

Eyewitness to War

Volume III

US Army Advisors in Afghanistan



Michael G. Brooks
General Editor



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Cover: US Army Staff Sergeant Robert Bauer instructs Iraqi Army Soldiers
Photo by Mate 2nd Class Katrina Beeler, US Navy

Eyewitness to War
Volume III
US Army Advisors in Afghanistan
– Oral History Series –

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Foreword

Eyewitness to War Oral History Series: US Army Advisors in Afghanistan is the third publication by the Combat Studies Institute that makes exclusive use of oral history. This volume is a product of interviews obtained by the CSI Operational Leadership Experience (OLE) project and our Contemporary Operations Study Team (COST).

The interviews used in this volume range from a senior officer who conceptualized the idea for Task Force *Phoenix*, the Coalition Joint Task Force that execute a broad-based training, mentoring, and assistance program aimed at improving the Afghan National Army's (ANA) ability to field mission-ready operational commands, to embedded transition team members assigned to coach, teach and mentor their ANA counterparts. The interviews are in their own words; they provide frank commentary to a range of topics including pre-deployment training, logistics support, poppy eradication (and some of the corruption they encountered associated with that task) and integration of Special Forces with conventional infantry on operations.

As the US Army continues its advisory mission in Afghanistan and in other countries around the globe, the relevancy of *US Army Advisors in Afghanistan* grows and should be on the reading list for Soldiers tasked with this mission. Soldiers interested in this topic are invited to read two other CSI publications: *Occasional Paper 18—Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador*, and *Occasional Paper 19—Advice for Advisors: Suggestions and Observations from Lawrence to the Present*.

CSI—The Past is Prologue!

Roderick M. Cox
Colonel, US Army
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Introduction

Everybody has a story to tell. In 2005, the US Army Training and Doctrine Command gave the Combat Studies Institute (CSI) the mission to capture some of those stories by conducting oral interviews with Soldiers who have participated in operations during the Long War.

In this third volume of the Eyewitness to War series, the narratives of US Army Advisors in Afghanistan are unvarnished, first-person accounts of Coalition personnel deployed in support of OEF. Those accounts, because of the immediacy of their production, some of them just months after their return from their missions, will be of incalculable value and service to historians, researchers, media and future generations of Soldiers and civilians to come. The accounts have been only lightly edited for clarity to remove the occasional use of excessive profanity and the rare injurious personal attack. The content and tone of the interviews remain untouched. No classified information has been included in this book and the opinions expressed by the participants are their own.

Michael G. Brooks
General Editor

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Interview Abstracts

Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry. Lieutenant General Eikenberry's first assignment to Afghanistan was as Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan (OMC–A) and US Security Coordinator from October 2002 until September 2003. His second assignment was as the Commanding General of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC–A), from May 2005 until January 2007. In this interview, Lieutenant General Eikenberry focuses primarily on the timeframe of his first assignment as Chief of OMC–A. He discusses the early development of the Afghan National Army (ANA) from scratch the establishment of the Afghan Central Corps. Lieutenant General Eikenberry also discusses his experiences with the internationalizing of the mission, along with donations of Soviet-style equipment and how it made standardizing equipment problematic. Lieutenant General Eikenberry continues to discuss topics that include his relationship with Afghanistan government officials, security sector reform, creating military doctrine for the ANA, establishing a Ministry of Defense and General Staff, the recruiting efforts for the ANA, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program, and the creation of Task Force (TF) *Phoenix*.

Colonel Dominic Cariello. Colonel Cariello was the commander of the 57th Field Artillery Brigade, Wisconsin National Guard. When he was given the opportunity to lead an embedded training team (ETT) to Afghanistan, Colonel Cariello arrived in theater in February 2006 and, during his 11-month deployment, commanded two regional corps advisory groups and served as the senior mentor to two Afghan generals, Major General Rahmatullah Raufi and Major General Abdul Khaliq, the commanders of the Afghan National Army's 205th and 203d Corps respectively. In this interview, Colonel Cariello begins by discussing the pre-deployment training he received at Camp Shelby and then moves into his "15-minute right-seat ride" upon arriving in country, which led immediately into planning for Operation RIVER DANCE—the poppy eradication program conducted jointly with the ANA.

Colonel Mark Milley. Colonel Milley was the commander of 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division and was deployed in support of OEF from May to December 2003. In this interview he talks about the creation of Task Force *Phoenix*, assuming ownership of training the ANA from the Special Forces, and the establishment of the Kabul Military Training Center. He also talks about helping to stand up the Central Corps headquarters and its staff.

Lieutenant Colonel John Schroeder. Upon relinquishing his three-year command of a Wisconsin National Guard field artillery battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Schroeder was offered the opportunity to volunteer for Embedded Training Team (ETT) duty in Afghanistan. He was mobilized in January of 2006 and until

his redeployment in January 2007, served variously as the ETT leader assigned to 3d Kandak, 2d Brigade (3–2) of the Afghan 203d Corps, the 2d Kandak, 1st Brigade (2–1), 203d Corps, and finally as the 203d Corps executive officer and deputy commander mentor. In this interview, Lieutenant Colonel Schroeder discusses first the pre-deployment training he received at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, then moves into the process of getting into theater, meeting and establishing rapport with the Afghan units as well as his 16-man advisor team and also the circumstances that found him changing from 3–2 Kandak in Gardez to 2–1 Kandak in Orgun–E and later Ghazni after the ETT leader for the latter unit was relieved.

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Slusher. Lieutenant Colonel Slusher, a Kansas National Guard soldier, served on an ETT in various places throughout Afghanistan in 2006. Slusher begins his interview by discussing the treatment of other states' guardsmen in the Wisconsin National Guard's mission as well as the generic nature of pre-deployment training and his willingness to take the most difficult assignments. He explains his role in Operation RIVER DANCE, why he viewed it as a failure, and the importance of opium to everything in Afghanistan. Slusher closes the interview by stating that he approaches other cultures with humility and humor, that many of the problems in Afghanistan have to be worked out by the Afghans and that successes in Afghanistan might not be ready solutions for Iraq or elsewhere.

Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Stevenson Jr. Lieutenant Colonel Stevenson discusses his November 2005 through August 2006 deployment to Afghanistan during which he served as chief of the Special Initiatives Group in Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan's CJ5 or Plans section. In this capacity, Stevenson was responsible for the planning and oversight from a policy perspective of several key programs, among which were: the partnership program with the ANA and Combined Joint Task Force–76; the Afghan National Police (ANP) support program; reestablishing provincial coordination centers in the southern and eastern regions of the country with the mission of coordinating, synchronizing and de-conflicting all provincial security, and development operations by maintaining and promulgating a common operational picture of army, police, National Directorate of Security, and development/reconstruction organization activities.

Major John Bates Mobilized in April 2005 for service in Afghanistan as a company ETT leader, Major Bates, a full-time National Guardsman, arrived in country in July and linked up with 1st Company, 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade of the 205th Corps. During his roughly five months as an ETT leader as part of Task Force *Phoenix* 4.0, Bates' infantry company was operationally controlled by Task Force *31* and was assigned to Special Forces A-teams to conduct operations all over the five provinces in the Afghan southern area of responsibility. Midway through his tour, he briefly acted as a brigade logistics officer before serving out the remainder

as the executive officer/aide-de-camp to the Commanding General of Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC–A), Major General Robert Durbin.

Major Stephen Boesen. From May 2007 through May 2008 Major Boesen served variously as the chief of three different ETT teams within 1st Brigade, 203d Afghan Regional Security Integrated Command–East, and as the operations officer for 1st Brigade, ARSIC–East. During his tour, he was based, again variously, out of Khowst, Gardez, and Ghazni. In this interview, Boesen—an Iowa National Guard infantry officer with, at the time, more than 21 years in service—begins by discussing the three months of pre-deployment training he went through at Fort Riley and then of his advisory experiences with the 203d Corps.

Major John Clark (United Kingdom). In this interview, Major Clark discusses his deployment from February to May 2006 as the commander of the Afghan National Army Training Team (ANATT) which was designed to mentor the leadership at the noncommissioned officer school at the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC).” In this interview, Clark details the three courses he oversaw as part of Task Force *Phoenix*: “a junior NCO course to train lance corporals and up, a senior sergeant course, and a company quartermaster sergeant/regimental sergeant major-level course. ‘We spanned the chain of NCO courses. It was a mixture of classroom work and field-craft out of the back of the camp.’”

Major Thomas Clinton Jr. (USMC). Major Clinton deployed to Afghanistan in April 2004 to lead a 13-man embedded training team assigned to coach, teach, and mentor the 1st Battalion of the 3d ANA Brigade which was considered a commando unit. By the time he and his fellow Marines got in country to begin their six-month tour, the commandos “were in combat operations and they were pretty well versed in what they were doing.” Clinton further talks about his work with a number of Special Forces units, the manifold difficulties he had obtaining necessary equipment, how higher headquarters often did not have an adequate understanding of the real-world problems he and his team had to deal with and which periodically required them to do what “Marines have probably done throughout the centuries—begging, borrowing, or stealing from anywhere we could.”

Major Hurel Johnson. Major Johnson deployed as a volunteer from the US Army Reserve to embed as a trainer and mentor with the ANA. Johnson transitioned through Fort Benning’s Continental United States (CONUS) Replacement Center with a week of training and in January 2004, Johnson traveled to Bagram and then on to Camp Policharki, Afghanistan which is east of Kabul, in order to join Task Force *Phoenix*. The five-man team mentored the Afghan garrison commander and his staff. Assisted by contractors from the MPRI Company, Johnson and other advisors addressed all manner of base camp and station operations as well as support.

Major Rich Lencz. Major Lencz served on an ETT as the advisor to the S3 and the commander of 1st Battalion, 2d Brigade, 203d Corps. He later served in 2d Battalion, 2d Brigade, 203d Corps, in Paktika Province from January 2007 to January 2008. Lencz was paired up with the other nine members of the team and received pre-deployment training at Fort Riley. Once the team arrived in theater, they were paired up with the ANA at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Bermel. The team would conduct three to four patrols with the Afghans per week. During these patrols, they would hand out humanitarian assistance items to the villagers or they would travel to the combat outposts (COP) around the village of Shkin. During the course of the deployment, there were two missions with the 10th Mountain Division aimed at clearing al-Qaeda and Taliban forces out of the Bermel Valley: CATAMOUNT FURY and CATAMOUNT FURY SURGE. Lencz talks about the operational role the ETT and the ANA played in support of these missions and assesses their effectiveness.

Major Christopher Plummer. For most of his January to November 2005 deployment, Major Plummer served as the training and fielding officer for the entire Afghan National Army or ANA, focusing on marksmanship, small unit tactics, and fielding combat, combat support, and combat service support battalions country-wide. Working under the Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan, Plummer was based out of Camp Eggers but his duties took him “all over the country in some of the most dangerous places in Afghanistan.” In this interview, he discusses in great detail and with remarkable candor about the full range of his experiences. Plummer talks about numerous equipment shortages the ANA had and his poor opinion of the general officer leadership he saw, the extensive interactions and doctrine-related challenges he had with Coalition partners including the British, French and Germans, his assessments and personal waging of the counter-insurgency fight, as well as his analysis of enemy capabilities and motivations.

Major Doug Ross. From July 2005 through July 2006, Major Ross—a field artillery officer in the Kentucky National Guard—supported Operation ENDURING FREEDOM on an ETT assigned to the 4th Kandak of the 1st Brigade, 205th Corps and operating in Regional Command–South in the Kandahar region. Based out of Camp Shir Zai, Ross was dual-hatted as both the operations officer and the artillery mentor of this combat support Kandak. In this interview, he discusses the training and mentoring process, his relationship with a partnered artillery battalion from the 82d Airborne Division, as well as the operations conducted by his Kandak in support of infantry units. The principal focus though, is Ross’ participation in the major poppy eradication operation in the spring of 2006 which was known as Operation RIVER DANCE.

Major John Tabb. Major Tabb deployed from January 2007 until January 2008 as both a border police transition team (BPTT) chief and an ETT team chief.

An armor officer, Tabb operated in Farah Province in the southwest of Afghanistan. His area of operations belonged to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) nations like Italy and Spain and had no US, British, or Canadian forces. After volunteering for the mission, Tabb began training under Fort Riley's relatively new program in October of 2006, where he felt they should have received a much more extensive block of instruction on marksmanship with the AK47. In Afghanistan, his team was stationed about 25 miles away from the regional headquarters at Camp Stone, located just outside of Herat. His team advised the 6th Afghan Border Police Brigade which had responsibility for the entire Iranian border from Nimruz Province in the south to the Turkmenistan border in the north.

Major William Woodring. As an Alaska National Guardsman, Major Woodring served on a brigade ETT for the 209th ANA Corps as part of Task Force *Phoenix* 3.5 from February 2005 through February 2006. In this interview, he begins by discussing the less than adequate pre-deployment training he and his fellow ETT members received at Fort Hood, Texas, saying that it was manifestly not geared toward teaching them to advise indigenous forces. Subsequently their team was broken apart and, once in country, Woodring was placed with an entirely new team. Based in Mazar-e-Sharif, Woodring personally advised the Afghan operations and intelligence officers in the conduct of a broad-ranging stability and support/counterinsurgency mission. He was also heavily involved in making sure national elections took place as smoothly as possible. Woodring talks about the constant problem of corruption, the difficulties he faced communicating with his Afghan counterparts and the two US brigades his ETT served under: the 76th Infantry Brigade from Indiana and the 53d Infantry Brigade from Florida.

Command Sergeant Major Jeff Janke. Command Sergeant Major Janke volunteered for ETT duty, was mobilized, went through pre-deployment training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi—of which he discusses both good points and bad in great detail—and finally arrived in country in February of 2006. He took up his duties in Gardez as the mentor for the Afghan 203d Corps sergeant major. Janke begins by discussing the overall role of NCOs in the ANA and then, more specifically, how his comparatively young 28-year-old Afghan corps sergeant major handled the myriad challenges that arose from his position. These challenges were compounded by his relative inexperience but also mitigated by his many positive traits as well.

Master Sergeant Michael Threatt. Master Sergeant Threatt is a veteran of two deployments to Afghanistan as part of 3d Special Forces Group (Airborne)—the first from January to August 2004 as the 1st Battalion, Charlie Company operations sergeant, the second was from June of 2005 to February of 2006 as an Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) team sergeant in 2d Battalion. Threatt, in this wide-ranging and introspective interview, comprehensively and expertly

discusses a range of subjects and issues related to his experiences in Regional Command–South (the Kandahar area) and in Regional Command–East (the Paktika Province’s Bermel District). During his two tours, Threatt was involved in everything from security, reconnaissance, air assault, and other direct action missions (both mounted and dismounted) and to advising and training the ANA and border police, as well as executing a variety of civil affairs, counterinsurgency, and psychological operations. He discusses a number of these missions against (and ambushes by) al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in varying degrees of detail according to operational security restrictions. He is remarkably informative as well as candid in regard to dealing with interpreters, the rapport building process, and working and fighting with indigenous forces.

Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry
27 November 2006

This is an interview with Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry (KE), the Commanding General of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan at the time of this interview which is on his experiences in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). The interview is conducted by Dr. Lisa Beckenbaugh (LB) from the Contemporary Operations Study Team or COST at the Combat Studies Institute or CSI, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The team compiles a history of OEF covering the period October 2001 to September 2005. We are located in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and the time is approximately 0810 hours on 27 November 2006. This is an unclassified interview. If we ever enter classified territory, please either respond in unclassified terms or simply say you're not able to answer. Thank you for agreeing to this interview, Lieutenant General Eikenberry. By way of introduction and for the record, please state your name and rank.

KE: My name is Karl Eikenberry, Lieutenant General.

LB: Since you have served in Afghanistan twice, could you please list your duty positions and the dates of deployment for each mission.

KE: My first assignment was as Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan (OMC–A) and US Security Coordinator. That was from October 2002 until September 2003. My second assignment was as the Commanding General of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC–A). That was from May 2005 until present.

LB: For the purpose of this interview, we are going to primarily focus on your experiences with the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan. Were you the first military leader of this organization?

KE: I was not. I was preceded by a National Guard brigadier general.

LB: What was your command relationship with Combined Joint Task Force 180 (CJTF–180), the US Embassy, and US Central Command (CENTCOM)?

KE: I was under the command of the commanding general of CJTF–180. At that time, that was Lieutenant General Dan McNeill from the time of my arrival until May 2003 and then subsequently Lieutenant General McNeill transferred command to Lieutenant General John R. Vines. So I was under their direct command line. It is hard to define with a precise military term but I had a, let's say, security assistance responsibility that took me directly to US CENTCOM and that was more in terms of programmatics and resourcing. Then I had a coordination relationship, actually more of a partnering relationship, with the US Ambassador there wearing my hat as US Security Coordinator. A lot of the work that I was

doing in Kabul at that time with working on security sector reform took me into areas of policy that were the purview of the US Ambassador, so I had a close coordination relationship with him.

LB: How did you resolve conflicts between all of these organizations?

KE: It is interesting looking back at that time, Lisa. I would not characterize the year that I was there as filled with a lot of tension between the different organizations. The mandate that was given to our command, wearing my hat as Chief of Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan, the building of the Afghan National Army of ANA, there was not really a divide between what CJTF–180 wanted accomplished, what CENTCOM wanted accomplished, and what the US Embassy wanted accomplished. So at that particular time on the ground, there appeared to me to be a pretty good common view of what needed to be accomplished and a unity of effort that was achieved just by careful coordination, ensuring that people were kept informed of what each other was doing.

LB: I reviewed the CENTCOM campaign base plan and it seemed that initially CENTCOM did not perceive the requirement to build an Afghan National Army or any security forces. When did the Coalition realize that this was going to be a key task?

KE: Well, I think one of the reasons that I was sent to Afghanistan in October 2002 was that by that point in time there was clearly, as I was going in, recognition that the building of an Afghan National Army would be central to success. I can't talk about what preceded that. CJTF–180 arrived in Afghanistan in May of 2002. Certainly by the time I arrived in October 2002, the mission was clear that one of our central tasks would be the fielding of a capable Afghan National Army. On the other hand, as I look at the time that I arrived in early October 2002, my own headquarters on the ground as a two-star general consisted of about 15 people working out of a couple offices in the US Embassy. As an adjunct to that there was a small planning staff and then the actual training mission was being conducted by a Special Forces battalion that was on the ground. So I think as I arrived, the mandate was clear and it was a central task but it is also fair to say that up until that time there had not been any resources that were committed.

LB: As the situation evolved, how did OMC–A fit into the overall CENTCOM campaign base plan?

KE: I would say, again, during my first year on the ground, I really considered myself a subordinate unit of Lieutenant General Dan McNeill and he had a clear line of operation established in his campaign plan which was for the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan and the building of the ANA. During that period of time, we were still in a phase of the development of the Afghan National Army where the army had not achieved sufficient mass and sufficient quality and

experience capability that they were able to go out and conduct combat operations. So from October 2002, when I arrived there, until about the summer of 2003, as far as the amount of interaction between the operational command of CJTF-180 and my command, there weren't strong linkages that were there. Now, that started to change by the summer of 2003, in the last several months because we finally started to develop capabilities where ANA units could deploy outside of Kabul and when they could deploy outside of Kabul they could start to work much closer with the operational forces.

LB: I have read that the Afghan National Army was designed around the NATO model. What was the original design of the force structure?

KE: It was a phase development for the Army. When I arrived in October 2002, the emphasis had been placed entirely on the development of the operational forces and the first phase of the development of the Afghan National Army would be the establishment of one corps, an Afghan National Army corps being the equivalent of a very light American light infantry division, so mostly light infantry with some enablers. This corps was called the Central Corps and it was to be established in the greater Kabul area. The thinking was that we would build up this one Central Corps which would then, in terms of its leadership and getting the systems right, serve as the foundation and the central point from which the ANA operational forces could expand based upon the experiences gained.

The second attribute of the Central Corps was that it would have enough combat power that it would be able to act on the behest of the central government and move forward into any area of Afghanistan and impose its will upon any contending factional force. So that was the idea. Then there was also the more distant thinking that after that task was accomplished, we would then start expanding the presence of the ANA slowly over time into the different regions of Afghanistan. So, not long after that we started to conceptualize the idea that perhaps there should be four or five regional corps with the Central Corps in the middle and then maybe four other corps that were established throughout Afghanistan and wouldn't have as much capability as the Central Corps.

LB: When was it first seen that this would happen?

KE: The thinking was that it would not happen until we had the Central Corps fairly well established. If I recall, Lisa, I would have to go back and look. We were thinking in terms of late 2004 that we might be able to achieve that. So perhaps maybe later in 2004 we might then start to plant flags outside of Kabul and slowly build up. So we had looked at this process of building a strong Central Corps as being maybe a two-year or a two-year-plus process, with the training of the whole Army beginning in May of 2002. So, that was the thinking on the operational force but by late 2002 or early 2003, our analysis of the problem was rapidly evolving.

I just discussed the operational force in some detail but we had a group of staff officers on the ground who were quite capable and they started to think in terms that if we were going to build a holistic force, a holistic army, a complex organization and a complex institution, obviously building combat forces was only part of the equation. So, by late 2002, we were thinking in terms of a complex organization that would consist of a Ministry of Defense and General Staff at the top which would give policy and operational direction as well as a set of sustaining institutions such as an intermediate between the Ministry of Defense and General Staff and the operational force and so, the idea of logistics commands, medical commands, and so forth, and then finally at the base would be the operational force. That thinking began by late 2002. By the spring of 2003, we were starting to develop fairly mature plans for that.

LB: So that significantly changed your mission?

KE: Yes, very significantly. To go back on that, my mission when I went in as a first task was to build an Afghan National Army, defined—as the problem was handed to me—to build a Central Corps and we will think about the next phase after we get a little bit further into this. So, the evolution of thinking of a Ministry of Defense, General Staff, and sustaining institutions, and a complex organization all evolved after early October 2002.

LB: In your opinion, was there pressure to increase the size of the Afghan National Army and pressure to do it even more quickly than originally planned?

KE: Not on my watch. Now, there was some tension or pressure let's say, or expectation, to continue to produce infantry battalions according to the production schedule that we had established. What was good was, as I arrived, I was given as a first principle that it would stay all-national and it would stay all-ethnic and Lieutenant General McNeill was extremely supportive when we reached decision points about whether or not we should proceed with the training of another infantry battalion. If I were to go to him and report, as was the instance several times, that it was not all-ethnic, that we had a much higher percentage of Pashtuns or Tajiks, let's say, and it was not reflecting the ethnic demographics of the country, he was very good about showing support for that. So, there were several times where we delayed the training of infantry battalions because the Afghan recruiting system wasn't able to deliver the necessary all-ethnic characteristics that we insisted upon. Now after my departure, there were a series of decisions made to rapidly accelerate the growth of the Afghan National Army.

LB: Now I am going to ask a few questions about the joint mission. The Bonn Agreement stipulated that the Coalition countries support the mission. Could you describe some of the international support you received?

KE: Yes. Prior to my time, Lisa, in May 2002, when the mission of the training of the ANA first developed, just prior to that, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with the British and the Turkish, had helped trained up Afghan National Army units. At that time, it really wasn't a structured Afghan National Army program but they were pulling together Afghans and trying to put them in battalion formations. So there were several battalions that were trained up with their oversight, primarily the Turkish, and then when our mission began in May of 2002, again, before I got there, the first group on the ground was our US Special Forces. They had the task of just training infantry battalions. Their narrow task was to train infantry battalions. So they did so but they also partnered with the French Army. Then the French Army, with us, went through a period of time where the French would train one infantry battalion and then we would train another. In fact, it was quite interesting. There was a story before I arrived where we were having an extraordinary problem with pay, the ANA soldiers' salaries. We had some bureaucratic obstacle that we had run into and the French actually delivered for us until we could work through our own governmental bureaucratic problems. So, there was a period of several months where the French were taking care of the pay for the army to solve that. Now beyond that, very early on in the process of our work in Afghanistan with building the ANA, we did try to internationalize the mission. By the fall of 2002, after my arrival, we were able to work pretty effectively with key allies and get them engaged in important aspects of the army building program. I will give you some examples.

By the fall of 2002, the British had agreed and had established a noncommissioned officer training program which has since evolved into a very sophisticated program. The French provided for officer training. Then we also brought in a series of other countries that were able to do niche missions or make niche contributions. As an example, in 2003, we had the Mongolians coming in quite expert at using Soviet style artillery such as D-30 122-mm Howitzers. So, the Mongolians provided mobile training teams but there are many examples of countries that were then making niche contributions. As I recall, the Romanians came in and did work with the old T-55 and T-62 Tanks. The Bulgarians came in and they did work with Soviet armored personnel carriers.

LB: So there were a lot of countries that had experience with Soviet-style equipment or weapons?

KE: There was a combination of western contributions that were being made with regard to leadership training and basic training and then there were a series of countries that had the equipment experience with the Soviet-type of equipment that were coming in and helping out in that area.

LB: How many representatives from Coalition countries were on your staff and in what capacity did they serve?

KE: I can't recall, but I was about to say though that we did have a pretty good representation of military on our staff. We had, as I recall, on the staff itself, Canadians, British, French, and some of the Eastern European countries that made contributions in that area. So, we had a pretty good Coalition group in there.

LB: Was most of the equipment Soviet-style equipment that you received for the Afghan National Army?

KE: It was, certainly in terms of the weaponry and the ammunition. The vast majority of it was Soviet-style. It included AK47s, D-30 122-mm Howitzers and the tanks and the mortar systems were Soviet bloc. Then there was also other materiel that was delivered that was more generic like boots, ruck sacks, and just basic equipment. Then there was a hodgepodge of all kinds of vehicles that were being donated but the donation of these various kinds of equipment caused great difficulties in terms of standardization for the ANA.

Then, once the decision was made to rapidly accelerate the growth which was a decision made after my departure, this started to become a very significant problem. It was more manageable when you were talking about one corps in the Kabul area but with the decision to expand rapidly with different corps and different brigades within those corps and different battalions within those brigades having different kinds of vehicles and different kinds of weapon systems, that started to cause some great difficulties. Then secondly, it was just the amount of transaction costs that are involved in working through a donation system. That is, a country with great intentions might offer 1,000 AK47s and 500,000 rounds of ammunition to go with them but the amount of staff effort that would have to be put into trying to get the delivery of that equipment, actually seeing it through to delivery to the force and then the training of the force on that kind of equipment, was extraordinary.

So there is a tipping point, a balance, when you go with a donation system, where you have to consider what price you are going to pay for not standardizing force and what price you are going to pay for taking less than very significant donations when clearly it is worth the effort and it is cost effective from a staff viewpoint to take this very large donation because there is a huge payoff. That is a political issue as well because you want to keep as many countries engaged in this fight as possible and it is very difficult when you are offered a donation from some country to reject it. At the end of the day, in many instances, when you fall below a threshold of standardization problems and sufficient quantity and quality, you are probably better off to ask the country just to donate money. In terms of donations, there is also another flaw with the donation system or another weakness with the donation system. Generally, when countries make a donation, it doesn't come with the training, it doesn't come with the sustainment package, and it doesn't come with the ten years of guaranteed spare parts. So in cases of donations of particular

kinds of vehicles and small donations of particular kinds of weapons systems, we found those not to be very cost effective. Over a series of several years, the equipment simply would not be maintained or operating properly.

LB: Was there a conscious decision to use Soviet style weapons because the Afghans were familiar with them?

KE: There was. There was absolutely that factor. One was that they were familiar with them. Two was that it is rugged equipment and it can take a lot of abuse which in the Afghan environment is a good characteristic. Then third was the idea that with those kinds of systems in Afghanistan, there was not only a familiarity with them but getting spare parts would not be a challenge. As an example, when we finally assembled the T-55 and T-62 Tanks for the ANA, it was extraordinary when those were first delivered to Kabul from different parts of Afghanistan as different militia commanders were under the disarmament process and were letting go of some of their hardware and were donating or turning it over to the central government. My sense was that this equipment would be impossible to maintain because there would simply not be sufficient spare parts available, if nothing else. However, the Afghans, after 30 years of warfare and having to figure out how to fight in a very autonomous and independent manner, turned out to be extraordinarily clever and adept in keeping things running. They would go out to the old junk yards where there were rusting Soviet T-55 and T-62 Tanks and they would scrounge parts and cannibalize the rusting tanks to keep things going. So that decision to go with Soviet systems in the first several years of the development of the ANA probably was the correct decision. Now, at this point in time as we look at it, should there be a shift to more standardized equipment and better equipment? The answer is probably yes. If you go back to that first premise and the use of Soviet equipment, it was that the Afghans were capable of operating it. That's true. If you had given them a higher level of equipment at that time, they didn't have the leadership, the maintenance systems, and so on that could maintain it but you have to continue to look at this enterprise of building security forces because conditions change. As the leadership gets better and as these sustaining institutions do kick in and start to develop their own competencies, then you might want to go back on some of your initial decisions and maybe change them. Our assumption at the time was that we couldn't maintain the equipment. That was the correct assumption. It was much easier to maintain Soviet equipment and they could not maintain more sophisticated equipment. I think that was a good assumption at that time but that has probably changed now.

LB: Could you describe your working relationship with the other services such as the Marines, Navy, and Air Force?

KE: At the time I was there, Lisa, it was very different from now. It was very much an Army-centric program. If I recall, we did have some Marines with us. In fact, at that time, we had some very good Marines that were assigned to the mission but there were very few from the US Navy. Now we have the US Navy in 2006. Then, because we had made a decision in the 2002/2003 time frame that we were not going to, at that point, develop a very robust Afghan National Army Air Corps, we also did not have a real robust Air Force presence with us.

LB: How was your mission affected by the staffing of OMC-A in 2002 and 2003?

KE: When I reported in October of 2002, as I said, we had about 15 people on the ground and then we did have a plans section that was an adjunct. They initially had a coordination relationship with me but then I went to Lieutenant General McNeill and asked if they could be chopped under my command. So Lieutenant General McNeill was extremely supportive of my efforts. As soon as I got on the ground and made assessments that if this was really a main line of operation for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan that we would need to have much more of a headquarters staff implementation capability, we started building rapidly.

LB: So was it easy to find people?

KE: Well, Lieutenant General McNeill was very good about this. Remember that his headquarters was much smaller in terms of an operational headquarters than we have today on the ground but Lieutenant General McNeill, wherever he could fill my requests, would send people from his headquarters down to join my headquarters. He was generous in that area and then he gave me the full support as I went quickly back to US CENTCOM through him showing what organization I needed to build to quickly achieve success. That did take us a period of several months, as I recall Lisa, to actually start getting delivery of people on the ground but we had good support from Lieutenant General McNeill and I had very good support from US CENTCOM.

LB: How well do you feel the services supported your needs for personnel, equipment, and funding?

KE: In terms of equipping, because of the decision we had made to go with a donation based system, I would have to say that the services were doing what they were being asked to do. In terms of personnel, I would say that because of the way we were building our headquarters as an ad hoc headquarters, it was not a table of organization and equipment or TOE kind of headquarters. We had to build it on the fly. So this expression about the joint manning document kind of headquarters where it is a headquarters that is made up for a particular mission, ad hoc, tailored, and then the call goes out for individual fills to come in, I would have to say that

the record was decidedly mixed. There were a lot of phone calls that were being made late at night back to different commands and a lot of direct hires were going on from OMC–A to help populate our headquarters as fast as we could. Generally what I would find was that back here, at that time, there was not stress on the force yet. We were not in Iraq yet so there was great support for whatever I was asking for.

LB: Did that change with the invasion of Iraq?

KE: Yes, it did.

LB: Was it a little harder to get personnel, equipment, and funding?

KE: It was. For instance, our embedded trainer task force, Task Force *Phoenix*, which was a brigade-level command serving as the nucleus of our embedded training or mentoring effort within the ANA with the first Task Force *Phoenix* being an active duty brigade from the 10th Mountain Division. I asked that they be replaced with another active duty brigade but I was told that no, it would be a National Guard brigade that would take their place. This was in the fall of 2003 before my departure and I think that was already starting to reflect the stress on the force.

LB: Afghanistan had next to no infrastructure or military systems in place when you took on this mission. Can you describe the process of basically starting from scratch?

KE: Well when you start from scratch, I don't even know where you start to tell the story of starting from scratch but I think if I recall a couple of things about the challenges of this starting from scratch, one was in terms of the leadership challenges that we were facing. Where do we draw our officers who are going to man the ANA battalions, which were being churned off the assembly line in ten-week training cycles? How long will it take us, through pre-commissioning and then initial training, to develop a young officer, and then how long will it take to develop a battalion commander? We recognized early on, based on our system of pre-commissioning in four years and growing a battalion commander in 18 years, that we didn't have 22 years to wait to have the first battalion commander of the ANA and that would also be a little bit patronizing toward the Afghans themselves to assume that they didn't have quality people out there and that it would take 22 years of training. They happen to have very experienced fighters, people that had left Afghanistan during the time of very serious trouble but were professional officers with great education and great skills prior to their departure.

How do you put this back together again and how do you go through a vetting process for officers and leaders given that you also, at that same time, want to keep this thing all-national and all-ethnic? Then there was a political factor that

sat behind that too. What is going to be the balance between a former communist, a former *mujahedeen*, and a western trained officer, all from different political factions? So suffice it to say that to work through that problem in about 10 week's time for each battalion, it was going to be a very imperfect outcome. It was an art form in keeping political balance, ethnic balance, and competency. That was just for the officer corps. For the noncommissioned officer corps, the Afghans had no experience in having a professional noncommissioned officer corps. In fact, the last true army that they saw in the field was the Soviet trained Afghan Communist Army of the 1980s, reflecting the Soviet model of noncommissioned officers being less than what they are in our system as the backbone of our forces.

So, all of that posed extraordinary challenges for us in terms of figuring out, as we moved forward, this requirement to start fielding an army quickly and it was not necessarily because of pressure from higher commands to get this army going immediately. There was a feeling on the ground of pressure to start to deliver something because the Afghans were looking to the left and to the right and they were trying to figure out where their national identity was and we knew that fielding an incredible army would be essential in delivering that.

So there were those problems and at that same time that we were trying to deliver this army rapidly, we also knew that there was the tension against that of needing to have an army that was values-based and was a disciplined force for the long term. If I look back to October 2002 we had a time rebuilding an army in terms of just some observations such as infrastructure that was as simple as communications with cell phones with spotty coverage for communication with the Afghan Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, in general, you would have to get in your vehicle and drive down to an office or to a headquarters to have a conversation.

The state of the Kabul Military Training Center, the basic training center in eastern Kabul where the training of the ANA was occurring, had a terrible mess hall for the Afghans and horrible sanitary conditions. It was a tough winter in the winter of 2002. My first thought one day, as I was walking around the Kabul Military Training Center on a particularly bitter December day in 2002 was, "This is the Valley Forge of the Afghan National Army." I remember talking to the Chief of the General Staff, General Bismullah Khan, about the situation and I said that our Special Forces had said there was no heat out at the Kabul Military Training Center so everyone was having some pretty rough nights in their sleeping bags but that our Special Forces commander said that until the Afghans had heat on their side of the compound that they were not putting heaters on their side to show solidarity.

Well, I remember General Bismullah Khan smiling at me and saying, “I’m very happy to hear that and that is very moving but wouldn’t it be better if both sides had heat inside their barracks?” The road from Kabul out to the Kabul Military Training Center was in terrible condition. You could probably maintain about a five to ten mile per hour speed to get out there. We were rapidly trying to get a construction program going with the Army Corps of Engineers, which was to rapidly evolve into a hundreds-of-millions dollars program in October 2002 when I arrived there but we had about three or four members of the Army Corps of Engineers trying to do construction projects in a construction program that was worth hundreds of millions of dollars and they were quite overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge.

LB: Things as basic as rebuilding buildings, communications lines, and water?

KE: Rebuilding implies that there was something there to begin with. This was almost all new building.

LB: Then what about basic communications, fixing roads, and water?

KE: Yes. It was just an extraordinary set of challenges. I have been in the service for 33 plus years and I have never seen a set of infrastructure challenges, leadership challenges, and organizational challenges as we were facing in Afghanistan in October of 2002.

LB: How did you prioritize?

KE: That is a great question. What we did was we formed a very good team of who we thought were all the important stake holders in this mission and it was a complex group of people. It included the engineers, the planners, and the embedded trainers of the ANA. We formed a very cohesive team with them and then started quickly to partner with the Afghans but in terms of what we prioritized, we prioritized the building of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, the reorganization of it, and the reform. That was priority number one. Priority number two was the steady development and deployment of the Afghan National Army operational forces. Then our third priority was the slow development of the sustaining institutions.

LB: How did the security situation on the ground affect either reconstruction or field training?

KE: In 2002 and 2003, it did not have a real significant impact on the development of the army. A lot of our activity during that period of time was really close around Kabul. We were building the Ministry of Defense and General Staff, Kabul based. We were building the Central Corps deployed in the greater Kabul area. There were occasional deployments outside of Kabul but nothing very robust at that point in time. Then a lot of sustaining institutions were to be developed inside

the greater Kabul area as well. So one, it was Kabul based, and then secondly, the security situation certainly in eastern Afghanistan and southern Afghanistan was better than it is today in the main.

LB: I have read the Government Accountability Office (GAO) assessments where embedded trainers said that they were experiencing shortages in uniforms, equipment, and vehicles. Can you discuss any of the shortages that you faced?

KE: For the embedded trainers or for the Afghan National Army?

LB: For the embedded trainers.

KE: There were recurring challenges. As the Afghan National Army was increasing in size and then the need to keep expanding our embedded trainer base was growing, we did have problems in terms of coming up with sufficient communications equipment and vehicles and we always found ourselves just a little bit behind.

LB: Also on the equipping of the Afghan National Army?

KE: We had problems with the Afghan National Army. As I said, we went with a donation-based system. I talked about different donation problems but another donation problem was the inherent unreliability of the ability to project when donations would actually arrive. So there would be discussions that a donation was going to be made and then we would come to bank on that donation being delivered at a certain time only to be somewhat infrequently disappointed with the lateness of delivery. So that was even why we were trying to build just the Central Corps. When the decision was made to accelerate the growth of the Army in late 2003 or early 2004, our inability to keep up with the equipping of it then became a very acute challenge.

LB: Did the Afghan government have money to buy its own equipment?

KE: They did not and this remains a very difficult problem in terms of our building of the Afghan National Army. What assumptions do you make about the host nation and its level of resources that it will be able to put toward, if nothing else, operational maintenance costs? Now, early on in our development of the Afghan National Army and the reformed Ministry of Defense, we did work hard with the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Finance to ensure that parts of what we thought would be appropriate contributions from the Afghan budget would be put into paying for some of the security costs.

So the Afghan government today has picked up a large responsibility for the payment of Afghan National Army salaries and they are paying for some of the operating costs. I believe today that amount is about 100 million dollars but back at that time, we were still at a stage where we were paying, I think, darn near 100 percent. We were already beginning discussions with them about how they needed

to start to make contributions over each year. However, as the fourth poorest country in the world with a very weak revenue system and tremendous problems with just their ability to collect and spend revenues, I am under no illusions that in the case of Afghanistan that they are not going to have to rely on a tremendous amount of support from the international community and the United States for the next 10 to 15 years, to include probably at least a portion of their operational maintenance expenditures.

LB: How heavily did you rely on contractors for training and mission support?

KE: We very early made a decision that we were going to use contractors in various parts of our mission and we could divide those into several areas. We relied on contractors or utilized contractors to help us with the reform and the mentoring of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff. We used them to perform niche duties within our own headquarters of OMC-A. Then we also committed a group of contractors to the training of the Afghan National Army, in particular what was called the Kabul Military Training Center, which is the rough equivalent to the US Army Training and Doctrine Command. Now, one of the interesting things that I think we did get right on the use of contractors was there was a discussion that we had among ourselves about whether or not we should have a contracting wing that was given a tremendous amount of autonomy and then would report eventually up to the Chief of OMC-A. I elected not to use that model. Instead, I went with a model in which I would always have inherent US military oversight of each one of our, let's call them, directorates under my command. So I would always have inherent US military lead and then contract teams filling different requirements would be reporting to them but blended in with other US military or US Department of Defense civilian teams. I think, at least for Afghanistan, that was the correct approach.

LB: During the time you were in Afghanistan, the government was in its infancy. Who were some of the Afghan leaders that you found were influential?

KE: Clearly, starting with President Hamid Karzai, then Minister of Defense Fahim Khan, Minister of Interior Ali Jalali, and National Security Advisor Zalmay Rasoul, were all very important for me. That was the national security community. Then at that time not selected but now the current Minister of Defense, Rahim Wardak, who is more of an advisor to the president on security. He was, to me, very influential as well in terms of his insights into how the ANA should be developed and clearly he was a highly respected leader, who, with the reform of the Ministry of Defense, became the Deputy Minister of Defense and then went on to become the Minister of Defense. There was another leader that I should mention too, the current Chief of the General Staff, General Bismullah Khan. He was selected under the reform to become the Chief of the General Staff of the Afghan National Army and he was also, and is, quite an extraordinary leader.

LB: What was the process for working with the Ministry of Defense?

KE: Well, during the first about nine months of my tour of duty, the Ministry of Defense had still not gone through a reform process. So it reflected very much the old Soviet organization and was further complicated by the Taliban years in which the Taliban made adjustments to the Ministry of Defense, none of which added much in terms of efficiency or competence.

So my relationship with the Ministry of Defense, at that time, Lisa, was very much kind of a personalistic relationship to some of the critical actors who were in ministry like Marshall Fahim Khan who was the Deputy Minister of Defense, a Lieutenant General named Barialai, and a very capable Army G3 named Lieutenant General Shir Mohammad Karimi. What we were working toward over that period of time was an agreed upon reform for the Ministry of Defense, with about three months to go, we actually began the implementation of it. So with the reform of the Ministry of Defense, we reached that point where, obviously with personalities of people always mattering, we actually then had the template for an efficient organizational structure. So we were then able to start developing processes that are essential for a complex organization to work as opposed to making everything just based on personalistic ties and handshakes.

LB: Did you have any problems working with Fahim Khan?

KE: Fahim Khan was a critical leader in the Northern Alliance after the assassination of Commander Ahmed Shah Masood. During the war against the Taliban, Fahim Khan was really the first among equals of the Northern Alliance and Fahim Khan, when the Northern Alliance then moved into northern, eastern, and western Afghanistan to Kabul, was a critical individual in terms of having at his disposal the organized forces of the Northern Alliance. Fahim Khan was the person who actually took the Afghans from a Northern Alliance factional army composition and set the conditions that allowed them to transition to the all-national volunteer professional model that we are working on today. He willingly participated and led his commanders, encouraged his commanders, to take part in the disarmament process of these different factional forces. Without that disarmament the door for the robust fielding of the Afghan National Army could not have been opened. So he played a very important role in that transition and he remained loyal to this enterprise of the new government of Afghanistan. Then President Karzai went through a transition of his own cabinet and Fahim Khan stepped down as Minister of Defense and paved the way for Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak. I think Fahim Khan would be the first to say that Rahim Wardak, if the task is to field a new professional Afghan National Army based upon his own experiences to include professional military education and years of combat experience like Fahim Kahn, was a good choice to take the development of the Afghan National Army to a new level.

LB: Did you work closely with other ministries like the Ministry of Interior?

KE: I did. I worked very closely with the Minister of Interior, Ali Jalali.

LB: On what types of projects?

KE: I had the additional hat of coordinator for security sector reform. With security sector reform, there were five pillars of security reform in Afghanistan. There was the building of the army. There was an agreement in April 2002 in Geneva among the G8 (“Group of Eight”) countries that different major nations of the G8 would take responsibility to lead particular aspects of security sector reform. So we got the army, the Germans got the police, the British got counternarcotics, the Japanese got demobilization as well as disarmament and reintegration, and the Italians got justice. So my US Security Coordinator hat was to try to tie together those five strands of security sector reform. I came across the notion quite early in my stay there by late 2002, that police reform was not keeping pace with our army development program. The Germans were concentrating very heavily on training and somewhat narrowly based they had established a very excellent police training academy for officers and noncommissioned officers but it wasn’t broad based and it was rather slow. So by late 2002, I was working with the Minister of Interior, Ali Jalali, to see what we could do to try to find ways to accelerate the development of the police and to make it a much more comprehensive program like the army program. I also worked with Ali Jalali as we saw early on that there were challenges with border security which is in one of those grey areas on whether it is a military problem or a police problem. So we were working together very closely to see what we could do to help the border police with the border police being under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior.

LB: How did the initial Afghan view of a national army differ from the type of army that you were trying to develop?

KE: Looking back, it is hard to say what the Afghan view was and that was a big part of the problem that we were having of trying to get the Afghan view of this. What I would say is that if you look back at that period of time, the great challenge that we faced in 2002 and 2003 and still face today, if you look at the history of Afghanistan by the late 1970s, is that the security institutions of Afghanistan were already highly suspect by most of the people.

You had that period of time with heavy communist influence before the Soviet invasion. So the army and increasingly the police and the National Director of Security, which is kind of a combination of their CIA, FBI, and KGB welded together, all those security institutions were suspect. Then by the 1980s, as the Soviets rolled into town, they were not suspect, they were puppet institutions of repression.

Then you go into the 1990s and the *mujahedeen* armies lacked discipline and there were cases of them committing outrages and depredations against their own people. Then you go into the Taliban area. So why do I go through all of this? If you are a leader in Afghanistan today, here in 2006 or at that time in 2002/2003, when do you recall there was a credible Afghan National Army and an Afghan National Police? A lot of the leaders that we have today in Afghanistan, for instance President Karzai who is in his late 40s, are in their 40s and 50s. They really in their adult lifetime have not seen what a good police force all-national, and a good army all-national, look like. What do they really look like? What do they deliver? What are their attributes? Worse, they are suspicious of centralized security forces because they have been fighting against them most of their lives. So it is the idea of how do you get national leaders in a new Afghanistan, who are inherently suspicious of national security forces and are much more inclined by way of experience to rely on personalistic ties such as friendship ties of the Northern Alliance and friendship ties that go back to tribes and families that have fought together, that is where their real trust is. Their trust is not in this new experiment called the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.

That is less of a problem today than it was in 2002 and 2003 but at that period of time it was extraordinarily difficult to, as we saw the problem, field an all-ethnic force respected by all the people as an a-political pillar that would be out there to give people hope that this country could come back together again. Trying to achieve that has proven to be a tall order.

LB: You not only have to convince the people of the value and the integrity of the army, you have to convince the army officers and soldiers themselves, correct?

KE: Correct. Over time, we have seen that the corporate identity of the Afghan National Army has increased and even by 2003 we were starting to see that they were a much more resilient force with a good sense of identity. Outside of that, if this is going to be an Afghan National Army and it is going to really be an Afghan National Police force, what I have said is that the soul of that army can't be breathed into the army by a foreign military power or a foreign military force on the ground. Only the Afghans can give their army a soul and its identity. That is why it is absolutely imperative that if this is going to work that the civilian leaders of Afghanistan and the tribal leaders of Afghanistan, have to embrace that army as their own. That has proven to be the toughest challenge.

LB: How did you begin the process of creating a military doctrine for Afghanistan?

KE: As I was telling you earlier about what we were dealing with at the time, truly the developing of a military doctrine, in terms of the thinking here at Fort Leavenworth about the development of a sophisticated military doctrine, when

you don't have any school system in 2002 except basic training. You are looking left and right at the group of officers from the Ministry of Defense that are sitting around and then the General Staff is looking at you and one says, "Well, I have been to Fort Leavenworth in my career," and another says, "Well, I trained at the Frunze Academy," and then the third one says, "Well, I'm a *mujahedeen* and I despise both of you. I take great pride in that I've never been anywhere except fighting in the hills." How do you pull all of that together into military doctrine? What I would say is that in 2002 and 2003 it was relatively simple.

We were going to train just solid light infantry. It would be capable of performing reasonably well at platoon and maybe at company level given the threat that we were looking at during that period of time. A battalion would be more a training, accountability, and logistics headquarters. Small unit tactics would be very important but more important, when I think in terms of doctrine, the real doctrine that we were developing was back to the first principle of all-national, well-disciplined, and respect for the rule of law. That was the overriding doctrine of the Afghan National Army.

LB: How did recruiting work?

KE: Recruiting in 2002 relied very much on the Ministry of Defense that existed at that time to deliver quotas on time to the Kabul Military Training Center, which at that time, 600 made up an infantry battalion.

LB: How would they get the recruits?

KE: They would get the recruits through ways that we will never know. They went through their own networks. Very much at that time, it was through networks of personalistic ties that existed through the Ministry of Defense and through the various militia forces that existed around the country. They would convince young men, sometimes not so young men, to come in and sign up and join the force. So that would be the soldier level. Then sets of personalistic ties would draw the officers for the force with the officers arriving with rank and no pre-commissioning. They were just handed to us as the officers for a battalion. What we did right early on though, was that we were just relentless and rigorous in terms of ethnic balance.

So there were personalistic ties and that worked to bring the soldiers and officers in, but we did a pretty good job of keeping track of ethnic balance. We did get that right and whenever it would get out of whack, we would slow things down until they could produce an ethnically balanced set of recruits and then we would move forward again. That program began to change then. By 2003, we were rapidly starting to develop what was to become a recruiting command.

Every week, I was making a trip sometimes a day and sometimes overnight trip and going out with leaders of the central government of Afghanistan, the still to be reformed Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, to meet with government and tribal leaders in many of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. There would be huge meetings which the Afghans call *shuras* and we would have leaders from Kabul stand up and talk about the new Afghan National Army and why it made great sense for their sons to join this Afghan National Army.

LB: Was this a publicity program?

KE: Yes, albeit Afghan style We had recruiting posters that were being put up in Kabul and then that expanded out to the different cities of Afghanistan but to get back to this issue about the doctrine of the army, frankly I wasn't thinking about a fighting doctrine at that time. I was thinking of just light infantry and keeping it simple. It was the attribute of all-national to create excitement that this was going to be a respected force.

So talking about recruiting posters, still today, if you go into Kabul and you go around some of the big traffic circles, there are recruiting posters about joining the Afghan National Army. Every recruiting poster that is up will show a mix of Afghan soldiers and it is clear when you are looking at this wedge of Afghan soldiers with the map of Afghanistan behind them that you are looking at a Hazara, an Uzbek, a Tajik, and a Pashtun.

So we got on the recruiting piece of this quite early on. We got extraordinarily great help from, at that time, US Army Recruiting Command. They sent us some first class officers to help us out. So by 2003 the recruiting was really starting to become, by that point in time, much more of a system which we would recognize in the United States. I think that when I left in 2003, we already had four provincial recruiting offices that had been established and now 33 out of the 34 provinces have recruiting offices. They have quotas and they have to keep things ethnically balanced within their province. So we got on that relatively early on and I think we made pretty good progress within the first year.

LB: How did you vet the incoming recruits, especially since for most of them there was no written record of their background?

KE: That proved to be a real challenge as well, especially in a society where communications are weak. There is not great census data, there are no bureaucratic traditions, and there is a 20 percent literacy rate. So how do you work through vetting? What we evolved to was a system in which you would have village leaders or elders who would take responsibility for when a young man would join the Afghan National Army.

At that point, we actually started to have recruiting stations that were stood up and it was a requirement that a village elder or parent would actually put the thumbprint on the piece of paper as a soldier vetted.

Now, the Afghan National Army's G2 section has worked hard to develop its own counterintelligence capability and they do a degree of vetting as well. What is interesting is that in that 2002 and 2003 period and still today, we have not had instances where Afghan National Army soldiers have turned on each other or have turned on the embedded trainers. Of course, I'm knocking on wood when I say this, but what you will find is there is a lot of talk about how you have to ensure good vetting goes on and you have to have a vetting process and you have to have a counterintelligence system. At the end of the day, where is the real test going to come, where is the real vetting going to take place? It is going to take place within the unit itself. If you have a good unit and if you have good formations, that outlier that might have been planted in there or came in with another purpose, he will be discovered by his colleagues and that is the best vetting process.

LB: When you began your recruiting efforts, did you find that most of your recruits had military experience against the Soviets or the Taliban or were these primarily green recruits?

KE: In the initial year that I was there, say October 2002, a much higher percentage of the group included experienced fighters against the Taliban and in some cases the more senior officers had fighting experience against the Soviets. That began to change by the summer of 2003. By then, with each battalion that was coming in, we saw the percentage of recruits at the soldier level without any military experience or without any militia experience steadily increase. I hesitate to give you a precise number but if I recall, by the summer of 2003, I think we were on the order of perhaps 30 to 40 percent of the recruits had no experience at all. They were fresh.

Now with the recruits, the vast majority of them that join the Afghan National Army have no military experience. With the noncommissioned officers, they were the best and the brightest of each one of these battalions that were going through basic training. The best and the brightest were given the chance to be a noncommissioned officer. They were pulled aside and given a special training course. The officer corps, even into 2003, was still those that were being directed to be in the Afghan National Army and they did their own vetting process for them. Even that is changing now in 2006 with the establishment of Officer Candidate Schools and we have an Afghan National Army Military Academy that has been established which is lagging somewhat behind, as to be expected.

LB: I have read that desertions were a particular problem. What measures were in place to encourage retention and were changes made to encourage retention?

KE: Desertions were a very significant problem. There was an array of challenges that we faced with desertion. Fundamentally, there was leadership as a big problem. It is a volunteer force. This isn't a draft army. The ethos that

we were trying to develop with the Afghans would be one of positive leadership as we define it but you had severe leadership problems. You had problems with corruption. You had problems with the broken infrastructure that we talked about, the dilapidated infrastructure of Afghanistan. There were also problems as fundamental as just getting paychecks to soldiers on time. Then, when a soldier got his paycheck, that soldier wanted to get that paycheck home. Unfortunately, if you were assigned to Kabul and your family lived out in Herat, this could be a two or three week trip home and back in order to get the paycheck there because at that time, there were no ATMs.

Then there were problems with the facilities. There were problems with the quality of the mess halls and I could go on and on and on. So yes, there were some very severe challenges but there is one story that I always like to relate from Afghanistan from that period of time about one of the very best battalion commanders of the ANA at that time who has since gone on to be promoted to brigadier general. He is a brigade commander—Aminullah. I was talking to him after I had been in Afghanistan for about 11 months and I was getting ready to leave soon. Aminullah was just a great leader, so I asked him this question. I said, “Aminullah, I see that your personnel manning levels right now are at about 40 to 45 percent. Let me ask you, if you get a reload of fresh recruits, how much time would it take to get back down to 40 to 45 percent or would you hang onto them this time?” He said, “No. I would hang onto them. I won’t have these attrition problems again.” I said, “Well, why is that?” So Aminullah then went through the checklist of problems that I just gave you and he said, “Remember, I was the third battalion to be formed up. Do you remember how the barracks conditions were terrible as we had sanitation problems, food problems, logistics problems, we had broken weapons, and we had vehicles that weren’t assigned to me? So here I was the battalion commander and I had no resources and I didn’t have communications equipment.” On he went. I was a little bit disappointed with that answer because it was all material based. He also talked about pay problems but I guess it would add up to then an explanation of why he thought, since a lot of those had been fixed, that he could right it the second time around with new recruits.

Then as he was walking away from me or I was walking away from him, he called back to me. I was very good friends with him. He was one of these guys who I had been through a lot of pains and triumphs with but he said, “There is one more thing I want to add and it is probably the most important reason I know I can hold onto these guys now.” I said, “What is that?” He said, “It is because we believe in ourselves now. Remember a year ago when I first came here and we got this thing going, most of us didn’t think that this would last. We thought this was an experiment by the United States of America and that you guys would work with us for a while and then you would let go and move onto something else.” He said,

“We believe in ourselves now. We believe this army is here to stay. So if you give me a group of good recruits, they will stay now because we believe in this.”

LB: Well, we have to wrap up for today but I want to thank you very much for your time and willingness to support the Army mission in chronicling its history in OEF.

This is part two of a two-part interview with Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry. The time is approximately 1320 hours on 27 November 2006. This is an unclassified interview. If we ever enter classified territory, please either respond in unclassified terms or simply say you're not able to answer.

LB: My first question is what in your background as a military professional best prepared you for your mission in Afghanistan?

KE: I would say there are two parts to this. The first would be for the mission of training the Afghan National Army. The best experience that I had was my time as a lieutenant in the 1st Ranger Battalion which was a very training-standards oriented unit with extraordinary emphasis on discipline and accountability in junior leadership. That probably served me the best in terms then of working with the new Afghan National Arm as to how you take a band of brothers and pull them together as a disciplined and training-oriented group. Then, in terms of my responsibilities as the security sector reform coordinator, the best experience I had was my time in political-military assignments. For instance, my assignment as defense attaché in China, where you have to deal with a very different culture and take a very patient approach in a complex international environment. It wasn't about just imposing your will. It was building consensus, forging teams, and working through problems that you had to be able to look through a cultural prism in order to understand more clearly. So those would be the two experiences for my first tour of duty in Afghanistan that were most important to me.

LB: Do you really think, and this may differ depending on your time period in Afghanistan, that there is such a thing as an Afghan nation?

KE: Yes. I think that there is. In fact, if you talk about big surprises that I had on my first tour of duty, one of the big pleasant surprises I had was discovering that the Afghans do have a very deep sense of national identity. I had thought going into it, knowing very little about Central Asia and even less about Afghanistan, my preconception was that I would find a group of tribes and various ethnic groups and factions, especially after the three decades of warfare that they had been through that would turn out to be just a very fragmented group of individuals. As I got on the ground, I developed an appreciation for the Afghans. Despite great pride in their tribal identities and great pride in their ethnic identities, at the end of the day, their first identification in the main was as an Afghan. Now, having said that, they

have wildly different ideas about what the Afghan state should look like. There is a very firm consensus on their part that they are Afghans.

LB: What was your budget to begin training the Afghan National Army?

KE: You know, I don't recall. What I do recall is that we had an adequate program. We were using a fund that had been established called the Afghan National Security Force Fund. It was primarily for the building of the army. There were other funds that were available for the police building which we didn't have the responsibility for at that time. We had the army.

I do recall that there were sufficient funds when I arrived, as we projected to have for the establishment of the first corps of the Afghan National Army, what we called the Central Corps. Even if there wasn't on the day I arrived, we were quickly in a position, as I recall that we had lined up the necessary and appropriate funding to field the first corps of the Afghan National Army. In addition to that, we had funds that allowed us to start to put into place other parts of the overall army building program. So, for instance, the training base for the army that was established, the Kabul Military Training Center, had funds available for development of the facilities there. We had funds that were available for contractors as we started to broaden our definition of the mission. That was the first of funds that were available. Then, when we took it to the next level, where the program started to become much more comprehensive in nature, where we went to building the Ministry of Defense and we started thinking about the sustaining institutions and needed many more trainers and more contractors to support us, much more in the way of funds for facilities, that was really the next of the funds that we went after. This is where we identified a new and much larger set of requirements over the next several years and that was what we had to fight for to get approval.

LB: That was a supplemental?

KE: All supplemental. All of this was supplemental, primarily supplemental, and then the use of some operational funds where you would have that overlap of things that we were doing that were operational but were benefiting the Afghan National Army. In the main, money was supplemental with donations.

LB: Did you work in conjunction with the International Security Assistance Force of ISAF at all?

KE: I did. In a couple of areas we went to ISAF. You asked earlier about how much Coalition or non-US we have engaged in the building of the Afghan National Army. We were very opportunistic in the sense of looking around to every resource that was available in Afghanistan and where we could tap into expertise. So one of the things that we did with the NATO ISAF forces, at that time their mandate only being for the greater Kabul area and the Central Corps was all being built

in Kabul, we went to them and they provided some opportunity training for the Afghan National Army and they provided some mobile training teams of their own. For instance, I recall that the Italians did some very good training with the Afghan National Army Central Corps for checkpoints.

Then we got them to also sign up to start doing joint patrolling in the greater Kabul area. So that was one primary area where I worked with NATO ISAF. The second was in my capacity as the security sector reform coordinator. As I put together this international team of the different key actors of the international community that were involved in various aspects of security sector reform, this also included the commander of the ISAF forces. So, whenever I would bring together that coordinating body, NATO ISAF was there as well.

LB: What types of training were necessary to help the Ministry of Defense stand up?

KE: As I recall, there was collective training that we had identified and then there was individual training. It was after we had gone through the reform process of the Ministry of Defense and it was tiered. So we had tier one, the highest level, down to, the protocol equivalent of one-stars and two-stars within the MOD. I say the MOD but it was the MOD and the General Staff. Two different entities but the reform was going on simultaneously. So what I'm explaining was not only for the MOD but it was for the General Staff. We had collective training for them. That collective training had two purposes. One was to first of all just explain the reformed Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, the structure of it and how we would anticipate the process to work. Then the second, probably the more important of the two, was the team building aspect of this. This is where we would bring the people from the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff around the table, a group that had not worked with each other before, with some degrees of suspicion and with different backgrounds and different ethnic groups.

So we brought them together simply to break bread and start to build a team. That was on the collective side. Then on the individual side, using the mentor program very robustly and occasionally going to the extent of putting teams together from the MOD and General Staff based upon their functional expertise and their functional area, we would send them back to the United States for maybe a one or a two week visit. I will give you an example. I don't know if this is correct for that time or not but it is an example of the things that we were doing. Let's say, taking the head of the recruiting command or the portfolio, the assistant minister who had responsibility for recruiting, we would put together a team from the Ministry of Defense and General Staff and they would go back to the United States for a week or two weeks and learn more about their functional area. Then we would also have multiple training teams coming forward from the United States

who would help them along in their functional area. This was very much where we used contractors but not always contractors. It was a blend of contractors and some uniformed military and some of them were Department of Defense civilians coming in, where there would just be the extended mentoring programs that would be more one-on-one, or one with the directorate, in working really tirelessly with these guys day in and day out helping them to develop expertise.

So we would have a pretty good blend over time of working within each functional domain and building up expertise and competency and then periodically bringing a whole team together for the team building exercises and seminars where we would help them along with working through their collective processes.

LB: So were you kind of teaching them the basics of what their jobs all entailed?

KE: Yes, in each area. Like with the comptroller, we had a very strong finance team that just sat down and rolled up sleeves and in certain cases it was starting with the very basics of developing budgets and accounting. In the case of our engineering team, sitting down with Afghan counterparts and helping them. We found that there were widely different capabilities there. For instance, I do recall, actually in the area of the comptroller, in the area of medical, and in the area of engineering, that there was some tremendous expertise that existed on the Afghan side. There was a group of people, older officers either trained in the west or by the communists that then disappeared during the 1990s or went into remission then and then came back. They had some great skills and were highly motivated individuals.

So it was dusting off some of their skills, bringing them up-to-date, adapting to what would be appropriate for Afghan standards and getting them going. There were other areas though. For instance in the area of the Inspector General, another example would be in terms of the Strategy and Policy Directorate where these were really foreign concepts but even still with Afghan characteristics these were very much functions that were needed. Now, what we found that was probably the greatest difficulty we had was in separating the Ministry of Defense from the General Staff. The old Soviet model had really kludged all this together, so there was not a well-defined delineation between policy of the Ministry of Defense, representing the civilian side, and then policy in military direction provided by the General Staff. That was one of the hardest things that we had to accomplish, trying to define the roles and responsibilities in each one of those, with all of them wishing to gravitate to the side of the General Staff. It was the idea that, "If I'm a real person, I have to be wearing a uniform. I don't like this idea of wearing civilian clothes and being in the Ministry of Defense."

LB: So was this a whole different idea of civilian control of the military?

KE: That's correct.

LB: How did you integrate Afghans who maybe had considerable experience in guerrilla warfare but might not quite be ready to accept the new discipline required of the ANA?

KE: That was one of the most profound challenges that we did face in standing up the Afghan National Army. You had very charismatic *mujahedeen* leaders who could not make the adjustment to being a commander in a regular conventional force in which you would need a standardization that would have to be applied along with a rigid military rule of law that would govern the organization and having to subordinate yourself to the hierarchy as opposed to being an independent commander in his own for years with a tremendous degree of autonomy and actually being a rule of law.

So there was no easy answer to this. In fairness to these *mujahedeen* fighters, some of them had fought brilliantly going back to the Soviet jihad. Many of them had fought very well in the Taliban years. Many of them were our allies in the war against the Taliban and some of them were our allies in the war against the Soviets.

So where do you draw the line in terms of who gets to come in as an officer in the new army and who should not? I think there was a fairly liberal approach in the first several years that had a lot to do with making sure that the Afghans perceived the Afghan National Army as doors open to all those who had contributed to Afghan security in the past. I think that as we went forward in the process, there was some attrition that occurred where some of these *mujahedeen* commanders self-selected to move out of the Afghan National Army on their own and decided that this wasn't something that they wished to remain in. Then there were some that wished to remain in it but they had not sufficiently adapted to the new ways of doing business.

So the Afghan Ministry of Defense, sometimes with our recommendations but ultimately always with Afghan decisions, moved some of them. Now fast forwarding to today, we increasingly are finding that the Afghan Ministry of Defense and the General Staff seem to have now turned the corner in what they define as the necessary attributes of a new officer of the new Afghan National Army. One of the innovations that they have had of late, which is pretty interesting, is for some of the former *mujahedeen* leaders who have not had the benefit of professional military education. They have established a six-month course for them where they are pulled from the field and if they wish to continue they have to complete this six-month course. This has just started and we are not sure what the results will be but I'm cautiously optimistic that what we will see is those that would just like to hang on and not adapt, that the course itself will prove rigorous enough that they may elect at that time to leave the Afghan National Army. Then we will see a good group out there that really do want to stay in. They want to

soldier and they are desperate to learn the necessary skills as a staff officer and a commander that this six-month course should offer to them.

Now, there is one other thing that I wanted to say about the Ministry of Defense that is important. Actually, I wish I would have said it during my presentation to the Leavenworth class here. I don't think it is on your question list and it is about the establishment of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff and it applies really as well to the establishment of the Ministry of Interior and the police forces. In an environment like Afghanistan, you have to understand that it is imperative that this be an all-national force and that it be a reflection of all the ethnic groups and all the factional groups with all the different backgrounds of leaders who could be in the Afghan national security forces: communists, *mujahedeen*, and former pro-western officers. How do you finally get to the point that you are going to be able to select a group that is going to be the first tier and then how do you go to the second tier and then the third tier? What is the actual selection process? What we did was that we sat down with our Afghan counterparts and we came up with the tier one organization of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff.

Then the next step was, given what the tier one organization was, we spent a considerable amount of time in coming up with the job descriptions for these different posts. Then the third part was coming up with the qualifications that matched the job descriptions.

Now, these were not US civil service job descriptions or qualifications that go on for seven pages. These were pretty simple like you must be literate, cannot have committed war crimes, and then there were other aspects as well. For instance, if you were going to be the Judge Advocate General, you must have had professional military justice education and maybe a couple things about experience. So that part was done.

Then the next step was probably perhaps the most important. What I did was I spent an extraordinary period of time, for about three weeks of non-stop time from morning until midnight with an Afghan counterpart and I went and I briefed every political leader in Kabul. I briefed the President, at that time the four vice presidents, the cabinet, and every factional leader. This was before they had a parliament. So I went around and briefed and briefed and briefed that this was the plan and here was what the organization looked like. Here are what the qualifications and the job descriptions were and then here was how it was going to work.

We had established with President Karzai that the way it would work was that the Ministry of Defense would come up with at least four names for each position and then the President, meeting in consultation with his four vice presidents at tier one, would make the choices. The Ministry of Defense would come up with the first list of four nominations, it could be more. That would go to the President. The

President then would sit down and before making any decisions could add names to the list if he wished in conjunction with the vice president, provided they met the qualifications. Then, based upon that, he would sit down in counsel and select. That process was painstaking and it took a lot of time but what it did was several things. As I look back, these were important and my sense at the time, the reason I was doing it, was that I anticipated the following. First of all, the Afghans did not really know, because of the chaos that they had been through in their times of trouble for over 30 years, what a merit-based and fairly selected Ministry of Defense and General Staff might look like and how the process would work. It was all with personalistic ties and no transparency. So we laid out the organization.

The next benefit of this was that the Afghans, because I was there, were thinking that this might not be entirely fair but at least the international community and the Americans had their eyes on this so there were referees in this process and we will trust them. They are trying to be as transparent as they can and if something goes terribly wrong in this at least we can get a hold of the Americans and talk to them about this, like if I think that my faction got trod upon. Then third, let's say that you were the one who was trying to maximize your own gains in terms of the new distribution of power within the Afghan national security forces. If you were of that mind, the other thing of going around and briefing all the leaders was that you were putting them on notice that the international community was watching this. We were watching the process. So you were putting them on notice to be careful about overplaying their own hands. Everyone was going to try to maximize their own set of gains but they knew that there was a referee. So both on the good side and on the not so good side, the role of the referee was important there.

Then we went through this extraordinary six-week period of time when the nominations finally came in and the President added his list. We went through a six-week period from the time the President got the list until the announcements were made. In fact, they were made 48 hours before I got on the plane to finish my year's tour in Afghanistan but it was a very good learning experience. To fast forward again to 2005, we did not do that with police reform and that was to my regret. Now I'm trying to go back on police reform and make up for that oversight.

LB: Was that process continued through all the tiers then?

KE: It was. Now, each time the delegation of authority for decisions went down and then eventually by the time it got to tier three, it was entirely within the Ministry of Defense but at different levels. We continued to make sure we had transparency, engaging with the Afghans to reassure them that the international community was watching and saying, "We are not here to make decisions but we are going to be here for a degree of assurance and transparency until you guys tell us that you have enough trust in each other and enough confidence in your own systems that you don't need us anymore."

LB: How closely did you work with the Afghan government on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration or DDR?

KE: Very closely and for two reasons. One was in wearing my hat as the US security sector reform coordinator and the second was that if we were going to have success in building and fielding the army, we would have to have success in DDR. You couldn't field the army while we had competing militia or factional organized forces with heavy weaponry contending for power and vying for control of the use of force. So the two processes, fielding the army and DDR, were processes that had to be linked.

LB: How successful do you think the program was?

KE: The program was very successful. Actually, the rigorous implementation of what was called DDR Phase One began in earnest after my departure and it succeeded to a far greater extent than I had thought. Now, the approach that we used with DDR Phase One was that we would concentrate on heavy weaponry. Accordingly, by going after heavy weaponry, you were going after the core power and the symbols of power of the major factional commanders around Afghanistan. Remember, up until this very organized and methodical DDR began in late 2003, we still had tanks, artillery, and even helicopters that were out there that were not under the control of the government of Afghanistan. A lot of them were sitting in tank parks and a lot of them were sitting on airfields but they were still very much under the control of the factional commanders, some affiliated with the former Northern Alliance and others affiliated with different commanders outside of the Northern Alliance. It did work well.

The government of Japan deserves a lot of credit for not only the material resources that they committed to the program but for their political leadership as well. The United Nations had the lead for implementation and I think they did a fairly good job. President Karzai also got behind the process very strongly but it was very much a balancing act because how do you call the heavy weaponry forward and bring it under control? Once again, each one of the commanders around Afghanistan was looking to his left and right as he was asking, "Is the commander on my left flank in the north Afghanistan and is the commander on my right flank in the west of Afghanistan turning in their tanks at the same time that I am turning in my tanks? Are some of my officers being allowed to join the Afghan National Army and are some of the guys in my province being allowed to join the army or am I being excluded while these other guys are joining?"

So, that was the relationship that existed between army building and at the same time demobilization. So, there were a tremendous amount of discussions and a tremendous amount of negotiations and bartering about who would turn in what and when but in the main, it went reasonably well. When I arrived in 2005,

there was still one group, primarily from the Panjshir Valley, that had still not come forward with full demobilization and disarmament but after several months of work with them they also volunteered to join the process.

LB: I guess that was my next question. How cooperative were the different faction leaders with building a national army and a national government?

KE: It was a slow acceptance of the process. We went through a period of time from October of 2002 until maybe the next spring where we would see soldiers who joined the Afghan National Army and officers who had joined the army who were perhaps compelled by factional commanders to show up in order to check the block that their quota had been made but were not seriously engaged in the process or committing to it. On the other hand, we saw some that signed up who would go through the training, get issued their uniforms, and then we would not see them again. Sometimes we got I think, reliable reports that some of them were reporting right back to their particular patron and were rejoining that patron's factional force or militia force with a higher set of skills. So it was mixed but in the main what we found over time was that these commanders did continue to increasingly support the Afghan National Army and there was a tipping point where they had disarmed themselves enough that now their only hope was with the Afghan National Army.

So when we got the majority of the heavy weapons, it became clear to these factional commanders that they now had no means to really resist the government of Afghanistan if the government of Afghanistan sought to impose their will upon them. At that point then, success in the modern army became in your own self-interest to achieve.

Now, there was a limit to how successful we were. What we did manage to accomplish through the first phase of the DDR program was to collect the heavy weapons and the large formations were eliminated and that paved the way then for the Afghan National Army to take the field. What we did not succeed in was eliminating what we called illegally armed groups, in other words, lightly armed and informal militia forces and informal armed groups, that were beholden to local power brokers, sometimes in police uniforms and sometimes out of police uniforms, could impose their will with impunity outside of the rule of law. Our development of the police program did not begin in earnest until late 2005. The army began in earnest in 2002 and it paved the way for the success of DDR Phase One by late 2003 or early 2004.

So in order to achieve success in this next phase, to get rid of the illegally armed groups, you have to have a coherent police strategy. DDR paves the way for the army and then the elimination of the illegally armed groups paves the way for the fielding of a robust and respected police force that is under the control of a legitimate authority. In that, we still have a distance to go because we are behind on

police reform. It only began, as I said, in late 2005. So if you ask a question about DDR, you would correctly hear many people from Afghanistan say that DDR has not been a success because there are still people running around with Kalashnikovs everywhere and some with rocket propelled grenades or RPGs. They are working for local thugs outside of the Afghan government's control. This is true but this is in the second phase and that is what we need to get after.

LB: I would think that, considering Afghanistan's history, having someone turn in their personal firearm would take an incredible amount of trust in the Afghan National Army.

KE: Oh, yes. You can achieve that in some of the urban areas but if you are ever aspiring to define success in disarmament in that every Kalashnikov within the country has been turned in to government control, no, that is simply not going to happen in the Afghan culture for many decades, if ever. I remember making a trip to the south of Afghanistan once with the Deputy Minister of Defense. We were talking to a group of Pashtun tribal elders and he was explaining the disarmament plan and we were discussing the building of the Afghan National Army. He was saying that they would be allowed to keep their Kalashnikov rifles and I remember watching all these tribal elders in their turbans and beards all nodding very approvingly. Then he said, "Now, your 12.7-mm heavy machineguns, you will have to turn those in." There were murmurs of disapproval. Then he told them that he thought that they could keep their RPG-7s and there were nods for approval that this is as it should be. So it is a culture in which a sign of your status is your ability to bear arms and actually there are a lot of places in Afghanistan that are still pretty dangerous places. It is reasonable to expect that people in villages and rural areas be allowed to keep their weapons, more for kind of village defense or village watch with Kalashnikovs.

LB: You talked about wanting an ethnic mix within the Afghan National Army and that it was going to be everybody inclusive. Did you have any problems because of the ethnic makeup?

KE: Yes, we did. One of the most significant problems that we faced was that because of the way that the history of conflict had evolved in Afghanistan especially in the latter years of the mid-1990s until Operation ENDURING FREEDOM began in 2001, a majority of the Northern Alliance leaders were non-*Pashtun*. So when it came to the point in time to constitute the new national army, you had to draw from who was there. Who was there for the officer corps was a larger number of non-*Pashtuns* who were coming in as officers than who fairly represented the demographics of the country. Let's say that the population of the *Pashtun* in the country of Afghanistan was perhaps 40 to 45 percent. Then I would expect in the first year that the officer percentage of *Pashtuns* would be 25 percent. However, it was low enough that there was concern being expressed by the *Pashtuns* about

whose army this was. Was this a Northern Alliance army, was it a Pashtun army, or was it an Afghan army? That posed a challenge. There was a challenge as well with regard to the *Hazaras*. *Hazaras* are a very significant and important minority group in Afghanistan who are racially very different in characteristics and from Mongolian stock.

So a group that has a very different appearance and has a history of being oppressed in Afghanistan, kind of the down tribe in the ethnic group, accordingly were quite sensitive and understandably so given their history, about ensuring that the national security forces gave them a fair representation, with a fear that, given their history, those security forces, if they didn't have fair representation, might be at some point in time used against them.

So we also had a great challenge with the *Hazaras*, which for another variety of historical reasons there wasn't a large pool of *Hazara* officers to choose from. So that became a source of contention. I found myself in the first year spending a fair amount of time with leaders of various ethnic groups of Afghanistan, very factional leaders, trying to address their legitimate concerns about why their particular groups were under-represented, especially in the officer ranks, and then to an extent among the ranks of the soldiers.

Now, what we did find out very interestingly and only much later after I left, but now in force, is that the Afghans have much more of a system of merit to screen, vet, and choose officers. In the very early days of the Afghan National Army, the noncommissioned officer corps was merit-based. The Afghans had no tradition of an empowered noncommissioned officer corps. In the Soviet model that was adopted during the 1980s, we all know that the Soviet role for the noncommissioned officer is less than our definition of "backbone of the army" and I think I talked about that earlier. Then during the 1990s, the Afghans, between *mujahedeen* fighters and the *Taliban*, had commanders which roughly equated to officers, but they did not have noncommissioned officer ranks. So the noncommissioned officer rank was somewhat of a novelty to them but it was also because they only had that Soviet experience and that army was a very discredited army and noncommissioned officers were discredited, everything about that army was discredited, that they seemed to be much more willing to adopt the notion of an empowered noncommissioned officer corps.

We did find with some of the older officers that there was a resentment of it but in the main, the Afghans did take to it. Now, the way that noncommissioned officers were selected was that we would have a group of recruits and they would go through six weeks of basic training in what was a ten week long program. At about the sixth week, the best and the brightest, if they raised their hand, would be selected and pulled aside and then they would be put through a noncommissioned officer course developed by the British.

So from the first days of the Afghan National Army, the noncommissioned officer corps was merit-based. Now, when you talk about different ethnic groups in the army, it was fascinating because one of the appeals that I was able to make to, let's say the *Hazaras* minority group, was I was able to tell the *Hazara* leaders of Afghanistan, "I understand where your frustrations are. You are looking and you are 15 percent of the population," although some would say it is 20 percent of the population, whatever, "but when you look at the senior leaders of the Afghan National Army there are only five percent or less *Hazaras* and there are very few battalion commanders that are *Hazaras*. At the same time, look at the noncommissioned officer corps of the Afghan National Army. It is pretty stunning because *Hazaras* are doing extraordinarily well." So we turned to them and said, "Look. This is the future of the army that you are seeing here. You are going to have to be patient. To get you to 15 or 20 percent right now, you will end up hurting yourselves because we'll wind up putting people in that just can't get the job done and that will end up then setting your cause back."

LB: Since this was a Coalition effort, who were the major countries that were involved with training and what were their responsibilities?

KE: We had the overall lead and we took the responsibility for the basic training. Then, under our umbrella, the British took the lead for noncommissioned officer training but as I said, it has evolved since then and they have the responsibility for the Officer Candidate School as well. The French took the lead for officer training of both platoon and company-level and then established later the equivalent of a Leavenworth Command and General Staff College. We established a National Military Academy and the Turks partnered with us on that and gave some very good assistance and they still do. That was late during my stay. That was in 2003 that we put the pieces in place for the National Military Academy.

I talked earlier about some of the specialized mobile training teams that we fielded. The Romanians were working on the Afghan armored corps, the Bulgarians on the mechanized infantry, and the Mongolians on the Afghan artillery. Those were the major assignments and then we took on the overall lead as well when we established the reformed Ministry of Defense and the General Staff. We took the overall lead in mentoring but we did solicit participation from different non-US Coalition allies, so they had an array of mentors and coaches distributed throughout the Ministry of Defense with us.

LB: How well did all these different countries' ideas of what noncommissioned officer or officer duties were, mesh with the overall US model that you were projecting?

KE: There were pluses and minuses with this approach. The plus was that there was a big political gain that we had from it and there was a gain on the

information operations front. I firmly believe that if the United States had thrown more resources in it, even if we were able to tell ourselves this was much more efficient and we were moving much faster, that there would have been a risk in that the perception of the Afghan people, certainly with the enemy trying to create misperceptions among the Afghan people, would have been that this was merely a United States enterprise.

So there was a certain risk in terms of credibility. They had been through this experience in the 1980s and it was called the Soviets trying to stand up an army. Here we had the British working with a noncommissioned officer corps, the French out there doing a great job with the officer corps, ourselves, and all of these other armies. The Turks were with us and still are. So that adds to the sense of legitimacy of the army among their people as an international enterprise. Look, they have great respect for the Americans. They know we are doing heavy lifting in terms of resources and we are doing heavy lifting in terms of the amount of mentors, coaches, and trainers that we have put on the ground. Still, there is that aspect that the whole international community is with them.

Secondly, there was one other benefit and that was that it would be arrogance on the United States military's part, to say that we had a monopoly on how to do this right. What I found was that, and I still find it today, when we see the British running the noncommissioned officer course and the French running the officer training, I will see certain things that are going on out there that we are not doing, so we are learning from each other and very importantly, at the end of the day, this isn't going to be the Afghan-American army, it is going to be the Afghan National Army.

So the Afghans, with each year, develop more capable leaders and I think the ones whose heads are in the game and have a pride of ownership in their own army, they are now in a place where they are looking at different examples from the British, the French, the Turks, and the Americans and they are trying to draw the very best of each as it applies to the Afghans. Now, what is the not so good or what is the downside of this or the liability of this kind of approach? You have to admit, there is a loss of efficiency. Our doctrine or American way of war, is different from the French and the British, so there is some confusion as you have a French Command and General Staff College training a group of officers whose basic training came from the US military.

Then there was a bigger challenge but I wouldn't say this was necessarily a Coalition challenge. It was a challenge for us as well, the American Army and the Marines as we were trying to get this Afghan army going. I talked to you earlier about what were the attributes and what was the doctrine that we wanted to follow and I said to you that the most important doctrine was with fundamentals of

discipline, fundamentals of respect for the rule of law, taking care of your soldiers, and very basic combat skills. The one fundamental that I wished to apply to the Afghan National Army was to make them a very rigorously trained and focused group.

Having gone through the experience with our Army when we came out of the Vietnam War, which was a broken and shattered Army, and seeing the revolution of what occurred from my junior officer days of 1974 to where we were in the mid-1980s and what had really caused that revolutionary turnaround, a lot of it had to do with the development and rigorous application of training doctrine of standards-based training.

So with the Afghan National Army, I had worked very hard to try that approach as that is an approach that is not American. You can have a standards-based army if you are the fourth poorest country in the world. You can make the modifications or adaptations. There was a set of things that were good about that but I had very mixed results in trying to achieve that. I could say some of that was Coalition because the French and the British don't look at the problems the same way we do in our Army but actually, it was also some of the challenges we had with our embedded trainers, where they simply did not have the right skill sets in order to apply them.

LB: Who initially trained the military forces?

KE: Before the formal establishment of our program, which began in May of 2002, the British and the Turks of ISAF, first the British and then the Turks in the second ISAF command, each trained one battalion on their own of what became Afghan National Army. They were finally integrated into the Afghan National Army. Then in May of 2002, US Special Forces arrived in Afghanistan. They were brought in for the explicit mission of training the Afghan National Army. So it began as US Special Forces together with the French, and we had over that, what you would call a security assistance office that was there to help administer the overall program and work on the programmatics and the broad management of these programs. By October of 2002, that was when things really began to move up to the next level.

LB: What were the origins of Task Force *Phoenix*?

KE: The concept of Task Force *Phoenix* was developed when we saw that the size of the program was now going to exceed what US Special Forces were able to do. First, there was the question of the availability of Special Forces. Special Forces are admirably suited for the training and the development of the Afghan National Army battalions but the first question was whether there were enough Special Forces available. Then secondly, it also seemed to us that we were at a point in the development now of brigade echelons within the Afghan National

Army and starting the corps echelon and now starting to get into the complexities of sustaining institutions and a functioning General Staff, so we would need to rethink our basic training organization.

So we looked at what the requirements would be and we developed the idea of Task Force *Phoenix* which would be led by a brigadier general. It would be a US Army infantry brigade, augmented to meet all of the various requirements that we had for the Afghan National Army at that time. Those requirements included embedded trainers for the fielded forces and then a training command that would be at the Kabul Military Training Center. So we constructed Task Force *Phoenix*. In fact, we had a debate about what the task force was to be called and we used *Phoenix* because it was to signify the rising of the Afghan National Army from the ashes of 30 years of very brutal warfare.

LB: I was supposed to ask you who thought of the name.

KE: I thought of Task Force *Phoenix*. We had this big debate going around and I said that I was going to end that debate. I said it would be Task Force *Phoenix* and I explained what it was. So the idea was then to establish this task force and in about February or March in the spring of 2003, one brigade of the 10th Mountain Division under Colonel Mark Milley, came in and established Task Force *Phoenix* on the eastern side of Kabul at what we called Camp Phoenix, led by a brigadier general. The 10th Mountain Division then came in with another combat brigade so we had two brigades of the 10th Mountain Division and the division headquarters there and one wing was operational and the other wing was Task Force *Phoenix*. Task Force *Phoenix* was under the OPCON [operational control] of the 10th Mountain Division commander and under my TACON [tactical control].

LB: Do you see any advantages or disadvantages with using Special Forces to train the Afghans?

KE: I see some great advantages but there are limitations to what Special Forces can do. The tremendous advantage of the Special Forces is that it is a doctrinal mission for an internal defense, partnering with indigenous forces and working with them in very small numbers and providing advice. Then if you are in combat, there is the ability of these small Special Forces elements to also bring to bear all the combat support and combat service support resources that might be needed in order to conduct movement, provide intelligence, and bring in all the enablers necessary.

The Special Forces units in the main that I have operated with in Afghanistan are extraordinary in their ability to perform that mission. They share the hardships with the Afghans. They take risks with them. To use an expression, "The Special Forces are the best we've got in sharing pains and victories with the Afghans." So the Afghans, when they are with our Special Forces, live with them. They are

the band of brothers. They go into combat together. If a Special Forces soldier goes down, the Afghan unit that they are with will fight to provide security until a MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] gets called in. If an Afghan soldier goes down, the Special Forces fight to hold things together until we can get a US MEDEVAC for them. So the Afghans along with our Special Forces have always been the deadliest combination from a Taliban perspective. Those guys just fight like tigers when they are with us and they get better over time.

What are their limits though? Well, their limits are that there are a set of tasks that have to be accomplished with building the Afghan National Army. A lot of function systems have to be developed that link that operational unit to their higher headquarters or to functional commands. So there are requirements for developing Afghan resupply and there are requirements that Afghan soldiers get paid on a regular basis. There also has to be some way for us to communicate to the General Staff when we have an ace Afghan National Army battalion commander. How is that guy going to get promoted? It is too early for them to have a fair and partial system and we can't wait for 20 years for that to occur.

