

MAJOR MICHAEL THIESFELD

Major Michael Thiesfeld has a philosophy about his role as personnel officer in human resources (HR) for the U.S. Army.

"When you're not infantry, you're not the guy pulling the trigger. There's a lot of times that HR guys feel like the redheaded stepchild," Thiesfeld said. "But we don't do it for ourselves, we do it to take care of [the soldiers down at the company level]."

During a 2005 to 2006 deployment to Iraq, Thiesfeld served the personnel officer for a battalion stationed in Mahmudiyah, in the area known as the "Sunni Triangle". Leading a team of nine, Thiesfeld was responsible for the human resources needs of an average of 900 soldiers.

"I was in charge of all the HR related resources," Thiesfeld said. Those responsibilities spanned from payroll and accountability to awards and evaluations, from deployment operations to casualty operations.

"Everything in the HR related world, I did," Thiesfeld said.

Commissioned in 1999, Thiesfeld had been working in HR for more than three years at the time of that first deployment.

But, he said, "what I was not trained or prepared for was the environment we were in. Doing [HR] in combat is a lot different from doing it at Fort Knox, Kentucky."

One of the challenges, he said, was the limited connectivity. The battalion was broken up and spread out in a number of different locations, he said, which made transferring information difficult and complicated.

But the hardest part of the deployment, he said, was running casualty operations. When a soldier was killed in action, it was the duty of Thiesfeld and his team to handle a large part of that operation.

"It's so easy in the schoolhouse. There's a process for the reports you send up for KIA and WIA," Thiesfeld said referring to soldiers killed and wounded in action.

When it becomes personal, again and again running the operations for soldiers killed in action becomes a "dreaded personal event," he said.

"On our side of the house, it doesn't end with the event. We end up preparing for the memorial service, sending out the letters of condolences, packing up the memorial gear to send to the next of kin," Thiesfeld said. "Along with the commander, in some cases you end up being the face, the point of contact for that next of kin. It opens up reminders. That was the biggest drain."



Hutchinson, MN
The Bronze Star

The Army does a good job, he said, of helping soldiers deal with the stress and hardships of deployment.

"We had a wonderful chaplain," he said. "If you...knew the person who was wounded or killed, he would come down and talk to our shop personally to see how we were doing."

"It's a tough job, but the philosophy is that we're doing it for the soldiers," he said. "I enjoy taking care of people. And I've met a lot of great people from putting them first before other things."

"I love what I do," he said.

Thiesfeld earned a Bronze Star Medal for his service during the deployment.