational company leadership was under an entirely different SOTF. The geographic and SOTF separation put SSG Bales in the position of being the senior NCO from B CO or 2-3 IN at his specific sight. He still had communication with his Platoon Leader and the new Platoon Sergeant, but they were isolated from SSG Bales and his Squad, as well. To make it even more difficult to reach out to the higher elements of 2-3 IN, HHC was located in another location in Afghanistan in an entirely different SOTF and Regional Command (RC). With each level of separation came other logistical concerns that limited communication and ability to travel to seek guidance from higher. Additionally, despite 2-3 IN and B CO retaining Administrative Control (ADCON) of SSG Bales and his squad, it was SSG Bales' SOTF commander that retained Tactical Control (TACON), further complicating the chain of command and ability of SSG Bales to seek out help, guidance, or mentorship from anyone that might be able to help him with the concerns he might have at a given time. His SOTF leadership only cared about the tactical ability of SSG Bales and didn't want anyone to disrupt it with administrative concerns in another SOTF. All of this is not to mitigate SSG Bales' responsibility for his actions, but rather to show the complexities that SSG Bales was placed into given the concerns and stresses he already had on him going into this deployment. It is easy to see that the nature of the ADCON and TACON of the platoon up to Battalion leadership is something that could contribute to the already strong feelings of abandonment that SSG Bales possessed.

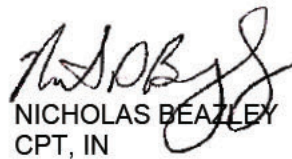
12. One common feeling that many platoon and company level leadership shared leading into the deployment was the comfort that they had knowing that they would not be working with the 2-3 IN Battalion Command Team. It was commonly thought across the companies that the top three leaders (Commander, Executive Officer, and Command Sergeant Major) were ill equipped in leadership and experience for the deployment at hand. The Command Climate was so poor that many leaders were relieved so much that they did not fear the uncertainty of knowing what would happen being placed under the command of a Special Forces Battalion. Training events from YTC to NTC had shown that companies were best served trying to fend for themselves rather than hope the Battalion would be able help. I tried to share in the collective comfort but it bothered me knowing that a Battalion with such a strong history had developed a culture that made Soldiers feel like they could not depend on their own battalion. To send NCOs and Officers into combat without a sense of connection or camaraderie is something that isolates leaders from the resources and collective sense of duty that would be inspired by being part of something larger.

13. Following the events that unfolded at Belombai, I have struggled to understand what exactly could have caused someone to go out and commit such violent acts. I have found myself wanting to blame myself for not seeing the signs of an NCO that was in need of help and likely suffering from PTSD.

I have wanted to blame leaders for not being proficient in understanding the dynamic requirements of leading men in combat. I have wanted to blame the knowns and unknowns in hope that it could change what happened and let me share a laugh with my friend again. Through all the searching and hoping for answers, all I have been able to come up with is knowing that there is not one single person we can lay the blame on for the events, but rather a cast of supporting characters that contributed to SSG Bales feeling as though he had no option but to take matters into his own hands. It pains me to realize that regardless of what comes out of the sentencing, the Army has lost a true hero, a talented NCO, and gifted leader who always put his Soldiers first. There is no getting back the old SSG Bales, the one we affectionately called Bobby. However, my hope is that my letter can help those involved in his sentencing to understand that that SSG Bales is a great man that has carried more than his share of the burden for his country. He quietly carried that burden for all of us and when he cried out with concern we did not see it as a cry for help but rather we mistakenly saw that as strength and proceeded to add more responsibility for him to shoulder on his own. It is in this moment, that I ask we realize the burden he carried with him, and find a way to show leniency on SSG Bales.

14. The point of contact for this memorandum is the undersigned and can be reached at




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