So how do all those things happen? Well, you can have the Special Forces soldiers doing it but then you are taking a highly professional well trained operative that is out there, that should be out there fighting with the Afghan National Army, helping them through their troop leading procedures as they get ready to go into combat and you are putting them on other tasks for which you don't need that same set of skills in order to accomplish. That is where the ETTs [embedded training teams] come in. You have a combination of embedded trainers that are needed to do the tasks I just described, administration and logistics, getting the non-combat systems up and running with the Afghan National Army, and then you have the Special Forces coming in to partner.

Now, what we evolved to over time is that we have Special Forces who are doing that partnering and we have ETTs but then we also use our conventional forces to partner with the Afghan National Army if we don't have enough Special Forces. Our conventional forces do very well in partnering but then we continue to spread ETTs out. There is also another requirement for ETTs, when you think about it, with the Afghan National Army. You still have units that are out in the hinterlands of the Afghan National Army and they need resupply and still the Afghan system can't provide their resupply in many instances. We are getting better by 2006 but in those times it was still very much US led.

So we shifted to the idea of partnering by 2004. It was actually after my first stay but I turned up the heat a lot in 2005 when I got there and that was when we covered down and did full-up partnering. What else Special Forces can't do well, because is it really an echelon above them, is when you start getting up

to the brigade-level of command and certainly the corps-level of command. The Special Operations Forces can do it and they will give it their best effort but your conventional forces seem to have an inherent advantage because they are used to operating at higher echelons. When you get up to the command level of, let's say, colonel within the Afghan National Army, conventional trainers are generally more appropriate to deliver results.

LB: How did problems of illiteracy affect training?

KE: As I recall, it impacted it in ways that we adapted to relatively quickly. It didn't take us long to learn that field manuals were not necessarily a recipe for success or that getting the technical manuals on fighting vehicles necessarily would help us in any big way when there were literacy problems. Actually the most profound impact of illiteracy was in leadership. It proved very challenging in the first year as we had problems with literacy with officers and certainly with our noncommissioned officers.

There are a lot of hidden assumptions out there that we don't even realize as we are trying to teach in the classroom about what literacy enables you to do. On the other hand, we found that the offer of literacy training has turned out to be one of the great enhancements of the Afghan National Army. I got there in October and by the spring that was one of the mantras that we had, literacy training for every soldier. Now we have it in the basic training. Literacy is uneven in the field but compared to October 2002, soldiers have access to literacy training and that has become very important because of the prestige that goes with it in a society that is highly illiterate which Afghanistan still is. I think perhaps about 30 plus percent of the country is illiterate. To have a national institution which prides itself or advertises that one of the attributes will be reading and writing for the force, that offers some compelling advantages in terms of prestige that the civilians attribute to that organization and actually the sense of pride that soldiers have.

It is very moving. When you get out and talk to these young Afghan National Army soldiers. They are a very honest group. If you are out talking to a platoon and you ask them to raise their hands if they can't read or write, maybe seven out of every ten hands will go up and these are new recruits. Then, when you ask them the question, "Do you guys want to learn to read and write," they will say, "Yes, we do." If you ask, "If you get a chance to study are you going to," their answer is, "Yes." So it puts constraints on the leadership of the force but we are making pretty good progress right now in making the Afghan National Army into a much more literate group than it was say, four or five years ago.

LB: So was it an enhanced recruiting tool?

KE: Yes.

LB: How capable were Afghan units in taking over their own battlespace by the end of 2003?

KE: By 2003, not at all.

LB: Not at all?

KE: No.

LB: By 2006?

KE: By 2006, it depends upon the mission. The mission I like to cite as an example of how far they have come along is the Kabul riot of 29 May 2006, where the police force had failed in Kabul in a very serious way following a traffic accident that our forces got into. Tragically, there were several Afghans killed in the traffic accident and a riot broke out. Then our forces, thinking they were under fire, fired some rounds into the crowd and several more were killed and that led to very serious several hours of rioting that spread quickly throughout Kabul. Minister of Defense Rahim Wardak went to President Karzai several hours into the riot and recommended that he deploy the army onto the streets. So the Afghan National Army took to the streets and within 30 minutes the riots were over. That was without US advisors. I told him our forces were not going to put advisors out there, they could do this, and they needed to do it on their own. It needed to be a demonstration of a national army. So they took to the streets and performed brilliantly. When the word got out that the army was on the streets, the rioters went back home. I think it was more because of the confidence of the people that it settled things down.

By 2006, in the Afghan National Army there are things that they can do well such as civil disturbance control. There are areas of Afghanistan where they operate by themselves with our embedded trainers and do presence patrolling and do extraordinarily well in maybe a dispute between two tribes in a host province where they are shooting at each other. The Afghan National Army will roll up in their Ford Ranger trucks with their green berets and have an officer come forward and say in *Pashtun*, "Time out. What is going on here? Let's sit down and have a little *shura* here and talk about this. Let's drink some tea." They are able to do that phenomenally well.

As far as their limitations, when they get into heavy contact with the Taliban forces, clearly for us to want them to win 100 to nothing, which we do, they can use our intelligence help, they can use our close air support, they can use our medical evacuation, and they can use our firepower. The Afghan National Army has been in combat with *Taliban* with just our embedded trainers. They are in their Ford Ranger trucks and we might have an uparmored HMMWV [high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle] with a crew-served weapon and these guys, when

they make contact, go after the *Taliban* and they hunt them down relentlessly. They are a very brave group but still today some of their critical combat support systems are extraordinarily weak compounded by the very difficult challenges of the topography of Afghanistan and the absence of roads which makes this even tougher.

They also do lack precision firepower, not an American standard of firepower precision. They need more help in terms of having more heavy mobile weaponry, more mortars that they can bring to bear very quickly in a fight and that is what we are working on right now, trying to give them those levels of enhancement. In the tough places of Afghanistan, where we are fighting more dangerous and well-armed and trained Taliban and foreign fighter elements, it is going to be three, four, or five years before I would be confident that you could have companies of Afghan National Army that could operate with maybe just a very small team of embedded trainers, where if things really got tough they would be able to call in the necessary support to bail them out.

LB: How did the problems of narcotics trafficking affect your mission?

KE: In 2002 and 2003, it was not the problem that it has emerged to today. We already saw the storm clouds on the horizon in then. The poppy cultivation was increasing rapidly but still not to the levels that we have today. There were discussions that were going on at that time, even back in 2003, about whether the Afghan National Army should be committed to counternarcotics missions, should they be committed to the eradication.

I had argued strenuously against that and successfully argued against it. It was primarily from our United Kingdom colleagues, who had the lead for counternarcotics in the security sector reform pillars. So we were able to protect the army at that time. We were able to keep the counternarcotics mission away from the army.

My point was, first of all, even if you wanted to have the Afghan National Army do it, there was inadequate Afghan National Army available to get them committed to that. Then I was terribly worried about the possibility of corruption of the Afghan National Army and the Ministry of Defense. Then third, I was quite concerned about the loss of respect and legitimacy and the perceived fairness of the Afghan National Army among the people. For the Afghan National Army, we could even see in 2002 and 2003, that if you looked at the attributes that we saw as important for the army in 2002 and 2003, albeit with the threat that had not evolved to the level it has today, even then we believed that more important than their ability, to take the fight to Taliban militants and insurgents and defeat them would be them serving as an apolitical pillar of stability within this very immature and still developing but quite rowdy Afghan political system.

After 30 years of warfare and now trying to pull their country back together again, trying to figure out how to come together as a people and reconstitute their nation having a respected, all-ethnic and national army would be a national asset far beyond their ability to go out and fight the Taliban forces. What we found with the building of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police is the challenge that we face that we're trying to build an institution while we're at war and there is an inherent tension between those two objectives. The tougher the war gets, the more the Afghan political leadership wants Afghan national security forces now fully committed to fighting a dangerous enemy. That is what their constituents are telling them. They need security now, not ten years from now.

Then you have your international military forces that are fighting and those that are operating in the field know that their operational effectiveness, their operational effectiveness and the Afghan operational effectiveness, will dramatically increase with the synergy that you get by competent Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army operating together with international military forces. At the same time that you are fighting the war, you have to find a way to build the institution, so this is just a tremendous challenge. Our US Army probably has not faced a problem of this level really since the Revolutionary War. I talked about the Valley Forge experience, going to winter quarters, getting a couple months to try to build the institution, and then there was no more institution building. It was back to the campaign season.

One of the difficulties that the Afghan military leadership has and we have is trying to strike that proper balance. If you look at keeping a stance there, if you get too far over on the operational side, you will have a great campaigning season but then you will look left and right and your attrition rates will have risen dramatically because the forces have been kept in the field too long and the sustaining institutions weren't getting built any more. You didn't look at the longer term. If you lean too far on the side of protecting and you don't get the guys out of the barracks and they don't fight, one is that they are not gaining combat experiences but there is also a growing frustration of the international military forces that we are not going to do this forever. We are not here to save Afghanistan. We are here with the Afghans to save Afghanistan and to train them to do it themselves.

So there is a lot of tension and we need more Afghan forces. Not only non-US forces and commanders are asking for more Afghan security forces but our own operational forces are saying they need more. Well, that is great, I know you need more but remember that after your one year tour of duty and you go back home, those Afghan soldiers are going to inherit now the next infantry division that is also going to want them to stay in the field and campaign for their 12 month tour of duty. I believe that is an experience we have in Iraq as well, setting that balance between building the institution and protecting the institution so that it can build

itself up, its traditions and way of doing business, even while you prosecute the war. The tougher the war gets, the harder that striking that balance will get because the pressures will start to mount to get them out in the field and just keep them there.

LB: Is there some issue with the Afghan soldiers themselves wanting to get out in the field and fight for their country?

KE: There is. It is interesting with the Afghan soldiers. They truly do like being out in the field as long as they are getting paid and as long as they are getting taken care of. Minister of Defense Wardak was joking with me once and he said, "One national asset that we have in Afghanistan is that we know how to fight." He said, "We would like to export that capability."

So the Afghan soldiers, yes, they like to be out in the field and they like to be out there fighting, provided that they are well partnered and taken care of, and indeed you have to protect the Afghans sometimes from themselves because you have aggressive commanders in the Afghan National Army that just want to be out there fighting for their country. It is a matter of pride. Five years into this, the Afghan people want to be exercising their own sovereignty and the greatest manifestation of sovereignty is your ability to have your own national security forces under your own command and control out in the field and not beholden unto foreign militaries.

LB: So are there quite a few different pressures from different areas to balance?

KE: Yes, there are.

LB: Thank you again very much for your time and willingness to support the Army's mission in chronicling its history in OEF.

Colonel Dominic Cariello
16 February 2007

JM: My name is John McCool (JM) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Colonel Dominic Cariello (DC) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). Today's date is 16 February 2007 and this will be an unclassified interview. Before we begin sir, if you feel at any time that we are entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information. If classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Okay, sir, could we start off by you giving me a brief sketch of your military career up to this point and then we'll focus on OEF. How did you get commissioned, what units have you served with, and what were your deployments and duty assignments?

DC: Sure. I started back in 1981 on the delayed entry program. While I was in high school and 17 years old, I enlisted in the Armor of the Army Reserve. When I graduated from high school, about seven days after graduation, I went off to Fort Knox, Kentucky and I was an armor crewman, coming back to the 339th Brigade, 84th Division. I started that process, started to drill once I got back and wanted to get into the ROTC program but because I had a college bonus as part of my enlistment, I ended up going into the OCS [Officer Candidate School] program. In order to go to the state OCS program as a reservist, you had to have 60 college credits. At that point I only had 39 credits. So I transferred over to the Army National Guard, a field artillery unit, which my father had retired out of. He had 20-plus years in the service and retired from the 1st Battalion, 126th Field Artillery which I went into.

So I went to the state OCS program, got my commission in 1983 and in January of 1984, I went down to Fort Sill, Oklahoma because I stayed with the Army National Guard and did not go back to the Reserves. I went down and became branch qualified in FA [Field Artillery]. I went back in 1990 for my advanced course. I had to go back to the CAS3 [Combined Arms and Services Staff School] I got stuck in between those commissioning dates where CAS3 was not a requirement to get into the CGSOC [Command and General Staff Officer Course], so I got stuck and had to go to CAS3 as a major. It wasn't a big deal. It was just four weeks of added schooling. In 2000, I took command of the 126th Field Artillery. We had just converted to Paladins. Then in 2004, after other numerous assignments at battalion level and up at brigade level after I was a battalion commander, I went up to the 57th Field Artillery Brigade as the brigade S3 [operations officer] and then became the brigade XO [executive officer]. In November 2004, I took command

of the 57th Field Artillery Brigade. At the end of 2005, I was tasked by the state of Wisconsin to be the Task Force *Wisconsin* commander for Hurricane Katrina and took 500 other Wisconsin soldiers and a bunch of equipment down to New Orleans. We were stationed at Belle Chasse, Louisiana. At that point I became the task force reception, staging, onward-movement and integration (RSOI) commander. I was responsible for the group that was at Belle Chasse in-processing all the soldiers, airmen, Marines, etc., who were coming into New Orleans for the disaster. I spent three weeks there and then came back to Wisconsin.

Throughout all that, I had been wondering when the 57th Field Artillery Brigade was going to get a mission to either go to Iraq or Afghanistan. I had a bunch of soldiers who were now looking at what the true relevancy of this brigade and the battalions were because we're not going anywhere. What is the future of field artillery?

So I was hoping to get an FA mission to take them over. Everybody else was getting into the fight and I had soldiers who were watching that. I started having soldiers who were requesting to become fillers for some of the other states that were being deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan so they'd have some form of relevancy in their minds. They were young soldiers wanting to get into the fight to be able to have the bragging rights to do that. I was supposed to be Task Force *Phoenix 5.0*. The 57th FA Brigade was tagged back in June 2005 to be *Phoenix 5.0*.

Within a matter of about three weeks, though, I was called and told that I was not going to get it. It was going to the 41st Brigade out of Oregon because they were trying to get them into the BCT [brigade combat team] cycle. They wanted to convert them under the transformation program and under ARFORGEN [Army Force Generation] to get them into that theoretical four-to-six year set and work through the last of the general officers who were at each of these separate brigades, now going to these BCTs, and it downsizes to a colonel as a commander.

So, at that point in time, I had already had one battery of the 126th tagged in 2004 to go over to Iraq as a SECFOR [security force] battery for the 141st out of Louisiana which was the organic artillery to the 256th BCT. Bravo Battery of the 126th deployed so I had a group of guys over there. Now the question was, "Okay, when are the other units going to deploy?" I also had another artillery battalion under my command, the 121st. They are the MLRS [multiple launch rocket system] and the 126th is the Paladin. The 121st guys were now asking when they were going to go. So the 57th, the rest of the 126th, and the 121st were all looking for a mission. The 126th's Bravo Battery came back in September of 2005. In fact, they came back while I was down at Katrina. Then in 2005, two additional battalions from Wisconsin were going to be going over to Iraq and they needed fillers. So we took the remnants of the 126th, all the other units minus Bravo Battery, and stood them up for deployment as fillers to the 120th FA Battalion and

the 128th Infantry Battalion in Wisconsin. So that now got everybody a tour from the 126th. We mobilized them, got them through the in-process, and in country. We, the 57th, were still looking for a mission though. We were potentially going to pick up another mission that would be in OEF but it was going back and forth between us now and Alaska.

What also popped into the picture was, "Okay, you are not selected as one of the six fires brigades so we're going to transform you into a CSB [combat support brigade]." So now, at that point, they're not going to mobilize us as a brigade because they had to stand us up as a CSB and they had to work through that process. All hopes have faded that the 57th was going to take its flag and go into the box. At the same time, a new mission was coming up and the 121st got tagged for it. They're now a transportation SECFOR in Iraq and they are over there. They will come back in July 2007. They left in July and will come back in July. So now that left the 57th. In order to get the 121st over to the sandbox with the numbers it needed as this new organization, we took a bunch of soldiers out of the 57th FA Brigade, my brigade headquarters, to fill the 121st so they could stand up and go over to the box.

Now both of my battalions have experience. I received a call in November from our deputy adjutant general stating, "First of all, I'm going to tell you that the 57th is going nowhere. There isn't anything in the books for you now. You're going to transform to a CSB and there's nothing until like 2008/2009 as it stands. Plus, we're seeing nothing that's going to shift to say that you're going to be a fires brigade." Which, later on, they came and made seven fires brigade out of the National Guard but by then we had committed to the CSB. The seventh went to Wyoming but I'll tell you, looking to the future, this CSB is probably the best thing for us. It really is. It allows a lot of great leaders to get promoted and it allows a lot of great leaders to stand up and go into positions where they wouldn't have had the opportunity to do that before. If you'd asked me when I was a captain or a major if this was a good plan, I would have been kicking and screaming. After going through the War College and looking at the overall strategic program of our Army and our defense, it's one of those, "This makes sense." So anyhow, the deputy adjutant general called and said, "Do you still want to go on a mission?" I said, "Absolutely."

JM: You personally?

DC: Me personally. I said, "Absolutely, what do you have, sir?" He said:

"Here's what I have. The leadership we had identified to take a 16-man team over to Afghanistan has to back out because he has a job at USPFO [United States Property and Fiscal Office] and has to go off to a two-year program. So with him went a couple other guys who said they would go if he went but now that he was not going they didn't want to go either. Now

here's the deal. You have eight vacancies, so you need to fill them if you take this mission."

This was a Friday morning, right before I was going to work. I pretty much had my mind made up by the time I got to work that I was going to do it but I hadn't said anything to my family yet. I waited for them to come home to tell them this was something I wanted to do.

They told me they supported me and they'd always known that someday it was going to happen. So I had to call the deputy adjutant general back on Monday. I called that Friday night and left a message on his Blackberry telling him I'd take the mission. He called back on Monday and told me okay. Oh, and by the way, over the weekend, I began calling some of my FA guys. Lieutenant Colonel John Schroeder is my S3, soon to be my deputy commander, under the CSB. The other individuals I brought were Command Sergeant Major Jeff Janke, who's my command sergeant major in the 57th FA Brigade. So I put together a team of eight individuals who were 57th FA. A couple of them were out of the battalions and the rest were from my staff. Part of it was because I have a couple full-timers that I know their peer groups have been to the box and the competitiveness that's going to be there. Although it's not a "criterion" for future promotions or positions, it is a criterion and it needs to be a criterion. In some cases, you want somebody who has experience. John is going to see another tour and I'll potentially see another tour before I retire in the next couple of years.

My captains will see potentially two or three more tours in their 20 years, if they hold this out. So you need people who have that relevancy and experience. So I accepted the mission, put together the team and we met. There were eight other Wisconsin soldiers whom I had never met before and I met them on 3 December for the first time. In January 2006 we deployed. We home stationed, started on 5 January, and on 8 January we had our farewell ceremony. By 08:30 p.m. on 8 January, we were at Camp Shelby, Mississippi to start our in-processing.

JM: Where is your home station?

DC: My home station is the 57th FA Brigade out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I've got soldiers who are a part of the 32d Brigade, I've got some who are part of the Joint Force Headquarters, and I've got others out of the RTI [Regional Training Institute] from Wisconsin.

They were a good bunch of guys, in fact a great bunch of guys who did an outstanding job. I'm very proud of them. They did a good mission. I put in some tight controls in the beginning and maintained them while we were in country, too. So that was the makeup of the group. That's what got us over to OEF. One of the other things, at that point in time, was that we were told that we were going to be at Shelby for two to three weeks to process and train.

That was perfect. Let's get in there, do the training we need to do, and let's get downrange. Let's get this started, let's get over there and let's make a difference. When we got to Shelby though, we found out we were going to be there at a minimum of 45 days. They had now extended the training plan. Some of those days you were just looking at each other. They really didn't need to extend the training days. On 23 February, we departed out of Gulfport, Mississippi and on 24 February we were boots on the ground in Manas, Kyrgyzstan.

JM: At Shelby, was this embedded training team (ETT) specific training?

DC: Yes.

JM: Can you tell me what that entailed and maybe evaluate it?

DC: Sure. First Army has a program put together for these ETTs. One of their issues, which is why they sent us back a month early, was to work with the 218th and the ETTs. There will probably be a question later on as to what I did in country but I commanded two RCAGs [regional corps advisory groups]. I was the senior mentor to two two-star generals, the 205th Corps commander and the 203d Corps commander. At Shelby, the training focused on a lot of the TTPs [tactics, techniques, and procedures] that were coming out of Iraq. There wasn't a lot of information coming back out of Afghanistan.

I'll tell you, Afghanistan is one of the best kept secrets. Everything is Iraq, Iraq, Iraq, success in Iraq/no success in Iraq. I'll tell you, there are a lot of great successes happening in Afghanistan. Part of that is because you have an Army, a nation, that's committed to doing this, so that helps but anyway, back to Shelby. Their trainers were a bunch of guys coming back from Iraq.

I'm a very vocal and straightforward person. I look at value versus non-value. Everybody's time is valuable. We were getting training on going out and doing a cordon search. Okay, why are we doing that? Well, because you have to do that. I asked why we had to do that. They told me it was because it was a FORSCOM [Forces Command] regulation. Well, why are we doing this and how does this fit our mentoring the ANA [Afghan National Army]? Well, you'll know how to do it, so you'll know how to mentor them. No, no, no. I want to focus on how you're going to train me to mentor this ANA, because I've never done this. Well I haven't been to Afghanistan so I don't know how I'm going to tell you to do that. I told them that basically this was bullshit and they're wasting our time. There were a lot of different training scenarios we went through that we never used in country, all the IED [improvised explosive device] training we received. I'm not knocking the program. They were just trying to put together what they needed to put together.

JM: Hadn't the advisor training previously been conducted at Camp Atterbury, Indiana?

DC: It had been at Camp Atterbury. We were the second group, or maybe we were the first group, that went through as ETTs at Shelby. So they were feeling their way through it. They had done a lot of Iraq training and now all of a sudden they're doing Afghanistan. In fact, I want to say we were the first ones. We were originally going to be going to Atterbury because that's where the crew before us from Wisconsin went and all the other teams went to Camp Atterbury. That's where they learned to be ETTs for Afghanistan.

Shelby was running the Iraq scenario. We did cordon and search, convoys, convoy ops, ground assault convoys, entry control points, escorting local nationals into a FOB [forward operating base], qualification of weapons, going through the gas chamber. Oh by the way, we never put our protective masks on. Hell, we never took them out of our duffel bags. The JLIST [joint service lightweight integrated suit technology] we had to have, we turned them in in-country because we never pulled them out.

JM: What about cultural awareness training?

DC: We had cultural awareness and again, they were working their way through. They hired some guy who had fled Afghanistan in 1974 who was now the expert on Afghanistan but could only tell you what it looked like back in 1974.

The language training we received was that we had these little books that had *Dari* in it and some common phrases and some words. There would be a group of 50 or 60 of us in this room in these force provider tents and you hoped like hell it wasn't windy because the flapping and all the other external noises prevented you from hearing anybody. He would have each of us say one of the words in the book and then go around the room and do that. So, he's getting good money for us to recite different Afghan phrases. There wasn't any formal sentence structure or how to interface.

Then to get the cultural awareness of Afghanistan, there were PowerPoint slides that we had received earlier and all he did was to throw up those same slides and make us read them. They were in English. Well, English we know. Plus there was a lot of instructing us to never touch them with your left hand, don't ever show them the bottom of your feet, don't ever deny *chai*, don't ever deny food. Well, that's all BS. Now yes, we have to be sensitive to a lot of that and we were but there weren't going to be any international incidents had I touched the corps commander or any of those soldiers with my left hand or embraced them with my left arm and hand, or when I had my legs crossed, worrying that he saw the bottoms of my feet. And you know, you can deny *chai* and food, although we always recommended you didn't because it's great. In fact, I miss *chai*. I had *chai* withdrawals when I got back into country. I drank a lot of *chai*. Everybody wants to offer you *chai* all the time but that was the training and we were waiting for it to end.

We wanted to get started. They were trying to work a program and we had block leave coming. Even though it's a 45-day training program, we had block leave coming and we didn't want it. We wanted to get going. Get us over there. Plus, our group was supposed to deploy to Shelby on 11 December. With all the hurricanes hitting Mississippi and Louisiana, Lieutenant General Russel Honoré gave Shelby two weeks off. He was shutting them down for Christmas. So had we gone there on 11 December, we would have been there for a week and a half and then we'd be going home for two weeks or we'd be sitting there for two weeks. Christmas, New Year's, we're here and there's nobody training us, the post is closed. How do we get our life support?

So they pushed us to 5 January. Well, that meant that the 3.5 ETTs that were in Afghanistan had an option to extend for 30 days. A lot of them did not because we were already a month late. When we got in country, we were over a month late. I had no right-seat ride. A lot of the 4.5s did not have a right-seat ride with their counterpart because their counterpart left a month earlier. As well I would, for the most part. So that was the issue. That was the training at Shelby and they took a lot of the recommendations on the AARs [after-action reviews] that we threw out. They had the horse blanket which was always changing. You always have knuckleheads who have worked behind a desk for the last seven or eight years of their military careers and now all of a sudden they are wanting to go back out and be Rambo.

So they were trying to influence additional things to throw on there that were of no value which started shifting some of the horse blankets. We had a O6 [colonel] who was part of team. There were three O6s. The other O6 and I had to finally pull him aside and tell him to knock it off. He was now shooting the schedule off while he added in what he thinks will be cool/gee whiz stuff that has nothing to do with the mission. They're trying to meet his needs because he's saying, "I think it would be great if we did this." At the same time, they're telling us that there's really no need for us to do this. "Do you guys really want to do this?" The other O6 and I would say no. We wanted to know what we needed and if we're going to do something additional, how did it improve the current training we're receiving to make us better once we get into country? If this has nothing to do with Afghanistan, then let's not do it.

JM: What was the handoff like when you got into country? Since you didn't do a right-seat ride, how did you familiarize yourself with the environment and figure out who's who in the zoo, if you will?

DC: I brought down Lieutenant Colonel Mike Slusher with me. When I got into it and I have to step back and will do this very quickly, we still did not know where the hell we were going in country when we left Shelby. We did not know

what jobs we were going to be doing but we were told by the LNO [liaison officer] who was sent back that we were all going to be split up. Each state put together a 16-man team to be a brigade or a battalion team. I was going to be a brigade team chief and the 15 other individuals I brought from Wisconsin were going to be my brigade ETTs. We were under the impression, as well as the others, that we would all be together. We would train together at Shelby, we would go to Afghanistan and we would all be together.

When we got to Shelby, the second day we were there, a colonel and a command sergeant major were sent back to be the LNOs to talk to us. They were *Phoenix* 3.5 guys who came in and told us we were getting split up when we get into country. We were going to do our team stuff here and that's good but be advised that we were going to go in different directions. Well, we got to Manas and I'm still calling down to the 53d. Now prior to that, I had tagged into the DCO [deputy commanding officer] of the 41st because I understood he was going to be coming in at the time I needed to go to my two week War College to finish and there was a policy in country that stated nobody went home for schools. I said, "Look, I need to know now if I'm deferring or what I'm doing."

So I started working with Dave Enyer (ph) and got in contact with him knowing he would be taking over in June and I would be going to school in July. "Look, I'm going to need permission from the commanding general. Is this going to happen?" Well, then they read into Third Army blah, blah, blah and found out that for War College and the Command Sergeant Major Course, those guys will go home. However, everyone else could not go home for CGSOC, for ILE [Intermediate Level Education], for the BNCOC [Basic Noncommissioned Officer's Course], or for the ANCOG [Advanced Noncommissioned Officer's Course], etc.

When you're in theater, you're in theater, except for those two I mentioned because those are Department of the Army appointed. Anyhow, I get to Manas and I'm still trying to get info from Dave to see if he could get info, because Dave was a 3.0 and the deputy commander of the 76th when they were in country. Colonel Butch Redding, who was the DCO of the 53d, right-seat rode with Dave, so I figured that Dave knows Butch and maybe we could get something going. We're up at Manas asking what was going on but we were told things had not been worked out yet. When we get there, we'll get our assignments. Two days after I'm in Manas, I'm down in Kabul as part of the advance. We couldn't get the whole team down there. I looked at the roster and they had my Wisconsin team going to five different locations. For the most part, all the nine other teams were going to five different locations.

I said to the lieutenant colonel and the two majors, "All right, why are we doing this?" "Well, because we need the fill and we really don't know the intricacies of

these teams.” was the answer. I said, “Okay, give me the permission to redo this and I will fill all your slots with competent individuals but I’m going to restructure this so that the states are as close together as they possibly can be. They might not be in the same *kandak* or brigade, but they’ll be in the same region.”

That being said, when I got in there and met Butch Redding, because Brigadier General John Perryman was now on leave, the O6s had to go report in person to Butch to get our assignments. We still didn’t have our assignments. Butch sat me down and said, “You’re going down to the 205th to be the G3.” I said, “Okay.” The other two, Mike Slusher went over to the 207th as the XO mentor and Colonel Marty Leppert was going to become the LNO of, at the time, the Office of Security Cooperation-Afghanistan [OSC-A]/Task Force *Phoenix*.

Marty wasn’t happy. He’s a National Guard Bureau guy who is sitting behind the desk all the time and wanted to get out. As it was, we got it rescheduled. Marty ended up coming downrange and he was the 2d Brigade senior mentor of the 205th. We left Kabul and took 30 brand new up-armored Humvees, so we drove from Kabul to Kandahar, which was great. I got to see a lot of countryside of Afghanistan in the 18 hours we were driving that day. We had a couple of stops along the way so that’s why it was 18 hours.

I got in and we got to the RSOI tent at Kandahar Airfield and there literally was this sergeant major holding up a sign that said, “Colonel Cariello.” As I got into the tent, I told him I was Colonel Cariello. “Yes sir, come with me. I’m going to take you to the TOC [tactical operations center].” I asked him who he was. “Well, I’m the command sergeant major mentor, the sergeant major ops mentor for the 205th. I’m going to take you and introduce you to the RCAG [Regional Corps Assistance Group] commander, Colonel Ken Edwards.”

So we go over to the passenger terminal where the temporary TOC is located. They called it “Taliban’s Last Stand” because that’s where the Taliban were. You could see inside the one corridor where they dropped the bombs to kill the Taliban when we took Kandahar back. We went there but he wasn’t there. He had gone to bed because he had been up a long time so we went back over to his barracks. I introduced myself and was told he was glad I was here. There was some stuff they needed me to start knocking out. They had an IWS [information workspace] brief on Operation RIVER DANCE tomorrow morning at 0630.

JM: Welcome to Afghanistan.

DC: Yes. So we drove back to the TOC where I met a lieutenant colonel who was the G3 and happy to give it up. They made him the deputy commander/XO mentor. I had been tracking RIVER DANCE in the 205th because, at that point, they weren’t doing the computer IWSs because they were doing TACSAT [tactical satellite] command updates on a daily basis at 1700. I went and sat in on that. Once

I found out I was going to the 205th, while I was at Kabul, I would go into their joint operations center conference room and sit in to listen to what the hell was going on. I started looking at maps and talking to the '3s. "Okay, what's going on down there? Tell me about the American leadership down there. Tell me what you know about the ANA down there. What's their strength?"

I just started gathering information from the headquarters and then I talked to Ken Edwards a couple of times on the DSN but I didn't get a lot out of it, just him looking forward to me coming down. So my right-seat ride was 15 minutes. That's how long it took to drive from the RSOI tent over to the TOC. I put together some slides until about 0130 in the morning, close to 0200 in the morning and then I was to meet Edwards at 0530 for breakfast. At 0630, we were going to do this IWS. They had just now started the IWS. We were doing two IWSs for Operation RIVER DANCE which was the poppy eradication program in Afghanistan. The ANA were to provide the security for the Afghan National Police who were providing the security for the eradication force which was a bunch of guys with tractors and plows who were going to plow under all the poppies all the way up the Helmand River.

Of course, where you've got water, you've got crops. So my immersion into country was that I was thrown into it feet running and it didn't stop. It did not stop. Okay, that's the way I love it. I learned a lot as I went on and 16 days after I came in there, I was made the RCAG commander. So then I was the senior mentor/RCAG commander. That meant two things: I'm responsible for all those US troops plus KBR [Kellogg Brown & Root] and MPRI [Military Professional Resources Inc.] [contractors], etc., that are under the 205th RCAG as well as I'm responsible for mentoring the corps commander and making sure all the mentoring meshes from the corps level, brigade level, *kandak* level for the operations.

They were just standing up the international forces in Regional Command [RC]-South, so we were the combative force with the ANA. For RIVER DANCE, there weren't any Brits, Canadians, Dutch, or Romanians with us. So, like Major General Richard Durbin says, "Where goeth the ANA, so goeth the ETT" and that's what we did. If it wasn't immoral, illegal or stupid, we went. Where they went, we went and we had to. We provided the close air support or CAS and the MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] as well as our advising, mentoring, coaching, and facilitating.

We were also the advocates. We were the advocates for the ANA. We're the guys who, when our own Coalition forces come up two hours before a major mission and tell us they need 50 ANA to go out on this, we'd tell them no, we weren't doing that and ask "How long have you been planning this mission?" if the answer's "Well, for two weeks." then "Good, two weeks ago you should have

come and got us. You're not getting the ANA." We don't do that to our Army, why are we doing it to their army?

JM: This Operation RIVER DANCE, can you talk about how that was conducted and the effectiveness of it?

DC: I'll tell you from the ANA perspective. The overall picture was this. There were boxes that were established up the river and these are the areas and this is how we're going to track it. In fact, as an artillery officer, when I first saw the map at *Phoenix* of these boxes, I said, "Perfect, kill boxes, all right. Okay, what artillery assets do we have? What CAS do we have? This is going to be fabulous. Are we going to start an array of fires? How are we going to do this?" They answered, "No, no, no, those are poppy eradication boxes. We're going to start here and plow or drown everything." If the ceilings were a certain size, they had pumps and they would pump water. Because when they plant, they create these huge troughs, so there's a buildup that they can pour the water in and it doesn't sift back to the river; it stays in this pond per se.

We're going to eradicate by box and then we'll shift from Box 19 to 18 to whatever. Okay. From the ANA standpoint, this is what we needed to do and this was initiated before I got there. They took a *kandak* from the 207th. 3d Brigade of the 205th only had a brigade headquarters. It didn't have any *kandaks*, no infantry. They come with three infantry *kandaks*, a combat support *kandak*, which is artillery, engineers and recon, and then a combat service support *kandak*, which has haul assets, maintenance, and medical.

So you have five *kandaks* that make up a brigade. The headquarters there didn't have any *kandaks* because they just stood the headquarters up. So they took an infantry *kandak* from the 207th in Herat and attached it to the 3d Brigade of the 205th. Our role was to take and task-organize at 3d Brigade, 207th into supporting the operations of RIVER DANCE as well as grabbing a couple companies of *kandaks* of 1st Brigade of the 205th. This was the first major operation that this corps had ever done like this. They had done little quick reaction force of QRF to react to an IED and react to small attacks but now they're doing a planned operation. We had to take them through the MDMP [military decision making progress], take them through the course of action process, battle tracking processes, CCIRs [commander's critical information requirements], PIRs [priority intelligence requirements], take them through all that so they had an understanding of what they have to be cognizant of when they send this element down.

By the way, how are we going to support them because these are remote locations? When we take them to the bottom of the Helmand River where it touches Nimruz in the southernmost portion of the Helmand Province and we're over in Kandahar, how are we going to get them supplies? How are we going to

resupply and refit them? What if they have maintenance issues? How are we going to take care of that? We had to walk them through those steps. General Durbin has a saying, and we tracked this, “First in your mentoring process, you do it for them, then you do it with them, and then you do it by them.” That holds very true. During the first part of RIVER DANCE, we were doing it “for them.” We evolved into “with them.”

JM: In the same operation?

DC: Yes, and there were a lot of moving parts. You had the police who were now involved, trying to command and control. At that time, OCS-A [Office of Security Cooperation-Afghanistan] had their team in Lashkar Gah working through the provincial coordination center which was stood up as part of this to command and control the police, the National Directorate of Security which is equivalent to the FBI and CIA lumped into one, the local governance, and the Governor of Helmand Engineer Mohammed Daud. All these people want to make decisions and want stuff to happen. It has to happen in an organized manner or you have no control over it. So we had to establish command and control throughout that operation. We tagged into that. I initially sent Mike Slusher there as the LNO of the 3d Brigade to me as the G3 and eventually as the RCAG commander.

I needed somebody who was going to give me ground truth of what was really going on before we launched the 5th *Kandak* of the 1st Brigade, which was the CSS unit, to go resupply these 3d Brigade guys. That’s a two day trip through hostile areas and so we had to make sure we had ground troops. We heard they needed water but when we got there they had two CONEXs trailers full of water. You said you needed water? Oh, well, he didn’t know we had water. We need people to make sure that before we do these sorts of things, we’ve got good command and control. So the ANA, in this operation, evolved. The 205th Corps evolved. Now, that ended taking us up to Sangin.

We moved elements of 3d Brigade, 207th to Sangin, which is north of Highway 1, up Highway 611. We had a lot of activity that was going on in Sangin because Daud had stated that we needed to put a FOB there at the cross rivers of the Helmand River and I can’t remember the other river’s name. That other river was normally dry unless there was a rain so it was a dry *wadi* that fed into the Helmand at that point but it was a good crossroads intersection for drug trafficking. Daud said we had to put it there. In fact, that FOB was in a poppy field. We plowed the poppies to start building the FOB. Then we put the ANA in the bottom half of that. There was a wall that stretched out and around and we put them down in the one section of it and we were up in the top end of it. We had a hole that we dug about 6 x 20 x 5 and that’s what we were in initially with some triple strand concertina around it as we were waiting for the support elements of the CS engineer element from 1st Brigade to get up there and start building some infrastructure and force protection.

The ANA had to learn how to do that. So we took that engineer element and mentored them into establishing force protection. Here's how you start from nothing. We also hired some local contractors to go up there, always keeping in mind that we were looking for means by which we can force the stimulation of the Afghan national economy. We have to do that. So we hired those folks. Back to your question, keeping that in mind and trying to get the ANA to help develop that as well. When we needed something, we had the ANA get it for us. We had them go through the local contractor to purchase Jersey barriers, for example, have them shipped and have a crane there to take the barriers off the trucks. We're not going to do that. We wanted them to do that but again, we were still at that point in the "with" process.

By the time I left the 205th which was in July, we had a lot of operations under our belt at that point. We had what we called the Sangin mission. We lost a US soldier in this one operation at the same time we lost a Canadian soldier. The Canadians came up and helped. Now they're getting into the fight. It was their first into the fight. They came up to Sangin. We had the Kajaki. I lost two of my French ETTs and we lost 14 ANA in that mission. We had Panjwai, we had Panjwai, we had Panjwai, we had Maymwan, and then we had Panjwai, plus the other things that were happening in Uruzgan and over in Zabol like Kalat, Shinkay, Naubahar, Atghar, etc. So there were always things popping around and happening. At the same time, now as we're in the "with" and almost close to the "by" with the US presence, now all of a sudden we're bringing in the British OMLTs [operational mentor and liaison teams], Canadians, Dutch, and Romanians to start partnering with the ANA.

JM: What were your experiences working with these Coalition partners?

DC: Well, we kind of took a step back when we did that because we Americans lead by example. We lead from the front. Where the ANA goeth, so goeth the ETTs. We don't hesitate. I'm so damn proud of those guys, everyone I had in the 205th and the 203d. They went and did their job in austere locations. When we brought in the international forces, though, there was a hesitation and a reservation because they hadn't worked with the ANA like we had. They hadn't been in combat operations with the ANA and now they wanted to bring them back to a comfort level that they had. They wanted to see them go through all this.

Well, okay, keep in mind, though, as you're seeing them go through all this, we still have the enemies of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan shooting at us and trying to blow us up on an almost daily basis. We're not going to stop the fight so you have this huge warm fuzzy as to how the ANA works. So I kept those ETTs, because I had to as well. We called them the LSTs [logistical support teams]. Because we're the G8 lead nation, we still have to have US presence holding the

dollars. Our money can only go through our hands, our US hands, so therefore all the CERP [Commander's Emergency Response Program] funds, for instance, that were being spent in Afghanistan had to go through our guys. We could not give that money to the Brits and tell them they could use the cash whenever they needed to buy something. So I kept those ETTs with them. Until they fully conducted their TOA [transfer of authority], the ETTs were still pretty much in the ETT role and not an LST role.

The ANA, as they were now developing, were apprehensive about the British, Canadians, Dutch, and the Romanians because we had taken them to a level and now all of a sudden the leadership is seeing that they want to take them back. They're questioning why they're being treated like this. The US, when we're given the order to go, you go. The Brits say, "Let's be pragmatic about this."

JM: Did they have national restrictions or anything like that on them about what they could do?

DC: The Brits did. Before they had complete TOA, they really weren't supposed to be engaged in some of the operations they were. I will tell you that the Brits were engaged in some operations because it happened. They were part of it. There were some perceived caveats but they worked through those caveats. The Canadians are strappers, man. Those guys go out and fight. Once they got into the game and started standing up their battalion and we started partnering them with the ANA, those guys are strappers. I'm really impressed with the Canadians. I had never worked with them before. I had worked with the Brits down at Fort Sill a couple times but never with the Canadians. I was really, really impressed with these guys. Not that they were warmongers. They had something to offer, they knew what they were there for and they didn't want to be sitting at Kandahar Airfield or doing local patrols around there. They wanted to get downrange and get with the ANA. They had a lot to offer and they did.

The Dutch stood up a force but it came in as a bunch of engineers and the Romanians came in but they didn't bring in their OMLTs. I TOA'd on 4 July with my replacement and on 5 July I drove up to Gardez to take over the 203d. At the end of that week, the Romanian battle group came in and they put them over in the Zabol Province. But they never brought any OMLTs with them down there which they were supposed to do. RC-South, RC-West, RC-North were supposed to be all OMLT. Under the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force], the US contribution was going to be RC-East. Eventually that would evolve into additional international battalions, countries coming in and being a part of that as well, so eventually the US could fade away or just put smaller pockets as the potential exit strategy for Afghanistan. Then we would rotate leadership and units. Now again, that's levels above me at that point of how that was going to be taken care of but that's what was briefed to me as we were developing the OMLTs because I would ask what we were going to do with these US folks.

Now, 96 ETTs make up a brigade. When an OMLT comes in and takes over, that gets our initial planning that we put together. I had Mike Slusher and, at that time, Lieutenant Colonel Sean Ward (ph), I think he's an O6 now, from the 53d out of Florida. Sean was the 3d Brigade senior mentor. Mike reported to him. We worked together and developed our thoughts of what this LST should be, sent that back up to *Phoenix*, who sent it to CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan] and they approved it. That worked for the Brits because they came in strong. They brought in 300 OMLTs whereas we had 96 for the brigade. The concept was that we're going to go from 96 to 32. That was the number we came up with and I'll tell you that that number is even shrinking now as well, the LSTs but that was based on these international countries fully standing up 96 at a minimum if not more for each of those brigades and also provide an OMLT for the RCAGs. So the Dutch stand up their combative brigade, because they would bring in a battle group. From the battle group, they would dice out so many folks to become the OMLTs or they brought in a battle group from, let's say the Netherlands, and then they brought in a separate organization which was of that same army and made them OMLTs where they had some form of habitual relationship, i.e. the Brits had the 5th Para which was the combative battle group in the Helmand Province. The Light Horse Artillery Regiment was the OMLTs. Now, that had a habitual relationship.

That artillery supported the 5th Para and the 3d Para in operations. So they knew each other. They had worked with each other. So that's how that was supposed to work. Why I got to this, as we reduced that force, we went from 96 to 32. We now had 64 folks. What are we going to do with them? Well, we would start putting them over into RC-East which was the US contribution to the ISAF program, so that's how I knew we were doing that and eventually it would convert over to OMLT.

I will tell you, as I left, I was helping process in the 203d. I left 18 January and departed Gardez to go up to Kabul. I was already working three weeks prior to that. They were going to bring in a Polish battle group and a Polish OMLT and put them in RC-East so they were already getting ready to bring an international country into RC-East, which is really good. I had 23 Romanian ETTs in the 203d. I had 21 prior. I thought we were going to lose them because the word was that the next group of OMLTs was going to go down to Zabol and they're going to work with their battle group. Well, okay, that's only 21, not 96, so you're not bringing in a whole bunch. Then we found out that they weren't providing any OMLTs. They were going to keep the US down there as ETTs and these Romanians would stay up at the 203d as ETTs, not OMLTs.

JM: You talked a little bit about the cultural awareness training, or lack thereof that you got at Shelby. Once you got into country, what were your rapport building

experiences? Were there any cultural differences or language barriers you noticed or had to overcome?

DC: Yes, language being the number one. You rely heavily on your interpreter. I tell you, these are very hospitable people. The Afghans are very hospitable people, especially in the army.

They know a couple of things. One, they know that you have knowledge. They really look up to the United States Army because of our training, education, and the caliber of the soldiers we bring to the table. So they respect that.

Number two is that they know we have the checkbook. They know that all the equipment, money, and infrastructure they're getting is coming through us so like I said earlier, you really couldn't offend them because they understood there were differences between us and them. The cultural training is spot on, as my Brit friends would say.

You start out having *chai* and you really don't talk business. When I first met Major General Rahmatullah Raufi, we did have *chai* but we immediately had to get into operations because RIVER DANCE was happening and we needed to get his soldiers downrange. Normally what happens to build rapport is that you sit down and drink *chai* and they have little dishes where they have these little dried chick peas, sugar coated walnuts, and raisins. Not like our raisins because ours get real brown with all the sugars and crap that we add. They take their grapes and dry them down to a raisin. You eat a little bit of that, you're drinking *chai* and you'll talk about things. You'll talk about Afghanistan.

They'll ask questions about the United States. They want to know about you and what you're bringing to the table. Now here's an O6 mentoring a two-star general saying, "What do you know, Colonel?" They're very receptive to what you have to bring to the table. You have to be professional when you bring it to the table. You don't treat them like garbage.

The two generals I mentored had 35plus years of military experience. Major General Abdul Khaliq served in five different armies in his military career within Afghanistan. He has fought against the enemies of Afghanistan. He was on the Russian side fighting against the *mujahedeen* as a divisional commander. Then he went to Pakistan. Raufi did the same thing. They were trained under the king's army. They were under the open government army, as they called it, after they punted the king. Then the Soviets came in and they were under them. Some of them were under the *mujahedeen*.

They left the Soviet Army and became *mujahedeen* or they then became the Northern Alliance. Some of those senior leaders went into Pakistan when the Taliban came in because they would have been killed. It would have been a main

threat to have an individual with that much experience so they went into Pakistan. When the Northern Alliance developed, they started coming back in.

They were under the new government army and then now there's the formalized army. So they served under all that. You'll be taught in the cultural classes that you have to be very, very polite. You can never raise your voice and you can't embarrass them, and I say, *go egal* which is Dari for bullshit. Very professionally and tactfully, I used forceful mentoring and I evolved into that down in RC-South. My days were long and I was always on the phone with the corps commander.

We had soldiers, his ANA soldiers, who were getting killed all over the place. We had US soldiers. We had the Combined Joint Task Force 76 (CJTF-76) element that came down and helped support the Brits and the Canadians in operations.

We had ODAs [operational detachment alphas] in RC-South. At least once a week we had ramp ceremonies where we were putting someone on a plane from all those forces we had down there. We evolved the ANA into having ramp ceremonies as well. They can do a lot. Now, it's a matter of them getting you to do it or you getting them to do it.

They can be very crafty as can we, but they would love to enable you to do what they should be doing and then blow sunshine up your butt. "Oh mentor, it's so great you're here, we couldn't do this. Oh, you must never leave me."

It's like, "Yeah, I got news for you. One year from now I'm gone. I love you, but I'm gone." So, you could work through things. Now, there were a couple of things I would push the line on. I got shunned once by Raufi. When it happened, I was at first worried that I may have lost it and wondered how the rest of my tour was going to be. At that point, I didn't know I was going to the 203d so I thought, "Man, this is going to be a long year." Their parades are a big deal to them, a huge deal and this *kandak* was tasked to be the 205th's representation to go to Kabul and be in the parade where President Hamid Karzai sits there and you've got the artillery going by.

JM: Like a pass in review?

DC: Yes, and they come marching by. For three months this *kandak* was doing nothing but learning how to march. I said, "We don't have enough forces for RIVER DANCE. We need to pull this unit and get it out of this parade detail."

We had to now support troops going up to Kajaki because of a perceived threat where Karzai personally called Raufi and told him, "You need to get soldiers up there." That's how it sometimes works there. I know he's the president but I told Raufi, "Hey, hey, hey. You work for the Ministry of Defense" and Raufi said, "Yes, but he's the president." "Yeah, well he should go to Abdul Rahim Wardak, the minister of defense, and Wardak should go to Bismullah Khan, the chief of

the General Staff, and Bismullah Khan should be calling you. There's chain of command, unity of command. The president should not be calling you." "Well, I will call Wardak." he'd say.

JM: President Bush isn't calling commanders in the field . . .

DC: That's right. This is how it works, Commandancy. This is how it works. He said, "What would you do?" Remember, this is now "with" him and sort of "for" him. I'm in between that "for" and "with" on this one because this needs to happen. In some cases, and we were warned, it'll take a month to get a decision. Go back to what I said earlier. If you allow them to take a month to give you a decision, you'll wait a month. When you say, "Listen, by the end of the day, we're going to make a decision. You better sit down and plan this out and by the way, I'm going to roll up my sleeves and sit right next to you. We need to go through this and get this done because we have to get forces out there because I don't want your ANA to die and I don't want my US troops to die. So we're going to do this."

"Okay, we'll do this." he'd say. Are they enabling you or are you enabling them? I pushed him on getting the 1-2 out of this march. Now I worked into that. Well, we'll take the recon of the 4-1, send them over to Lashkar Gah and make them the QRF. We'll take the 2d Company of the 2-1, put them up at Sangin right now and hold that in place until we do a RIP from the 3d Brigade, 207th as they're coming up through Lashkar Gah. We'll take them from Lashkar Gah up to Sangin and rotate them out. That's what we're going to do.

Then we'll take the 1-2 and put them at Kajaki for where there are supposedly 400 (always over-exaggerated) enemies. Fifty used to get us moving and then it was like, 50? You know, that's one artillery mission. One volley of artillery and that's done. "Oh, I mean 100." was the response. Then it went from 100 to 200 to 400 and it was always even numbers. I even said to Raufi once, "You know, aren't there ever 43 enemies? Is there never 101 enemies? Why is it always that they have it right down to 100, 200, or 400?" So anyway, I rolled in and said, "Then we'll put 1-2 from the 205th up at Kajaki," and he blew a cork. "Why do you say things you know are not going to happen?" He ripped into me. "You know damn well they're not going to pull the 1-2. They have to go to the parade.

We are done," he said. Well, okay. So I left, walked out, got to my truck, got ready to start it and then said, "No, go *egal*." So I went back in there, "Commandancy, Commandancy? Who are you going to put there? Who are we going to put there? If there are 400 enemies and you now have Engineer Daud, the governor, who has called Karzai and Karzai's called you, who are you going to put there? Who do you have to put there? Tell me who you're going to put there? What guys are you going to get killed? Because I want to take pictures of them so you can have a good picture to send with their bodies back to their families. I want to do that."

“Well,” he said, and Raufi would give his little grin and say, “*Chai?*” He’d call in his aide and tell him, “Bring in *chai*.” Okay, now we’re going drink *chai* and we’re going to talk.

We’re going to get over this. At the same time, when I went to the truck, I called *Phoenix*, talked to General Perryman and said, “I need overhead power on this. We need to get the 1-2 from the 205th released from this goddamn parade so we can put them up at Kajaki. We don’t want to spread his forces any thinner because he doesn’t have anybody. These folks, trust me sir, are going get killed if there is a 400-enemy force sitting up at Kajaki. We need, at a minimum, 200 to 250 soldiers there along with our ETTs,” and those were the French. Plus I always had to have two US soldiers with them because they can’t touch our money. So having Romanian or French ETTs still required that I have US ETTs embedded with them to handle all the money.

So anyhow, we got 1-2 from the 205th released. At that point in time, Raufi saw some of the power we could bring to the table whereas Wardak would have said, “No, you know they’re going be in this parade. How dare you even think of not having them in the parade. Who are you going provide for the parade?”

What I brought up as a recommendation was, “You know what? Grab a bunch of 209th or 207th guys who aren’t in the fight right now, put together a company and throw 203d Corps patches on their shoulders and let them march by. Is Wardak going to know? Is Karzai going to know? Do that if you have to have representation from the 203d.”

They ended up doing something like that but they sold it off as, “President Karzai, because of your desire to have Kajaki protected. . . .” Kajaki Dam provides the hydroelectric for all RC-South. It needs to be protected. So we then established a rapport, plus I was always there for the corps commander. Through my interpreter he would call at one, two, three o’clock in the morning. If he wanted me there, I was there. He and I stood in the soil of the blood of his soldiers and he stood with me in the soil of the blood of our Coalition forces. We mourned over our dead together.

We built a rapport. So in that culture, you establish trust and a bond of brotherhood. Like I’ve been telling the ETTs, you don’t call yourselves brothers. You and I would not sit down and say, “We are brothers.” In Afghanistan, we are friends.

We are only brothers when we go out and do operations together, when we get shot at together. See, I proved my brotherhood to them. They don’t have to prove any brotherhood to me. I’m out there helping him direct his forces under combative fire or on the radios and on the phones, helping mentor, direct, and advise him to help array his forces.

At the same time, I'm talking to my ETTs to help mentor that level so there is success. I'm providing needed things that they know, through their system, that they're not going to get right away. I can have my guys provide or pay for things that might be on the fringe of, "Well, that's really not authorized to be paid for with FOO [field ordering officer] funds."

We needed to get the supplies to them and getting their dead bodies out as soon as we can, because it's a big deal for them. It's a hard deal with aircraft because of weather restrictions and such but that's how you build rapport with the ANA. Like I tell the ETTs, "You have arrived when they call you brother." I've been called brother by both of those generals I mentored. Not that I'm that great, just that I was there. That's what I tell the ETTs, "You have to be with them." You want to establish rapport and get through the cultural differences and you'll learn to love Afghanistan. I love Afghanistan. I love their food, their country. I see where it's going. You go to Afghanistan and you're stepping back to the colonies and you're building a nation and we're part of that. This whole team, this group and *Phoenix* rising is building that team, building that country, and we're watching it day by day. There are new roads, solar lights, schools, medical clinics, and wells going in. there are district centers that now are providing governance, a place for the people to go to hold *shuras* and *jirgas*. Coordination centers are now sharing information they wouldn't share before. So being a part of that and then making them be the forefront enabled you to put an Afghan face on things.

Hell, I put on the whole Afghan body. The corps commander handed out humanitarian assistance stuff, not me. I wouldn't allow any of my soldiers to hand out stuff. The ANA would hand out stuff to the people. I'd have to coach them, "Whatever you do, don't tell these villagers that you got this from us. They don't need to know that. Say, 'We, the ANA and the government of Afghanistan, are here to provide you food, clothing, and school supplies.'" That's what you need to tell these folks, not, "My American brother has coordinated getting these supplies sent from Americans to come help you." They knew anyway.

So the people would come up, "Oh, please thank your families or thank whoever sent this for providing this to the government of Afghanistan." Perfect, that's what we want. That's how we get out of there.

JM: These ETTs, how and how well did they receive logistics, medical, airpower, and other forms of combat support?

DC: We worked that. Now keep in mind that we are not the combatives. ETTs are not the combatives. Now in RC-South, we were the combatives. That's why I bring it up because we stepped into that. That's not for glorification of what I and the team I took down and fell into in the 205th created. It was that. Prior to these OMLTs coming in, it was that. Under the dual key relationship in Afghanistan, a combative force is partnered with the ANA.

I told you all about the OMLTs. Now over in RC-East, it was the 10th Mountain Division. So they had battalions out of the 3d Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division that were partnered with elements of the ANA. I sat with the corps and Brigade Commander of the 10th Mountain Division, Colonel John “Mick” Nicholson and talking with Nicholson, saying, “Okay, Mick, what do you need? I know you need to be partnered and we need to establish a structure for MOUNTAIN FURY,” which was going to be the first major combative operation the 203d had ever done as a corps. All they had ever done as well, was react to an IED, react to an ambush, go off and do some operational training that turned into finding caches, and security patrols, etc.

They had never conducted a corps level combative operation. So the ANA are now partnered with this group and the ETTs are embedded with the ANA. So when we put together one of the brigade task forces, the combative brigade said this is the operation we think needs to be done. By the way, we took it to the point where we wanted the ANA to come up with these combative operations and turn around to the 3d Brigade commander of the 10th Mountain Division and say, “This is what I need you to provide me.” That’s where we wanted to take it, that’s where Mick Nicholson wanted to take it, that’s where Major General Benjamin Freakley wanted to take it as well. “For them, with them, by them,” now we’ll be “by them.”

So how do we get that? Well, we have to develop them, to answer your question. For our ETTs we had a LTF [logistics task force] that was assigned at the RCAG level.

We had SECFOR assigned to the RCAG as well. The ETTs downrange, using the chain of command, would submit the requests. So not only are they mentoring ANA now but they also have to take care of themselves like our formalized Army. The S1 had to do S1 stuff, the S2 had to do S2 stuff, S3, S4, etc. So the S4 of that ETT *kandak* would be mentoring the ANA and also having to get his reports that said, “We’re going to need more food and fuel, we’re going to need ammunition, we’re going to need some lumber because we’re going to do some self-help to rebuild our TOC, rebuild our living area so that it’s a better quality of life.”

He’d make that request through their brigade and their brigade S4 would send it up to the RCAG S4 and then we would put that request through to *Phoenix* and get our supplies.

We would ship out the LTF to Kabul or we would have stuff flown in a ring flight. Or like in some cases, when it came to the 205th, it would be put on a C-130 from Kabul, our LTF would go pick it up and they would pull it over. Now remember, we’re pushing the economy of Afghanistan, so we would go do local purchases. With our ops funds we would go to town and request 56 sheets of plywood.

Then we'd go to a lumber yard and I'll tell you, plywood is not a good example of the quality of their lumber because they don't have it. They get it. There are special contractors that get it but if you need 2 x 4s, 1 x 2s, whatever, you could go into town and get it. There's a lot of stuff you can get in Afghanistan at these shops. You can get computers, paint brushes, clothes, and drugs. You know, although they do have some formalized pharmacies, a lot are bazaars. So you can go get vicodin, percodan, valium, and morphine. You could go to the bazaar and the guy in his little box would sell you that stuff. You don't need a prescription to get it. You can just go and buy it. So anyway, supply would come through and then we would put together a mission via the SECFOR to attach to the LTF.

Or, if we knew we needed to send ANA supplies via their system, we would put some of our supplies on their trucks, add another truck, or we would put our trucks in their convoy and go downrange. So our ETTs could be supplied, they had communications, they had a pretty damn good quality of life, and they had NIPR [non-secure internet protocol router] access to e-mail home every day. Some of the FOBs, in fact most of the FOBs, had DSN capability so they could call home via their calling cards. Guys would buy cell phones and the SIM chip in country which was about four to five dollars a minute but some guys did that. If they had compatible cell phones, and a lot of them were, they would just buy the SIM chip at a hundred and some bucks and then buy so many minutes per month, throw that in there and make a quick call home letting family and friends know what was going on. So they could be supplied downrange.

Now, I bring up that combative force and if they needed parts that we couldn't get to them right away, for example the 10th Mountain brought its 710th Brigade Support Battalion that had maintenance assets, the PRT [provincial reconstruction team] which were part of the 10th and other organizations that were forward support elements, had maintenance parts.

You have to love the US service member. Anybody could pull up. My ETTs over in Ghazni could go to the Ghazni PRT and say, "Hey, we need new power steering on this up-armored Humvee." "Hey brother, not a problem, two hours and I'll have her done." You know, not, "Oh wait a minute, wait a minute, that patch, that's not our patch." So there was good rapport. Nobody ever denied anything from the US forces.

Now of course we couldn't do the same thing with the Canadians, Germans, Italians, etc., because of different equipment and different funding sources. We're not going fund your army, okay? Fund your own army.

JM: You did a lot of coaching, teaching, and mentoring. Did you personally learn anything that maybe especially contributed to your professional development?

DC: Yes, absolutely. General Khaliq, prior to becoming the corps commander, and I learned things from General Raufi too. General Khaliq was the G5 planner for the MOD and a great tactician. I learned a lot about tactical operations that were relevant to Afghanistan through General Khaliq, things I would have thought of differently based on the institutional training I received here, even with the counterinsurgency training.

JM: Differently and you wouldn't have been as successful, you think?

DC: There would have been success but it would have been a little bit harder or a little bit longer. There would have been success. Our tactics, techniques, and our counterinsurgency program that has been put together are damn near spot on. It's a good read. I took the first draft because I had to read it for the War College first year.

JM: The new counterinsurgency manual?

DC: Yes, and then seeing how it was being applied and watching it unfold. In fact, a couple of times I would make copies of pages and give it to the Brits and say, "Look, this is what counterinsurgency is about. This is what we need to do. This is why I told you what you need to do with the ANA is this because it's not about going out and killing everybody. It's about going out, killing a few, and getting the others to no longer have the enemy come in." From the personal side, just by being the mentor with the ANA, I learned patience, tolerance, acceptance and a new and better appreciation of flexibility.

JM: This is kind of a related question but what would be the characteristics of a good ETT member? What are some of the necessary qualities for people who are taking on these kinds of training and advisory roles?

DC: Number one, have an open mind. You have to be patient. Take those four other attributes I just gave you as well. You have to be able to apply those. You have to understand how an army works and you have to know that it's not just the kinetic piece of the fight. It's the non-kinetic piece as well. In fact, the non-kinetic is a bigger piece. A lot of guys hate the terminology but winning the hearts and minds of the people will move you forward a lot faster than going in there with guns a'blazing and then doing the battle damage assessment afterwards.

An ETT can't think that when he goes over there, and I'll tell you, I was of the same mind just not to the extent that a lot of others who have gone over there were, that we are going to go over there and we're going to end the war.

We're going to find Osama bin Laden. We're going to end this. Here's how I'm going to call in all my artillery and let's see what type of counter-fire assets I have available. How am I going to integrate those and where would I put the 105s versus the 155s and integrate that with CAS? You have to go in there with the mindset that you are not the combative commander although you have that available to you.

We were never denied, for the most part, a CAS mission. It is an *in extremis* for us. It's an *in extremis* that we call it in. That was one of the mentoring things, and I'll get to your question even more but I want to throw this in. That was one of the other things I had to mentor my own ETTs on, being an artillery guy.

They see a truck out there that has a PKM on it, so they request an A-10. Hey, I got a better idea, why don't you turn around, go mentor that ANA who has a PKM or an RPG to go shoot them because I'm not going through the process of calling in this expensive aircraft. A life is more expensive and valuable than any piece of equipment we have but instead of calling in a jet or artillery to blow something up, what he really should be doing (based on his ratios and the assets he currently has available to him) that ANA has an RPG, so shoot the goddamn truck and let's move on.

JM: Because they're not going have A-10s when we leave?

DC: That's right. They're not going have that. So I was getting a lot of calls through the TOC, "We need CAS, we need CAS. They fired at us." "Okay, fire back. What are they firing at you with?" "Uh, AK-47s and PKMs." "Okay, what do you have?" "Well, we have our M2." "No, no, not what do you have. What does the ANA that you have with you have?" and I already knew that it's a rhetorical question. "Get with the commander, tell him to formalize his platoon or his company, set up the proper formation, and go after the enemy." not, instead, let's wait for a half hour to 45 minutes for this CAS to come in. By the way, you have no artillery in Helmand, so that one's off. There isn't any naval gunfire because we're not close enough to the water unless they have cruise missiles. Forget it, it's not happening. So, guess what? Remember, you mentored the ANA on how to be fighters.

You have to have that understanding and appreciation as well. So one of the needed skill sets is you have to look at the big picture. Look at what resources you really have available, and at what point you draw the line in the sand and say, "Okay, now I'm bringing in CAS, now I'm going to bring in everything I can possibly bring in." You have to be able to talk through situations. When we had the Kajaki Dam incident where that whole crew which was going up to get the 1-2 from the 205th because it's a resort village there, there weren't any enemy. It was a bunch of 400 locals who were pissing and moaning because they had heard rumors that they were going to shut the dam down which would shut down the power. The reason it pissed off the locals along the Helmand River was because they were growing poppies and they needed the electricity for their pumps in order to irrigate their poppy fields. So, yeah, I guess if my livelihood is based on that poppy and the other crops I'm growing to survive. I too would be up at the dam pissed off if I had heard rumors that they were going to shut it down. That's what got us up there. There was never 400 Taliban. It was 400 locals pissing and moaning.

So now we're going to get them and they didn't take a left to go through the desert. They stayed on Highway 611 and were fired at the whole way down. That's where the two French were killed and the 14 ANA. Of the 14 ANA, eight of them were not killed outright. They were chased, run down from 09:30 and the last one died around 15:00 or 15:30. All those people were chasing them down because they thought the ANA were up there to cut their poppy fields and they were going to kill them. That's it. That's why. I had to be on the radio. I had a couple of the other individuals on the radios talking to that element as it was out there, as they were being fired at. You have to be calm, cool, and collected. There has to be a voice of reason, maturity, and assuredness that what's going on, you're going to get them through it.

“Okay, captain, stop. Take a couple of breaths. Here's what I need from you. Keep your ass on that radio. I got aircraft inbound and I need you to be able to communicate with them.” You have to be able to visualize what's coming over that radio and be able to formalize a course of action for those individuals who are in it at the same time they're formalizing their courses of action. Mentor them into that course of action. Mentor them into thinking right, thinking straight, at the same time while being fired at.

Having been fired at a few times, I can tell you that there are a lot of things going through your mind. You need to engage, “I have to be making decisions because I'm the damn leader.” At that point, in that quick microsecond when all that other shit is going through your head, boom, you need to react because now they're all looking at you. What do we do? Okay, here's what we do. You have to be able to take that to the table. You have to realize that there are going to be some gruesome things you're going to see. That's a small part of that overall thing but what you have to do is go in there with the mindset of two things. The second one I evolved into and that was where I told the corps commander, “I am your last mentor. I'm your last mentor. That's it, I'm it.”

The first thing you have to bring to the table as a mentor or the skill sets you have, is that you are going to stand up an army. What they are going to be in the future is what you show them to be, what you mentor them to be. Their future is dependent on the way you mentor them, the way you interact with them, your professionalism, how you look, how you dress and when you think they're not looking at you...they're looking at you. They're watching you all the time. So you can't be Johnny straight laced, hard rigid ass and then leave their office, walk 10 feet and start punching, rope-a-doping your buddy. You have to be what you are but you need to be that at all times. You need to be a professional.

They're not looking to be rigid. I like to joke around. I had great rapport with the generals and everyone else and it wasn't just the generals I was mentoring. I ended up as the RCAG commander mentoring a whole bunch of folks. I even

helped support-mentor the leaders that my mentors were mentoring because they were cautious of, Well, I really don't want to insult them. I'd be the guy saying in the staff meetings where they were presenting, "Are you kidding me? That's what you're going present? That's what you're showing the two-star general here? You should be ashamed you even thought about standing up and presenting that piece of garbage." I'd be the guy who would do that and I'll tell you what, the next week, that guy would present a good product and then I'd go, "Oh, what an improvement! (Applause) Outstanding job!" and then praise the living piss out of him. Then guess what? We had product.

They loved to be rewarded. I could take this 5 x 7 card and write, "You are the greatest!" put their name on it, sign my name to it, give it to them and you would think I gave them a million dollars. Certificates, pictures, small things but that's what you evolve into and that's what the mentor needs to be able to bring to the table. You need to know your government too because I'll tell you, at the RCAG level and even at the *kandak*, John Schroeder was out at *shuras* and *jirgas*. You're with the governor. You're with the district elders and district leaders. You are re-formalizing their government, their local government as well. So you have to know that. You have to know how our government works, not just our Army.

JM: Political Science 101?

DC: Yeah, Political Science 101, and you also have to be sensitive to their religion. They're sensitive to your religion. In fact, the corps commander and I would have many discussions. He wanted to know about Catholicism, Methodists, and Lutherans. I said, "Yeah, well, my family was Catholic a long time ago but then they became Methodists." "Well, why did they do that? When you're a Muslim, you're a Muslim." Well, yeah okay, I got it.

Then he would tell me about his religion—the four books that make up the Koran and what each of those four books are, the purity and sanctity of a Muslim and how they have to be pure. Right before the suicide bombers die, they shave because they have to be clean when they present themselves to Allah. They have to be clean shaven. They have to have new clothes because they're going to their proverbial pearly gates. Okay, learn all that but you have to know and be sensitive to that.

You also have to have some form of decorum because they have a formalized program. When President Bush comes to Afghanistan, he's eating off a paper plate. He's sitting down with the troops, eating off a paper plate but in Afghanistan, if somebody from MOD or a high ranking individual came down, we're breaking out the china and then, oh shit, we don't have enough china and they're saying, "Uh oh. How do we get more china so we can have this? I want the blue plates with the gold." Commandancy, I'll get you a bunch of paper plates. Oh no, oh I wish our

army and our culture was like yours so we could get away with that, but I have to have these plates. You have to be able to work through that.

You have to have social skills. You have to have a sense of humor too because if you don't have a sense of humor as an ETT, this shit's going to choke you up sometimes. You have to look at it and say, "I can't believe that just happened." In one of the CSTC-A leaders' e-mail signatures he put T. E. Lawrence's quote which I'm opposed to. In fact, I have a rebuttal quote that I gave as my command philosophy. He said, "It's their country and our time is short," blah, blah, blah. Yeah, okay. What I say is, "If we enable them to do that, if we succumb to that, and we don't force them to strive for perfection, then they will never be perfect. It's our goal before we leave here because our time is short, to drive them to be the best they can be so they can stand up their country, provide security and stability for the future of Afghanistan." That's my rebuttal but in this, he had a quote in Latin that basically, when translated says, "You can't make this shit up."

There is a lot of that in Afghanistan. An Afghan, with an axe in his hand, walks over to a generator. What is he going to do? I don't know. Well, what do you think he's going do? There's the power cable that's coming from the generator. He takes the axe, chops the cable, gets flung 20 or 30 feet, he's smoldering on the ground, and his buddies come running out with a Romax cable and they start wiring into the power of the generator so they can run that wire to their B-hut to plug in a TV. You can't make this stuff up.

They'll take a garbage can, wrap a bunch of wires around it, run it up a wooden pole, run it back down and it becomes an antenna for their TV. Some of the best reception I've seen in country was off a garbage can dish. You can't make this stuff up.

JM: You said you guys were there 11 months?

DC: Yes.

JM: Looking back on 11 months and based on what you know now and the little time you've had to reflect because you guys just got back, what kind of outlook do you have for Afghanistan? Whether we're talking about eradicating poppy fields in a limited sense to the country as a whole, where do you see this country in a couple years?

DC: I've told both corps commanders that Afghanistan will have security and stability. It will get there in the next couple of years. In the next few months is where it's going to be the make or break. The country is either going to implode on itself because the people are still questioning the government of Afghanistan. Part of that are the issues of promises that were made via us and the international community that haven't been upheld. "By the end of this year, you're going have a road and we're going have the Gardez to Khowst road done."

Well, it's not done. There are a lot of villages in between in what we call the KG Pass and the Khowst to Gardez Pass. All these villages have always been supportive. In fact, when we went in there the first time, if you remember the first bombing missions that were conducted, they were conducted against the caches up in the KG Pass. So the *Haqqani* have been supporting that area. Well, they've been supporting the people. We're going in there with the government from both *Paktia* and *Paktika* and we're saying, "Look, we're going provide infrastructure, we're going provide a highway, and pretty soon more trucks are going to come through here. You can build up your shops, start commerce and you make money and we're going to be here with police and they're going to have to buy their food, supplies, and fuel from you. Economically we're going to develop you. This is what we're going to provide you. In return, you need to provide us the names of the enemy and you need to let us know where their caches are. You need to tell us when they come here so we can go nab them, kill or capture them. You need to do that," and then 10 or 11 months later, there's no road. There is no district center. There aren't the bunches of police who are buying the food and fuel, or the ANA to do this.

Then you got the *Haqqani* coming in and saying, "What was it they promised you? What have they delivered to you? Why are you listening and believing this government of Afghanistan or this Coalition force because they're not doing it?" however, I do see Afghanistan being free. I've told both corps commanders when that becomes a free country, they'll start tourism into Afghanistan.

An enterprising individual could set up a lot of stuff in that country that people would flock all over the world to go to. The mountains, when they have snow, you could have ski chalets, ski resorts. It's unbelievable. You could have casinos in that country. It is the hub. Afghanistan is the hub of all the transportation. It's the crossroads. It literally is the hub from Pakistan, India, and Russia to get to Iran, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Germany. Afghanistan is that hub. You build that infrastructure, put in rail systems, you put in all that, and that country will flourish. I've told them, I will have my family back in this country.

Afghanistan is a success story. It started with General Karl Eikenberry but General Durbin has really taken it over the edge and has done all the right things as the CSTC-A commander to stand up that army and now to stand up the police to the same level that we've stood up the army. The development of the country, working with the government and the mentors that CSTC-A provides and that the State Department provides as well as what the international community under ISAF provides, will cause Afghanistan to flourish. I'm overly optimistic always but I will tell you that in the next two years the army is going to be able to stand on its own. It'll take two to three years, maybe four, to get the police to that same level. *Phoenix* has now picked up the mission of training the police and once that's

accomplished, the enemies against the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are going to see that coming to Afghanistan is no longer going to be an option, the people are not going to stand for it anymore. Because under ISAF, they have what are called the Afghan Development Zones, the ADZs which make sense.

We need to focus our energies, our efforts and our resources on a location to each of the RC areas (Gardez, Ghazni, Khowst and Sharan) instead of trying to go to all these little villages and make a whole bunch of people happy. At the end of the day, if I go into the district of Awband and I build them a school, well, what does Awband do for the overall security of Ghazni Province? Very little but if I can grow Ghazni and get it to be completely secure, remember, the operative word here is “development.” Develop it economically and socially so that commerce and free enterprise start to flourish in that area along with the security.

When you have these ADZs where you’re focusing and you start establishing security there, eventually they’re all going to bleed into each other. The other thing we need to do is help identify what is the level of insurgency we’re going to allow in that country or should I say, the level of unlawfulness.

Okay, let’s get the insurgency out. What’s the unlawfulness? The day I got back into country, I watched more on the news of more shit happening here in the United States (murders, kidnappings, rapes, racketeering, extortion, corruption) than we had in Afghanistan. I turned to my guys and I said, “Hell, we were safer in Afghanistan than we are in the United States!”

They did a survey over in Afghanistan. I don’t have all the results of that. Task Force *Phoenix* does. We should probably work that out so you guys get a copy of that. I’d like to have a copy of it myself, to be quite honest but the bottom line, what was presented to us at the commander’s conference for Task Force *Phoenix* right before I left which was on January 20th, for the most part the people of Afghanistan think Afghanistan is secure.

They love their ANA. They love their ANA more than they love their ANP. When you talk about potential of corruption of ANA against the people, it’s very small compared to the corruption they’ve perceived at the ANP. One of the biggest complaints against the Coalition forces and predominantly the US, and this has taken a 180, is the way we treat them on the roads.

When I first got into country, the SECFOR folks were running them off the roads. You’d have the guys up in the turrets, waving their fists, waving them off. They’d get on their bullhorns and yell, “Get off the road.”

We’ve now changed, though. We are part of the traffic and we’re not running them off the roads but we have created a behavior in them that when they see US or Coalition forces coming down the road, they immediately pull over to the side

anyhow. We're trying to get beyond that, that we are with them. We're just another driver. In fact, I did a lot of driving around Afghanistan, quite a bit of flying too but more driving because I control it. Many times I was stuck at places because the helicopter pilots couldn't fly or a storm came in and when you're out there, you're stuck. It is what it is. When I'm driving, I can come and go as I please. The corps commander is driving the majority of the time, he's in my convoy with his vehicles, and we're driving around.

We got back in country on 25 January and by 28 January, we were driving up here to go to Fort Riley to meet with the ETTs and we were told they could fly us out there. No, we want to drive on a highway. We want to drive on an infrastructure where we know we're not going to be IED'd, VBIED'd, RCIED'd and everything else.

We want to be able to just do that. We want to see trees, a lot of trees, and green and animals. We want to see this infrastructure because for almost a year, we didn't see that.

When we came back the second time, they also said they'd fly us. No, we want to drive again because we can. So anyway, Afghanistan is going to get there. The ADZs are the way to do it. Focus your money, your resources, and your energies on getting roads in there. When the corps commander came to visit last week, he came here to Riley and then he came here to Shelby. He came with General Durbin. I was able to take him out the next day and give him United States cultural awareness of shopping malls, movie theaters, restaurants, Walgreen's. "Look, Commandancy, here's where we get our drugs."

JM: He's like, "Where's the morphine?"

DC: Yeah, yeah, right, right. You know, he did. "Now, how do you get the drugs that I get?" Because he thought I was going to get it for him because I would in country. I would get it for him.

We would have Lipitor. He's got blood sugar and high blood pressure. He's a borderline diabetic. A lot of the older Afghans are. So, I would work it out through our US, my team, "Hey, you guys got Lipitor?" "Yes, we do." Okay. In the US he says, "I'm running out of my medicine." "Well, we're not going to get it here." "Well, what do you mean?" "You have to have a prescription. This is called over-the-counter. These are all over-the-counter. See all of those back there? Those are prescriptions which require a piece of paper from a doctor that says this is what you need and you're authorized to get it." "Oh, that's how." "Yes, that's how we get it. There's no free morphine, valium, vicodin and all that here."

JM: I also wanted to ask you how well you feel you were supported by the Wisconsin Guard.

DC: Excellent. First you have a family support group for the soldiers. It's real nice going as a small team because first of all, I have a bunch of mature soldiers who, I'll tell you, I did not have any family issues and I did not have any knuckleheads in my group. As ETTs, we were busy all the time. You didn't have time to sit around and wonder, "Oh, what is Matt doing today. It would be three o'clock in the afternoon. I wonder if he's coming home from school." You didn't have time to do that. When I called the leadership and asked for things, I got it.

The state of Wisconsin, Joint Force Headquarters and all the leadership are a bunch of professional folks and they always have been. Wisconsin always goes the extra mile. Our adjutant general and deputy adjutant general have always taken the mindset that we're going to do it the right way, even if we have egg on our face because of this.

How do you fix it, how do you make it better? I'm also smart enough to know that the long arm of Wisconsin still reaches over to Afghanistan. I have worked with the state leadership being a battalion commander and a brigade commander and there are just some things you don't say or do. I had one soldier who was a little frustrated because he was prior service Air Force and was told that he couldn't be promoted to E7 because he had to go through the ANOC. "Yeah, but in the Air Force I took this course." It doesn't matter. You have to go to the Army's ANOC. "Yeah, but I had this." It doesn't matter. He started becoming spiteful against his unit's first sergeant. That got to some of the senior state leadership but at the same time it got to them, I got it and was able to defuse it back to the state to take care of it.

Wisconsin currently has close to 2,000 soldiers mobilized out of the 7,000 and at one point, there were close to 4,900 mobilized. I think I can safely tell you, except for the 57th, that being a brigade, every unit in the state of Wisconsin has been mobilized. It's either been in Iraq or groups have been over to Afghanistan. Some have gone over to Bosnia and some over to Egypt for BRIGHT STAR. So yeah, state leadership is very good and the support channels were there. I'm transforming from an FA brigade to a CSB.

I was able to get online and be part of state leadership meetings where we talked about transformation. These meetings could be held at ten, eleven, twelve o'clock at night for me but that didn't matter. They made it so I could be part of it because it does affect me, my leaders, and my unit. They kept me abreast of what was going on so I had visibility of what was happening with leadership changes and issues with other soldiers.

JM: I've heard it often said about Iraq but also about Afghanistan that the US Army is at war but the rest of the government is not and doesn't have as big of a presence or as forceful of a presence in country as it perhaps should. Did

you notice, or would you have benefited from, more other government agency presence? What was the nature of your visibility on them?

DC: Down in the 205th, I had better visibility because. I was going into AEGiS and AEGiS had USAID and State Department folks right in the headquarters building. They were part of the Monday, Wednesday, Friday BUBs [battle update briefs] that AEGiS was conducting and so were we. I had to present at the BUB. General Raufi had to present at the BUB but they were talking about the infrastructure. They wanted to do all the right things.

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program was basically pulling in all the old armaments and weapons, munitions, and evaluating them to see if they're good and if they can be reused and if they can be fixed. Destroying a bunch of things we don't want to be out in the public's eye.

As to agriculture, I went over to the University of Gardez with the corps commander and it's an agriculture and education program so it has teachers and farmers. You get a degree in agriculture or a degree in teaching but yes, I think there could be more representation. I didn't have them as part of my RCAG so they would be up in Kabul or they might have been over with the CJTF-76 folks. Could they get there? Yes, but let's go back to counterinsurgency operations, let's go now to Phase IV.

We have now provided the security and stability where we can bring these folks in and they don't have to worry about being abducted, killed, shot at, blown up, etc. See, that was part of the issue with the guys not building the road from Gardez to Khowst because a suicide bomber blew up where on two days later, they were going to start working on the road. It was insecure. They were not going out. I think there could be a bigger presence but from the 203d's standpoint, I don't know that they weren't there.

We were still in combative operations. We needed to provide the security. I didn't have people knocking down the door. Come to think of it, some of those folks were over at the PRT. So at the PRT level, some of them were there. I did meet a couple guys who were from the State Department who were helping the PRT commander but yeah, we need to have somebody thinking about a rail system in Afghanistan and somebody there now planning it.

I didn't invent it so I can't take credit for it but they talked about saffron versus poppy for Helmand. What are we going to give these people? Ninety percent of the people's income of the Helmand Province comes from selling poppy. Now we're taking it away. Yeah, of course they're going to take up weapons and shoot you. You just took away their livelihood. They have a family to feed. So what do we give them?

They talked about saffron. I brought up the University of Gardez professor because he went to Syria on a symposium of sorts. He brought back a saffron plant and he's going to try to start developing saffron in Gardez. They found out that Gardez has the perfect climate where, two-thirds of the year, it can be growing saffron. The US will buy saffron. Saffron can be made for perfume, it has medical uses and it can be used as a spice in foods. It's a multipurpose plant. It will give them more money than the poppy will give them. We just have to get them started.

You need a team there now that starts helping that university. I took the guy who replaced me over, Colonel Jerry Acton, as part of our right-seat ride to the university to meet the professor. Jerry is going to try to see if he can get Utah State University which has an agricultural program, to adopt the University of Gardez and see about working a partnership program to do just what you're talking about. Get somebody with agricultural experience to start saying here's what you need to do and giving them some money because the government only has so much money to give to the schools for these programs.

We were over there delivering blankets, cots, firewood, rice, beans, *chai*, and sugar to the university because those college students were sleeping on the floor on mats and it was getting cold. Winter was coming in. Gardez is 7,830 feet elevation. It gets cold there. It gets a lot of snow and we, through the ANA, were providing that to them. Because the corps commander is an educated man, he's interested in the university but that's a program.

The other thing Colonel Acton was looking at was dairy farming. Why aren't we doing that? They have milk, they have cheese and they love milk, they love cheese. They get it from goats or they buy it from Pakistan. You got grazing lands, start bringing in dairy cows. That's Phase IV of counterinsurgency.

JM: On a different note, we were talking earlier about their inability or reluctance to have a concept of logistics. What is the origin of that? Is it just this warrior ethos, where everybody wants to be in the infantry and nobody wants to be a cook? Has it always been that way or did you get a sense of the why behind that?

DC: I'll tell you, they are improving their supply and accountability programs. It's now becoming an emphasis and we, as the mentors, are making an emphasis. It's being directed from CSTC-A. I'll answer the cook question. For men, cooking is kind of frowned upon because that's seen as a woman's job. So men who cook, although they love the food they get, are considered sissies or feminine because they're cooking, although there better be a meal on the table. So they're very apprehensive to sign up as cooks. In fact, we hired a lot of local nationals to cook in the dining facilities from that standpoint. Now if you're a caterer, oh, then it's okay.

JM: You're kind of a professional?

DC: Yes, because you're a professional cook, getting money for it and it should be a professional meal, then that's okay. Being a caterer is one thing, but being an army cook is another. They used to have locals. When they started, local nationals were doing all the cooking and then they found out that we have cooks in our Army.

We can't say that really now, because we hire KBR but we have cooks in our Army and you should have cooks in your army. So we worked on standing that up and there were guys who were signing up but they were apprehensively signing up in some cases and those who did, they did it because they did like cooking.

On the other side of the coin, a *kandak* is authorized 613 people and the strength of a *kandak*, like in the 203d, was anywhere from 130 to 225. So now we're in combat operations and we're working on the recruiting/retention programs as well. Now we're in combat operations and we need folks. I can put a weapon in that soldier's hand and send him downrange but I can't with that local national.

That would be number one. Number two is that there is a hoarding philosophy in Afghanistan. The hoarding philosophy is that you never know when you're going to get it again so you get it when you can and if you can get more, you do that. For example, we provided 20,000 AK-47 rounds and two days later they needed AK-47 rounds and for what? It's because they didn't have any. We just sent them 20,000 AK47 rounds two days ago. Well, they didn't have any. Well, we better get them 20,000 because we're about to do an operation. So we get them another 20,000 and then you go downrange and you find this CONEX sitting there. "What's in this CONEX?" "Oh, nothing. Don't worry about it." "No, no, open up this CONEX." There are 60,000 AK-47 rounds in there because more is better and as long as I can continue to get more, I'm going to take more because then I'm a man of power, a man of substance. I have things. I have things you don't have. A man with one goat is a pretty fortunate man. A man with many goats is a very rich man.

JM: is it the same thing with 7.62 x 39 rounds?

DC: Yes, absolutely. So, you have to remember too, back when they started the *Phoenix* program, it was OSC-A and then *Phoenix*, we put a bureaucracy in place that we're now beating our heads against the wall because of it. Durbin brought it up to the 218th the other day. We created that bureaucracy. It takes 32 signatures to get a supply released to go downrange. We made that happen, and there are two or three three-star generals who are approving that. We put that system in place.

