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FEATURED

Raptor battalion bids farewell to its first command sergeant major

by Staff Sgt. Sierra A. Melendez, 2nd Brigade Combat Team Apr 6, 2017



Photo by Staff Sgt. Sierra A. Melendez | 2nd BCT

Lieutenant Col. Christopher Payant passes the 39th Brigade Engineer Battalion colors to incoming Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Lake M during a change of responsibility ceremony. Outgoing Command Sgt. Maj. Vincent Silva played a key role in the Raptor battalion's suc newly-activated unit of Strike.

The 39th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team held a change of responsibility ceremony March 29 at the Strike Rock, in which outgoing Command Sgt. Maj. Vincent Silva relinquished duties to incoming Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Lake.

Silva was the senior enlisted adviser for the Raptor battalion since its reactivation into the Screamin Eagle Division. Already a storied battalion with accomplishments that stretch back to the Vietnam

War, the 39th BEB saw many additional achievements during Lt. Col. Christopher Payant and Silva time in command.

Silva played an integral role in the seamless transition of the once 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion to the now BEB, a change that followed the U.S. Army's BCT 2020 initiative.

"It was an extremely hectic but absolutely rewarding time," Silva said. "We had to divest military police and chemical platoons all while importing an entire engineer company, reducing a signal company and standing up a military intelligence company. It was challenging but nonetheless a learning experience."

Immediately following, the Raptors dove straight into Strike's perpetual whirlwind operational tempo. With a full-scale brigade field training exercise including two rotations at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and a subsequent deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, the Soldiers of 39th BEB quickly established themselves as force to be reckoned with.

During OIR, Task Force Raptor played an integral role in supporting the CJFLCC-OIR effort. Their missions included supporting intelligence collection operations, enabling the Iraqi Security Forces' mobility operations and protecting Coalition Forces adviser and logistics movements along ground lines of communication.

Additionally, they assumed responsibility of building and expanding the Logistic Support Area Strike in Erbil and Camp Mann in Qayyarah-West, facilitating staging of ISF equipment in preparation for the next major operation against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

"That was probably one of my most memorable moments during my time here," Silva said. "The level of destruction ISIL left was post-apocalyptic. Every structure was reduced to a pile of rubble – no landmarks.

"Our orders as Task Force Raptor was to go in there, build a fully operational airfield that could land a C-130 while simultaneously establishing a logistics staging area to facilitate the Iraqi's eventual push to Mosul – out of this place of utter mess and nothingness. At midnight on 20 October we landed a C-130 without incident. It was amazing."

Payant attributed a large portion of the battalion's success to Silva's relentless and tenacious

leadership attributes.

“Command Sgt. Major Silva oversaw the uncasing of the 39th Engineer Battalion colors,” Payant said. “I can say without a doubt that his leadership during the subsequent two years immeasurably contributed to the incredible legacy the colors he uncased represent.”

Silva humbly gave all the credit to the Soldiers and leaders who fill the ranks within the battalion.

“With the assets we have, the organization accomplished every mission assigned,” he said. “I’m not talking about the equipment we have. I am referring to the Soldiers. Our Soldiers are the best I have ever seen.”

Soldiers of the Raptor battalion warmly welcomed incoming Lake, his wife, Sarah, and their children Nathan and Samantha. The Lakes are no strangers to Strike. Lake acted as the Strike Ready Force command sergeant major during the brigade’s deployment.

“Command Sgt. Maj. Silva and Lt. Col. Payant, thanks for the warm reception into the Raptor battalion,” Lake said. “You both have built a team of fit and disciplined warriors who proved that they could accomplish any mission in Iraq.

“I feel privileged to fill such big boots.”

Strike brigade is in a transition period, and the ceremony was one of three changes of responsibility that occurred within 2nd BCT. 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, and 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, also conducted ceremonies. In the upcoming weeks, several Strike battalions will conduct change of command ceremonies.