Now we need to change it and we are starting to do that. General Durbin is having his CSTC-A, MOD logistics guys work that. Now, the corps' were just being stood up. *Kandaks* were stood up first. When they stood up the army in

Afghanistan, they needed to have fighters to get downrange to start protecting, to start going after the enemies, the Taliban that were there. In some cases, you had *kandaks* that didn't have brigades. It was the corps to *kandaks*. The corps commander established that he had communications right down to the *kandak* level. Well, that's not unity of command. Even with Raufi and Khaliq, I'd have to get all over them because the corps commander would get on his cell phone and call the platoon leader down at Shkin and ask, you're the corps commander." The reply would be, "Yes, that's why I'm finding out what's going on." I'd say "Hey, Commandancy, you should be getting that from your brigade commander. You should not be calling that platoon leader. Do you think General John Abizaid is calling me? It doesn't work that way in the chain of command. How are you going make those other leaders who you say are not good leaders become good leaders unless you do that?"

The same applied with the supplies. So we created a system that went from the FSD [forward support depot] directly down to *kandaks* and the brigade and the corps were not involved in it. So these soldiers could continue to order. These *kandaks* could say, "I need 580 sleeping bags." but they only had 200 ANA. "Yeah, but I'm authorized 613 and I have the rest to make it 613. I need 580 sleeping bags." Well they're going get 220 less whatever they have currently on the books.

We created a system that we now have to change. They're now using jingle trucks to get the economy flourishing. They're contracting movers to throw supplies on.

We're using the seven and a half ton trucks that the ANA CSS units have to go up and get these supplies. Load up the trucks, go get the supplies, and bring it down from the FSDs to your brigades. Let's get the forward logistics elements going. So, their supply system is coming along, as well as the maintenance system. Again, we put a lot of focus on combative operations.

We have RM Asia who we contract to fix all their vehicles. With the old contract, RM Asia did not have to train any of the ANA. Now, we're looking at this pool stock of guys who can do amazing things to vehicles. Why aren't they training the ANA? So the new contract, RM Asia will be training the ANA on how to fix their Ford Rangers, their deuce-and-a-halves, the five-tons, and the other pieces of equipment that are in country.

That maintenance program is increasing too. Remember, we're getting better at providing security and stability. Now we have to build up that army. We have to take it to that step to which they can sustain and maintain and we're doing that, making the shift of some of our ETT forces to get in there.

They now have contact trucks. They didn't have contact trucks before. They have beautiful Ford Ranger contact trucks that have the cases. You open up a door

and it's got all the wrenches, open another one and it's got the socket set, it's got the jacks and tools so we can now send them downrange. RM Asia, at a minimum, should be doing 16 services per day per the contract we have in country.

We need to get those vehicles up to that. Well, coming from Bermel and Shkin or Lawara all the way around to come back because you have the KG mountain range so you can't go from one location to the next. You have to go all the way around and come back over here to get two trucks fixed. Well, let's get a contact in. Let's mentor the ANA maintenance folks and, by the way, we need to go pull the maintenance guys out who we made infantry. We need to pull the supply guys back from being infantry.

Now that we're standing up our police and now that we're securing areas and we don't have to have a 100 percent presence every day, we need to get them back to their jobs. Medics, physician assistants, surgeons, need to do the same. Two brigades and the corps go with garrison. The 203d is authorized 6,475 soldiers. Well, those who were physically present for duty as of January 2007 was 2,724. There's a 3,900-plus disparity. So we had to push folks out. If we're getting attacked, we have to get them out on checkpoints, get them on security patrols. We have to get them out there working combative operations with the combative force.

The Bonn Agreement in country says no US or Coalition force runs around without ANA. We don't go killing on our own. We have to have ANA or ANP with us. That's the law. So if we want to do a bunch of missions, we have to take ANA with us. The bottom line is that we have to make the ANA put together that mission, have the ANA do the mission and we go with them. As a success story in the FOB Wilderness up in the KG Pass, the corps commander developed with his staff the plan and then went to the 3d Brigade of Task Force *Spartan* from the 10th Mountain and said, "I need two companies, engineers, and I'm going to need a QRF." Perfect. They identified what they needed. I kept telling the corps commander, "This is your battlespace, it's not Mick Nicholson's battlespace. It's your battlespace. Mick shares it with you. He's your partner combative force. He'd be really happy for you to take more ownership in your battlespace."

JM: Do you have any closing thoughts or anything you'd like to add that we haven't discussed?

DC: There are great opportunities in Afghanistan. As I said earlier, Afghanistan is a success story that's just not getting a lot of press. I get the concern from family and friends who see a lot of stuff happening in Kandahar and wonder where we are in relationship to that. Of course my stock response would be, "Yeah, well, it's near me. I'm in Kandahar."

We were the ones, along with all those other forces that were making all that stuff happen in order to get at the root of the enemy. There wasn't a lot of press of

what successes were being accomplished. The model of Afghanistan needs to be taken into Iraq and I'm hearing that that's starting to evolve. This is the best kept little secret over there.

Tell Afghanistan. Let the people know that there is success. Our press needs to do that. Our Army needs to do that. The Coalition forces and the international community need to tout, "These are great successes." because not everybody's watching CNN and not everybody watched Eikenberry and Durbin the other night on CNN in front of Congress. In *USA Today*, there's a little blurb that President Bush authorizes 3,200 to stay in Afghanistan, extends 3,200, and is going to Congress tomorrow and going after \$11.8 billion to throw back into Afghanistan. Having had CENTCOM [Central Command] folks come over and interview me and interview the corps commander and see what's going on over there, that's \$11.8 billion well spent but the people won't read that.

They're going see 3,200 extended and \$11.8 billion going to Afghanistan. Well, here's why that's going to happen. Plus, when we get done with this, we're going have an army that will come to our aid in the future and we'll be proud to have them come to our aid. We'll feel confident having them come to our aid wherever our next fight may be. They will be there because that's the type of people they are. They will be there.

JM: Thanks very much for your time today, sir. I appreciate it.

Colonel (P) Mark Milley
6 June 2007

LG: This is an interview with Colonel (promotable) Mark Milley (MM) on his experiences with Combined Joint Task Force *Phoenix* during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. The interview is being conducted by Lynne Chandler Garcia from the Contemporary Operations Study Team at the Combat Studies Institute/CSI, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Our team is compiling a history of OEF covering the period October 2001 to September 2005.

We are located in the Pentagon and the time is approximately 0900 hours on 6 June 2007. This is an unclassified interview. If we ever enter classified territory, please either respond in unclassified terms or simply say you're not able to answer.

By way of introduction, please restate your name, rank, and duty position when you were in Afghanistan.

MM: My name is Colonel Mark Milley. I was the commander of 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. I became the commander in May 2003.

LG: What was the time period when you were deployed to OEF?

MM: We deployed in May 2003, toward the end of May and the beginning of June, since we flowed over time, and then we came home at the end of November through basically mid-December 2003.

LG: Then you were home a few months and then went straight to Iraq?

MM: Yes. We were home basically for January, February, March, April, and May 2004 and then deployed in June 2004 to Iraq. We stopped in Kuwait and then went to Iraq.

LG: When I was doing research, I came across a mission statement for Combined Joint Task Force *Phoenix*. Do you remember the mission statement?

MM: I don't but we probably wrote it because we were the first ones.

LG: The one I found was, "Combined Joint Task Force *Phoenix* executes a broad based training, mentoring, and assistance program in order to enable the Afghan National Army to provide effective and legitimate military capability for the Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan." Does that sound right?

MM: Probably right. Close enough.

LG: Can you describe the origins of *Phoenix*?

MM: Yes. I'm not sure this is going to be 100 percent accurate but, this is what I think it was. After the fall of the Taliban, one of the things recognized

early was, if we were going to succeed in stabilizing Afghanistan and help a new Afghan government provide its own security, one of the key ingredients would be some sort of security forces. So, throughout 2002, US Special Forces not only hunted down *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda*, they also went ahead and began a program of developing an embryonic ANA [Afghan National Army]. However, it was quickly determined that the development of a full national army was probably beyond the skill sets and capabilities of SF [Special Forces] and, for a lot of good reasons, that mission should be handed off to the bigger army, for lack of a better term, and it was determined that they would hand it off to an active duty unit.

The commander at the time in Afghanistan was Lieutenant General Dan McNeill. Underneath him was a division headquarters, a two-star command, led by then Major General John Vines, and then a one-star promoted into a two-star, Major General Karl Eikenberry, who was the Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan [OMC-A] and US Security Coordinator. Major General Eikenberry was the senior military guy working with the embassy and he had responsibility for foreign internal development in the training aspects of a national army and the institution building. So he had that responsibility, whereas Major General Vines had the responsibility to conduct offensive combat operations against *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda*. So, on top of both of them was Lieutenant General McNeill and they decided collectively, with people back here, that it would be best perhaps to have an active duty Army brigade take over the mission of developing the Afghan National Army. The 82d Airborne Division was in country at the time under Major General Vines conducting offensive combat operations and the Special Forces guys were doing combat operations and training the national army. So in the January/February/March 2003 time frame, decisions were being made to go ahead and transition this mission over to the conventional military.

Now, the 10th Mountain Division was replacing the 82d Airborne Division at that time. The 10th Mountain Division had two brigades, 1st Brigade and 2d Brigade, and Major General, now Lieutenant General Franklin Hagenbeck was the commanding general. So Major General Hagenbeck and his division were going to go in and replace Major General Vines and the 82d Airborne Division. Major General Vines then got promoted to three-star and became the overall commander of Afghanistan. Major General Eikenberry stayed where he was, and Major General Hagenbeck rolled in with the 10th Mountain Division. So the way the 10th Mountain Division handled it was one brigade, the 1st Brigade, would do the offensive combat operations generally along the Pakistan/Afghan border in what today is known as RC-South [Regional Command-South] and RC-East, and then my 2d Brigade would take on the mission of training the Afghan National Army.

Now, my brigade was split up at the time. I had one battalion that was chopped to 1st Brigade, task organized with 1st Brigade, making it a four battalion brigade

for offensive combat operations. I had a battalion minus in Iraq in OIF [Operation IRAQI FREEDOM] and then I had one company in the Horn of Africa. So my brigade back at Fort Drum essentially had two infantry battalions, a logistics battalion, and a brigade headquarters when the mission came to the 10th Mountain Division and 1st Brigade had three infantry battalions, its logistics battalion, an artillery battalion, and a brigade headquarters.

So the mission came to the division, the division made the decision that 1st Brigade would do the offensive combat operations and they would give them an extra infantry battalion to do it and we task organized one battalion from my brigade over to 1st Brigade to do that.

Then, my brigade minus that one infantry battalion would go ahead and conduct the training mission. So that was how we organized as a division for the mission with Major General Hagenbeck as the division commander.

Before we deployed, we did a little PDSS [pre-deployment site survey] in April 2002. At that point, I was in the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii slated to take command. So, I went on TDY [temporary duty] and did the reconnaissance mission, came back, took command in May 2003, and then 10 to 15 days later we were flying the brigade minus to Afghanistan to pick up this mission.

We went over to Afghanistan and linked up with the Special Forces guys who had already started this program and linked into Major General Eikenberry, who had supervisory control over foreign internal development and the development of the Afghan National Army. So our brigade was part of the 10th Mountain Division but our day-to-day operational direction, if you will, with respect to training the ANA, came from Major General Eikenberry and then we all worked for Lieutenant General McNeill for starters and then Lieutenant General Vines when he became the XVIII Airborne Corps Commander and the senior guy in Afghanistan. That is kind of the background of how we got involved with that mission.

LG: So you took over directly from the Special Forces?

MM: Yes.

LG: Did you do a left seat/right seat?

MM: Not really, because they were organized completely different but there was a transition period.

LG: What capabilities do you think the conventional troops brought that the Special Forces didn't have?

MM: Well, I am a former Special Forces guy so I have an understanding of their capabilities and limitations. While Special Forces capabilities are significant, when it comes to training a large national army, they soon run out of experience

and skill sets. They have limited capability to train beyond small unit tactics. When it comes to things like larger scale command and control, battalion operations and brigade operations, logistics and setting up supply systems, doing the tactics of combined arms operations at battalion and above and so on, SF soldiers at the team level who that actually conduct the training, soon get beyond their former experiences. SF guys are great at smaller unit tactics at the squad- and platoon-level and even up to the company-level but once you start getting up into that level, it really gets beyond their mission profile or their mission set. It takes basically conventional guys that have that kind of experience when you get to large scale operations. So they handed that mission off to us. That being said, the SF guys had done a lot of good and had trained the Afghans very well.

They got an army organized and off the ground, so to speak, in everything from ranks and photographs and registration and identification cards to some basic training level stuff in individual skills and some collective skills at the squad and platoon levels and some basic command and control. They did a lot of good.

They set the ground work but to go beyond the groundwork and get to the next level, you probably do need to have conventional folks working that. That was where the 2d Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division came in.

We took over from the Special Forces and our mission, our task really, was to get them to the next step, the next level, up into company and battalion operations and then to start working their brigade and corps type stuff since they don't have divisions in the Afghan National Army.

We also worked on their institutional development, their school system, their logistics and supplies, as well as their combat tactics and so on. So that was what we did. We got that part set up but it is a long term process. It outlives any one single rotation. We got that set up and we started working those taskings in order to make those things happen and then we handed off to the next guy and the next guy and so on and so forth and, over time, it will become a self-sustaining operation.

LG: When you came in, what was the planned structure of the Afghan National Army? Was it still just the Central Corps?

MM: I would almost have to go back to look at some slides but, as I recall, there was one corps which did not exist at the time, and it was being stood up. So, one of our missions was to help stand up the Central Corps headquarters and its staff. It was being put together during my time there. There were no division level headquarters per se. There was no National Police at the time either. There is today but there was not back then to speak of. There was an organization, something called the National Police but it really was in its very beginning stages. Now, I forget the exact numbers of how many battalions, companies, and troops that we had at the time but, I would argue that the basic unit, when I was there, was probably the company and platoon.

We were putting them together as battalions and we were trying to train them up through battalion operations but, by the time we left, I would say that they were okay at company operations but they weren't quite ready yet to conduct battalion level operations but they did have battalions, *kandaks*, as they are called in Afghanistan. They did have battalions on paper, organized, in garrison, and they had battalion commanders and a battalion headquarters but to say that they had functional, fully operational, combat ready battalions at the time I was there, there may have been a couple but there were not many when I left. Now, today it is a little different. Today, they have a significant amount more but, at that time, there weren't. So we were standing up a corps.

We were trying to move them from platoon and company level operations to battalion operations and we were trying to get their logistics system put into place for equipment and that sort of thing.

LG: What was their reach beyond Kabul?

MM: In my time, the reach was very limited. They weren't quite ready to do much. They did some though. It was during my time that we started farming out *kandaks*, and their subunits, their companies; out to my sister brigade, 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division and I would send a package of advisors with them.

So we started to get them integrated into combat operations and the way that would work was we would task organize them to work with 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. We would pick up some Special Forces guys and integrate them with the Afghan National Army and then we would have my advisors with the ANA. So the ANA guys would have some SF guys that were working in the same area as the 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, plus my advisors, and we would take that unit, send them forward to a FOB [forward operating base] for a period of time, say 15 or 20 days or whatever, and they would work with a unit from 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. They would work alongside them and conduct operations.

We didn't get beyond that level by the time I left and it was probably, I would say halfway through my time there before we even got to that. Now, today is different. Today they are doing considerable operations and they are doing independent operations. They are not side-by-side in all cases with US battalions but they all still have advisors.

Another kind of big step forward that occurred while we were there was basic training. An American soldier comes in, goes to basic training, and gets six to eight weeks. Well, for an Afghan, we decided basic training would be four weeks, if I remember. So, at first, the Special Forces literally taught basic training and then they handed basic training off to us and we taught basic training. However, while I was there, shortly after I got there I think a month or two after we were there, we

handed that off, basic training, to the Afghans. So the Afghans now conduct basic training.

We also had an officer and a NCO [noncommissioned officer] course. The officer course was administered by the French and the NCO course was administered by the British but they were all part of our organization. Task Force *Phoenix*, by the way, wasn't just 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. Task Force *Phoenix* was a combined organization consisting of, in my time, I think, nine different countries. Nine different countries had forces as part of Task Force *Phoenix*. We had Americans, British, French, Bulgarians, Mongolians, Romanians, and others so there was a multitude of international folks.

LG: So, the soldiers that you brought with you, were they the embedded trainers primarily? Did they serve as the embedded trainers with the ANA?

MM: Some did. Within this organization called Task Force *Phoenix*, we had a rifle company which provided some force protection and security. We had a logistics battalion from the 10th Mountain Division which provided logistics support and then we had other soldiers from that same infantry battalion, most of whom became embedded trainers.

We had embedded trainers from Fort Benning, Georgia. We had embedded trainers from the Marine Corps, from their Mountain Warfare School. We had embedded trainers from Fort Knox, Kentucky and we had a group from Fort Irwin, California, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment [ACR]/the OPFOR [opposing force]. They sent out a team of embedded trainers. So these trainers, both noncommissioned officer and officers, primarily captains and majors, came out of the school houses and they formed these embedded training teams.

Then we had embedded trainers from the Vermont National Guard and a variety of other individual volunteers from the active duty and National Guard from around the country that we task organized into training teams. In addition to that, we had an international contingent of the countries I mentioned earlier and they were embedded trainers as well.

Then, of course, there were my own guys from the 10th Mountain Division. So we had a potpourri of trainers that we put underneath the title of Task Force *Phoenix* for which I was the commander and then shortly thereafter the deputy commander because they brought in an active duty brigadier general, Brigadier General F. Joseph Prasek, to be the commander of Task Force *Phoenix*. He came in about, I guess, a month or six weeks after we got there.

Now, when we got there, Task Force *Phoenix* didn't exist. The SF guys were just doing their thing. So many of the pieces and parts were there but they hadn't been put together in an organization yet. There wasn't even the compound where they currently exist in the vicinity of Kabul. So, we showed up and we literally

went out with some of Major General Eikenberry's folks and conducted a little reconnaissance.

We went into a parking lot behind a warehouse, we looked around, and we said, "This looks like a pretty good place to establish a base camp." and there was nothing but trash but that was what we did. We established that as a base camp. I brought in that rifle company, they secured the area, and then we began to build that camp from the ground up which they are currently in right now.

Then, if I remember right, Major General Eikenberry was the one who settled on the term *Phoenix*. I think his logic was that a *Phoenix* is a bird that rises from the ashes. So that was symbolic of what we did and that was where the name came from.

Then, all the other things that go along with building an organization, everything from a coin to some sort of emblem or something to represent you, letterhead, and command and control, all that kind of stuff had to be built from the bottom up. Even the superficial stuff like coins and stuff all the way through substantive type stuff like how to command and control, how to train, what tasks to train on, and then getting out there and doing them, all of that had to get built and that was what we did.

Then, it was decided that committing an active duty brigade or pieces and parts of a brigade, to the mission of training the ANA was a cost that the Army couldn't afford from its active duty brigade structure. So we were a good pick to get this thing started and get it off the ground but then the task was to hand it off to the National Guard since they would be best suited to do this mission to preserve the combat power of active duty brigades to conduct regular combat rotations into both Afghanistan and Iraq. So we handed off to a National Guard brigade and it has been a National Guard brigade ever since.

LG: Right. You handed off to Oklahoma, correct?

MM: I think so. I'm pretty sure it was.

LG: Did you have any involvement with the Japanese and the DDR [disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration] process?

MM: No. I know that happened, was going on, and so on but we didn't have any interaction with that. That was all done with Major General Eikenberry's headquarters. I didn't get involved.

LG: What measures did you use for retention to keep Afghan Soldiers in place?

MM: We didn't do anything special other than to ensure that they were regularly paid, to ensure they had good leadership that wasn't abusive, and to ensure that they were trained and had sort of a motive for staying.

We strongly encouraged multi-sectarian, multi-religious, multi-ethnic units so at least at that time, and I think it is probably true today, you wouldn't find a *Shia* battalion or a *Sunni* battalion or a *Tajik* battalion or a *Pashtun* battalion in the ANA. At the smallest unit level, squads and platoons, we integrated that battalion. We integrated those units and we kept track of their ethnic and religious background because we were trying to create a mental atmosphere of, "I am beyond my tribe and I am part of a nation state." We were trying to create a national army, with emphasis on the word national, as opposed to a tribal or sectarian army. We didn't want a militia.

We wanted an army. So that, I think, helped because I think they eventually developed a sense that they were participating in something greater than themselves and that they were witnessing the birth of a nation. Good housing, relative to the society at large along with good food and clean water, your basics of life in a society such as Afghanistan, I think, go a long way to contribute toward guys not deserting. Now, we had to give them considerable time off because the transportation infrastructure of Afghanistan was rudimentary and, when we did pay them, they had to get that money back to their families in order for their families to live. So you had to give them a fair amount of time off in order to travel since some of these guys weren't from Kabul. They had to make their way back to their family, give the money to their family and then come back. So we had to manage that. Erroneously sometimes, that was observed by the casual observer as they had deserted and then come back. That was not really true. They might be gone for 30 to 45 days and some of them might never come back but most of them came back.

We had desertions but, when I was there, that wasn't a huge problem. Now, relative to today, the Afghan National Army was forming and training and doing some limited combat operations. Therefore, there were limited casualties. The ANA was not being explicitly targeted by *al-Qaeda* or HiG [*Hizb-I-Islami Gulbuddin*] or *Taliban* or whatever. That is not to say they wouldn't get targeted. It just wasn't like what you would see, for example, in Iraq where the Iraqi Army or the Iraqi Police are gunned down when they try to go home at night or something like that. This was in the early stages and I don't know if that condition has changed or not since I was there. So, I would never be so arrogant as to say that life was good for some of these people. Life is hard in these countries and life for an Afghan is particularly hard.

However, life in the ANA for your average Afghan youth of army age, in many respects, was probably better physically in terms of basic needs than if he were not in the ANA and just living out in the society because he got medical, he got water, he got food, and he got our shelter. He had something he was participating in, he had a certain sense of self-worth and self-esteem and, hopefully, that developed into nationalism and so on and so forth. So I think all of those things contributed

toward not deserting. I would have to look at numbers again but I don't recall desertion being a big issue at the time.

LG: Do you have, for instance, your metrics or your PowerPoint briefs that have all your statistics?

MM: No.

LG: Do you know where I might find all the numbers?

MM: Probably Task Force *Phoenix* in Kabul. They probably have a computer record. I don't have any of that stuff. I would suggest probably two places, I guess, maybe four. There are four places you can look.

First, I would go to Task Force *Phoenix*. They probably have a computer record that goes back to the beginning of Task Force *Phoenix* with statistics and data. I won't guarantee it but I would almost guarantee it.

The second place to look is at CFC-A [Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan] which now has kind of mutated a little bit into what is now General Dan McNeill's headquarters, ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] but the Embassy Kabul, Major General Robert Durbin's office, Major General Durbin fulfills the function today that Major General Eikenberry fulfilled then, probably has pretty good data that can be shared unclassified. So the second place I would go to is the US military assistance group there led by Major General Durbin in Afghanistan or CFC-A.

You could check with the 10th Mountain Division but I don't know that they would have much there. I'm pretty sure we didn't keep all that stuff for ourselves. XVIII Airborne Corps, however, might have some things because that was the corps headquarters. That was Lieutenant General Vines' headquarters and Lieutenant General McNeill's headquarters in Afghanistan at the time. Those guys could have some stuff. Another group here, right here in the building, is the Joint Staff J5, although I don't know who is doing Afghanistan these days but Brigadier General Michael Jones, who is in charge of the Middle East, has one guy who does Iraq, another guy who does Afghanistan. The guy that does Afghanistan probably, almost certainly, has a record because he has to turn in a report to Congress on all that kind of stuff. So he almost certainly has a record of the data on things like desertions, size of the army, how many battalions, and all that kind of stuff. There is a congressionally mandated report, by the way, that has to go to Congress once a quarter on both Iraq and Afghanistan and it is a public record. Well, that data is the same data that we had. We had to generate, from the bottom up, those reports. So that is actually another place to look, the congressional record. You might have to go on the classified side, but most of that is unclassified.

Then, finally, I would say CENTCOM [Central Command]. CENTCOM keeps all that stuff too but, as an individual, I don't have any of that stuff. So I would start with Task Force *Phoenix*; then go to the J5 Joint Staff, then the congressional record; and then CENTCOM. Then, if you can't find anything in any one of those, dip down but those guys, for sure, have the data you are looking for.

LG: I was reading in a GAO [Government Accountability Office] assessment that the embedded trainers said they experienced a lot of shortages of equipment and had some quality issues in the equipment that they needed for the new Afghan Army. Did you experience shortages or quality issues for the Afghans when you were over there?

MM: Oh, yes; there is no question. First of all, when we started, the Afghans had a mixed bag of equipment that was essentially battlefield refuse that the SF guys had picked up from the former Afghan Army as well as from the Taliban and the *mujahedeen*, and they were recycling. So, say they were in a firefight and captured 10 AK-47s, the SF guys would turn those AK-47s into a pool back at the SF battalion headquarters building up an arms collection and then they would use those weapons they had captured to give to the new army. So, when I got there, that was how they were resupplying the ANA and one of our tasks was to form a national system of supply. When we got there, they had no vehicles, tanks, helicopters, and no artillery. They did have boots, they had some uniforms, and they had just gotten some green berets. They wear this kind of lime green beret.

Then, for the most part, they had weapons. They had a variety of Soviet-era weapons that were older models that were taken off the battlefield but things like spare parts or newer weapons, better quality weapons, even if they were Soviet era models, there was a lot of that kind of shortage. Major General Eikenberry and his guys did a lot of coordination with our allies in Europe, former Soviet Eastern European Bloc countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and others that used Soviet Russian style weapons. I really don't know where all the weapons came from because I was the customer but they got replacement parts and they got like new AK-47s and stuff like that, so we did get a system stood up and the flow began while I was there.

We would get cases upon cases of TA-50 and helmets and boots and uniforms and berets and binoculars and maps. All military type equipment just began to flow but, to say there was a shortage, yes. There was a shortage.

They started with zip. They started from nothing and they went from zero to 60 in a very short time with the Special Forces guys and we were trying to take them from 60 to 80 but the bottom line is, yes, they didn't have a lot of equipment and it was not standardized. For instance, radio equipment, they didn't have that. So it wasn't standardized, it wasn't modernized, and it wasn't necessarily in great repair but, they did have the beginnings and then when we got there that improved

significantly with major efforts by contributing nations. I don't know what the numbers are today for all of that stuff but I think it is much better today. There is no question about that. It is much better today than it was back then. Even, for instance, their barracks buildings still had holes in them, gunshot holes, and tank-round holes. So there was a great effort in things like self-help projects in just facilities and structural fixes.

LG: So you were trying to stand up a combat service support system at the same time then?

MM: Right. The Afghan Army had no logistics units.

We were introducing logistics companies. So we not only built and trained Afghan infantry companies. We had one company that was designated as a commando company. We were building combat support companies and we were building headquarters command and control type companies but, yes, we had to build a logistics structure.

LG: Was somebody trying to write doctrine as well?

MM: Yes. The Vermont National Guard played a significant role in that but it wasn't just doctrine. They were writing things like range regulations so that they would have a standardized rifle range rather than just taking a bunch of soldiers and going out in the back and plunking rounds in order to train and learn how to fire a weapon. We literally built ranges using plows and other equipment. We built standardized rifle ranges and live fire ranges. So, yes, training doctrine was being written by the Vermont National Guard with the Afghans.

In addition to that, they were taking some basic small unit tactical doctrine, like squad and platoon tactics and getting that translated and using that.

Then, MPRI [Military Professional Resources Incorporated] had a whole bunch of civilians that came over and they worked at the higher levels. They worked at the national strategic level. They worked with the Minister of Defense. So they were not part of Task Force *Phoenix* but we worked with them closely.

They ran a lot of the classes for the corps headquarters and they worked kind of above battalion level, corps and above. The MPRI guys helped write doctrine, plans, and then taught classes and helped them learn to plan, coordinate, and synchronize operations at that level.

LG: So did you work much with the Minister of Defense?

MM: No but I saw him all the time. The Minister of Defense was and still is a guy named Abdul Wardak, I think but I didn't work at the ministerial level. We were tactical level.

We worked up to the corps level which, like I said, didn't exist when we started. We created a corps training team. They had designated some members of the corps staff but they hadn't picked a corps commander.

They picked a corps, they formed it. We had to find a building for them to operate out of. We had to set up their command and control. We had to get them vehicles and radios, and we had to train them in the rudimentary stuff of corps tactics. Now, the Afghan Central Corps is not like the XVIII Airborne Corps or III Corps in their capabilities and span of control and training and tactics, techniques, and procedures. It is not even close to that but, it is a corps nonetheless and it is a giant step forward for them. We activated them, we stood them up, and there was a big huge ceremony but no ministerial, the corps was the highest level for us.

LG: So the Afghan soldier went through four weeks of basic training and then, after that, did he start embedding with some of the US forces? What happened after those first four weeks?

MM: They went and joined their units. Now, to create and build these *kandaks*, you had to train groups of people along parallel paths. You had to train your individual soldiers, your junior soldiers. You had to train your noncommissioned officers and you had to train your officers. So, the way we did that was simultaneously we would train elements of a given battalion.

We had this very involved matrix but in simple terms, let's call it Battalion 1, for example. You were training Battalion 1 soldiers at the same time you were training Battalion 1 NCOs at the same time you were training Battalion 1 officers. Now, they didn't actually see each other, but you were trying to train them all together. So you trained them for X amount of time which differed for each group. So you had to synchronize this so that they were graduating around the same time and they could join their unit at the same time. As the soldier graduated, then you brought his NCOs in and put them on top of those soldiers and they started doing NCO and soldier interaction and some small collective stuff to start to bond into a team and then once the officer training was done, which was the longest, the officer piled on and now they had an officer, NCOs, and soldiers.

They all came together and then you had the basics of a company, of which there are three in a *kandak*. So we were doing the building block method and at the end of X amount of time, say eight to ten weeks, out spit a *kandak*, a battalion. It was still not ready to go but it was an organization. It had the basics.

Then you had to get that battalion and marry it up with its embedded trainers. So now you piled on advisors and they took them from that level, basically birth, they had all gone through their training, up through collective training, squad, platoon, and company level tactics, battalion tactics, and they ran exercises, day and night live fires and so on and so forth.

Then, at a certain point, once they were evaluated and we certified them as being operational, then we thought these guys were good enough to actually engage in combat against the enemy. So, once they were certified and ready to go, then we would coordinate with the 10th Mountain Division headquarters and say, “We have a battalion here ready to be committed if you have a mission for them.” Then we would start working the coordination between the SF, the brigade, the 10th Mountain Division headquarters, and my brigade Task Force *Phoenix*. So the next piece was where to employ them. So it was a considerable process to take guys from ground zero all the way to combat employment.

The good thing in Afghanistan is that the Afghan is a very good soldier. Afghans make very good soldiers because they are just mentally and physically tough. They make good troops. What they have to have are skills. You have to give them training and give them skills but once they are trained, Afghans are pretty good troops.

LG: From your time period, from when *Phoenix* stood up until Oklahoma took over, what were some of the themes that were very important for your deployment?

MM: Well, for starters I would say we were present at the creation. The 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, was literally present at the creation of the Afghan National Army. Major General Eikenberry used to say to the American soldiers that were involved in this whole thing, “Think of yourself as von Steuben at Valley Forge because that is what you are doing. You are like the American Continental Army in the early days.” That is an organizational comparison, not a political comparison, with the American Continental Army and how it was forming and organizing. The Continental Army had foreign advisors like Lafayette, von Steuben, and others, so Major General Eikenberry used to say that.

So I would say that the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division’s contribution was in taking a torch that was lit by the Special Forces and carrying it forward and developing it and being present at the very creation of the Afghan National Army where it becomes a national army and where it starts forming the capabilities and the organizational structure and kind of puts on the muscle and the bone of a national army. The contribution of 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, was that it laid the foundation. It set the standards. It put on that first layer of muscle, so to speak, of the Afghan National Army and it was significant. Task Force *Phoenix* has been very successful as it has been handed off from one organization to another, from my brigade to Oklahoma to whoever, all within the greater effort of the US effort in Afghanistan and within the effort of the divisions in CFC-A.

So it is a big deal and that army today is not all that bad. It is not as big as we would like it or as skilled as we would like it but it is pretty solid. From what I can tell, it doesn’t run in the face of the enemy. It engages the enemy.

They are tactically reasonably competent. They maintain reasonably good stability where they are physically. The challenge in Afghanistan is not necessarily the Afghan National Army but the Afghan National Police but that is a different animal. My day wasn't there but the Afghan National Army has become a fairly robust and reasonably decent, competent, and capable organization within Afghan society. It has a lot more improvement to do but I feel that we were there at the beginning of the creation of that army and kind of set standards that have weathered the storm at least to date.

LG: Are there any other important topics that you want to cover in the interview?

MM: A couple things. We ran into a couple of minor roadblocks which at the time were significant but in hindsight were meaningless. For example, one of the problems we ran into, a lesson learned, was there was a set of rules on the books that restricted American advisors from engaging in ground combat operations with the organizations they advised. Now, if you go back in our history and you go back to Vietnam, there was an unsavory feeling of what occurred in Vietnam and that carried on into a series of laws that took place in the 1970s that prohibited advisors from conducting combat operations with host nation units because there was a feeling at the time that the advisory effort directly led to what became the debacle in Vietnam. So we put laws in place in the early 1970s that said we couldn't do that. Those laws were first tested in the late 1970s and early 1980s in places like El Salvador where we restricted both the number of advisors and the duties and roles that they could do. Advisors couldn't carry "offensive" weapons. So we had a very restrictive view of what an advisor could do. Now, one of the things that we did was we pushed for permission when we first got there. It seems incredible in hindsight that after 11 September 2001 and as late as 2003, American uniformed active duty infantry soldiers would have to ask permission to engage in combat operations against *al-Qaeda* or the *Taliban* but we were restricted by US statute, at the time, to participate in combat as an advisor. We could do it if we were in an American infantry platoon but if we were an advisor to an Afghan National Army unit, we weren't allowed under law to engage in combat operations which didn't pass the common sense test but it was there. So, we broke that barrier down the first few months we were there. We said, "This doesn't make any sense. The world is different from when these laws were written." So we asked for the laws to be changed and they got changed.

I would say that one of our contributions was the integration in the Afghan National Army. We really emphasized that units at all levels were truly national in character and we monitored it. We made sure if there was a *Tajik* commander, then you would have an *Uzbek* deputy commander and maybe a *Hazara* chief of staff but you wouldn't have a *Tajik*, a *Tajik*, and a *Tajik*. If you had a *Pashtun*

leader, you would have a deputy leader who was *Tajik* or something like that. The counterargument was we would inherently create friction. Well, maybe at first, but then they would realize that they had a lot more in common than they did in difference and you would break down these barriers, these tribal, cultural, and sectarian barriers with the society pretty quickly because of the idea of a crucible. The idea is that you all stuck together. Shared misery builds bonds. Put a *Tajik*, an *Uzbek*, a *Hazara*, and a *Pashtun* all together in the same organization, give them all a weapon and ammunition and make them all stick together and pretty soon they will find that they are bonding together and they are no longer really a *Tajik* or an *Uzbek* or a *Hazara* or a *Pashtun*. They are all Afghans. So I think setting that bar right off the bat, there was never a debate about it, it was right at the beginning, these organization were built that way and I think that policy approach has been successful. So the way we built the organization was important. Then the idea that it was international was, I think, significant. Today it is a little different because you have ISAF there now but, at that time, it was one of the few places where you had this international melding of US and other nation forces at a small unit level and it really showed an international face and international commitment to the building of Afghan institutions. I think that has mattered in what has gone on. So I'm very proud of what the brigade did with the Afghan National Army. In my current job, because I actually see all kinds of reports on Afghanistan and Iraq, I keep track of it and it seems to me that they are doing pretty well, relative to the enemy.

LG: Any other comments you wanted to make?

MM: No. It is a long war, we are going to win it, and we have to stay in the fight.

LG: Great. That concludes our interview. Thank you very much for your time and willingness to support the Army's mission in chronicling its history in OEF.

Lieutenant Colonel John Schroeder
16 February 2007

JM: My name is John McCool [JM] and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Lieutenant Colonel John Schroeder [JS] on his experiences in support of OEF or Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Today's date is 16 February 2007 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Could you start off by giving me a brief sketch of your military career up to the present? How did you get commissioned, what positions have you held, what deployments you've been on, etc.?

JS: I enlisted in the Army Reserve in 1984 between my junior and senior year of high school and went to basic and advanced individual training during that summer. Following graduation, I went to the state's officer candidate school program and was commissioned a year later as an infantry officer. I went to the Infantry Officer Basic Course and then to Operation DESERT STORM as a maintenance platoon leader with one of the companies from the State of Wisconsin. When I came back, I went to the Armor Officer Advanced Course. I commanded a mechanized infantry rifle company in the Wisconsin National Guard and then the battalion I was in was disbanded so I went over to the field artillery. There I held the typical jobs on the battalion staff of logistics officer [S4], intelligence officer [S2], and assistant operations officer [S3]. I then went to brigade and held the S3 position there and the personnel officer [S1] position as well. I commanded our MLRS [multiple launch rocket system] battalion for three years.

Following that command, I was offered the opportunity to volunteer to go to Afghanistan on an embedded training team or ETT and we mobilized in January 2006 and spent about 45 days at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, doing our training. I was initially assigned to the 3d *Kandak*, 2d Brigade (3-2) of the 203d Corps in Gardez.

Then, because of an incident that happened involving a team leader in another *kandak* being relieved, I was moved down to his old *kandak*, the 2d *Kandak*, 1st Brigade (2-1) at Orgun-E. We also had a company out at Lwara at FOB [Forward Operating Base] Tillman where we stayed until the end of May 2006. We then moved the whole *kandak* from Orgun-E and Lwara over to Ghazni and were there until November 2006.

Then I was assigned as the corps executive officer [XO] and corps deputy commander mentor for the 203d in Gardez until I came back to the US in January 2007. That's when I started working with follow-on ETTs at Fort Riley, Kansas, and at Camp Shelby. We will demobilize next Saturday.

JM: Did you know you were going to be a *kandak* team chief from the beginning?

JS: No. When Wisconsin was offered the opportunity to put a team together, we put together a brigade-level ETT with a brigade mentor, a brigade XO mentor, which was the position I was going to fall into, and the whole staff. Once we got over to Afghanistan, though, our whole team was broken up and sent out into different corps.

We did end up just going to the 203d Corps and 205th Corps. Once I got to the 203d, they assigned me as a *kandak* team chief. That was the first time I heard I'd be in that position.

JM: What training did you get at Camp Shelby and what was your assessment of it?

JS: It was a 45-day training program that focused on individual skills. We did common task training and common task testing. We did individual weapons qualifications with the M9 pistol and the M4 rifle. We did some familiarization training on the M249, the M240B and the M2 .50 caliber machine guns. We also did some familiarization training with the MK19 grenade launcher.

We did up-armored Humvee training, convoy training with the up-armored Humvees. We did land navigation training and a lot of basic skill tasks.

We did get into some urban training as well. We assaulted the MOUT [military operations on urban terrain] village. Everybody went through the combat lifesaver program which was a very good program that everybody should go through.

We also did some *Dari* language training with a *Dari*-speaking Afghan who had moved to the US back in the 1980s. Overall, the training was pretty good and it was just about the right amount of time. Forty five days was enough time to train up most ETTs going overseas. Most of these ETTs are more senior people. On the enlisted side, they are usually staff sergeants and above and the officers are usually captains to colonels.

JM: Was there any other ETT-specific training? For example, did you learn anything about advising indigenous forces?

JS: We had a few classes on how to work through a *Dari* interpreter in giving a class in a classroom setting. We did also have some cultural awareness classes but we really didn't have a lot of training that was geared towards how to mentor somebody from a foreign army.

JM: When you were at Camp Shelby, did you get training on the AK47, the PKM, or other foreign weapons systems?

JS: We got one day of foreign weapons training. One thing I would work into a pre-mobilization training program is more training on the AK47 and the machine guns, specifically for those soldiers going to an infantry *kandak* because there is a weapons company there. I think there needs to be more training on the mortar system and the SPG9 anti-tank system because those are both combat multipliers that can be very effective if the *kandak* can use them properly.

JM: What would be an ideal POI [program of instruction] for an ETT going to Afghanistan?

JS: Before we left Camp Shelby, we actually put together a 40 days training program for them. A lot of what we got at Camp Shelby was disjointed. In some cases we'd go out and work on a collective event and then after that event was over, we'd go back and work on the individual tasks that support it. We laid it all out in a more logical sequence for them. For example, soldiers would arrive and do their in-processing, admin, and medical tasks.

Then they'd move to common task training, weapons qualifications, and work their way up to collective tasks. That's how our 45 days could have been better spent had the tasks we did do there been in a more logical sequence.

JM: Did you do anything personally to prepare yourself for this deployment?

JS: I did some reading on Afghanistan to learn about the history and the operations we had already conducted over there and we got some of that at Camp Shelby. The contractor, MPRI, put on some battle analysis and history classes but I think most people just did some cursory background information collecting before they went over.

JM: Can you walk me through the process of getting into theater and how you linked up with the *kandak*?

JS: Once we left Camp Shelby, the 139 of us who flew over took a chartered flight to Bangor, Maine. We refueled there and headed to Germany. We refueled again there and then landed at Manas Airbase in Kyrgyzstan.

We spent about 48 hours there. It was just enough time to download our equipment off the plane, get processed into theater, re-sort our luggage, and get put onto a tactical C-17 aircraft to get flown into Afghanistan.

We were fortunate in that our C-17 landed right at Kabul International Airport. The group behind us had to go to Bagram and then get trucked down from there.

Then we were trucked to Camp Phoenix. We got stuck there for 10 days because the group behind us had numerous issues that came up with their aircraft.

President Bush had actually flown into Kabul the week they were trying to get out of Manas and to Kabul International. I think they were actually in the air flying when they got word that Air Force One was going land at Kabul so they had to turn around and go back to Manas.

During those 10 days we were there, we identified what corps we would be going to. We got some additional communications training on the actual communications systems we'd be using downrange. We did some basic in-processing and filled out some forms.

We were fortunate in that a large group of new up-armored Humvees had just arrived at Camp Phoenix and they needed people to drive those vehicles to the corps areas of operation. So, we broke our group into four-person teams and identified the drivers, gunners, TCs [tank commander], and passengers, and we actually drove them to our corps headquarters. Gardez was about three hours south of Kabul. The *kandak* I was initially assigned to was at Gardez.

We arrived at about 1700 hours and had a meeting with the corps team chief at 1900 hours when he gave us our assignments. We then headed over to the brigade headquarters and the brigade team chief gave us our specific assignments.

Then finally I went over to the team chief I would be replacing in 3-2. He left the next day to go on a pass for four days in Qatar and so I was pretty much on my own to work with the team and figure out what needed to be done.

JM: How many people were on your team?

JS: The first team I was assigned to in 3-2 had a full 16 people. For the most part, they had all been there about nine months already. It was a very experienced team.

They were one of the last teams to link up with the *kandak* at the Kabul Military Training Center [KMTC], finish up the *kandak* training at KMTC, and then bring the *kandak* downrange. That's the way it was originally set up. The ETTs were to fall in on the *kandaks* still in training, go downrange with them, and then train them for a year.

They had tons of institutional knowledge on this *kandak* and they knew these guys inside and out. It was a really good situation for me to fall into because I had experienced people who already knew the *kandak* and knew all the idiosyncrasies of the personnel in the unit. The next day I went over to meet the *kandak* commander that I would be mentoring. That went well and we got along very well. We worked together for about three weeks and then I was sent to 2-1 down in Orgun-E.

JM: You said there was an incident with this *kandak* that resulted in the ETT chief being relieved?

JS: Yes. They had placed into custody a local national who was carrying an AK47 and didn't have any identification on him. As it turned out, though, this local national was working with some of the other government agency [OGA] forces in that area. They locked the local national in a latrine to secure him instead of securing him in a regular detention facility, so there were some borderline human rights violations. Nobody on the team had reported it up through the chain of command so they relieved the team chief and sent me in to replace him.

JM: How did you introduce yourself to your counterparts? What was the rapport building process you went through?

JS: The first thing I did was to spend time with my interpreter so I could get to know him.

JM: Did you have the same interpreter all the time?

JS: Yes. We typically had nine or 10 interpreters per team and one was assigned specifically to work with the team chief. Sometimes a company team would have one interpreter assigned to them for the two ETTs that were there. A lot of times you ended up sharing interpreters because one would be on leave and one would be off somewhere. I spent some time with my interpreter and got to know him and his level of ability to interpret for me. I then went over to meet the *kandak* commander and, as per tradition, the first meeting we had was strictly social.

We just got to know each other and didn't talk any business. It was a good meeting and I found out that he had spent time in the Afghan Army before the Russians invaded. When the Russians did invade, he stayed with the Afghan Army on the Russian side. He made some combat jumps with them against the *mujahedeen*. He had a real solid military background and career. He was a pretty professional officer, knew what a professional unit should look like, and was trying to get his unit towards that.

One of the things he did was wear a pin above his nametag with the Olympic rings on it. When I asked him about it and he told me that he used to be the Afghan national field hockey coach and he actually took them to the Olympics one year. That gave us another thing to talk about on a more social level. He had to give up that position when he became a *kandak* commander in the new Afghan Army because they obviously didn't want him splitting his time. During the next meeting we had the next day, we sat down and started establishing the goals for the unit, how we wanted to manage missions that had come up, what training events he wanted to do, and how we could support him. So, we developed a pretty good relationship fairly quickly.

JM: What was your overall philosophy about how to approach this mission and what your level of involvement was going to be?

JS: Going into it I thought I could spend a lot more time with the person I mentored and with the unit I mentored. What we discovered when we got there though, is that you can spend two to six hours a day working with your Afghan counterpart but there are a lot of other US issues you have to deal with as well. As a team chief, you have 15 other US soldiers underneath you which brings 15 family issues, 15 awards issues, and 15 personnel evaluation issues.

We discovered when we got there that our time was split a lot more between just taking care of the day-to-day household activities that needed to happen for a US unit and we couldn't spend as much time as we wanted to mentoring, training, and just working with the Afghans.

JM: How experienced was this second *kandak* that you fell in on?

JS: They had been there much longer. They had graduated about two years before I got there so they were very experienced and were already downrange. They were at Orgun-E and at Lwara and FOB Tillman which is right on the Pakistan border.

They were more of a combat-seasoned unit. Their authorized strength was 613 soldiers. When I got there, though, they were already down to less than 300 due to AWOLs, combat losses, and transfers to different units. It was a much different organization when I got there. It wasn't really a training *kandak* that still had all the spit and polish from KMTC like the first *kandak* had. This was a unit that had been fighting the *Taliban* for probably about a year and a half by the time I got there.

JM: How did you approach rapport building with the whole *kandak* itself?

JS: As the *kandak* team chief, I worked primarily with the *kandak* commander, the XO, the S3, the sergeant major, some of the other staff guys, and the company commanders. I never had an opportunity to work with every member of the *kandak*. I really had to focus in on the people I was supposed to mentor. You do run across certain people you wind up working with. In 2-1, we had a very good motor sergeant who was a very good mechanic but he wasn't very good at managing a maintenance program, so I tended to spend a lot of time with him.

We had an S4 who wasn't working well with the S4 mentors I had on the US side, so I spent some time with him as well. I had to identify those key places that needed to have extra mentoring time.

JM: What was your overall impression of the condition of the unit and what their capabilities were?

JS: The Afghan soldiers in the units are very capable. They were actually more capable than I expected to find them when I got there. For the most part, almost everybody in those units has been fighting in some way, shape, or form since they were about 10 years old. The country has just been in a state of constant conflict

for the last 30 years, so everybody had military experience. Everybody knew the AK47 weapons system because everybody owns one over there.

They had a good military background. What they didn't have was a good grasp on how a professional army should look. They still brought a lot of their cultural habits and cultural mindsets with them into the army. We really had to deal with breaking them of those cultural habits.

JM: What were some of those and how did you address making them more professional?

JS: One of the big ones was the way they hoarded things and also the "me first" mentality they had. Before we got there to 3-2 the officers would get paid first, then the NCOs, and then the enlisted.

We turned that around and told them we wanted to see the soldiers get paid first, then the NCOs, and then the officers. The officers have a bad habit of having enlisted assistants live with them and do things for them. They'd go over to the chow hall, get their chow for them, and bring it back to their rooms. We told them they had to stop that and eat in the dining facility with their soldiers.

If they were given credit cards for their cell phones, they typically didn't make it beyond the *kandak* staff or the commander. They really needed to get down to the S2 and the S4 so they could take care of day-to-day business. We needed to get them to push those assets down to the people who needed them. There's still a hoarding mentality over there because they don't know who the next bill payer is going to be, so they tend to hoard the things they get.

JM: What did the *kandak* staff most need from you? What did they look to you for and what do you think they most needed your help with?

JS: The biggest thing they wanted from us was resource management. The logistics system in the ANA [Afghan National Army] was broken when we got there. It's getting better but it's still broken. That's the Achilles' heel of the ANA right now.

The problem is that they can't decentralize their logistics system because they can't trust that if they send cash downrange it will get spent on the things it needs to get spent on. They've centralized their logistics system and everything comes out of depots in Kabul. It goes down to a forward support depot at the corps and then the *kandak* either comes and gets their stuff or the combat service support *kandak* pushes it out to them. What they really needed from us was a redundant system to communicate their needs up our ETT channels to higher headquarters to make sure they got the supplies they needed.

They also just needed mentorship in that area to constantly push the supply system to work for the *kandak*. For the most part, they had the tactical operations

down pat. They knew how to fire their weapons and they knew how to engage the enemy. What they needed was for us to help them sustain themselves.

JM: What about things like the MDMP [military decision-making process] and battle tracking?

JS: In the 2-1 *Kandak*, we were lucky in that our S3, Major Mohammed, was a graduate of the Command and General Staff School for the ANA and so he knew the MDMP very well.

The problem they have is that the officers tend to live and work in their bedrooms. They have a room where they'll sleep and that's where they'll typically set up their office, so they're not always in an environment conducive to exchanging information. We had to build them a TOC [tactical operations center] with rooms off it where the primary staff officers could live and work so they could exchange information. The S3 would be putting together a good solid operations plan but the S1, the communications officer, or the S4 weren't involved with it. He had a good plan that wasn't completely staffed by the *kandak* staff.

JM: Were you living and eating with the Afghans? How embedded were you, so to speak?

JS: I lived in three different types of situations. At Gardez all the ETTs lived on one side of the FOB and the ANA were on the other. There's a HESCO [earthen barricade] wall and a gate in between. We were kind of collocated but not truly embedded. When we moved to Orgun-E, we lived on a FOB with a US infantry battalion from the 10th Mountain Division. We lived on their side of the FOB and there was again a HESCO wall in between and then the ANA FOB was there. Now, our offices were on the ANA side of the FOB.

During the day we were with the Afghans and we always had the opportunity to eat with them. We could either eat in our dining facility or in the ANA's dining facility on their side. We had guys who ate more meals with the ANA than they did on the US side and vice versa. It just depended on people's personal preferences.

When we went to Ghazni, we lived on an ANA FOB. It was an old Russian helicopter base that had been used in the 1980s. It was still Ministry of Defense [MOD] property. We had our 250 ANA soldiers on that FOB and there was an inner set of buildings within their FOB that we occupied.

JM: Can you evaluate those various arrangements? Was the latter better in terms of being an effective ETT?

JS: Yes, I think it was. Having the ETTs living closer to the ANA is better for both sides. You build better relationships and better rapport right from the beginning. Major General Robert Durbin, the CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan] commander now, is mandating that all the

inner-FOB walls between the ETTs and the ANA come down. He wants to have it where the ETTs are totally embedded with the ANA and I agree with that.

JM: so, those HESCOs can be physical as well as psychological barriers?

JS: Exactly and where there weren't HESCOs, there was usually a large steel gate or door that literally separated the two groups. We never had a problem with ANA guys stealing US property. There was a mutual respect between service members on both sides.

JM: In regard to the combat support and service support issues, I've heard from other people that there's this warrior ethos among the Afghans in which everybody wants to be in the infantry and nobody wants to be a cook or a truck driver. Did you find that as well?

JS: Yes, especially with the cooks. Now, I haven't heard it with respect to the artillery, transportation, or medics but there is something about Afghan males that they don't want to be cooks. They look at it as women's work. However, we were always able to go out and find local civilian males who were willing to come onto the FOB under contract and cook meals for us. It ended up being a civilian contracted business on the FOB, and I think it actually worked out better. The cooks we hired took a lot of pride in their work and they actually produced better meals for us.

JM: What were some of the major cultural differences that impacted operations?

JS: The biggest one was the work ethic. There isn't as strong of a work ethic in the ANA as there is in the US Army, especially among the officers and NCOs. When a *kandak* was brought to KMTC for training, about midway through the cycle they'd identify those strong ANA soldiers who should be NCOs and they'd take them out of the *kandak* and send them to NCO school. At the end when the *kandak* graduated, they'd come back to the *kandak* as qualified NCOs because of their schooling and then they'd go downrange as a unit.

What you didn't have was the command sergeant major in that *kandak* who had 20 or 25 years experience in the army like we have in the US military. In fact, our sergeant major in 2-1 *Kandak* was a university professor at the university in Kabul. When he joined the army, he could speak English so he was pulled out right away as the *kandak* began their training. He was sent to the basic NCO schooling that he needed and became the *kandak* sergeant major but he never had the sergeant, staff sergeant, or sergeant first class experiences behind him to make him a good command sergeant major. Culturally, that was a problem. With a lot of the officers, it wasn't what they knew or what experiences they had that gave them their positions, it was who they knew and how much they were willing to pay to become a *kandak* commander or a brigade commander.

JM: Can you explain the process of how the ETTs themselves received logistics and other forms of combat support?

JS: We had a couple unique situations. When we were in Gardez, all our supplies came from Task Force *Phoenix* in Kabul. Our logistics task force ran missions back and forth to Kabul every three or four days. They'd bring down everything we needed from food and ammunition to major end items and repair parts.

When I was at Orgun-E and in Lwara, we were collocated with US maneuver forces and we got most of our supplies from them. When you only have 14 or 15 extra people on the US side, feeding us was never an issue. Fueling our trucks wasn't an issue either. It was a fairly easy way for them to support us. When we went to Ghazni, we were two miles down the road from a provincial reconstruction team [PRT] and another US maneuver battalion headquarters, so they provided the majority of our support. They gave us our food, fuel, some ammunition, medical supplies, and repair parts.

The major end items we needed still came through Task Force *Phoenix*. They provided things like trucks or weapons systems and they gave us our sundry kits as well. There were some small things we got from Task Force *Phoenix* too but the majority of it came from Combined Joint Task Force 76 (CJTF-76) units that were there.

JM: How responsive were they?

JS: There was some inefficiency based on the road network there. Anything that had to come by ground convoy was going to take a week to two weeks to get to you just because they didn't plan too many ground convoys. Obviously there was an element of risk involved every time you went out on a ground convoy.

They did fly these ring flights every four or five days. Those were problematic though because of weather and altitude. The ring flights were also responsible for moving mail, supplies, and personnel between areas. So, it was a 50/50 shot that you could get something moved on a ring flight at any given time.

JM: Can you characterize the general security situation in your various locations and tell me about the nature of any enemy contact you had?

JS: When I was in Gardez we were rocketed twice and they both fell wide of the FOB by a few hundred meters. When we moved to Orgun-E, one of our vehicles was struck by an IED [improvised explosive device] when we first got there. I had three ETTs out in Lwara with a company-plus size element of ANA and they got rocketed and mortared periodically.

The observation posts would end up getting into small firefights with ACM [anti-Coalition militia]. They typically stayed on the Pakistan side of the border and shot across, because they knew we wouldn't pursue them across the border.

In Orgun-E we had a couple rocket attacks. One was extremely effective, and I'm not sure how. They launched nine rockets at our FOB. Eight of them hit on our FOB and one hit dead center on the TOC. Luckily it hit right on top of an I-beam that was supporting the roof. Otherwise, probably 10 soldiers from the infantry battalion would have been killed in the TOC.

We had numerous occasions where local civilians would come in and report unexploded ordnance that they had found in their area. That was good and we would reward them for that. We always went out and looked for it. When we went to Ghazni, we ran a real effective medical clinic on the FOB.

We spent a lot of Title 10 and Title 22 money on our FOB.

We had a good rapport with the local community and we never got attacked.

We did have one instance where a vehicle-borne IED went off about mid-May out in front of the FOB, right before we moved the *kandak* there.

JM: Were there any memorable operations that your *kandak* participated in?

JS: Yes. We participated in MOUNTAIN FURY. That was the 10th Mountain Division's major operation that went from August into October. The way we ran MOUNTAIN FURY was to start out in the districts in Ghazni that were already supportive of the Coalition forces. We reinforced the success and cooperation that we had with the governors in there.

We did humanitarian assistance drops, medical civic action projects [MEDCAPs], and veterinary civic action projects [VETCAPs] and then we gradually worked our way into the districts.

We used kinetic operations where we knew they were less supportive or where the Taliban were hiding out. It was a very successful operation for us.

JM: How would you assess the performance of the Afghans?

JS: Overall they did very well.

We had a very good working relationship with the 102d Infantry Battalion from the Connecticut National Guard that was in Ghazni. They were completely supportive of the ANA and trusted the ANA to the point where, as soon as they started planning a combat operation, they would involve the ETTs and the ANA leadership in the planning. That was a great teaching tool for the ANA. We'd actually be involved with the planning right up front with them. The ANA and the US forces would be doing parallel planning. I think that led to better operations because it wasn't just us telling them they needed to do something. They knew why they had to do it as well. The officers could explain it to the NCOs and the soldiers and I think we got a lot better response out of the ANA and they performed better. They knew what they were going to do and also why they were going to do it ahead of time.

JM: Did you have any *kandak*-specific operations that your guys did and they planned themselves?

JS: Yes. In October they had received some information from the human intelligence gathering they were doing that there was a vetted target in the Andar District. They had made contact with an associate of the vetted target and were calling him on the cell phone and trying to arrange a meeting with the vetted target to place him under custody. They did put together the operation and put some soldiers downtown to meet with the acquaintance.

JM: Where was this?

JS: In Ghazni. This operation was unique in that it was planned and executed by the ANA but supported by the Coalition forces. At that time, we had Task Force *Iron Grays* which was the 102d Infantry Battalion from Connecticut. They used their Shadow UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] to follow the ANA through the whole operation. They were supporting them the whole time. As it turned out, they did meet with the acquaintance and they did go down to Andar but they never captured the vetted target they were looking for. From our standpoint, it was still a success, though because they had planned and executed the whole thing by themselves.

JM: Colonel Dominic Cariello was talking about the concept of “for, with, by.” Was that something you followed as well?

JS: Yes, absolutely.

We always tried to get to the point where we were just rolling with the ANA to provide them the combat multipliers of medical evacuation, fire support, and air support. That’s the point we need to get to with all the infantry *kandaks* that are out there now.

JM: At what level do you think you left them?

JS: The *kandak* is only scheduled to stay together for another four or five months. They operate on a three-year rotation. If they could have another year together, they would be at that point where they could stand on their own. The staff has been together for a long time. The *kandak* commander has been in command for 15 months. If you could just get them to the point where you can entrust them with funds and resources, I think they’ll be all right.

JM: Did you have much visibility on what motivated people to join the ANA?

JS: Just like in our Army, I think there is a certain percentage of people that join because they want to see the national government succeed. It’s probably a small percentage. Some joined for the money which at the time was only \$60 a month but was more money than they were making doing nothing and being unemployed. Typically anybody who is employed in Afghanistan is probably going to be supporting anywhere from 13 to 15 family members. The families are

very tight over there and they live together and stay together until someone can go off and support themselves. That doesn't happen often because there's still about 40 percent unemployment over there. For a lot of them, it's a job they need to do to support their families.

JM: Did you guys have any poppy eradication responsibilities?

JS: No. I was in Regional Command-East and we didn't have to deal with that.

JM: Did you get a sense of how the local population viewed the ANA?

JS: The ANA we were with were very well respected in the communities. There was a lot of animosity towards the ANP [Afghan National Police] though. Unfortunately a lot of the ANP officers were not being paid so they were running graft on the side on their own behalf. They were shaking down jingle trucks for money and robbing people. They'd just go into merchants, take what they needed and not pay for it but the ANA was well respected.

We made sure the soldiers were getting paid and that they got a chance to go home and bring the money to their family.

We weren't living right in the communities like the ANP were. We'd go in and do something good like a MEDCAP, a VETCAP, or conduct a security *shura* and then leave. We really didn't have a lot of the issues you have when you're actually out there living in the communities.

JM: What was the US unit again that you had that great relationship with?

JS: It was 1st Battalion, 102d Infantry Regiment of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

JM: Generally speaking, did you have good relationships with the US units in your areas of operations?

JS: Yes, they were excellent. Those relationships were based on a mutual respect for each other because US forces that go out and conduct combat operations need to have Afghan forces with them.

JM: Wasn't it actually official, the Bonn Agreement?

JS: Yes, exactly. It was also in their best interest to give the ETTs whatever they needed to make the missions with the ANA productive and safe. We drew a lot of our life support from those units as well.

JM: What kind of support did you get from back home in Wisconsin?

JS: The state provided great support. They made sure we had everything we needed. Family members and friends were always looking to send things. Because of our medical clinic we were running in Ghazni, we always asked that they send something like Beanie Babies, writing tablets, pens or pencils because those were

always great giveaways for the Afghans who came through our clinic. It also just created a lot of goodwill.

JM: You did a lot of coaching, teaching, and mentoring during your tour. Is there anything that you personally learned from your experiences that you'll take forward with you in your career?

JS: One thing I learned is that soldiers and armies, no matter where they are, have more similarities than differences. We had discipline issues in the ANA and things like that and we have the same thing in the American Army, although usually to a much lesser degree. The positive things you see in the US Army with young soldiers taking initiative and getting things done that they know need to be done, you see in the ANA as well and that was very encouraging.

JM: What kind of advice would you have for someone who was going to hold a position similar to yours?

JS: I would tell them to spend as much time with the ANA as they could. It doesn't have to be anything formal. You don't always have to go to the *kandak* commander's office or the *kandak* staff and have a formal meeting. A lot of times it's nothing more than going over and just spending time with them and talking to them, finding out what their issues are and talking through with them how they should address those issues.

I would also recommend that people spend as much time as they can socializing with the Afghans because they are incredibly sociable people. They'll always sit down and offer you *chai*. If it's around a meal time, they'll always ask you to stay for a meal. I would say take advantage of all those things. That will probably be the one opportunity you'll have to really immerse yourself in a foreign culture and you should take advantage of it.

JM: Was your immersion a positive experience?

JS: Absolutely. In fact, I joke around with people and tell them that I only got sick once in Afghanistan and that was on the US food, not on the Afghan food. We ate everything over there. They have this yogurt that people said to stay away from. I tried it and it was delicious. They have this custard dessert they make and that was delicious as well. I was even offered sheep's brains at one of the meals and I tried that. We also had sheep's heart one morning after we had slaughtered a sheep the night before and that was fantastic. The rice was great and the *naan* bread they eat is good. It was just neat to eat that kind of food with Afghans in that culture and talk to them about their past experiences. It was very interesting.

JM: What are the characteristics of a good ETT member who's going to be training, working with, and mentoring indigenous forces? What do they need to bring to the table to be successful?

JS: The most successful ones I saw over there were soldiers who came over and didn't take charge of the company but took ownership of the company they were mentoring. They saw that as their unit that they needed to get to the next level. Because they took that ownership in it, they worked with their counterparts and worked with the subordinates of that organization.

They spent a lot of time over there with the ANA on missions. Even at night after the evening meal, they'd go back over there and sit and socialize with the NCOs or officers from the company and just get to know them. Spending time with the Afghans is really the key to a good mentoring relationship.

JM: What do you look back on as the major accomplishments for your team?

JS: The biggest one we had was when we got to the point where the *kandak* was doing parallel planning with the US maneuver forces. They were putting together missions on their own.

We had a rifle range that we built for them on FOB Ghazni. It got to the point where they were coming over and telling us that tomorrow morning at 0900 they were going to have 20 people on the range firing and they needed the ammunition to do it. We'd work through with them how much ammunition they could have based on what they needed for operations and things like that. When it got to the point where they took the initiative to train themselves, that was really the highlight of the year.

JM: Conversely, were there any major frustrations or heartburn issues that you had to deal with?

JS: I still think a lot of their culture is getting in the way of them being a professional army. There are always two cultures in any community: the civilian culture and the military culture. Too much of what they bring with them from the civilian side is affecting their military culture and they definitely need to continue working on building a truly professional acting army.

JM: Based upon your 11 months there and what you learned, what's your outlook for Afghanistan in general and the ANA in particular?

JS: I think they'll do fine. What they need right now is a good strong economy that will keep the insurgency and keep terrorism out of Afghanistan. Once they have that and they can figure out a way to fairly tax the businesses and the people over there or develop some sort of national income and use that to fund their own army, they'll be in better shape.

What you'll see then is the population becoming the check and balance system for the ANA. It won't be the Coalition forces or the US forces over there keeping an eye on them. It will be their own population mandating that they have a professional and an honest army.

We're at the point now with the ANA where they need less help working on intelligence, operations, and administration of their army. They really need to get into more specialized areas.

They need help in their legal section. This past summer they implemented their UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] program and their non-judicial punishment program for the ANA. That was a huge step forward. When I first got over there last year, it was still based on officers literally beating up soldiers as a form of discipline.

We need to get to the point where we're mentoring their public affairs people and their information operations people. We need to start digging further into their army and training the more specialized staff areas.

JM: When you were at Fort Riley, did you get a chance to evaluate the program they have going on there?

JS: Yes. One thing we noticed at Fort Riley that's different than Camp Shelby is that Camp Shelby is a Reserve Component training center.

They tend to pack a lot more into each day and they train seven days a week. That's how we got out of there in 45 days. Fort Riley is on an Active Component post and was given to the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division and they're treating it more like a PCS [permanent change of station] type move. The soldiers come there and they get six to eight weeks of training on being ETTs but there's a lot more downtime in that training. They're not working at all on Sundays and they have half-days on Saturdays. It's a lot slower paced but I think they're getting better training. When we were there, we saw the Humvee rollover trainer. That's great training that none of us ever got. They work more on preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) of the Humvees.

They take them out to the ranges. They do more work on weapons qualifications. I think they're doing some better training but they really stretched out the whole program a lot further than Camp Shelby did. For Reserve Component soldiers, I think it's important to get them into that training, get them as much as they can get in a short period of time and then get them overseas. A lot of them have civilian employers waiting for them to get back, to fulfill obligations at a civilian corporation somewhere.

JM: You mentioned the ACM. Did you get a sense of who they were and what was driving them?

JS: I'm not sure all of them were true *al-Qaeda* or *Taliban*. I think a lot of them were more criminally-based individuals. The villages and towns we went to over there didn't really have an anti-government attitude. When we went into the villages, they were supportive of us during the day.

At night, though, the *Taliban* or recruiters would come in with weapons trying to recruit people and, for the most part, these are defenseless villagers who don't have any choice, so of course they're going to say they support the bad guys. It really wasn't a coalition of the willing over there on the ACM side. It was more coerced participation on the part of the villagers. I think when we'd roll into a village, if somebody was recruited the night before and they saw our Humvees rolling in or our helicopters flying overhead, they'd take the AK47 they were just given by the *Taliban* and drop it down a well or hide it somewhere and that would be the extent of their participation. I don't think there's a huge movement. I think they join the *Taliban* out of fear of being killed right on the spot.

JM: Did you find any counterinsurgency strategies that worked particularly well and have you seen the new counterinsurgency field manual?

JS: One of the things that really works over there is getting away from the large base mentality. You can't have tons of Coalition forces and your ANA all on one FOB somewhere and try to operate out of that FOB. You need to push down to the *kandak* and company level and put forces out into the districts.

You need to do the same with the police. They need to be everywhere as well. You need to have a large government footprint out there even if it's only small numbers of police officers in the village. You still need to have that connection to the government.

We developed some good TTPs [tactics, techniques, and procedures] in Ghazni where we had the maneuver force and the ANA go in and separate the insurgents from the villagers like it says in the doctrine.

Then we had the PRT come in behind and do the MEDCAPs and VETCAPs and bring in jobs and projects such as drilling wells, building district centers, and building schools.

On a tactical level, we had a really successful operation the night before we kicked off Operation MOUNTAIN FURY. We were able to exfiltrate out of the PRT into Andar based on some deception operations we had done.

We had noticed that across the street from the PRT and the ANA compound where we always drove our vehicles out, there were always people hanging around watching our activities. We assumed some of them were reporting our activities and where we were going. That night before, we had all our vehicles meet up at the PRT and at about 2200 we all drove north towards Dih Yak District but all the vehicles were empty, although all the people watching us didn't know that.

Task Force *Iron Grays* then conducted some fire missions with their 105 howitzers out of the PRT but they were all directed north. They fired illumination rounds and some HE [high explosive] rounds into the hilltops to the north.

About 0200, we literally cut a hole in the HESCOs and in the wire on the south side of the PRT and our forces marched out of the PRT into Andar and when the sun came up at 0530 the next morning, we literally had two ANA companies and a US rifle company already in the village. There was no time for the ACM to react or get out of there. During the next week, we ended up killing about 44 *Taliban* in northern Andar. We had just completely surprised them and showed up at their doorsteps the next morning.

JM: How impressed or unimpressed were you with ACM tactics and capabilities?

JS: For the most part they were just hit-and-run activities. They were setting IEDs. Once in a while they'd follow up an IED with some small arms fire. I think our tactic of driving through the kill zone empowered them to conduct more of those types of operations. When our forces stopped, turned, and pursued the enemy out of the kill zones, it was more effective. That was a TTP we developed in response to that. The attacks slowed down if we went right back into the kill zone and hunted down the enemy or else if we stopped right there in the kill zone and hunted them down.

JM: You mentioned the PRTs. Were there other agencies you worked with?

JS: One of the things we noticed when we got there is that there were a lot of agencies working. There were OGAs as well as many civilian agencies.

We had a UN contingent in Ghazni and a lot of NGOs [non-governmental organizations] running around the country. The PRT was a good way to put together the USAID [US Agency for International Development], State Department, and Department of Agriculture but there were still a lot of other agencies that if we had had our druthers would have all been in the PRT working for that commander.

In our case, the PRT commander was a Navy commander. He really understood what needed to happen in Ghazni Province and had some good plans that he set up. There were just a lot of agencies out there that were doing things that were disjointed from what he was trying to accomplish in Ghazni. So if you could pull them all together under the PRT umbrella, I think it would be a lot more productive in the long run.

JM: So the agencies were there but there was just no central authority directing them?

JS: Right. I think they really could have cooperated and accomplished much more with the resources they had, had they not been off on their own trying to do it.

JM: What were some of the NGOs working there?

JS: DynCorp was there training the police. There was a group called Doctors Without Borders. The UN was there. There were probably more up in Kabul than in Ghazni. There were also the civilian contractors working on the roads. There was an Australian organization building roads along with a group from Turkey.

JM: At any of the places you were at, did you have any Coalition partners?

JS: In Gardez we had a Romanian ETT. Their teams had about 24 personnel in them and they only stayed for six or nine months. Instead of assigning them as one solid team to an Afghan *kandak*, we broke up their teams. There were a few reasons why we did it. One of them was because they brought a fantastic knowledge of Soviet weapons systems.

We also broke them up for force protection reasons. If we gave the Romanians to a certain *kandak*, we wouldn't be allowed to give them up-armored Humvees or US weapons systems but by integrating them into existing US ETTs, they could ride in the US Humvees and use US weapons systems. It was our way of looking out for them and making sure they were protected.

JM: Were they as competent as you needed or wanted?

JS: Yes. The team we had that we split and sent to Ghazni had already been on one rotation to Afghanistan already.

They were very well-rounded and were a professional group of soldiers and officers. They did a great job for us.

JM: Did you do a right-seat ride with the guy who was replacing you when you left?

JS: The recommendation I made and was accepted was to pull up the officer who was my S3 mentor to be the *kandak* team chief when I left and we replaced him with another major who came in on a later rotation. He had actually been there longer than me because he started out in that *kandak*. He was well read in to what needed to happen and he knew the unit better than I did.

JM: Did you think you had sufficient rank to accomplish all what you needed to do?

JS: At the *kandak* level I did because I had already been a battalion commander. That was a great help and I would highly recommend to the Army that they make the *kandak* team chiefs senior lieutenant colonel positions. Right now, they're slotted as a major's position. That way, you can tell that guy you're mentoring that you've already been in his shoes and you know what he's going through. At the brigade level, I really think there needs to be a full colonel mentoring the brigade commanders who are one-star generals in the ANA. If the colonels we send over there have brigade-level experience, they'll be okay.

A colonel mentoring the corps commander seems to be working out really well right now. Plus, I think it would be very difficult to get anything higher than a colonel assigned to the five corps of the ANA right now unless you went with retired general officers on some sort of contract. The other advantages we had when I was mentoring the corps XO during my last couple months there was the small MPRI team we had living on Gardez that consisted of S3, S1, and S4 mentors as well as a couple property book officer mentors and an NCO mentor.

By the time you get to the corps-level ETT staff, there's much more responsibility and many more actions that need to be accomplished on the US side, so you really can't spend as much time as you need to on the ANA side. That MPRI staff was really a huge asset to help mentor the ANA corps staff. We also had them at the brigade level which was a huge help there as well.

JM: Were they all retired Army guys?

JS: Yes. As an example, the individual who mentored the corps G3 was a retired lieutenant colonel who began his military career in Vietnam in the '60s. He'd been with the Army through all the changes from the '70s, the buildup in the '80s, into the '90s. He'd seen a lot and had a ton of experience.

By the way, an ANA corps looks pretty much like a US division. The corps commander was a two-star general. The deputy commander was a one-star general as was the corps chief of staff. The primary staff was made up of colonels. When you got to the G5 and G6, they were lieutenant colonels and their secondary staff was at the lieutenant colonel and major levels.

JM: Are there any other lessons learned or takeaways you'd like to impart?

JS: One thing we really made large use of, especially when I was in Ghazni and we had our own FOB and were sort of on our own, was the Title 10 and Title 22 money that we were allotted.

We got about \$25,000 funding every month to six weeks depending on how quickly we were going through it and that really became a combat multiplier for us. We were able to put local nationals to work on our FOB. We were able to buy services to come onto our FOB to take care of things. We bought a lot of products off the local economy like steel, lumber, plastic bottles, and pot-bellied stoves. That created a lot of goodwill around the community of Ghazni.

At one point, we had 16 local nationals setting up HESCOs around the FOB and we had another team of eight just doing miscellaneous projects. We had the cooks we brought onto the FOB every day as well. All the metal we bought was purchased right across the street from the FOB.

We really became an asset to the community and that was one of the big reasons we didn't get rocketed as much as other places. Even the PRT, which was just two

miles down the road, must have been rocketed a half dozen times while we were over there and we didn't have a single attack on our FOB.

JM: Did you have any interaction with the local government?

JS: Yes. As the Army unit in town, we sat in on all the weekly security meetings at the governor's office. In fact, we were in an unusual situation. The reason our *kandak* was sent to Ghazni was because the governor of Ghazni, Haji Sher Alam, served with our *kandak* commander in the *mujahedeen*. He had been the logistics officer for General Ahmed Shah Masood and my *kandak* commander had been his assistant.

JM: What sense did you have on how well organized the government was?

JS: It wasn't really. Haji Sher Alam was there most of the time we were there in Ghazni. He ran it more like his own personal business. He had about 200 to 300 hired security forces that he was paying for himself throughout the district.

JM: His own mini army?

JS: Yes and when he left, they left, so that was a big hit security-wise in the province when he was removed by President Hamid Karzai. He really didn't run a professional government. He didn't give guidance to his ministers, have them put programs together and then come back and brief him. The ministers were basically working with their contacts at the PRT doing what they could do but it was always removed from what the governor was working on.

JM: did the fact that you had guys who were former *mujahedeen* as well as some who were in the former Russian–Afghan Army who were now all in the same unit cause any problems there?

JS: Not openly. Our *kandak* commander fought with the *mujahedeen*. Our *kandak* XO stayed in the Russian Army and was a regimental commander with the old Afghan Army and fought with the Russians. I even went into a meeting one time where a general officer from the MOD was there. He was sitting next to our *kandak* commander and they were laughing about something, so I asked if they had served together in the *mujahedeen*. The room got real quiet all of a sudden and we came to find out that they had actually fought against each other in some of the same battles. I got out of it by saying that that's one of the strengths of the new Afghan National Army. Former enemies can now be friends and serve together. There was a lot of that. For the most part, they've gotten over that and have let the past stay in the past.

JM: Were these ethnically integrated units as well?

JS: Yes. The ANA is doing a real good job about that and they're putting a lot of emphasis on mixing up the ethnic groups. Our *kandak* commander was *Pashto*.

Our *kandak* XO was *Uzbek*. Our S3 was *Tajik*. You see a lot of cliques that develop within the *kandak* based on the tribal backgrounds. The *kandak* commander had a personal security detachment of eight soldiers and all eight of them were from his tribe and some even from his village where he was from.

JM: Was a lot of the recruiting done from the local areas?

JS: They had a colonel who was in Ghazni assigned as the recruiter. As he recruited people, they'd be sent to KMTC. When they had 600 soldiers and they were ready to start the class, they'd start the class. The *kandak* that went through in the past was strictly a cohort *kandak*. The whole *kandak* would go out somewhere and some of the soldiers may be from that area and some may not be. For the most part, most soldiers wouldn't go back to the area from which they came. That creates some problems because you can join the ANP from Ghazni, go to the regional academy in Gardez, become a police officer and they'll send you back to Ghazni. So you're serving in about the same position and making about the same pay but you're in the police and you're back in your hometown. Whereas, you may end up somewhere across the country if you join the army.

JM: So about 600 men comprised a full-strength *kandak*?

JS: Yes.

JM: It seems to me that it wasn't all that common to have a *kandak* at full strength but maybe 30 to 40 percent strength?

JS: Right. There's no replacement system there either. You may even start with 650 but as time goes on you lose people through AWOLs or "escaping," as they call it, and there's no way to get them back. The numbers would change daily. When we moved from Orgun-E and Lwara to Ghazni, Ghazni was actually a better place to serve because it was only three hours from Kabul on the Ring Road, whereas Orgun-E was about six to eight hours away.

We actually gained strength when we got there because guys would call up their buddies and tell them to come back, that they shouldn't have left the unit because now we're in Ghazni. So, a week later, the guy would show back up, he'd get his uniform back and his weapon back and he'd be back in the army. It's a lot different than what we're used to here in the US.

Some of the *kandaks* that are going through KMTC right now are filler *kandaks*. They'll send out 30 soldiers to one *kandak*, 40 to another to try to bring the strength back up where it needs to be.

JM: Did you think they have good strategies in place now to prevent this kind of attrition?

JS: They're starting to develop some retention programs. A soldier who stays beyond his initial three-year tour will get more than the normal \$100 a month that the others get. He'll get \$120 or \$150.

They're also starting to develop disability pay where if they get injured on active duty and can no longer serve, they'll give you a monthly stipend for that. There's a death benefit now where if a soldier gets killed on active duty the family gets enough money to bury him. I think they'll eventually turn around the AWOL rate and the ETS [end tour of service] rate.

JM: Because that's a huge obstacle to building and maintaining a successful army, correct?

JS: It is and they've really plateaued on their strength. All the people we're recruiting and putting through KMTC right now are just covering the AWOLs. So they've really hit a plateau of about 30,000 where they can't go any further.

JM: Thank you very much for your time.

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Slusher
16 February 2007

LL: My name is Laurence Lessard (LL) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Lieutenant Colonel Mike Slusher (MS) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 16 February 2007 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Let's start with some background. Where are you from, how did you get interested in the Army, and where did you get your commission?

MS: I was born and raised in Leavenworth, Kansas. I had every opportunity to join the Army and I associated with a lot of kids in high school whose parents were career officers or noncommissioned officers passing through Fort Leavenworth.

Following that I enlisted in the Marine Corps in the middle of the Vietnam War because they were the only ones who sent me anything. They sent me a letter in the mail asking me to come down and join.

At that time I was dating a girl whose father was the chief of staff on Fort Leavenworth. He immediately stopped talking to me and wasn't happy with my decision. He thought I should go into the Army. He said, "Do you understand there is a war going on?" I said, "No, not really." I was busy in high school. So I went in the Marine Corps when I was 17 and spent almost the next five years with their special operations community.

When I got out I was a policeman out in California for six years. I came back to the Midwest for some family issues and went to grad school at Kansas University. I joined the Kansas National Guard and stayed with them except for a couple of years that I spent with the US Army Reserve and an ODA [operational detachment alpha]. I was an infantry officer the whole time.

I'm 56 years old now. In 2001 I had been running a research foundation in Topeka, Kansas that did public policy and criminal justice work. I went on active duty with the Army in January 2002. I went to the Pentagon and worked G3 [operations] Army. I was hired into the Guard's AGR [Active Guard-Reserve] program as a G3 for the 35th Division which is just off post here at Fort Leavenworth. I spent three and a half years in the AGR, including a Balkan deployment and a lot of TDY [temporary duty] time. Then I took this Afghan deployment in January '06.

LL: You were one of the few people who went from the Wisconsin Guard to this deployment?

MS: Actually, that's kind of a point of contention. That mission goes back and forth and they argue between United States Army FORSCOM [Forces Command] and National Guard Bureau as to whether that's going to be a RC [Reserve Component] or an AC [Active Component] mission. Thus far, it's stayed a Guard mission, although I hear that the AC would like to pick up the Task Force *Phoenix* mission. The Guard has used it to finish out their brigade deployments. They wanted to get all of their combat brigades to pass through an OIF [Operation IRAQI FREEDOM] or OEF theater.

What happens is that a brigade headquarters will get the mission. They will take the command and control piece and all of the senior pieces they can for their states.

Then they have to go out and get people to take the ETT [embedded training team] missions. The Guard Bureau was then advertising them as brigade and battalion teams of 16 people, with slightly different compositions, and the states would sign up for it thinking they were going to send a team from their state and it would remain intact. As soon as the teams would deploy, they'd find out they'd be broken up as soon as they got into country and redistributed based upon the needs of Task Force *Phoenix*. There were a lot of hard feelings over that.

LL: When were you given the opportunity to volunteer for this?

MS: It went back and forth. We were supposed to mobilize 17 December. This was the first time Kansas had this particular mission. Rightfully so, the state had a lot of concern over who takes their kids different places. I'm a fairly senior infantry officer in the state, so they basically said it was something they wanted me to do. Was I interested? I said sure.

That was in the first part of November. At that point we were getting ready to do an exercise the next spring called COBRA GOLD with I Corps. I was on my way to Bangkok, Thailand to one of the meetings on that. When I got there, there were some folks from Singapore I had worked for the previous year and they were looking forward to it because we would be hosting them at Leavenworth. I had to tell them that I wouldn't be there.

The December mobilization date got pushed back to 5 January 2007. I'm told that Lieutenant General Russel L. Honoré had decided that Camp Shelby, Mississippi had to shut down for Christmas because they had been fairly busy for an extended period of time.

We got pushed back three weeks. The problem with that is the 3.5, 4.5, and 5.5 series all arise in country, normally in January. Because they moved our

mobilization date into the first part of January, that only left about 20 days to train and then ship. That didn't meet up with any of the FORSCOM guidance on the training requirements. So, they slipped the arrival date back to the third week in February so they could spend more time at Camp Shelby.

LL: Can you describe the pre-deployment training you received at Camp Shelby?

MS: I can describe it and I won't describe it very glowingly. All of these deployments have issues as they're generally based upon the Annex T training and exercises, of FORSCOM, of whatever theater they're going into. They'll set up a series of one-size-fits-all training lanes that indemnifies the US government from being criticized as to whether they prepared the soldier. That's my opinion but I believe that it's commonly shared. As a consequence, you go through a set of training events that may or may not have anything to do with the theater you're going into but are titled "theater specific".

For example, as a senior O5 [lieutenant colonel] I had to go through, as did everybody else, a lane that made sure we knew how to do the low crawl and three to five-second fire team rushes. There were no exceptions. Everybody had to do that. There were several cases of things that were similar to that.

The issues that were truly essential for everybody to learn, such as learning to use the radio systems in theater, or BFT [Blue Force Tracker] or even spending time in the vehicles, weren't done because they didn't have the equipment sets there to do that. Most of the senior guys made the choice of ensuring the junior folks got through the communications training, the BFT training, the vehicle time and banked on being able to have the opportunity to pick up those skill sets once they arrived in theater. In many cases the schedule drove the training and it was dictated by a higher command. When I came back a year later I figured it would have been resolved but it still hasn't been.

LL: Was there any piece of that Camp Shelby training that was useful?

MS: No. There wasn't enough time spent on the ranges to achieve any competency. The foreign weapon systems were limited and there wasn't enough time spent on them to achieve anything. I never saw the radio systems or the BFT until I got into theater. The training on the up-armored vehicle was extremely limited. It amounted to simply about a mile drive to ensure licensing and didn't go over in any great detail the maintenance of the vehicle or recovery operations. As I came to learn very early on, recovery operations are a part of everyday life over there. The terrain is such that those vehicles wind up getting stuck and damaged. It's a system that requires everybody to pitch in. The manpower levels are low enough that if you don't, things just don't get done. You'd have six vehicles for 16 folks. That's about two folks to a vehicle. You can't put all that on one person to take care of.

LL: Was there any cultural or language training?

MS: There's never going to be enough time to learn any of the ethnic Afghan languages in the US going through a training readiness cycle like that. *Dari* which is kind of the Rosetta Stone over there, is pretty complex. It doesn't always have words that are translatable from English into *Dari*. What you find is that it takes a lot of *Dari* explanation to get from English to where somebody understands it.

As far as cultural awareness, I think that country has had an extensive American presence long enough that the culture is changing or adapting to our presence there. Some of the things we were told were gospel just weren't true. They may have been looked at through the eyes of whatever resource was available. That may have been an émigré who left during the Russian occupation in the 1980s and was now providing language training and cultural orientation.

There were some smart cards provided by the DOD [Department of Defense] and they were out of date and were culturally inaccurate. I don't feel bad about that. This is one of those theaters we were dropped into. The map sets weren't in existence and there wasn't a lot of information out there. It wasn't part of our strategic targeting. It kind of came up on the screen as something you had to go do and there was a scarcity of information and a scarcity of maps and everything else. There are parts of the world that we've been to for extended periods of time and have an opportunity to go back to again and the maps still aren't good. Japan is one of those areas. It's just the way it is and you learn to overcome all that stuff.

I found that the Afghans like to teach about their country and their culture. It's like anywhere you go. If you ask somebody about something and why you want to know it, they'll generally give you that information. When I deal with people I apologize right up front. I would say, "If I do something to offend you, it's not my intent. It is merely because I may be ignorant about your culture or the issues that we're trying to talk about." That generally opens the door and gets you in.

LL: If the entire issue of pre-deployment training were placed in your hands, how would you put it together?

MS: We've had some discussion on that. I think the idea of getting the folks who have had the experience to come back and be part of it is the right thing to do. However, you have a problem with the RC in that respect. Generally, anybody that comes back from a deployment with the RC and you want them to stay and work on that, they probably won't be allowed to. The people you want are the same people that their jobs want them back as well. Those are folks that are in demand by both the Army and the civilian force. As a consequence, you end up with a lot of folks who are probably there because they didn't have a job to go back to in the start. That's not the right clientele.

There is a lot of discussion right now on the length of tours. It would seem to me that if there was some way of having more of the folks that actually worked in theater to then come back and work as trainers, this would be helpful. I think there is a way to impact that. Send the Title 32 folks that go on these missions on a two-year tour. They spend a year in theater and then they spend the last year at that training site. That would be doable.

The non-AGR, non-technician people are probably going to have to go home. This whole process for the RC is going to become more difficult rather than less despite what we want. It has to do with this policy that's now hitting us of the 12 month plus a month. My understanding of what they're doing, and why I think it's going to be so problematic, is that they're going to take the Guard year, the 39 days, and put that in front of the MOB time. Whatever training is not accomplished in that 39 days, spills over into that 12 months and that's how they finish the MOB training. Then their tour begins and then it ends. Whatever leave time they get comes off outside that 12 month window.

Having gone through a couple of these rotations before and dealing with the AC validators, or the TSBs [training support battalion], there's been a reluctance for them to certify any training that didn't occur at the MOB site that they didn't supervise. States are going to fight this because they're not going to want to send people to the MOB sites before they absolutely have to because it doesn't make any sense. If they're trying to do the 12 month thing, we'll just allot 14 months. That's the same thing that I wound up with before this policy was in place.

Trying to do any of the training at home station and get it validated is going to be a problem. The certifiers aren't going to be able to send folks out to certify those events on a daily basis. If you send them to the MOB station to do their 39 days beforehand, I don't know if we have any issues on Title 10 versus Title 32 status or not. There's a lot of stuff to work through. It's just getting more complicated instead of less. I suspect that almost every state will wind up with some type of training support detachment that will be tasked with providing the training for that first 39 days for those missions. That's what it looks like.

LL: Can you talk about the actual deployment to Afghanistan?

MS: Yes. I'm one of those guys who thinks that I'm a lot tougher than I am and I still see myself through 21-year old eyes. As a consequence, when I got into Kabul and Phoenix I said, "Give me the toughest job you have. Send me where it's the worst." I shot out of Phoenix and hit Kandahar. I got in late one day and left early the next. I got a Thuraya [satellite phone], a couple of vehicles, and an azimuth. That was it. I still didn't know how to use the radios, I still didn't know how to use the BFT, and they said, "You're going to the desert for two months."

I went west across the Helmand River out into the southern part of Helmand Province and started on this Operation RIVER DANCE which was the poppy eradication. There was nothing out there. I mean absolutely nothing out there. There were times when we were two days by vehicle to get within MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] range.

You had your ETTs out there with the Afghans. At that time, the brigade I was going to didn't own any so we were taking *kandaks* from corps outside of the AOs [area of operations]. You had the border police, the State Department, the South African mercenaries, and a bunch of other folks who I didn't know. We were out there trying to plow up these thousands of acres of poppies and provide security operations for the guys who were actually running the tractors. That went on for three or four weeks.

Then we went out to a new FOB [forward operating base] they were building. An interesting thing was every time you got one of these new groups of ETTs or *kandaks* they wanted to change your call sign. They'd end up with some call sign that gave them some state of identity with their state or some personal identity. They had some very unique call signs. It was secure comms so everybody had a Hollywood call sign. I walked into an established call sign. It was Marshal and the FOB was Tombstone, whatever.

So we're out in the middle of the desert and we're at a FOB that we're trying to stand up. We're about 60 days into it and all we have is a perimeter wall and contract *Gurkhas* guarding it. There weren't any Afghans out there and we had a brigade's worth of ETTs, about 16 ETTs.

We did have another FOB that had been sent up, up the Helmand Valley north of the ring road at a place called Sangin. It really wasn't a good location tactically or a good place to be. What we had up there was basically a mud hut and some concertina wire. I define that area north of that river and up the Helmand Valley as Talibanistan.

We were at the capital of Talibanistan. Routinely the mortars would start about 2200 and end about 0100, just a lot of harassing fire. There would also be some incoming small arms fire as well. It was difficult to get up there because we didn't own the highway up there. It was constantly mined and ambushed, so we'd have to stay off the highway and run out through the desert.

Until you really got to know the terrain, you'd have problems identifying what the choke points were. There were certain chokepoints but as long as you avoided them you were okay until you got up close to the FOB where there were some chokepoints into the entrance. Sometimes they would be mined pretty close into the FOB.

We had a guest battalion in there until we got our *kandaks* in out of the KMTC [Kabul Military Training Center]. Then we started pushing them up there. It became the main effort after RIVER DANCE had stopped. As it turns out this FOB had been put in there by the government. The governor had requested to President Hamid Karzai, the establishment of the military presence there. So they started to build it up.

We spent about two months building up the force protection there and trying to do some improvements for the soldiers we had assigned there. We wound up building a HESCO perimeter around it with wire. We redid the well and put in a septic system so we had some showers, toilets, and laundry.

We never did wind up with a good situation for the meals. The people up there wound up just cooking out of UGRs [unitized group rations]. The OPTEMPO [operations tempo] never slowed down. The violence kept getting progressively worse. At one time we had an ODA in the camp, a mechanized company from the Canadians, an ANA [Afghan National Army] battalion and an ETT battalion supporting that and it was still busy. The Brits came in and we changed hands. I am not an Anglophile. I think they're arrogant without cause. When they first came in they were talking about all the great things they were going to do.

I remember the guy I was interfacing with saying two things. They had had a suicide attack down on Lashkar Gah before they did the transfer of authority and so Whitehall had told them they couldn't leave the FOB because a soldier had been killed. This colonel proceeds to tell me how his great grandfather had been at the Battle of Maiwand and it didn't work out real well for them. So I said, "You're here to regain the family honor." He said, "I guess you could say that." I said, "That's going to be real tough to do if you can't get off the base."

We progressed to try and build our relationship. We never really got there. We were there in the early spring while the illegal agriculture, the poppy season, was still going on. It hadn't gotten as bad as it did as soon as the poppies were harvested. As soon as that happened then the drug lords weighed in and the Taliban weighed in and it got real tough. That was right around the same time we handed it off to the British. Although one of our soldiers and a Canadian were killed one night up at Sangin, as soon as we handed it off to the British within a week they were taking numerous KIAs [killed in action] and WIAs [wounded in action] pretty bad. I stayed on through there until the end of June and then passed through Kandahar and went over to the 205th Corps that was in Gardez.

One of the other fellows getting interviewed was the corps commander at the 203d and then over at the 205th. I went with him. My stipulation was that I didn't want to go to a headquarters so they sent me downrange. I got into Gardez and went down to Khowst.

We were building a FOB there just as we had at Tombstone. In both these cases I was the XO [executive officer] or team chief for that brigade. This was the first chance we had to work with the ANA. The business out at Helmand was just combat operations and keeping things going. When we got down to Khowst, the OPTEMPO had dropped somewhat.

We had considerably more rocket attacks, IEDs [improvised explosive devices], and suicide bombers than out there but it wasn't the continuous units in the field combat operations. I had a greater chance to interface with the leadership of the brigade and try to do what I thought I was supposed to do with them and try to get that FOB opened up. Eventually we got the FOB opened in November. I put a lot of effort into getting all the units that were out at different locations moved in before the winter hit and closed down the pass that was between us and Gardez.

About the same time some other operations came up that took some of our resources and we wound up building another temporary FOB in the pass between Khowst and Gardez.

We couldn't get the convoys through there because of the combat activity. That kind of quashed that and we were able to turn most of our efforts towards winterization. In January I got a call that said I was heading back to the states to work with some of the next folks who were coming into theater to give them a heads-up on some of the important things they need to know.

In the middle of January I started moving up towards Gardez and eventually Kabul. I spent a couple of days there and then got out. The most important thing in my tour was that I managed to spend only a week in Kabul which was good. I avoided having to take leave. I avoided all the passes. It was just too difficult. If you wanted to take a four day pass, you lost about three weeks in the field and I didn't want to do that. I didn't believe in taking the leave because I thought it was tough enough on my family with one goodbye let alone two. I did have to come back to the states one time because one of my soldiers who had come over with me was killed. I took the body back and was the command representative for the services there. That's pretty much what I did in country.

There are other things that are more detailed. For a while I did a pretty good job of writing down most of the things that I did on a daily basis. I'm pretty inquisitive so I'm always interested in why things happen. I spent a lot of time learning the politics of the region and the politics of the country and the Army. I tried to learn some cultural things and I spent a lot of time interfacing with several groups of village elders to learn how things work in those particular areas. Anybody I could talk to, I would talk to. There were a lot of little smaller details about my deployment but what you have are the operational details of my deployment.

LL: You said you spent a lot of time in the field with the ANA. How good are they tactically?

MS: The KMTC training program is pretty good although they train very limited MOSs [military occupational specialties]. They trained just a handful, and of course one of them was infantry.

The problem was there were a lot of kids. The older guys, the guys who'd worked with the Russians and the National Army and who had been around and had done this for 20 years. They understood how to do this stuff. It still has all the things you hear about. It's still tribal. It's still corrupt. It's still political. As a consequence, even though they have pretty good company-level leadership, the soldiers do mob assaults. What will happen is they'll get into contact and everybody will jump out and start running towards it and shooting up all their ammunition.

What will happen is that although they may have learned things at KMTC, they get caught up in the OPTEMPO of combat operations and there isn't enough repetitive training done by the ETTs on basic combat skills.

They have to have structured requirements to keep the weapons clean. They do need to go to the range once in a while. You hear all this business about the great Afghan marksmanship. I didn't see any of it. I was fairly confident that if I didn't get hit by an IED, I sure wasn't going to get hit by a rifle over there. I was out there where they were shooting and it wasn't going to come anywhere near me. That was the bad guys who probably did actually work on marksmanship. I think we need to work on a lot more soldier task basic fire and maneuver things down at the platoon level. That will continue to be a major emphasis for a long time to come.

You keep getting new guys in the units and they're not scared. They go out and they run right into the fire. It's kind of crazy because the anti-Coalition folks will sit in those defensive positions and just let these guys run right up on them. They'll run right up the side of a mountain after them shooting all the way and yelling. They're brave little dudes but that's not the way we want to do business.

LL: How receptive were the Afghan commanders towards you as their mentor?

MS: I think I was pretty effective. The reason being, since I didn't get a lot of culture training leading up to my deployment, I decided I would just figure it out on my own. What I have learned is that there are certain universals in the military and probably in cultures all together. The first thing is that you have to talk to people. Everybody communicates the same way. There are two styles. You are either friendly or you're threatening. The approach I always used was to joke around with these guys. I used to tell them all kinds of jokes. Pretty soon they started telling me Afghan jokes and we'd talk about their culture. I would show a genuine interest in them.

Before I go into a country, I spend a lot of time reading about the history of it. They don't always get that. People come in and they might not be steeped in the history of their country but if you can talk about the history and they're educated then they'll start telling you the same things. If you can bring up points that they wouldn't expect a foreign national to talk about or have knowledge of, that will give you bonus points. Then they become much more cooperative because you're obviously interested in their nation and probably in them also.

I spent most of the time working with the brigade S3 [operations officer], XO, and commander. I think it was pretty successful but that's because I worked very hard to develop some type of personal relationship. I found it enjoyable as well. I love going into another country and telling jokes through an interpreter. It always creates some interesting situation that's humorous. Most of my stuff isn't offensive. The joke I'd always tell them is, "Did you hear about the three legged dog who came into town. He said, 'I'm here to get the man who shot my paw.'" That doesn't translate into Afghan and that little thing usually takes about a half hour to work through. They'll scratch their heads and then they finally get it.

They'll tell one of their jokes and their jokes aren't funny either. So you reach an agreement where I'll laugh at your jokes if you laugh at mine. Once you start doing that, then you can start talking about other things. You can start building a relationship built on trust.

LL: Was there any area in particular that you tried to emphasize with the Afghan officers you were working with or were things more generalized?

MS: I'm confident that they can operate tactically and I'm confident they can't operate logistically. Logistics is a big problem. There are many reasons why. The first is that they can make money off of the resources. Their system dictates that if something gets sent down from higher then it gets taxed at each level.

The best of whatever it is winds up at the higher headquarters. Not that that ever happens in our Army. I spent a lot of time pushing logistics and pushing it with tough love. I told them they had to get it fixed and they had to get what was entitled to them because I wasn't providing it. I wouldn't pay for it and I wasn't going to go get it for them. I'd go with them to get their stuff to make sure they got it but I wouldn't do their work for them. They're not lazy but they're incredibly cunning, and if they can get you to do their job, that's just fine with them.

LL: How were you set up with interpreters?

MS: We had plenty of interpreters but none of them spoke English very well. Interpreters were a real problem. Most of them were young. The ones that were educated were a bit older. There were schools they could go to in order to become interpreters. They could invest a little bit of money to get one of the better paying

jobs in the country. The families would scrape together money, send one of the kids to the interpreter school and then he'd get a job as an interpreter and his money would go back to the family. Because they're young, they're still young, so they kind of interpret things the way they want to interpret them. You constantly have to check on them.

I would make sure they understood what I had said. I would ask them to tell me what someone had said or what they were going to say so I could get some feedback. Other guys would throw things into it so they could check what they were saying. They'd throw a name of a city or a person so they could recognize it during the translation. Another reason a lot of the interpreters were young is because being an interpreter over there can be pretty dicey.

They'd travel to cities on their own and they'd have to go back to their hometown for leave on their own and they could get shot at. If they get stopped at a checkpoint that the Taliban had set up, those kids would get killed. I remember coming into Kandahar one time from out west and we were coming into the Panjway district. There were a couple of dead dudes laying in the road. We found out that the day before there had been four interpreters kidnapped from near one of the bases in Kandahar. One was killed on the spot, one they hadn't found, and those two guys on the ground were the other two they were looking for.

Being an interpreter can be dangerous. In some cases these kids take these jobs without telling their parents what they're doing.

LL: Were these interpreters provided by the US Army or were they contractors?

MS: They were on contract provided by DOD. Just before we left the contractor was Titan. They hired all the interpreters and brought them to the FOB to work. Somebody else has picked up that contract since then. The way it would work is that there would be a section of the camp that would be "Terp Town". That's where the interpreters lived and ate. They had their own cook house and their own cook who would provide their meals. That was all part of their contract.

The US government had to provide them with comparable quarters to what the US soldiers were living in. At one point, before "Terp Town" was finished we had them living next to the ANA. Normally you don't want to do that because there can be a lot of friction between the soldiers and the interpreters, mainly based on pay.

We were having them eat at the American dining facility. That was a problem for some of our soldiers. Some of the soldiers thought it was fine and that's what we should do but some of the others didn't think it was a good idea. Most everyone over there is a fairly big health risk to you because of tuberculosis so getting them into our dining facility around food and in close contact made some folks pretty uncomfortable.

LL: How was the support for the US forces?

MS: I thought it was reasonably good. I didn't have a lot of expectations. We had our vehicles, our ammunition, our communications and both of the FOBs I worked out of we had KBR in there to provide limited maintenance for the facility. KBR also provided some pretty good food at our dining facilities.

We also had some MWR [Morale Welfare and Recreation] support in the way of some gym equipment, internet access, and DSN [Defense Switched Network]. I thought it was reasonably good.

I think we fall down on vehicle maintenance. You had to go find an AC unit that has some maintenance shops to get your stuff taken care of or else you're doing it yourself and if you don't know crap about vehicles, like me, it can be pretty damned challenging especially on some of the more intricate systems. If the air conditioning goes out on that Humvee, that thing is like a pressure cooker in the summertime. It's very uncomfortable. I think we have some problems there.

We didn't have all the systems that we needed. We had all the systems we could get but as the Chief of Staff of the Army explained, Afghanistan is not the main effort. Iraq is the main effort. They were providing what they could to Afghanistan so it wasn't exactly the best or enough of but it was adequate.

LL: Did you run into any situations where there was some kind of cultural obstacle or misunderstanding that really prevented you from getting done what you wanted to get done?

MS: The best example of that is the brigade operations center. We went into a new structure and I was trying to get this brigade operations center set up along the lines of how a US unit would do it. I couldn't really get buy-in from the brigade commander or much work out of the ANA that were assigned there. We worked through this for four weeks.

Then we were getting close to doing a dedication for the opening of the base. President Karzai was going to come down and do that. We went through this big long thing of setting up the training room so it would be acceptable. I finally went up to the corps headquarters and looked at their training room and then I got it. He'd been talking about religious slogans and all these things. He needed help buying those things and I hadn't known what he was talking about until then.

We worked through building the stage he had to have and getting a calligrapher to make the religious slogans they had to have. We were talking one day and he said, "I need you to help me on this. I have many competitors." So much of what's done over there is appearance and not necessarily how it performs. Performance is an individual thing and it's almost like an act. For example, is someone a good general? Well, he's a good general in their minds by how he and his surroundings

look such as his uniform, his awards, his office, and how he talks. In a tribal society, you're talking about accoutrements and how you inspire others.

We finally got the operation center done but there was an agreement. I told them that I would work on functionality and that they would work on decorating. That's what we did. He had to have curtains, these religious slogans, and specific pictures but he didn't give a shit about how it functioned. He would provide the resources so I could get the functionality done and it was happening. His boss came in and it looked like his did, so everything was okay.

I was able to get the commander to have an accountability formation every Sunday morning. He'd bring the whole brigade in there and he wanted to talk to them. He'd talk to them about issues that he and I had discussed. Things we needed to do in order to make that base successful.

He'd talk about establishing standards for the appearance of soldiers, the operating facilities, driving safety, and all the things that have to happen in a garrison situation. He'd get up there and he'd talk to them. He'd cover those issues and others that I was surprised to hear him talk about. He was very eloquent and very inspiring to his soldiers. It was almost like a pep rally but that's what they expected to hear.

Afterwards they'd do their pass in review. They loved to march. It was quite the little ceremony. It looked a little like when Patton was in Tunis and the camel guards were coming across the front. Everybody was happy. That's what mattered.

LL: I've interviewed some people who say that the Afghans are fine tactically but that they have to work on the institutional side of things. Would you agree or disagree?

MS: Yes, I'd agree because it never existed before. Maybe at some point they had an institutional army that provided rules and regulations and all those things, but it's gone now.

We've been in the process of developing the institutional side of it, a uniform code of military justice, doctrine, and a training base utilizing the capabilities of the KMTC which has been around for a long time but hasn't had the capacity to do what needed to get done.

We've been in the process of improving it and making it efficient and standard. That stuff has all been created. For the last 15 or 20 years they've been a field army. They haven't had the chance to be a garrison army. They've been in the field operating.

They really didn't have the logistics or the national infrastructure to have logistics. They don't have the internal production capabilities to produce their own uniforms. All of the other things that an army moves on today comes to them

from outside their country. That says that if it's coming from outside your country, somebody else is providing the logistics tail for quite awhile. They haven't had the need to create it. All they've had to do is provide the bullet-stoppers.

LL: Did you come across any situations where there were some tribal or sectarian differences that got in the way of you doing business?

MS: How's this for an example? When I got to the camp at Khowst I looked around and said, "Why is this here?" The contractors building the camp were the first to explain it. They said it was here because of the *Zani Khel* and the *Mani Zai* tribes.

I scheduled a meeting with the tribal elders from both tribes and I asked them how things were between them. They told me that they had been fighting for 80 years over the land where the camp was being set up. They took it to President Karzai and he said he would build a camp for the ANA right here. He said it would create jobs for us and we wouldn't fight over the land any more. So we were right in the middle of one of those tribal feuds.

We had to get right into a lot of mediation between them. In our particular case, I tried to provide work for them. I'd have contracts for the different things they could do with the equipment they possessed and the skills they had. We'd buy the products we could from them and we'd do what we could to honor the government's promise to them of bringing some economic prosperity to them.

We sat there as the keepers of the peace and as the biggest dog in the herd and it pretty much kept them quiet. Down the road, there was the village people of the Bak District and the migrant Kuchis, who had an equally long-standing land dispute. The Kuchis had decided in recent years that they were tired of wandering the desert and they wanted a piece of the Bak District but the villagers didn't want to give it up. Both these tribes had acquired multiple shot rocket launchers, DShK machine guns and explosives. That thing still hadn't been resolved by the time I left. Every couple of months it would flare up and somebody would wind up dead over it. Tribal disputes are alive and well.

LL: Did you ever see any of those tribal disputes manifest themselves within the ANA?

MS: There was a propensity, even at the brigade, to try and reshuffle the deck to wind up with tribes in certain headquarters or companies or battalions. I never really saw any open conflict between the tribes within the ANA. You'd hear remarks made about guys but the same thing happens in the American Army as well.

LL: Were the ANA units you dealt with predominantly from one tribal group or were they completely integrated?

MS: The government of Afghanistan and the MOD [Ministry of Defense] has done a pretty good job of trying to use the army for social engineering. All of the brigades I was in were pretty well mixed. They even seemed to go to a fair amount of trouble to place commanders that aren't from that location or that tribe.

We were firmly in the *Pashto* area and the commander of our brigade was *Tajik*. What he did was make sure there were a few *Tajiks* immediately surrounding him. He knew he was in an area that was not necessarily of his persuasion. I've seen him operate in *Pashtun shuras*, and at least overtly, they were accepting of the fact because they respected his position as a general in the army and as a representative of the central government.

What you would see is that sometimes we'd have to get an interpreter for the Afghans because there are different dialects within Dari and Pashto. If you're not from the right part of the country you won't understand the other people.

LL: How did the Afghans view you and the other soldiers from the US Army?

MS: I think they liked the Americans for the most part. Some of them they didn't but that's because they made themselves unlikable. In my particular case it was pretty humorous. The ANA leadership in that brigade referred to me as the camp village elder. I was older than them but before they really signed on to things or went in certain directions, they could consult me just like they would an elder within their tribe. I was the older guy that supposedly had some experience and age carries some weight over there. It doesn't mean the oldest guy is always the village elder but generally they give a lot of respect to those folks. At first it was funny but then you could see it was very serious.

They really wanted to know what I thought. At one time there was another guy who was the team chief and I was his XO but the leadership would still come to me to see what the village elder thought than the team chief.

LL: When you first showed up in Afghanistan, were you the first one to hold that position or did you do a handoff?

MS: There were some other people there in each case but the hand off wasn't all that formal. There is a lot of discussion out there on the right seat/left seat thing. It's a pretty good process but in some cases it's flawed. Sometimes it's too long. Sometimes it doesn't require as much time as we want to put into it because it's just not that complex. Always the incoming guy needs to be smart enough to just shut up and watch a little bit so he can absorb what's going on around him. That way, when he does ask a question, it's not something that he should have figured out on his own. The answer is that I've always picked up something from somebody else, except for that time when I was thrown out in the middle of the desert.

LL: You weren't replacing anybody when you went to the desert?

MS: No. (Laughter)

LL: What was the biggest challenge you had to deal with in Afghanistan?

MS: The most difficult thing was dealing with the US. Other combatant US forces always seemed to want to misuse the ANA. I wound up in a fair amount of arguments with the ODA and the combatant ground forces because they wouldn't include the ANA in their planning. They'd cite operational security as the reason why but they'd always want the ANA to do the dirty work. They'd want to put them out front if they were going somewhere in a convoy. They'd want the ANA to run over the mine with their little Ranger instead of running the risk of running over it with an ECM [electronic countermeasures]-protected up-armored Humvee.

They wanted the ANA to run up that hill instead of them. Almost always the ANA did not have the air cover or the ground fires that the US operation had. We didn't either. We had what the ANA had. The AC over there would not move unless they had aviation or artillery support. That didn't get shared.

LL: Was there a partnership program between your ANA units and an American or Coalition unit?

MS: Yes. We tried to have them matched up with everything and we tried to have a habitual relationship. Each *kandak* had a US battalion or company that they would match up with, and if there was an ODA in the area they'd be matched up as well.

LL: Did that relationship work the way it was supposed to?

MS: I don't think it ever worked at all. From my observation, the US used them as an expendable resource and not as a true partner.

LL: Let's go back to RIVER DANCE. Can you talk a little more about that?

MS: Narcotics is a big driver in Afghanistan of the internal politics. It's probably the reason NATO is there. I think if Afghanistan had not had heroin that NATO wouldn't have come to Afghanistan. I think the Germans, French, and British saw it as a way to try and impact their drug problems. The Germans are the lead company for the narcotics but so much of this is happening down in Helmand and Kandahar where the British and the Canadians wound up being.

The Canadians always wind up going where the British go and sometimes where we go. It's like 90 percent of the world's heroin comes from Afghanistan. Almost 100 percent of what goes into Europe comes from there. They were late in coming because, up to a year ago, we really hadn't pushed much out from Kabul.

We certainly had the air base at Kandahar but we didn't have much presence out there. Part of the reason behind that is because the ANA has been slow to

build and the numbers haven't been there. Another part of it is because the foreign NATO partners have been slow to respond. It was a big deal with the Brits sending that Para Regiment out there because they hadn't sent that kind of presence before. They didn't come until after the RIVER DANCE had already happened.

As best as I could sort out how things were happening was that the Department of State owns drug reduction. So the DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] was over there and they had to persuade the Afghan government that something needed to be done.

It wasn't the first drug demand operation but it may have been the biggest. They say it was very successful. I think that's just plain B.S. The State Department went about it through a combination of military resources and contracting stuff out. There is a section of DynCorp that works on drug reduction. They subcontract that out to some other folks. South Africa is a big player over there. You'll have South African security working for corporations and building things. You'll also have the South African security folks working within that drug reduction.

They have a bunch of people involved and a bunch of border police, the ANP [Afghan National Police] and we had one *kandak* of ANA. The ANA mission along with the ANP was to provide a security perimeter so the reduction folks could get in. Their plan was to plow up these poppy fields. This ran down south along the river towards the Pakistan border. It was marked up in a series of very large grid squares that they would work.

They would report that they had plowed up and destroyed so many hectares per day of the poppy fields. Mohammed Daud was the governor of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province. He used to be a warlord there. The reason why I think this whole thing was B.S. was because you'd see the tractors go out in the morning and they'd plow stuff up. They wouldn't plow too much up. They'd flood the fields. The tractors would get stuck. They'd plant some IEDs and blow up some of the tractors. When they got up into the area that Daud controlled, they just went around his fields in the city of Lashkar Gah.

They didn't fire him until he openly took \$900,000 from the Coalition guys. I don't think that the eradication through RIVER DANCE was worth a damn. There's a lot of irony there. This river began to be developed in the 1950s and 1960s and the Peace Corps came in and helped them. There was a bunch of canals that would give you four or five kilometers on each side of the river that was farmable. The canals would move the water back into there and they'd have the fields in there. They'd have a patch of wheat and a patch of poppies.

Some of those poppy fields were 400 acres. While the flowers are blooming, it's a pretty safe place to be because they don't do anything to get anyone unnecessarily shot that needed to be working in a poppy field. As soon as those

fields are harvested, it is a dangerous place to be. All kinds of bad things happen down there. I don't think what we did was very effective. I think the only way to really get rid of them is to spray it.

There is a reluctance to that because the Soviets used herbicides over there and the Afghans think that is bad jujū. They say it would destroy some of the wheat fields in the process. They don't raise enough wheat over there amongst those poppies to amount to anything. It's probably a nine to one ratio. I think you need to go in there with herbicide and spray the poppies and convince the folks not to grow them anymore. Why don't we offer an alternative? We were supposed to do that but nobody would fund it. It never got off the ground.

LL: Is a replacement program even economically viable?

MS: One of the first targets hit in the bombing of Kabul was the warehouse that the Taliban had with \$3 billion of opium paste in it. They didn't blow up any granaries with that much grain in it or anything else. I don't think there's anything that you can replace it with that will have comparable economic benefit.

When I was a cop in California, I used to work narcotics. You always get into these discussions about trying to deal with drugs. Do you go after the user, the dealer, the producer, or do you jump that and put your money into treatment? Do you go after the producer and try to give him another way to make money? That never works because what happens is if you offer some other alternative or you make it impossible to work in that region, the money is still fluid even if the land isn't.

They'll move the money somewhere else, and where you didn't have a production problem before, now you do. I guess I'm always convinced that you go where the money is. You go after the people who hold the money and you go after the people who finance it. We're trying to do this but the lure and the effect of cash in those quantities gets to just about everybody. Everybody has a price. If you have \$1 billion, you can buy almost anyone.

LL: Did you see more resistance based upon economic interest with the poppy fields or was it based more on ideological things with the *Taliban*?

MS: The *Taliban* isn't everywhere and they're not the only problem over there. They have a triumvirate of problems.

They have the religious fighters that are the *Taliban* and that's kind of a cultural thing and they're, in some cases, a band of thieves.

Then you have the criminal thing. The criminal thing is the drug lords but it's also bandits. There are people who just make a living by killing, robbing and intimidating people.

Then you have the third group who are the insurgents based on political reasons. They have not solved some important political issues there. This Gulbuddin Hekmatyar thing is political. Al-Ghani is political because he is still a warlord and his family still has control and sway in a good part of the regional core east area. I think that exists in other parts of the country as well.

Before they can come close to fixing the criminal thing they have to come up with some political concessions. If they reach a political agreement, they can probably get a handle on the religious thing. Senator Bill Frist was over there several months ago and he said that it will probably come to a point where they will have to make concessions to bring the *Taliban* into the government and to bring Hekmatyar into the government. Once they've done that, then they can take a shot at the drug lords. I think the drug lords profit because they put money into the other insurgencies.

LL: So are you're saying the people with the drug interest spread money into the other problem areas to keep the attention off themselves?

MS: Yes. I think that's part of the complexity of it.

LL: Did you have much contact with other US services or Coalition forces?

MS: We had Air Force and we had Navy on our compound as part of our team. The Air Force kids were good. We didn't have anybody above a captain and all of the Air Force people integrated very well.

We had a bunch of Navy garrison guys who were majors and lieutenant colonels and they were lazier than shit. They didn't do much more than feather their nest. Their biggest issue was how good the MWR was going to be. They didn't want to spend any time with the Afghans so they spent less than the minimal amount of time with them. As a result the Afghans didn't like them because it was obvious they weren't going to help them and they weren't going to do anything. I don't have much good to say about them at all.

Now, that may have just been that team except I had almost the same exact experience at another location with another Navy team. The Navy has some issues over there. They're struggling for relevancy so they're trying to get into installation management but the Reservists they're sending are not the right guys and they're just not cutting it.

We had some Marines and they did a good job. My other encounters were with the Air Force and the Navy at other locations were positive.

LL: Were the Marines involved in the training teams or were they working on the garrison side?

MS: We had one ETT down at Bermel that owned that area. Bermel was probably the crappiest place we had. It was always getting rockets and mortars.

About a month ago, the anti-Coalition folks had massed and about 120 guys attacked the camp. Our guys found out early enough and they smacked them down. About 80 or 100 were killed. The Marines were fine down there and the Afghans liked them.

LL: Did you have any other contact with Coalition forces aside from the British?

MS: We worked with the Canadians. They've taken a couple of good whacks over there but they've stood their ground. I worked with the Canadians in the Balkans and they were the same way there. They're good fighters.

The Australians are good as well.

The Romanians got a bad reputation initially because the first folks that were in the area where I worked let the Romanians stay in a group. They kind of came up with their own national caveats about what they would do and wouldn't do. When I wound up getting some of them I told them I would be treating them just like I treat my soldiers. I said some days would be good and some days would be bad. I told them they wouldn't be paired up together but they'd be paired with a US soldier. I told them their national caveats were no good here so what the US soldiers do, they'd do. They were going to live where we lived and eat what we ate.

They liked it and they did a great job because they brought skill sets we didn't have in working with the Soviet weapons. They liked the way we treated our soldiers and were very comfortable. I had a good experience with the Romanians.

I didn't have a lot of contact with the French. I don't hate the French. There was an incident with them. We had this operation in this area called Kajaki Dam. They sent a French ETT up there to work with the Afghans. This area was a problem area at the time. We sent some SECFOR [security force] and another pair of ETTs to go get them out. The guys going up ran into contact and had a big firefight. Coming back out with the French they got into another big firefight and they got chased for about 18 kilometers. All the French vehicles got destroyed and several of the French got killed.

One of the kids that was driving one of our Humvees was on the radio. We asked him where the French were. He said, "Yeah. They're running." (Laughter) We asked him what he meant and he said that all of their stuff was on fire and they were running to get into his vehicle. He came back down to the camp with nine guys in the Humvee. It was bad because you don't like to see your allies get whipped on like that. It even got worse because we wound up having to buy the bodies back from the locals. That was a very nasty situation.

LL: Did you have any contact with the media?

MS: The higher command effectively kept them away from me. We did have a journalist come and stay with us for a couple of weeks. He was a guy who'd written a couple of books. I brought him to a couple of different things and then sent him on his way. He got to see how things were and was pretty happy with that.

LL: I take it that he really wanted to see the rougher side of what we were doing in Afghanistan?

MS: Probably. It makes for a good story.

LL: Did you ever have to deal with non-government organizations while you were there?

MS: No. Most of those guys worked out of the provincial reconstruction team. Broadly define what you think NGOs are.

LL: Organizations like Doctors Without Borders or United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund or something like that.

MS: Okay. No. I never worked with anyone like that. I misspoke. The OGAs were at the PRT. There wasn't anybody over there in that part of the country. We did have a guy come down from the UN one time but he was part of the UN observer group. That was about it.

I dealt with some civilian contractors who were not Kellogg, Brown, and Root but who were some construction people working on building FOBs. I sometimes jokingly describe my time as the CNN tour of shitty places because in plus or minus 24 hours, if it made international news, I was probably there.

There was a civilian contractor called the Fluor Company. They worked in Khowst and they were the ones that lost all those people in that Russian helicopter that crashed back in August. It killed 14 people including one guy's entire family. For some reason he thought it was a good idea to fly them in to visit him.

LL: What are the biggest professional lessons learned that you took away from your time in Afghanistan?

MS: Most importantly I learned to trust my instincts. The human body seems to process information quicker than your consciousness does. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. If someone doesn't feel right, they probably aren't. I'm a very firm believer in that and I draw impressions pretty fast. If I'm not comfortable with someone or in some situation, I'm not going to get comfortable because I think there is some danger in there. That's not just in combat. That's in all phases of it. I walked away from this last year firmly convinced in trusting my instincts.

LL: If you could make a recommendation to the military powers that be, what would it be?

MS: I guess it would probably be advice. Don't confuse Iraq and Afghanistan. Afghanistan is successful where Iraq isn't because of the people that are there. If we have success in Afghanistan, it's because the Afghans are different than the Arabs. The Afghans will correct you on that, too. They will tell you they're not Arab. They're not in any way, shape or form. Don't think that whatever is working in Afghanistan will work in Iraq.

LL: If you were given an opportunity to go back to Afghanistan again and do your same job again, would you go?

MS: Yes. I've been on active duty since January 2002, so that's five years. I've been home 18 months in those five years. This is my 31st month on OEF and then I had a whole bunch of TDY in the Pacific Rim on top of that. I owe my family a spring and summer. I haven't been home for any holidays in quite some time. My wife already knows that I'm going to be deployed again next winter. I'm not going to stay around the state headquarters and play around with politics. I'd rather go somewhere else where stuff is going on and it really means something more than somebody's ego.

LL: How have you dealt with family separation?

MS: It's not a problem. I have a wife that's smarter than I am. I'm kind of a big and burly guy's guy but I have an exceptionally attractive wife who makes probably twice as much money as I do and I have four adult children. Three of them have careers established and I have grandkids. My son says, "We don't mind you being gone, Dad, because you like us better anyway when you're a couple of states away." It's a family that has a good attitude about things and that's positive about everything. My wife supports whatever I do. She respects the things I do because they're generally based upon values based in patriotism and loyalty and all of those things that I think are important. My youngest daughter said that she used to worry about me but she doesn't as much anymore because she says she knows I'm indestructible. That's fine.

LL: Is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview?

MS: No.

LL: Thank you for your time.

Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Stevenson Jr.
9 January 2007

The following is the interview with Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Stevenson Jr. (NS) conducted by Laurence Lessard (LL) of the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It covers Lieutenant Colonel Stevenson's November 2005 through August 2006 deployment in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM during which he served as chief of the Special Initiatives Group in Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan or CJ5.

LL: Let's move on to your deployment to Afghanistan. When did you find out that you were going to be deployed to Afghanistan?

NS: I found out for sure about two weeks before I left Naples and headed here to Fort Leavenworth. I knew prior to that that it was a possibility and that the assignment officer sent a note out to all the lieutenant colonels that basically said there was a lieutenant colonel billet in Afghanistan that had to be filled quickly, about two months down the road. That was pretty much the extent of the message. She sent it out to all the lieutenant colonels in the career field. So I sent her a note back asking what the job was, where it was, how long a tour—just some questions. Well, I asked the questions and she took it as me volunteering for the job. After the conversation, in her mind, Nate Stevenson was going to Afghanistan but in my mind I just got a little bit more information to help me decide whether I wanted to volunteer to go or not. My intent was to come back to the States and retire. After we talked, though, I told her to go ahead and throw my name in the hat, expecting she'd come back to me a little bit later thanking me for volunteering but after looking at all the guys who volunteered, they were going to take someone else. So waiting on a message similar to that, when I had gotten down to about two weeks before I was getting ready to do a permanent change of station, the PCS, from Naples to here at Fort Leavenworth, I hadn't heard from her so I just assumed someone else had been selected for the position.

The position was the deputy to the CJ5 on the Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, the CFC-A, staff. I called her one day just to verify and that's when she told me it was actually me who had been selected. I told her it would have been nice to know that a month ago because I had my family with me in Italy and they would rather have stayed there than come here with me being gone for a year. I would have to turn around and leave my wife with a house full of boxes, trying to get resettled in a new area.

What made it easier for us was that we had been assigned here before and we knew a lot of people in the area. My wife told me, though, that she would rather have stayed in Italy while I was gone for a year. So I found out about two weeks, for sure, before I left Italy that I was going to Afghanistan.

That basically meant I had enough time to get here and get signed in. I didn't have time to look for and close on a house. Since they had quarters available on post, we moved into them. I got furniture delivered. Of course these quarters are a little smaller than all the furniture I have so I arranged to have other stuff put in storage but I really didn't have any time to get into any work here, so I was useless to the unit I was assigned to which was the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, the CADD, because I was going to turn around and leave within 30 days.

About 30 days after getting settled in and everything, I started processing to turn around and go to Afghanistan. So I had some notice. It wasn't like two weeks' notice and I'm on a plane to Afghanistan. It was two weeks' notice and I PCS'd here to turn around and do a temporary change of station, the TCS but with that PCS, there was some leave and some time here to get a little settled before I left.

LL: Did you have any pre-deployment training before you went?

NS: Yes. Individual augmentees had to go to the CONUS Replacement Centers, the CRCs, to draw combat gear and do the theater-specific training and other pre-deployment training.

LL: Which one did you go to?

NS: I went to Fort Benning, Georgia. It was a little over a week long. I had mixed emotions about it. Most of what we did there could have been done at home station so that I wouldn't have to spend as much time at Fort Benning. In fact, most of what we did there, I did have to do here.

They don't care that you did it at home station. You're going to do it again at Fort Benning. So there was some repetition. Even though I had the checklist of all the things I'd done that had to be done and they were the exact same things they were going to do, signed off and stamped by the command here, I still had to repeat much of it there. It could probably be more focused on country-specific things such as the command, the mission, the command organization, the command and control. None of that is looked at in the CRCs.

They're getting you qualified. They're getting you medical and dental, legal, personnel, and all that kind of stuff which was done here. There was some training on basic infantry stuff such as moving under direct fire, reacting to ambushes if you're in a convoy, reacting to improvised explosive devices, the IEDs, which were things I thought, at least for me, were a waste of time. These things are kind of second nature to me. I'd done them for so long as an infantry officer that I didn't feel like I needed that. However, about half of the people in the group who went through with me did indeed need it. So I wouldn't cut that out.

We had some civilians there. We had some Defense Intelligence Agency, the DIA people there. We had one woman there from the FBI and we had individual

reservists who hadn't been in a uniform in 10 or 15 years who needed that kind of stuff. They didn't know how to put their gear together. They didn't have any idea how to put the load-bearing equipment together and to wear that. They didn't have any idea how to put the body armor together and how it was supposed to fit.

So a lot of that kind of stuff was needed for a lot of the people but it wasn't needed for a lot of other people as well. To make sure everybody's covered, you just make sure everybody gets it but there wasn't any training on country and mission specific stuff. I didn't expect them to give me any kind of training on what I was going to be doing in the CJ5 over there but it would have been nice to have known what the command structure was like, what some of the operational issues were that were being dealt with at the time. A lot of that kind of stuff you can get.

LL: Was there any language or cultural training?

NS: No language training at all. As to cultural training, I would say no. There were a couple hours, and it literally was just a couple, on the history of Afghanistan but no, it was almost a waste.

LL: Was there any further pre-deployment training that you thought, in general, was a waste? Was there any part of it you thought was really great and you wish you'd had more of it?

NS: Yes. The nuclear, biological, and chemical, the NBC training there wasn't any NBC threat in Afghanistan. In fact when I got there, I never pulled my NBC stuff out. There was some training I would have liked to have had more of and that was basically technology stuff, things that I was personally not familiar with. In fact, the vast majority of us were not familiar with it. The precision lightweight GPS receiver, the PLGR devices—I had never worked with one or used one.

We got a real quick block of instruction on what it is. I needed them to go a little slower on that and maybe do it a little longer. Do it actually in a vehicle, moving around so I could see how the thing was working and gain some confidence in it. I didn't have enough of that. You can take this all with a grain of salt.

I'm an infantryman and I like firing and maneuvering, so I enjoyed the react-to-ambush-in-a-convoy training. I just liked it. It was really fun. I really didn't need it but it was fun. There were a lot of people there who did need it, so I think we probably should have had a couple more of those and a few more hours of that—a couple more scenarios where you're actually moving and you hit an IED and how you react to it because that's very real in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

You have to know how to react. Every convoy I traveled in when I was in Afghanistan had a convoy briefing by the convoy commander. One of the things you go over is actions on contact if you hit an IED, if you're ambushed, stuff like that. Quite frankly, most of the people you're convoying with when you're not in

a unit are other individual augmentees and staff guys and they're not familiar with how to do that. So you get a little routine. In fact, I was actually in at least one convoy where the convoy briefing was nothing more than telling us where we're starting, what route we were taking, and how to contact the different vehicles. There wasn't any rehearsal on actions on enemy contact or if you get hit by an IED. That threat is very real in country. It's much more so in Iraq but it's very real in Afghanistan as well. So I was uncomfortable on just about every convoy. I led about three of them and I made sure we did a good briefing. I actually had a major come up to me who was on his first convoy with me. He told me he was impressed and he was being a little facetious. I asked him what he meant. He said, "You actually gave a convoy briefing!" That told me that the convoys he had previously been on didn't have a convoy briefing. There isn't any admin headquarters over there but at the higher headquarters people tend to get a little complacent about convoy security.

Now, one thing I would do if I was king for a day, I deployed over there with a nine millimeter but I would have liked to have had a rifle as well. I did some traveling while I was there and when I did I had to borrow a rifle from somebody in the staff group who wasn't traveling that day. So I think everybody should deploy with a rifle.

Now there are no arms rooms over there so, I have a rifle and pistol. Where do I keep my rifle? The pistol is easy to carry, it's on your hip or your vest and you're carrying that thing but you've got a rifle now, you have to have that thing on you all the time or secure it someplace and there really wasn't an arms room, if you will. That could be problematic. The requirement to have a long gun in every vehicle in the convoy I think is a good requirement and that was a requirement. Every vehicle had to have at least one long gun in it. So if you had a six-vehicle convoy and you're mostly officers, you have to start looking for long guns and that shouldn't be. For the most part, you never had trouble meeting that requirement. You would always meet that requirement. You didn't roll without that but there were a couple times where I had to go outside of my directorate, outside of the CJ5, to make sure I had a long gun in every vehicle in my convoy.

LL: When did you actually deploy?

NS: I finished CRC in the middle of October 2005 and it took almost 10 days for me to get a flight to Afghanistan. So I literally sat around waiting to get on a plane but having said that, I just didn't sit around. Georgia is home and I'm in Georgia so I went to visit my dad, my brother, and my grandmother. My kids are in college in Florida, so I came back and a couple days later I'm in a car again driving down to Tallahassee to see my kids in college but it was a couple weeks later before I actually got on the plane to go to Afghanistan.

LL: Did you have a handoff for the position you filled or were you the first person to do that?

NS: No. I wasn't the first person and I didn't have a handoff. On the joint manning document, the JMD, I was going over there to fill the deputy CJ5 position. The position was actually filled by another guy. I mean, you put guys where you need them and I didn't have an issue with that. The guy in that position had been there a few months and was very good. It was more admin-focused not planning-focused. It focused on running the directorate. When I got there and saw what the deputy did, I didn't want to do that, so I was one of the planners initially.

I worked for a Marine colonel who was short. When he left, I took over that branch and we renamed the branch the Special Initiatives Group. So I was the Special Initiatives Group chief but doing the same thing, just different title. I didn't have any overlap. The CJ5, in terms of our JMD, was between 55 and 65 percent manned so there wasn't anybody to have a handoff with. When I left, though, my replacement arrived a couple weeks before I left and we had a really good transition.

LL: What exactly was the Special Initiatives Group and what did you do?

NS: The name might imply, and probably rightly so, that whatever projects come up that need focus, you got it.

We had a policy section in the CJ5, a plans section and then we had the Special Initiatives Group. Within the Special Initiatives Group, we focused on policy direction for key programs that were either being stood up or running in Afghanistan. An example would be the partnership program which is a training and support program between Afghan National Army, the ANA, and Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan, the CFC-A. So we oversaw that program as it evolved while we were there. We were involved with the constant evolution of that program and the planning that went along with that with the Ministry of Defense.

We did the initial planning for these programs with the Afghan ministries and General Staff; Combined Joint Task Force, the CJTF-76, actually executed the programs. We were responsible for setting up, at the policy level, a similar program for the Afghan National Police, called the ANP Support Program.

We were responsible for transition policy planning, not the actual plan itself but from the policy level, and developing orders for these projects. We did some transition planning with NATO's International Security Assistance Force, the ISAF. NATO was going to eventually take over the whole country. When I got there, they had the north and the west and we had the south and the east. So we were responsible for that transition planning from a policy perspective, not the actual nuts and bolts of the transition itself. The plans section was doing the actual details of time lines and things like that.

We were responsible for a program that we started that we called the Primacy Program. It's basically how, when, and under what conditions do we hand over territory from the coalition to the Afghans. This was bigger than battle handoff of a piece of ground because we rolled development into it. We were basically planning, with the Afghans, the criteria, what conditions must be met, and how are they measured as well as the process for handing over to the Afghans full control of a province or area. This full control we termed primacy. We were basically turning over sovereignty to the Afghans. Now that sounds funny because we never occupied Afghanistan unlike Iraq, where we deposed Saddam and set up our own government initially as the provincial authority. In Afghanistan, we never governed. We never "occupied" the country.

They were always a sovereign nation so they always had sovereignty. The Afghan minister of defense could do with the Afghan Army anything he wanted to, whenever he wanted to. He didn't need our approval to do it. So I want to be very clear on that but the truth of the matter is that with the stage of development the Afghan government and country is in now, they cannot exercise full sovereignty.

We are doing a lot for them. So one of the key planning things we were working on was how to transfer full sovereignty and we were looking at doing it by province, back to the Afghans. What do we need to do, programmatically, to facilitate that? If security is an issue in this particular province, what can we do programmatically to make sure security isn't an issue? If in our ANA development program, this region is supposed to have three full brigades and they've only got two and a battalion, then maybe they need another battalion. If the next battalion is not due to come online for eight months, well maybe we need to change the program and bring that battalion online in three months. So we're looking at the programmatic that went into development, security, governance, and all that stuff.

We tried to figure out where, when, what, and how can we affect the transfer of full sovereignty to the Afghans. It was a major undertaking that dealt with all the headquarters, to include NATO headquarters under the ISAF, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, and some non-governmental organizations, the NGOs. It was a huge undertaking and took a lot of time.

We were also responsible for working with the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Finance as well as the US Embassy staff on developing a border management plan. Now in this case, we were actually working on a plan.

We were focused on the policy but we were also focused on the nuts, bolts, and details of a plan. It was a little strange because it was a plan that was eventually not going to be executed by us but by the Afghan government. So it needed the input and buy-in of key ministers.

We were working with all of them to develop a detailed plan on how we managed key border crossing points. There are, I think, 13. This is a major revenue generation issue for the Afghans so it addressed security, customs, customs police, transportation, commerce, and treasury. You're inside the border zone which is covered, in terms of security, by the police and not the army. It's a major undertaking. The embassy, in fact, was standing up a border management task force and we were helping to design what it should be and what some of the job descriptions should look like. So that was another project we worked.

LL: How much personal survey, personal liaison did you have to do? Did you go out into the provinces and such?

NS: My work was more in Kabul at the ministry level. I worked very closely with the assistant minister of defense for strategy and policy. That would be Lieutenant General Muhibullah. I worked very closely with his deputy, Major General Payenda, and his staff. I worked with the minister of the interior's staff.

Back during the presidential election, the national assembly, and the provincial council elections, the UN actually established in several places around the country, what they called provincial coordination centers or PCCs. These were really just to support the elections, securing polling sites, and making sure things were going well. After the elections, though, they all but disappeared.

We realized that those things worked very well and the potential to stabilize provinces in areas through the use of PCCs was great. So we were trying to get those reestablished, manned, equipped, and getting people trained to execute specific functions. This was a major undertaking and, in conjunction with this, I traveled to different provinces to see existing PCCs, to survey them, to see what they needed and what kind of training and equipment were needed. So there was some interface and travel with regard to that aspect of what we did in the CJ5 shop but mostly I worked right there in Kabul. With regard to the support program, the police program we were trying to get to mirror the partnership program we had with the army, I was traveling to some of the different forward operating bases, the FOBs, to talk to guys down there. These are the guys going out patrolling and responding to requests for fires and things like that.

We had some interaction with these guys with regard to what works and what doesn't work because we were getting ready to publish an order that they were going to have to execute.

Just by chance, I happened to be escorting the Training and Doctrine Command, the TRADOC, commander on a visit to one of the FOBs. I was talking to some of the guys down there and realized we had several things in our order that really weren't going to work well at their level. So I went back and told my boss that we had to get out more. This trip, just call it serendipity – I don't know, I discovered

some things that we needed to change in the order we were preparing. So he told me to get out as often as I can.

The problem is transportation. It's just tough getting around in Afghanistan. The roads are bad and the distances you have to travel are great. You almost need a helicopter to go everywhere you need to go. So we often had to hitch a ride with people who were traveling by air. That might mean you're out for four days when you really only need to be out for one or two days. You'd like to go out in the morning and come back in the evening but you're traveling with the general so if you go on this trip, you're not just going to go to one place, you're going to go to multiple places and you'll be gone for four days. Four days out of my shop hurt me. Actually it didn't but nobody likes to be away for that long a time. So there was travel out to the provinces and interaction with Afghans in all those areas but by and large our work focused on our immediate subordinate headquarters, CJTF-76, and to Task Force *Phoenix*. We worked directly with them as well. We did direct coordination with them and with ISAF headquarters, and with the ministries in Kabul.

LL: In general, what kind of support did you have?

NS: we had transportation support. We owned one vehicle and that was the director's vehicle. It was an unhardened SUV. For the kind of traveling we needed to be doing it would have been great if within the CJ5 shop, not necessarily the Special Initiatives Group, we had had three hardened Humvees with PLGRs and long guns. That would have been great. So that kind of support, if you will, the combat type support for the higher headquarter was wanting. There was a recognition that our role was operational and strategic planning, not the actual warfighting.

We're not out conducting patrols, we're not out training on the ground with the police and the army but we did have to get around. It was potentially scary getting around in unhardened SUVs. They were easy to spot, easy targets. We had guys who were ambushed. So in terms of that kind of support, it was lacking. Of course the guys who were out there fighting would tell you that that kind of support was lacking for them as well. So if it's short, who should have it? They should.

When I traveled, to Herat, I got on a small jet and we flew out there and landed and then moved around in unhardened SUVs. I didn't have any issues with the flying piece. There isn't any air threat but landing in areas where you could possibly get attacked as soon as you hit the ground and then moving around in soft-skinned vehicles, I would have liked to have had hardened vehicles.

LL: Is that endemic to basically everything in Afghanistan? Everybody would like to have that kind of asset?

NS: Yes. The NATO guys seemed to be better equipped in that respect than we were but they traveled around in soft-skinned SUVs as well. Everybody would have liked to have had more of that. I don't think I would complain about any other type of support we had over there.

LL: You already mentioned that you had a lot of contact with the Afghans in all different capacities. Did you have any interpreter/translators with you?

NS: Yes.

LL: How many and how good were they?

NS: How many depended on what we were doing at the time. Usually only one or two and you usually didn't need any more than that. They weren't great but they weren't bad. They did a pretty good job overall. The problem we were having is that a lot of these guys spoke pretty good English but at a very basic level. So sometimes their translations were literal and you can lose something in the translation.

We used one guy whose name was Omar. He was actually born right in Kabul but Omar, prior to the invasion, had spent the previous 18 years in upstate New York. So Omar is American. His dad migrated to the states 23/24 years ago. Omar's understanding of English was outstanding, as well as his understanding of our culture and how we use our language and the use of idioms. He went back to Afghanistan when he saw he could perhaps help.

They've got different dialects over there. They're speaking *Dari*, they're speaking *Pashto*, probably more *Dari* than anything else which is essentially *Farsi*. Omar was very good at that. At meetings where we had different people, Omar would make sure the translations were correct.

We did have some problems. We probably had more issues not with the spoken translation as with written. I would produce documents that had to be translated into *Dari* before I sent them to the Ministries of Defense or Finance.

We worked with their NDS a little bit, their equivalent of our CIA. Those guys were key in those PCCs that we were reestablishing and standing up. They were also key in the primacy effort that we were working on. My problem with the written translations was that they were also translated literally. You lose so much that way.

We had one document that we had translated and I gave it to General Payenda, the deputy assistant minister of defense for strategy and policy, and he then, as we were going over this document together with our Omar and another interpreter, realized there were several problems with the written translation. So General Payenda whose English was better than he ever let on but probably wasn't as good as I imagined it was, understood a lot of what was said. He said he would take

it and get with Lieutenant General Karimi. General Karimi was the operations officer, the G3, on the General Staff. General Karimi is a US Army Ranger and his English is excellent. This guy is a fantastic story altogether. We won't go there but what General Payenda did was get together with General Karimi and they took our translation and, working from it, put it in the right words. Then they gave it back to me. Of course, they didn't have the automation to produce documents the way we did but he and Karimi went through and put this thing in the right words and then gave it back to us. Then our translators looked at it and approved it, so then we published the documents.

We had more problems like that with written communications than with verbal. The verbal wasn't too bad. It wasn't too bad at all. Every time I went to the Minister of the Interior, he had his own interpreter, and every time I went to the Minister of Finance, he had an interpreter too. They were pretty good. The guys in the NDS that I worked mostly with, one of them got his master's degree from Georgetown. So we didn't have problems talking with him. The NDS director's English was excellent.

We didn't always need an interpreter but we always took one with us just in case. For the most part, verbally there wasn't any issue. It was the written translation of documents that we had more problems with.

LL: Did you run into any cultural obstacles while you were there in Afghanistan?

NS: Yes, much like the one I mentioned in Iraq in how we get things done. There is a tendency to do things the way you're familiar with and there's nothing wrong with that. The Afghans need help and they recognize they need help, so they're very reluctant to say they don't want to do something and that it wasn't a good idea or it's a good idea but they don't want to do it that way. So they'll go along with a lot of stuff or they'll say they will and then go out and do it their way which can be a frustration and cause problems. So there were some issues like that.

One of the things had to do specifically with bodies. We moved some bodies and handled the corpses in a way that was taboo in their religion and it caused a stink. We didn't know any better.

When General William Wallace was over there and I was escorting him to the different FOBs and to our various subordinate commands, he would ask the guys what they needed and what he could do for them. One of the things he wanted to know was how could TRADOC, as an institution, better train and equip guys for the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. I gather from his comments that he got some of the same responses when he was in Iraq doing the same thing – language. That's just impractical, though. To train an Arab linguist in the basic course at the Defense Language Institute, the DLI, which we say is the best language training institute in the world, takes 63 weeks and we're lucky if we get a 2-2 linguist which is the

a level two in reading and a level two in comprehension, out of that. That's one guy for 63 weeks. You just can't train enough guys to put several linguists in every unit. You're not going to get that and General Wallace, I think, made the comment, "You're going to get in trouble more from cultural *faux pas* than from saying the wrong thing." These guys understand that this is not our language.

We just have to be able to hire good interpreters. You're going to say the wrong thing at times if you're trying to speak the language. You'll laugh about it and you'll move on but the cultural things such as handling corpses the wrong way, handling children or women or whatever the case, that's going to get you in trouble more than not being able to speak the language. So we did have some problems and that one with the corpses jumped out at me. We didn't handle the bodies in a way that's acceptable in their culture. By the way, I didn't have a cultural advisor either.

LL: Did your translators ever try to steer you in the right direction with regard to certain cultural items?

NS: Well, yeah, Omar was very good and I'll use him as an example. He actually wasn't *my* translator. He worked for the '3. We in the '5 didn't have our own but I could get him anytime I needed him. So I kind of saw him as mine. He was very good at that.

Of course the guys who translated documents were just a pool of people. We turned in our documents and it could be somebody different every time translating documents. I don't know exactly how many translators they had in that pool of four or five, whoever could get to yours quickest would get to it. So it's not like you're using the same guy all the time who understands your lane. Those guys would just literally translate what you gave them. They wouldn't put the right spin on it, although I didn't want them to. I wanted them to translate and then we'll talk about the kind of spin that needs to be there. We didn't talk about what the meaning is. Omar kind of guided us. He gave us a little bit of guidance on some cultural things. Some of the other ones didn't. They're there to do the job. You work with a guy and get to know him and you get that kind of guidance. If it's somebody you're not working with regularly, you don't.

We had it great with Omar. Some of the other guys we worked with, some of the contractors over there we worked with, had their interpreters they worked with all the time and they got that kind of support from them. So when we worked with them and their interpreters, that bled over to us as well, so that was good. We got some of that but not always.

LL: Did you ever encounter tribalism or sectarian divides that stopped or slowed you down from doing what you wanted to accomplish?

NS: Not me personally in anything I did. Of course you heard about some of that stuff and that was more at the tactical level. One of the things we insisted on in Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic army. I don't mean you have an *Uzbek* company in the battalion, you have a *Tajik* company in the battalion, no, I mean full integration. You had *Uzbeks*, *Tajiks*, *Hazaras* all in the same platoon. We insisted on that. It is working and the Afghans kind of like it.

Now, that creates some problems with them in terms of some travel type things and language, believe it or not. There are some Afghan company commanders who can't communicate very well with some of their platoon leaders because they're speaking different dialects and that creates problems but yes, we had heard about some of those things occasionally but I never experienced any of it.

LL: In general, how did you find the conditions there?

NS: Rotten. Let me qualify that a little bit better. You'd asked about support earlier. As to life support, the food was great. Of course you have to complain about food because it's the easiest thing to complain about. The air quality was horrible. In fact, I had heard and it was pretty much acknowledged by the medical community over there that 15 percent of the pollutants in the air are fecal matter. It's dirty, it's dusty, the road conditions are bad but the food was good.

The living quarters were adequate. As a lieutenant colonel who has been in the Army as long as I have, I kind of like to have my own room but I had a roommate and the rooms were small. I ended up moving once while I was there onto the installation as a matter of fact. I was the only one in the room I lived in at that point. My walk-in closet here is bigger than that whole room. I could literally stand in the middle of my room there, hold my arms out, lean back and forth and touch one wall and then the other. So in terms of living conditions I wouldn't complain about them but they weren't great.

The same was true with working conditions. We worked long hours, oftentimes with ambiguous guidance. That's not a reflection of poor command guidance. That's a reflection of very complex issues. Travel was very difficult in terms of not always having the assets to travel and the roads were just horrible. The living conditions weren't the greatest but I wouldn't complain about them. I'm an infantry guy. The Air Force guys over there, that's all they could talk about.

One of the things I always made sure I did when I was going to be at Afghan facilities, I used the latrine before I left to go there because facilities like that, you didn't want to walk into in a lot of places. So the conditions weren't great. To say they were good would be a stretch.

As an infantry guy, I will tell you that you're in a combat zone and there's active fighting going on every day. So you could argue that it isn't bad but I expected, as

a higher headquarters, and we were the highest US headquarters there, I expected a three-star headquarters to have some nice facilities but that wasn't the case. In fact, Camp Eggers which is where CFC-A was, was probably the smallest camp in Afghanistan. The accommodations and the amenities, if you will, were better at every place I've visited than they were at CFC-A. Now, frankly, I don't know that I have a problem with that. I want the troops who are going out every day to hunt bad guys down to have the best. I'm sitting back there in Kabul relatively safe. Push some of those creature comforts down to the guys. Use the money for their facilities instead of up here. It's adequate back here.

LL: How much contact did you have with other US services?

NS: Quite a bit.

LL: Did you run into any cultural differences?

NS: You always do. I just mentioned one. Strangely enough too, my boss after the Marine colonel left was actually the CJ5.

One day we were complaining about the food. This guy's a British colonel. We were in the chow hall eating together and he just kind of laughed and said, "Oh yeah, this is *really* bad." His sarcasm put things in perspective for us. We were eating, the chow was very good and it was pretty well prepared but when you have the same thing a lot, it can get old so you start complaining about it. Essentially my boss was saying, "This is *the* best I had ever seen, anywhere, in my whole career, and you guys are bitching about it? Give me a break!"

In terms of contact with the other services and other countries that were part of the Coalition, there were some cultural differences but nothing that hindered our work. What hindered work, in some respects, was that the Air Force would only send guys there for three months at a time or sometimes for four months. It takes you three months to really figure out what's going on. Well, if you're leaving in three months, you never really quite figure out what's going on. Depending on what job they were in, some of them would be there longer. So that created some problems.

We have some of the same problems in the Army, though. The Army will send some guys there for six months at a time. Well, okay, I'll get six months from you but it means that I'll probably get three months of good work out of you but were there any cultural differences between our services that hindered the mission? No. I didn't see it anyway, other than the tour lengths. The Marines would send guys there for four to six months. The Navy would send guys there for six months. The Army, we'd send guys there for a year.

The Navy has come on board and has started sending guys there for a year. Before I left, we had a couple Navy guys come to the directorate for a one-year

tour. So I think all the services have recognized that the three-to-four-month tours don't really cut it. You can have an LNO, the Liaison Officer, for three months but I would even argue that an LNO is a guy who really needs to understand more than his mission. He needs to understand yours, your subordinate element's and he needs to understand the bigger picture. You need him there for longer.

So, the cultural differences happen at the institutional level of the Department of the Army, the Department of the Navy, and the Air Force level where tour lengths are set. That then got in the way of some productivity because what do you do with a female MP or a female information technology specialist who's in your '5 shop for three months and hasn't any idea about plans? There was an Air Force billet on the JMD for a lieutenant colonel and they gave us a lieutenant colonel for three months. Even if it's the right mix and you say what you want in terms of experience in those positions, the services try to fill that, I think. Still, for three months, you're not getting a whole lot out of somebody in three months.

LL: What about NGOs? Did you ever have to try to coordinate with NGOs in some of this nation-building planning?

NS: I was in meetings where there was NGO representation but these weren't my meetings. I was part of some joint planning groups, the JPGs. I took part in JPGs that had NGO representation but they weren't *my* JPGs. Essentially no.

LL: Contact was just incidental?

NS: Incidental, yes.

LL: What did you find to be your biggest challenge or challenges while you were in Afghanistan?

NS: From what I did, and I've already kind of hit on this, getting out and about to have a different perspective on things from top down. That top-down perspective isn't always accurate. Your information will be accurate but the perspective is different. So it was a challenge getting out and about to understand things better from the perspective of the subordinate headquarters. I thought working with NATO was challenging. I've been assigned to a NATO unit before. I really enjoyed it and I think NATO does good work but there was a challenge getting things coordinated with them because we basically go about things differently. The American way of doing things versus the European way of doing things is, I think, what it really boiled down to. So coordinating some things with NATO was a bit of a challenge.

We wasted far too much time on details which, to me, were inconsequential. There was a document that we were coordinating with the Ministry of Defense that NATO obviously had to be a part of because they were going to take over this program. It had to do with the partnership program. You wouldn't believe the amount of time we spent on this sentence or these words. Words are important,

they mean things and I understand that but we spent an inordinate amount of time on documents, getting them both to our satisfactions.

I think that wasn't so much at the commander's level. Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry never saw these things until we were ready for him to sign them. Yes, he'd have a draft copy to comment on earlier and give us guidance but then as we went through and were able to get the commander's guidance and his intent, he wouldn't see it again until we thought we had the final product to put before him and Lieutenant General Sir David Richards, or his predecessor Lieutenant General Mauro Del Vecchio.

So it isn't commanders, it's their staff guys who are making sure their commanders' interests are protected. I had too many issues on some of that. Now some of that is that there's one NATO headquarters but you're dealing with 26 different nations within that headquarters. In other words, there are some things that General Richards as the commander down there would like to be able to mandate but it was just the nature of the beast. So that was a big challenge, getting some things coordinated with NATO. Another challenge I think that we have in Afghanistan is resourcing and this isn't just me with regard to my job, obviously this trickles to everybody who is working over there.

LL: How would you say the overall effort in Afghanistan was or is being resourced?

NS: I think the mission in Afghanistan is under-resourced. We say the main effort in the Global War on Terrorism, the GWOT, is Iraq. Strictly my personal opinion which does not reflect the command's view is that it's misplaced. The main effort should be Afghanistan. Iraq, in my mind, is going to be what it's going to be and we've done everything we can to influence that. In terms of the political Iraq, post-Saddam, we have done everything we can to influence what Iraq is going to look like five years to a decade from now. We can't do any more than we have already done. Iraq was a developed nation with good infrastructure of communications; roads, banking, and its people were educated. You're not going to change that culture. You're not going to change their mindset in just a few years.

Yes, we were helping to reestablish a government but to the extent that we can influence what that government long term is going to look like, we've culminated. This is Nate Stevenson's personal opinion. That's not the case in Afghanistan when 60 or greater percent of the population can't read their own name, they're illiterate. They understand right and wrong, good and bad, and that we're there to help, and they still overwhelmingly want us there. Now, there are some who are saying that our presence there does get in the way sometimes and innocents get hurt sometimes when we conduct operations and whatnot. So, it's easy to find people who are discontented with our presence but overwhelmingly the Afghans aren't.

They understand we need to be there and they understand that we, the international community, are pumping a lot of money into their development.

Given the extremely high illiteracy rate there, it's going to be a couple decades before we can really step back. That gives us a couple decades to get it right, make friends and really influence what it's going to look like 20 years from now.

The kids in Iraq would maul me, trying to sell me candy and gum at outrageous prices, or they would beg for gadgets. The kids in Afghanistan were asking for pens, notebooks. We're starting schools and they want to go to learn to read and write and do math. That's what they were asking me for. Well, it's when those kids are 25 to 30 years old and are now local leaders, store owners, members of parliament, other government jobs, that we then can proudly say our job there is about 95 percent done. Because those who follow them are going to hopefully be educated broadly.

We have to make sure they're broadly educated, not just in *madrassas*. They need to have a broad education and they need to understand how the world outside Afghanistan works, looks, and functions. They don't need to understand computers. Well, they need to understand that too but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm saying they, from a systems perspective, need to understand how the world works. So it's when those young kids who are on the streets now begging for school supplies are in jobs and their children are teenagers, that's when we can say, okay, "We've probably got it licked here." So we have all that time to influence Afghanistan.

We're not making a little America over there. That's not what I'm talking about at all. I'm talking about a country that understands global standards, global norms, and global ways of doing business. I think that's where our main effort ought to be but it isn't and the resources reflect that. Arguably when and if we finally draw down in Iraq, we might be able to divert other resources to Afghanistan and maybe make a bigger difference faster. One of the things we're trying to do over there is accelerate how quickly we can give them full sovereignty but we're trying to do so much with a very small percentage of the population that can read a document we give them, a document in their own language.

So that's, I think, a challenge that we're trying to do the mission and I think we're really under resourced. I don't mean that just from the military perspective. Overall we're under-resourced. The international community is not putting in the effort in terms of building civilian institutions and providing mentors for those civilian institutions. The military is trying to build some of those but we need to get out of that business. Yes, we have Commander's Emergency Response Program, the CERP, funds that we can use for this and that but you know what? We need to get out of that business.

We need to let some international contracts for people to come in there and build roads so the military isn't doing it. Build them here, build them there, the plan is to develop with the Afghans. Roads support commerce and the military too but if roads support commerce, getting your goods to and fro, they're also going to support getting people to and fro. There are things the military is doing over there that are better done by civilian contractors so we can focus on crushing a resurgent Taliban, so we can also focus on maintaining security here.

We go into an area and do a security op for a month, get rid of all the bad influence and now we have to move on to the next place to clear them out. Well, guess what happens in the previous area? The bad guys move back in when we go because we don't have the resources to stay. It's getting better now but our development plan wasn't synched with our security plan. In other words, we'd go in and do a security operation in one location, move on, and the bad guys would move back in a month later. While we were there and had it secured, we needed to come in there with development, strong development efforts, to get the proper facilities stood up and things going before we moved on. Even after you move on, you still have to have something from keeping the bad guys coming back in and blowing up what you did.

Schools were a popular target over there. They don't want the kids educated. I heard recently that a school principal was assassinated. He was shot in the head by the Taliban. So they're targeting schools and children and teachers, and you know what? The teachers, the parents, and the kids themselves are still going to school. They want to go to school. So that's a challenge. It's a long way of saying that resources are a challenge.

LL: Any other challenges that come to mind?

NS: Some of our other challenges we should have overcome by now. They were related to the command structure there. You had a US-led coalition, you had NATO, parallel headquarters not subordinate to the others, and different ways of doing things.

NATO won't do the counterterrorist mission so we maintain that mission. We reserve the right to go anywhere in the country to conduct counterterrorist missions, even in NATO-controlled grounds. Well, that still has to be coordinated and you have to have agreements and things like that. Those are some of the things my shop did too.

We negotiated this agreement with NATO. The Central Command, the CENT-COM, commander and the Joint Force Command Commander Brunssum signed a memorandum of agreement basically detailing how they would support each other. Then we developed an implementing arrangement that gave the details of how that would happen. My office was responsible for that implementing arrangement.

We got into a lot of issues with NATO and the challenge of coordinating things with them on that. We'd say, "Guys, you're not doing counterterrorism, we are, and we reserve the right to go anywhere in the country to do it." The two higher commanders understood that and said it was acceptable, we could go anywhere in the country to conduct counterterrorism but then we had to work out what coordination measures needed to be in place and what we were going to do when we need to come into their battlespace to conduct these. Oh by the way, if it's time sensitive, some of that can't happen, so this is what we do. So we had a lot of challenges with that kind of stuff but now that NATO has control of security of the whole country, we've turned over all the ground to them. Some of those kinds of problems should have gone away. That happened after I left, so I say "should have." The counterterrorism piece is still there because NATO will not do that.

One of the challenges that I hinted to is synchronizing the development plan with security. I think we're doing that better. We recognize it as a problem area but that's not something the military by itself can solve. That's why you do have to get NGOs in there to work on development issues.

The provincial reconstruction teams, the PRTs, do development stuff. They're not there for security purposes. They're there for reconstruction and stability. So you have to get those guys involved. In our areas, the PRT commander worked with that brigade combat team commander, that tactical commander who owned the ground. In NATO that wasn't the case. The PRTs answer directly back to their capitals, not necessarily the NATO commander on the ground. So, synchronizing all those efforts for development and getting it synchronized with security operations so you don't lose your development effort or it doesn't take three steps back because now you've got to focus somewhere else on security was a bit of a challenge. I know NATO had this plan called "development zones" that they were trying to implement to fix that.

They were basically saying they were going to secure different areas, stay there and they had a plan for securing these areas while development takes place. No, they couldn't cover the whole country simultaneously so they had to do it in small bits. They would use their resources where they could.

One of the other challenges and it's not so much our challenge but rather an Afghan challenge that we deal with, is they don't have a banking infrastructure. My check goes directly to the bank and I can write a check anywhere in the United States and basically anywhere in the world. Well, in Afghanistan, they don't have such a system. So when Joe Private gets paid, he's got to take his check home. He'll spend half his check on the round-trip bus ticket to get home. These guys only get \$70 a month but he has to take it home and it takes a long time to get there and a long time to get back because of the roads. He's been fighting this war since

2001 and the army, I guess, really didn't exist before 2001 as a national army. So since 2001, he's tired. He's home with his money, he stays for a while and doesn't get back right away, so he's AWOL. He doesn't care because there aren't any consequences. Now we're working to put consequences into the system, so we're developing this stuff. It isn't that this guy wants to be a deserter. He just wants to spend some time at home. When he's ready to go back, he goes back. Some guys show up two months after they've been declared AWOL ready to go to work. The attrition rate of Afghan National Army soldiers is a bit of a challenge for us, attrition for all reasons such as combat losses and desertions.

They lose a lot every month, almost as much as they take in. So the growth rate is slow in the military or their contract is up. It's an all-volunteer army so nobody's drafted over there. So when the contract is up, they're gone. Since we insist on this ethnically diverse organization, guys are far removed from their home areas. We'd have a *Tajik* who lives in one spot but he's in a unit far from home, so it takes him four days to get home. They want to be close to home. The police, on the other hand, we haven't made them ethnically diverse. The police work in the areas where they live and they're at home. That's probably a good idea.

So there are issues we're dealing with in regard to the police and the army and how they're managed and so on and so forth. Yes, you could say that's an Afghan problem but that's a coalition problem too because we're helping them develop their institutions and their procedures. So we deal with that. I don't know if those are the kinds of challenges you had in mind when you asked the question but those are just some of them that we're facing as an organization.

Here's another challenge. One that I talked about was the resourcing. Well, part of that too is configuration. CJTF-76 comes over there to fight a war, to go out and hunt down Taliban and insurgents and shoot them in the face. Hoo-ah! That's what we want them to do. I think we're at the point of development but again this is Nate Stevenson's personal opinion here and not necessarily a command viewpoint. The Afghan National Army can fight. We're not teaching those guys how to fight. We're trying to teach them how to be a professional army.

They've been fighting for a long time. What we need to do is accelerate their development as a national army and we don't have the training structure in country to do that. Every year we send over and rotate the CJTF-76 to come over to fight a war. I think there's less warfighting that needs to be done over there than training and development. So the training and development unit that's over there is inadequate in terms of size to take care of the function. That's what Task Force *Phoenix* does. All the embedded training teams, the ETTs that are embedded in the ANA are what those guys are there to do. They teach them how to run an army and how to run a company. Not how to fight but how to run a company. One of the

things they do, because these guys are out in combat with the Afghans, is if they have a need for medical evacuation or close air support, the ETTs are calling that in.

We don't have any Afghan pilots flying close air support missions for us. So they provide some of those, what I used to call combat multipliers. We're calling them "enablers" now because they enable the ANA. So we're providing those things through our ETTs. Well, we don't have enough of those out there to do that. With the Afghan National Army spread out all over the country, these 16 ETT guys have to coordinate with a battalion that's conducting company operations in three different locations for example. Well, you have to cut that ETT up in four different pieces with a battalion headquarters and three companies. So we don't have enough of that structure to do the job and that's creating a bit of a challenge. That's why we came up with the partnership programs.

We link these guys up with the US combat units out there to kind of accelerate their operational development but we need more of those Task Force *Phoenix* organizations over there. You could probably take the CJTF-76 and make sure it's more configured, not specifically for a lot of combat operations but for some of that training development operation, the guys in Task Force *Phoenix* doing that? Those are guardsmen and reservists who are mobilized and come over to do that.

We don't have that rank structure in an Active Component element to do that. To take a brigade out of the Active Component and give them that mission, you're going to have to take a division and gut its leadership to get enough of the right rank and expertise in that brigade to go over to do that mission. So, we don't have the right force structure over there to do what I think is the predominant mission now.

Yes, the combat mission is still there and you still have to do the security mission. NATO is taking on a bigger part of that and the training piece now. With all the caveats the different nations have against certain types of functions of combat, getting on aircraft, not providing any kind of fiscal or material support causes the bulk of what's happening in terms of their development as an institution is being underwritten by the US. So we need to make sure the force structure we're sending over there is configured more for that mission and less for the combat role now.

LL: What were the biggest professional lessons learned you took away from your time in Afghanistan?

NS: The getting around. You have to do that. There is a tendency for us to make a decision on things and go with it and then the Afghans just kind of get on board.

We need to start pulling them in. In fact, they're starting to assert themselves which is a good thing and we recognize that and appreciate it. The biggest lesson learned from my perspective with what I did was getting out and about. You can't be a staff officer in a combat zone and just stay at headquarters and think you know what's going on because you don't.

LL: If you could make one recommendation based on your experience in Afghanistan to the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Secretary of the Army or the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?

NS: Afghanistan needs to be the main effort in resources in this GWOT. I know that's broad and not a specific recommendation but I think we need to look at resourcing the mission in Afghanistan better. When I was getting ready to leave to come back, I wanted to have a final office call with the guys in the Afghan ministries I'd been working with. I was sitting in General Payenda's office and he commented that, "Just about the time we start working really well together and we're getting to know each other really well, you guys leave. That's not a complaint. I understand that. I understand you all have families, you're separated from your families, you have to go home and we really appreciate your efforts but I'm sorry to see you go." Quite frankly, I was in a hurry to get back to see my wife and children but I was sorry to leave. So I've been heard to say, and I'm not sure how much I believe it but I think a year is too short; and I think for unit deployments, a year is too short as well. The guys in Task Force *Phoenix* will tell you: "We got it, we're starting to click, and then presto, we're starting the transition with another unit." That's a two-year assignment per unit. I'd just make that a two-year assignment. You'll then experience some of the things we now have trouble conceiving of with the Afghans. Okay, you've been here two years fighting but that guy's been fighting for *four* years. Now you understand why we have to be real hard on implementing a red, amber, green training operations cycle because these guys need some red time.

They've been in the green cycle for four or five years, you know? They need some red time. While we have that in writing, it's not being implemented very well for a lot of reasons but we've just got to be pricks about it in making it happen. I would make tours over there two-year tours. I would certainly get rid of the six-month tour and anything less than that. Nine months might be about right for an individual augmentee to a staff. So that would be my recommendation to resource it better and with longer tours.

LL: How did you deal with family separation while you were over there?

NS: Well, you know, it's not so bad. That wasn't the first separation in my military career. My wife and children understand that and everybody in the military understands that. At the headquarters level, you have pretty good access

to computers, so you're emailing every day or every other day. There's such a great outpouring of support for the soldiers over there and in Iraq.

You get these packets from www.anysoldier.com. They send you phone cards. You use phone cards when you can and you call home. In some places guys were able to call home every day. When somebody asked me if I called my wife every day, I said I didn't talk to my wife that much when I'm at home. Why would I call her every day? The separation isn't too terrible to deal with. Why is that? Well, in Nate Stevenson's opinion, you're more focused on your job there.

Everything is real. It's very real that you could die tomorrow. It's very real that your vehicle could get blown up by a suicide VBIED on your way to your safe house this evening. It's very real that you could hit an IED. The days are long. You're focused on what you're doing. You're not concerned about paying this bill, how well Ben's doing in school, the football team, or how your wife is dealing with all of that. So you have to call her frequently to make sure she's got you to vent to and whatnot and keep you informed but that's not your focus. You're over and you're focused on your mission, so it makes the time go. The year was up before I knew it which kind of helps support my idea that a year is too short.

We tried to put things on our camps to give soldiers some diversions. We're into gyms and staying in shape, so we put a gym in on the installation. We had some free weights in there, some machines and some treadmills. We tried to make sure your chow was the last thing you're upset over. So the contractor who provided the food was doing a great job. So things like that.

We didn't get a whole lot of morale, welfare, and recreation or MWR while I was there, although a few USO shows came. I'm personally not into USO shows. We did have some NFL football players come over and I thought it was interesting to talk to them but it was good when we had congressmen come over. We probably had them coming over too often. There were representatives from your state and things like that. Yeah, I think we probably had too many of those visits but those guys need a firsthand view of what's going on so that's just something you have to live with. We had some representatives from my state and they'd want to have dinner with the guys. So I had an opportunity to eat with one of my representatives and it was a good conversation. He's a good guy. So all those kinds of things mitigated the ill effects of separation from family but guys don't really focus so much on that, especially if they know they're going to be there for a year.

They're focusing on the mission. If you're only there for 90 days, you can't wait to get home. What you're hoping is that your flight out actually starts on the second of the month so you get the combat pay and tax exclusion for that whole month too but yes, the 90-day guys are waiting to go home. The one-year guys settle down, nose to the grindstone and get it done. Now, don't get me wrong, that's

kind of a blanket statement. The guys who are there for 90 days hit the ground just like everybody else, excited about being there, want to work but after 30 days those guys know they're going home in a couple months and you lose them after the next 30 days. When you're 30 days out, if you're lucky and you got somebody backfilling you and you're doing some transitions, you got other things you're trying to do and there are some social things to go to. You want to get to the market if you can and buy scarves and souvenirs and things like that, so your last two weeks there you're not being very productive.

Dealing with the separation is a personal thing. People deal with it differently. If you're there for a year, you get a mid-tour two weeks of leave and your time doesn't start until you hit the ground in the States and it ends when you leave. Getting in and out of theater can sometimes be difficult. You might fly from Afghanistan to Qatar and then you might wait in Qatar for a week before you can get a flight back to the States. You don't have priority. Units have the higher priority and you're space available. So, mid-tours are great. Guys look forward to mid-tour leaves.

If you're there for a year you also get a four-day pass in each half of your tour there too. In Afghanistan, you take your pass in Qatar. That's the pass location. So you go to Qatar and you go to movie theaters and you hang out at the pool, you can have a beer. You can't have beer in Afghanistan. So if you're there for a year, you take advantage of those things, you're focused on the mission, the amenities are there. The conditions aren't great but you have a gym. Yeah, okay, I eat in a tent but it's not too bad.

LL: Do you know what your next assignment is going to be?

NS: Retirement. I got my orders. On 1 July 2007 I retire.

LL: Any regrets?

NS: About going to Afghanistan?

LL: No, no, about the retirement.

NS: Oh no. I've loved every minute of it. My retirement will be my mandatory retirement but frankly, when I was a lieutenant I never thought I'd be in the Army 20 years. I didn't come in with the intent of making it a career. I came in with the intent of doing one tour, maybe two, and then getting out. There was just one thing after another. I just kind of liked what I was doing, or this looked good and I wanted to try it.

At about the 12-year mark, I was going to get out and work for the Drug Enforcement Agency, the DEA. I had interviews set up and so on but I had a long conversation with my dad and after that I figured okay, yeah, I've been in 12 years, I might as well do 20. As the 20-year mark was approaching, I hadn't done a whole

lot to transition into another job at that point in time. When my oldest son told me that if I retired he would be a senior in high school and have to face another move, I said I'd stick around for another year. It was that year that I deployed to Kuwait. While in Kuwait, I got offered the opportunity for the fellowship. I got selected for it which was a year with a two-year payback. I was overseas for that payback so it was a three-year tour, and I was going to come back to the States to retire but then there was Afghanistan, so it was just one thing after another and it dragged it out this long but I don't have any regrets in any step of the way. I enjoyed it but it's time to move on.

LL: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your deployment either to Iraq or Afghanistan?

NS: Our presence and our efforts are needed in both locations. There's a lot of talk today about drawing down in Iraq or to use the president's words, "cut and run." I indicated to you earlier that I thought we've done about as much good as we can in terms of influencing the midterm political future of Iraq or what it's going to look like politically, economically, socially. We're not going to change much in Iraq so it's probably time to leave but the conditions haven't, in my mind, been set to leave yet. I think we can't leave a fledgling government incapable of governing that whole country in the wake of our departure.

We've got to have solid institutions, not all of them but key institutions firmly grounded under the command of the central government that has security forces loyal to it before we can leave. I'm not sure we have all that in Iraq yet. We have to create that so we can get out. Now, I think we need to surge to do that, although I don't necessarily mean militarily.

We might need to surge militarily temporarily to quell the sectarian fighting in Baghdad, and I'm sure there might be some elsewhere in the country too but what we're all hearing about is what's happening in Baghdad, so militarily we can surge to get that under control a little bit but the international community needs to surge too. NGOs need to surge, international organizations need to surge, the organizations that are helping to ground Iraqi governmental institutions need to surge, so that within a year our presence there can be significantly reduced. I think we're going to have to have some kind of a presence there for the next four or five years but we don't need 140,000 troops there.

We could probably go with 30,000 troops there after this year or after a year and a half if we surge in the right places. Like I said, if it's up to the US to do it alone, we're going to be there awhile but if we can convince the international community, those international organizations, those NGOs, the other governmental organizations, our friends and allies to all come together and agree on a plan for surging to make sure that that fledgling government is well grounded and its key

institutions are well grounded and we've got security for the most part in Baghdad, then we can start to pull out. When we pull out, Iraq is going to start to look different because the Iraqis are going to have more and more control of it and they're going to do things differently than the coalition is doing things.

They might be much harsher and more brutal in putting down sectarian violence. Sometimes it's the only thing these guys understand is the hammer. So there's some efficacy to that old adage that you fight fire with fire. Of course our national values don't allow us to do that and I agree with that national value. You just can't be brutal sometimes but war is not pleasant and sometimes you just have to crush your enemy. We're fighting a coalition war over there with coalition partners who don't believe in crushing your enemy. So, we have to surge to create the right conditions to allow us to draw down within a year to 18 months. This is my personal opinion.

We can draw down that much by the year's end or by 18 months and be down to about 40,000 troops which means bringing 100,000 home, and maybe 30,000 of those end up in Afghanistan to do the training missions over there.

LL: Thank you very much.

Major John Bates
5 March 2007

LL: My name is Laurence Lessard (LL) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major John Bates (JB) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 5 March 2007 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information; and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. To start off with, let's have a little personal background. Where do you call home, how did you get interested in the Army and how did you get commissioned?

JB: I'm from Lexington, Kentucky. My commissioning source was the University of Kentucky ROTC. I started out in the Guard and now I work full time for the National Guard Bureau in Washington, DC since roughly 2002. All my male family members have at some time or another been in the military and I pretty much started following in their footsteps. I got a little lost in college and felt this was a better direction. I never thought that, 17 years later, I'd still be in doing this but the country calls.

LL: When did you first find out that you were going to deploy to Afghanistan?

JB: Roughly 60 days prior to the mobilization date. I was executive officer, the XO, at the National Guard Bureau to the director of the Army National Guard, the three-star general. My son was six months old and my wife and I had no other family in the area and I had to train my replacement for the general.

Then I had to sell my home and move my family, so I think 60 days was about right. I moved her back to her family while I was gone. When I found out, it was the middle of March 2005. I mobilized the last week of April 2005.

LL: Once you mobilized, how much pre-deployment training did you go through?

JB: They squeezed 10 days of training into 60 and I'm already on record on that one. Things have been changed from that already but it was roughly a 60-day training cycle, post-mobilization training, at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. It was done under the auspices of First Army, Lieutenant General Russel Honoré's group and the training support brigade, the TSB, there at Camp Shelby that didn't have any idea what our mission was or what responsibilities to train, other than here are these Combined Forces Land Component Command [CFLCC] guidelines of anyone going into theater. So, it was very rudimentary and just an absolutely unworthy experience.

LL: Was any of the pre-deployment training worthwhile?

JB: Yes. Number one, you're building your group dynamics even though it's not the group you're going to be working with in theater. There are inherent benefits of just wearing the uniform every day. An example of how misleading the training was is that you got one day of instruction on the .50 cal but you didn't get to fire the .50 cal and the .50 cal was your mainstay over there for every vehicle, or the 240B or what have you. You were required to take eight hours of precision lightweight GPS receiver, the PLGR, training, although they issued us defense advanced GPS receivers, the DAGRs, which is the new version of the PLGR but would not give us training on the DAGR because they didn't have anyone to train us. It wasn't part of the CFLCC requirement to have DAGR training, although we're going to send you to war with a DAGR.

Another good example of how things were not done correctly is that we were issued PAC-4s, the infrared laser and floodlight on the front of your weapon, and NVG 7Bs, the really high-speed new ones but when it came to night firing, we weren't allowed to use those optics for night firing and we also went into theater without instruction on how to use them. Also they had not been zeroed or even familiarized. The first time I used it was in an actual gunfight the day I got into Afghanistan. What was tough was that they compressed our 60-day training. It was supposed to have been more like 90 to 95 days and so, to use old football acronym, we were doing two-a-days during daylight hours where we were on ranges and in the evenings we were in class instruction until 2300 to midnight. We'd then get up at five o'clock and do it again.

We spent 14 hours on the range to shoot 40 rounds. Being a major at the time and having been in the military for 15 years and there may have been a staff sergeant in the organization but everyone was predominantly a sergeant first class and higher and a captain and higher. It was really poor training. Several of our instructors started the courses off with, "Gentlemen, I realize you're very senior and I apologize but I have to teach this course as if you're a female truck driver just out of basic training without any experience," let alone several of us had already been in a combat zone before.

It was, like I said, very disheartening. I wrote a complete after-action review, the AAR, on it and shipped it back to the National Guard Bureau which the deputy director himself took around the country and told people was factual. I took the training blanket of what we did and didn't receive and although I'm opinionated here because this is my oral history, it was a very factual document and he actually called me in theater and thanked me for delivering it

As a result of that and my future job as the commanding general's XO, we changed the way embedded training teams, the ETTs, were trained. It was brought

to Fort Riley, Kansas and the 1st Infantry Division took over the role of training for that because it had been so inadequate.

LL: Did the pre-deployment training contain any cultural or language pieces?

JB: Oh yes, well, "This is really for Iraq but Iraq is similar to Afghanistan." That's how the class would start. Don't show the bottoms of your feet, don't shake with your left hand. It was irrelevant cultural training.

We had four days of *Dari* lessons but we were in *Pashto* areas. Also, Afghans aren't Arabs. When they talk about the cultural, they should be discussing how the Afghan military works.

They're used to a Soviet-style doctrine where the NCO corps is not very well developed. That type of cultural background, versus not giving them the evil eye and not talking to women types of nuances which are not true.

LL Did you receive any further training once you got into theater?

JB: Oh yes, sir. I arrived in theater and the first day in Kandahar you're paired up with your organization. I was a company ETT and we were assigned to the operational control of Task Force 31 which was a Special Forces [SF] task group for the southern area of responsibility or AOR, for Afghanistan. You're immediately paired with an SF A-team that takes you under their wing and they pretty much train you as a member almost before you see your infantry company.

They want to make sure you're a contributor and not a deficit to them. That's not a training process, though. I mean, they wait to see how you'll function in combat also before you actually earn your keep with them. SF really put us through our transition, firing drills, up/down drills, using 60 millimeter mortars, the Gustav, the Mk19, the Mk47, the 240B, the squad automatic weapon or SAW, and the .50 cal.

We had to go through some more close air support classes and do some on-the-job when we actually get in a troops-in-contact. They'd say, "Here, you take the phone on this one and we'll walk you through it." So the SF really did a great job spinning you up because you're walking into advanced light infantry scenarios or situations and your 60-day train up. When you were doing infantry tactics, they wouldn't allow you to walk in the woods. They were scared you'd get lost. You had to do all your movement to contacts in open fields so you wouldn't get lost. It was quite disheartening.

We also did a lot of shooting from the vehicles, shooting around the vehicles which, of course, in the States, you have to stop the vehicle, put it in park and turn the vehicle off, everyone gets on line in front of the vehicles. It was very unrealistic training. From what I understand it's a safety issue so you don't shoot the vehicle but what's bad about that is you're not practicing like you're playing the first time

you're engaged. You'll get out, you'll walk in front of the vehicle, you'll lay down to return fire instead of actually learning how to use the vehicle or the tires or the engine block, especially when you're at complete defilade to them and they're just on top of you. The only safe place is trying to squeeze underneath the engine block to return fire.

LL: When you were at Camp Shelby, were you already divided up into ETTs or did that happen afterwards?

JB: We were. Just real quickly, it's important to understand that Task Force *Phoenix* is the parent organization there in Afghanistan.

They're broken up into continuous coverage throughout the rotation of people. I was 4.0, that's usually first, second week of July when the .0s arrive in country. We replaced the former .0s.

Then you have the .25s, the .5s and the .75s. Roughly half the organization comes in as .0s and the other three variations are the remaining 50 percent. Although you have a large turnover once a year, you still have continuity inside those organizations.

So when we formed up at Camp Shelby, the Florida National Guard, the 53d, was the headquarters element whose flag we fell under. Each state provided either 16 or 96 personnel to be part of Task Force *Phoenix* 4.0 and from there we formed up into pseudo teams. As soon as we got there, we assimilated because the 16 guys you came with from your unit or your brigade, you've known all your life so you stay with those. However, when you get into theater, Location A may only need two personnel, Location C needs 42, Location D needs six. At that point, we did have a command and control structure for training but once we got into theater, you may have been planning on being the operations officer, the S3, for a brigade or a battalion but when you get there you may find out that you're a company ETT or an assistant logistics officer, the S4. There isn't any continuity from training to actual employment.

LL: Were you or anybody else in your training group able to use email to talk to your counterparts, the people you would be replacing in Afghanistan?

JB: What was very difficult about that was we didn't know exactly where we were going. There was scuttlebutt but nothing definite. I had direct contact with our regional corps advisory group, the RCAG, commander every day. He's a full-bird colonel and he was able to talk to his counterpart because his counterpart was obviously at the rear in Kandahar or at a large facility in Afghanistan but you personally don't know who you're replacing yet, so it's very difficult to communicate with anyone.

Oregon replaced the 53d, the 41st Brigade Combat Team, and we made that a priority. I don't care if you're replacing me or not but if you're coming down here, I'm an infantry company ETT and here's what my life is like. I also got to go spend time with them at Camp Shelby before they came to Afghanistan. So, number one, you don't know where you're going. Number two, if you do know where you're going, your counterpart is on some little forward operating base, the FOB, that only has HF or tactical satellite, the TACSAT, burst transmission back to headquarters. So, you don't necessarily have a lot of connectivity in those locations.

LL: Compared to all the other training you went through at Camp Shelby, how valuable was the limited amount of talking that went back and forth between the brigade that was in Afghanistan and you who were going to replace them?

JB: What we did know is that Kandahar Airfield had laundry service, a Pizza Hut trailer, we learned what barracks life at that location was like.

We never saw a map, though, where the FOBs were located because they were "sensitive," so you didn't know what regions you were going to even if you knew what task force or what team you were on. You pretty much just went in blind. It would have been a lot better if you had had that information because the way the TSB was training us was, "You're going to go be an advanced individual training instructor," or, "You're going to go mentor a supply distribution section."

Not that you'll be loading up and moving out every day, movements to contact, doing raids and sweeps and all these other things. It would have been a lot more beneficial if we could have circumvented the TSB program to make sure we were practicing our movements to contact, our hand and arm signals, our shooting skills, our individual movements, driving skills and these types of things.

You have your trainer saying, "Oh, no, you might just get a mortar attack at night," which was very disheartening when the day you arrive they call out a three-number element and you're wondering, "What's a 314?" "It's an operational detachment alpha, the ODA, a Special Forces A-team. You're assigned. Go. Bye. Chief so-and-so will pick you up and take you to your FOB. Your helicopter leaves in 20 minutes." That's how you find out where you're going.

LL: Can you describe the actual movement to Afghanistan?

JB: It was fairly smooth. We only got four or five days of leave before we left.

We returned on 4 July, on 5 July we loaded up our equipment, that evening we jumped on an airplane, and two days later we got out of that airplane seat, we were in Kyrgyzstan a day and then they flew you into Kabul. For this, we got brand new 114 up-armored Humvees so we had to drive them down to Kandahar. That process went very smoothly. Now you're in Kandahar within three or four days from leaving the United States and you don't know anything about the world yet, although you just made a 500-mile move right down the center of the country.

LL: Can you talk about how you got integrated into your ETT once you got there?

JB: For company level, by concept, it's one officer and one enlisted. It doesn't quite work out that way, though. The manning levels aren't always 100 percent.

They're infusing more Afghan units in without the ETTs there. I know they're actively working that all the time but the majority of my time in the ETT I was by myself. The SF team helps you out greatly when you're in contact but the rear administrative functions, because there is a dual process, there's the American side for all the filing of paperwork and it has to match the Afghan side for requisitions, leaves, passes, pay, everything. So, like I said, I spent a few hours at Kandahar.

We went through field ordering officer and pay agent courses, paying straight out to the A-team. Because the way these battalions were set up, your integration was with that A-team.

They had been on the ground about 30 days prior to you, so they really were your trainer. That's your integration process. I'm a major and have been around the block but you get to a country and the next thing you know you've been shoved over with an A-team and they ship you out to a FOB 150 kilometers from home and you don't know who to call.

My battalion commander is back in Kandahar and I don't know how to get hold of him. It took about two months for us because we all got jammed like that until the battalion ETT chief, Mike Dyche, told me he'd been trying to contact me by email, satellite phone, and everything else. I didn't have connectivity for email capability but every once in awhile I got my Army Knowledge Online, the AKO, and we ship our information through AKO which is probably not that secure at times.

So, integration was tough. Organization was tough. Theoretically you'd want a two-week left seat/right seat ride with someone but with the terrain and the lack of infrastructure in Afghanistan my left seat/right seat ride was a three-ring binder on my bunk in my tent when I got to my new spot. The guy I replaced had to leave early to get to where he was going. It just happened that the A-team had to come back for money and I was there that day. If not, I'd been sitting in Kandahar for a couple weeks until someone could get me out to my FOB. So, it's definitely a challenge out there.

LL: Were you paired up with a single Afghan company the whole time or did you move around between different Afghan units?

JB: While I was an ETT, I had one company: 1st Company, 1st *Kandak*, 1st Brigade, 205th Corps. There was mention of me staying with that SF team and they'd ship me another company, or perhaps I'd go with my company to a new SF

team whenever we would change areas. What seemed to work the best, though, was that it's easier to learn a new A-team than it is a new company, especially once you've established a bond and trust with those guys.

We would stay as much as we could with the company we had.

LL: How long did you stay with that company?

JB: Five months or so. I injured my arm and wasn't able to hold my weapon anymore. I needed rest and so I swapped a job back in the rear with another guy. He took my company and I took his job so I could go through physical therapy and all that so I could use my fingers again. I tore my ligaments in my arm because of overuse of that area.

LL: How did you get along with your counterpart, the commander of the Afghan company?

JB: Captain Doud. Soldiers are soldiers no matter where you go. Although he's the commander, you being the American walking in, you're really the commander also. So everyone is hesitant and withdrawn and waiting to see what kind of guy you are. You're coming in and you don't want to cut slack at first, so it's very typical to assuming command in an American unit. This guy is more your operations officer than your commander. I'd say our first month we probably had eight or 10 good firefights and, after that, I didn't need my interpreter any longer. Although he didn't speak English and I didn't speak *Dari* or *Pashto*, we could communicate very quickly in the sand or just listening to him and the first sergeant talking or listening to what's coming over the radio. I knew enough about tone or certain names or the situation. You had situational awareness where you understood what's going on.

We had a great relationship, one of almost as brothers. Many times both of us had to do hard things for each other in certain situations. I only had one lieutenant in the company and I felt the same way with him also. The first sergeant and I were very close, too. He understood the role of the NCO and it was his unit. After the first few weeks of inspecting to ensure he did the tasks that the commander said, I was very impressed that they were done well ahead of schedule and way beyond the standards I thought were acceptable.

It was a very crack outfit. You heard a lot of war stories about other units, how they were lazy and didn't do anything; they'd run away from the fight, yada yada. This company had been together for three years when I got them and they were very tight, very organized, very disciplined, and no one messed with the first sergeant. If he told a squad leader to take his squad up that mountain now, bam! They were gone, up and out. There wasn't any lip service or anything of that nature. This company was probably more disciplined than my National Guard company. I'm not saying because it was National Guard, I'm just saying than an American company, because they had been fighting straight for three years.

They had been with SEALs, Force Recon, and now with Army SF. They understood that failure to do the small jobs meant people died the next day. I was very impressed with them.

LL: You always hear that in the Middle East, the military doesn't give NCOs the same role that we do in the American army. Can you explain how that works? How much did you have to work on that?

JB: I think it has to do more with the Russian influence coupled with a culture based on status, meaning that the sheik is more important than anyone else and everyone bows and kowtows to him. In the company I was in, the company commander, the first sergeant, and the platoon sergeants understood the role of the NCO. My squad leaders were getting there, just like in any infantry company. They're obviously not there yet or they'd be platoon sergeants.

They understood the relationship. Now, the young enlisted men saw the commander as something higher than a captain. Not a religious figure but their culture is that someone who is in charge or educated or this type of thing is owed more respect. Whatever he said or did, they responded to him instantaneously. It was a different response than when the first sergeant said it. When the first sergeant said it, the squad leaders would say okay and point at their men directing them to do things. If the commander said it, though, they all took off running and when they went over the hill, then they delegated tasks. You could still see the subservient culture towards the officers. Like I said, I didn't have to teach NCO business to these NCOs, and I was amazed by that. If today was weapons cleaning day for the crew-served or whatever, I'd come by at around 0800 in the morning and they like to get up real early. They'd get up at 0400 and do their prayers before sunrise but by 0600, those weapons were immaculate. I'd been warned to make sure I checked their magazines because they don't clean them very well.

They had already learned that lesson a few months earlier in a firefight when their weapons started jamming. So magazines were probably always the first things broken down. I was very impressed with that. I was getting to the point where I had realized that my NCOs were fully operational, my sergeants first class and above. I had three or four very strong squad leaders. I sat down with my platoon sergeant and said that for the next few months, this is what we're concentrating on, training these sergeants and these squad and section leaders on how to do your job. That's easy to say, though. It takes you awhile to get used to constant combat operations and then realize you have to do some training too. Usually training was just mission rehearsal exercises for this compound take down or this village take down and then when you get back it's recoup time.

You've been living off the land for three or four days. They need to clean their weapons, get a haircut, and relax for a day before they go back out. By that

time, you're already spinning up for your next mission again. So once I got to the point where I could handle the rotation of the mission thing and got settled and understood that, okay, now I've evaluated the company, I know where we're at, I know how we react to contact, now let's see if we can take this a step further and teach the NCOs to teach the younger NCOs.

It might be attrition from casualties or attrition from people being AWOL but the staff sergeants and sergeants first class had predominantly been *mujahedeen* or had been fighting for quite some time. It was the younger guys, the guys under 24 years of age, who needed to start to step up. These guys needed to go take more responsible jobs. It hadn't been an issue before because they weren't promoting from within. When a new company would be stood up in Kabul, they would take the oldest guy in the unit and make him the first sergeant and the next four oldest guys would become the platoon sergeants, so there wasn't any internal promotion. You only promoted inside your little unit. Well, now it's becoming a more mature theater and they're starting to promote within. Back then they were going for quantity versus quality at the beginning of the building of the Afghan National Army, the ANA.

LL: Was all the leadership in your Afghan unit previously experienced in some kind of fighting in Afghanistan?

JB: Yes. I'll speak to my company and then my battalion. Both officers in my company were Soviet-trained in the Soviet Union. One was an AN-32 pilot, the big Russian transport plane. The lieutenant was a political officer who had gone to Russia and trained for 18 years. My XO, the lieutenant, was Masood's cousin and had also been a company or battalion leader under the Northern Alliance. He had been wounded so many times. Several 7.62s all over the body type of thing. The company commander's father was a general who went to the military academy at the time, then to Russian Academy. His father was an army general who was the commander of the Kandahar region when the Soviets were there. People fail to realize that there was a period of time when the Soviets were like us. They were ETTs. They weren't occupiers. Not until later in the 1970s when we started getting involved and the Northern Alliance started gaining speed, then it became unpopular to be associated with them but he was assassinated in Kandahar, so both of them had grown up in the military.

Three of my NCOs had been prior military in the *mujahedeen*. They had a military period, then the military kind of died and they went to the *mujahedeen*, and then the *Taliban* came in later. It's still kind of gray what happened in the *Taliban* period, and they really didn't want to talk about that too much. The battalion staff was the same way. You didn't become a battalion or brigade commander because you knew somebody. You were a professional military officer prior to the invasion of October 2001.

LL: How was your unit equipped?

JB: we had AK47s, RPGs, PKMs, RPKs, whatever we could get. Our individual load-bearing equipment was horrible. It was Chinese-made vests that you couldn't carry water in, you could only carry three magazines and they wouldn't fit in the vest very well anyway. No body armor whatsoever, no Kevlars. Radios were somehow purchased, integrated communications, the ICOM radios, little hand-held Motorola looking things. I actually had my wife send us Motorolas, the little ones you can buy a two-pack for \$40, because they actually have a commercial encryption. It was a lot better than the ICOM. The ICOM is a shortwave radio that we used mostly to listen to the *Taliban* who were attacking us because that's what they use.

We had *Kamazes* and *Tatas*, equivalent to our family of medium tactical vehicles, the FMTVs. They're Russian-made and very hardy trucks but poor maintenance. I had to pay for the maintenance. You had guys assigned as mechanics but they're not necessarily trained. He was a mechanic at home before.

Then there wasn't, at this period, a supply procedure, and you were so far away from any other unit, battalion, or brigade that you have to buy the tire, the alternator, the belts, the exhaust, the lights, whatever, off the economy because you're not going to drive 200 kilometers where there's just nothing but suicide bombers to get a spark plug. So we purchased most of that off the market for our wheeled vehicles.

We had two Ford pickup trucks, Ford Rangers, and all this got better after I left. It was already in the pipeline, it just hadn't gotten to the teams yet. Now they have body armor, squad radios and all this.

They're not completely functional, though. They have these vests, body armor but still nowhere to put their magazines, so you still have that problem.

Winter clothing was good. We did get winter clothing. It's a really tough concept for them that there's a right shoe, a left shoe, there are sizes to clothing.

They are very scavenger-ish to where they will take whatever they can and Insha' Allah if they lose it, if it's the wrong size or if they got five bottoms and no tops. It's a difficult concept. The first sergeant was really tough on them about that which was his business.

We were buying some really poor equipment. We'd get a shipment of boots in and these guys had never had their feet measured so they didn't know what size boot they were. So we tried to start indicating their clothing record in their personnel file of what everything is but the first day, halfway through the mission, the sole of the boots come completely off and we're not just talking about one boot, we're talking about 65 percent of the new boots that day that it happened to.

We were buying a lot of Pakistani items poorly-made, which was changed shortly after I left. I saw where they were getting really nice shoes after that but I was losing soldiers because they were getting foot injuries from poorly-made boots.

The weapons themselves were in fairly good shape. The biggest drawback, forget the nomenclature but it's the zeroing device for the AK47. We couldn't get them. It was horrible. You have to use a tool to zero the AK. If you got one, man, you wore it around your neck like your dog tags. You wouldn't let it get out of your sight.

We taught them the concept of their own weapons. When you get up in the morning, you grab your weapon, not someone else's.

We actually wrote their names on the weapons so the first sergeant could walk down the row and see that that was their name on the weapon. That was his idea.

LL: How were you set up for interpreters?

JB: I had one interpreter. What was tough was that we were way out in the boonies but the interpreters had a requirement that they had to be back every month to get their pay. If they didn't come back, they didn't get paid. If you weren't back inside a certain window, they said they would hold the money for them and then in three months when they do return, they only paid them for two months. It was a shady damn business, I'll tell you. I think I need to start an interpreter business over there. Sonny was the guy's name and he drove around in a great big yellow unarmored Hummer H2. I think they went to a more legitimate contract while I was there. When they did go to the new contract, it required all the interpreters to go to Kabul to get IDs. Well, that's two weeks at best that you've lost your interpreter and then when they were in Kabul, if they didn't have their new ID, they couldn't get in to get their new ID. It was horrible. Things you and I in our society would think would be an organizational issue, because of the internal infrastructure in the country it's just mind boggling how getting an ID card means you're a month without an interpreter.

The SF team, though, got to pay their own interpreters. They were subcontracted just to them. When my guy had to go, I would use one of theirs.

LL: How was he in terms of quality?

JB: I had used interpreters for a few years, so I had a certain standard that he hadn't been raised against. If I say three words and he speaks for 10 minutes, I'd tell him he's screwing up. When he would paraphrase too much or, especially on orders, there's a relationship you have to build with your interpreter, things you have to know about each other and how you work and after 30 days I think I was in a lot better shape. He spoke *Dari* and *Pashto* which, I don't care who you are,

though they tell you in school or at your mobilization station that *Dari* and *Pashto* are similar, it's like speaking French versus German. They're not similar.

He would have to give orders, depending on who he was talking to, in either *Dari* or *Pashto*. He was a very smart kid with a college degree. His father was a colonel in the Ministry of Defense, the MOD. He was waiting for the aviation branch of the army to open up and that's where he was going. That's probably where he's at now but he could understand my "Southern-ese" and was very good. He carried a weapon. I gave him an extra set of body armor. The company loved him because he was one of them. There was never a question of his loyalty or who he answered to. He was 100 percent responsive no matter what time you wanted him. I was very impressed and glad to have him. I've seen others who weren't.

LL: Can you talk about the kinds of operations your Afghan unit went on?

JB: We were an infantry company assigned out of sector of our brigade, operationally controlled by an SF A-team, a hunter-killer team was what it was called sometimes and also a direct-action team. All over the southern AOR, the five or six provinces down there, we could be in any of them at any time. There were long helicopter rides or long drives. A lot of times we had time frames we would operate in and, because of the intelligence coming in this time frame, we were the team on the spot and would action that intelligence. That would range from an air assault into a remote region to clear 31 kilometers one morning to raiding towns with multiple SF teams and multiple companies.

We even got to the point where we did battalion missions without any problems. The whole battalion belonged to the same SF company A-team, so that made command and control very easy.

We had named operations that lasted anywhere from seven to 10 days, to reaction missions that would be one to three days in length. Very rarely would we go out to a new area where no one had been just to go. We did do that occasionally because I assume we were going to answer someone's priority intelligence requirement on an area to find out what's going on.

We did sensitive site exploitation missions. We chased high-value targets across the desert. Command and control in that type of environment, you think the desert is flat and you can see them but when you get there, it's not quite that way. The *wadis* and the rivers and once you get in the dry riverbeds, it's not like you can get right out. It was the whole gamut, there was nothing similar all the time. There was no "Groundhog Day," which is what the maneuver companies would say.

We'd be around the 173d and they'd be complaining about going back to the same town again just to walk. We didn't do those types of things.

LL: I'm going to assume that as a highly-tasked direct-action company, you had a lot of contact with guys who'd shoot back?

JB: Yes, sir.

LL: Did you have very many casualties or just lots of action?

JB: I really don't know how many direct actions we were involved in. A lot of them blurred. One of them, my helicopter, the one I jumped off of, the Chinook, was still the last shot down helicopter in Afghanistan right now. All five guys and I had to go secure the wreckage and man, that turned into a fight.

They had mortars on us and it was a rough night. We had to abandon our original fight, and once a helicopter gets shot down, no more rotary comes and it's 45 minutes. Although he's only two kilometers away, two kilometers away of 1,500 feet takes awhile to get there.

Casualties? We did lose a few. It was either dead or barely wounded. My first 30 days, in the SF company, the B-team that the A-team was assigned to had lost five guys, ETTs and SF. I was doing the math very quickly there and I said, "Okay, in six months that means there's none of us left." I didn't know what the hell I had gotten into.

They were very good about always knowing where the casualty collection point was. If there wasn't one assigned, because a lot of times you'd just jump out of the helicopter and go, they would make one. The 18D, the SF medic, was very good. He worked with the ones we had assigned as medics in the company also.

They had bags, not purchased with Title 22 money but the way we looked at it was they could be treating me or they could be treating you, so we had it dispersed.

We were fortunate in that I didn't lose as many as other people did but when a suicide bomber hits your truck right in the middle of town, a motorcycle guy, when there are 50 motorcycles around you, you're going to have casualties. People are going to get hurt.

They have a completely different concept that was just so foreign to me that I couldn't accept it at first. Combat was foreign to me at first too, though but when people got hurt or get killed, it was *Insha' Allah* to them, and I don't mean that haphazardly. They mean he was a good man and lived a good life but it was just his time. God wanted him back and so now he's back and we don't mourn for him. That's how they were. They would speak kindly of him but they would move out after the third day.

They'd have him buried by the morning of the third day according to Muslim culture. It's tough, too, when you can't get a helicopter in. You can have a riot on your hands if you don't get him buried and there were riots.

LL: Over that particular issue?

JB: Yes, yes. To the point where President Karzai said he would send his helicopters to come get the body.

LL: Were you ever injured in any of these firefights?

JB: Not from a gunshot.

LL: How about shrapnel from mines?

JB: I lost my hearing for a few days. I tore my arm up just from carrying my M4 one-handed all the time. The Army's rail system is very heavy on the front end. One of my ETT teammates worked at Galls and if you wanted to pay the \$85 for the hard plastic stock that's as strong as steel, you could but it made that end of the weapon like a pound or two lighter. I didn't realize what that meant until I was carrying it for probably six months more than I should have. You always had that constant pull forward because the front end of your weapon was so much heavier. I made a note to myself the other day, thinking, "Man, I haven't had pain in this arm in a month or two." That's the only thing. I had an improvised explosive device, the IED, go off right next to the truck and I lost my hearing for a little bit but my wife even said that my hearing is better now than it was before.

LL: Knocked something loose?

JB: It may have. I don't know why but there were three days when I couldn't hear a thing.

LL: Did you ever observe any tribal or sectarian divisions within that unit?

JB: A lot of people say that and I think personally, and I can only speak for my company, the uninformed person thinks it's a tribal or clan or a *Tajik-Uzbek-Dari-Pashto* issue but to me it's, "That guy's an asshole." Really.

We've been under a lot of pressure for a long time and this one platoon sergeant has worn this one squad leader to death, that he's been training him and making him take care of his squad. Well, he finally wants to take a swing at him.

They handle it. Let me tell you, NCOs handle it there probably like it was in the 40s and 50s in the United States. The first sergeant will tell me it's not my concern and to please walk away, they're taking care of business right now. You saw older guys pick on younger guys and you had to mentor that to tell them we're all in this together. You may pick on him because he's from the rival town next door like we would have basketball or football rivals but here we're all one person. If it did occur, it was not prevalent to me, and I ate, slept and shit with them.

I'll say that the officer politics may have been not necessarily tribal or anything but more of political issues. "I like this kid, I don't like that kid. I want this guy to work for me, I don't want that guy to work for me." You can blame it on cultural

or tribal differences but to me it seemed like they just didn't have as tight equal opportunity standards as we do, so the commanders could get away with firing someone if they didn't like them or if they screwed up. Of course, the disgruntled person would say that the commander was doing it because they're from different ethnic groups but let me tell you, all the way from the brigade commander down that I worked with, it was business. There wasn't any inappropriateness going on. Now, above brigade, I think there were misappropriations and things of this nature which were taken care of while we were there. I saw it. I didn't know what I was looking at but I knew it didn't look right and the next thing you knew it had been taken care of by Kabul.

LL: When you injured your arm and had to take another position, could you describe how that handoff went and what your duties became then?

JB: I was bringing my company in.

We had come off an eight-day mission and I was changing locations from Zabol Province to Helmand Province. I was physically moving the company which takes several days. I was becoming the brigade S4. The then-current brigade S4 was an experienced infantryman, Ranger School, Pathfinder, Airborne, Air Assault, all the tabs and badges, and he didn't really want to listen to me when I was telling him how the men in my company operate. "Yeah, I got it, I got it." He was more interested in clearing his hand receipt being the brigade S4. I have to state that being the brigade S4 meant that you were the brigade supply sergeant. It was just you. There wasn't a supply section, a supply NCO, or anything else. It was just you because we weren't manned very well yet.

They came in, of course, after I left. It's a big-boy environment and everyone knows it when they go there. People asked me wasn't I getting intelligence dumps every day? "Dude, white Corolla, gonna blow up, bad guys in the area. It's all the same. When you roll the gate, game's on." You don't need to know these things, it's the way it is every day. The transition was fine but it was hard leaving the company. There were only about three or four companies at the time that were in direct contact every day and I was on one of them. The rest of the guys back in Kandahar who'd been there five or six months now, that's all they knew was Kandahar, the airfield and Camp Shirzai where the ANA lived but they didn't realize what we were doing out there because we don't report through them.

We're operationally controlled. Everything goes through the SF. So when you call back and ask for 26,000 more AK47 rounds, they wonder what the hell you need those for. You know what? If you get out of your bunk, you might see what's going on in the rest of the world. I came back and I was going through the first stages of my post-stress. You felt guilty because you weren't still with your company. You felt mad that the brigade commander wouldn't give you because I

knew the company was going to go sit for three weeks to give me time to heal. So he made me go see the chaplain. I had cussed some people out and probably shouldn't have. That was a transition back to pseudo-realism instead of big-boy rules, back to the flagpole.

LL: What kinds of duties did you have to pick up once you got back to the flagpole?

JB: I was the brigade S4 and we were transitioning to winter operations which meant that the MOD said all Afghan units will return to their corps or brigade headquarters where they had these nice warm buildings and mess halls, everything's contracted there and everything's taken care of. The SF said, "No way. If you take my ANA, the *Taliban* is going to overrun our eight-man position that night." So the ANA had to stay out in the field which they weren't authorized by the MOD. The MOD okayed it but then there weren't the funds or the ability to get them winter food and winter fuel, fuel being wood. In these mountains there aren't any trees and the rivers have already risen at this point. This is the end of November. I remember having Thanksgiving at Kandahar, so it was right around that time frame. So I was trying to get the winter clothing, the food and, believe it or not, hay for the horses, all this to the Afghans.

We can't go by convoy anymore because the rivers are too high. So we have to go by the ring flights which are US Title 10 dollars and you're trying to put Title 22 dollars on those aircraft.

They said they would take it if there was room. Well, they haven't been there in three weeks, of course there isn't any room. They're putting the food in for the A-teams. It was a chore. At the same time, we're transitioning to contract food.

We used to pay for it, \$8.32 per soldier per day which is a lot of money in Afghanistan, and now it was going to be \$2.10. The contractors were little mom-and-pop shops in the towns. They wanted to know why they would want to do this now for one-fourth of the money. "The *Taliban* is trying to kill me for feeding them as it is and now you're going to take it away?" I was trying to set that up also. It was tough because I knew what it was like not to have the right boots for your men, still going on missions, and now it's getting really damn cold at 6,000 feet and up. I think we were at 5,500 feet in Kandahar and that's a low spot.

I had nine FOBs where I was trying to do this all at once. I don't even know the system. I've never been a logistician in my life. I don't know what a 2032, a 2011, or whatever those forms were. It was difficult for me because I wasn't smart in logistics but I knew what they needed, knew the existing infrastructure, and I was trying to get them everything they needed. Of course they're just burning me up on the phone and the radio asking for their food, ammo, and other supplies. So I just went over to the SF compound and told the battalion XO, "Steve, man, I'm

in trouble. Help me out. I want you to get those guys on your side of the area of operations.” because at that point, I wasn’t any longer part of Task Force 31. I was back to ANA but I’m trying to support all their needs. I guess it worked out in the end.

LL: How long were you the brigade S4?

JB: Only about four or five weeks.

LL: What did you do after that?

JB: I got a call from Kabul that said the new commanding general who was coming in needed an aide-de-camp/executive officer, and Brigadier General John Perryman, Task Force *Phoenix* commanding general, had offered my services. I said, “Hell yeah, anything to get out of this S4 job.” So pretty much overnight I had someone sign over my hand receipt and I went to Kabul. I went and sat at the airfield and found a plane. I rode with the Canadian minister of defense that day.

LL: The day-to-day operations you did with that Afghan company were obviously different than when you were a general’s aide-de-camp. Could you describe what those looked like?

JB: Major General Robert Durbin was the commanding general of Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, the CSTC-A. He was Task Force *Phoenix*’s boss. There are two major general positions in Afghanistan, one being Major General Benjamin Freakley, 10th Division, the maneuver commander, and the other was Major General Durbin who’s the ANA and the Afghan National Police [ANP] person. He also mentored the minister of defense and his general staff, the minister of interior and his general staff.

So you have not only the American component of the ETTs, you also have the international narcotics law enforcement agency that he mentors, part of the Department of State. There was an ETT type of thing, too, with the police that provide mentor teams and regional training centers all over Afghanistan to train the Afghans and police. So he’s resourcing the training, he’s resourcing the leadership and he’s resourcing the equipment which meant donor conferences.

Germany was the lead nation for the police and the United States was lead nation for the military. There was a lot of politicking you had to do with NATO elements, the International Security Assistance Force or ISAF, which was really interesting and also, keep Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry happy at the same time. Day to day, I had a 12-man security detachment with a personal security officer who was part of the personal security unit out of the Pentagon. He was a bodyguard.

We had four or five uparmored Suburbans that we traveled to Kabul with. We had advance teams, communication teams and those types of things that I

was responsible for. Since I was the XO and the aide-de-camp, I had to sit in the meetings, take notes, and advise the general on issues and then get back and do the aide stuff such as planning the trips and all those types of things.

We also developed the commander's information group. It was a room full of lieutenant colonels that helped me out a whole lot. They got the general his information and his strategic plans teams. It was difficult. It was 0600 to midnight every day. I was completely much busier working for the general than I was as an infantry company mentor but that's what the general wanted. He wanted someone who had been down there, someone with XO experience, I having been that in DC, and then we had to deal with Rumsfeld, Army Materiel Command, Capitol Hill, and all these types of things which I had done with the National Guard Bureau. I hope I gave him a little bit of resource by my service. Also, he wanted someone to say what reports on the ground really meant and I would tell him since I had been trigger-pulling for five and a half months. It worked out well. My replacement got fired the first week I left.

LL: Can you talk about some of the more interesting meetings you sat in on, some of the major issues that were dealt with?

JB: The reason I'm pausing here is that I've got some interesting ones but I don't know if I want them on record about getting the ministers of defense and interior to agree to certain events, war plans or policies.

We don't necessarily have to make it their idea but you can't force-feed them. It's their military, their police. They have to have ownership in the issue. So the way you would have to, and I don't know the correct word to use, maybe "massage" the situations or the issues. That was difficult. There was definitely a lot of diplomacy that the general had to have to make these things happen. Case in point was the eradication last year. It was the first time we eradicated a poppy crop. That was a tough one.

LL: What made the whole eradication issue so difficult?

JB: Timing. It's the first of March, last week of February, and now they decide they want to eradicate the poppy crop early enough to where the farmer has the ability to plant another crop and late enough to where, if you cut this poppy crop, they'll have time to grow poppies again but I don't think we even scratched the issue or what the tactical problem was with the poppy crop. If you noticed, this summer in Helmand, it got very hot combat-wise. You had two contributing factors, I think. The multiple named missions 10th Mountain was doing from Khowst all the way through Uruzgan into northern Helmand, just pushing all the *Taliban* that way.

We were disgruntling the whole province of Helmand, at the same time taking the farmer's money. Well, we were really not taking his money, he's already

been given the money. He owes, say, 18 kilos of poppy gum and that drug dealer doesn't care where he gets the poppy gum but, "I gave you \$2,000 last winter and you owe me 18 kilos and if you can't give me the poppy gum, then I'll either kill you, kill your wife, kill your kids, or you can pick up this gun and help me fight the Americans." So, I don't think anyone has ever sat down and analyzed all those issues together with the eradication, the named missions, and why Helmand exploded.

They say it's a reemergence of the *Taliban* but I completely disagree. It was not a reemergence, it was a culmination of events.

LL: Did you ever have to deal with any issues as far as Afghan-Pakistan relations?

JB: You know, I've still got a valid Pakistan visa. I don't think I should discuss that, though.

LL: Classified?

JB: I think it probably is.

LL: Okay. When you were mentoring the Afghan company, what were your biggest challenges?

JB: Getting my guys back from leave. Everyone says they go, they escape and they never come back. In the facilities we lived in, I could only keep about 50 Afghans at a time. On the books I had 125. Twenty two of those 125 we knew wouldn't come back until the crops were in because their families depended on them for the crops.

They then would come back for four or five months in the winter. The commander and the first sergeant knew exactly who it was and if they had to go get them, they'd go get them but how did I employ those other 50 that I didn't have with me physically? I'd send them back to the battalion and that was tough because moving troops around the battlespace in an asymmetric, non-contiguous area was very difficult. Up until about 16 October, we didn't have a suicide bomber problem and then overnight, man, we were getting hit with suicide bombers all the time. Yesterday I talked to a guy who was in my brigade in Afghanistan. I saw him at the airport, he was home on leave, and he says they've lost five ETTs this year so far of the guys who replaced us, from suicide bombers.

It doesn't make the news here about Afghanistan. You've got to realize that the infrastructure throughout all of AO South, there are only two roads. One is the Ring Road and one is Route 5 that runs to Pakistan. The soldiers, if they did get to go home on leave, they would spend three months worth of pay to get back to their home because the majority of the soldiers are from the north. Very few are joining the military from the south, and they're in the south. The realism of it, not

the actual distance, you're in Florida but you have to get to Minnesota and there aren't any buses. There aren't any set procedures to get anyone back and forth from leave, and oh by the way, if you do just jump on a civilian bus and the *Taliban* stops it up the road, you've got the close-cut hair, you look like a soldier and you're not going to let people boss you around like that, you might end up getting killed. That was tough.

Getting supplies, the supply system was not established. Just turning in your supply requirements required someone to get into a vehicle and drive 90 kilometers one way with the form and to get those supplies to you when they did come in, if they came in, was difficult. So a lot of things came out of operational funds. I'd have \$20,000 a month in op funds and I'd use them. If you need something, you have to get it. You can't do your mission without it. If the trucks broke, you'd needed to fix them. Even the US was having a very hard time with the number of soldiers and vehicles we have there to keep the supply system going, even with the Chinook helicopter ring routes, armed convoys up and down with tractor trailers. Sustainment is a real issue. The physical infrastructure of the country is not there, let alone the internal infrastructure of the ANA that is still developing.

They don't have it where you can type on the computer that you want something, then it ships UPS and you got it overnight. You're still doing ditto paper, that copying paper between the forms, so that when you write it, the top line is in English and the bottom line is in *Dari* and they write right to left and we write left to right. It's very challenging.

LL: How about your time as aide-de-camp and XO. What were the biggest challenges you had to deal with then?

JB: Every week we would go somewhere different in the country.

We would take the minister of defense, the minister of interior, and we would take 50 people with us from Kabul, to get Kabul out of Kabul. Does that make sense? The biggest problem, and I explained this to the general when I got there, although I'm sure he already knew it, was that the ANA did not trust the ANP and vice versa. Their whole culture is based on walls. Every compound has a wall around it and every house has walls around the house. There is a trust issue inside that country, just culturally. That's why the women wear the veil. They don't want you to see what their wife looks like.

When we would go places, we would make the ANA and the ANP come together wherever we were at. If we went to a regional area, like Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, these are regional facilities that have RCAGs, corps, ANA elements, regional ANP elements, border police elements, customs police, and highway police. You have several different organizations that don't trust each other but they all work for the same person. It's getting all them to come. I could

send an email or pick up the phone, call that RCAG commander and tell him that General Durbin will be down there on Tuesday and we'd like to do X, Y and Z. Please send me an itinerary at your earliest convenience. Well, it's hard to do that with the border police or the ANP commander and we would work through the MOD or the MOI, the Minister of Interior, to make those things happen but to bring all those guys into a room was a challenge.

We made the whole country every four weeks which meant doubling up during the week which we would do. Then you had to make them start talking to each other, not just come to a room at the same time. You had to have them do combined missions together and then you saw things starting to change. The army would come through and wipe out the *Taliban* but the ANP wouldn't come in behind them because they were scared and so the *Taliban* would fill right back in the void. Well, now when the army goes through an area, the police come right behind them and set up shop.

They have a special team now that goes there and stays there for weeks to eliminate the void, so you don't have to keep taking the same towns over and over again. That was difficult. General Durbin didn't have a big staff. When I got there, the Office of Security Cooperation-Afghanistan, the OSC-A, had 40 people. I think it's supposed to be like 500 by now but that meant there weren't all these people to do these things for the general. So I was doing it and it was difficult. I had a very, very, very outstanding interpreter for the general. He was a medical doctor, school trained. I even talked to him last night on email. He would help me out immensely and he knew how things worked. I don't know what's ever going to happen to him but it'd be dangerous for him to stay there if we leave anytime soon.

LL: How much contact did you have with other coalition forces or NATO forces?

JB: As an ETT we had Romanians and Canadians. I did a mission with Canadian SF, Australians, several missions with the British Special Air Service, the SAS. In Kabul, for the general, of course we had to work with ISAF at the time. The Italians were in charge. The French had just left and the Italians came in. Our deputy commanding general, the one-star for Major General Durbin, was a Canadian general. Eikenberry's deputy general was a British officer, so there were many meetings that we always dealt with.

Then you have the German ambassador and really all the ambassadors from all the countries that were there. The British ambassador, quite often, the American ambassador, obviously, and then they have the equivalents of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the INL, so it was always a rainbow event. It was tough watching them drink beer or wine and you had to sit there and say, "Boy, I wish I could have one of those."

LL: Did you ever have any cultural misunderstandings with them because they're from another country?

JB: The Romanians were difficult, and the reason I say that is that whenever I'm out the gate on a mission, I have tactical control right there. If I want to go around this street, around this village or through this village, I make the call. The Romanians don't operate that way.

If it's a company, he has to call back and get permission, even though we see the IED in the middle of the road and the police won't let us go down the road, the Romanians have to call back to the battalion to get approval to re-route around that road by 150 meters.

LL: Very top-down oriented?

JB: Yes, very much so.

They were taking over Zabul Province and I had had very limited dealings with them but they were taking over a province I used to live in. I thought, man, that's not going to work very well if they're that regimented. I don't know the politics behind it or whether it was just rear echelon guys filling that mission and that's why they had such tight controls but everything I saw about them was them needing to be told exactly what to do, versus the French wanting to know what the end state was. The Australians wanted to know the end state too and they would get to that end state. Don't tell them what to do but if you tell the Romanians an end state, they'll say, okay but we didn't tell them they had to drive out the gate, for example.

They still have that Soviet mentality, for lack of a better term.

LL: was there any contact with the media while you there?

JB: CNN International did a story with us as an ETT, and then of course, as an XO, Fox News and National Public Radio. Pentagon press meetings done by satellite at the Pentagon and *Al Jazeera* also come to mind.

We did a whole big thing in Qatar where we brought in all the regional news outlets from the Middle East to interview us. So, there was quite a bit of involvement. A lot of radio and telephone interviews. The reporters would come from the States, too, and we'd take them with us on our trips.

LL: Would you say, in general, that your contact with the media was positive?

JB: Yes, I think so. I have an IO [information operations] background. I was an IO in Bosnia. So I don't necessarily put up the cross and push people away from me. The general is a very dynamic person and able to handle any type of situation that the press could put him in. With the foreign press you didn't know what their organizations were, so you don't have a background of where they're coming from.

You have to be careful with that. If this is a very left-wing liberal, down-with-the-USA type organization, you need to know that beforehand and your public affairs officer is not always with you or reachable. You have to be careful with those types of things.

LL: What were your biggest professional lessons learned you took away from your time in Afghanistan?

JB: First as an ETT, the stress, the hardship, the sleep and food deprivation. I had lost 36 pounds at one point. The physical endurance taught me a lot about myself which I'm glad to have done. Like my brigade commander told me when he was pulling me out, "How many firefights do you need to be in to know if you can handle a firefight?" That really does make sense.

We were very careful in not keeping people in the job like I was in too long, because they really do burn out. One or two guys we didn't pull ended up getting killed. Living with the Afghans day in and day out and doing those types of missions, you need to take care of your people and rotate them. For me, it was time. It may have been a few weeks earlier than I would have preferred but I'm glad of the job I did as an ETT. I'm glad to have had that opportunity. I learned more about myself, what I can go through and how many goats I can eat. It was a life event.

Then the professionalism the general demonstrated and taught me. He would always take the opportunity when we were moving in the trucks from point A to point B to explain to me what just happened. I'd think I understood what happened and he'd ask me, "What just happened?" I would tell him and he would show me where I was probably lacking, not understanding the full background of the issue of what the second and third order events were of whatever was just discussed. His reason was, number one, he was always developing younger officers and for me personally so I could assist him better in how to handle the former secretary of defense but not just him, people like him. I don't mean just people of power but people of certain personalities, debaters versus listeners. Not sympathy but empathy for a person's position. A lot of these people in Afghanistan do a job where people try to kill them or their family when they go home at night. You're asking them to do things that don't just affect them but it affects their four-year-old and their six-year-old too.

How the money actually flows from AMC. I know how Iraq is getting their up-armored Humvees and all that because I got to sit in and watch that happen. How the Defense Security Cooperation arena works. That was an eye-opener. I didn't realize how it was done but now I have experience and info and will never use it again, more than likely. How to deal with our coalition members, understanding their country caveats and I don't mean just that their rules of engagement are

different from ours. It's also that this general officer can't make this decision because you have to realize his Congress or Parliament has to approve certain things and how that's affected by the time-space continuum that that works in. You need an answer tomorrow but they're on recess for three weeks and how you have to look outside your little ball to understand all these things of how to keep up with current events all over the world at the same time because it does affect wherever you're at.

It's a lot of intangible experiences that a professional with experiences that I had was exposed to and hopefully I absorbed some of them. People sometimes make fun of you because you're an aide-de-camp or an XO but you have to look past that. You're there for two reasons. One, to serve the general who you're working for at the time and, two, to learn from that experience so when you're a colonel or whatever in your future life, you apply these lessons learned. These things you can't read on the CALL [Center for Army Lessons Learned] or somewhere else, that you'll be able to visualize, direct, and assess before it comes to fruition.

I was just very thankful for that opportunity. It's difficult for me to understand exactly what all those were but it was great that I came here to the Command and General Staff College, the CGSC, from Afghanistan after all I was exposed to. When they talk about what the Department of State should provide and not provide, and my US Embassy badge just expired also. Working inside the embassy every other day, I know what the Army thinks right looks like and I have an understanding of what State's perception of an idea is and how you have to mold them into thinking together to come up with the right solution. There are a lot of moving parts. That's why I never want to be a general officer because they don't sleep. They can't.

LL: When did you leave Afghanistan and how did your final handoff go?

JB: I had deferred CGSC one year to go to Afghanistan. The information I was getting in Afghanistan said I had to be here for some P920 class that was like two weeks long or something. I didn't want to go to that but because I was a National Guard officer, even though I'd been on active duty for seven years was apparently irrelevant. As it turns out, though, I didn't have to go but it meant I had to leave like three weeks before the 4.0s left, so I had to leave by myself.

Then you have to backwards plan, someone has to be selected to take your position and then you have to train them.

Then you have to match the general's schedule with the selection period and you may be doing it by interviewing on the top deck of a C-130 as we're flying to X, Y, or Z. It was that crazy. He made the selection and I had 10 days to train. There's a lot to train when you're talking about the security, the air movements, all the MOD and MOI players and then those trips I was telling you about with

the 50-plus Afghans we'd take with us. All the relationships you build with all the different ambassadors. To civilians or ambassadors, sometimes when they're talking to me, they're actually talking to the general. Not that I think I'm a general or speak for him but they think that you're his right-hand man. "If I tell you X, he'll know X in the next five minutes", those types of things. It takes a lot to develop those relationships with all those people and my replacement didn't have the opportunity I did because the general was new when I came in, so he didn't know what right looked like. If I was doing something wrong he didn't know any better but he had molded me the way he wanted and my replacement probably didn't meet the general's expectations. That hurt me because I didn't do my job right for him. I didn't serve him by fully training the right person for the right job. He hasn't held it against me, though. Once in Kyrgyzstan I had like three days of layover and then came straight home. Other than having to go and waste five days at a demobilization station with a bunch of people who didn't care you were there or not, I demobilized through Fort Stewart, Georgia, because Camp Shelby was hit pretty hard by the hurricane.

They weren't set up to receive us and it was broke. I understand that, three weeks later, when the main body came through, it was still very rough on them. You know, there's something definitely wrong with our Cold War mentality of our mobilization/demobilization process in the National Guard and the reliance or the relationship we have with the Reserves for that is astronomical. The general said to me, "If you don't like it, change it. Embrace the situation, get involved in it and change it." Well, they're at Riley right now, so I've been doing some changing.

LL: Based on your experience in Afghanistan, if you could make a military recommendation to the powers that be, what would that be?

JB: Twelve months is too long for an ETT to live with the Afghan Army. Six months is good. There's a period in there where you get a superman complex.

We were not trained to the mental state that you had to be in when you arrived in Afghanistan for combat operations. It was game-on with big-boy rules, 24/7 immediately. There isn't any adjustment period, there isn't any transition period but it's immediate. A lot of guys got hurt either in the beginning or at the end. There needs to be more discussion about killing, about being wounded and about actions on objectives. I'm talking less of the physical issues, more the mental preparation. If a guy is going to be going to an SF team as soon as he gets on the ground, he needs to be mentally prepared before he gets there. I don't consider myself a brainiac or a coward but it was very tough to go from sea level and 80 degrees to 6,000 or 7,000 feet and 120 degrees, carrying 88 pounds and operating from Day One.

Then there is the stress of all that, trying to learn that company, trying to keep them alive and trying to fight the fight. It was difficult for me. I'm not an infantryman, I'm an artilleryman, and I seriously fell back on the things I learned when I was going through Ranger indoctrination in college. I didn't get to go to Ranger School. I finished the Ranger Indoctrination Program and then cadets couldn't go to Ranger School anymore but that's what I fell back on.

LL: Family separation?

JB: That's a big one. That's when my son was five months old and had just started crawling, and when I came home, he's got all his teeth and running around talking. Now mom is in charge. That was difficult to get over. This was my second deployment and we have a strong relationship already. We already went through that learning curve of her telling me what's going on or what's happening. She doesn't expect me to fix it where I'm at, she's just informing me.

We didn't have to have that conversation anymore like we had on our first rotation. I can see where it's more difficult for younger guys and not just younger but someone without as strong a relationship. One of my best friends over there, before he got to his FOB, he went to one of those SF teams that took him a couple weeks. His mail was already there and so were his divorce papers. He ended up getting killed while we were there. I burned up a lot of iridium satellite phone minutes talking to him at night, trying to get him through that but you know, all that I went through, it was more difficult for my wife staying home with the one-year-old than it was for me, and I really do mean that. Even though I was working 16 to 18 hours a day and all that, I had people to lean on, people to talk to. She was at her mother's house and no one else understood what she was going through. Especially for Guardsmen, we don't live on post.

We have family support groups at the armory but they're not there Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday or Saturday when that wife has just had it with those three kids. It's not a question that she loves those children, it's a question of her not having had a break yet. Every time I find that someone is getting deployed, someone I know, I call her up and say my wife's going somewhere, why doesn't she go with her and I'll watch the kids. If they could just have a few hours on their own every once in awhile it'd be nice but not a lot of families have that. For Guardsmen it's not 12 months, it's 15 to 18 months. At the six-month mark, they haven't left the country yet. You're just praying for that start date with a boots-on-ground day so you can start the clock. It is a long time, personally, to put these families through that. The type of Guard units I'm always around is the maneuvers, those types, that this isn't their first go-around. Units haven't deployed but the men in the units have deployed. I've deployed twice for my brigade. At the end of September my brigade is finally being deployed. I told the brigade commander,

“Sir, I love you but . . . call me if you need me.” I was home prior to this one for 14 months, home another 14 months, and then went again. I’ll do it if I’m asked to but try not to ask me. I have another baby due in June, so that’s a major reason.

LL: Do you know what your next assignment is going to be?

JB: Yes. I’m going to be the operations officer for the Battle Command Training Center here at Fort Leavenworth. So although we’ve moved three times in three years, we get to spend four years in one town, hopefully four years in one town. It’s a National Guard simulation center that works for the Battle Command Training Program for division and brigade warfighters.

LL: Is there anything else about your deployment to Afghanistan you’d like to add to this interview?

JB: Being an ETT was one of the greatest, most fulfilling events I’ve had in my military career. To take men you don’t share a common culture or language with and become a coherent team, to feel their pain, to feel their joy, to be their leader, to be part of their successes and their failures, to just watch them grow, it was an enlightening experience as a human being. It doesn’t matter if you’re from Afghanistan or Pakistan or anywhere else, human beings are human beings and bad people are bad people. The things I and my company were going through, they hadn’t seen their families in 30 or 40 months. I would try to get them back for a baby’s birth. The same basic wants and desires we have, they also have, and I truly feel that I have benefited from knowing those people and doing that job.

LL: Okay, thank you very much.

Major Stephen Boesen
7 July 2008

SO: My name is Captain Shawn O'Brien (SO) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major Stephen Boesen (SB) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 7 July 2008 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Can you start by giving some background information on yourself?

SB: I'm a graduate of the ROTC program at the University of Northern Iowa. I graduated in 1992 but had been commissioned in 1990. I was one of the last of the early commissionees from UNI. I went on active duty as an infantry officer in 1992. I attended the basic course and Ranger School. My first assignment was in Korea where I did my rifle platoon leader time and HHC executive officer time.

Following that assignment, I did two years at the Old Guard where I was a rifle platoon leader and a company XO again. I then went to the advanced course and then moved out to Fort Carson where I did time as an assistant operations officer at the brigade level and then took two commands. My first was a Bradley mechanized infantry company in 1-8 Infantry which was part of 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. My next command was an HHC. Following that command, I decided to leave the Army for a while.

I spent nine months in the civilian sector and then decided that I was only built for soldiering so I came back in. Through the Iowa National Guard I found out about an AGR [Active Guard Reserve] opportunity back here and got selected for that position. While in the AGR program in Iowa, I served as a battalion officer in charge/task force S3 for 1-133 Infantry and I deployed to the Multinational Force and Observers, the MFO, peacekeeping operation in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. When I came back from that, I was selected to be the S3 for the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 34th ID. I did that job for three years and was then selected to lead an infantry embedded training team, the ETT, to deploy to Afghanistan.

SO: When did you find out that you were going to be assigned to an ETT?

SB: I found out around July 2006. That's when the senior leadership of the state approached me. There were three ETTs going out. One was a brigade team, one was an infantry team and the other was combat support. Initially they wanted me to go be the S3 on the brigade team but after some leadership changes occurred

they came back to me about two months later and asked me to lead the infantry team. That was around October 2006.

SO: How much notice were you given before you deployed?

SB: I probably had about nine months. We had a good idea it was coming down the pike and were able to start preparing for it. I was the full-time guy that kind of pulled everything together and did all the preparation and coordination to get all three teams out the door.

SO: When and where was your team actually formed?

SB: The team was formed in Johnston, Iowa. We did three drills prior to being mobilized, going on Title 10, and reporting to Fort Riley.

SO: Did you have to go through a mobilization station or did that happen at Fort Riley?

SB: That happened at Fort Riley. We jumped onto the whole transition team training program that the Army had standardized just before we were selected for the mission. We fell in on the Chief of Staff of the Army-directed transition team training program at Fort Riley.

SO: Can you talk about some of the pre-deployment training you went through at Fort Riley and how you think it went?

SB: Some of the pre-deployment training at Fort Riley was very good. Most of the transition teams are made up of senior guys who have transitioned into being more staff guys and haven't done platoon-level operations or training in a while.

We got a pretty heavy dose of range fire and crew-served weapons training. All of that stuff was very beneficial for a lot of us because most of us hadn't touched a machine gun since we were at least captains, if not lieutenants. That was one of the unique things about this transition team mission. For a field grade officer like myself, it really gives you a chance to get back in touch with your warrior skills that have gotten pretty dull since you were a lieutenant or a captain. We did a lot of weapons training and got certified as combat lifesavers.

We did some scenario training as well but the problem with that was that they didn't have anybody there with any actual experience in Afghanistan. There was one sergeant who wasn't even in my battalion, but in another class, who actually had Afghanistan transition team experience. Everyone else had trained in Iraq and very few of them had been on transition teams. The problem at Fort Riley was that they were grasping at straws a lot when figuring out which scenarios would be the most beneficial for us.

We did do some key leader engagement training which was beneficial to a point but some of it wasn't really necessary. One of the things they told us was not

to look at our interpreter when you're talking to the guy you're interacting with. In reality, that's not the case in Afghanistan. When I interacted with the *kandak* commanders I mentored, it was more like a three-way conversation. I was talking to the 'terp and the 'terp was talking to the commander. He would talk back directly to the 'terp and the 'terp would talk directly to me. There wasn't a lot of face-to-face interaction which was something I didn't learn about until later on after I'd been in theater for a while.

We did a lot of physical fitness training. Some of it was pretty beneficial. I was already in pretty good shape when I got there, but the problem was that we were training at sea level for operations that would be occurring well above sea level. In Afghanistan, I operated at anywhere from 7,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level, so there was quite the acclimation period we had to go through when we got to Afghanistan because there is no way to replicate operating in the mountains in the hills at Fort Riley. Overall, though, I thought the training was pretty good.

There was quite a bit of stuff that was hokey and not beneficial. In most cases, we were being trained for operations in Iraq rather than Afghanistan. In Iraq you have to worry about clearing overpasses but in Afghanistan that's not an issue. There are no overpasses. I only saw two paved roads while I was in country. The rest of the time we were bumping around on wagon trails throughout the country. There's a big difference between how you operate in Iraq versus how you operate in Afghanistan. I have a brother-in-law who did the military transition team, the MiTT, mission over there in 2005 and we've since compared notes, so that's why I'm familiar with a lot of things Iraqi even though I haven't been there yet.

SO: How big was your ETT?

SB: We started out with 16 people. Each of the three teams I mentioned earlier had 16 personnel on them. Ironically, both the infantry and combat support teams didn't come with medics embedded within the team itself. That was a big deal because every MiTT goes out the door with a medic. I'm not sure why all of these teams aren't standardized. Why are MiTTs organized differently than ETTs going to Afghanistan? That makes no sense to me.

SO: When you got into theater, did your 16 people stay together or did they have to split up because of the location of some of your companies?

SB: That brings up another problem we have in Afghanistan. Whereas the MiTTs pretty much stay together because they've trained as a team at Fort Riley, we get split to the four winds. My team was spread out all across the 203d Corps, otherwise known as Afghan Regional Security Integration Command-East, the ARSIC-East. There's ARSIC-East, ARSIC-North, ARSIC-West, and ARSIC-South. These commands used to be aligned with the corps. The 205th Corps is where most of the bad things happen in Afghanistan but the 203d Corps, where I

was, was pretty busy as well. When we flew into country, we got spread to the four winds. A good chunk of us got sent to Khowst Province which is right along the Pakistan border. Some of my guys were sent to Ghazni Province and to Gardez in Paktia Province. We were spread all over the 203d Corps but at least we were still in the same corps.

We trained as a team at Fort Riley and then got split up in the name of continuity when we got to Afghanistan. Continuity is virtually non-existent in Afghanistan though, and that was a big problem we had to deal with. We'd come in and possibly get two days of relief in place or RIP with our counterparts. I was lucky to get two days but I moved three times to three different jobs while I was there. Each time I moved, I had varying degrees of battle handovers before I assumed the reins.

SO: Were you given flexibility at Fort Riley to incorporate any other training you felt was necessary?

SB: Not really. The only flexibility we had was on the weekends. We did have our weekends free but that was the only chance I had to do any extra training and I did that fairly frequently, much to the disdain of the guys on my team.

We sometimes did additional physical training [PT] like road marches. I always gave them Sundays off so they had at least one day to refit. My intent going into theater was to make sure these guys weren't burned out before they even started getting into the real show. I saw that happen on a previous mobilization and it's sometimes a problem with National Guard leaders. Early on in the mobilization cycle, during the Global War on Terrorism, a lot of the leaders felt like they had to occupy every second of the day with something to maximize their time. By the time they got ready to rotate into theater where they were really getting shot at, guys were mentally and physically exhausted. I endeavored not to do that to my guys, so I tried to give them as much time as possible while still trying to make sure they were prepared for what we believed was the mission over in theater. However, that was a problem because early on there wasn't a lot of information coming out of Afghanistan.

We didn't know what we needed to be prepared for or what equipment we needed above and beyond Army issue equipment. You always need personal comfort items and/or other little things to operate effectively. When I got into theater, one of the things I did right away was to sign up to be a mentor on the Battle Command Knowledge System, the BCKS, web site run by Fort Riley. A lot of people would contact me looking for information on being an ETT. I wound up mentoring a lot of ETTs before I even came home. I produced a couple of documents to help give them a good feel for what was going on. I did a PowerPoint slideshow on TTPs [tactics, techniques, and procedures] and lessons learned. I also did a document on key personal equipment to purchase as well as a third document

for recommended items for a go-bag or something to grab if you had to dismount out of a vehicle very quickly. Those are the things I tried to do to make things better for others.

SO: Can you talk about some of the cultural and language training you received at Fort Riley? Did they have some Afghan nationals come in to give you some training or were they all contractors?

SB: It was a mix of both. It was very similar to what they did for the folks going to Iraq. You had the program called Tactical Iraqi which I hear is a pretty good program but there wasn't anything like that for the guys going to Afghanistan.

We did receive 40 hours of *Dari* training which was more than adequate. The problem was that where I operated at, the primary spoken language was *Pashtu*. Essentially the 40 hours of *Dari* was useless. I had to very quickly try to learn *Pashtu* as I was operating on the ground out there. I learned just enough to impress the Afghans. I knew enough to be able to introduce myself and ask people how they were doing.

They were amazed that I knew that much. I should have known by the time I got to Fort Riley, the exact location I would be pinpointed to so I could prepare myself in terms of learning the language as well as getting a good picture of how the enemy fights and what the terrain is like. It would have been beneficial to know where I was going so I could find out what units I'd be working with when I arrived in theater and possibly even make contact with them before I got there. I didn't get any of that though because I had no idea where I was going until I got there.

SO: When did you find out where you were going?

SB: I found out just before I left. Some people didn't find out until they got into theater. It kind of varied. The fact that I was the team chief helped me a little bit because there were only so many jobs I could go into. Some of the folks who were more lower-ranking could have gone anywhere. For example, we had a signal officer who was training up to be a signal mentor because that's what he thought he was going to do on a brigade team. When he got into theater, he got shot out to ARSIC-West and ended up mentoring an infantry company commander. To go back to your question about culture and language training, we did receive 40 hours of *Dari* and we did get some key leader engagement training from actual Afghan nationals who basically role played as 'terps or key leaders for us but looking back on it now, some of the scenarios they put us through were pretty hokey.

They tried to set up a scenario of key leader engagements where they built on each other. You would meet with a *kandak* commander and then you'd meet with the brigade commander and so on but that's really not how you do things over there. I'm not trying to knock Fort Riley.

They did the best they could but unfortunately, doing a 10-day pre-deployment site survey and then coming back thinking you've got it all figured out just doesn't pass muster when there's a whole lot more to peeling the onion of Afghanistan. The problem with Afghanistan is that Afghanistan is the shaping operation for the theater. It's a secondary effort and not a lot of attention has been paid to it, somewhat rightfully so, because they were focused on Iraq. That's where the decisive operation is. However, now we're seeing that we probably haven't paid as much attention to it as we should have because Afghanistan is starting to blow up in our face.

SO: When did you actually deploy to the Middle East and how did that movement go?

SB: I deployed around 5 May 2007. The actual deployment itself was fairly fluid. Fort Riley had a pretty good system to get us to Forbes Field and get us off the ground. The biggest hiccup we had occurred when we got into Kuwait.

We went to Ali Al Salem and the people there wanted to hold us there for two weeks because they said we weren't validated and that we needed to do an additional two weeks of training. Well, we got a couple of the colonels on our team involved and they pitched a big enough fit that they let us go after about three days.

They were going to make us go through Camp Buehring and do the kind of train-up the guys get before going into Iraq. That can be attributed to the lack of coordination between Fort Riley and theater. If they were doing any talking, it wasn't apparent because they were going to have us revalidate on tasks we'd already been validated on at Fort Riley and that was supposedly the whole idea of going to Fort Riley in the first place. After we got that ironed out, we rolled into Kabul International Airport, got one magazine, and hopped on a five-ton truck.

We rolled from Kabul International Airport to Camp Phoenix where Task Force *Phoenix* is based. They spent about a day and a half in-processing us. The biggest problem we had was getting downrange after we finished our in-processing at Camp Phoenix.

We really felt like bastard children. The 82d Airborne wouldn't allocate a lot of aircraft to us so we had to beg, borrow, or steal to get downrange. The bottom line was that it took me about two and a half weeks to get to my first station. If Afghanistan is a secondary effort, ETTs are about four rungs below that in terms of getting support. The support for an embedded trainer, or a combat advisor as Colonel Nagl calls us, is absolutely terrible.

We went through a counterinsurgency academy there. Unfortunately, we were the first class to go through and they basically rehashed all of the COIN theory and doctrine we got at Fort Riley which was pretty good to begin with. I didn't get

much out of that except that it gave me a week to interact with Afghans before I went out to my assignment. Each class had half Afghans from the Afghan National Army, the ANA, or the Afghan National Police, ANP, and half Coalition.

SO: Were you able to talk to the team you were going to replace once you got into theater?

SB: I was able to talk to the team chief I was replacing about two or three times before I arrived in theater.

We got linked up too late though and he was out doing operations and couldn't get back to me and answer my requests for information. I didn't even find out who he was until about three weeks before I arrived in theater. The whole sponsorship and continuity program for transition teams going to Afghanistan is woefully inadequate.

SO: Once you got there, how did your actual RIP/TOA [relief in place/transfer of authority] go?

SB: It was nonexistent. I had about two days which was just about enough time to inventory the equipment I was going to have to sign for as a team chief and ask a few questions and then away my counterpart went. I've been in the active Army and from the experiences I've had I expected a much better battle handover and the time to do it in. When I RIP'd out in May 2008, I had to fight, kick, and scream to get nine days with my counterpart. I put together a comprehensive continuity program and we had briefings.

We were still pressed for time to get through all of that and get them validated on some things. Fort Riley does the best they can but they can't teach you everything and they can't replicate it.

For example, in the up-armored Humvee there is the Bose headset. We didn't have that stuff to play around with at Fort Riley, so we didn't know we had to be prepared to use those things when we got over there. It takes a little bit of doing to put that stuff on, figure out how it works, and figure out how it's integrated with everything. If you had the 115 and multiband inter/intra team radios, the MBITRs, or the 114, you could end up with anything from Harris 117 radios to the ASIPs. That might sound trivial but when you get over there and have to figure out how to use all that stuff, it becomes really significant.

We could have worked that all out at Fort Riley before we left. When I out processed Fort Riley, it appeared as if they had improved a lot in that arena. I saw a lot of frag-five-equipped up-armored Humvees rolling around so I assume they had some of that stuff so the newer transition teams would have an opportunity to work out those bugs before they got into theater. This was my first deployment and I hadn't seen any of this equipment before. When I first saw the Bose noise

canceling headset, I tried to put the damn thing on wrong. It was a stupid thing that I could have figured out at Fort Riley if I'd been given the chance.

SO: What type of equipment did you actually fall in on when you got to Afghanistan?

SB: There is a somewhat standardized package for each ETT. Generally speaking, every ETT falls in on a certain number of .50 cal's, 240s and either 114 or 115 Humvees. Currently, I think they have the MRAP [mine resistant ambush protected] vehicles. I actually fielded two MRAPs two weeks before I left country for the new team. As far as theater-provided equipment, things aren't too bad provided the team before you has taken good care of it and they haven't been in contact where their stuff got blown up. For example, the first team I took over hadn't serviced their vehicles in almost a year. In peacetime that would be unacceptable and in wartime it's even worse, particularly in Afghanistan where the terrain is just brutal on equipment. One of the first things I had to do when I took over was to roll those vehicles to a major CJTF-82 forward operating base to get services done.

SO: You were a team chief for three different teams. Why did you have to move so many times?

SB: After I'd been on the first team for two months, they decided to convert the ANA *kandak* to a commando *kandak* which would then fall under the mentorship of the operational detachment alpha, the ODA, team that was working in the area. The entire *kandak* minus about a company went up to Kabul to be trained as a commando *kandak* and that left me without a job.

They then moved me to the second *kandak* which caused me to move from Khowst Province up to Paktia where I operated for a couple of months. While I was there, I was a logistics support team, LST, chief and was basically supporting a Polish operational mentor and liaison team or OMLT. The problem is that there's a language barrier and they have a hard time understanding US Army operations. I was there as the LST to bridge that gap in terms of keeping an eye on the equipment and basically provide Coalition effects like close air support and MEDEVAC. I did that job for about three months but there really didn't need to be a major in that slot. I lobbied for and was able to go back to Khowst Province where I was the brigade S3 in operations for two months. I thought I was going to finish my tour out in that job but about two months into it I got moved over to Ghazni Province to take over a team being run by a captain who wasn't really managing things very well. Plus, the commander of that ARSIC wanted me over there to try and get the *kandak* validated. The CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan] commander, a two-star general, tried to implement some kind of validation program in Afghanistan. They'd send teams out to "validate" *kandaks*

for independent operations. I was sent over there because of my experience as a team chief and because of my experiences throughout the country. I had basically served in each province within the 203d Corps. I was sent over there to fix a problem. That's why I moved so much.

SO: Since so much of what goes on in Afghanistan is relationship-based, did you find it hard to move every couple months and have to build new relationships with each new commander?

SB: Yes. Everything we did as a transition team was relationship-driven, everything from getting support from your Coalition buddies to getting the host nation army or police to accept you. You really have to have some great people skills. The one thing I had going for me was that I moved around within the same ANA brigade because I had a good reputation, the Afghans I had worked with would talk to the guy I was going to, so they already knew my reputation coming in and that helped me quite a bit.

When I finally took my third *kandak*, I had a pretty good comparison model for what right looked like for a *kandak*. I had a pretty good idea of what to expect standards-wise and what I shouldn't expect because I had seen a couple different *kandaks* do things well or not so well.

SO: What was the ethnic makeup of your units?

SB: They've done a pretty good job of diversifying the *kandaks*, so there's a mixture of *Pashtu*, *Tajik*, and all sorts of different ethnic tribes. Most of them were from *Pashtu* tribes and they primarily spoke *Pashtu*. My 'terps had to speak both *Dari* and *Pashtu* and all of them did. I had to understand some of the differences between operating out in some of the bigger urban areas versus areas where things were more conservative.

For example, I had a *kandak* commander who had a mustache. In some of the villages in Paktia Province over in what they call the Khowst-Gardez Pass, where back in the day the Soviets got whacked really bad, we'd do a lot of operations there to look for weapons and bad guys. When we did key leader engagements there, they were more liberal in that area and so the commander was okay just having a mustache in that area. Facial hair has a lot to say about how well received you are in terms of being wise and all that kind of stuff. Well, when we moved into the more western part of Paktia to do the same operation, called KHYBER, the commander wouldn't go talk or do key leader engagements with the locals there.

They were much more conservative and they expected him to have a full beard for him to be accepted as a wise elder. He would instead send his religious and cultural affairs, the RCA, officer who had a full beard. Those were some of the nuances you had to learn in order to operate in eastern Afghanistan.

SO: Were there any problems with the mix of languages? Were the soldiers able to understand and follow orders?

SB: There weren't too many problems. There are really only two languages spoken over there. There's *Dari* and *Pashtu*.

They did speak some *Urdu* which is like an Indian or *Paki* language. Some of them know how to speak that but that's not their primary language. There wasn't any perceived language barrier from my perspective. The *kandak* commanders always had pretty good authority. They were mostly Russian-trained so they were very authoritarian and had very centralized control over what they did. Soldiers either did what they were supposed to do or they escaped, meaning they went AWOL.

SO: How would you characterize most of the operations you conducted with the Afghans?

SB: I would characterize them as the best of times and the worst of times. In the best of times, the operation would go really well and the Afghans would do what they were supposed to do. Sometimes they would not. One of the biggest problems I had was dealing with our partnered CJTF-82 units. There is a schism in the Army right now on how to conduct counterinsurgency COIN operations. Some of the units I worked with in the areas I worked in didn't seem to understand COIN or how to apply the foreign internal defense portion of COIN as laid out in FM 3-24.

They would put an Afghan face on what they did but their idea of doing that was to not include the leadership in any preparation for the operation. They'd just come up to me as the ETT and say, "I want 20 Afghans and three light tactical vehicles, the LTVs, at this time to go do this operation." They did that instead of including the leadership in the planning process so they could pick it up and get better at it, so some day we can get out of the country and they can run things without us there.

We were told at Fort Riley that the Afghans were far enough along that they should be able to pick it up and at least walk with things if not run with them. We should just be standing in the back, leading from the rear and supporting them to make sure they stay on azimuth and doing what they should be doing.

Of course there are operational security concerns because there are infiltrators in the ranks. There are people who are *Taliban* sympathizers, if not full-blown *Taliban*. How you work around that is to just bring a small group of leaders into the mix to go over some of the specifics of the operation so they could at least plan. Until we get over that hump, we will not be able to hand things over to the ANA and leave. You can ask any ETT that was over there with me and they'll back me

up about this. Towards the tail end of my tour, things did get better and they started to let the Afghans take more of the lead, particularly at the corps level.

They have a much deeper bench up there and they were able to do 24/7 operations. They were able to oversee the current fight and do some future planning. At the *kandak* and brigade level though, the staffs weren't deep enough to be able to do that. I did work with one infantry maneuver battalion in Ghazni Province that was fantastic. The other two maneuver battalions I worked with were not. Most of my time was spent fighting our own US forces to get them to do the right thing in terms of how to treat the Afghans, build up their confidence, and get them to lead the war fight.

SO: I think it's getting better now but those smaller combat units just don't want to give up that power. Isn't that our only way out of there?

SB: That's exactly right. It's a power thing and frankly there were some guys that were just out there to make a name for themselves and weren't willing to let the Afghans take the lead.

We are starting to see the Afghans take the lead now, as are the Iraqis when we let them but if I give you a job to do but keep doing it for you, eventually you're going to just take a step back and not do anything. If I force you to do your job, you'll start taking ownership of it. I fought that fight just about the whole time in country, until I got to Ghazni. I worked with three different *kandak* commanders and all of them understood COIN just as well, if not better, than I did. One Afghan colonel taught me a lot more about COIN than I could ever have learned from FM 3-24. They understand their people and if we just empower them to do their jobs, they'll do them.

SO: Did you ever run into any incidences of sniping, improvised explosive devices, the IEDs, or complex attacks?

SB: Yes. I didn't encounter too much sniping. I was part of a complex attack and we also encountered indirect fire.

They mostly hit fixed sites like FOBs, although there was one time during an operation when I stayed in a vehicle patrol base too long. We were doing cordon and knock operations out of there, they dialed in on us and we had rockets coming in to about 100 meters of my position. It's always a good thing to have a pre-designated rally point. We did see a fair amount of contact. As I was getting ready to leave, Ghazni Province was pretty hot.

SO: Did you take any casualties on your team?

SB: No.

SO: As team leader, what areas of responsibility consumed most of your time?

SB: There were two things. Dealing with Coalition forces required a lot of coordination and fighting with them to get the right thing done. The second thing that took up a lot of my time was resolving logistical and support problems for the Afghans. The logistics system for the ANA and ANP when I left Afghanistan was broke.

We spent a lot of time doing work arounds so we could keep the *kandak* operating. We spent a lot of field ordering officer or FOO money to work around the system and keep them going. Some of that's good and some of it's bad. At some point, you have to give them tough love and say, "If it's not going to come through your system, we're not going to fund it." You're in a quandary as a team chief, though. You have to empower them with the tools to continue to do operations so they feel as if they're taking ownership of their area of operations. At the same time, you have to force them to use their system.

The problem we ran into was that they'd send up a MOD-14, basically the equivalent of a DA Form 2062. They'd send it up through their system and then crickets would chirp for months. At some point, we had to step in and go purchase the items they needed on the local economy. We never violated any FOO regulations and we used the money for its intended purpose which was to support the ANA so they could continue to operate.

SO: How was your ETT's logistical support?

SB: Our logistical support was terrible through Task Force *Phoenix* channels. I got very good support from the CJTF-82 units. A lot of the times they had most of the assets we needed. Task Force *Phoenix* had folks that were essentially indifferent to supporting us downrange.

For example, we got the Generation-III cold weather gear. The task force commander, who was a one-star, and the task force sergeant major were wearing that stuff around in September 2007. Most of us down in Khowst Province didn't receive any of it until January. There was no coherent logistical supply system for getting it pushed out to the folks who needed it most, those who were out on the front lines. They basically took care of themselves first and then everybody else got it when they got it.

We only got it in Khowst Province because we sent a patrol up to Bagram and brought it back to ourselves. I will characterize the support I got out of Task Force *Phoenix* as very poor and the support we got from CJTF-82 as pretty good but we also had an operational control, the OPCON, relationship with CJTF-82 units.

SO: Were you living on an Afghan FOB or were you collocated with American units?

SB: We were generally collocated with Americans but most transition teams in Afghanistan live on a US-controlled FOB with our own US security force within an Afghan FOB. It's a small goose egg within a larger goose egg. Every one of the FOBs I lived on was like that. I was on one FOB where we didn't have our own security force, so we had to rely completely on the Afghans for our force protection. One location was pretty austere and we were basically our own support.

We were collocated with police mentor teams, the PMTs, and since we lived on the same FOB as our *kandak*, we would provide an internal quick reaction force for them. If they were out, we'd jump to their rescue if they needed it and vice versa. The maneuver unit in that AO, their Quick Reaction QRF was so slow to respond, at least 45 minutes to an hour, that it was almost pointless to have them in some cases.

SO: How were your living conditions?

SB: Our living conditions at two of the three places I was at were pretty adequate. We had KBR [Kellogg, Brown, and root contractor] support and we lived in B-huts.

We had access to electricity and morale, welfare, and recreation, the MWR, facilities. That wasn't too bad but that was a FOB that was built on an \$85 million Afghan FOB. That money bled over and we had pretty good facilities. Another FOB I was at was the ARSIC headquarters, so you know they're going to be in pretty good shape. Another area I was at, I was the FOB commander and we had to use Title 10 FOO money to keep the FOB running. We basically put bubble gum and bailing wire over things to keep it going.

We had no non-secure internet protocol router, the NIPR, or SIPR [secure internet protocol router] at that FOB. All I had was an Afghan local internet connection and I used Army Knowledge Online AKO for everything. I had a heck of a time getting my chain of command to understand that I didn't have SIPR and that it was a combat patrol to go way down to the provincial reconstruction team [PRT] where the maneuver battalion we worked with stayed to go use their SIPR. A lot of times they'd send me stuff on SIPR and I'd have to tell them that if it wasn't super hot, it would have to wait until I went and checked my SIPR for that week.

SO: What areas did you see the Afghans improve the most in?

SB: I moved around quite a bit and I didn't see a lot of improvement. When I came in, they were already at a certain level of competency which I considered to be pretty competent. I didn't see a ton of improvement while I was there, and that's for varying reasons. The transition teams in Afghanistan are not very well supported. I spent a lot of energy fighting with Coalition units to get them to do the

right thing and get support for myself and the Afghans. If I had to say anything, I would say they improved slightly in logistics but not much and they may have gotten better since I left.

In my opinion, we're just spinning our wheels in Afghanistan and until we develop a comprehensive national strategy, we're not going to be successful there. You can see in the news right now how the situation has further deteriorated, particularly in ARSIC-South. I think that's why the administration is considering sending additional troops in there. Afghanistan is bigger than Iraq in terms of land mass size and in population. Throw in the stark terrain you operate in and we cannot dominate that terrain. Until we do our own internal surge in Afghanistan, that situation will further deteriorate because the enemy can essentially operate out of a safe haven in Pakistan, just like Laos and Cambodia during Vietnam. The enemy can cause mischief on the Afghan side and then just run away. That's why we're spinning our wheels over there, in my opinion.

SO: How were you set up for interpreter support? Were they mostly local nationals or contracted civilians?

SB: All of the interpreters for transition teams in Afghanistan are contracted through a company now called Aegis. The company changed its name three times while I was there.

We had anywhere from five to seven interpreters working for us. At one FOB I operated at, I had just one 'terp for a seven-man team. Once again, that goes back to the lack of support I've spoken about. By the time I left there, they had four 'terps but three of them were brand new and right off the street. Those new 'terps had to be trained on the use of weapons and how to drive, so in a pinch those guys could possibly save a US soldier's life.

SO: When you were going around and doing cordon and knocks, what kind of reception did you get from the local nationals?

SB: We got a great reception for the most part, except from those who were *Taliban* sympathizers. That is one good thing the ANA has going for it. If you were to do approval ratings over there, their approval ratings would be through the roof. The people over there love their ANA and they have a very high opinion of Coalition soldiers. I worked primarily with US soldiers and they had a great opinion of us there. I read somewhere about a poll that was done and the approval rate was up over 80 percent for both the ANA and US soldiers. I also saw this when I sat down with my *kandak* commander to do key leader engagements with elders.

They were always happy to see us there and very much wanted to see their army rolling through. In a lot of places, because of the stark terrain and where we operated, a lot of times the ANA was the only face of the Karzai government they'd

ever see. They'd see the ANA coming through doing a patrol, doing a humanitarian assistance drop or a medical civic assistance program, the MEDCAP.

SO: Did you have any contact with the media while you were deployed?

SB: Yes. We had three embedded reporters with us during Operation KHYBER for about three days. One was from the *Christian Science Monitor*. One was from the *New York Times*. I'm not sure where the third guy was from. That was the only interaction I had with the media, other than some military reporters.

SO: Was your experience a positive one?

SB: I think the *New York Times* reporter had an agenda but other than that the interaction was pretty darn good.

SO: When did your team actually leave Afghanistan and who replaced you?

SB: My team left Afghanistan in early May 2008. We were replaced by a hodgepodge of folks. It was a mixture of National Guard from Maine, Nebraska, and New Jersey. It wasn't a team that had trained together coherently at Fort Riley. Those guys didn't know they were coming to Ghazni Province until I contacted the team chief on AKO just before he got into country and said, "Congratulations, you're replacing me."

SO: You said you had to fight for your nine-day handoff. Why do you think you had to fight to get that and how did the handoff go?

SB: I had to fight for it because of the way they rotated units out of the AO. The ARSIC commander at the time had a very antiquated idea of how everybody should rotate out. He wanted everybody to come through the headquarters, out-process and then go up to Camp Phoenix and out-process. That was about a four-hour trip away from where I was in Ghazni and it was heading southwest from where I was. I'd basically have to go back and then come back the way I just went to go out-process up at Camp Phoenix to RIP out. That kind of thing caused problems and cut into our time.

A lot of our time lines were dictated by Task Force *Phoenix* and I'm sure they were tied to movement out of theater with aircraft. The bottom line is that the Task Force *Phoenix* commander came out and said there had to be 10 days of RIP unless you got approval from him to go less than that. He later rescinded that although, because they hadn't properly planned the RIP and were running out of time.

They had to get us pushed out there, out-processed and on the plane. I had to send a formal request to the ARSIC-East commander to go pick up my transition team from Camp Phoenix directly without them having to go through the ARSIC-East headquarters to out-process. That would have added another five days because of the way movement happened in Afghanistan. That would have killed our RIP. To his credit, he did approve my request and I went up and got my guys. The problem

was that the RIP time line was slid to the right because of the aircraft running late but the biggest factor I saw was that there wasn't a commitment by the then Task Force *Phoenix* leadership to give people the time they needed.

Once I got my replacement there, things went really well. I had already put together a training schedule for the RIP and we executed it. Some of that included going to meet the maneuver battalion commander they'd be working for. I'd already done a capabilities brief to that battalion commander since the new transition team was running late. CJTF-82 had RIP'd out with CJTF-101, so there was a new infantry battalion commander there. I gave him a brief and set the stage so that new commander didn't misunderstand the capabilities and limitations of the new ETT or the *kandak*.

We also got them close air support training from the ODA team that was over, because they did that kind of thing more often than we did and were much more proficient at it.

They also had a tactical air control party, the TACP, to train them. I arranged for Task Force *Paladin* which does a lot of the investigations of IED strikes, to do some training with them. I gave them my plan from an operational level on what we did and didn't do but those guys could give them a better once-over-the-world view. We also did some one-on-one training, took them out to revalidate their weapons zeros and do some familiarization fire on the crew-served weapons.

They were coming from Fort Riley and had only done that one crew-served live-fire exercise. I wanted them to feel very comfortable being able to fire crew-served weapons. We also had the new turrets on there, so we wanted them to feel comfortable using the joystick for that.

We did a lot of things to set them up for success. I thought the RIP went very well but I guess you'd have to ask the team chief how well it's playing out now. My intent was for them to come in, go through the RIP and after that week be able to hit the ground running and be able to competently operate in the AO. Fort Riley just doesn't completely prepare you to operate in Afghanistan.

SO: Most of the ETTs are coming out of the National Guard and Reserves and fall under active duty units. Did you experience any difficulty because of that?

SB: Yes. There's still some Active Component/Reserve Component or AC/RC discrimination. They can see that I have a funny-looking patch so I must be either a Reservist or a Guardsman. The way I got around that was to be competent in my job and to know my business. Because I had prior active duty experience, I could talk the talk. As a matter of fact, I ran into three or four peers I had worked with while on other assignments, so in a lot of ways it was somewhat of a reunion.

I'm kind of ashamed to say that at almost seven years into this war, there's still some of that going on. There are many prior active duty guys that have gone into

the Guard that are just as competent as their active duty counterparts. The only thing we get fuzzy on are some of the newer systems because we don't get the time to train on them like the active folks do. I had to get spun up on some of the ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] systems because I hadn't seen them in many years, or they were new since I'd been on active duty. You just have to ask the right questions and make the commitment to be competent in your job.

SO: I think you're right. Things are changing now that the active duty folks have had more experience with the National Guard and Reserves.

SB: I won't sit here and say that the National Guard is just as competent across the board as the active Army. You can't expect that given the level of training time they have. However, with all of these deployments we've been on, we've certainly gotten more competent in our wartime mission. Just like in the active Army, there are good soldiers and bad soldiers. I did my best to set them up for success.

SO: What was the biggest professional lesson you learned while you were in Afghanistan?

SB: There were several. It's very important to build up your relationships as much as you can. I learned a long time ago how important good leadership is. For example, I got into some dogfights with my chain of command over end-of-tour awards, getting awards in a timely manner.

These guys had gone out and done a great service for their country. They had done a lot of work to try and improve the capability of the Afghan security forces, they had been shot at and had laid their lives on the line for their country, and they were leaving country without an end-of-tour award when the award had already been submitted 120 days earlier. That's inexcusable. I'm still today fighting to get a combat infantryman's badge, the CIB, for one of the active duty captains on my team for two months and then RIP'd out. I am still working with ARSIC-East to get that award because they had some clerical and administrative errors that caused them to issue him a combat action badge, the CAB, instead of a CIB. It's now on its fourth resubmit but I'm going to stay on it for as long as it takes because the guy earned it and deserves it.

I'm pretty disappointed in some of the senior leadership of the Army. It's really caused my confidence to be shaken in their ability to properly lead. I had some senior leadership at the ARSIC level, who were unfortunately National Guard officers, who didn't understand basic Army operations or basic leadership.

They made some very poor leadership decisions that unnecessarily put soldiers' lives at risk. When I could, I stood up to them and fought it. As a leader, you have to be willing to put your career on the line and stand up to take care of your subordinates. Those guys work their butts off for you. There are some

junior officers and NCOs just doing wonderful work over there that aren't properly being taken care of. My biggest lessons learned were about relationships, basic leadership, and making sure you understand basic Army operations. If you've got those three things down, you're fit to be a pretty good leader in this organization.

SO: Looking back over your 21 years of military experience, what assignment or person best prepared you for your position as team leader?

SB: That one person would be Brigadier General Steve Salazar who was my battalion commander at Fort Carson. He commanded 1-8 Infantry and was one of the best leaders I've ever worked for. He's now in Iraq. I've been fortunate to have had great leaders all throughout my career. Lieutenant Colonel Vann Smiley, who commanded a Stryker battalion, was another great leader I worked for in Korea. He will most likely be a brigade commander.

I was blessed in the active Army with some great leaders and great examples of how to do the right thing and how to take care of your people. That's why I had such a burning desire to take care of my guys in Afghanistan. Those guys took such good care of me as I was coming up. I was commander of General Salazar's Headquarters Company when he was the battalion commander of 1-8 Infantry and he taught me so much about leadership, public affairs, and information operations. It really shaped my career and how I approach being an officer. I'm about two months away from making lieutenant colonel and if I ever get blessed with leading again, I will certainly apply the principles he taught me.

SO: If you could make one or two recommendations to the Army Chief of Staff, Secretary of Defense, or Secretary of the Army based on your experiences in Afghanistan, what would they be?

SB: My first recommendation would be to put together an integrated strategy in Afghanistan for success, where we know what the end state is.

We want to stand up the Afghan security forces over there so they can provide security both internally and externally for their people. What I saw in Afghanistan was a lack of any kind of strategy. Yes, we have great tactical operations going on and we're taking the fight to the bad guys when they rear their ugly heads. The problem I had was that as a team chief, I didn't know where my piece of the pie fit into the overall picture. Why? It's because nobody at the two-star level ever came out and said, "Okay, guys. Here are the benchmarks. By this quarter, this is what I'm looking to be achieved." I didn't see any evidence of that and I was looking for it while I was there. If it does exist, it's not being effectively communicated down to the field grade level and we're supposed to be the guys executing the grand plan at the transition team level. I didn't see it. I would also recommend that they do a better job of placing personnel in Afghanistan.

We're just throwing people in there. The joke in Afghanistan is that if you have a pulse, you're good enough to be on a transition team. That's the wrong answer. We need to have our best and brightest folks over there. The chief is starting to recognize this and you're now getting key and developmental, the KD, credit for being a team chief on either a MiTT or an ETT. The chief is recognizing how important the job is but the problem remains that we're just throwing folks in there left and right without looking at their experience levels. I had an infantry officer who was leading a combat service support *kandak* mentoring team. He was a great guy but he was an infantry guy, not a logistician.

We are not doing a good job of putting people in the right jobs. On top of all that, continuity has got to get fixed in Afghanistan. We are not allowing enough time for the outgoing teams to mentor the incoming teams and get them spun up.

We're getting by but if we really want these guys to hit the ground running, keep the projects we have and make ground quickly, then we have to have better battle handovers. When we cycle in and only have very little battle handovers, you end up sitting there for two months with your eyes closed trying to feel your way around, figuring out what it is you should be doing. You're really relying on the guy who has already been there for a year to sit you down and walk you through things.

I tried to be part of the solution by putting together a fairly comprehensive plan to get those guys as spun up as I could in nine days. If I'd had more time, I would have done more with them. Like I said earlier, I didn't see the ANA progress much while I was there but that wasn't because I wasn't working hard or my guys weren't working hard. It was because we don't have the proper support or a strategy. It's hard for me at the *kandak* level to teach logistics to them when the system all the way up to the Ministry of Defense is broken. The *kandak* logistics officer or S4, stops having any confidence in his logistical system after he's submitted that MOD-14 form for the tenth time. He's just going to blow you off because he knows he's just wasting his time. That's the stuff going on over there right now but I can't fix that as a major. I need a two-star and all the colonels that are running around over there to get engaged and fix the problem.

SO: Is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview?

SB: I had a lot of high hopes going into Afghanistan on a transition team. I felt that with my background as an operations guy, I could go in and have a big impact and do good. Unfortunately, I felt kind of bitter leaving country and that my mission wasn't accomplished because the support systems weren't in place to make me successful. I spent too much time fighting with our Coalition partners on what our strategy was going to be to improve the Afghan security forces, except for that one battalion I worked with in Ghazni and I spent too much time trying to beg,

borrow, and steal to keep my team running. Until we fix those systemic problems, we're going to be in Afghanistan for a long time. I'm sad to say that my children will probably be doing the same mission I did when they're old enough, if we don't get our act together. I was very proud to serve over there and do my mission. I was proud to serve with some wonderful Americans and receive the support of the American people.

We got outstanding support from the average John Q. Citizen back home who really believed in our mission. I try to convey that as I go around and speak to local schools and so forth. I try to convey what the mission is over there in order to keep public support strong. At some point, though, our citizenry is going to say, "We've spent enough blood and treasure over there. It's time to pull out." It may be too soon. That's why we really have to get our act together. We don't have an infinite amount of time over there. At some point, we're going to get pulled out so we better get our stuff done now.

SO: Thank you for your time, sir.

Major John Clark (United Kingdom)
27 February 2007

GK: My name is Major Glenn King (GK) of the New Zealand Army and I'm a student at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Today I'm interviewing Major John Clark (JC) of the British Army, also a CGSC student, in support of the Operational Leadership Experiences Project for the Combat Studies Institute reference his experiences in Afghanistan in early 2006. Today's date is 27 February 2007 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Can you give me some information on where you're from and what you did in the military before you were assigned to Afghanistan?

JC: I'm a Royal Engineer. At the time I deployed to Afghanistan I was actually a squadron commander in 23 Engineer Regiment, the Air Assault, in support of 16 Air Assault Brigade, the UK. Prior to that, I'd been the executive officer for the same unit. Before that, I'd held a variety of posts as an aide-de-camp and other engineer posts, mostly in light parachute roles but I also had some experience of armored reconnaissance. During my previous service I deployed to Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and Afghanistan as part of the UK Operation FINGAL in early 2002, and to Iraq as part of the initial Operation IRAQI FREEDOM [OIF] in 2003.

GK: How were you alerted for your mission in Afghanistan and how did you and your unit prepare for this mission?

JC: At the time NATO was expanding and British forces, under a Canadian headquarters, were moving into southern Afghanistan's Helmand Province in particular. That mission was given to 16 Air Assault Brigade which I was part of and the regiment and my squadron were warned to deploy for operations. In the event, it was actually a far smaller grouping that would deploy on that operation. In the initial planning stages, in the exercising and training for the operation, I was busy preparing my squadron for deployment.

Closer to the time of our deployment, we found out we would also be providing the US equivalent of an embedded training team, the ETT. The British form is called an operational mentor and liaison team, the OMLT. I was earmarked to be the advisor to the infantry *kandak*, the battalion equivalent, operating under the 205th Corps, headquartered in Kandahar, in Helmand Province.

I immediately started working on some force generation and procedural issues for that. About a month before we deployed, I found out that I was subsequently going to attend the US CGSC at Fort Leavenworth in a matter of a few months and

because of that my role was changed again and I became the commander of the Afghan National Army Training Team, the ANATT, which was designed to mentor the leadership at the noncommissioned officer or NCO school at the KMTC [Kabul Military Training Center].

As far as actually preparing my team, I took on a disparate group of individuals from across the Army and there were significant force generation issues in trying to make sure I had the right people in the right place at the right time. My unit was to provide only six of the 22-man team. There were significant issues in generating the other people who were pulled from across the Army, getting them into one place, training them, and then deploying on the operation.

GK: In terms of the Afghan training team, can you describe what you understood your mission to be? Also, what kind of pre-deployment training did you conduct in the UK before you went into theater?

JC: The mission was very much to mentor rather than train the leadership of the NCO school. In essence there was a formed structure within the ANATT or rather the NCO school within the KMTC. The team I took out there effectively mirrored that structure in terms of rank. At every level we were mentoring our respective counterparts within the ANA. In my case, I was mentoring the commanding officer of the training team.

We were there very much as advisors and counselors rather than as trainers specifically. It became very clear as soon as we got there that our role should be much more mentoring rather than training to enable continuity and also to ensure that they could cope when we left. That was the mission as we understood it and it expanded slightly as we got into theater.

In terms of the pre-deployment training, historically the mission had been conducted by a battalion that had been based in Kabul and they provided several functions, among which was the team that ran the training school. I was the first person to take a team out there without the battalion support that my predecessors had enjoyed. In terms of pre-deployment training, I relied very much on other elements of 16 Air Assault Brigade that were deploying to the south of Afghanistan with the OMLT. Also in terms of the specific training, I was fortunate enough to go out on a reconnaissance to Kabul and was able to speak to the various personalities on the team at the time and see what they did.

When I came back, we spent about three weeks preparing as a team. On the surface it was sufficient time to complete all of our mandatory requirements for deployment on operations and enough time for me to impart the way in which I wanted things to be run. I was also able to do some work-up training in terms of preparing the team to mentor our counterparts in the ANA. It was tight, though. For a group of people who have never met each other before, three weeks is a very short time to prepare for a deployment of this type.

GK: What was the structure of your team? Who was your second in command?

JC: Ironically the generation of the second in command was probably the most problematic job I had and it was crucial because I knew I was only going to be out there for a few months. I knew I would be headed to Fort Leavenworth and so I was quite keen to get somebody in there who was strong enough to run the team in the likely event that there would be a period of absence between my leaving and the new commander coming in. In essence, I had a second in command who was another major and who ended up taking on the team when I left. I had a smattering of warrant officers and senior NCOs, a sergeant major, and a quartermaster sergeant. I had four warrant officers second class. I had several staff sergeants and sergeants. The lowest rank I had was a full corporal.

They were all very capable trainers in their own right and a lot of them came from training backgrounds and were selected for the job for this reason. Despite the fact that it was a disparate team, there was a lot of experience from across the field army. I had infantry, signals, engineers, logistics, and artillery officers and NCOs and it was a good eclectic bunch of people who offered a variety of different perspectives. The model we were using was an infantry one so you'd expect it to be very much an infantry game but the presence of an all-arms grouping actually added a different perspective.

GK: You mentioned you only had three weeks to do your training. Was there anything you felt could have been a risk to your mission and that you would have to do on the job to try to catch up?

JC: On the one hand in terms of force protection, we'd completed our mandatory training. I had identified significant force protection issues in theater because we had to travel from where we lived to where we worked without designated protection. There was quite a high-threat environment at this time in Kabul so we had to be able to defend ourselves on the move and when we went on exercises to training areas, there were quite a lot of attacks on those training areas.

We had to be sufficiently trained and capable of defending ourselves but I was confident in the skills of the guys. They were all very experienced. If we could have done more that would have been great but I was very confident in terms of their abilities. In terms of training for the job we were going to do, it was limited in the fact that we weren't infantry in the main and that we couldn't do too much training but I think that actually helped us. If we had had too much time to do work-up training and work on our drills and skills, we'd have been at much more risk of trying to train the Afghans rather than sitting back in a monitoring role.

So the different knowledge we had actually gave us an advantage because we had to sit back and learn from the instructors who were there and also from the system that was in place. Our job in the whole build up was made easier by

the fact that this had been a British responsibility for several years. It was a well-established system and the whole thing worked. So, I would have liked to have done more training but I was confident we had done at least the minimum to be safe. I was also cognizant of the fact that it would probably be to our advantage in the end. One of the greatest challenges was to try to reign in my very proactive NCOs and officers.

GK: Can you talk about who you were under in terms of command and control? What was the command dynamic?

JC: I was in a unique situation. The team sat in the US chain of command as part of the training and advisory group in Task Force *Phoenix* but in terms of administrative support it was directly linked in to the rest of the British forces in Kabul. There were British forces in Kabul at the time but they weren't my direct bosses. It was thus quite a different dynamic, certainly in terms of the logistics aspects of getting out of theater and parent unit responsibility.

We were there at the same time that the new Allied Rapid Reaction Corps headquarters was taking over and they were the people who became primarily responsible for our administration. That was on the British side.

We were relatively on our own which certainly has its benefits in terms of freedom of action but in terms of logistics it didn't cause us any problems even though it could have if we hadn't had the right balance of personalities. From where we sat, it was a US chain of command under Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan, the CFC-A, at the time and then down through Task Force *Phoenix* where we were assigned for training.

On the other hand, the actual training and advisory group was based at KMTC and that was the organization in which we sat alongside my counterparts from the US for the basic and advanced individual training or AIT. The French were conducting officer training as well as the US Army and while I was out there the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, UK, also came over to do some officer training. The Canadians had responsibility for combined training and the Romanians and Mongolians had the lead for reconnaissance and field artillery respectively.

GK: You mentioned that your team was really responsible for senior NCO training, can you talk about how that actually occurred on the ground in terms of the day-to-day running of your program?

JC: We ran three courses: a junior NCO course to train lance corporals and up, a senior sergeant course, and a company quartermaster sergeant/regimental sergeant major-level course.

We spanned the chain of NCO courses. It was a mixture of classroom work and field craft out of the back of the camp. It was a combination of the two of those and

a certain amount of written work, bearing in mind the low rate of literacy and more than that, the fact that they spoke many different languages. Trying to standardize that was very much an issue. One of the main concerns we had was that KMTC was the only place the NCO courses were run in Afghanistan, unlike the US and the British Armies where we tend to run a lot of courses internally within our battalions and brigades.

An idea that was pioneered by my predecessor and that my team took to a new level was the concept of a mobile training team, the MTT. While I was there I led a team out to Herat in the east of Afghanistan. There were subsequent trips planned to the various brigades throughout the country because the ANA brigade commanders were very reluctant to release their quality men to go to Kabul when there was no guarantee that they'd get them back. Also, the soldiers themselves were very reluctant to travel to the capital because of security concerns.

GK: You mentioned the different students turning up all literate but speaking different languages. I assume you had some interpreter support?

JC: Yes. We had a pool of about 20 interpreters. There was almost one per man on our team. In many ways they provided a lot of the continuity for the NCO School because many of them had been working there for a while. Often they would be out demonstrating AK47 drills on the range when the particular ANA instructor didn't seem capable of doing it.

They also translated the manuals we were developing into *Dari* or *Pashto*. They were also very good culturally. They had studied English and a few had traveled outside of Afghanistan. They were a very good bridge between the cultures.

GK: How was the relationship between your team and the interpreters, living and working so closely together? Did you form a tight-knit group?

JC: Yes. We spent a lot of time traveling around together, so not only do you get the military aspects of it and the knowledge they bring from having served there for a long time but also the cultural aspects.

They were particularly helpful in pointing out the rights and wrongs, the whys and wherefores. Despite the fact that we had a pool, the guys on the team would generally pick one particular guy who they were comfortable with to come out with them and they wound up building very strong relationships.

GK: You mentioned the MiTT going to Herat. Can you talk about how that was facilitated and how it tied in with the Afghan brigade as well as the Coalition forces operating in that area?

JC: It was really facilitated by the US ETT that was in Herat. They had a liaison officer in Kabul with whom we would meet. They really were the facilitators and were keen to get it going for obvious reasons. The ANA brigade was hugely enthusiastic about us coming and no door was closed to us.

We were very well received. We did a detailed reconnaissance over there. Like I said before, the ANA commander was very welcoming. The US commander of the ETT was also extremely helpful in facilitating it. The main issue we had was with training areas. Lots of new ANA barracks were built on old sites and the outlying areas were littered with unexploded ordnance from various campaigns. It was very difficult to find clear training areas particularly for live firing which is what we wanted to build the troops up to by the end.

GK: When you went out as an MiTT, did you go with an already defined set of competencies that you were going to train to or did you arrive, assess what was lacking, and then design the training appropriately?

JC: In essence we endeavored to take the same courses we were running in Kabul and run them wherever the team deployed to. For example when the MiTT deployed to Herat, where we normally would have been running two junior NCO courses in Kabul, we programmed just to run one and all the manpower and resources that would have gone to the other course was lifted directly to Herat to run the training over there.

GK: Let's talk about training Afghan soldiers. They have a different culture than the US Army or British Army. What did you find when you had to deal with the indigenous military in terms of adapting your training regime from a Westernized approach to an appropriate approach for the theater?

JC: I think there are two issues to touch on. The first thing is that we were part of a US team and within that coalition there were French, Canadians, Romanians, Mongolians, and British. As part of this team we had internal issues in terms of making sure that what we were teaching was consistent throughout all the different branches of training. Things had mainly been set up with US doctrine since they had the lead and were doing the brunt of the training but nonetheless it clearly had to be adapted to Afghan culture and techniques.

One member of my team was tasked specifically with making sure that what we were teaching was consistent with everybody else. There was a Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC] branch set up within the training and advisory group headquarters to ensure just that.

We wanted to ensure that somebody wouldn't go through basic training or advanced training and then come to us and we'd be teaching something completely different that they'd have to relearn. Similarly, we didn't want the officers learning tactics that their soldiers and NCOs had no idea about.

The second major problem we had to overcome was the fact that historically within the ANA the NCO corps had been very weak in contrast to all the Western armies, where our NCO corps are generally very strong and often are given

responsibility for low-level training and are not afraid to take a lead, in many ways mentoring their junior officers. In Afghanistan, though, there was an issue in the 1970s when the NCOs lost confidence in their officers and there was what can be regarded as a coup, albeit a failed one. From that moment on, there was something of a purge and NCOs were generally sidelined. Those who were kept in for show's sake were really just the tea boys for the officers. We had to overcome that.

We had to culturally convince the officers that the NCOs were worth having, that they had a valuable role to play and that they could actually help them with a lot of their work. They weren't just there to carry their weapons or make their tea.

We also had to convince the NCOs who had been downtrodden for so long to stand up and take responsibility for themselves and perform the functions that NCOs perform in our armies. In addition, digging right down into the culture you find various differences. There was a problem both in designing the training and in terms of the way we mentored. One of the most difficult things as a commander was to force my team to stand back and not get too involved in the training. I couldn't let them upstage the ANA instructors by telling them that something wasn't correct, because that was a big issue in terms of face saving. In general terms, the way they conduct training is very different from ours.

We tend to be proactive in Western militaries and if we see something that isn't right our first instinct is to go fix it ourselves. That's what I geared a lot of our pre-deployment training towards - teaching our guys to hold off and let the Afghans do it. Talk to them quietly in an area away from the troops but don't get involved in the specifics of what they're doing because it's their business and when we're gone they're going to need to get on with it.

In terms of what we were teaching them, they were using different weapons systems from what we use so that took a bit of training. Their small group tactics were different as well. All of that said, I think we were all very impressed by their enthusiasm, guile, and resourcefulness. A lot of the individual drills we wouldn't recognize as being classically suited to a massed army but they were certainly very effective in their own way. A lot of the soldiers we were training were former *mujahedeen* who were very used to fighting using fairly unconventional methods. It was just a case of taking the great spirit they had and ensuring some sort of unity demanded by the design for the ANA.

GK: The makeup of the ANA is diverse in terms of the tribal backgrounds. How did that work?

JC: This was one of the first times that all these people really came together in this kind of group. Regardless of the political issues of where these people were deployed, it was still often difficult because bear in mind that despite tribal or familial affiliations, there might still be people within the same tribe or family

who don't get along anyway. Socially the common groups used to hang together in the barracks or when they went home since they were traveling to the same areas but at work they generally tended to mix very well and there wasn't a particular issue. The main problem was one of language whereby people just couldn't communicate with each other.

GK: You mentioned that a large part of your job was mentoring the battalion commander. Can you talk about that role and your relationship with him?

JC: The colonel I was mentoring was fairly new in the job and his predecessor had just been sacked a few weeks before I arrived in theater because of corruption. He had been trying to steal some cooking oil from the chow hall and had been caught by the camp commandant. Thievery at lower levels was commonplace and there were several instances of soldiers taking ammunition from ranges and selling it at markets downtown. When his predecessor had been sacked for a very similar offense, the new commander had some challenges in establishing his credibility throughout the school. He was a man of great integrity, though. He knew what he wanted to do and how he was going to get there. A lot of my business with him was conducted over a cup of *chai* in his office which is where we generally spent most of our time. Unlike many of the other commanders over there, he wanted to go out and watch the training and not just hang out in his office.

The main difference between the ANA and Western armies is the formalization and practice of doctrine and discipline. While the concepts were there, the procedures were not necessarily laid out. In terms of the way he was communicating with his subordinates, it took a bit longer than usual because it wasn't instinctive for them to know how he expected them to behave. I was very impressed by his presence, his enthusiasm, and his understanding of what we were trying to achieve. He was very keen that it was his show and that we were there to help him out. That was just perfect because that's exactly what we wanted.

In the lower levels of command there were instances where a lot of instructors would try to turn lessons over to British instructors because they knew it would be easier for them and they wouldn't have to do it but the battalion commander was very keen on recognizing his responsibility and taking on his role. He was certainly one of the few people who would challenge up the ANA chain of command. There was a general reluctance throughout the ANA to do that because of authoritarian reasons.

GK: As far as working with the commander, did you go over there and try to add extra tools to his kit bag or did you just take what he had and try to refine them?

JC: Given that I was only there for a short period of time, I only did the latter. I tried to refine the processes he had in place. Having said that, though, I did do quite a bit of work on the curriculum at the lower levels to make sure the NCOs

were learning the right stuff. As far as the commander was concerned, it was more a case of honing his management skills of the school. I would point out what was deemed acceptable or not in our army and not that it had to be applicable to him but it was a guideline as to what he should and shouldn't expect. In many ways I was a sounding board so he could ask questions. He was a lieutenant colonel and had been in the army for 30 years so he knew what he was talking about. I did what I could, bearing in mind that we were introducing his people and his school to methods and techniques they hadn't heard of before.

GK: When the Afghan soldiers turned up, did they come equipped with their own personal weapons and uniforms or did they have to be provided by your training team?

JC: They were provided for from a central issuing facility which was a US-led function within the KMTC. That was another huge drain on time and resources. Accountability was not something that was particularly inherent in Afghan forces historically.

They took what they could get away with. There were a lot of instances of people being issued a whole roster of kit, "losing" it the following week and selling it on the market. That was a big issue and a big headache for the US quartermasters who were running the facility. It also highlighted another issue, because when an instance like that happened they would often come to us and ask us to get them another kit. We'd respond by telling them to speak to their own Afghan quartermaster and make sure he could get them the kit because it wasn't our job. I was very keen to press the fact to them that we weren't there to do that sort of thing. There were instances where there were financial things or the allocation of pistols which were generally beyond the pay scale of the other members of the team that we occasionally got involved with but in general terms it was critical that they learned to go through their own chain of command.

GK: What was the duration, for example, of the senior sergeant course versus the junior NCO course? Were they roughly the same?

JC: The courses were rewritten significantly, mostly by my predecessor, and there were two New Zealand senior NCOs on the team who provided a great measure of continuity in this area.

They offset the rotations of the British which was excellent. One of them ran the standardization of doctrine and the other ran the senior sergeant course.

They brought a lot of experience with them. In essence, the courses were standardized to all be six weeks in length during the time I was there.

GK: I presume that after leaving the course a number of students went back to their units and then took part in combat operations in Afghanistan. Did you receive

any feedback from those Afghan units or any validation that you were actually teaching them good stuff and that they were putting it to good use?

JC: I didn't get any feedback but it was something I was keen to do. There was a system I had put in place but had yet to receive any of the fruits from because I was only out there for a short time.

We were in a lucky position because, having come from 16 Brigade which was in the south with the ANA 205th Corps, we trained up all the NCOs who were going to work down in Kandahar. The OMLT that would be working with the soldiers from 205th Corps in Helmand Province came to KMTC for the last couple of weeks and saw them complete their training. They were also able to see the various strengths and weaknesses of the commanders, so they would know what they were dealing with when they went to the field.

We had systems in place so when they got to southern Afghanistan they would be able to report back to us on the quality of training. I left theater about a week after they deployed down south although and so I did not receive any detailed feedback. In general terms I know that they were involved in combat operations a couple weeks after leaving KMTC and they performed very well.

GK: Did you share a common lessons learned summary with other Coalition forces conducting NCO training that you could use to improve your training?

JC: Yes. I used to send my team out to watch other training, particularly when they were following up the NCO training and the officer training. When the officers, senior NCOs and junior NCOs came out of their training they would do a combined arms training exercise under the Canadians. I was quite keen to get my team out to see all these things. I wanted my team to take lessons back so we could look at ways to improve our training. As far as the overall aspects went, it was very much a US TRADOC-led activity but we wanted our own eyes on what was going on as well. Apart from the nations doing junior officer and NCO training, there were other countries such as the Mongolians in this case who were teaching field artillery which wasn't necessarily relevant to what we were doing.

GK: What benefits did you see your team getting from working with the Afghans?

JC: I think in the contemporary operating environment that we're in today, whereby we're often going into alien cultures and regions, the importance of understanding that there's more than one way of doing particular things is a good lesson to learn in life. In terms of the military, too, it's good to broaden horizons.

As NCOs and officers we're used to finding a problem and dealing with it in the way we're used to and coming up with a very good solution but actually that's not always the best way to do things. As Lawrence of Arabia once said, "better

[they] do it tolerably well than that you do it perfectly. It is their war and you are to help them, not to win it for them.” I think the guys learned patience, they learned about the Afghan culture and how it works and that there are other ways of doing things and that in this particular environment it’s important in the long term to stand back and let the Afghans deal with things.

GK: Was your team living with the Afghans or were you staying in another location?

JC: We were staying in another location and traveling in every day. When we deployed to the field, we’d go with them but between courses we’d be living separately in a different barracks.

GK: What challenges did that present for your team? Being in Kabul there were obviously threats all around you. What did your team do to negate those threats?

JC: The main force protection issue we had was in terms of getting back and forth to work down the Jalalabad Road. That was a particularly treacherous route and it has most of the military installations in Kabul on it. So it was a high-threat area.

We had to do a lot of defensive driving. The other issue was that we had to have some way to identify who the quick reaction forces were that were available to come and help us if we ever were in trouble.

We needed to know what radio frequency they were on and that was a very important aspect of our travels. We mitigated that with comprehensive briefings in the evenings and before people went out.

GK: What advice would you offer an officer who is about to deploy to do a mission similar to yours?

JC: Always bear in mind the reason for you being there. In the short term it’s very easy and innate as Western officers to go in, sort things out, put our own procedures in place that we’re comfortable with and get out in good order. Looking at the long term, though, it’s essential that you train the trainers rather than train the soldiers or recruits coming through. I could offer advice as to what I thought was or wasn’t right but I had to always remember that I couldn’t do it for them. It was never going to be perfect and it probably won’t ever be the way I’d envisioned it but it was a way that they were comfortable with and when we’re gone they can stick with. I was only there for a few months but normally it is a six-month rotation for the British and having that kind of continuity to get them through is another very important point. I would advise anybody going to do this job that the value of the personal relationship is very strong in the Afghan culture. It’s also just as important that, as a nation mentoring the school, the ideas of one team

don't deviate greatly from the next. You're going to have to accept imperfections from the systems that the team which has gone before you has come up with, so you don't try to radically change the system in the space of six months and then your successor comes in and changes things again. That's certainly not in the best interest of the people you're there to help.

GK: Was it articulated to you what the end state of this training was going to be?

JC: The only thing we knew was that it was supposed to be self-sustaining. The end state for the British mission was to make sure the ANA was capable of training its own NCOs. That's what I was working towards but that was part of the whole broader context. This is a fairly enduring commitment and I suspect this type of support will be there long after offensive operations have ceased in Afghanistan such as in the same way we still see a lot of training teams deploying to Iraq now. It's a very visible demonstration of a nation's commitment to the country. What's more, in terms of the effect it delivers, the fact that you're building for the future is arguably far more enduring than an offensive operation.

GK: Have you heard anything about how the training is going over in Afghanistan in terms of what you set up?

JC: I spoke to the officer in charge who took over the team for me on a fairly regular basis until he left theater and it was progressing very much along the path I'd set us on.

We were putting out a good number of teams into the provinces and generating a huge number of NCOs to the delight of the various corps and brigade commanders in the field. In terms of the metrics of the numbers passing through KMTC, they've increased significantly. Those are all positive steps in the right direction. I don't have any measure to qualify any assertion as to the improvement of the individual coming out the other end but I do know from speaking to some of the British working down south with the ANA that the NCOs are doing a good job.

GK: Are there any other points you'd like to add?

JC: No, thank you.

GK: Thank you for your time.

Major Thomas Clinton Jr. (USMC)
12 March 2007

CH: My name is Major Conrad Harvey (CH) and it is Monday, 12 March 2007. I'm with the Operational Leadership Experience Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major Thomas Edward Clinton Jr. (TC). Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Can you go ahead and give me some of your service background?

TC: I was commissioned in '93 in the United States Marine Corps through the Platoon Leader's Course. I went to 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at the 1st Marine Division. I served as a platoon commander in a rifle company and a Dragon's platoon commander in a weapons company. I served as a company executive officer, the XO, and also as a rifle company commander and then I went on to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and was part of Marines Barracks, Guantanamo Bay for two years as a guard officer. I was the XO [executive officer] of Rifle Company Windward and then I was the commander of Headquarters Company at Guantanamo Bay.

I went to Amphibious Warfare School for a year which is a Marine Corps career-level course and then went on to command two companies in 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, one as a headquarters company commander and then later as a rifle company commander.

I transferred to The Basic School in 2003 where I was head of the maneuver section which teaches all the tactics to brand new lieutenants coming into the Marine Corps. I was then a company commander and did an advisory tour for approximately six months with the Afghan National Army, the ANA. I returned to the States and then transferred to be a student here at the Army's Command and General Staff College or CGSC.

CH: Can you go ahead and tell me about your experiences in the Global War on Terrorism, the GWOT, since 9/11?

TC: I have two experiences with the 7th Marine Regiment and then, more importantly, I did the advisory duty which was termed as embedded trainers to the ANA. That was a program that started at the end of the *Taliban's* rule after the Army's Special Forces, the SF, had basically ejected the *Taliban* from Kabul and 3d Special Forces Group, I believe it was, immediately started to stand up the ANA, the initial battalion. Something that was kind of unique was that the battalion I was with, the 1st Battalion of the 3d Brigade, was considered a commando battalion.

They were stood up by 3d Group and then when 3d Group was taken away to hunt down *Taliban*, the Army National Guard, the Marine Corps and some regular Army, I guess, came in and assumed the mission of training and advising the fledgling ANA. 1-3 Commando was the only one that had Marines at the time. They only had Marine advisors.

CH: Did you get any special training prior to that assignment?

TC: Unfortunately, no. The Marine Corps, in my opinion, did not learn its lessons well from Vietnam. At the time, it wasn't considered a dangerous billet. It was considered that you're going to go there and be almost like in a School of Infantry environment where you're going to train new recruits. Of the initial teams that went over, we were the third iteration. The first team that went over just did training and assist. The second team that went over, halfway through the tour, went into combat operations with them.

They were authorized Title 10 to go on patrols and do combat operations. By the time we got there in April 2004, we were in full-on combat operations. The 1-3 guys were in combat operations and they were pretty well versed in what they were doing. So that's the kind of thing we fell into. The Marine Corps had an element at the time that was doing some training and the training we got was advise and assist type stuff but they were focused more on peacetime training.

They had been sending guys to Georgia in the central Asia area, sending guys to Africa, and were assisting different forces. This was kind of like what the Marine Corps did during the small wars.

They did a lot of police training, checkpoint training, and that type of thing in small units, probably no bigger than a platoon but this was the first time since the end of the Vietnam War in '72 that you had Marine advisors accompanying forces in combat operations in a strictly advise and assist role. That's one of the things that's the hardest to break Marines of and even the chain of command you were working for at Army, Marine Corps, and SF level.

Guys did not realize that, at the end of the day, advisors are not commanding. Advisors are not in control unless all hell breaks loose but never once did I have to take control of a situation other than to facilitate maybe air support or medical evacuation or my guys would facilitate air support for MEDEVAC. Only in those rare cases did we have to take control of a platoon, a company, or a battalion.

That was a hard thing to deal with because a lot of people didn't realize that it was their army and their forces and you had no constitutional authority to tell them what to do. There were a lot of commanders who were talking to me as if I was the commander of that unit. I just told them that what they want to do is what they want to do. So our training was known as SCET which stands for Security

Cooperation Education and Training. It used to be called special coalition warfare which I was referring to earlier.

The Marine Corps was sending guys to South America and Georgia and were helping a lot of these police agencies and governments deal with drugs and things like that but it was strictly in a peacetime role. So this SCET itself, at the time, really didn't have any cadre to train, didn't have any funding to train, didn't have a program of instruction, and there weren't any standards. As Marines have done throughout the ages, they've taken bits and pieces of things and adapted them but I can speak for the team prior to us and the team after us that all the training was generated from initiative within the unit itself.

We had a 13-man detachment, all senior enlisted and officers. We had one sergeant who eventually made staff sergeant while we were over there. So we did a lot of convoy-type training, reflexive shooting, went over the basics, taught classes to each other such as patrolling, offense, defense, basic squad/ platoon stuff. A lot of medical stuff we did on our own.

We did a lot of communications training to make sure we were up to speed on the radios and stuff which, if you'll remind me later, I'll talk about because the gear we fell in on was atrocious. When we got over there, the gear that the unit had was strictly for self-defense. There were some pistols, a couple carbines but there weren't any tactical satellite, the TACSAT, radios or machine guns or light machine guns or any of that stuff you would think you would need to protect yourself in an environment like Afghanistan. At any given moment you could find yourself in the middle of the Wild West. Guys would say that the *Taliban* were shooting at us. Well, how the hell do you know it's the *Taliban*? It could just be some pissed off local, for all you know. That's how "wild" the outer land is but that's the training we had.

CH: Can you walk me through the process of getting into country and getting yourselves oriented?

TC: We got into country and the whole time we're being told by the Marine Corps side of the house that we're not going to be in combat operations, we're not doing any of that stuff. We're not allowed to do that.

We're just going there for six months of training and then coming back. Fifteen days after we arrive in country, my guys are with companies in combat operations as a part of Task Force-31 which was an SF task force operating out of Kandahar. So there went the "strictly training" thing. Fifteen days into it, my guys were coming under fire from whatever the action was such as ambushes, raids, anything like that. So we spent about three months in Kandahar. That was a wacky relationship.

We were attached to Task Force *Phoenix* which was a multinational coalition joint task force. At the time, it was commanded by a command element out of the National Guard from South Carolina, and then halfway through our tour they went home and a unit from Illinois came in. That was really difficult because in the National Guard group that was commanding and running, you had British, Germans, and Canadians. We even had Mongolians teaching artillery to the Afghans. So you had this big coalition of guys.

The French were there teaching the officer corps and the British were teaching the NCO corps which makes for some interesting encounters but you had all these guys training and that's what they came to do was to strictly train. At some point, somebody decided the Afghan Army had to get out of the training mode and go for what it's built for which is to fight the enemies of the national government.

So they were initially attached to SF units and the advisors who were National Guard, Army, or Marine Corps would take these guys down to wherever they were going to operate in, hand them over to the SF guys, and they would take them out on training missions which is a weird thing. As a side note, I did not see at any time an SF unit engaged in training the national army. SF had their own little militia groups which were their indigenous forces that they were using, much like they used them in Vietnam.

They weren't training these guys to take over. They were training them to assist in hunting down and killing members of *al-Qaeda* or the *Taliban*. When we got there, we were allowed to go on missions with them. Here's the chain of command. Each team was made up of a Marine captain and two staff sergeants, or a gunnery sergeant and a staff sergeant, and they would go with each of the companies. So you had one Marine captain who was advising and assisting the Afghan company commander. Oh by the way, that company is attached to an SF operational detachment alpha, the ODA, which has its own captain and chain of command. So you have these two units working together. Technically the SF battalion has TACON [tactical control] over the Afghan battalion but you're on loan from Task Force *Phoenix* and this is where the problems started.

We would come under fire, especially with the second iteration of command from Task Force *Phoenix*. Task Force *Phoenix* was trying to tell us what we could and couldn't do tactically, even though we were tactically under the control of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, the CJSOTF, which was commanded I think, by Colonel Pat Higgins at the time, in 3d Group. So you had that going on. It was a weird combination.

Then in my case, I'm at a firebase on the border with two of our Afghan companies and the battalion staff, and I got SF captains who are in this weird relationship with me. I outrank them but they have tactical control of the area and I'm

just there to advise and assist. They technically couldn't tell me what to do because I outranked them but at the same time they had tactical control of what was going on, so it was a weird mix of what was going on but we made it work. We had really professional officers and staff NCOs on the Army side but it was a weird situation to go into.

Technically if it had been Vietnam, I would have been out there with the battalion and my guys and no SF or anything. Unfortunately, we were tied to SF because they controlled the areas of operation, the AOs, and they also backed us up because they had the ammunition and some of the weapons that we ended up having to borrow from them, so that made it difficult. What really happened was that Task Force *Phoenix* never accepted the fact, in my opinion, that we had gone into combat operations. Training was over, or as one of my gunnery sergeants who was wounded, but not seriously while advising said, "Sir, preseason is over.

We're in the season and points are going up on the board. Unfortunately, Task Force *Phoenix* still thinks they're at training camp but actually we're already three games into the season and we're not doing well." However, we did three months in Kandahar and did quite well. We didn't lose anybody, although we did have some minor wounded. No Americans from our side were wounded.

CH: Could you describe your AO, generally the working environment and your relations with the Afghans?

TC: Kandahar was a funny region and that, to me, is what you would call a classic counterinsurgency war. You knew the enemy was out there but nobody was giving them up. I probably talked to 10 or 15 *Taliban* on a weekly basis but I just didn't know it. They might have been *Taliban* because it was safer for them to be *Taliban* than it was to be a member of the Coalition but the ANA commander, Colonel Mohammed Esok, was pretty professional as far as Afghans go. You have to accept the fact that Afghans are not Americans. Afghans do what they do to survive. There are a lot of rumors of Afghan commanders being drug dealers, gun runners, having their own militias but at the end of the day as an advisor, you have to count on them to protect you. In some cases there are only two or three Americans with that Afghan unit at a time. We had guys saying, "Oh, that guy's dishonest. He's selling drugs and he's shaking down the locals." Do you know what? That's the way of life there.

They are not Arabs. Don't ever call Afghans that or they'll cut your throat. I had one guy yell at one of my guys because he called him an Arab and he was pretty pissed about it. It's a very martial culture.

They believe in the gun and the knife but at the same time. They're not Americans and that means they don't do long-range patrols and they're not good at tactical discipline for long periods of time. They just don't function that way.

They don't do well being away from their families. If you're taking a battalion that's been mustered in Kabul from the outlying areas and you go down south, there's no real phone system, there's no mail system, there's no internet for them to use, and so keeping in contact with their families is very difficult and very trying. When we go on a deployment for seven months to a year, we don't think much about it but to them, it's a very debilitating thing. In fact, they thought very highly of us, the way we were spending all this time away from our families to help them. The ones who really did care were constantly saying thank you. You always knew they really liked you because they would ask you all kinds of in depth questions about your family. Some of the guys were suspicious when they were trying to find out about our families but they really care because that's how their culture functions. If they didn't care, they wouldn't ask you anything, which goes back to the training.

We got the hand-wave cultural stuff and the history and everything, and 90 percent of it was bullshit. We came back and actually fed a bunch of stuff back into the Marine Corps intelligence activity, telling them which of the cultural training was BS and which only applies to specific regions. "This only applies if you're in Herat on a Tuesday." There were all these Western visions, just like Iraq and everywhere else I've been in the Middle East. The US has got it wrong. They think they know what the culture is because some Brit or American wrote it.

CH: Can you give me some examples?

TC: First of all, not all Afghans are devout Muslims. They're just like any other religion in America. You have ultra extreme Catholics, Baptists, Protestants, and then you have other guys who say they were raised a certain religion but don't go to church anymore. They don't stop and pray five times a day. If they were on mission, they didn't stop and pray.

They were patrolling; they were serious. So Islam is not as strict as you think it is. Amongst the extremists it is but within the ANA very rarely did I see anybody young praying. The only time they would go to mosque is if they were back in garrison and the battalion commander, who is also the spiritual leader of the unit, made everybody go but other than that, very rarely did I see any of our guys praying. I saw little groups here and there but not everybody was this ultra extremist Islamic person.

It's a good thing to rally to if they're in trouble, though. There's another thing I like to call the "myth of the *mujahedeen*," or the "myth of the *muj*." The Afghans are tough fighters. Some of them will break and run but I never saw it. In fact, I saw guys stand there when they should have taken cover get hit but the "myth of the *muj*" is that we think they're so fierce because they threw the Soviets out of Afghanistan. The Soviets, for a lack of a better word, screwed them up royally when

the *Spetsnaz* got into that war, just talk to someone like my battalion commander who was 17 and is *Tajik*. He fought in the mountains with Ahmed Shah Masood. He was the real deal. This guy could barely walk from his injuries but in a lot of these cases, a lot of these guys were wiped out.

The thing I call the myth of the *muj'* is that they only fought when it was convenient for them. They would come down from the hills, a bunch of guys mustered, maybe smoke a couple hookah pipes, and go down and assault a column of 100 tanks and trucks being driven by a bunch of conscript Afghans and Soviets. Then they would disappear for a month and not come back. On the other side, you had the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, the DRA, which we would like to say were all these dummies who didn't know what they were doing but there were some Soviet-trained Afghan officers who I would fight by their side today.

They were extremely well versed in what they did and knew what they were doing but it was interesting dynamics. You'd take these *muj'* who are a loose collection of guys, stick them together with Soviet guys and Soviet discipline which as you know of the old Soviet Army—you don't go on a head call or eat chow unless you're told to. So you mix this group of guys together and it makes this weird dynamic.

They're not these freedom fighters who would stand until the last man. I mean, they'll break and run if it means they can live to fight another day. So there's a lot of myth about what they can and cannot do but it's funny, you have Soviet influence, you got *muj'*, cultural influence, and now you're trying to slap decentralized training and command philosophy and Western philosophy on top of this menagerie of guys with different backgrounds. Oh, and let's throw in the tribal too, because you got *Tajik*, *Pashto*, *Hazara*, all these weird groups. It's a wacky dynamic. A lot of times, you spent a lot of your time trying to read the terrain. Some companies had a *Hazara* first sergeant or a *Tajik* first sergeant and the commanding officer was *Pashto* and those two guys hated each other. The *Tajiks* are a very militant and proud people. I would liken the *Tajiks* to the Apaches.

They're a warrior culture unto themselves. The *Pashtos* are a little slick. They're always looking for an angle. Not that the *Tajiks* aren't but the *Tajiks* would rather throw down with you in a knife fight. When it came down to it, the CIA would rather use *Tajiks* than *Pashtos* because *Tajiks* would stand and fight. *Pashto* units were cowards. Not all, of course but the guys who would break and run were *Pashto*. One of my company advisors, a guy named Captain Pat Fay, likened it to being as if we were in the Godfather movie constantly. You always felt like you were in that mafia atmosphere where everybody is smiling and hugging and everyone is a comrade but you just never know when one guy is going to turn against another guy. There was a lot of infighting among the company commanders for positioning with the battalion commander.

When I was a battalion advisor, I had company commanders constantly talking to me trying to position themselves. They figured if they couldn't get to the battalion commander that day, they would come seek me out and try to position themselves, hoping I would say something positive. The staff was like that too, and I dealt with the staff mostly but they would constantly be trying to pimp me, asking me what I thought the battalion commander was going to say about things, "Can you mention this to him? I would very much like to be promoted."

My battalion commander was the same way. Towards the end I had some issues with him. The Afghan upper echelon is very political. One day he said to me, "Major Clinton, I just got a letter from Major Bourne." Bourne was my predecessor. I asked him what happened. The commander said, "He's congratulating me on making full colonel." I said, "Really? When did that happen?" He wanted to know from me why I hadn't told him he had been selected for colonel. "Man, this is the first time I've heard about it." Then what I like to call my "street sense" clicked in and I asked him for the letter that he had in his hands. He quickly changed the subject to something else. There was no letter. He was pimping me to see if I could find out something because the promotion period was coming up. I wasn't really involved in that.

We had to recommend officers for promotion but once again, officers you recommended for promotion, we're basing that on American standards, whereas the Afghan Ministry of Defense and the brigade and the corps headquarters were basing promotions on, "Who will best support me?" That's not too dissimilar from the way the South Vietnamese military worked in the 1960s. Guys were promoted, selected, and put into certain billets because of their political affiliation but that's a little bit on the Afghan culture.

CH: So how was training the ANA?

TC: A lot of the training we did was at the forward operating bases, the FOBs. Believe it or not, a lot of them are very good shots with AK47s and even better shots with an M4 rifle and an M16.

They understand the basics. They're willing to learn, they're really sponges, especially the senior enlisted and the junior enlisted. I've trained with and trained the Jordanians and trained with the Saudis. I've trained with the Eritreans and the Kuwaitis too, and everything is *Insha'Allah* [God willing] and there wasn't a lot of that amongst the ANA. If we said we were training this day, we were training that day. Now getting them to set the training up themselves was the hard part.

We were at the point where we were trying to break them off the nipple with SF, and rightly so. They did everything for them. They facilitated the training and gave it to them. The Marine detachment who took over from the SF did the same thing. The guys before us were trying to wean them off and get them to plan their

own training. That's when we ran into some problems. The logistics officer, the S4, couldn't do anything. He was really frozen by his personality in which he was a lazy bastard, and I truly believe he was. Another reason he couldn't do anything was reinforced by the fact that he could not request anything from brigade because in order for him to request something from brigade, he would have to have his battalion commander's permission, then the battalion commander had to go get the brigade commander's permission to do this, and only then the S4 could send it up. It was a pain and it was crazy. It just didn't function. My guys went nuts and after awhile I just learned to accept it as how they do business, though.

The battalion commander, when they finally got an arms room, could not go down. We as company commanders and battalion commanders, the units could go down and draw their weapons as long as the armory was open and do whatever training but there was only one key to the arms room and the brigade commander had it. Nobody else could draw and you had to have special permission to take weapons out of the arms room. The way I got around that is we stacked arms and we had fire watch in the barracks. I was done with that.

There's a lot of ammunition hoarding amongst the higher and I truly believe that's not their fault. They're culturally waiting for the next civil war. Hoarding was rampant throughout the ANA and getting them to plan was very hard too. I know the brigade staff tried to get them to do brigade planning. Another thing about Afghan culture is that when they're given the opportunity to stand up and talk to a group of people, standby because they'll go on for hours. It's their chance to run their mouth formally. There's a reason why at the *shura* that only the old men speak. It's because they're short and to the point whereas the young guys haven't learned that yet.

Training them at the company, platoon and squad levels was relatively easy compared to training staff functioning. They're very good and picked up company, platoon, and squad level tactics, techniques, and procedures, the TTPs of attack, defense, and patrol.

They had been doing it for a while, and we constantly remediated. I think that was the only hard part; they couldn't understand: "We did it right once, why do we have to continue to do it?" Well, because you get rusty and you have to continue to remediate and you have new guys coming in and there's different configurations. Training brigade and battalion staff was hard. We didn't do a lot of it, and if we did, it would have never been reinforced.

We went to Kandahar, worked for CJSOTF and then came back to Kabul and went back onto Phoenix, did some training and they took leave. Then we went back to CJSOTF, this time on the border. CJSOTF would take these guys, just break them up into companies and then let them function as a battalion. Everybody

is yelling, not at me personally but they're asking why these guys can't function as a battalion. Well, you're never going to let them function as a battalion. You're basically training little mercenary companies for the SF to back up their militia. Some of my guys ran into trouble with that. Some of the SF guys believed that the militia was in control of an area and that was it and the militia was shaking down the locals for cash. One of our Afghan company commanders, who I think was a very righteous guy and really believed in the cause, had issues with that and threatened to kill the militia commander. The SF guys had the balls to say something to one of my captains, saying it was bullshit and that this was the militia's area. I had to point out to the SF captain that the only legitimate army in Afghanistan is the ANA and the militias were only to be used in FOB defense. The militias were being used in offensive actions and from my understanding when I got into country, they were not supposed to be used for offensive actions but they were doing it.

That's the other broken thing which might have changed. Of course it's been three years now but you had two armies. You had the legitimate ANA which was trying very hard to build up. The guys don't get paid much, there's no pension at the time, there's no incentive other than you get three hots with a cot and roof over your head and if they deployed down to Kandahar or the border, they got deployment pay. Well, the militia is getting paid 10 times what an Afghan soldier was getting paid and I can't remember the figures off my head. I'd have to look them up. So what's the incentive to join the ANA? So in a way, the SF effort was really shooting the national army effort in the foot, in my opinion. I just don't understand why SF wasn't strictly in the advise, assist, and train mode like they were supposed to be doing.

Now, granted, I know there had to be some SF to hunt down and kill guys but whom better to do it with than the locals? Going back to this whole weird chain of command thing, you just didn't know where you stood half the time. It was a weird dynamic having been in the Marine Corps for, at that point, several years. There's no manual that showed me how to function this way. It was really frustrating how jacked up it was.

We didn't have proper equipment. I had made several requests up the chain to the point where I became such a nuisance with everybody that Lieutenant General Wallace Gregson, who was the US Marine Corps Central Command [MARCENT] commander, sent his deputy out to find out what was going on. He flew out and was the first officer above the rank of major who had ever come out and seen us in the five months we had been there.

We were kind of out of sight and out of mind. When the National Guard command changed over, the general in charge made a decree that no Afghan unit will operate in anything smaller than a company. Well, every day my guys are

sending out squad-sized to platoon-sized patrols like you would do with any Army or Marine company in your sector. You have to keep pressure on the enemy and you need to know what's out there. You're doing stability operations. You're walking through the same village every day, you're shaking hands, you're getting to know your environment, you get to kind of pick out who's squirrely and maybe spend enough time with the village elders smoking the peace pipe, drinking *chai* tea and smoking their crappy cigarettes. Then you get to know them much like we're learning now. You get to know them and after awhile you've known this guy for two months, he's the guy who's going to show up or one day pull you aside and say, "There are some guys in town who don't belong here." He'll give you a heads up. My beef is that they told us we couldn't operate with less than a company. That's BS! You can't tell me that. First of all, you can't tell me that. I'm TACON'd to the CJSOTF.

They said they had already talked with SF who said they would not employ us that way. I told them that's not the way you function in a combat environment. You can't do company-sized patrols every day. It's just physically impossible. Plus, you don't need a company full of Afghans charging through a village every day.

They made silly decrees and it was all based on the fact that they never came out and saw what the common operational environment was out there. Their whole time was spent inside the Kabul region, going from Bagram to Kabul, maybe flying down to Kandahar, maybe going out to Herat on a windshield tour but the higher command never came out and saw what the hell was going on. That was the same, I think, for a lot of the Army National Guard and Army guys who were doing it. It goes back to my thing that they never wanted to accept the fact that we had trained in the Continental United States, the CONUS, to train Afghans and that was it.

They never considered us going into combat operations, so when the situation changed they continued to do what they trained to do. It's a shame because there are some great American advisors in those other units who were doing a great job kicking ass and taking names.

They were just wearing an Army uniform or a National Guard uniform but they were all being crippled, in my opinion, by the total incompetence and ineptitude of the chain of command to realize what was going on. The sad thing is that they finally stopped harassing me after an ambush in which two SF soldiers were unfortunately killed. My gunny was severely wounded, I had 18 Afghans wounded and two of our interpreters were shot up, not to mention we lost several vehicles.

Then, and only then, did they realize, "Holy shit!" The first thing anybody really cared about was whether or not they were wearing their body armor and how come we were driving around in pickup trucks. Well, because that's the only thing we had.

CH: You were saying that there were some equipment issues and you wanted me to remind you about those.

TC: Okay, yeah, that plays into it. When we started off, we had an iridium phone and everybody had a nine millimeter pistol and an M4 carbine.

We had no night vision equipment, no aiming lights or anything like that. We had the iridium phone and seven PRC-119s.

We had no TACSAT and the iridium phone was only to be used in case of emergency and there was only one. We had five companies in the battalion so you do the math. That was our link to the outside world and it was a shame because we did two separate 18-hour convoys from Kabul to Kandahar with no remain overnight site or anything. It was a straight shot of 18 hours of driving, and we were all done on our iridium phone. That would be like driving from Massachusetts to Florida and not talking to anybody until you get down to Florida. It was disgusting. Looking back on it now, I'm so glad nobody ambushed us because it would have been days until somebody figured out what happened to us.

The only thing that gave us security was that we had over 500 Afghans who were well armed. They had old Soviet stuff. They had recoilless rifles, machine guns, RPKs, RPGs, AK74s, AK47s – you name it but for the advisors, we had very little in the way of equipment.

We had no up-armored Humvees. The Humvee we did have was the hangar queen that one of the Marine Expeditionary Units had left behind from 2001. We found out the hard way that when you put armor on it and it's not designed to carry all that weight, it overheats the engine and destroys it, especially in the 100-degree heat of Kandahar.

We found out that pickup trucks were the best thing to use because they could be fixed on the local economy and, believe it or not, they could take a lot of punishment and you could put six Afghan soldiers in the back of a little Toyota *HiLux* pickup.

We also got pretty good at rigging radios and stuff in those things to be able to talk. I mean, it looked like *Road Warrior*.

We actually had an old Soviet 12.7 millimeter machine gun off of a tank or something mounted in the back of one of our vehicles but that's the type of equipment we had. It wasn't until the end and the team that replaced us that we got the multiband inter/intra team radios, the MBITRs, and headsets.

We had a hard time when we went in country trying to find Small Arms Protective Insert, the SAPI, plates for our Kevlar helmets. Nobody wanted to give us SAPI plates because there was so much worry about losing control of the item. So we didn't have a lot of that stuff.

We had very poor medical equipment. Thanks to 1st Battalion, 3d Special Forces Group's doctors, they gave us more than we could ever imagine. They gave us everything from IV kits, tourniquets, to anything you needed, you name it. We found out the hard way that the stuff you crush up, the clotting agent, doesn't work. It causes guys to go into shock, or if you don't wash it out and you leave it there, it burns.

We had a lot of equipment issues. I think the Marine gods were probably smiling and laughing at us but we were doing what Marines have probably done throughout the centuries, which is begging, borrowing, or stealing from anywhere we could. We borrowed shit from the New Zealand SF guys.

We had nothing but ball ammunition. When I got to Kandahar, we came out of there with grenades, anti-tank rockets. Somebody asked me why I needed antitank rockets and I said because the *Taliban* still had tanks in some places and BMPs dug in to some of their strongholds. Not to mention an AT4 does a good job on a truck with a bunch of bad guys in it. So we had a lot of equipment issues but I think that's been overcome now.

The teams that followed us, in fact there are two Marine teams in country now, have pretty good equipment. They have the MBITRs and they have armored Humvees but at that time it was taking awhile for the idea to materialize that we've gone from training to combat operations.

We made the mindset change but a lot of other people didn't and it took awhile. It was hard because administratively we belonged to the Marine Corps but tactically, from time to time, we belonged to CJSOTF. Operationally we belonged to CJSOTF and sometimes we belonged to Task Force *Phoenix*. Plus, my team was assembled from across the Marine Corps training command, so you had guys from Parris Island, the Schools of Infantry from the West Coast and the East Coast, you had guys from the Drill Instructor School, guys from Quantico who taught in the schools, guys all over the training commands across the United States were coming together. So all their commands either did or did not send them with equipment. That was another weird thing.

We had a guy show up with no desert utilities and he had to go and buy desert utilities. This was interesting. The ANA wears the old Marine Corps/Army woodland uniforms and SF guys wear a variety of things but their militia wore the same uniforms as they did. My big thing was why were we wearing desert uniforms when we should be wearing what the ANA is wearing? Marine Corps advisors in Vietnam adopted the same dress as the Vietnamese battalions because they didn't want to stick out but the typical Marine Corps or Army straight-leg guys were saying, "Oh no. That's not an issued uniform. You can't wear that." However, they weren't the guy walking around as the only guy wearing desert utilities with

a radio on his back and a map on a patrol alongside the battalion commander. Who do you think the *Taliban* or *al-Qaeda* is going to shoot first? They are going to hit the guy with the radio. They knew. Hit the guy with the radio, the American.

One time we were ambushed and the first things they attacked were the .50 calcs on the vehicles and they shot at all the Americans. They knew if they could take us out that the Afghans would be in trouble. Luckily they weren't very good shots.

CH: What are some of the TTPs that you came away with?

TC: If you're going to be an advisor, you're not making a US soldier or a US Marine out of them. You're making them a good soldier, a good fighter who can do the basics. You could try to impart some of your ethos and stuff on them but you have to do it within their culture. So remember, they're not Americans. There are some cultural things where you just have to look the other way.

We have things we call redlines. We knew the battalion commander and some of the company commanders were skimming money. They were taking money from their soldiers as tribute. Can I prove it? Not really but did the soldiers really complain? No but our thing was that if the soldiers started complaining, we would probably look into it.

Physical abuse was a redline. We did not tolerate physical abuse. That was difficult because a lot of these DRA [the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan] guys were taught that way. That's how the Soviets disciplined their soldiers, through physical abuse. We didn't tolerate that.

You have to accept the fact that, much like Arabs, they won't tell you the truth. They're going to avoid it to save face. I always tried to make it sound like it's their idea and I always praised them. Your best Marine or soldier is not always your best advisor. You have to have patience. You have to be willing, and this is going to sound weird, to be humiliated but not to the point where it's going to scar your reputation.

CH: Could you give an example of that?

TC: Sure. At the time, we paid the battalion. We would go down to Task Force *Phoenix* which was in Kabul and we would get the money. It was like in the old days of the Corps and the Army. You were the paymaster but the deal was that their personnel officer, the S1, maintained accountability. So just like the old days, if you weren't there on a day, if you decided to have an unauthorized absence, you didn't get paid for that day. So say you were there for all 30 days, you were paid for all 30 days. I think they were always trying to manipulate the system to see if they could get more money out of us but what happened was that they were slow. The only way you could get the money was after they verified who was who and

they were all there. There was some certification process that I can't remember off the top of my head. The paymasters would deal out the Afghan money to us and then we would take it back and pay them. Well, they were late in doing it which delayed them going on leave because they have to go on leave. There are no banking systems so they have to take the money home.

Well, the battalion commander was fuming and it was completely his staff's fault. They blew it out their ass. He came in and told us he was in trouble and I knew it because the battalion was pissed. The troops were getting restless, you could see it. The battalion commander was on the hot plate. He told me I had to tell the battalion that they were not going to get paid today and I bit my tongue and it was the best thing I ever did, and this is why. I went out there in front of the whole battalion and told them through the translator that it was my fault and my fault alone. I accepted the responsibility. If they were going to be mad at anybody, they could be pissed at me. I told them I apologized and basically threw myself on my sword.

From that day on, I had the battalion commander in the palm of my hand because he knew I was willing to take a shot to the face for him. I don't know if he was testing me or not but I've thought about this over the years and talked to my wife and some other people about it and actually talked to my brother about it too. He's a Marine himself. I really think he was testing me to see if I was going to stick up for him. After that, I had a bodyguard assigned to me and I had my own radio operator and this was after three months into it.

We had a good relationship. So what I'm saying is that you got to be willing to put up with some BS to make some strides. Don't put your values aside, don't go native but there are some things you have to learn and sometimes you smash into them. Another thing we didn't tolerate was that one of my captains caught a company commander taking money off of a dead Afghan soldier, and we crucified him. Not literally but he was done. He's lucky the first sergeant didn't drag him off and shoot him in the bushes. He was pilfering money off a dead soldier. He claimed he was going to send it to the guy's family. I asked him how, there wasn't any mail system.

Some other things are to have utmost patience and remember you are never in command. You are an American first and never do anything to compromise your principles as an American Soldier or Marine. Don't ever do that but at the same time, you have to be willing to take some body blows. You have to humble yourself. You need to know your stuff because they expect you to know it. Just like your Marines or soldiers expect you to know your job. You better know your stuff and then some because they're really looking to you to learn. Another TTP is to get used to drinking tea, get used to smoking, get used to sitting around and shooting

ragtime, because that's how they do business. Having worked in the Middle East quite a bit and in Afghanistan, talk about your family and bring pictures of your kids. Not your wife but your kids. In fact Colonel Esok has several pictures of my kids that he kept in his office, and as of a year ago I know they're still there because the other advisor had seen them but that's a sign of kinship and clanship among the *Tajiks* at least, I believe.

They are a very family oriented people. The family is everything to them. The one truism is to not ever talk about wives. Colonel Esok is a little bit westernized in that he had been trained in Britain. He was taken out during the war and trained there, so he would make some jokes about being careful or else my first wife would have my ass but I never joked to him about his wife. I just never did it. He would make some jokes but nothing bad. You must know your stuff, the culture and then don't be wedded to what you have been told culture wise. Don't be afraid to ask about something being true or not.

CH: What about the religious aspects?

TC: My Afghan commander, Colonel Esok, was a strict Muslim but he never pushed Islam on anybody else unless you were an Afghan. He wasn't any different than any nun or priest when I was growing up. Colonel Esok was very concerned about my spiritual wellbeing, though. He would ask me if I had prayed today to God. Muslims, at least this brand of Islam, recognize Jesus as a prophet. Don't bring up religion with them but if they bring it up talk to them about it. I asked all kinds of questions. In fact, if you want to learn more about Islam, talk to a Muslim about Islam.

Some of the Americans got upset with me. They wanted to know why I was talking about Islam. They'd ask me what I did today and I told them I had spent six hours in a philosophical discussion about Islam and Christianity with Colonel Esok. They couldn't believe I had done that but I explained that he's the one who brought it up. I'll tell you what, I learned a lot talking to him.

Make every effort to learn the language. We worked with our interpreters at night to learn the language, and don't be shy to use it. They'll laugh and make fun of you as you pronounce words wrong but they'll help you. Every little bit helps because it shows you give a shit.

Just like with your Soldiers and Marines, don't become wedded to those guys or don't become friendly with them. Be cordial but with Afghans, especially, because they don't understand. If you show the enlisted guys any amount of attention or stuff like that, that's bad news if you're going to Afghanistan. I would not do that.

You have to remember too that a lot of these guys don't read or write. They really don't know anything about current events outside what they're told. Some of

them are farm boys. Some of the city guys do know. You have to remember that a lot of these guys grew up in Pakistan, so their vision of the world is limited.

Unfortunately, six months is not long enough. We should have been there a year, living with that battalion. That's what the Marines and Army did in Vietnam. They stayed for a year. Not a full year but sometimes longer than six months.

Also, use common sense. If it feels wrong and smells wrong, it is wrong but you definitely have to put a cultural filter to everything you're doing. You know the old saying, "Think before you open your mouth"? You really have to think and then think like an Afghan or an Iraqi or a Saudi. How is that going to be viewed when you open your mouth? If you're a field grade officer, they recognize the rank structure. If you're senior enlisted like a gunny or a first sergeant or a sergeant first class, they recognize us. So when you open your mouth, you're speaking with the authority of the US military. Don't promise stuff you can't deliver. I got boxed into a lot of stuff.

They try to shame you but so what? You don't know how many times my battalion commander would get upset with me, "You promised me." I said, "I didn't promise you anything. I said I'd look into it but I don't have the money to pay for this."

Afghans think that anybody who raises their voice and yells is a crazy person. So yelling and screaming like we're used to in order to get a point across doesn't do anything and you immediately lose credibility. Instead, don't show up to a meeting. That sends a better message. On several occasions I would show up late to prove a point. Afghans think they're pretty good about keeping time but they're not. It depends on how they're feeling that day. I was punctual when I wanted to be punctual and there were other times when I wanted to prove a point. Like Colonel Esok wanted to talk me because he had gone out and spent some money thinking I was going to back pay him. He went out and bought some equipment off the black market because they were so badly supplied. We had to buy socks and things like that because getting something from supply system was like getting blood out of a stone. After I told him not to buy it yet because I didn't have the money, he went out and bought these ICOM radios, these little handheld radios, anyway. He was buying them from a buddy of his and he was getting a kickback from us. So say they were 50 bucks a piece. They were probably 20 bucks a piece and he was getting 30 and they probably stole them from somebody else but I got wise to that early on. It goes back to what we were talking about. You're living in almost a mafia-type society. That's what I can remember off the top of my head.

CH: What about any operational TTPs?

TC: We did classic counterinsurgency of patrols and looking through the villages. Another TTP is that if you're working with indigenous forces, sending

them into the village and let them do the talking. Make it look like you're almost serving them, that you're just another trooper or Marine with the unit. That helps out a lot. Kids like to talk to Americans but be careful about talking and giving stuff to kids because the enemy will target them and do horrible, horrible things to children. So be careful with what you do with children. A lot of guys like to give them candy and stuff and we stopped them right away from doing that because it's dangerous. Any time a US unit rolled through, some of the kids were throwing themselves at the front of the vehicles to get you to stop because they were trying to get something from you. I never saw it but there were reports of *Taliban* mutilating and killing children because they took candy from Americans. I believe it, I just never saw it. So you have to be careful of that but always put an indigenous face on it.

My thing was to play up to their national pride, speaking specifically about Afghanistan. They are a nation unlike the Iraqis. They want to have a central government and they want to believe they're a world player but they don't want the central government telling them what to do even though they want all the benefits, just like Americans. "I don't want to pay taxes but I want nice roads, cops, firemen, and Social Security."

They're no different than Americans. They want roads, schools, water, wells, all this stuff. Wait until they try to institute a DMV over there. I mean, everybody has a vehicle. Compared to them, the Afghans think Americans have money coming out of their butts. I gave a class once on the American Revolution 101. I talked about taxation and all this stuff. When I started talking about the taxation piece with England, they asked what taxes were. I started explaining that it was much like your warlords who used to tax people. "Oh no, that's just stealing." Then I had to explain the whole tax thing. The officers were enthralled because they didn't have any concept of taxes. There's no real concept of a central government that has all this overarching power from Asadabad to Herat in the west down to Kalat and Kandahar in the south and Spin Boldak and Mazar-e-Sharif to the north. They have no concept of a government agency that taxes and does all that stuff, so that's an education.

So when you thought all the mathematics and history you had in college and high school didn't count, I'll tell you what, I was on Google making sure that what I was saying was right when I had the chance to teach them about America.

That's how you get guys to talk about their government and how they think things are going. They'll open up then. From an advisor's standpoint, be yourself and be personable.

If you're going there to get a combat tour, thinking you're going to get yours and win a medal, you're in the wrong business. I can count on both hands how

many times I was shot at, and most of them were not firefights. Those things were like gunfights at the OK Corral and there's like five or six guys at the most. I watched a guy step out who literally tried to spray a platoon of Afghan soldiers and they let him have it.

CH: This was good. It was good information.

TC: There are some things I haven't thought about in a long time.

CH: Well, thanks for sharing it, though. I appreciate it. Thanks on behalf of the Combat Studies Institute for getting this information down.

TC: Thank you.

Major Hurel Johnson
17 September 2007

LL: My name is Laurence Lessard (LL) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major Hurel Johnson (HJ) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 17 September 2007 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. When did you first find out that you would be deploying to the Middle East?

HJ: Around July 2003.

LL: When were you told that you would actually be deploying?

HJ: Late September, early October.

LL: How did this come down? Was it an individual tasker or was a whole unit going?

HJ: This was an individual tasker. A list went around our division, the 75th Division, and at that time, I was a Headquarters and Headquarters Company or HHC commander and I volunteered to be put on the list.

LL: So it wasn't one of those cases where, "We're looking for a volunteer and it's you"?

HJ: No.

LL: What were you actually volunteering for?

HJ: It was an embedded trainer position.

LL: Did you know where that position was going to go?

HJ: All I knew is that it was an embedded trainer in Afghanistan. I don't know when I first realized that I would be with Task Force *Phoenix*.

LL: Can you talk about some of your pre-deployment training and preparation?

HJ: At that time, we were already mobilized. I was an HHC commander and we were getting ready to do a post-mobilization mission.

We're a training support division so that's what we did. In terms of training for going to Afghanistan, the only training I got was at the CONUS Replacement Center, the CRC, at Fort Benning, Georgia. All the training I got related to Afghanistan was done there.

LL: How long was that?

HJ: It was about a week.

LL: What did it actually consist of?

HJ: We had small arms qualification, an in-country brief on the Middle Eastern culture, medical preparations, and that was about it.

LL: In retrospect, what kind of training do you wish you'd had?

HJ: I wish I had had more cultural training and that I understood more about the area I was going into. In fact, I felt so strongly about that, that when I came back and rejoined the post-mobilization training mission that my unit had, I made a point to give the types of briefings I would have liked to have gotten.

It would have also been helpful if the CRC had gone over some of the tactics, techniques, and procedures that were being used in the area. When I say culture, that includes the people, the society, the Afghan National Army-ANA, that I would be working with and training, maybe some recommended readings I could have done there while at the CRC on the *mujahedeen* and everything that had taken place. I could have done that at home because I didn't actually leave the country until January 2004. I had a couple months I could have used to study up on the area.

LL: Why was there a delay between when you were told you were going and your actual deployment date?

HJ: I think it had to do with when the job was becoming available. It worked out perfectly, though. It gave me time to really finalize things at home, to turn over the unit to another commander, and I was able to spend Christmas with my family.

LL: When did you first meet the other members of your embedded training team [ETT]?

HJ: At CRC, there were people going to different locations. Some were going to Iraq, some were going to Afghanistan. I met most of my team members, though, when I got to Bagram, Afghanistan and they came and picked me up. There was one other gentleman at CRC with me but he went to train the Afghan National Police. I saw him later on while we were there but he was on a separate mission.

LL: Can you talk about the actual movement over there? How easy or difficult was it?

HJ: It was just long. I flew from Fort Benning to Baltimore. We had a fairly long layover there and then we flew on to Germany. From Germany, we flew into Bagram. It took a long time but it was nice because it was on a commercial plane for the most part.

LL: When you got there, was your ETT already put together with the exception of you?

HJ: The team was already together. I was coming in to replace a Lieutenant Colonel David Eyre, who at that time was an Army Reservist out of Colorado. He was the team leader and I took his position.

LL: Were you a major at the time?

HJ: Yes. I was a fairly new major.

LL: How did the handoff go?

HJ: It went very well. We had about a two-month overlap before he left, so I was very fortunate. I observed him for several weeks and then we switched seats. He watched me and let me do it while he focused on other things like getting ready to leave.

LL: Where was your team located?

HJ: Camp Policharki which was east of Kabul.

LL: How were you set up for interpreter support?

HJ: I had a dedicated interpreter who worked for Lieutenant Colonel Eyre and then became my interpreter. He was very helpful. Different interpreters had different skill sets and when you're talking about what we did which was to mentor the garrison and all the technical terms that are associated with that, that consistency was very helpful for us, too.

LL: How many people were on your team and how many interpreters did you have?

HJ: We had five members on the team, including me. When we got our MPRI [contract company] support, they brought in logistics personnel and operations personnel that we didn't have, so that really freed me up to focus on the garrison ANA commander, the colonel. We grew to about seven personnel after that.

LL: Were you partnered with a garrison unit, an operating unit, or something else?

HJ: It was the garrison for Camp Policharki. The garrison commander had an operations section. There was an engineering section. There was a directorate of public works or DPW section which we were trying to get stood up, and security. It was the standard staff complement.

LL: Who did you spend most of your time mentoring?

HJ: Before MPRI arrived, most of my time was spent with the commander. We spent a lot of time working logistical issues and trying to keep that up and going. What kept driving us was, when the soldiers graduated from the *kandak* and they

would be stationed at Camp Policharki, we were trying to make sure the buildings were ready and they had uniforms.

We had construction going on. Most of my time was spent doing those kinds of things. Major Shauer [ph] had his hands full with making sure the buildings were on schedule. He worked with the Corps of Engineers on that. We probably did them a disservice.

LL: The Afghan commander?

HJ: No, the other staff directorate. I wasn't able to spend time with them and I could tell that they were hungry. When MPRI hit the ground and that operations officer had a dedicated person who could work with him every single day, I could tell they were happy. I wish I could have done more for them but I couldn't. It was challenging.

LL: How would you describe the relationship between you, the rest of your team and the Afghans?

HJ: It was very good. I recall no problems with the team.

They realized we were genuine in our efforts to try and help. I think they realized that when we said we would try to do something, most of the time we were able to deliver. We had enough cool points with them that they realized if we couldn't get them something it must be out of our control. We managed that by not promising things we knew we couldn't get for them. Overall, it was very good and they were very hospitable to us.

LL: Can you talk some more about the logistical issues you said you had?

HJ: One of the big things was vehicles. For the longest time, all the *kandaks* and everyone else could get vehicles but the garrison could not do anything in terms of getting vehicles prior to us getting there. When I first got there, I was immediately able to get one vehicle for them. It was just a chore to get more vehicles.

Uniforms and equipment were also challenging to get. I think that process got streamlined but it was difficult at first. I think it was because they weren't the priority. The line units were the priority and that happens in our Army as well, so that's not entirely surprising. I think some of our processes, too, may not have been formalized in terms of how to go about doing things.

You look at the transitions between the units that come in. The 45th had their way and then the 76th out of Indiana coming in behind them had their way as well. There were differences in processes and procedures. Getting qualified personnel in and training them on what needs to be done so they can get to the point where they have some autonomy and they're able to do some predicting on what the requirements are that are coming downstream. Uniforms and clothing were always big issues.

Pay was also a big issue. I acted as the pay agent for them. I also acted as the field ordering officer for them so I worked on going out and getting resources for them that way, too.

LL: What about the support that you as an ETT got? Was it a mirror of your Afghan counterparts or was it easier for you to get what you needed?

HJ: I didn't have any difficulties getting things for our team. I can't think of anything major that I really needed when I got there. I needed a weapon and they got me a weapon. Most of my time was spent just trying to get things for them.

LL: Did you have any opportunities to get out and meet any Afghan civilians?

HJ: Yes. I got invited to a couple of weddings. I actually never went to one because something always seemed to come up. Different members of the team would go, though. I heard they were really interesting in how they segregated everybody. I'd go to picnics and things like that. When I went to the Ministry of Defense, I'd meet people there as well. When we did the mission in Herat, we met some pretty high profile Afghan leadership and dignitaries there. They were always very hospitable.

LL: Did the whole team go to Herat or was that just you?

HJ: The US team went but not the MPRI contingent. They stayed back at Camp Policharki and continued to train the garrison. The Herat mission was part of the Herat governmental transition team, the GTT. This was when President Karzai was replacing the governor there, Ishmael Khan.

We were part of that team to go down there and facilitate that transition. At that time, I was the chief of staff for the group. Colonel Robert Hipwell, the CAG [Corps Advisory Group] commander, had asked me to be his chief of staff which was another lieutenant colonel billet. The previous chief was a lieutenant colonel, part of the 45th, and when he left, he asked me to take the job and I did. Our operations officer, the G3 trainer at the time, Major Bobby Simmons, also a Reservist, he went as well.

LL: What kinds of challenges did you have to deal with in regard to assisting with this governmental transition?

HJ: One of the ANA brigades was down there. The Central Corps commander, General Moeen, who was being mentored by Colonel Hipwell, went there. He was the ranking military official there for the Afghans. When I took that job, I became the chief of staff mentor but he didn't go. Because of the relationship between General Moeen and Colonel Hipwell, I ended up facilitating the meetings that would take place.

We're talking high level meetings. I often think about that experience and how I was performing at a level that I don't think I will ever perform at back home in

the US. That was one of the beauties of the tour over there. There was the ANA there.

We had our active duty forces from 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry there led by Lieutenant Colonel Mike McMahon who was actually killed sometime later in a helicopter crash. Their equivalent of our CIA and FBI was working with the human intelligence or HUMINT teams from our side and just trying to facilitate all that was a challenge. The challenges associated with getting the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration [DDR] process going over in that part of the country. You probably heard about the massive riot that broke out the day after Ishmael Khan was replaced. I was caught in the middle of that. Things started out to be a simple recon of the area in which Lieutenant Colonel McMahon offered General Moeen an aerial recon of the area so he could see how the city was doing. The riots broke out while we were on that recon and then we had to go and help people in the UN get out. Trying to facilitate at that level and make the meetings meaningful was a challenge.

LL: Did that mean you were trying to figure out an agenda for all these high notables to deal with or were you just trying to get everyone in the same place at the same time?

HJ: I was just trying to get everybody talking. General Moeen knew what he wanted to talk about. I had to set up the structure so the talks could facilitate. I had to work on identifying who would talk and what they would talk about. I had to make sure everyone had the opportunity to talk and to facilitate it in a structured manner was the key.

LL: In mentoring the Afghans, did you find anything they were culturally resistant to?

HJ: One thing that comes to mind is the treatment of the enlisted soldiers and how they deal with them. We wanted them to treat them with more respect and to get comfortable with giving them more meaningful responsibility. They had a habit of treating them like gofers, not as an integral part of their organization.

They can be trusted with significant amounts of responsibility and if that happened, the organization could do limitless things. That was one thing I remember dealing with.

LL: I've heard that one of the challenges working with the ANA was developing NCOs and actually getting the officers to use them. What was your experience with that?

HJ: We figured it was a carryover from the Russian regime because that's how they treated their enlisted soldiers. That was a challenge to try and break them of that.

LL: Did you ever run across any situations where there was some kind of tribal or sectarian feud that acted as an obstacle to what you were trying to get done with the staff you were mentoring?

HJ: I wouldn't say it was tribal. It was almost like a form of racism in the sense that a person would be marginalized just because he was a *Tajik* or an *Uzbek*. I remember on more than one occasion telling them that I was the last person they really wanted to present something like that to. I used as much leverage as I could to make them see that that was wrong.

LL: Was it a matter of certain groups getting shortchanged or were they simply not being given an opportunity to do what they could?

HJ: Both. They weren't given opportunities or assignments because someone thought that another person from another ethnic group would be smarter.

LL: Was it mostly a matter of *Pashtos* pointing the finger at *Uzbeks* or somebody else or was it just a matter of who you happened to be talking to at the time?

HJ: Who I was talking to at the time. It was interesting.

LL: Do you think you made any headway in changing attitudes as far as that went?

HJ: I hope so.

LL: Aside from dealing with all the logistical issues, what would you say were the biggest challenges you had to deal with while you were in Afghanistan?

HJ: I had to deal with people on our side who, I perceived, didn't care about the mission they were doing. I explain that as being the difference between someone who volunteers to go there versus someone who was involuntarily called up. I'm not going to divulge names but there was more than one person I had to deal with who, I felt, were doing more harm than good.

LL: Was that on your team or someone external to your team?

HJ: One was part of my team, or was supposed to be. I experienced this at different levels. I remember talking to Colonel Hipwell and sharing it with him on a ride to the battle update brief.

LL: How did you deal with it?

HJ: I did the best I could. If there was another way to get what I needed without having to deal with that person, I maximized that avenue.

LL: Did you find that that attitude was equally distributed between Reserve, National Guard, and Active components?

HJ: The difference was whether they had volunteered or didn't volunteer. I think there's some definite merit to that. Think about it. If you've been pulled out

away from your family and your job and sent to do something you may not believe in, it's almost understandable. One of these guys was a Guardsman and one was a Reservist.

LL: Did you have any interaction with other US services?

HJ: Yes. We worked with the Navy Seabee construction teams. They were part of the construction effort and the building up of the base.

We worked with the Marine Corps, too. We actually had a Marine colonel on our staff. In fact, I was replaced by a Marine colonel. Ain't that something? I was a major, doing the job of a lieutenant and I was replaced by a colonel.

LL: Did you have positive interactions with them?

HJ: Yes. There were no problems.

LL: Did you have any opportunity to work with other Coalition forces?

HJ: Yes. I was involved with the International Security Assistance Force. At one point General Moeen wanted the garrison to secure the base, as well as a buffer of about two miles. The problem with that was that ISAF was out there patrolling the area so things had to be coordinated with them. There was this one particular Danish officer I ended up working with quite a bit in order to work out rules of engagement, the ROE, issues. That was the bump in the road.

They wanted us to be with the ANA but, at that time, my MPRI staff hadn't been fully onboard. So to take us out on patrols meant we weren't training the garrison leadership. That was an issue, as were the ROE. They were different. Their ROE said to shoot only if they were shot at and ours stated that we can shoot if we felt threatened. That made them very uncomfortable. They were responsible for the area, so essentially it was their turf. I really gained an appreciation for the ROE after that.

We did do a couple patrols and the ANA performed admirably. The Danish guy was a Reservist as well.

LL: Did you have any media contact while you were there?

HJ: No. I never did any interviews.

LL: Did you have any contact with non-governmental organizations, the NGOs, or maybe with the UN?

HJ: Other than getting them out of the building that was burning in Herat, we didn't have any other interaction with them. Their compound was down the road and we passed by it every day but in terms of working with them, not at that time.

LL: Looking back on your deployment, what would you say was your biggest accomplishment and what was the one thing you felt was left undone?

HJ: Vehicles were still an issue for them.

We were trying to establish a central warehouse for them, kind of like a central issue facility for the garrison. I wish I could have seen that project through. I don't know where they are with that now but hopefully it's completed. I still keep in contact with the MPRI team leader but he's been moved to a position of greater responsibility now.

LL: What about your biggest accomplishment?

HJ: Getting them to where they were when we left. It wasn't easy. I think they were able to start planning and thinking more at the organizational level by the time we left.

They had made major headway. Their success with the Russians was based on small-unit tactics. Now we were trying to pull them together and get them to think at the organizational level. That's no small undertaking. It involves a very different skill set.

We also brought in all new people, some who had previous military experience but many who did not.

LL: When did you deploy back to the States?

HJ: December 2004.

LL: Did the whole team go back together?

HJ: I had come in as an individual so, when I left, it was just Colonel Hipwell and me. I could have left earlier but I stayed until that time. I fell in on the middle of the 45th Separate Infantry Brigade out of Oklahoma. By July, the 76th Infantry Brigade had come in and taken over. Anybody leaving outside of that window would be just the individuals.

LL: How was the handoff with your replacement?

HJ: When I left, I was the chief of staff/executive officer. We had a deputy commander who was a lieutenant colonel and essentially took over my responsibilities. He came in with the 76th so, to my knowledge, I don't think the XO position was replaced. There wasn't any replacement identified so he just assumed responsibility.

LL: So there wasn't any formal left seat/right seat ride with him?

HJ: No.

LL: What were the biggest professional lessons learned that you took away from this deployment?

HJ: As an embedded advisor, the biggest lesson was to understand not only what you do in terms of your processes and procedures but also why you do them.

You need to understand the spirit and intent of why the system is set up the way that it is. If you understand that, you can try and get it across to your trainees from different approaches versus just saying, "This is how you do it. Just do it this way." Versus being able to say, "This is how we do it and this is why we do it that way. These are the problems we saw and these are the lessons we learned." I communicated this to soldiers I briefed to give them an idea of what they were getting into before they went over there. I got a lot of positive feedback from them that it was very helpful. For what we're doing now as advisors and trainers, that's what we have to know and understand if we're going to be effective.

LL: Based on your deployment to Afghanistan, if you could make one recommendation to the Army in order to make things run better, what would you tell them to do?

HJ: I often wonder sometimes in terms of using personnel and the assets we have available if we have soldiers doing things they're not accustomed to doing. We have platoon leaders and captains acting as mayors or governors of the small areas they have and literally controlling that area. I will submit that many do not have the experience to effectively do that. They're doing great but think if we had the experience and really understood all the nuances associated with building an area and understanding the economics, the cultural issues, and the second and third order effects of what we do.

I wonder if the Army is really maximizing the capabilities of the Reserves and National Guard and what they bring to the table. I wonder if active duty equates capacity with rank. In the National Guard and Reserves, you have guys who may be enlisted, junior NCOs, or junior officers who are also division directors, elected officials in their areas, owners of their own companies and so they understand economics and business. I often wonder if the Army has really tapped into that. I have my reasons to believe that they have not because we had at least one distinguished visitor here to speak to us.

We have this database where we have to input all our civilian education and experience. I told him, "We have reservists and guardsmen who are elected officials. We have junior officers who have to act as mayors. Is this database being utilized to identify these personnel and put them in key roles?" The answer we got was, "No, it's not being used that way." He said I was right. He then recalled an experience where the guy flipping his slides was a junior NCO and he asked him what he did on the civilian side and the gentleman said he was the chief justice for his state. Here he was flipping slides! I wonder how often that happens.

Are we identifying these people and really trying to identify the capacity of individuals versus their ranks? I know rank is important. I've been in the military for 20 years. I know the structure is important but, in this environment we're

operating in now, I wonder if we're really getting the full capacity out of the people we have.

We see the State Department is unable to be there for various reasons. We're collecting all this information but not using it properly. I also really think there's a cultural thing here in the US and if we're going to continue to be engaged in these types of endeavors, we need to do a better job of making sure that people are more sensitive to different cultures. See that they understand them and are making a concerted effort to understand and grow our knowledge of the different cultures and the history behind why certain things are the way they are. It's not enough to just learn to speak the language. We need to understand the history of the areas as well and why the hatred is the way it is.

Education is important. Support to the families is important, too. For the last five years, my wife has essentially had to put her life on hold. I always wonder if there's some way to transfer the benefits to them, where they can use some of our benefits if we're not utilizing them. They're an integral part of the mental stability of the soldier who's deployed. If he's not worried about home because his wife has everything in check, he's able to focus on his mission. We had a soldier in Afghanistan, on the base, who shot himself deliberately so he could try to go home. There were other issues as well but the bottom line was that he was having major problems at home and wanted to get home and deal with them. That affected his ability to stay focused on the mission.

LL: Given that you were an individual volunteer from a Reserve unit, what kinds of challenges did you have to deal with in terms of family separation and the family readiness group, the FRG, or lack thereof?

HJ: I'm a geographical bachelor here for the Command and General Staff College and this has been harder on my family than my actual deployment. She was committed to that, though.

We talked about it. I remember being in the colonel's office, he was going to approve me to volunteer, and he had her on the phone saying, "Are you sure? Are you cool with this?" and she said yes so he signed the request. She wasn't all that happy about me coming here, though. My wife has said she isn't being contacted enough by the FRG. I think overall she's okay. For the tour to Afghanistan, I don't think there was a problem but for this one, since I'm stateside, the feeling is that it's not that big of a deal.

LL: Is there anything else about your deployment to Afghanistan that you'd like to add to this interview?

HJ: It was a great experience. I learned a lot and got to perform at levels I don't think I'll ever get to perform at again, in the near future at least. I believe in that mission and we need to continue to help. There are some good people over there.

LL: Thank you for your time.

Major Rich Lencz

5 September 2008

BH: My name is Major Brad Helton (BH) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major Rich Lencz (RL) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF from 24 January 2007 until 27 January 2008. Today's date is 5 September 2008 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Let's start with some background information. Where did you grow up? How did you receive your commission? What jobs have you held during your military career?

RL: I was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. I went to the United States Military Academy and graduated in 1997. I was branched as Infantry. I went to all the usual infantry schools of Airborne School, Air Assault School, and Ranger School.

After I did all of those at Fort Benning, I moved on to Fort Hood where I was a platoon leader with Bravo 1-22 Infantry. After 18 months in that job, I became the company executive officer, the XO, for Charlie Company 1-22. They were both mech companies.

After that, I went to the Captains Career Course and the Combined Arms Service and Staff School, the CAS3, here at Fort Leavenworth. I moved on to be the assistant operations officer or S3 for 2-9 Infantry for about eight months and then I took command of Bravo 2-9 Infantry. I was the company commander there for about 14 months and then I took command of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-9. I was the company commander for HHC for about a year. 2-9 was also a mechanized infantry battalion.

After that command, I went to Fort Stewart and was an observer-controller team chief and assisted the National Guard in getting ready for deployments. After a year in that job, I moved up to be the S3 for the battalion and continued to assist National Guard units in getting ready for deployments, mostly to Iraq. I then got orders that said I was going to be on a military transition team, the MiTT, in the summer of 2006. I was told that I had two weeks to report if I was going to Iraq or I had two months to report if I was going to go to Fort Riley and be on an embedded training team, ETT, in Afghanistan. Of course I chose Afghanistan so I could get my wife settled somewhere else. We had three months of train up at Fort Riley. While I was there, I was part of a 16-man team and we were preparing ourselves

to be advisors for an Afghan National Army on the ANA brigade staff. By the time we got over there, though, we were sliced and diced down to about 10 men and we were sent down to advise a battalion. The train up at Fort Riley consisted of basic individual soldier skills as well as a review of some collective infantry tasks.

We got into country on 25 January 2007 and we stayed there until 26 January 2008. I stayed my whole year at Forward Operating Base Bermel in Paktika Province, Afghanistan. It's on the southeastern border with Pakistan. When I first got there, we replaced Marines who had been working with the 1st Battalion, 2d Brigade, 203d Corps. The Marines had been there for about three months but the Marines were trying to consolidate all their guys into one area up north at Paktia Province, so we took their place down there. January was a good time to take over because *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda* incidents were at a minimum because of the snow in the mountain passes which separate Pakistan from Afghanistan. There are very few passable passes during the winter and those lead straight into villages of about 1,000 people. All the small goat paths that the *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda* use were snowed in, so we were able to get a good two week handover with the Marines. We got to see the whole area of operations, the AO, and all the different villages we'd be patrolling. We had a chance to experience what it was like to patrol in the mountains and to be a mile and a half up in the air while carrying a full pack. There was the battalion from the ANA as well as an outpost of about 10 Afghan National Police, the ANP, at FOB Bermel. There were also two US companies from the 10th Mountain Division and halfway through my rotation, the 173d sent two companies to replace them.

I went on about three or four patrols a week but the battalion was out patrolling every day. The average patrol consisted of passing out humanitarian assistance products to villagers or going down to their combat outpost in the vicinity of the village of Shkin which was one of two major crossing points in the Bermel Valley area. The ANA had a company down there and we had to go there weekly to resupply them with fresh food. Because FOB Bermel was a half day's drive from the nearest ANA sister battalion, they would drive to brigade once a week to get their own supplies and that would take a full day. In order to get to brigade, they had to drive a route that was heavy with improvised explosive devices [IEDs], set by local smugglers and other criminals that were in cahoots with the *Taliban*.

We started doing patrols with just four ETTs and we divided into two ETTs per Humvee. The ANA had 40 to 50 men divided into eight Ford Rangers. That's how we'd leave the FOB. When we got to where we were going to conduct the patrols, we'd walk the mountains on foot or we'd stop at a village, cordon it off, go in and talk with the village elders. After the ANA's patrol leader was done talking to the village elder, he'd have the village elder assist him in passing out the humanitarian assistance.

While I was there, we had three major operations that were aimed at clearing *al-Qaeda* and the *Taliban* out of the Bermel Valley. The first operation was called CATAMOUNT FURY and it occurred in the early spring. That was followed up with a late spring, early summer operation called CATAMOUNT FURY SURGE. These operations were foot patrols behind the villages of Malikshay and Mangratay [ph] in the mountains that separate Pakistan from Afghanistan.

We'd patrol up to the vicinity of the internationally recognized boundary looking for any personnel that shouldn't have been there or any supply caches. The year earlier when 10th Mountain had first gotten there and 1-22 was with them, they'd had great success with these types of patrols. The *Taliban* had learned from that, and they stopped creating large caches in the mountains on the Afghan side of the border. They realized it was only a three-hour walk from the border to the small villages, so they stopped caching them on the Afghan side and our operations didn't yield much at all.

The third operation was conducted by the 173d in the fall and it lasted about a week. This operation actually established contact with some *Taliban* members as they were falling back because they were able to get behind them before they dropped their weapons. The enemy only sustained minimal casualties. I think it was something like three killed and five captured. The more important thing was that we created a buffer around the southern village of Mangratay [ph] so the Americans could establish their own combat outpost. That was the area where we were receiving rocket fire on a daily basis. The enemy had started to get fairly accurate and rockets were landing inside FOB Bermel which is only about 300 meters by 300 meters large. Luckily, there were only a few casualties. The ANA suffered a few casualties that were evacuated but they returned to duty a week later. The rounds that landed on the American side of the FOB didn't hit any soldiers.

After that combat outpost was put out there, the *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda* were no longer capable of conducting rocket attacks on the FOB, not even inaccurate fires. Everything just stopped because they couldn't get to their positions any more due to the combat outpost we put in place. The failure in that was that there was a lack of coordination in developing and planning for that combat outpost. Whenever we build anything or do any patrols over there, we want the ANA to work together with the American Army.

1st Battalion, 2d Brigade was a very competent ANA unit. They were one of the first units stood up in the 203d Corps. The 203d Corps came down and said that the first company in that battalion was the best company he had in his corps. Their battalion commander was a very strong leader but he got injured in an ambush in the vicinity of Malikshay during the summer. After that, morale plummeted. He was a very strong, forceful leader who really looked after his soldiers. He knew what he was there to do. He was there to kick the *Taliban* out of Afghanistan.

When he got injured, his XO took over but he wasn't as strong as he was. He spent most of his time sitting around in his room when he was at FOB Bermel. When he did conduct business, he'd do it out of his room. As his advisor, it was very frustrating to work with him and to watch the performance of the battalion slide down.

The chief of staff of the Ministry of Defense came down to FOB Bermel soon after the battalion commander was wounded and the soldiers in the battalion were begging him to let them rotate out of there to somewhere quieter. The weird thing about Afghanistan is that there were guys who went over there as ANA advisors who didn't see any kind of fire for their entire year there.

They spent all their time training up in the northwest. Down in Paktika Province and Helmand though, you were going to see some kind of enemy contact weekly, if not daily. I'd say we had some kind of contact in the form of IEDs, direct fire, or rocket attacks at least twice a week. The men in 1st Battalion, 2d Brigade knew there were quieter areas where they could be stationed.

They were told they were only going to have to be down there for six months. By the time they were finally replaced, though, it had been a year and a half. 2d Battalion, 2d Brigade rotated in with them and they didn't have anywhere near the reputation that 1-2 did. After working with them for a short time, we discovered why. The battalion commander had just gotten to the battalion a month before they came to us. Their leadership had been completely corrupt and, because of that, all the soldiers were abusing drugs.

We wound up sending away a very effective battalion when 1-2 left and in return got a weak battalion. In between this shifting of battalions, the head American company commander, Captain Kristol [ph] came up with the plan for the operation to create that buffer zone around Mangratay [ph]. He got his battalion's approval to set up that combat outpost there. He thought that the ANA were going to send a platoon out there with his platoon. I spoke with the 2-2 battalion commander and said, "This is a very good opportunity for your guys to get out there." He said, "I can't send a platoon out there because of my lack of manpower." He was correct. He had about two thirds the manpower of 1-2. 1-2 had about 300 men at any one time and 2-2 only had 200 men.

The list of AWOLs before the new battalion commander showed up was at zero because all the company commanders were taking that money and putting it in their pockets. They were saying the soldiers were there and they would receive their money. The reason this new battalion commander was put in charge of 2-2 was because he had a reputation of being able to weed out corruption and the first thing he did was make the company commanders put everyone's name on the AWOL ranks. By the time I left three months later, he was finally getting the extra

100 to 200 soldiers that he needed to replace those AWOL soldiers. Before that, he was down to just 200 men. Fifty of them were at the combat outpost around the village of Shkin. That left him just 150 guys to conduct daily operations out of FOB Bermel. Out of those 150 guys, he also had to make sure that all of them got their two months of leave. He would lose about 20 percent of them to leave, so that left him with about 120 soldiers to work with. He had to guard the FOB with at least a full company and a bunch of those guys were just headquarters guys, like cooks, maintainers, and medics. They weren't infantrymen.

He really only had about 80 guys available for patrolling when you whittled it all down. Every day he'd send out a 40-man patrol. If they got into a nasty contact, he only had 40 guys left to go help them out. He told the American company commander no. I tried talking to him about possibly sending a squad, because this was going to be a good public relations campaign. I told him it would be great because we had set up a combat outpost at what was a village that was pro-Taliban by intimidation, not because they wanted to be. Now, that combat outpost is being occupied by ANA forces and American forces. Unfortunately, that fell completely flat because the Americans didn't coordinate with the 2-2 commander. I had to tell the Americans that 2-2 wouldn't be able to permanently occupy it anyway, unless he got permission from his corps. I told him that he needed to talk to his battalion commander who needed to talk to his brigade commander because brigades work with ANA corps. Somewhere along the way, the ball was dropped and things weren't worked out. This turned out to be a source of great tension between the 173d and the ANA because the 173d companies thought the ANA were signed up to do it but the reality was that no one had ever told the ANA that.

As the ETT, you would think someone would have let us know. I wound up contacting my brigade ETT and told them what was going on and they said, "No one has talked to the brigade staff about this at all." That's kind of normal standard procedure over there.

The brigade staff usually brings together the forces that are in the less hostile areas, i.e. that weren't on the border with Pakistan. They'd go into one of the two areas that were on the border with Pakistan and do maneuver operations.

They just let the 1st Battalion do whatever they did in that area. They were really hands off and didn't really support them at all. When 2-2 took over for 1-2, it was the same thing. "Do what you want to down there. It's your area. Play nice with the Americans. When it's not physically possible to do so, then don't."

The other thing that caused a lot of tension was the fact that the capabilities of the ANA aren't nearly the same as those of the American Army. When the Americans go out, we have a coordinated fire plan to go with our maneuver plan. We have mortars, artillery, attack, lift, and evacuation helicopters. We plan all that in order to support a maneuver platoon as they go out to patrol the hills around.

When the ANA go out on patrol, all they have is 60-millimeter mortars or 82-millimeter mortars. That's it. It's not like they have anyone acting as their forward observer either. They do everything by line of sight. If they can see you with their mortars, they're going to kill you in three rounds. If they can't see who they're shooting at, though, they just lob rounds out there and hope for the best.

When the Americans go out to patrol, they're riding in up-armored Humvees or they fly in by helicopter and they know they have lots of fire support. They have greater protection against IEDs than the ANA soldiers riding in Ford Rangers. When I went to visit my grandparents in Missouri as a kid, they would just throw six of us cousins in the back of a Ranger. You're not even allowed to do that in America anymore but that's how they do it. The ANA squat on some makeshift bench seats and roll out that way. If they hit an IED, they lose everybody in the truck. It was fortunate that while I was there they only rolled over one IED and it was the smallest IED in recorded history of Afghanistan. It blew out a tire and caused a couple scrapes on a couple guys but the vehicle was still functioning and we didn't have to MEDEVAC everyone. That IED was about the size of a cigarette pack stuffed with plastic explosive. Usually the IED is filled with dynamite or plastic explosives and it's about a foot by a foot by a foot in density and then it's wrapped up with little BBs so it can have a claymore effect and injure more people.

BH: Did you do any cross-border operations?

RL: No. We weren't allowed to cross the border. On one of the first patrols we did with 1-2, they identified an illegal border crossing but it turned out to be nothing. It was just a family doing an illegal crossing. The ANA checked everything out and didn't find anything illegal or any explosives and so they let them go. Because we had gotten so close to the border, though, we did have to do a small investigation to make sure that the international border was respected.

At times, the ANA did get into cross-border shootouts with the Frontier Border Brigade from Pakistan. That unit was known to be corrupt and to be supporters of the *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda* in the Shkin area where our combat outpost was. They did have a couple shootouts with them across the border with direct fires and mortars. There were a couple times when they did shoot it out with them because Pakistan was putting up pickets of where they planned to put up a fence to separate Afghanistan from Pakistan. The only problem was that Pakistan was on Afghan soil. The actual border control points that Pakistan has are actually in Afghanistan. They did a land grab back in the days when the warlords were fighting with each other and the *Taliban* couldn't stop them, and they stole a bunch of land around Shkin because it's a very healthy and robust market area. They grabbed that territory and now don't want to give it back. It's a source of contention between the Afghanistan government and the Pakistan government and especially between

the soldiers. Afghan soldiers are very proud to be Afghans. The same goes for the Pakistan soldiers. So every once in a while they butt heads.

BH: How would you assess the effectiveness of the operations the ANA participated in?

RL: The ANA from 1st Battalion worked with the 10th Mountain to do the CATAMOUNT FURY and CATAMOUNT FURY SURGE missions and they executed them well. The Americans were prepared to support the Afghans because in the past the Afghans hadn't come out prepared to support themselves with food and water beyond one day.

They were quite surprised when the ETTs were telling them not to give them anything because the ANA had enough food to support themselves for three days. The 1st Battalion had worked with some Marine and some Special Forces units on how to conduct tactical operations and they were proficient at squad-and platoon-size maneuvers. What they weren't proficient in was planning and resourcing their own logistics which was something we worked with them on. By the time they were leaving us, their logistics officer, the S4, was capable of planning for how many meals they needed to take with them depending on how many days they were going out and how many men they were taking with them.

We were not capable of convincing them to use their own water, however, because they thought their water was contaminated. They wouldn't drink the water unless it was boiled. To work around this, we'd have the S4 count how many people were going out, how many days they were going to be out and calculate how many bottles of water a soldier should drink each day while climbing mountains. He would then work with the XO of the company from the 10th Mountain Division or the 173d to get the correct number of bottles of water. Now they were capable of supplying themselves for their own missions. Instead of being out on a mission, coming down from a mountain, looking at 10th Mountain and saying, "We need food and water." All the while leaving the area completely unsecured. They made that step forward while we were there and it was very effective.

What wasn't effective was intelligence. CATAMOUNT FURY occurred too soon. The snow caps still hadn't melted. They were melting as we got out there.

We got out there before the *Taliban* did. When it came to FURY SURGE, we didn't establish contact. We went to the areas that they had used in the past. We did that because the enemy was not a learning enemy. In the past, they had resupplied the same caves with their ammunition, rockets, RPGs, small arms, and mortars if they had them. They'd store them in the same caves and they'd done that for a couple years in a row. Because of that, we went back to the same areas but this time we came up dry. I think the enemy had finally learned. They may have been hit over the head a couple times but they figured out that they couldn't go back to the same spot every time.

BH: Did you find out where they did store their stuff?

RL: No. We weren't able to find any large caches. I think they had gotten smart and kept things on the Pakistan side of the border which was only a three-hour camel walk.

They figured out that either we were on the goat trails in the morning or we weren't going to be there at all. They could tell if it was clear to come or not as soon as the sun came up. Even if we did try to go in that general direction, they'd see us coming and immediately send out information, duck down, and head more north or south instead of east or west to move away from where we were patrolling.

BH: What drugs were the soldiers from 2-2 using?

RL: Within the first week of being there, I established a good rapport with an NCO in HHC and he told me that about 70 percent of all the soldiers in 2-2 were using hashish. 1-2 wasn't all that innocent in this either. At least 25 percent of their soldiers were using as well. The real difference was that 2-2 was basically high all the time whereas 1-2 would only get high on their free time. When they found out they weren't going out on patrol that day, they'd go hide somewhere and get high. 2-2 didn't care. It didn't matter if it was a patrol day, a quick reaction force day or not, the soldiers who were getting high got high all the time.

2-2 was heavily populated with *Hazaras* which are from a different portion of the northwest end where most of the 1-2 kids had come from. They were away from their families, aside from the cousins they had in the battalion with them. Their mothers pampered them, just like American mothers do, and the soldiers missed their families very much.

They did drugs to alleviate the pain. 1-2 had great leadership and that kept them focused on conducting the mission. The soldiers could take one look at their battalion commander and know he wasn't corrupt. With 2-2, though, before they changed out battalion commanders and got the new guy in, they had a battalion commander who was sexually molesting the soldiers. That got around and all the soldiers knew that you didn't want to get called into the battalion commander's headquarters because they knew what would happen if he thought you were cute. They also knew that the officers weren't putting anyone on AWOL status so they could pocket the money.

They also knew that the battalion commander had an illegal taxation going on in the village they were located in and that was the reason the brigade commander replaced him. It's very difficult to get someone fired or thrown in jail for corruption in Afghanistan because it's a very tribal system. Everyone's related to someone in power. It could be through the Ministry of Defense, through the Ministry of Interior, or Karzai's cabinet. Everyone is connected to someone. So, if you try

and report that a battalion commander is a child molesting bastard and we want to throw him in jail, the head of his tribe, who is well connected, will say, "No way because I know about your brother who's doing similar things in a different area." Everyone has dirt on everyone so no one can get punished but at least they could still get removed which was a good thing for 2-2.

BH: What would you consider your greatest success and your greatest failure?

RL: My greatest success as an ETT was assisting 1-2 in developing their logistics capability. We were not only able to teach that S4 how to count water bottles and meals, we also taught the mechanics how to fill out forms to request supplies from the 203d Corps. That was important because 203d Corps kept all the vehicle spare parts. We also created a system in which the mechanics could go get those spare parts. In the three months we had with 2-2, we taught them how to count heads and water bottles. You really have a parabolic curve of success in Afghanistan. While what we did was only considered a small success on that curve, we were able to set the conditions for the next group that replaced us. They would see that the Afghans could fight as fire teams, as squads, and platoons in a direct firefight.

They could bring their own supplies at the company level. The company XOs and company supply sergeants were now working with the S4 so they could have supplies in the field. Now that they were at that level, the new ETT coming in could teach them how to coordinate their artillery with the two artillery pieces they have.

They could teach their platoon leaders and squad leaders how to call for mortar rounds and adjust fire. If that new ETT could accomplish that, it would be another small step on that parabolic curve. My greatest personal failure was not getting the operations staff to use maps to help them in planning operations. The majors, lieutenant colonels, and captains don't want to admit that they don't know how to read maps. What we hoped to do was teach their lieutenants who came straight out of the officer basic course how to read maps and you hope the captain watching over your shoulder making sure you're doing a good job is really learning something as well. I wasn't able to get their operations staff to draw graphics on where everyone was expected. I worked with the S3 or the assistant S3 and occasionally the battalion commander for six months telling them, "You've been in that area 12 times in this last year. You don't have to drive down there first. You've already been there." We weren't able to get them to do any forward planning.

Someone listening to this might be thinking, "Why is he saying that training the ANA to supply themselves and read maps is his greatest success and failure?" I'm saying it because that's what we were there to do. We weren't there to drag them along into a fight, even though we went on patrols with them. We were there to help them become able to patrol without us. These are all steps to becoming an

independent unit. That's the reason when you ask me about my biggest success and failure, I talk about the training of the ANA.

BH: How were your relationships with the American brigades?

RL: They were bad. The 10th Mountain company had heavy casualties. Just about every soldier in his company got wounded. I think maybe only four guys weren't wounded while they were there at FOB Bermel and only one guy died. There were guys who were patched up, sent away, brought back and got patched up again. When I arrived, they'd already been in country for nine months and they were tired of getting wounded.

FOB Bermel was named after a small bazaar that was 100 meters away from the FOB. They came in, created the FOB and fought the enemy out of the bazaar. They fought them out of the hills within one kilometer. They fought them out of the villages about one kilometer and they fought them into the hills towards the Pakistan border.

They were tired of getting wounded and they wanted the ANA to take over and fight for their country. 1st Battalion, 2d Brigade was expected to walk the hills while 10th Mountain sat in their Humvees, so there was some animosity there.

While 10th Mountain was willing to support us with maintenance, food, and water, we didn't fall under their chain of command. We were an additional agitation that they had that they had no control over. The Marines don't really play nicely with the US Army anyway, so we kind of inherited a bad relationship there. Things got a little bit better while we were there but it still wasn't a great relationship. When the 173d came in, things started off okay. 1st Battalion was showing them that they were competent and the 173d said they would walk the mountains with them. The relationship was good until 1st Battalion wanted to do a major combat operation around Malikshay before the battalion commander got injured and the 173d didn't think they were ready to do it yet. 1-2 was requesting additional forces from the 173d's battalion that were in different sectors conducting other operations. The ANA got frustrated that the Americans weren't ready to do that big operation in the area. The relationship with the 173d was really ruined on 16 July when Colonel Habibullah was ambushed. That ambush was the best ambush the enemy had done to date. The ANA had 12 wounded and somehow Colonel Habibullah miraculously survived. His Humvee was in the lead of the convoy and they were traveling with Alpha Troop from the 91st CAV which was attached to the 173d. The ANA was first because they knew the area and they were followed by Alpha Troop.

When we got to the vicinity of Malikshay, the lead vehicle in the convoy made a wrong turn and Colonel Habibullah was furious at them, so he took the lead with his Humvee. He had just gotten one of the new light armored Humvees that

our scouts used to use in mech warfare before we started the rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan. They were pretty good against 5.56 and 7.62 but nothing bigger than that. He was feeling invincible because he had a guy on top with a machine gun and he was riding in an American Humvee with light armor. He went out and took the lead and as we were turning north from and one of the soldiers from the ANA battalion was goofing around in the back of a Ranger and fired off his RPG.

We all jumped out and formed a perimeter thinking we were about to get ambushed but nothing happens. The enemy maintained their discipline and stayed in their high positions for their ambush which was only another 300 meters north. After we figured out what happened, Colonel Habibullah was steaming mad. If he had not been injured that day, that soldier would have gotten seriously reprimanded for embarrassing him like that in front of the Americans. The Afghans don't like to be embarrassed in front of the Americans. Anyway, we jumped back into our vehicles, drove into the ambush and the colonel takes three RPG rounds into his Humvee. One went through the engine block, one at the crevice of his door and frame and one through the trunk. The one that hit his door frame peppered his face and chest with small fragments and he got a major wound down in his large belly. After that, an intense firefight ensued that lasted for about 15 minutes before we were able to beat the enemy back.

We took about 12 ANA casualties. Alpha Troop assisted us in beating the enemy back and they followed them but wasn't able to kill them. The first thing that really upset the ANA was that no artillery rounds were fired because the ambush was too close. I was right there with them so I couldn't call in artillery.

Helicopters had just flown over the area and said things were all clear and then flew out of our AO. By the time the helicopters came back into the AO, they couldn't get permission to fire into the caves where the enemy was probably hiding. Alpha Troop followed the tracks of vehicles to the north and search the village but find nothing.

The ANA was upset that the Americans didn't call in any indirect fire or helicopter attacks. The XO took over for Colonel Habibullah. This was the XO who didn't like to leave his room or go out on missions. The Americans wanted to go out and conduct missions and he would say, "Fine. You guys go out. I'm not going out." That's when things just got weird. There was a 180-degree change. When Colonel Habibullah was in charge, he would jump at the chance to go on missions. He would say, "How many men do you want? Do you want a company or a platoon? You got it." If the Americans asked for a platoon, he would give them a company. The Americans would either say, "No, I don't need that many." Or they would say, "Gee, thanks. We'll take it."

When the XO took over, he wouldn't send soldiers out like that anymore. As ETTs trying to foster relationships with the battalion, we'd let the Americans walk away and not pressure the ANA in front of them. That would have damaged our relationship with the battalion commander and S3 but that infuriated the 173d.

Then 1st Battalion changed out, 2d Battalion came in and was a wreck compared to 1st Battalion. I had guys who would go down to FOB Shkin and work with the Special Forces.

They'd come back to FOB Bermel and ask why we couldn't do the same things at Bermel that they were doing at Shkin. It was simply because we had a different chain of command. My guys were wearing civilian clothes like they were Special Forces, until I found out about it and corrected it. We had to put out to everyone, "What you do with the Special Forces, you do with them. When you get back here, you're normal again." They all got the picture.

My lowest-ranking officers were captains and they'd constantly go on missions with platoon leaders. The lieutenants wouldn't take the time to explain the mission properly and the details wouldn't get fleshed out, so my captains would have the ANA go to where they thought the platoon leader wanted to go to but it wasn't right.

They'd stand there and look at each other and if they were the same rank, they'd probably be yelling at each other but I had a captain out there so they were respectful. The thing about my captains was that they weren't infantry. I had one field artillery captain but the others were intelligence, logistics, and signal guys who were out there conducting infantry patrols. It wasn't as if they could receive a mission from an infantry platoon leader and ask the appropriate questions before they went out. They would receive the mission and be like, "Okay, let's move out." That created even more tension.

I was gone for a month and that's when things went to hell in a hand basket. As far as I'm concerned, when my boss gives me an order that's legal and moral, I do it. I don't care how stupid it is. You get a lot of stupid orders but you follow through because of discipline. When your commander tells you to wear your flak vest and helmet at all times during certain conditions, you say, "Okay, boss. No problem." All my non-infantry captains and NCOs would say, "That's really stupid. There will only be one chance in one hundred million that we're going to need to wear that stuff." They would question everything and when you tell people that the answer to their question is discipline, they don't like that. They'll do it but until you tell them to do it and you catch them, they hadn't been doing it.

During my time as an ETT, we had three different bosses. My boss at that time was a very grating personality when it came to working with outside people, and he usually had me work with the American company. I was able to go with the flow

and make things work well. My boss was very much one of those guys who would tell you if something was stupid. That just grated the American companies when he told them one of their plans for a mission was stupid and he wasn't going to tell the ANA to support it. Some other incidents occurred and when I got back from leave, I was told that I was now going to be in charge of the team. I was the third guy to do so because my boss at the time was a senior major from the adjutant corps. He talked to our boss and got me to be in charge because it just didn't make any sense to have an adjutant guy in charge. I was only going to take over when 2-2 came up so 1-2 would only see him as the guy in charge.

2-2 showed up three days after I got back from leave. One day after that, Task Force *Phoenix* which was my senior headquarters in Afghanistan, sent the command sergeant major and deputy commander down to investigate what we were doing. I was like, "What's going on? No one above brigade has ever come down here at all until today. Now all of a sudden you're bringing a laundry list of things that you say I'm ate-up on?" I went down the list and said, "Not true, not true, fixed it, fixed it." There was one thing that we didn't do. When we were 20 meters from the gate, we didn't ground guide to the gate. I admitted to it and the sergeant major was like, "Even the commanding general ground guides his vehicle when he's on the FOB, so ground guide your vehicles." I said, "Okay." Every time we went to another FOB in Task Force *Phoenix* after that, I had to deal with my guys pointing out how there were people not ground guiding their vehicles. I just told them to shut up.

BH: Do you have anything else you'd like to add to this interview?

RL: When it comes to training the ANA, Special Forces does an excellent job training sergeants to lead soldiers and training soldiers to be soldiers. Unfortunately, they don't share what they're doing with the ETTs. They worked in their own little microcosm.

We had a group right down the road and they would say, "Send us six guys and we'll square them away." And they would. They would send back some phenomenal soldiers and leaders. I would say that the Army needs to find out how they train those guys and send that information out to the ETTs. That would allow the ETTs to do a better job training squad leaders and individual soldiers.

BH: Thank you very much for your time.

Major Christopher Plummer
6 June 2006

JE: My name is Lieutenant Colonel James Evenson (JE), United States Marine Corps Reserve, a student at the Army's Command and General Staff College, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major Christopher Plummer (CP), United States Army, also a CGSC student, in support of the Combat Studies Institute's Operational Leadership Experiences Project. We're referencing Major Plummer's experience in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF in Afghanistan. Today's date 6 June 2006 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, Major Plummer, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Major Plummer, I'd like to begin with some questions about your background. Could you please state your full name and branch?

CP: Christopher Plummer, US Army, Infantry.

JE: And could you give me a brief career chronology that brought you up to the point of training to go to Afghanistan?

CP: I entered the service in 1984 and served as a paratrooper in the 82d Airborne Division and as a drill sergeant and then separated service to seek a college degree and a commission. I graduated from college and received a commission in 1993. I then attended the Infantry Officer Basic Course and after completion was assigned to Korea, serving as a platoon leader, company executive officer-XO, scout platoon leader and then headquarters and headquarters company XO. From 1996 to 1997, I completed the Advanced Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, followed by Combined Arms and Services Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. From 1998 to 2001, I went to Alaska where I was a brigade plans officer in the 172d Separate Infantry Brigade or SIB, a battalion logistics officer or S4, in 2-1 Infantry, rifle company commander in 21 Infantry, and then commandant of the Northern Warfare Training Center. From 2002 to 2004, I was an Active Component/Reserve Component or ACRC team chief, assistant operations officer, and operations officer or S3, in Indiana, when I received orders to go to Afghanistan.

JE: Was that the unit you were with as you trained for OEF?

CP: Right, the 1st Battalion, 335th Infantry, Indianapolis, Indiana which was an ACRC slot but this was not the unit I trained up with for my deployment to Afghanistan.

JE: Could you please describe your experiences in training prior to deployment?

CP: I was given orders as an individual filler to replace someone in Afghanistan, so they cut the orders and sent me to the CONUS Replacement Center, the CRC, at Fort Benning, Georgia, where we trained for two weeks on what was supposed to be theater specific training to get a soldier ready for deployment.

JE: Could you describe some of that training?

CP: It was real basic kinds of training such as first aid, nuclear, biological and chemical, weapons familiarization and weapons qualification on the 9-millimeter Beretta.

We also received some operational security classes, theater-specific training, security briefs, convoy security classes, and just basic standard pre-deployment stuff. It wasn't really the kind of training I was expecting. It seemed like a check the block with no real meat to the training. Some of the lesson plans seemed to be training outlines for units going to Bosnia or Kosovo. It was poorly run, poorly organized, and in my opinion a waste of time.

JE: Could you describe the circumstances around your deployment order? How much time did you have prior to your order? Were there any special preparations you made besides the training?

CP: I received about 30 or 40 days notice. In November or early December, I found out I was going. By January 2nd, I was at the CRC conducting the train up. By the end of January 2005, I was already in Afghanistan. It went very quickly. As far as special preparations, the normal stuff to make sure my will was in order, power of attorney, make sure the family was set in case the worst case scenario came to pass, and just getting all my personal things in order.

JE: Did you have any idea what your mission would be as an individual filler?

CP: Yes. I was told by Human Resources Command that my mission was to serve as a provincial reconstruction team or PRT leader which means they place me in a province somewhere in Afghanistan and I help rebuild the infrastructure, fight the insurgency, and get the local police and military up and running.

JE: When did you actually leave the US to go to Afghanistan?

CP: It was the end of January, around the 20th.

JE: Could you describe your experiences going to Afghanistan?

CP: I was surprised to find out that it takes a long time to get in theater. You get on a civilian contracted jet in Atlanta, you fly for hours into Germany and, from Germany you flew on another civilian contracted jet which took us into Turkey. From Turkey, we switched to military air, the C-130, which was supposed to take us straight into Afghanistan but we were weathered out because of bad

weather reported in Bagram. The aircraft turned around and ended up landing in Uzbekistan where we stayed for a couple more days, then we attempted it again and after multiple stops along the way finally landed in Bagram. So it took about seven days to get in country.

JE: Was Bagram your final destination?

CP: No. Bagram is where everybody initially enters Afghanistan and where they scan your ID card so they know you're in a combat zone, so you can begin picking up imminent danger pay and separation pay.

Then from there, you contact your unit, they form a convoy and they come and get you. I had about an hour or so drive to get to Kabul Compound Camp Eggers where I was to be stationed.

JE: Who came to get you?

CP: Some guys from the Office of OSC-A [Security Cooperation-Afghanistan] soldiers already assigned to my unit.

JE: What gear did you take with you when you went to Afghanistan?

CP: Well, you go to the central issue facility at Fort Benning and they issue you four full duffle bags of stuff, of which I might add, you only use about half of one duffle bag for the entire year you're in country and they're very heavy, so heavy that when I put them on the cart on the airport, it folded the front wheel of the cart under. It literally collapsed one of those five dollar carts. A lot of it had nothing to do with Afghanistan. It wasn't theater specific gear. I would be issued the correct gear in country through the rapid fielding initiative or RFI, three more duffle bags to contend with.

JE: So your unit brought you back to where?

CP: Kabul Compound. It's named Camp Eggers for a soldier who was killed in action over there. I was then sent over to personnel shop where I was supposed to get the assignment to my PRT, somewhere in the country.

JE: Did that actually occur?

CP: No. They said, "Nobody comes here and does the job they were assigned to do. You're going to be doing stuff well above your pay grade.

We don't know what it is right now but come back tomorrow, get your equipment all squared away, and we'll tell you where we're going to put you tomorrow. There are several slots that need to be filled here at Kabul Compound, so we don't want to send you out into the country. We want to keep you right here." I was not too happy about this but there was little I could do.

They had another job in mind for me. Little did I know it would take me all over the country in some of the most dangerous places in Afghanistan.

JE: What specific duty position did you finally get assigned to?

CP: About two days later, I was finally assigned to OSC-A's Training and Fielding section.

JE: Did your prior training help you in this role?

CP: Training and Fielding was kind of a good job for me because I'd been a trainer most of my career in the Army. I'd been a drill sergeant, and I had just come out of an ACRC slot where we were training the National Guard and Reserve for Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. So the training aspect of the job I didn't have a problem with and the fielding of the Afghan National Army, the ANA, seemed like pretty interesting work. So I wasn't altogether unhappy with the assignment, except for the fact that I'd be stuck at Camp Eggers, kind of where the flagpole is. I wanted to get out into some of the provinces which I ended up doing anyway. It was a very difficult, complex, and at times a very dangerous job.

JE: Did you replace someone in this role?

CP: The guy I replaced had already left and I don't recall his name. I only heard it once or twice but he was long gone when I arrived.

JE: Any turnover?

CP: No, no turnover whatsoever. I was working for the training and fielding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Pettigrew. I would eventually take his job and so I was his assistant when I first arrived.

JE: Was Training and fielding the mission of the entire unit or was it just your area?

CP: No, Training and fielding is one of many sections under OSC-A. You've got other sections such as Training and Education which deals with professional schools for the Afghan Army for example and it's their version of CGSC, West Point, officer training, and all that and then Training and Fielding which is specific to building the ANA included rifle marksmanship training, maneuver training, combat service support, and logistical support training.

Then there's fielding which is once the Afghan battalions are trained, we put them in-country by basically putting good guys where there are bad guys.

JE: What was your area of operations, the AO, like in Afghanistan?

CP: As the training and fielding officer, I had the entire country of Afghanistan as something to manage, so my AO was literally the whole country. It all depended on the needs of the specific mission where we were sent to in Afghanistan.

We would do a lot of reconnaissance. We would go into an area and figure out where we needed to put newly trained Afghan infantry battalions, or combat support and combat service support battalions.

We would look into billeting for them such as what forward operating base, the FOB, they were going into, did we need to build a FOB, the logistical support pieces, how they were going to get around, feed themselves and things of that nature.

JE: Can you tell me about some of the soldiers of the ANA you trained? What were they like?

CP: It's a mixed bag. Afghanistan has multiple languages and dialects depending what area of the country the soldiers were recruited from but with no formal education system in the country a lot of the soldiers in their army are illiterate.

We would have to have multiple translators with us on missions just to communicate in the provinces. Many ethnic groups exist in the country including *Dari*, *Pashtuns*, *Hazaras*, *Tajiks*, *Uzbeks* and *Nuristani*. Most are *Sunnis* and *Shi'a* Muslims and it's just a mixed bag. As I mentioned before, most of them can't read or write, so it's very difficult to train them using just translators.

We tried using some sort of board with pictures on it but it was very difficult, so we had to teach a lot using hands on. Often times we couldn't communicate with them at all because even if we had two or three translators, they might not speak those languages either. So it was very difficult but the soldier coming in was recruited, not forced, to join the newly formed ANA.

To recruit new soldiers we sent out a recruiting assistance team or RAT. They go out and recruit just as we do here in the US. Of course, this is a very high risk job because they're going into provinces where there aren't any good guys and they're trying to recruit the Afghan populace to join the army but they would recruit them and when they arrived for training we would ethnically balance the platoons and then they would go into a 12-week training cycle and eventually join the ANA.

JE: How was the morale of these platoons?

CP: Generally speaking, it was pretty good.

They all wanted to be Ahmed Shah Masood. He was their hero. He was the guy who threw the Russians out of Afghanistan and was later killed by the *Taliban*. So they very much want to be heroes, want to be fighters. The only time we had a motivation or morale issue with them was when we didn't feed them or pay them in a timely fashion. Both are very difficult to do there because the logistical support systems are just too immature to support the new army.

We're working on it but often times it's very difficult to get them all fed or paid on a daily basis.

JE: Can you describe some of the challenges around getting supplies?

CP: The issue is that logistical support is 90 percent originating from the US/Coalition forces. The Afghans don't take into account any of the logistical support required to do anything. If you give them a mission, they'll pick up their weapon and they'll go. There's no real planning involved, no logistical support considerations.

They really don't have the transportation assets anyway and they were mostly using our food sources but now we're trying to get them to contract local food sources and get it to their soldiers, get their cooks to cook it and distribute it in their FOBs or bases. So feeding, fueling, ammunition, and just about everything is all still deeply rooted in US support. Hopefully that's getting better but when I left in November, it was still very immature.

JE: How about their equipment?

CP: Their equipment is a challenge too. They've got some very old, very beat up AK47s. Not only that, but there was a shortage of magazines, cleaning kits, sight adjustment tools, blank adapters, blanks, and personal equipment. You name it and there was shortage as far as the ANA was concerned. It created a lot of challenges for us to try to make up the equipment shortage.

JE: Could you describe some of the things you did to fill those gaps?

CP: There was a donation program. We tried to get some of the old Soviet-bloc nations to donate this shortage of stuff. That happened with some success but, in a lot of cases, we just ordered it but it took a long time to arrive. The sight adjustment tools were a critical shortage because the army couldn't shoot. In a lot of cases we would have them fabricated off post so they could adjust the sights on their AK47s and then continue to practice shooting.

JE: Were all the Afghan soldiers based at Camp Eggers with you?

CP: No. Camp Eggers is a US base. The place they would train at is called the Kabul Military Training Center, the KMTC, and that was about a 20-minute drive down Jalalabad Road which is a very high-risk road to travel. KMTC is run by Task Force *Phoenix* which is a National Guard run training center that trains up the ANA. Their higher headquarters is OSC-A.

JE: Let's talk about some of the terrain involved going between the two bases. What was it like?

CP: Well, Jalalabad Road is not bad. There are thousands of pot holes, it's in very bad shape but you're not out in the mountainous regions of Afghanistan. It's

a very dangerous road that has experienced its fair share of improvised explosive devices, the IEDs, direct fire as well as rocket attacks. There are certainly bad guys operating between Kabul Compound and the KMTC. Suicide bombers have been used as well against the KMTC. All these enemy activities took place while I was there, so as far as enemy activity is concerned it's a bad road to drive on.

JE: Did you actually go out into the mountainous regions?

CP: Oh yeah, on many missions.

JE: Could you describe some of those missions? Was that in support of the training of the ANA?

CP: No. The fielding piece, I would just go to the KMTC and observe training, quality control/quality assurance. That's where we found out about the marksmanship which we'll talk about later. The fielding piece is what took me out into the provinces and that's where, as these ANA battalions graduated, we wanted to move them. Where there are bad guys, we would put more good guys.

We would go downrange and talk with the Special Forces, the SF, guys on the ground or the Combined Joint Task Force-76, the CJTF-76, guys which was the 173d Airborne Brigade with some attachment battalions from the 82d Airborne.

We would talk with them about enemy in the area, where they pictured these battalions going. Sometimes they'd break them down into companies and then we had to ensure that when the ANA battalion showed up on the ground, they had a place to live, they had food, fuel, ammunition, training areas, etc.

JE: Were these places always mountainous or were there other regions as well?

CP: It just depended. We did missions in both mountainous areas in Jalalabad heading east of Kabul and some missions in flat desert areas when we went from Herat in the west to Qalat in the east and southeast to Kandahar. We went all over the country.

JE: Did you have the right gear for the different types of terrain you were dealing with?

CP: Yes but it's real hard in Afghanistan because you might find yourself in the desert of 110, 120, maybe 140 degrees one day and then the next day you're in a mountainous region where there's snow caps on the mountains, so it's very difficult. You just have to tailor your load and be prepared to execute the mission you're given and make sure you have the proper equipment. Did I have the equipment I needed? Yeah, I had the equipment. As a matter of fact, I had too much equipment. Out of the four duffle bags I was issued at Fort Benning and the additional two issued by RFI in Afghanistan, I actually used about one duffle bag worth of stuff.

JE: As far as the training and the fielding activities, the training was done near Camp Eggers near Kabul and then the fielding was done throughout Afghanistan in the various provinces, correct?

CP: Yes. The training was done at the KMTC which was 20 minutes away from Camp Eggers. Task Force *Phoenix* runs that.

Then fielding is anywhere in the country they need ANA forces. We used a fielding plan which would tell us, as each battalion came out of KMTC, where they're were going.

JE: What kind of sustainment training did these units get once they were fielded?

CP: Once they were fielded, very little sustainment training because there was a shortage of ammunition. Of course they also had the shortage of equipment, so once they fired and qualified at the KMTC, there was very little sustainment training.

They went right into combat operations which was a big mistake for a couple reasons. One is that they weren't properly trained and also, and this is a mistake I think needs to be addressed, we left some ANA units in combat operations for a year and a half without replacement. That only creates casualties, deaths, absences without leave, and there aren't any replacements for these soldiers in these units. Some of these battalions are now well below 50 percent strength.

JE: How effective was the training provided by the United States?

CP: When I arrived in January of 2005, the first thing I wanted to do was make an assessment of the training. I got a little bit of resistance for that for one reason. They wanted boots on the ground with rifles as quickly as possible. It didn't come across to me that they really cared about the quality of training. So after a lot of resistance, I got to go down and watch the training at the KMTC and, of course, it was no surprise to anybody that I came back with a report which said that these guys couldn't hit the broad side of a barn at 10 meters.

They were just going through the motions. Out of the 800 I saw try to qualify, only 80 actually qualified. In spite of that, they never re-fired the failures. They went right into the field, deployed and went into combat operations. The training was dismal to say the least and that's just in marksmanship, never mind the combat support and combat service support aspects of training the army. Those were just as bad or worse.

JE: Can you tell me about your boss there in Afghanistan? Who was your reporting senior?

CP: My direct line supervisor was Lieutenant Colonel Michael Pettigrew and then my senior rater was Colonel Ken Lissner, who was a Marine Corps colonel. He was outstanding. Those were my two bosses. Lieutenant Colonel Pettigrew eventually left in June and then I took over his job as training and fielding officer, reporting directly to Colonel Lissner.

JE: What was his formal job?

CP: Colonel Lissner was the chief of operations training director under OSC-A.

JE: What was the relationship of that unit to CJTF-76?

CP: Good question. CJTF-76 is the fighter. They're actually fighting and prosecuting the war. OSC-A looks at the training, fielding, and education pieces throughout the Army but they work together or in conjunction with CJTF-76. OSC-A is trying to build up the Afghan Army, the police, and the infrastructure to support the Army and things of that nature but we definitely work together hand in hand. Often CJTF-76 would provide OSC-A the helicopters needed to fly downrange to do missions because they would get those graduating ANA battalions which they really wanted, putting more good guys where there were bad guys.

JE: How did you get your feedback from CJTF-76?

CP: I'm assuming you mean about the condition of the ANA.

JE: Yes, that's correct.

CP: It came through the embedded training teams, the ETTs, there. They're called ETTs in Afghanistan and military transition teams or MiTTs in Iraq. Don't ask me why but the ETTs which were often National Guardsmen or they may have been active duty guys embedded with the ANA, they would report to either CJTF-76 or Task Force *Phoenix* which was their higher headquarters.

We would get the feedback from them. That's when we found out how woefully they were trained and about their poor marksmanship. The other thing that bothered me was the fact that the Afghan Army hadn't really moved above squad-level operations. The war ended in 2002, I'm there in 2005, and they're still operating at squad level. We were pushing very hard to move up to platoon and then company while I was there.

JE: Were there any other changes you made as a result of feedback from CJTF-76?

CP: The biggest thing I attacked was the marksmanship. I went after that with full guns, trying to get that squared away and again, we had many bridges to cross there, trying to find the sight adjustment tools, blank adapters, and increase the training of the Afghan Army. I think we had 16 or 17 hours of basic rifle marksmanship training and they reduced it to three hours before a soldier went out

and zeroed and qualified. We had to bump that back up. We also had to reconfigure how they zeroed and qualified.

They were using a Soviet-style zero and qualified at 100 meters. Well, at 100 meters, they were never hitting the target. There wasn't any way they could zero. Not only that, there weren't any sight adjustment tools. It was all a big paper tiger.

We moved the targets up to 25 meters, got them sight adjustment tools and, lo and behold, they could see where the rounds were going. We began zeroing and then we moved the targets back out to 100 meters and qualified. So, the biggest impact I think I had on the Afghan Army was probably the marksmanship piece and then the fielding piece of making sure we put the right guys in the right places and assisting in all that.

JE: Okay, we're going to shift gears a little bit and talk about the enemy. Tell me your assessment of the enemy you faced in Afghanistan.

CP: A lot of people think the insurgency going on right now is made of up primarily Afghanis but this is not true. The insurgency is primarily people from other Middle Eastern countries. They come from Syria, Pakistan, Iran or Saudi Arabia. Now, that's not to say there aren't Afghanis who are insurgents. There are. By day, they're fully supportive of us and our mission and by night they become insurgents with sympathetic ties to the *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda* but the majority we ran into, either killed or captured, were from other countries.

JE: How dangerous were they?

CP: They're extremely dangerous. They're not very skillful with their individual weapons, they don't shoot well, and they're not equipped well but they are absolutely 100 percent dedicated to closing with and killing US or Coalition forces. Now, that's not to say they want to die themselves. I did not find that to be the case. Although we had our fair share of suicide bombers, a lot of these fighters are fair weather fighters. They'll only fight during bright, clear, sunny days.

They definitely go into "survive" mode when it's cold or wet but they seem to want to hit and run, live, and hit again another day. I didn't find them to be decisive in terms of, "I'm going to go after these guys and, if I die doing it, that's okay."

JE: So was he very adaptive in his approach?

CP: Extremely adaptive, using the tools on the ground. When the Russians left in 1989, they left thousands of caches of mortar rounds, grenades, AK47s, mines, 107-mm rockets, so an insurgent need not even come across the border with anything. He can find what he needs there and then rig it. In a couple caches, we found them rigging artillery shells for IEDs.

They used pressure activated mines or command detonated mines or whatever they found, they adapted it and as we introduced things like jammers, they would use different frequency settings on cell phones or other means to detonate them.

They were extremely adaptive, which is the same thing we're running into in Iraq, a very smart enemy. This is not a dumb or by rote enemy. They definitely adapted to the situation.

JE: How would you describe the performance of the ANA during the time you were there with this enemy?

CP: The soldiers in the Afghan Army, like I said earlier, all want to be Massoud, so they will fight. It is not true to say the Afghan soldier won't fight.

They don't shoot well and they weren't trained well and the US is partly to blame for this. They will definitely go after the enemy. So, once we got their skills honed on the marksmanship piece, my understanding from the guys there now is that they're doing a lot better downrange. Despite the many challenges and shortcomings, they were not afraid of combat. I thought they were very good.

JE: Did your unit experience any casualties?

CP: Yes. We were conducting a reconnaissance mission in the Logar Desert about 40 kilometers south of Kabul, again with the fielding mission of trying to put good guys where there are bad guys. There weren't any good guys in that area and we wanted to put in a battalion of Afghan Army soldiers in so they could start working that province.

We were traveling in a three-vehicle unarmored SUV convoy. The second vehicle was hit with either a command detonated or pressure detonated mine. There were four casualties, initially two litter-urgent and two KIA. We tried to revive them but within minutes all four were KIA.

JE: Were there any other casualties suffered by the US unit you were with?

CP: Those were the only casualties from OSC-A/Task Force *Phoenix* while I was there. There had been other guys that had been wounded in the personnel security detachments and the RAT or rocket-propelled grenades, the RPGs, going over the hood and stuff like that but specific to my office, that was the only incident resulting in casualties.

JE: Did that instance result in a firefight or any other follow-on operations?

CP: No, nothing after the initial explosion, although we expected some sort of follow-on attack. The four guys that were killed, although OSC-A was running the mission, they were all from Task Force *Phoenix* because Task Force *Phoenix* is responsible for training the Afghan Army. So when I say they're from my office, they were tagging along on the reconnaissance because once we decide this is

where the Afghan battalion is going. They would be responsible for setting up the infrastructure, training ranges, and facilities to support the Afghan battalions. It was four National Guardsmen from the 151st Infantry Regiment, Indiana Army National Guard. We worked with them often, attended several meetings a week with them. We were their higher headquarters. They were part of our operation and we were part of theirs.

JE: What was the culture like in your AO?

CP: The cultural challenges are many. It's quite simply a differing cultural mindset. It's the vast difference between a US mindset and that of a Muslim. Theirs is a culture of dishonesty and corruption that seems prevalent in Muslim cultures going back thousands of years. Most Muslims believe everything is "Allah's will" so you don't see a real sense of urgency in anything there. This mindset invades the military too and a lot of military officers are corrupt and lie often to save face. Also, knowledge is power so if an officer knows something he will not share the information with anyone. It's very difficult to operate at times but, as time passes, this will get better as our cultures learn more about each other.

JE: Were there any memorable experiences with the Afghan people?

CP: Yes. I had to eat a goat that was undercooked on a mission once to please the village elder. I got dysentery really fast, literally within a couple hours. You're supposed to eat the food offered you. You're supposed to accept it because it's an honor for him to present you food. It shows his power, strength, wealth, and all that but I'll tell you that I don't recommend it. It can make you very sick, very quickly.

JE: How did that fit into the scheme of what you were doing with the ANA?

CP: Well, again, we're trying to win the hearts and minds.

We landed there in a very remote area of Afghanistan and were trying to find out about enemy activity in the area and also the possibility of moving some Afghan military into the province which is a whole Afghan Army battalion, that's going to impact somebody living there pretty significantly. So I really wasn't planning to eat or stay long but the translator recommended that I do so. It would be an honor to the village elder and it would help our cause but this is the same elder who didn't know he was even in Afghanistan, so I don't know how much mileage I got out of it.

JE: Did you have a dedicated translator?

CP: We had a translator pool. You would get a mission and then you would go to the translators and say, "Hey, I need a translator or two translators."

We had translators who could speak *Dari*, *Pashto*, and *Tajik*. There were multiple languages. The most common language was *Dari* or *Pashto*. I didn't have

the same translators on every mission. The missions were very high risk. I had one of our translators with me when those four guys were killed. Our vehicle rolled over the device first and then the vehicle behind us got hit. The translators were taking the same risk we were but without body armor, helmets, or weapons. They are a brave, brave bunch of guys.

JE: Who provided your security on these operations?

CP: Before the incident of March 26th which resulted in the four KIAs, we did it ourselves. I thought that was a big flaw in the way we operated. First, we were driving around in unarmored vehicles and secondly, we would just grab whoever was available. I always grabbed any Marines available. One thing is for certain, Marines all shoot well.

The Marines we had were really great guys. They would provide our security, along with whoever else was available. This is not the way to operate, though. Now, after March 26th, we put together a much more robust security package where we would pull from units that had armored up Humvees and additional security personnel. So then we had .50 calcs, Mk-19s, M240s, SAWs [squad automatic weapons], grenades, AT4s, plus we put devices in the package to jam the enemy from using remote detonated IEDs. You saw us, as an organization, learning how to properly secure only after taking casualties, when we should have done it right the first time.

JE: Did you get a lot of logistics support from the government of Afghanistan?

CP: Not really. Again, they didn't have a lot of money. They were trying to put together their government, had just completed their regional elections. They were trying to put together those packages but as I mentioned before, most of the money was provided by the US and oftentimes, they couldn't even completely pay their army, so we would have to throw in \$20 million here or there to pay the army. This is not a lot of logistical support.

JE: Let's keep talking about the Afghan people. How supportive were they of your mission? You described the one circumstance out in the province there with the elder. How about the population in general as you drove through some of those smaller towns and didn't stop?

CP: It's really hard to say. Sometimes they would give you the finger, their version of it. Sometimes they would throw rocks at you and other times they would run up to you happy and excited to see you there.

They were in most cases very welcoming, very open and very interested in what you had on you for equipment. They always wanted some food or handouts and stuff and would follow you around. So it depended on the area or the province. The biggest support we received was from the ANA and the Ministry of Defense, the MOD, but outside of that in the population, it was a mixed bag.

If we did an operation in a certain area, where we would do snatch missions, this was done by the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, the CJSOTF. They would grab guys that were clearly insurgents in the area. You would see the population very angry and they would riot and throw rocks but then two or three days later and there was nothing. So, it's very hard to say. It's a big case where, by day, they're supportive and by night, you probably have guys that are wearing two hats.

JE: Could you describe some of your successes for your deployment in Afghanistan?

CP: Well, the biggest one is the marksmanship, and the other piece is getting the guys downrange and making sure they had a place to live and the logistical support necessary to survive. There was a point in time where an Afghan infantry battalion would graduate and they'd just send them to the desert and there was just nothing out there, "Here's your area. See you, wouldn't want to be you."

We matured from that and got a lot better because that was an absolute disaster. If any success, it's the marksmanship program and then the fielding of putting the right guys in the right place, setting them up for success, and ensuring the training and logistical support.

JE: How long were you on the ground in Afghanistan?

CP: I was there for eleven months from January 2005 to November 2005.

JE: You mentioned the Marines. Were you exposed to other US conventional forces?

CP: Yes, I dealt with CJTF-76 which was the 173d Airborne, the 82d Airborne and the CJSOTF which were the SF guys. I dealt with them a lot and then other government agencies, the OGAs, which ties in to some national assets deployed over there that I really can't discuss.

JE: How about Coalition forces?

CP: Let's see, you have French, German, British, Korean, Italian, and many others.

We dealt with the Coalition a lot. In my office, I had a French Foreign Legion guy. I had a German and a Brit. The Coalition is a tricky one to work with depending on where they came from.

A lot of these Coalition forces that go there don't have the rules of engagement, the ROE, which supports a counterinsurgency operation. They're there for nation building and specifically to stay behind a FOB and train the ANA or the police. Or perhaps they're there to donate money and build something or be part of the school system. Everyone wanted to play and there were political overtones to this but the

difficulty is we were teaching basic training, basic rifle marksmanship, and basic soldier skills with the Afghans.

We had the British teaching the Afghan Army noncommissioned officers or NCOs, and the French were teaching the Afghan Army officers. When you put all three packages together, it doesn't work. Although our doctrines might be similar in some cases, in other cases they're absolutely not. So, when we sent this Afghan infantry battalion down to the 173d Airborne, to CJTF-76, they had to fix all that confusing doctrinal mess. You can't use a British model for NCO leadership and a French model for officers and then we're trying to teach the basic training skills to the ANA.

We've already turned over much of the basic and advanced individual training to the ANA with our supervision. You've also got the Germans teaching driver's training and the Italians teaching engineering but like I said, meshing all that together, trying to use all the battle operating systems, and trying to understand how that all works and in unified doctrine is just not workable. Working with the Coalition was an interesting exercise in understanding how other countries operate.

I understand Canada, who's taking over one of the ugliest areas in Afghanistan, has now taken on our ROE which is a huge success story because before they were very limited in what they could and couldn't do. They're moving in the right direction, at least Canada is. In my opinion, though, everybody should have the same ROE as the US so they can all assist in the counterinsurgency fight.

JE: How did you overcome the differences this entailed?

CP: Patience. Having multiple Coalition partners complicates and slows down the process of doing anything. Everyone has to weigh in on a decision. If you want to make a change at the KMTC, not only do you have to talk to Task Force *Phoenix* which is National Guard, you have to talk to the French, the British, and the Afghans. Everybody has to come to some sort of consensus because one change is going to impact the others. So it was extremely painful and laborious and was just a complexity that was not needed. My recommendation for the future is that it doesn't matter whose doctrine you adopt of French, German, British or American but just pick one. Call it a NATO standard doctrine, streamline it, and everybody follows the same one. That would be my recommendation. It doesn't have to be ours. Sadly it seemed the French, Germans, British, and Americans did not agree on much of anything.

JE: Would you have a memorandum of understanding, or a handshake control, as General Anthony Zinni would say?

CP: You would actually have both. It's definitely documented when you make any change but everything impacts everything else. By the time we got something

agreed upon and done, three months had passed. By then sometimes the problem didn't even matter anymore. You don't have that kind of time whereas if we had just one standard, boom, make the change, that would be it, and it would be executed.

JE: Across these Coalition forces, was there unity of command?

CP: There should have been a unity of command but there wasn't. For instance, Canada was taking orders directly from Ontario. They were not listening to Combined Forces Command, the CFC. They were not interested in listening to General Karl Eikenberry or anyone from OSC-A, in spite of the fact that we were their higher headquarters. If we told them to change something because they were doing something that wasn't following along with our intent or goal for the ANA, they wouldn't listen to us. They would call Ontario for guidance. Ontario, not being in Afghanistan, is going to give bad guidance. That's just an example of what we were running into with the British, French, Germans, and Canadians on a daily basis. It was very painful. It really doesn't work as it is now.

They're fighting through it and it's slow and it's moving forward but at a snail's pace.

JE: Did you experience any other US agencies in OEF, like the US Agency for International Development, the USAID?

CP: I ran into them. Here's my problem with these non-governmental organizations, the NGOs, or these agencies that are supposed to come from the State Department or other countries that are building a nation. They're building the schools, building the infrastructures and things like that but they weren't out in the provinces where they needed to be.

They were more than happy to be at Kabul Compound. They were more than happy to be in a FOB that was safe. They were more than happy to be in an area that had low enemy activity but out where they needed to be, out in the PRTs, out in the provinces, out in the towns and cities that were desperate for electricity and water and basic infrastructure, they could not be found. So the US military had to shoulder 90 percent of the burden.

We are not trained in how to build a banking system, put together an infrastructure, and get the water and sewage going and all that stuff. Now in the United States Army, not only are we fighting the insurgency but we're also trying to do infrastructure and building a nation.

JE: I'd like to separate some of the US agencies from some of the NGOs you mentioned. Were the US agencies such as the Department of State or any others present? If so, what were they contributing?

CP: I didn't really have any dealings directly with the Department of State people. They were there. They were running around the Kabul Compound and stuff. I didn't see anybody downrange which was the point I was making.

JE: As to the NGOs, were they ever involved in your operations of fielding the ANA?

CP: Like I said, they were real easy to find at Kabul Compound which is not where they needed to be. Where we needed them to be was downrange. So, the answer is yes and no. Yes, they were there but no, they were not where they needed to be. I needed them, and so did CJTF-76, downrange to help build these provinces back up and help build the roads and schools and all that stuff. The answer is yes and no. I wanted them there but they weren't there. They feared injury or death, so they were very reluctant to go downrange.

JE: Did they have their own logistical support? Could they have gone where you wanted them on their own?

CP: That was one of their complaints. They felt the security wasn't such that they could operate without getting injured or killed. Now, CJTF-76 was more than willing to provide that security once they got down there. They were just so desperate for these guys. It wouldn't have been a problem but a lot of the organizations felt it was just too risky but sending them there for a year to hang around Kabul Compound did nothing. That's not where they needed to be.

JE: What were some of the lessons you learned in OEF?

CP: We're still operating there without armored up vehicles. I was very surprised to find out that most of OSC-A and CFC were driving around in unarmored civilian SUVs. Of course, it cost us dearly on one of our missions. It cost us those four KIAs.

That's not to say we wouldn't have had casualties on the incident of March 26th if we were riding in armored up Humvees. The explosion was so powerful, it shattered their weapons. We probably still would have had KIAs but probably not all of them. So, I was very disturbed to see that. I was also disappointed about the coalition piece, the fact that it's not meshing. It's really not working and then most of all, I was disturbed about the general leadership. By that I mean that we're seeing a time in the US Army where things are a little bit backwards.

You've got generals showing up wearing one, two, or three stars who haven't had any real combat experience. They're showing up in a combat zone for the first time and they're learning combat from the guys who are sergeants, lieutenants, captains, and majors but those general officers make the overall decisions, so a lot of their policies do not make sense. For example, "Don't enter my FOB or base locked and loaded with the weapon on safe. All must lock and clear, and get rid of the magazine." What was this, in a combat zone?

We were even told once when you go outside the wire to place the magazine in but don't lock and load unless you are in contact. Huh? It was foolish policies and

guidance like that from garrison-minded leaders with little to no understanding of what a combat zone is. We fought foolish stuff like that constantly. I thought the general leadership was very poor there.

JE: Could we spend a few more moments on that one incident?

CP: Sure.

JE: Could you describe, after the vehicle was hit, some of the events that took place and how those events changed the way you operated?

CP: We were simply not operating like we should have been with these unarmored civilian SUVs roaming around in a combat zone. It's just a matter of time before luck will run out. You see this in history a lot. You take casualties, you learn from it, and then you do the right thing. The people doing the right things would leave, new people would come in, they would start doing the wrong thing again, and then they would take casualties. It's a vicious cycle. It had a profound impact on all of us.

The biggest piece was that we had gone in that area the same way before, so that's probably strike one. The other piece is that we were driving around that area over and over. Everybody could see we were there. You're not fooling anyone when you're in a convoy of three SUVs, whether they're civilian models or not. The enemy knows those are Americans because only Americans drive around in three-vehicle convoys.

When we went down the road and the second vehicle got hit, of course we were all in shock, thought we might be in a minefield, and then saw the casualties. The first thing we were thinking was to treat the casualties. That's not what you're supposed to do. Step one is to secure yourself. Now, luckily, we had the Marines with us and they started pulling security. Lieutenant Colonel Pettigrew and I immediately tried to treat the casualties. All of them succumbed to their wounds.

We called the medical evacuation, the MEDEVAC, and told them two litter-urgent and two KIA. MEDEVAC took 45 minutes to get there. I don't know why it took them so long but it really pissed me off. If these guys had been litter-urgent and we'd been able to resuscitate them and at least keep a heartbeat and breathing, trying to maintain CPR for 45 minutes would have been impossible.

When the MEDEVAC bird got there, they didn't have any body bags, so we had guys that were in pieces and they threw down an Army blanket. That's another lesson learned that I had to beat those guys up on. I flew back with them on a 40-minute flight with four KIA stacked like chord wood on the flight deck, landed in Bagram, unloaded the KIAs and we eventually made it back via UH-60 to Kabul Compound. I vowed never to go on a combat mission like that again.

That's why I told all my bosses that I'll handle security from now on, I got it. You tell me what and when the next mission is and I'll put together the security package, to include convoy briefings which were never done. I wasn't in charge of this mission where these four guys got killed. I was just a guy on it that was driving but when I took over the security package, we were able to drive eight hours down a road that had been hit with IEDs 30 times in the last 10 days or so, and we were fine. We went all the way from Kabul Compound which is up north, down to Kandahar which is in the south and then back again in an eight-vehicle convoy. So, it worked out pretty well.

JE: Did the leadership you mentioned earlier make any changes after that incident?

CP: They actually resisted change. I could not believe it. After four KIA, I got resistance about armored up Humvees and IED jammers on the next mission. I cannot tell you why, except that they wanted to go on the next mission as quickly as possible and didn't want to waste time, in their words, putting together a proper security package but I didn't relent. I stayed on it and we put together a good package but after that I did most every mission by air, big sky with little bullet by Blackhawks with an Apache. I did 99 percent of it by air because ground was just too dangerous.

JE: You mentioned the aircraft. What was your preferred approach for going out into the provinces?

CP: Two Blackhawks and one AH-64 Apache. I would get with CJTF-76 and say, "Hey man, it benefits you, it benefits me. I'm trying to put Afghan Army guys where your bad guys are. Give me some air." CJTF-76 was great and they were commanded by General Jason Kamiya, who was a two-star with combat experience. There's a big difference between him and some of the leadership at CFC but I called them up and said, "Here's the mission. I need air." They would give me two Blackhawks and an Apache, and I got that consistently.

Then I was able to go to Qalat, a very high risk, Kandahar, a very high risk, Paktika Province, a very high risk and all the way to the border of Pakistan where the enemy was infiltrating through Pakistan into Afghanistan. That package was the preferred method. If I had to drive, they would meet us on a helicopter landing zone, fly away, and we would drive an armored Humvee a very short distance to do what we needed to do, maybe overnight, and then fly back the next day.

JE: So when did you depart Afghanistan?

CP: I left in November of 2005 to come here to CGSC. I was supposed to stay until January of 2006 but because CGSC took priority, they pulled me out and sent me home so I could pack up the family and come to Leavenworth.

JE: In Afghanistan, was there a relief for you?

CP: No. When I left there wasn't any replacement, just like when I arrived.

JE: With the colonel gone and you gone, who picked up your responsibilities?

CP: There was a gunnery sergeant in the Marine Corps that we had relied on heavily for a month or so there. We gave him the bulk of the responsibilities for just holding the line, so to speak, and maintaining the fielding plan and the training. He was a great trainer. He had to work on the fielding piece and get a better understanding which he was working on. We just told him to hold the line until a guy arrived in January, who was supposed to be my replacement to take over the training and fielding full time.

He had help. Colonel Lissner was still there and some others were still there so he wasn't by himself but it was a huge job. If you wanted to do it right, you needed a lieutenant colonel, a major, and maybe a captain to really do the training and fielding right. So, we were undermanned and under correct strength.

JE: Is there anything you would have done differently?

CP: The mission dictated what we did or didn't do. I just regret those four casualties because that could have been done differently. Not to say they all would have survived. I still think we'd have gone down that same road and I still think a vehicle would have been hit. An Afghan had jumped on a motorcycle and raced away right after it happened which led us to believe that it was command detonated but either way, I think we'd have taken some casualties.

JE: Could you describe your departure from Afghanistan?

CP: You have a lot to do. You have to pack up all your stuff and you have to get out of there. The thing I focused on the most was the gunnery sergeant, getting him as up to speed as soon as possible. I spent a couple weeks with him, going everywhere, making sure he was up to speed in what needed to be done as to where he was going along with the documentation and the fielding plan and all that.

I started mailing some stuff home and, of course, packing. Now I had seven duffle bags worth of stuff, because when you get there, you get the RFI equipment. You get the new helmet, the new boots, the new goggles, etc. You arrive with four duffle bags and leave with seven. It was very painful to pack up and get out of there as far as equipment goes with unneeded and unused equipment to drag back and forth into and out of theater.

JE: When did you and your seven duffle bags arrive back in the US?

CP: We got on the plane in Bagram and we went to Turkey. From there we went to Germany, and then from Germany to Baltimore and, of course, you're dragging these bags everywhere you go. It's just a nightmare and they're all 80 to

90 pound bags. Then finally back to Fort Benning, to the CRC to turn in all that stuff, and then head home. It was a long and painful process.

JE: Were you back in the States in November?

CP: I got back around the 15th of November.

JE: Are there any other memorable moments about your deployment that you'd like to share?

CP: We've got some very good people trying to do great things over there. Here's a good observation. The Army spends too much time in theater and the Marine Corps, Air Force, and the Navy personnel spend too little time there. One universal six-month tour is about right. When I arrived there, Marines were only there three or four months. While I was there, it was extended to six months but when I arrived, they were still on three and four month long tours. For the Air Force, it was a three-month tour. I went through four Air Force guys, trying to do the training and education job in 11 months. That's ridiculous. You don't learn your job in three months, especially in a combat zone.

It's very difficult to get around, it's very dangerous and, in a lot of cases, an Air Force guy would leave before another guy would replace him, so there wasn't any transition. The same thing happened with the Marines and this is unacceptable. Army guys are there a whole year and you have everyone else leaving after three or four months. My opinion is that it's a six-month tour for everybody, all armed services, in and out. A year is too long. While I was there, I experienced multiple rocket attacks, mortar attacks, direct fire, and the IED incident resulting in four KIAs and I wasn't even in an infantry unit deployed downrange. By the eight-month mark, I was already a bit frayed and was still doing high-risk missions. The missions don't go away regardless of what you've been through or seen. You have to drive on anyway whether you think you're going to survive or not. That's what I would share is a six-month rotation for everybody, six months, six and out.

JE: So getting back to the US with your deployment now over. Has your family been back in Indiana?

CP: Yes, they stayed in Indiana. When branch called me and said I was going to be an individual filler, I said, "The only stipulation is that I don't want to move my family to some unit, be an individual replacement to that unit and have to do all that. I want to leave them right where they are." They didn't even raise an eyebrow. They said, "Fine."

JE: I'd like to ask you a couple questions about the family with regards to the deployment. I'm trying to get the whole picture here. Did your wife and children have anything like a family readiness group, the FRG, to support them while they were in Indiana?

CP: Not really. An ACRC unit is not deployable, so although she knew some of the wives and stuff like that, there really wasn't a support group. So, the answer is no.

JE: Did you have family in the area that helped?

CP: My wife's mother and father lived about five hours away, so as often as they could, they would come down and help her out. Three kids and a mom doing that all by herself, that's worse than a combat zone!

JE: Are there any recommendations you can make for other individual fillers or individual mobilization augmentees that might be helpful for people to know?

CP: What you need to know as an individual filler is that you're probably not going to do the job you were told you were going to do when you get there. For example, one of my other duties besides training and fielding was mentoring the MOD. I'm a major, okay, and I was mentoring four full-bird ANA colonels, and one brigadier general. I inherited all of that. I went to their weekly training meetings, the training meeting for the entire ANA. Sometimes I was the only US Army representative there. So now I had to talk intelligently about USAID, State Department stuff, military affairs, legal issues, logistical support issues. Not only was this stuff way above my pay grade but above my competence and ability too. I'm not a logistician, I'm not a cop, and I can't tell you about State Department stuff. The advice is just "be" ready to do just about anything.

JE: Well, I don't have any more questions. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

CP: No sir.

JE: Thank you very much, major.

Major Douglas Ross
23 June 2008

BH: This is the oral history interview for the Combat Studies Institute by Major Brad Helton (BH) of Major Doug Ross (DR) who is with the Kentucky Army National Guard. The date of the interview is 23 June 2008. The interview is about his experiences as an embedded transition team chief in Afghanistan in the 2006 time frame, approximately. With that, we'll begin. Would you please give me your full name, age, source of commission, hometown, branch, and summary of previous assignments and operational experiences prior to your deployment to Afghanistan?

DR: My name is Douglas Marshall Ross and I'm 43 years old. Today's my birthday. I was born 23 June 1965. I was commissioned through ROTC from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. I was born and raised in Lexington, Kentucky. My previous assignments have been all primarily with 1st Battalion, 623d Field Artillery-MLRS with the Kentucky National Guard. I've held positions from executive officer, the XO, to battery commander and intelligence officer or S2. I was the S2 when I was mobilized for this mission.

BH: Had you deployed prior to going to Afghanistan?

DR: No, the 623d was mobilized for OIF [Operation IRAQI FREEDOM]. We were slated to go through Turkey. That obviously did not occur, so we were demobilized. I was mobilized for *Phoenix* 4.0 in March 2005.

BH: You said you're Field Artillery?

DR: Correct.

BH: How were you selected to be an ETT [embedded training team] chief?

DR: My battalion had been selected for a security force mission. The organization for the security force mission required us to combine our four batteries into two companies.

We took all the lieutenants and two captains to lead the security force. Another unit had a rear operations center mission and they took about four officers for a liaison officer, the LNO, position. That left anywhere from five to eight officers in the rear for rear detachment. When our brigade headquarters came down with this tasking, we were all selected to go to Afghanistan as ETTs.

BH: What training did you have before the deployment?

DR: Kentucky has a 10-day annual training event that they make all their deployed soldiers go through. It focuses primarily on small weapons tactics and it was pretty good.

Then we went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi for two months of train-up that basically broke us down into two or three groups based upon what your assignment was going to be. If you were going to be a headquarters unit, you received a little more additional cultural training. If you were just going to be an infantry team leader, you received primarily infantry tactics which was unfortunate because they were the ones who probably needed all the cultural stuff to begin with. I'll say that a lot of the cultural training was pretty good. Some of the actual certification training was weak. That was it, just those two months.

BH: You met your entire team at this training?

DR: Yes. I was actually assigned to the brigade headquarters but reassigned to the 4th *Kandak* when I arrived in theater but everybody who was on my team was in the building next to me. I had served with most of them during my artillery career. I knew everybody.

BH: When did you deploy and to which unit were you assigned to advise?

DR: We flew out on 5 July 2005 and returned around 9 July 2006. When I arrived in country, I was assigned to Regional Command-South, the RC-South, which was the Kandahar region, and supported the 205th Corps. My unit assignment was with the 4th *Kandak*. The way the organization is for the Afghan Army is they have five *kandaks*. A *kandak* is basically a battalion. Three of them are infantry. The fourth *kandak* is a combat support unit. The fifth *kandak* is a combat service support unit. So in your three infantry *kandaks*, you have your three infantry companies and a headquarters company. In your combat support or your fourth *kandak*, you have an artillery company, an engineer company, a recon company, and a headquarters company. Then in the fifth *kandak*, you have transportation, maintenance, medical, and obviously a headquarters. So I was assigned to the 4th *Kandak* as the artillery mentor.

Everybody wore two or three hats. My team chief was Major Blake Settle and our executive officer was Major Shawn Flaughter. I was the operations officer or S3, and the artillery mentor. Then we had Major Mike Benton, who was the supply officer or S4 and the headquarters company mentor. Captain Dexter Bird from the Individual Ready Reserve out of the California National Guard was the recon company mentor. An Air Force first lieutenant was assigned to us in Afghanistan. His name was Woodrow Bell.

We had some enlisted guys, too. There was Sergeant First Class Timothy McClish, Sergeant First Class Scott Stephens, First Sergeant Daniel Holleran and Master Sergeant Phil Pyzyna.

BH: What does *kandak* stand for?

DR: It's the Afghan name for a battalion, or a unit about that size.

BH: So you were the S3 mentor and the artillery mentor to the 4th *Kandak*?

DR: Correct. The 205th Corps had a 1st and 2d Brigade and right as I was leaving country, the 3d Brigade was stood up. I had the 1st Brigade and we were based out of Camp Shir Zai, and it was right outside of Kandahar Airfield. The 2d Brigade was based out of Qalat which was just a little northeast of Kandahar on Route 1.

BH: How long had the 4th *Kandak* been in existence?

DR: I think we were the third rotation that worked with this *kandak*, so they were fairly experienced. A lot of their enlistments were expiring as we were rotating out, so I guess it was about the third year.

BH: Where was the 4th *Kandak* headquartered again?

DR: They were headquartered out of Shir Zai which is in Kandahar.

BH: What was their primary mission? What had they been typically involved in doing?

DR: The missions obviously evolved as the year went on. The three infantry *kandaks* were farmed out to all the Special Forces [SF] units. All the Special Forces A-teams had a company from each *kandak* that they would take out on missions so as to put an Afghan face on all their missions. The 5th *Kandak* was primarily for garrison-area stuff, other than running resupply convoys they didn't have much to do out in the field. For the 4th *Kandak*, we would have our engineers married up with Task Force *Pacemaker*, I forgot where they're out of. It's an engineering unit. They helped build the Tarin Kowt Road.

We had the artillery unit. We didn't have any D-30s which is the Afghan artillery piece, until real late, probably around May or June 2006 is when we received those. We married them up with the Gun Devils artillery unit. I think this is the 3d Battalion, 319th Field Artillery out of the 82d Airborne. We'd go out on missions with them.

We'd provide outer security and then when the operations tempo slowed down, we would conduct training missions with the Afghan National Army, the ANA, soldiers and let them learn their duty positions. That paid off pretty well when we got our actual equipment. The crews had a pretty good understanding of what they had to do. The recon company would typically go out with Gun Devil infantry units. Their area of operations, the AO, was around the Kandahar-Panjway area. They would conduct missions and our artillery unit would go out with a Gun Devil artillery battery and our recon company would go out with one of the infantry companies.

BH: So before the field artillery company received their D-30s, what did they have?

DR: They just had standard infantry equipment.

BH: What kinds of missions were they generally engaged in?

DR: In the Gun Devils, Lieutenant Ges was the battalion commander. They would set up missions where they would send out one company to try to stir up some contact and then they would send out the other two or three infantry companies to set up blocking positions or to exploit any kind of intelligence they were able to gather.

The artillery battery would set out in a supporting position. The artillery unit that I mentored would go out with the Gun Devils artillery battery and typically set up outer security. Once things were going kind of slow, we'd train them to shoot rounds into the mountain or something like that. Basically, we were just supporting infantry units as they were going out to exploit any kind of intelligence they had.

BH: How would you evaluate the unit? Obviously it's a field artillery unit not really doing a field artillery mission yet but how confident were they?

DR: I would say they were fairly confident. The battery commander was kind of weak. The Afghan mentality is that if you're a commander, you stay back in the rear in the office and you send your lieutenants out on these missions. That was a big challenge, getting the battery commander to go out on missions but the lieutenants were fairly good, fairly straightforward, and fairly knowledgeable.

They were good to work with. The battery commander was eventually promoted, so one of the lieutenants became the battery commander and then it was hard to get him to go out into the field. You know, that's a lieutenant's job. The enlisted guys were fairly good also.

They were artillery and because they didn't have a habitual relationship with one of the SF units. They would often get tagged with a lot of the ash and trash missions, like checkpoints in the city or providing security for a VIP who came into the area.

BH: What was the typical soldier's motivation to be in that organization?

DR: That's a good question. It's hard to really understand a different culture at times. It was good because they seemed to be maybe ethical but they were more understanding of doing things the right way than a lot of the other Afghan units tended to be. I'll probably have examples of that as we move on.

Obviously they wanted pay and I think they were looking for adventure. When we started talking to them about reenlisting, we didn't get a good feel for it. I don't know how much of the unit turned over after we left. I think a lot of them

just signed up right when the ANA was formed. I think a lot of them weren't too happy with the assignments they had but they were pretty disciplined and pretty motivated. I don't know if that answers your question but I don't really know the answer either.

BH: So you're assigned to RC-South and within the 205th Corps. Then below that you had the 1st Brigade and the 2d Brigade, and you were in the 4th *Kandak* of the 1st Brigade?

DR: Correct.

BH: Then your brigade team chief was Colonel West?

DR: Billy Jack West, yes.

BH: Leading up to Operation RIVER DANCE, what types of operations were you engaged in that were relevant to it or set up the operation?

DR: The big difference between RIVER DANCE and all the other operations that I did was that RIVER DANCE had zero Coalition support. Typically I would go over to the Gun Devils, get a briefing on what the operation was, and I would sanitize it for a briefing to the ANA.

We'd have the ANA ready, we'd show up at the right start point and the right start time and we'd go out on missions. So my only responsibility was really to take care of the ANA. I didn't have to worry about tactical control, the TACON, or anything like that. The only time I might have had something that was kind of similar was for the parliamentary elections which I think were in September 2005. I had to take the 4th *Kandak* down to Spin Boldak to provide security for the election. I was put under the tactical control of the French unit out of Spin Boldak but I didn't get very much support out of them. I had to drive a few issues myself but as a general rule most of the missions prior to RIVER DANCE, the Coalition forces drove everything and I was there to support them.

RIVER DANCE was the other way around. We were out there on our own with very little support or knowledge by the Coalition forces in the area.

BH: When did you first hear about Operation RIVER DANCE?

DR: Around 8 March I heard of it. I was in a brigade staff meeting when Colonel West mentioned that Lieutenant Colonel Hayter, the brigade S3, wasn't there. There was a poppy eradication mission and people could probably expect taskings for that mission. That was about all I heard. On 9 March, I actually received a briefing and was basically told I was going to take 100 of my ANA to Lashkar Gah as a reserve force. Lieutenant Colonel Hayter had come back at that time and he said that we would just put the reserve force at the airfield at Lashkar Gah and that I would report to the operations center which was at the governor's

compound for Helmand Province at Lashkar Gah. He also said I could stay at the provincial reconstruction team, the PRT, which was at Lashkar Gah which later I found out was not true. I was not welcome there. Around 10 March, I found that I could only take 70 troops, mostly from the headquarters company.

Then on that day I was told I was going to be taking 20 soldiers and the leadership from the 2d *Kandak* on this mission. The ETT chief of the 2d *Kandak* was on leave, so they put me in charge of his *kandak* leadership and my 70 troops. I had a total of about 95 troops when we left Shir Zai. We departed on 11 March for Lashkar Gah and arrived on that day.

BH: So you went there thinking you were going to be a reserve force?

DR: Correct.

BH: Then what happened?

DR: On 13 March, I met a Mr. Fitzgerald, who was a Department of State representative there. I received a call from a Captain Christianson, I think is his name, who said that I was expected at the operations center at a certain time. I showed up there and met Mr. Fitzgerald who gave me a quick briefing on the overall operation about poppy eradication. It was all primarily focused on the south part of the Helmand River. At the time, I heard there was an ETT-ANA team out of Herat working their way from the south to the north and they were under quite a bit of contact.

We also had another unit down there that was led by Lieutenant Jean Luc Houlne from the Kentucky National Guard and his company was out of the 2d *Kandak*. I'm not sure if he left the day before I did or the day after I did. I think it was the day after. I think they stopped at Lashkar Gah overnight and then the next morning got up and went on down south to their position. That was the first time, on 13 March, in which I was briefed on any kind of operational aspect of RIVER DANCE.

BH: What was the general concept that they briefed you on?

DR: Basically I was briefed that the ANA were providing security and DynCorp was eradicating all the poppies. They had tractors with blades on them and they would drive through the fields and cut down all the poppies. I went to those briefings for two or three days until I had a little bit of a falling out with Mr. Fitzgerald but they were reporting that they were cutting hectares of poppy every day but when I talked to Lieutenant Houlne, he said no, they were only cutting a couple strips out of each field. It's not like they were really cutting much. So, he questioned the report on how much they were cutting. That was the first inkling I got that they really weren't cutting much.

BH: What kinds of preparation were you involved in and how did you prepare your detachment for the mission?

DR: We went out on missions quite a bit, so we had the standard mission prep but the biggest challenge was arranging food. We had to go draw money to make sure the Afghans were fed and, of course, by this time the Afghan Army had taken over its own food supply. We had to make sure they drew the right amount of food and stuff like that. There was quite a bit of coordination as far as making sure they had the money and we had backup money.

BH: Was that to live off the land or were you getting external supplies through a logistics system?

DR: Well, we drew as much as we could but then we took money so we could buy off the local market. That was not uncommon. Sometimes you'd have to go buy a couple of goats to feed the men.

BH: What kind of transportation did you have?

DR: Let me back up here. One of the other things we had to do when we were prepping since we didn't have enough ETTs to go on the mission was that typically you're supposed to have a minimum of two US vehicles and they prefer four. At the time, though, just Major Benton and I were the only ones available. When we rolled out there the first day we had our 100 ANA but there was just one up-armored Humvee. I was driving and Major Benton was in the turret with a .50 cal. When we were going through the planning process, our recon unit was on a mission with Task Force *Orion* which was the Canadian forces. Task Force *Orion* had just taken over authority for RC-South and the recon and artillery companies were on a mission up near the Belly Button.

We had to get the ETTs pulled off the mission. We left recon and artillery with the Canadian forces and one of our American soldiers up there. We brought Captain Dexter Bird, Sergeant First Class Timothy C. McLish, and Lieutenant Woodrow Bell back. Those three came down from the Belly Button on a resupply convoy, immediately restocked their stuff, and caught a convoy out to Lashkar Gah. They joined us probably about four or five days after we got there, so my guess is around 15 or 18 March. All we had in my unit were two uparmored Humvees, five Americans, and about 95 to 100 ANA.

BH: How were they transported?

DR: The ANA had Ford Ranger pickup trucks and we had a couple of *Kamazes* and a fuel truck. I'm not sure if we had a water truck. I don't think we did. *Kamazes* are old Russian trucks similar to our deuce-and-a-half. That's about all we had.

BH: Were there any heavy weapons, mortars, anything like that?

DR: The infantry 2-1 Infantry *Kandak* had brought over a couple of machine guns that the ANA had and I forget what those were but they were the standard issue for an infantry *kandak*. The 4th *Kandak*, my soldiers, had only AK47s. Then the Americans had a 240B on one vehicle and a .50 cal on the other one, and the .50 cal really didn't seem to work that much. That's about all we had as far as heavy weapons.

BH: So on 13 March these other Americans came down on the resupply? Then how long before you kicked off?

DR: While we were in Lashkar Gah, we did run a resupply mission down to Lieutenant Houlne's location. Lieutenant Houlne's team had just pulled into DynCorp's FOB East. They had pretty good cooks there, actually. We ran some water and some ammo to Lieutenant Houlne. We went down there for one day and came back the next.

Then on 1 April, we received orders to go to Gereshk, so we went up there that day and slept at FOB Price. On 2 April, we had conflicting orders. The ANA said they were supposed to go up to either Qal'eh-ye Gaz, Kariz-koka [ph], or Musa Qal'eh. It's opposite of the Helmand river to the village of Sangin which is where FOB Wolf was located. I had orders that we were going to move up to FOB Wolf/FOB Robinson, whatever the name was. It got renamed to FOB Robinson. We were going to go up there and relieve the Tennessee unit at that location. It took us a while to work that out but we eventually went with the ANA direction and on 2 April we pulled up across from Sangin to Musa Qal'eh.

BH: What was higher telling you about the mission? Obviously the eradication of the poppies but what kind of end-state was desired?

DR: I probably had two or three chains of command at this point. Obviously my chain of command was Colonel West, who was my 1st Brigade commander, but I also worked through RIVER DANCE-6. At the beginning of the operation, that was Major Vernon Van Dyne and then he got pulled off to go to another mission and then Lieutenant Colonel Rudolph took over toward the end. So, I reported through them. We also had Mr. Fitzgerald, who was the Department of State representative and he had a small staff of some full-bird colonels and some senior enlisted guys. I kind of reported through them also. I often got conflicting direction from RIVER DANCE-6 and Mr. Fitzgerald. However, Mr. Fitzgerald was returned to the States and one of the full-bird colonels took over. The communication dropped off significantly then and I think he just went through RIVER DANCE-6. I rarely received any kind of guidance or direction other than to support the ANA on poppy eradication.

BH: What was their mission? How much of it, on paper anyway, were they supposed to eradicate?

DR: I never saw anything. I know Mr. Fitzgerald kind of had a tactical operations center or TOC set up. He was a retired colonel and was kind of abusive to his staff. Once I left Lashkar Gah, I never saw anything. Everything was verbal.

BH: So no objective really but just to support the eradication?

DR: Right. Now when I arrived at Musa Qal'eh, I found out that I had 100 Afghan National Police and 100 Afghan Border Police there waiting for us. So now I had a force of about 300. Some tractors showed up too but it was nothing like Houlne was experiencing down in the south. There, DynCorp was supposedly doing the eradication. Here, this was all native Afghan.

BH: About how many tractors would you say?

DR: I'd have to take a guess but probably 10, maybe 15 at the most.

BH: Let's talk about operation execution now. When did the operation begin and how did it proceed?

DR: This was still just a continuation of what we had been doing. Once we moved up to Musa Qal'eh, then it obviously changed. There was very little interaction from RIVER DANCE-6. Most of our communication was through Blue Force Tracker and cell phones.

We had trouble getting cell phone connections up there in that remote area. It was the border police chief, the Afghan National Police chief, and my *kandak* commander, and they basically came up with a plan where the ANA would provide outer security and the ANP and the border police would go into the town to provide security there. Then the tractors would go eradicate the poppies.

The next day, we went down and we provided security and the ANP and the border police went and did what they were supposed to do. Again, we started seeing that very little of the fields were being cut. It was just one or two swathes of some of the fields. A lot of the fields were not being touched. On 4 April, the ANA *kandak* commander came to me and said that the ANP were giving the farmers the option of paying money to prevent their fields from being plowed and I wrote in my notebook that I had serious ethical issues with this. Apparently they were under direction from the governor to only cut 50 percent of each field. He didn't want to devastate every farmer.

They understood that the farmers needed that money. However, they would shake down these farmers and say if you paid them 10,000 Afghanis, they would bypass a field. The big issue I had with that is that my presence and the ANA's presence gave legitimacy to the illegal operation. Basically, we're sitting here saying that we're trying to establish a government of the people and it's an ethical

government, we're trying to train the ANA to be ethical and build trust with the local populace. Well, if somebody's in there fleecing the people and we're providing security, then we're sending the wrong message. On 5 April, the ANA *kandak* commander managed to get control of cutting for the day and a significant amount of poppy was cut, a lot more. They were afraid to go over the 50 percent but every field was cut 50 percent, of what I saw.

BH: That's the 5th *Kandak* commander?

DR: This was the 2d *Kandak* commander.

Then on 6 April, we found out who was doing the actual money-taking. We found out that it was the security commander for the governor of Helmand Province. His name was Abdul Rahman. He would hold these town meetings and he would tell each farmer to pay 10,000 rupees or Afghani to have the field bypassed. I think a rupee is Pakistan's money. From what I understand, they basically said if you shoot at any of us, then we'll destroy all the fields. If you don't pay us money, we'll cut down 50 percent of your field, and if you pay us money, we'll bypass your field.

BH: That was the security commander for the governor of the province?

DR: Correct.

BH: Abdul Rahman. How much were they asking?

DR: 10,000 rupees or Afghani. My interpreter kept saying rupees but the currency there was Afghani. I'm not sure if they were demanding rupees, what the exchange rate was or if everybody in Helmand Province used rupees instead of Afghani. On 7 April, the *kandak* commander and I met with the local villagers. He called it a *jirga*. I don't know if that's the right word.

We told them not to pay the money to have their field bypassed and that growing poppies is wrong and it's not good. He talked about the religious aspect of it and how it wasn't good for the country. They shouldn't be growing poppies because it's a bad product.

We also discussed about them not allowing foreign fighters to come in to fight the ANA because the ANA is Afghan and they're all trying to build a country together. There had been a rash of troops in contact and IEDs up in that valley. We'll probably need to talk about that in a little bit.

So we had discussed why they shouldn't be shooting at Americans and Afghani but the emphasis of the whole meeting was, again, talking about how they shouldn't grow the poppies and how they shouldn't pay the money. I would say there were about 45 males and this was still around Musa Qal'eh. It's also called Qal'eh-ye Gaz. Half my Afghans called it Qal'eh-ye Gaz, the other called it

Musa Qal'eh. To give you a little bit of tactical understanding of what was going on at the time, across the river they had built a brand new FOB called FOB Wolf and later they renamed it FOB Robinson. It was located at Sangin. As soon as they built that FOB, they were under attack almost nightly.

They would either receive small arms fire or mortar attacks. We sent a supply convoy up there. Colonel West actually led it. They hit an IED that killed a lot of Afghan soldiers and knocked over an excavator which is a piece of engineering equipment we were sending up there to help build the FOB up. That area was very hot. They were under constant attack on the east side.

We were on the other side of the river and it was kind of odd because we weren't having any kind of contact whatsoever. We would sit there on the ridgeline and you could look over at the FOB and you see them under attack, you could see convoys going up and down the road and the convoys hitting IEDs. You'd see vehicles burning but nothing happened to us on our side of the river which I thought was very odd. Everything was in that context.

We thought we were going to be attacked at any time and we always had to keep that in mind because it was just two up-armored Humvees and 300 Afghans, and out of those 300 Afghans, I only trusted about 100.

BH: The ones you brought with you?

DR: Right.

BH: About how much prior to this had that convoy been ambushed?

DR: The convoy was ambushed when I was in Lashkar Gah.

BH: So this was only a few days before you got down there?

DR: Correct. The other thing is that when we showed up at Musa Qal'eh on 2 April, that night a Predator mistook our position for a sudden massing of troops along the ridgeline across from Sangin, and they were asking for permission to engage us in some form or another. Luckily my team chief, Major Blake Settle, was at the FOB with the engineers helping them build the FOB. He was aware of our location because I kept him abreast of what we were doing. He was able to help prevent a friendly fire incident. They were convinced we were anti-Coalition forces massing and getting ready to cross the river to attack the FOB.

They called us up and asked us to put infrared, the IR, chemlights all up and down the ridgeline where the ANA were. I told them I'm not driving around in the middle of the night to ANP and border police positions putting out IR chemlights. Each Humvee was marked with an IR strobe.

BH: When you secured an area, how big of an area approximately, did your 300 soldiers secure?

DR: Again, everybody kind of bedded down with their own units. The border police were in one location, the ANP in another location, and the ANA were in our location. We had set up a fairly large perimeter. Within the ANA, I had first dibs, so we usually took the highest and best defensive position but it just depended on the location for the night.

BH: During the day, during operations, how did they employ?

DR: That's where I had to change things. The first few days, we went down into the area with the Afghans to witness the cutting and everything that was going on.

Then after I found out that the Afghans were fleecing the locals, we tried to talk to the locals to see if we could stop it. That was part of the meeting on 7 April but the very next day, they bypassed some fields and only cut a couple of swathes of a couple other fields and that was it. It was obvious that what we were doing wasn't having an effect. The Afghans were still paying the money. At that time, I had to reevaluate what kind of impact we could have. The concerns I had included taking care of the ANA. That was my job to mentor the ANA and take care of them. Secondly, I didn't have any kind of combat power. It was two up-armored Humvees and if anybody got hurt or anything got damaged, there was nothing we could do. I had to be careful about any kind of direct contact. Then the third aspect was, again, I started feeling like my presence, the presence of the American vehicles and even the ANA provided legitimacy to the fleecing of the local populace. Even though I didn't agree with poppy growing, to go in there and tell everybody they have to pay 10,000 Afghans to not have their fields cut, I just felt like it undermined the government.

What I decided to do is, on the Helmand River on the west side, there is a cliff that's probably anywhere from 30 to 50 feet high. It's got paths that go down so you can climb down the cliff to get down to the villages. Then along the top of what I'll call a ridgeline, the Russians had built defensive positions, primarily trenches, where they could take cover or whatever and overlook all the villages in Helmand Province.

We made the conscious decision that we would maintain contact with the ANA and pull back a little bit into the desert where we wouldn't provide an American presence but we're still in contact with the ANA. We could provide any kind of support that the ANA needed. That way, our presence wouldn't provide any kind of endorsement of what was going on. So, that's basically how we ended up dealing with it.

BH: When you say “we,” you’re talking about your team?

DR: Yes, my team.

BH: So you focused on mentoring the ANA but minimized American visibility?

DR: Right. I felt that was the best way to provide support and help provide security for my ANA which I was more concerned about than the ANP or the border police. I could still accomplish my mission and minimize my visible presence. I was just afraid that we were providing the wrong message. I don’t think there was an information operations plan but I assumed that sending this message was not in it.

BH: So basically the operations kept going the way they had been going. You just reduced the American presence to make sure there was as little legitimizing as possible?

DR: Right. Obviously as we gathered this intel, I floated it up the chain of command to RIVER DANCE but primarily up through Colonel West because I knew the brigade headquarters had more established intel procedures. Someone was reporting that we’re cutting all these fields and the fields weren’t being cut. I’ve got pictures to show it.

Then the security commander was fleecing the local populace which I didn’t really agree with so I was recommending that we ENDEX and pull us all back. Talking to my friend, Major John Bates, I think the intel reports did get up pretty high about the governor and the security commander basically taking these payoffs but until we got ENDEX’d, my job was to support the ANA. I thought the best way to deal with that was to just minimize the American presence.

BH: What about the ANA commander? How did he respond?

DR: He was the same way.

BH: What was his name?

DR: I don’t remember because I didn’t habitually work with him.

BH: So he wasn’t from the 4th *Kandak*?

DR: No, he was the 2d *Kandak* commander. I think his name is Shiren Shah.

BH: The ANA were not looking to line their pockets, just the ones from Kandahar?

DR: Yeah. I’ll back up a little bit and say that when I was working and doing these missions with the Gun Devils, they would do these things called village engagements. They would send a company commander to go talk to the village elder or village chief. I was with them on a couple of these village engagements.

They'd pull in all loaded for bear and they'd say they wanted to talk to the village elder or village chief. So the locals would go bring some guy out and the commander would tell him, "We're here in the area and if you have any information, we'd appreciate it. We're here to help you out, just let us know." Then he'd turn around, get in his vehicle and drive off.

BH: That's the Gun Devils, the American officer?

DR: Right. It was a nuisance to them.

BH: It was a nuisance to the villagers or to the Gun Devils?

DR: The Gun Devils. Towards the end of the Gun Devils' rotation, though, we were sitting in position and they asked me to go to a village engagement. Since I worked with Afghan soldiers all the time, I was able to sit down with a lot of these villagers. You pass out a couple phone cards, you'd take pictures of people and you could gather some decent intelligence that you could pass on but through all those discussions, I found out that when people came across checkpoints that were manned by the ANA, they weren't very fearful because the ANA as a general rule were pretty respectful of the people but when they came to checkpoints that were manned by the ANP, they were a little fearful because the ANP usually made them pay to get through the checkpoint or they would steal something out of the vehicle.

Now with the ANA, you generally had an ETT with them. They worked with them constantly and the ETTs would never allow that stuff to happen. The ANP would be trained at a central location but then they'd go out in the boonies by themselves and nobody would know if they stole money from the local populace or not.

BH: They didn't have any kind of team with them?

DR: Correct. That's another thing. The 2d *Kandak* commander was very concerned that the ANP were also stealing stuff from the locals when they're down there providing security, so he implemented a rule where the ANA were not allowed to go into the villages. They provided for security but they weren't allowed to go into the villages. He didn't want them stealing from the locals too.

BH: Where were the national police usually deployed?

DR: They were at every intersection and just wherever they decided to set up a checkpoint.

BH: So they were usually for traffic control and not beat cops?

DR: Right.

BH: Did the border police and the ANP have a different mission?

DR: Yes. The border police were primarily in Spin Boldak and Zaranj. They were basically responsible for manning the Afghanistan borders with Pakistan and Iran.

BH: Were they about the same way as the ANP?

DR: Yeah, I think so. They tended to have a little bit nicer uniforms but, yeah, they were about the same.

BH: You elevated this. What was the response from higher?

DR: As I kept contacting Colonel West and RIVER DANCE-6, they said they had passed the information up but they were still under orders to continue with the mission, which we did. I think that originally the mission was supposed to go through the end of April. I think the mission really ended around 20 or 21 April. So we managed to end it a couple weeks early. Maybe it was supposed to go until around the end of April or the first part of May. I was told it was to go until the end of the month or maybe a little past that.

BH: Was there any kind of new accountability measures implemented from higher?

DR: Not that I'm aware of.

BH: Anything else you want to add?

DR: I'll just keep going down the time line a little bit.

I had a vehicle break down and we had to tow it to Gereshk and get it repaired. On 16 April, Lieutenant Colonel Rudolph, who was RIVER DANCE-6 at that time, requested after-action report comments which I provided to him. The general gist of those was that US and ANA presence added legitimacy to the shakedown, there was no information operations campaign in the north, and maybe one percent of the poppy had been cut.

Then on 17 April, I talked to some local villages who were complaining about paying off the ANP so I sent that spot report up. Around 19 April, the ANP and the border police started abandoning the mission. Every day we would get up, we'd look over and there'd be a couple less ANP and border police vehicles. They were basically abandoning the mission and things were really starting to wind down.

BH: Which day was this?

DR: It was around 19 April. We were working from Musa Qal'eh south down toward Route 1 at Gereshk.

We were starting to work our way back up toward Sangin. Around 17 or 19 April. We had reached Route 1, crossed over the river and started working our way back up north towards FOB Wolf.

Then on 20 April, Lieutenant Houlné moved from the south up to Gereshk and on 21 April, he with his group and my group got orders to return to base. That was about it.

BH: Now that you've had a chance to reflect on the situation, I think it's kind of representative of a lot of things that our leaders are facing right now as far as a lot of problems that don't have nice, neat solutions. Everything doesn't add up and whatnot. What are your thoughts on this experience?

DR: In hindsight from an operational perspective, if that's the right level, I don't think there was really any kind of information operations plan.

They should've gone in and told the local populace that next year we're going to come in and cut down all of your poppy. Don't grow it because we're going to cut it down. We could've also tried to provide other opportunities for them. That might've reduced some of the conflict they had down in the south and might've eased some of the tensions.

Then the other thing is that if we're going to do an operation like this, we have to understand what the local government might do to exploit it and be very knowledgeable of that. From a tactical perspective, having two up-armored Humvees in the middle of the hottest area of Afghanistan is crazy. I felt like I was hanging out there. I went back to FOB Wolf like a month later and probably got in the biggest firefight that I'd ever been in. It wasn't too far from where I was when I was there for poppy eradication. Why we weren't attacked I have no idea.

We just didn't have enough forces for that type of mission. We had a tight-knit team that managed to pull it off. I'm still amazed we got through with nobody getting hurt.

BH: Who was really pushing this?

DR: I really don't know. When I first got there down to Lashkar Gah, it looked like Mr. Fitzgerald was pulling a lot of strings and I don't know if people were under tactical control to him or what. It quickly digressed to RIVER DANCE-6, who was really the guy in TACON until I got sent up north. Once I got sent up north, he just basically turned into a logistics guy.

We called up our logistics requirements. What was crazy was that when I was up near Musa Qal'eh, maybe a little bit further south, the colonel who had replaced Mr. Fitzgerald, came with his staff to our location in a pickup truck and an up-armored Humvee. They didn't have any long-range communications as far as tactical satellite, the TACSAT, or Blue Force Tracker or anything like that.

They came to our location and, of course, they got mad at us because we hadn't shaved because we were trying to save our water. We were in the fourth week of a six-week mission. So they came up there and yelled at us for not being in proper

uniform and stuff like that. Then they gave us some more water and they left but as far as supplies, we really didn't get that much once we moved up north.

BH: I guess unless you have anything else to add, we can close it out.

DR: The ANA were aware of the corruption and they were not happy about it. The *kandak* commander made sure his troops weren't put into a position where they could take advantage, seeing what the ANP were doing and trying to do likewise. The *kandak* commander and I talked with some of the local villagers trying to stop the villagers from paying the money. That wasn't successful, though, so I sent the intelligence up and tried to get the mission ended but until we could, the only thing I could really do was support the ANA and reduce the American presence. That's probably it in a nutshell. I know it's not the most exciting thing but, believe me, my hair turned white by the end of this operation.

I'd also like to add that Major Benton and Captain Bird were great sounding boards during this time. I don't want to downplay their contribution. It was a team effort.

BH: Okay, well, thank you very much for participating in this interview.

Major John Tabb
27 May 2008

MD: My name is Major Marty Deckard (MD) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major John Tabb (JT) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 27 May 2008 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time that we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Can you start by giving some background information on yourself of where you are from, where did you get your commission, and what jobs have you held while in the military?

JT: My source of commission was Reserve Officer Training out of the University of Montana. I was prior service having enlisted in 1987 out of Miami, Florida. I did a four-year enlistment as an armor crewman [19K]. I served with the 2d Armored Division-Forward in Germany for two years and then with the 1st Infantry Division during DESERT STORM where I was a tanker.

I got out and went to college. I did National Guard while I was doing that and achieved the rank of sergeant. In 1996, I received my commission as an Armor officer. I went to Fort Hood for my first assignment where I was a platoon leader and a company executive officer. I did a six-month rotation to Bosnia for Operation JOINT FORGE in 1998-1999. After that, I went to Fort Knox for the career course. Following that, I went to Fort Lewis where I commanded Alpha Company 1-33 Armor and Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2-14 CAV when we transferred to Stryker Brigade.

From there I went to Fort Bragg where I was on an ACRC [Active Component/ Reserve Component] team as an observer-controller/trainer, and then served as the battalion operations officer, the S3, in 1st Battalion, 312th TSB.

I then went to Los Angeles and was a recruiting company commander for almost two years. Following that, I was assigned to a military transition team or MiTT mission in Afghanistan.

MD: When did you find out you were going to be assigned to a MiTT?

JT: I found out in the summer of 2006.

MD: Did you volunteer for it?

JT: I was coming up on 24 months in Los Angeles, branch told me about the position and I volunteered for it.

MD: What position were you assigned to?

JT: I was templated to be team chief of a reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition or RSTA team. That was a program though, that had not actually been given an authorization, so when we got to Fort Riley for training we were no longer a RSTA. They turned the RSTA mission to a border mission. So all the RSTA teams which were larger than the infantry embedded training teams, the ETTs, because it's a 19-man team, were allocated against border training missions in country.

MD: When did you report to Fort Riley for training?

JT: I got to Fort Riley at the beginning of October 2006.

MD: When you reported, did you have all your team members present?

JT: I started out with a full set of 19 guys. As the training went on, I lost four of those and I deployed into country minus four guys. Replacements trickled in later on but most of those went to other teams.

MD: Do you recall your class number?

JT: Class 12.

MD: What can you say about the training you received at Fort Riley?

JT: It was a relatively new program. We were the third or fourth class through and the first ones at Funston with the new facility. The training was really geared towards people going to Iraq. Most of the program of instruction was based on that and we didn't get a lot of specific Afghanistan training.

The language training was deficient. We had a couple evenings spent in front of a computer for our language training. There was very little dedicated cultural or language training. It felt like an add-on.

We got more than sufficient small arms training and basic survivability stuff but how to do MiTT and cultural and language training was severely lacking. Every class we got appeared to be an Iraqi brief that somebody had tacked Afghanistan onto.

MD: What part of the training did you find most useful?

JT: I would say the most useful part of the training was when we actually went out and did lanes. We got to work with Afghan soldiers and police that they had brought in, a company of each. We went out and did cordon and searches. I didn't realize the value of that training until we got into country and were doing almost the exact same thing. It was very valuable.

MD: Which part of the training did you find not useful at all, besides the language training?

JT: A lot of the training we got was geared towards team members who had very little Army training. We had Navy and Air Force guys in our class and those guys needed ground-up marksmanship, so we spent a lot of time on things we really didn't need training on. We could have just had a refresher course and been done.

We needed more training than we got on electronic warfare countermeasures stuff. We got it all on the fly when we got into country.

MD: When did you deploy and how was your movement into country?

JT: We flew in early January from Fort Riley and headed to Ali Al Salem, Kuwait. We stayed there for a couple days and then went to Camp Phoenix. We stayed there for about a week because of weather delays.

We then went through the Phoenix Academy which was really a waste and then headed to Herat and Camp Stone which is the base for all security assistance missions in western Afghanistan. For the first four months when I was border police, I was at Herat.

MD: Did you receive any foreign weapons training at any point in your training?

JT: We got a very brief block of instruction from civilian contractors on the AK. We got to fire the AK and RPK. We could have used more training, though. What we could have used was basic rifle marksmanship for the AK47 for an extended period where we all qualified and then could get a good block of maintenance instruction. What we got was one day.

MD: Can you talk some more about the training you received when you got in Kuwait?

JT: We didn't receive any training in Kuwait. All we did there was administrative stuff. When we got to the Phoenix Academy, we received a lot of force protection training and some rules of engagement training specific to, the Task Force, *Phoenix*. *Phoenix* is a National Guard brigade rotation, so it changes and is tailored to whatever they want. As a result, you don't get much of a tool bag to take downrange. You just get training on the things that would get you in trouble.

MD: Did you find most of the training at the Phoenix Academy and Camp Phoenix still geared towards Iraq?

JT: No, the instruction they were giving there was Afghanistan-specific. The Iraq-centric stuff was purely Fort Riley.

MD: Where is Camp Phoenix?

JT: It's in Kabul.

MD: Was there any contractor support as far as instructors for the training you received at Camp Phoenix?

JT: The training we received at Camp Phoenix was all done by National Guard members. There is also a counterinsurgency academy at Camp Phoenix that I didn't go to. The feedback I heard from that was mixed. Some guys got a lot out of it but others who'd already been deployed didn't get much. A portion of that training was done by contractors.

MD: I was on a transition team and went through the Phoenix Academy in Taji, Iraq. We received training on communications gear, improvised explosive device countermeasures and things like that. Did you get any of that training?

JT: No. All our electronic countermeasure training and comms was done at Fort Riley.

MD: Did any part of your training cover the organization of the border forces in Afghanistan?

JT: No. There was no discussion of the organizations in country. Everything Afghanistan-focused was, "You'll find out when you get there." There was very little communication with downrange. I didn't get the sense that the cadre was getting on the secure internet protocol router and getting the stuff we needed. We didn't get any of that specific stuff until we got to Camp Stone and the actual chain of command for western Afghanistan told us what we'd be dealing with.

MD: At what point in the process did you find out exactly where you would be going?

JT: When I arrived at Camp Phoenix, I went to the mess hall and it just so happened by chance that my commander, a National Guard colonel, was visiting Camp Phoenix. He came over and said, "Are you guys coming to my area of operations?" We said, "Yes." He handed us a sheet of paper that had our names assigned to specific billets.

We knew what corps area we were going to and we knew generally what type of team we'd been earmarked for. The big unknown was whether we'd be working with the police or the army. The straight infantry ETTs were trained to go advise the Afghan National Army, the ANA, but half of those guys went to advise the Afghan National Police, the ANP. You just didn't know until the last minute.

MD: Were you replacing a team already on the ground or were you forming a new team?

JT: I was forming a new team with the border police. There were two individuals who had been covering down on the border mission but the biggest piece of the border advisory mission at that point was done by DynCorp. They were extremely limited though, and couldn't do anything tactical with them. They would visit the brigade headquarters and would give some rudimentary police training but there was no one going on missions with them or advising the commander full time. So, I stood up the border police team for all intents and purposes.

MD: When did you receive your equipment?

JT: As soon as we got to Camp Stone, we got our equipment. We took some individual equipment, a computer and a few other things from Fort Riley. When we got to Camp Phoenix, my team was broken apart. I took eight guys with me to work with the border police and the rest of them were divvied out throughout the corps area which caused us to reshuffle some equipment.

MD: Was there any equipment you picked up in Afghanistan that you didn't receive training on?

JT: We were given a brief at Fort Riley about the different types that are in use but we didn't get any specific training on the use of the ACORN. There were certain things on our version of the 114 that we drew that we hadn't trained on. The armor package had heavier doors and the turret with the glass window which only enhanced what we had used before so that wasn't a problem.

We could have used more Mk-19 training because I ended up getting two of them and we relied on them heavily.

MD: What was the makeup of your team?

JT: About two thirds of the guys I took with me were captains. The majority of them were pre-command armor and infantry officers. I was allowed to pick who I wanted to take with me and I took the guys who had combat experience. That was the criteria to keep from hurting anyone's feelings. Every one of them had a combat tour but they had all just finished the career course. My NCOs were guys coming from Fort Benning or Fort Knox who they had pulled out of the schoolhouse.

MD: Did most of your NCOs have combat experience as well?

JT: There were fewer of them. All the NCOs I brought with me were combat vets but a lot of my drill sergeants had spent upwards of four or five years at Benning or Knox, so they'd kind of been out of the fight.

MD: What was the occupational specialty makeup of your NCOs?

JT: I brought three NCOs on my eight-man team. Two of them were 19Ks, armor crewman, and one was an infantryman, 11B.

MD: Is it safe to say that once you got your final group of guys and moved into your area, that you weren't getting intelligence reports or reports about what operations were like in that area?

JT: We got very little intelligence. The intelligence officer, the S2, out of Camp Stone relied on indigenous intelligence. They would get it from NDS which are the secret police in Afghanistan, and from the International Security Assistance Force, the ISAF.

We were in Regional Command-West, the RC-West, and that area was under Italian and Spanish ISAF control. There wasn't any US combative command presence at all. We fell under an Italian chain of command. The US S2 intelligence was part of the Regional Security Command, the RSC, and they got their stuff from the Italians which wasn't that great.

MD: Can you go into more detail about the chain of command as far as logistics support and command and control?

JT: Our headquarters was the RSC and that acronym seemed to change every week. Before the Italians took over in that area, that headquarters controlled all of the MiTT advising for the entire RC-West. When the Italians took over, pieces of it kept getting handed over to them. The same was true with the Spanish and a couple other nationalities. The US headquarters was shrinking. At Camp Stone, there was a colonel who was the commander of the RSC. He had administrative responsibilities for all the teams, both army and police. Under him were two organizations. There was the Regional Security Assistance Command, the RSAC, which covered the army, and the Regional Police Advisory Command, the RPAC, which covered the police.

The border police roughly fit under the RPAC. Those guys had a mixed bag of civilian contractors that do advising, like DynCorp and Blackwater. Logistics was handled by a forward logistics element, the FLE, that they send to bring logistics packages or LOGPACs out to the remote sites. When I was with the border police, I was located at Camp Stone and logistics were all handed there where we had KBR contractor running everything. When I was with the ETT in Farah Province, we had our logistics pushed to us by the FLE.

MD: How were your living conditions at Camp Stone?

JT: At Camp Stone we had super B-huts. They were brand new. Camp Stone has been there for quite a while and is well established. There's a large mess hall and the camp was expanding the whole time we were there.

We were a short distance away from a provincial reconstruction team, the PRT, in downtown Herat which was solely Italian owned.

We were also right next to the Herat International Airport which has a large forward support battalion or FSB which the Italians also run. They're well established there.

MD: How was maintenance support?

JT: Maintenance was done by the green-suiters mostly. They were building a 10-bay maintenance facility but were working out of a smaller one prior to that. The maintenance support was pretty good. Our operational readiness rate was about 90 percent the entire time we were there.

MD: How was the equipment that you fell in on?

JT: Our stuff was in pretty good shape because it had been pulled away for the border police and hadn't been used much, so the mileage was low. We had new 114s.

The biggest deficiency we had was that we didn't have our full complement of crew-served weapons at the time. I had to push hard to get them because the border police weren't fully stood up yet, so other units on the camp kind of took weapons away. We had to go through and look under bunks to see if people who never left the forward operating base were hoarding .50 cal. We were rolling out all the time and having to stick SAWs [squad automatic weapons] in the turrets because we didn't have .50s or 240s.

MD: How far away was Camp Stone from the battalion headquarters of the border police?

JT: It was about 25 miles. It was on the other side of Herat. It's about 80 miles east of the border. Herat is sort of centrally located on the 1,400 kilometer span of border with Iran and Turkmenistan. From 6th Brigade you can shoot straight out to the border on the only highway that the Iranians built, ironically, up to the border and then you can move laterally along the border north or south.

MD: How many transition teams were housed at Camp Stone?

JT: There were transition teams that served as the ANA core that were based at Camp Stone. Everything from brigade on up was done by the Italians and Spanish and they never left the FOB. They did all their advising from there.

There was one ETT that was US-advised initially but then transitioned to the Italians on the camp. The Herat police team was there as well. So overall, there were three US ETTs that actually operated out of there. The rest were all international.

MD: Can you talk about your Afghan counterpart within the border police?

JT: When I got there, it was commanded by General Ayub, who was assassinated shortly after I arrived. He was hit by an IED on the Airport Road.

He was replaced by Colonel Rahmatullah who was flown in from Kabul. He was a very incompetent guy and an alcoholic. He had a lot of problems but I worked hard to develop a rapport with him. Previous advisors to the border police had been very hands-off, especially DynCorp, so I really ramped up the involvement with them. I started involving the ODA [operational detachment alpha] that was on Camp Stone with border interdiction and drug interdiction missions and we went on every one of those missions as well which was a complete paradigm shift for them. That close cooperation helped Colonel Rahmatullah a lot. It gave him a lot of confidence and took him from being an incompetent, uninvolved, and disinterested commander to being a guy who actually felt like he could make a difference.

MD: What was the unit designation for the Afghan Border Police?

JT: They were the 6th Afghan Border Police Brigade. They had responsibility for the entire Iranian border down to Nimruz Province in the south, all the way up to the Turkmenistan border in the north.

MD: Given that you were working with the brigade headquarters, did you have any subordinate transition teams under you?

JT: No. For whatever the reason, they don't have coverage on the elements lower than brigade for the border police. That was unfortunate because they were so spread out that there was no way I could visit any one battalion more than once on my entire tour. The closest battalion we had was in a place called Tora Gundy on the Turkmenistan border and we only saw them three times, and that was frequent.

MD: Can you talk more about the makeup of the brigade? How many subordinate battalions were there?

JT: There were three battalions-*kandaks*. There was one in Tora Gundy in the north, one in Islam-Qala on the Iranian border, and one further south at Khalikah [ph] also on the Iranian border. They have headquarters which in all three cases was a dilapidated building. There weren't any companies per se under them.

They had some border checkpoints that they had responsibility for and within those areas there would be two larger headquarters checkpoints but they were glorified checkpoints. I guess you could call them a company but they didn't refer to them as a company. Between them, very spread out, were shacks that were completely unequipped and usually not manned.

MD: How was the brigade that you advised in terms of equipment?

JT: They were pretty well-equipped with weapons and uniforms, especially at the brigade level. If you went to the brigade headquarters, you'd see that they had everything but if you went to the actual checkpoints on the border, you saw that things weren't getting down to them. It seems to be kind of an Afghan-ism

that they hoard resources, so they had CONEX trailers that were full of brand new AMD-65s and AK47s that never got out because they didn't want to give them out. There were pistols and uniforms that never got sent out either, so we worked very hard to empty out those CONEXs and get them pushed down.

MD: What were the major challenges that the brigade faced?

JT: Getting logistics down to the checkpoints such as fuel, water, and ammunition. A lot of their weapons were broken and they had a very strange bias against the AMD-65 which is the Hungarian-made AK which we gave them. Most of the border police would prefer to have a broken Russian one than to take the AMD-65. They wanted to say they jammed all the time. We demonstrated to them again and again that with proper maintenance they'd be fine but they didn't believe us.

The biggest problem was that there was no way to get fuel to them. The larger checkpoints had a truck and an above-ground tank that they would periodically fill for them. The way the Afghans are, they sell that fuel almost immediately and then call us saying they're out of fuel. Those guys would just not do their jobs because of that and there was no way to police it either because getting down there was almost impossible.

MD: At the time you started advising the brigade, was there a formal system to train border policemen or were they just hired off relationships and knowing somebody?

JT: The border police were one of the few organizations that had remained intact, unlike the army and the police. There were a lot of guys who had been career border police officers. In terms of junior personnel, I think in that area they just asked for volunteers. They were sent up to Herat where they would receive some rudimentary training and equipment and then get sent back down.

MD: What areas of responsibility consumed most of your time?

JT: Most of my time was spent engaging the commander. I went out to see him at a minimum of three times a week but it usually ended up being more than that. The other piece was interfacing with the agencies in the area that influenced border stuff. I spent a lot of time with the State Department representative at the PRT who was very experienced with the border mission. He was very useful and he could get us help from higher echelons to influence things. I did a lot of networking with all the associated agencies, both multinational and interagency.

MD: What were some of your most difficult challenges to overcome?

JT: Trying to eliminate corruption and mismanagement in the brigade and trying to work with DynCorp to push their involvement was challenging. In my opinion, DynCorp was sucking up money and not contributing much to the fight.

A lot of that was because of their limitations. They couldn't leave the FOBs. There was also an illegal fuel-siphoning operation going on at the border which was our biggest continuing problem. Iranian trucks would cross the border, they'd be pulled over and all the fuel would be siphoned out of their tanks, and they'd leave them with just enough to get them to the next gas station. The fuel was pumped into big in-ground tanks where it would be sold off as a gas station basically right there. This operation had been going on for a long time but no one was doing anything about it. The one time they did try to crack down, one of the DynCorp guys got IED'd. So, there was a major backlash. That involved a lot of different agencies, so that was another big challenge.

MD: I take it the corruption was pretty rampant and frequent?

JT: Yes. For every 100 pounds of opium they would confiscate, probably a third of it was taken off the top and sold.

MD: How were you set up for interpreter support?

JT: We had three interpreters that we shared with others. They weren't terribly proficient. They were locals from the area. I didn't realize how bad we had it, though, until I went to the ETT side and had a great set of eight interpreters who lived with us on the FOB and were awesome.

MD: What were some of your successes while training the border police?

JT: The biggest success was pushing them to become more active on the border and we did that purely by example. We were anxious and active in getting up to the border and involving the ODA.

No one had ever approached the Special Forces that were there at the camp about involving the border police in any of their operations. They were flabbergasted that they were approached at all and were very happy to be involved. We turned the border police into a very active agent of interdiction on the border and they hadn't been that way before.

MD: Was there any American or Coalition presence at headquarters higher than the brigade within the border police?

JT: The headquarters for the brigade was in Kabul and they were heavily covered down on there. The closer you got towards the border, the less coverage there was.

The only direct mentor coverage below brigade was DynCorp. They had a small FOB set up right on the border that acted as a regional training facility. They did very little. They had representatives who were purely customs-focused, so they would go up to the customs house and mentor them on the conduct of that. We really didn't participate much in that. I kept our focus strictly on policing the border rather than customs.

MD: How was coordination with the level above brigade in trying to get logistics and equipment?

JT: It was difficult because they were in Kabul. My only interface was the RSC. It was hard to get things communicated to them. It took me a while to even get a point of contact in the main national border police organization. The other problem was that there were two stovepipes of information with DynCorp on one side and the military on the other side and we weren't always seeing eye-to-eye. That's part of the reason I involved State so they could push the influence of DynCorp down a bit and increase the green-suit piece.

MD: Do you think the mission of training the border police was identified but wasn't really resourced?

JT: Yes. Four months into things, we were taking a tour of the border with the brigade commander and things were going great. Next thing I knew, I got a call over the radio that said we were disbanded and they had another mission for us. It was the lowest priority. When I got there, I was told that the police were the high priority.

Something happened with the rotation of the South Carolina National Guard brigade that was coming in. They were going to be undermanned so they decided to reallocate resources to the places they thought were the priority and assume risk elsewhere. The border police was where they did that.

MD: Did the border police advising mission go away nationwide?

JT: I'm not sure. I know one of my friends in the east worked with the border police the entire time.

They disbanded us but a month later they stood it up again. It's possible that my friend had a bump where they said, "We're not going to do it anymore but stand fast." In my case, they had a position open immediately on the ETT because that team chief had been relieved so I had to get down there quickly. Had that not happened, I might have stayed with the border police and once they figured out what they were going to do, I could have taken it over again but it didn't happen for me that way.

MD: Can you talk about what you were feeling when you realized you were leaving the border police and the guys you had been working with for those four months?

JT: I was initially very frustrated because I had put a lot of work into it.

They were also going to split my team up again and I'd only be able to take four guys from my original team with me which is always emotionally difficult. I was excited to be getting away from the flagpole and I was excited to be doing the ETT mission but initially I was very frustrated.

MD: What were some of the challenges you faced moving from the border mission to the ETT mission?

JT: We took over the ETT that had Farah which is the southernmost province in Regional Command West. It borders Helmand. Well, Musa Qal'eh is a *wadi* where the biggest insurgent problem in Helmand is, is right on the other side of the mountains from Farah, so we got everything they did but the Italian command of RC-West really wanted to believe the west was quiet. When we got there they said, "You're lucky you're going out there because there's nothing going on in the 207th Corps area." When we got there, they told us, "As long as you don't go down south to Farah, you'll be okay. Down there, it's crazy."

Then I found out we were headed down there. The previous team chief's vehicle had been struck by an IED and it kind of rattled his cage, so they moved him out. Insurgent activity down there was going through the roof when I got there. We lived on a small FOB that was secured and manned by the ANA. There was a quick reaction force or QRF company that was our security.

We were collocated with an operational detachment alpha and there was also a detachment of Romanian Special Forces with us. Right across from our HESCO wall was the provincial reconstruction team, the PRT, which was run by a US Navy commander. That was it though for US presence in the area, the US PRT, the ODA, and us.

We had a dirt airstrip right next to us. The *kandak* was the first *kandak* of the 207th Corps and was the oldest *kandak* in the west. At one point, it had been the only one to cover the entire western part of the country. As the 207th Corps grew, it continued to get pushed to where things were the hottest because they had the most experience. It had a company with us and the rest of the *kandak* was downtown in an old army facility that had been there forever.

We had to split our time between those two places and drive through the city of Farah to get to the *kandak* headquarters. It was commanded by Colonel Jabar who was the best Afghan officer I've ever dealt with. He had corruption issues but no more than anyone else over there had. He and I established outstanding rapport from the go.

MD: You mentioned earlier that your team was split and you only took four guys with you. Which four guys did you take with you and what equipment did you bring?

JT: I fell in on what remained of the team. When I got there, there were 12 guys left behind from the old team. I brought my four guys with me and, as time went on, we had a rotation and half the team was rotated out and some South Carolina Guard guys came in. The four guys I brought with me were my three best captains and one NCO.

The captains on the team we fell in on were pretty squared away. They were all Iraq vets and were extremely seasoned from the four months they had been in Farah. They had been part of my class at Fort Riley but they had gone to Farah right away so they had a lot of experience in the area. I had a superb team once everything settled down.

Discipline in the camp wasn't great. There were some guys who were going a little too native, too SF as far as grooming and such. We squared that away and kept things rational. By the time I left, I had a team of 21 guys.

We had no KBR support on the camp. All our life support was done with our mission-related funds. We had generator power but we had to buy our fuel on the economy. Our food was provided by the PRT but it was cooked by a local that we hired to be our cook. Our mess hall was a screened-in porch. As time went on, the guys from Camp Stone sent me a mechanic and a dedicated US cook, so by the time I left I had a 21-man team that was able to cover all the life support issues.

MD: Where did the personnel you didn't take end up?

JT: Some of them went to another ETT in Shindand to our north and the rest stayed at Camp Stone and filled in various jobs.

MD: Do you think it would have been better to take your full team over?

JT: It would have been better with the border police to have my full team. When I went to the ETT, I was glad they split me because I needed those guys who had been there for a while. That continuity was essential. The operational tempo was extremely high where we were and if we were all starting from scratch, it would have been a very difficult transition.

MD: What unit did you end of advising?

JT: I advised the 1st *Kandak* of the 1st Brigade, 207th Corps.

MD: How did your initial meeting go with the commander?

JT: It went very well. They had done a good job at our camp of setting up a receiving area in our operations center and they were in the habit of meeting with the *kandak* commander every day. Every morning he would come in at 0800 and we'd drink *chai*.

We had a little team of eight interpreters who'd been there for a long time. They spoke superb English and had a great understanding of how the *kandak* operated. They were just great. It was easy to get settled into the battle rhythm that had been established by the team before us.

MD: What was the focus of the advisory operations that you were conducting?

JT: I tried to initially focus on the military decision making process, the MDMP, for the battalion staff. As many have though, we found that the Afghans

don't really embrace the traditional US deliberate MDMP, so we tailored it and compressed it down to where they could use it.

They had a pretty good operations officer, the S3, and a great operations sergeant major whom actually became pretty critical to things. We were able to do rudimentary mission analysis, intelligence preparation of the battlefield or IPB to produce an order. That was my focus, as well as my staff advisors' focus. My company advisors were focused on individual soldier skills. The operational tempo was such that we couldn't do a training cycle prior to a mission because missions were ongoing.

We tried to do the red, amber, green thing which was mandated up through Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, the CSTC-A, but there was no way to do that because they had to man their garrison facilities at all times and they had missions going hither and yon. Farah is the third largest province in the country and they had one *kandak* covering down on the entire province. The other two largest provinces either have no enemy activity to speak of or they have a US or British ETT-size element operating in them. We had a very unique condition in that the *kandak* was having to do it all with nothing.

MD: What were some of the strengths and weaknesses of the *kandak*?

JT: It differed depending on the company. Some companies were better than others. There was more corruption in some areas than in others. There were two extremely strong companies in the Weapons Company and the 3d Company. They had strong company commanders which was the key. They were very experienced in combat operations, so their reaction to contact and their ability to conduct a cordon and search were great from the beginning. Soldiers were very courageous and very thorough.

They were a "T" at traffic control points and vehicle searches. The other companies had morale problems which kept them from being particularly effective in those areas. They didn't have confidence in their commanders and subsequently they weren't inclined to react properly.

MD: Can you compare and contrast the border police and the ANA you worked with?

JT: The border police were decentralized. The only maneuver element that the brigade commander had at his disposal was a QRF that he maintained which had about 50 guys. Those guys were well-trained and very effective, especially when they started working with the SF but they certainly weren't the brigade.

We hadn't really met the vast majority of the brigade, let alone been able to assess their capabilities. The entire *kandak* pretty much had it together. It was uneven but by the second half of my tour, they could conduct *kandak*-level operations reli-

ably under their own planning. It took a lot of coaching but they were able to do it. The border police could never have done a brigade-size operation. They just weren't set up for that.

MD: Did you conduct any combat operations with your Afghani counterparts?

JT: Yes. We had numerous complex ambushes. We did three major cordon and search operations that interdicted IED manufacturing facilities. We had one very large complex ambush in a particular valley.

We had sent a team up to investigate a district center that had been overrun. It turned into a running ambush with about 400 insurgents that had moved from Helmand into Farah. We lost 24 ANA during that battle.

MD: What were some of the challenges that the ANA faced?

JT: Like everyone else, they were challenged with logistics. The *kandak* didn't coordinate food and water very well. When I got there, they were relying on the ETTs to provide that stuff for them in the field. At the time, my captains were in platoon leader mode. If there was a mission that had a start point, then by God they were going to make it go off on time. I had to tell them, "Let the Afghans miss their SP. Let them fall on their faces because they didn't plan properly." That was a very hard point to get across, especially when the ODA wanted to go on a mission and they saw us as the Afghans' babysitters.

We said, "If they don't have water or fuel, don't go." They were selling fuel like crazy. We finally gave them a finite amount and said, "When that runs out, you're done." It was hard to get it across to my guys that we weren't responsible. The Afghans were. We could help them and coach them to manage it but we weren't allocating it to them. That was the biggest paradigm shift I had to change but it paid off in the end.

MD: Was your Afghan counterpart receptive to your suggestions and recommendations?

JT: To my face he was. I know it caused him problems but he never told me about it. I convinced him through the rapport we built that everything I was doing was in their best interest. I don't think he ever thought I had an ulterior motive, so he knew it was the right thing but it was causing him pain. The pain it was causing him, he didn't discuss, because it usually had to do with corruption.

MD: Were there any instances where your chain of command and the Afghan chain of command were trying to do different things at the same time and, as a result, caused some friction within the ANA?

JT: It was mainly the corruption thing. The commander would pretty much agree with whatever I'd say, and it was a challenge for me to pull out of him what

he wanted to do. Most of the time he was like, "I'm with you, boss." There was what was going on at the surface and what was going on below. I relied on the interpreters to hear what was going on around the area so I was always informed on the corruption issues, like who was thinking about killing who because they were stealing something.

MD: How much interaction did you have with the Afghan local population?

JT: I had a lot. Because there wasn't any combatant command in the area, there was no senior security representative for the province. The PRT commander who could have filled that role was a ship driver though, and didn't have a clue. He was more than willing to let me be the security representative. I started to go to every provincial security council meeting with him every Saturday. My counterpart went as well but the decisions for any kind of security operation were usually made by me. The governor and the PRT commander would defer to me to make the decisions. I would go out on the key leader engagements and I would help foster CERP [Commander's Emergency Response Program] projects. I wasn't directly involved but I was there as the security guy. RC-West was very anxious to get into the build phase of the operations before we were even done with the clear phase, so I would go along to be the voice of reality. When a humanitarian operation would move into a village and say they wanted to start doing a specific thing, I would speak up and say, "We haven't even stopped them from IED'ing this route. We need to step back and establish a garrison here with the army or the police."

The biggest problem I had in the province was the lack of police. The police were virtually non-existent. The police general in the area was horribly corrupt and didn't care. He certainly wasn't going to stick his neck out for anything. The ANA had to do the job the police should have been doing and there were only 400 of them for the whole province.

We figured out that the only way to secure a district long enough to do any kind of CERP project was to put a fixed facility up with a company-size element to conduct patrols in the area. That's the only way we could keep the insurgents' heads down long enough to start doing "build" stuff. We'd build these facilities and HESCO walls which I helped to plan but we started running out of companies. We'd stick a company out there with the plan being that the police would relieve them in a month but that would never happen because they would never bring in any more police.

We were manning two of those which left just one company in reserve. That started to change with the implementation of a new program called the Focus District Development Program. They bring in additional Afghan National Police, the ANP, give them training, keep a police mentor team at the district level which is something they'd never done before, and eventually leave a garrison with actually

trained and equipped police. That was being done one district at a time though, and in my opinion they need to surge on that.

MD: How do you think the locals viewed the ANA?

JT: The ANA was the most reputable organization in the country. I think the locals had a lot of respect for them in contrast to the police who were hated and thought of as thieves.

The ANA were respected. The town of Farah was experiencing a lot of economic prosperity so they liked the police presence and wanted to see more of it. The further out you got into the tribal areas though, they had a history of defiance.

MD: How do you think the locals viewed the American presence and in particular your team?

JT: I think it was almost in hand with the ANA. When they saw us with the ANA, they felt proud that we were working with them. I think we worked hard on making the impression that it wasn't a US operation with Afghans in support. We worked hard on staying in the background. However, out in the tribal areas, we were considered occupiers so they didn't support us.

MD: Did you ever run into any situations where there was some kind of tribal animosity?

JT: The tribes that dominate the agricultural areas outside of the city of Farah were tribes that were based out of Helmand, mainly the *Barekzai* and *Noorzai* Tribes. They were very hostile and very *Taliban* supportive. Those tribes fought amongst themselves, too, and the thing they fought over was the drug trade.

Farah is the second largest opium producer in the country and a vast amount of opium comes out of there. Enemy activity was pretty much synched to the poppy schedule. During the cultivation time, there wasn't much going on. During the harvest, things started to ramp up in an effort to disrupt our ability to interdict them. Once the proceeds of the harvest started to roll in, we started to get hit a lot because the insurgency was then flush with money. The tribes would fight over who owned the most poppy and things like that.

Another interesting thing was that the police vacuum was being filled by tribes that were being contracted by the government to provide security. These guys, who were historically highway robbers, were getting paid to be police. They were now getting paid to police the same stretch of Highway 1 that they'd used to rob people on but now instead of robbing them . . . well, they were still robbing but now they were providing security, too.

They were very unreliable and very shady characters but they went to the provincial security council meetings with us. They would even start knocking each

other off. A guy you were working with one minute as a de facto police chief would be dead the next because they would attack him.

MD: The way you were set up as an ETT, being out there in austere conditions and having the freedom to operate and advise how you wanted to, versus how it is in Iraq, where you're under the control of an American brigade combat team, how was your logistics support? Can you talk through that? How much funding were you given and what were the challenges of being self sustainment?

JT: Our monthly budget was \$25,000 and we spent about \$2,500 of that on life support issues. Our generators broke down all the time. They were Afghan generators, Chinese-made, and they were unreliable. In the summer when they would get a lot of surge put on them, they would die. There were certain uncomfortable things we had to do because we had to do our own support but the freedom we had made it worthwhile. In our nasty little FOB, we had beautiful internet because we had a VSAT satellite communications.

We were in a Russian compound with hardstand buildings that were very comfortable with air conditioners, when the generators were running. As soon as the generators died though, it would immediately turn awful. We got very good at going out and getting that generator running again. It would have been more comfortable to be on a FOB with KBR support but it was better to have the autonomy and freedom that we had.

MD: Did you have any casualties on your teams?

JT: Yes. I had one soldier lose his leg from an AK round during an ambush. Then I had another soldier who left my team to join the team just north of us in Shindand who was shot by a sniper and died.

MD: What kinds of challenges did you face as far as family readiness and family support?

JT: Family readiness was pretty much non-existent. We were allowed to pre-position our families anywhere we wanted and I brought my wife to Fort Leavenworth which worked out fine for us. I don't think any kind of family readiness group or FRG stuff could have made it any better. The families were spread out all over the place and there wasn't any cohesion. When the teams are put together at Fort Riley, everybody now knows that the chances of staying together are pretty slim. I worked to have a little internal FRG but it didn't work because my team was broken up. The frustration level is very high among the families because the expectation level gets built up. Fort Riley put together this website that was supposed to be a virtual FRG but I don't think it ever really worked out. Towards the end when we started to redeploy, there was very little information for our families as far as when we were coming in. Expectations were set very high and I think they would have done better just not to put out anything.

MD: Did the fact that your team members had the ability to reach-back and talk to family members make a difference?

JT: Yes. That was huge. Most guys were talking by video teleconference on Skype with their wives every day. The operational tempo was such that we'd go on a three or four day-long mission where we were getting shot at, so when we got back I'd give my guys a good robust break. Some of my guys would go into their hooch, fire up the computer, and talk to the wife. For 24 hours, they'd pretty much stay there, almost in the same room. That reach-back was essential. When the generator went down and we'd lose satellite, it became a major hardship.

MD: What were the challenges involved with getting the personal effects of the casualty you had out of the country?

JT: It wasn't as bad as it may seem.

We were reliant on the Italian Army for combat support and they were unreliable. They used Chinooks and Super Pumas and they would only fly under certain conditions and they wouldn't fly into a continuing firefight. As a result, we had to do a lot of non-standard casualty evacuation. In the case of our soldier, we had to throw him in the back of a Humvee and drive him back to the PRT which luckily was on paved road about 50 miles from where we were. It became a real problem for the Afghans. The Italians would not fly for Afghans.

We got to the point where we had to lie to them and in the nine-line order we'd cut out the part about who would be in the bird. While I was there, we lost 50 ANA soldiers and that was very hard to have them see what we could expect in terms of support as opposed to what they could expect.

The same thing goes for close air support, the CAS. There was no airfield nearby, other than Italian, so we couldn't get attack aviation. The only CAS we could get were fast movers from Kandahar with F-15s and B-1s and we could only get those through the ODA's joint tactical air controller, the JTAC. If they weren't with us, we had no way to get CAS that would drop anything. Without a JTAC, they'll fly and pop chaff all day long but they won't drop anything. When they were around, it was great and we dropped a lot of ordnance. Otherwise, our support was pretty limited.

MD: Did you have any contact with the media while you were over there?

JT: No.

MD: Did you have any other contact with other services, aside from the commander of the PRT?

JT: The Air Force and Navy were everywhere. The PRTs were a mix as was Camp Stone. More often than not, we were dealing with an Air Force or a Navy

guy for logistics. We dealt with the Drug Enforcement Administration, the DEA, quite a bit and the CIA in some instances.

MD: Were there any challenges in dealing with the other services?

JT: No. They did a good job.

MD: What were some of the challenges in dealing with the Italians and the Spanish, aside from the support issues you spoke about? Was there a language barrier?

JT: Most of the Italians and Spanish were English speakers. I found them to be good people when I dealt with them. The biggest problem was that their national caveats prevented them from participating in kinetic operations. As a result, they only committed to RC-West under the assumption that there wouldn't be any kinetic operations.

They wanted to be in denial and leave it to what US units remained in the area but there weren't any combat units left. All of RC-West didn't have as much as one company of anything other than security forces, so it fell to us and the ODA to do it all. It was frustrating because the Italians would plan operations that were complete eyewash.

They would go do a drive-by of a place and call it a clearing operation. Then when I would call foul on that, I would get into it with the Italian brigadier general who was running things. Whenever US leadership would come in, General McNeill or General Rodriguez of Task Force 82, I would brief them up on what was really happening and that caused all sorts of problems because that wasn't what was being fed to them by ISAF.

MD: When did you finally leave Afghanistan?

JT: In late January 2008.

MD: Were you replaced by another team?

JT: Yes. This is a very good news story. The previous September, we had a pre-deployment site survey that came from Fort Riley. There were three majors, two of whom were Intermediate Level Education grads, came out to visit my sight. I was told by my commander that one of the three was going to be replacing me.

They were all studs and I got to pick which one stayed. The guy that ended up replacing me is a great guy. He had two Iraq tours and was perfect. The transition went perfectly. Half of my team for the majority of the time I was in Farah was National Guard.

They brought unique skill sets and were just superb for that mission. There's a lot of criticism out there about the National Guard but they are ideally suited for the military transition team mission, in my opinion. They were very motivated as far

as combat operations were concerned. They were very disciplined and extremely skillful. I had a civilian construction contractor who was a huge value because there was all sorts of building going on in our area. My sergeant major was the police chief of a county in South Carolina and that paid huge dividends in dealing with the police on all levels.

MD: Was this the first combat experience for the National Guard members who came in?

JT: It was for some of them. About half of those guys had been to Iraq at least once.

MD: Were the Afghan officers seasoned combat veterans as well?

JT: Most of them were.

MD: Did you ever run into any instances where they viewed your team members as inexperienced when it came to combat since they had been fighting longer than we have?

JT: Generally speaking, they knew that most of my team was made up of combat vets. They knew what the patch meant on the right sleeve. I never got the impression that they disdained us in any way. After a few operations, they lost any fear they may have had about us not performing.

MD: Can you use general terms to describe some of the improvements you saw in the ANA from when you first got there to when you left?

JT: There was almost a complete turnaround on their reliance on the ETT for support. When I got there, they were almost completely reliant on logistics for every mission. When I left, they were completely weaned off that.

They also went from being barely able to plan and conduct a company-level operation to being able to conduct a full battalion cordon and search with an actual orders process and rehearsals which they had never done before. Before it was just, "Hey you, let's go." Every operation we did with them we put them through the drill, even when it was painful. All this was done with the SF involved because they were truly their operational partners. The thing I wanted to push was that the *kandak* was a partner *kandak* with the ODA and I stressed that there were two maneuver elements in every operation. There was the ODA and the ANA. We were not a maneuver element. We were supposed to be invisible. Now, they didn't want to believe that. They wanted to make us the command element but we wanted them to view us as transparent.

Also, the ODA really wanted us to handle the Afghans. After a while, I had to tell the ODA to take care of things themselves. They were the guys who were supposed to be so great at foreign internal defense or FID. We told them to go do

their jobs but they didn't want to. My experience with SF was that they wanted to be door-kickers. They didn't want to do FID but we forced them to do that.

MD: When you left, what areas did you feel the ANA still needed more work on?

JT: I just wanted them to continue moving in the same direction we had been moving in. Corruption is a way of life over there and for a lot of those guys, it's the only real income stream they have. It's sort of the same thing as with the poppy industry. You can't just take it away. As long as it wasn't affecting operations, I left it alone. The guy who followed me in there had the same attitude.

We were unable to bring them much further along in training because of the operational tempo. We didn't have a chance to stop. I got to the point where my training assessments were being done based on combat operations. We would go on a mission and I would decide, "Well, it looked like a cordon and search. It was really a mixture of things. I'll get out the military training plan for that and evaluate how they did for that mission." That model I gave was actually taken on by CSTC-A for their template rather than the US model of red, amber, green and training standards.

MD: What previous assignment that you had best prepared you for your job as team leader?

JT: Company command prepared me. I never deployed as a company commander but the ability to lead officers and deal with outside agencies came from company command.

MD: Did you say that some of your captains were post-command captains?

JT: No. They were all pre-command captains.

MD: Do you think it would have made a difference to have one or two post-command captains?

JT: Yes. They would have been better prepared and would have had a better understanding of how a company operates.

MD: What are some ways the Army could change the transition team mission to make it better?

JT: I think we're spread too thin. In order to have max effectiveness, you need to be down at the district level in the case of the ANP. For the border police, you need to be at the battalion level.

We needed to have a 12-man team at all three battalions for the brigade, not just at the brigade headquarters. We weren't having nearly the effect we needed to have as far as that was concerned. The configuration of the teams needs to be changed, too. You need to have a JTAC in an ETT.

We lucked out because we had an ODA and we had a good relationship with them but there were plenty of teams that didn't have that. As anyone who's been there or to Iraq knows, you're not going to get CAS unless you have a JTAC.

We didn't have a medic so we were reliant on the Italians for that. So, I think they need to change the configuration of the teams and have more teams.

MD: Is there any additional training you would add to the program of instruction for training based on your experiences?

JT: In a perfect world, you would have quite a bit of time with an Afghan or Iraqi unit doing mission rehearsal exercises. That was the best part of what we did at Fort Riley but it was only one day. You could even do that in country. I could see going to Kabul or Bagram and building a training facility where you could actually go out with your team and do missions.

We need more cultural training. We needed an Afghan to tell us what was important to an Afghan. As far as language is concerned, it's either all or nothing. You either send your leaders to a Defense Language Institute-style immersion training or don't bother. Most of us were decent at flipping out the card and getting the basic conversation stuff but don't waste my time with a big block of instruction that's intended to teach me the language. I'm not going to internalize it. I think everybody ought to go to DLI. There ought to be time allocated to do that.

Then you have a regional focus identifier slapped on your officer record brief and that's where you'd go all the time.

MD: How much of your time, either training the border police or the ANA, was taken up by trying to figure out how the organization was formed and what their organization was? Do you think that was something they should have covered more in training?

JT: We got a quick briefing on how they were organized but nothing specific. I think that's one of those things they could have given us at Fort Riley. *Tashkeel* [ph] is the Afghan word for MTOE [modified table of organization and equipment]. We could have gotten a copy of the *tashkeel* for our unit while we were at Fort Riley. They knew well enough in advance what core area each team would be going to and generally who they'd be covering down on. They could have gotten us a copy of that and it would have helped a lot.

MD: Do you think if a slot opened up for another transition team that you would take it?

JT: No, but mainly because I want to do something different. It's hit or miss. I really lucked out. A lot of the guys I've talked to weren't so lucky. The experience between Iraq and eastern Afghanistan, where you're in a BCT area of operations, and what I did was night and day. Those guys really had their hands tied behind

their backs and were treated like “also-rans”. Where I was, I was the only show in town, so I had complete autonomy. I think if I did it again, I’d go to Iraq this time and things would be completely different. So no, I wouldn’t want to do it again. Would I want to do it somewhere further down the line in my career as a lieutenant colonel? Sure, I think it’s a very satisfying mission.

MD: What are some of the biggest professional lessons learned that you took away from your time in Afghanistan?

JT: I learned the importance of interagency cooperation. Over there, you can’t keep things just Army. It’s important to expand the areas that you interface with all the possible agencies that can provide services for you. You have to be a good resource manager for your counterpart. That’s something that doesn’t just apply to the MiTT thing. If I go into theater as an S3 or an executive officer, I’ll know who to plug into to get my unit everything it needs. It’s also important to build rapport with your counterpart. A lot of guys come in with a set mindset of how they’re going to operate and they’re really uncomfortable completely immersing themselves with their counterpart. I really worked hard to develop a very strong rapport. You will come to crisis moments with your counterpart and if you don’t have perfect rapport with them, your credibility will be lost and they won’t talk to you anymore. In their culture, you don’t have a big knockdown/ drag-out fight.

They just stop talking to you. Because we had such a good rapport, when the horrible things happened he still trusted me. He knew that no matter what I was doing, it was in his best interest to listen to me even if it bugged him.

MD: What’s some advice you’d have for a brand new captain or major who’s coming into the transition team mission?

JT: Make autonomy of the unit your number one priority. Look at what they’re doing and their level of training but make everything you do be a step towards disconnecting from them. Don’t abandon them and realize that pushing them is going to be a painful process. You can make them very happy and facilitate their ability to conduct combat operations by giving them all the stuff that they need but it’s never going to make them a better unit. I would sit down with my counterpart once a week and ask him, “Where do you see your army in 10 years or 20 years?” When I first got there, his response was, “In 10 years, I expect the US Army to still be here and I expect you guys to continue to provide all the support. That makes us happy. Life was good right after the war started and you guys were giving us everything.” By the end, I got him to the point where he could see things from my perspective which was 10 years from now we should be gone and the ANA should be standing on its feet. You should always have that in the back of your mind.

MD: Can you talk about how your redeployment activities went and if there's anything that should be changed?

JT: We probably spent too little time at Fort Riley on redeployment. We had three days and we didn't even bother to inventory at the central issue facility.

We didn't have a problem with it at the time because we wanted to hit the road but there were people who needed some counseling and who needed some help with readjustment. I think marriage counseling should be automatic for guys who are redeploying. I think that would eliminate the stigma associated with marriage counseling and would allow people to confront things right away instead of allowing them to fester. It wasn't something that was immediately apparent to me but after a while I was like, "We should have taken some more time to do this the right way."

MD: Is there anything else about your time in Afghanistan that you'd like to add to this interview?

JT: There is movement in some of the branches to make it full Key and Developmental. There are pros and cons to that. A pro would be that if you're a team chief, you're getting a big dose of critical field grade-level experience. I think it's fair to say that a guy who has been through that should get full KD credit, as long as it doesn't disadvantage him professionally. Unfortunately, the culture hasn't shifted yet and it's still being looked at as lesser than a brigade or battalion S3 or XO slot. I think some branches will use it as a way to disqualify some guys for those jobs. I'm concerned that future boards will look upon it as lesser and there will be negative drawbacks but I definitely think that it's worthy of being treated as full KD and it's a tremendous professional development experience.

MD: Thank you for your time.

Major William Woodring
12 December 2006

LL: My name is Laurence Lessard (LL) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major William Woodring (WW) on his experiences in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 12 December 2006 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Let's start with a little bit of background. Where are you from, how did you get commissioned, and what units have you served with?

WW: I'm from Maryland. I was interested in the Army all through high school and was actually in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program. There was a colonel there who really pushed me to look into joining the military which I did. I applied for scholarships for ROTC, West Point, and the Air Force Academy. I got accepted to a lot of colleges on ROTC scholarships and was then offered an opportunity to go to either West Point or the Air Force Academy through their junior preparatory school program. I took the West Point option. I went to the prep school in 1981, completed that and went on to West Point. I got my commission in 1986 and headed to Germany. I was there through the fall of the Berlin Wall and the first Gulf War. I didn't get to go to that but I got sent back to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The war was over and they had a big drawdown in the Army.

They were offering a lot of money to get out of the Army. I took the money and ran and ended up going to Alaska. I was there for 15 years. I was a civilian for five years. People knew I had been in the military and talked me into getting into the National Guard in Alaska. In 1996 I joined the Alaska National Guard and was pretty much the traditional Guardsman doing the weekend thing and the two weeks a year. Then 9/11 happened, though, and that changed everything. I was called up to do Operation NOBLE EAGLE and was put in charge of all of the tier-two airports in Alaska. I was very honored to be involved with that. From that point, things just snowballed and I was pretty much on active duty more than I was a civilian. My state got tapped to ask for volunteers to go to either Iraq or Afghanistan and I volunteered to go to Afghanistan.

LL: Let's concentrate on your deployment to Afghanistan. Were you assigned or did they ask for volunteers?

WW: It was a little bit of both. Each state was tasked to supply 16-man teams on a voluntary basis. If they couldn't come up with names, they were going to ask

people to go. My state couldn't come up with the 16 names. They only came up with eight. I was the senior man on our team from Alaska. My state got pressured to bring more but they just couldn't do it with all the other deployments we had. The team of eight was a sergeant major, me, and a bunch of enlisted guys.

We went to Fort Hood, Texas, in February 2005. We did six weeks of training there as part of the embedded team training program and then we were sent off with 300 other people from National Guard and Reserve units to go be Task Force *Phoenix* 3.5 and we were sent to Kabul.

LL: Can you describe the training you did at Fort Hood?

WW: The training could have been a lot better. The trainers had never been overseas so they really didn't know what they were doing. They had no background in what they were training us on. They just were going by what they thought we needed to learn. They had a checklist and we needed to pass certain gates. They tried to have cultural awareness training which didn't even come close to what the reality ended up being.

We were basically punching gates to get through our six weeks of training and get out of there. I wish we had had better focus on what we really needed to do. I don't think that what we trained on had anything to do with what we ended up doing in country. We didn't train on how to be trainers. It was more basic survival skills for us and reacquainting us with the military, tactics, driving, and survival. We got our shots. It wasn't geared towards being an embedded trainer at all and I think we suffered for it.

LL: Did you have a good idea of what you were supposed to be doing when you got to Afghanistan?

WW: We knew we'd be working at brigade, battalion, and company levels, either as personnel officers, logistics officers, or company mentors. There would be two people at the company level and then we'd cover all the major staff functions at the battalion and brigade level. We really weren't sure how involved we were going to be or how involved we were going to have to be.

We didn't know if we were going to be there to lead them or to just be advisors. There were a lot of unknowns and the people training us didn't have any idea either. We'd go through our briefings and they'd keep referring to Iraq instead of Afghanistan. That really bothered us because we felt we weren't as important as we were being told we were.

LL: Once you did get to Afghanistan, what were your unit's responsibilities?

WW: A week before we left, they broke all our teams up and reorganized us. They got information back from Afghanistan that they needed bodies to fill in slots throughout the country.

They came up with a new wish list for how many bodies they needed to send throughout the whole country of Afghanistan. So, the team I had been training with for five weeks was broken up. I was put with a whole new team that I had never worked with. I didn't even know who these people were. I'd never even seen them during training and thus had no idea what their capabilities were. I never even got to meet all of them until we arrived in country.

When I got there, I was told I would be the brigade operations officer, the S3. There were some people already in place who we were supposed to join up with, whom I didn't know and had never met and I was told at Camp Phoenix that they had seven vehicles ready for my team and we were to head to Mazar-e-Sharif. We went through some indoctrination for about a week in Kabul and then I was told to get my folks together and head to Mazar-e-Sharif.

We had to scrounge for everything we needed to get because we didn't have any support from Task Force *Phoenix*. After that, I made my way up to Mazar-e-Sharif after a 22-hour drive through February snowstorms. It was very nerve wracking since I'd never been up there before and didn't have any intelligence on the enemy situation. I actually think we were pretty foolhardy to make that trip. The roads out there are nothing like the roads here. If something were to happen to us, if we had had an accident or there was an avalanche or something, we probably wouldn't have made it.

LL: Was it just you going there as opposed to the whole team?

WW: No, it was me and the new team that I had. There were seven of us. We brought a bunch of extra guys as well because we had to bring all seven of those Humvees with us. We got some additional guys to support us because we needed at least four guys per vehicle. Out of all of us, only one guy, a lieutenant, had been up there before and he and I were in the lead vehicle with the other Humvees behind us. He sort of knew where we were going and I definitely didn't know, so we were kind of just driving and hoping we'd get there.

LL: Did you have a handoff with somebody else or were you the first one into your position?

WW: Regional Command-North, the RC-North, of the 209th Corps was just being built at the time. The actual permanent camp wasn't completed yet. They had a bunch of temporary buildings. There was a group of Americans there with a colonel, a couple lieutenant colonels, and a couple majors. They were the first group there and they were charged with setting up the camp.

They were understaffed and only had about 20 people with them. My group brought it up to about 50 people so we were actually supplementing that group. They were probably at 50 percent strength and we were trying to get them up to about 75 or 100 percent strength. Their mission at that point was to get the camp open.

The Afghan National Army, the ANA, was just starting to arrive. They had been positioned out in separate satellite camps and they were just arriving to the new camp. They were settling into billets and getting the equipment they needed.

LL: Did you function as the S3 or did you work with the S3?

WW: There was a corps-level staff, brigade-level staffs, and battalion-level staffs. I was the brigade-level S3/intelligence officer, the S2. I was supporting the ANA S2 and S3 and also supporting the US S2 and S3 functions and there was no way I could do all four jobs. I would really recommend that we have two staffs in the future. As the brigade S3, I could have been focusing on the ANA brigade S3 and then had a captain as my assistant who would just worry about US operations.

We couldn't do one without the other. It was really hard to focus on both jobs when I was wearing four different hats. The embedded training teams, the ETTs, were very under strength and we should have had a better division of effort on what we were going to do instead of trying to do everything.

LL: What types of operations did you do during your year there?

WW: The 1st and 2d ANA Battalions were the first two battalions in the whole ANA. They had been around for three years already. Their leadership had been in position for a while and they were trained pretty well. Since the camp wasn't ready to support them yet, we sent 1st Battalion out to the Sheberghan area which is toward the west of Afghanistan. The 2d Battalion was already out in the Kunduz area where they took over the old airfield.

They had teams with them and they had been doing missions for the Ministry of Defense, the MOD, who would call them up and send them out. The corps was supposed to have five battalions but when we got there, there were really only two and they had been deployed out so they weren't even around where we were. They were out doing security missions in their areas which covered about three provinces. Our job was to make sure we could bring them back in as well as bring three more battalions on line.

LL: How did that progress over the year?

WW: It was chaos. Around June at about my four or five month mark, we got our third battalion and we had to figure out how to get them from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif which was not easy. We ended up renting buses. There were just a lot of logistics involved.

We also had to figure out how to get them weapons and how we were going to support them, take care of them, feed them, get them firewood, etc. It took us about six months to get them on line and figure out how to support them. When we got them on line, we started doing missions. The elections were coming up in September and that became our primary focus.

Our mission was to secure the entire nine provinces in the north. We divided it up to three provinces per battalion. Their mission was to secure each of those provinces for the elections. The 4th and 5th ANA Battalions were the combat support, the CS, and combat service support or CSS battalions.

We really had limited time to invest in them, as our primary mission was getting the infantry units up to speed. The CS and CSS units had no equipment and no training and we didn't have the ability to train them very well. They were basically supplemental infantry. In order for them to be self-sufficient, we really needed a lot more CS and CSS support for them which we didn't have.

LL: Knowing the operations that you carried out in Afghanistan, what kind of training do you wish you'd had instead of what you actually got?

WW: I wish we'd had a lot more cultural awareness training. We should have known how to interact with the ANA better so we could understand how to get them to work with us. I had a good relationship with my guy but there were others who totally didn't get along with their counterparts so nothing got done. I think a lot of it was that we had to let them do their own thing instead of making them another American Army. That was hard to do, though, because there were certain issues like corruption which was an issue almost daily. How much do we allow or not allow? I would be very upset because we'd bring them brand new vehicles and they'd wreck them the next day or they'd steal gasoline.

As to policy, we should have never given them all these toys. We should have kept it under our control and let them prove to us that they could manage it. We just handed them all these goodies and said, "Have fun." That was a big mistake. We should have kept control of everything and let them sign things out from us until we had a plan to let them take it over piecemeal instead of all at once.

Another thing was, mission, we should have had a better plan. We should have known what it was we wanted to accomplish during our year we were there and how we were going to go about getting it done. It seemed like we didn't get a lot of guidance from our higher headquarters.

We were really out on our own and I felt like they were struggling just as much as we were to figure out what we were going to do. It would have been nice to know what they expected of us. We got some very general guidance but we didn't really have a plan to get there. We had to figure that out on our own, and that was a difficult thing to do.

LL: How much support did you get from your higher headquarters and how much did you get from the Afghan MOD?

WW: During my time, we were under two different units. We were under the 76th Infantry Brigade from Indiana and the 53d Infantry Brigade from Florida.

They were both very different. The 76th was ready to go home when I showed up. They were packing their bags already and the support we got from them was not what I would have hoped for.

The 53d came in around July and because they were new, they were very eager to support everybody in the field. We inundated them with our wants and desires so they were much more in tune to what we wanted them to do and they tried to support us a lot better.

We didn't even have computers when I got there. Basic things that we wanted we had to go downtown and buy. A lot of that was contentious because they'd expect things from us and communicate with us over e-mail. Well, we didn't even have computers to respond. How were we going to do anything? We were relying just on cell phones to communicate. We were pretty far out in the weeds.

We couldn't even get generators to work. There was no maintenance. I don't think they appreciated what it was like outside the wire from Camp Phoenix and Kabul to where we were. When the 53d came in, we made them understand what our situation was and we got a lot more support from them during the second half of our tour.

LL: Was there anything in particular that you were lacking or that was really difficult to come by?

WW: Basic office supplies were hard to get. Things we take for granted here is a luxury over there.

Then we'd actually turn around and give computers to the ANA which I thought was just amazing. They had no idea what to do with them. Then we'd give them printers and they had no way of getting printer cartridges.

They were just as frustrated as we were. The ANA would get all this equipment but there was no plan in place to support it once it was fielded. The first week they'd get a computer, they'd destroy it because they didn't know how to use it. Those kinds of things happened all the time. Somebody had a good idea and by the time it got down to where we were, it turned into a bad idea. Personally I could never get razor blades. I was always trying to find them.

LL: How much contact did you have with the local Afghan population?

WW: We'd go out on missions and if we were downtown, we'd talk to the locals but not a lot. If we had a meeting with the governor or the police chief or the school, then we'd interact with the locals.

A lot of young kids would come up to us and talk to us so they could practice their English. They would say they wanted to join the Army or they'd ask us questions about the United States. That's pretty much all the interaction we had.

We didn't want to get too far out there and become a target. Most of our interaction was official business.

LL: Did you have any translator support while you were there?

WW: Yes. We had five translators for our group. We had them but there weren't enough for everybody who needed them. Many times I had to borrow other people's translators and vice versa. They were available but not as much as we needed. We relied on them for everything. When you don't have one, it's kind of hard to communicate and do anything. We got by with what we had but we probably could have used more.

LL: How would you rate the translator support you did have, from one to 10?

WW: I'd probably say a five or six.

They were good conversantly but there were times when things just didn't get translated properly. I would be talking with my counterpart and I would say, "I agree with him." and the translator would translate that to say, "I'm angry with him." One word can really change an entire conversation. I could see by the Afghan colonel's face that something was wrong but I didn't know why.

Another example was the words "tourist" and "terrorist." They got confused all the time. People don't understand how one word can change a whole conversation. We'd have meetings with the Afghan generals and a lot would be lost in translation.

We usually would have two translators there so we could make sure we didn't miss anything. The translating was shaky at best and don't ask them to write anything down in English. It wouldn't happen.

LL: What kinds of cultural challenges did you face in your job?

WW: There were all kinds of challenges, just understanding the whole lifestyle of the Afghans.

We had a saying, "Man love Thursdays." When you're a newbie you have no idea what they're talking about. It takes a while to figure it out. You'd see Afghans holding hands, you're unsure of what's going on and you're afraid to ask somebody. After a while you start picking up on things. The Afghans are allowed to have two wives and homosexuality, it happens and you have to just understand it. If you're a homophobic person, you're really going to be upset by it. You really have to put your feelings aside and understand that this is not your country. You have to accept what they do and don't interject your personal feelings about their culture. Looking at women is forbidden. Even if a young 17-year-old stares at a woman he can be killed for that.

We weren't taught any of that, though, in any of our training. You need to understand that people might hit on you. People will skim money off the top for

their own use and you need to know that that happens and what's appropriate and what's not. They didn't talk about any of those issues in our cultural training.

We just got hit with it full force when we got there. Luckily we had other people who had been there longer to tell us what was going on. That's what saved us. The six-month transition we had went a long way to our success in being culturally aware. That was one of the good things of having the overlap we had. There are a lot of cultural issues that you just don't know about until you get there.

LL: Was there any instance where you ran into some kind of cultural divide which stopped you from doing what you needed to do?

WW: I think a lot of it was that they depended on us to supply them with everything.

We'd pay the ANA and provide them food and everything. They became too reliant on us and they would start almost harassing us to take care of things. They thought money was the answer to all of their problems. When there was a problem, they'd come to us and tell us to go fix it with money. Some people got very irritated by it. I was asked almost daily to go buy something for them. It got to the point where a lot of the guys got very frustrated and they let their frustrations show and wouldn't help their counterpart anymore.

They just got tired of hearing it. That was the bigger issue. We had the money and they wanted things. They're very poor and they saw that we had all this money which seemed to never end. That got to be problematic at certain times.

They would make excuses as to why they couldn't do things because they had no money and they had a lack of a conception of time. Time to Americans is very important. Time over there though, means nothing. We're trying to force them to do things on our time which to them, they don't understand. A lot of them don't have watches and can't even tell time. We're trying to force them to leave for a mission at a certain time and they can't understand why. "Why do we have to leave at that time?" To them, it's not important.

Trying to get them to understand our standards was a real challenge. A lot of guys got frustrated because they felt that the Afghans should be doing things our way. I never felt that way. Living in Alaska, I was used to dealing with the Eskimos. To me, working with the Eskimos was like working with the Afghans. I had no problem, to tell you the truth.

LL: Did you experience any tribal or sectarian divides?

WW: Yes. Where we were up north, there were the *Hazaras*, the *Tajiks* and the *Uzbeks*.

They definitely didn't like the *Pashtos*, who are the southern group. They don't even speak the same language. I know we tried to integrate the army into one Afghan Army but if you had a mixed unit where one group was a majority, that group would dominate the unit. Whether or not their leaders were in charge, they wouldn't do anything until that tribal group leader said it was okay. A lot of times they didn't even speak the same language.

Putting an *Uzbek* in charge of *Pashtos* didn't work and there were minor instances where they would rebel or revolt against that leader, or they would only follow their group leader within the unit. We probably had more shootings amongst the groups internally than against the enemy. It was a big problem and it probably doesn't get the attention that it should. Maybe there isn't a good solution for it but there were a lot of tensions there. I know there was a big shootout in Kabul over a racial incident.

LL: How did you find the overall conditions in Afghanistan?

WW: It was rough. I was lucky in that our base had hot water, showers, and toilets.

When we first got there, we didn't have any contractor support so we had to cook for ourselves. We all got sick and were miserable for the first six months. We were eating rice and chicken wings every day. We finally built a hard dining facility and we finally got contractors up there. Chow got much better but it seemed we spent the first six months sick. When you're sick, you're miserable and it's hard to do your job. A lot of times when we went out to the field we had to eat with the Afghans or eat MREs. There was no support.

The guys who went out on missions really had it tough. Being the brigade S3, I went out but not as often as them. My facilities were somewhat better but they still didn't nearly compare to what the guys in Kabul had.

LL: Did you find things to be better or worse than you expected?

WW: Much worse, especially in terms of our support. When we were out there, I expected that while we were out there we'd be supported by the United States Army. Instead, it felt like we were 200 miles away from everybody else and pretty much on our own. That was a concern. If something were to happen to us, I don't know if we would have been able to save anybody.

We were in the NATO area up north with the Germans and the British so we relied on them. My concern was that if someone was in a car accident or had gotten shot, I don't know how fast we could have helped them or gotten them out of a bad situation. I think in terms of that aspect of it, I was very concerned all the time.

Other support was there but we had to go beg, borrow, and beat people up to get radios, mechanics, tires, or parts. The logistics end was the worst of it. We knew we'd be on our own but we figured we'd have some logistical support.

LL: What would you say were your biggest challenges while you were there?

WW: The biggest challenge was trying to understand what it was we wanted to do there and how we were going to get it done. It seemed like there was no clear focus on that.

We were just on our own. I'm not a Special Forces guy. I'm a National Guard guy. So I felt kind of behind the power curve in terms of what we were supposed to be getting done with the ANA. I wish I'd had more training going over there. I don't know how effective I was while I was there. We just lived day by day and did missions seven days a week. We didn't have any place to train.

They didn't have any ammunition. There were issues that came up all the time that really prevented us from doing what we want to do. I wished we'd had more thought in the back end before we deployed so we could have gone out there with a real plan in hand to be able to really help them out. It's that balancing act between letting them do what they want to do and us stepping in and forcing it to happen. That was also another point of contention. How involved do we get or not get? When you're dealing with two different armies, you're going to face challenges.

LL: Was everybody you worked with US Army or were there other US services involved?

WW: It was a very fluid situation. When we got there, it was just US Army. Halfway through, the Navy came up and started working on the logistical end of things. They weren't ETTs per se but they came up and handled our logistics. That was our recommendation to the new group.

We needed more bodies to do the US stuff because we just couldn't do both. We did a lot with the Dutch, the Germans, and the British. I went a long way to get training teams up to Mazar-e-Sharif.

We told Kabul they had to send teams up to us so we could train our battalions. We got that to work and we ran a Primary Leadership Development Course for our Afghans. We had the Brits come up and do that. The Germans were doing missions and the Dutch did a six-week training plan. As the battalions were trained up, they'd go out and work with the Dutch to go through a six-week training assessment.

We did a lot of good things. A lot of it was personality driven. For example, we'd support the British and let them stay on our compound. In return, they'd train our guys. There were a lot of handshake deals to get things done. They relied on us and we relied on them because we didn't have anybody else to help us out. It was a win-win situation.

A lot of times there were differences of opinion on things like interacting with the locals and stuff like that but when it came to training the ANA, the Coalition really came together. The group I worked with had to pull off the elections as well as train the ANA and we made it work.

LL: How easy was it to work with the Coalition forces? Were some easier to work with than others? Was it all personality driven?

WW: It depended on the subject. If we were talking about the elections, for example, there was a lot of contention.

They had different rules of engagement, the ROE, than we had. We'd have meetings with our Coalition partners and have to go over what would happen if, say, an ANA soldier got injured. The Germans wouldn't be able to medically evacuate him out. If something were to happen to a US soldier, they would be able to help, though. We had to get clear on when they could help and when they couldn't.

We'd go through a long laundry list of circumstances of what they were going to do and what they weren't going to do. I remember the British got attacked at Sheberghan and they asked us to go help them but if we got attacked they couldn't help us. There were a lot of issues like that but we made it work.

We had weekly discussions with everybody and made sure everybody was on the same sheet of music. In that environment, you had to have a lot of meetings with people. We'd go and see the British and have meetings with them but we never brought our ANA with us. A lot of meetings were going on to make stuff happen and there were a lot of situational decisions that were made but we all agreed that we wanted successful elections and so we had to work out how we wanted to do that.

LL: In working with the other Coalition forces, did you find that the restrictions imposed from above dictated how you could relate to one another as opposed to personalities?

WW: It was a little bit of both. I got along with everybody I met. They all wanted to be successful and a lot of it was that if something really bad happened, they'd be there to help. I think when they realized that someone's life was on the line, they'd come to help. They might not be technically allowed by their caveats but if a US soldier was injured and needed to get to a hospital, they'd do it.

For the most part, a lot of the soldiers didn't personally agree with their own ROE but they had to follow them. On the side, though, they said if we needed them, they'd be there. There were a lot of handshakes and verbal understandings. The Germans had these two helicopters that we relied on but they couldn't fly at night. At least we understood that stuff before we got into a bad situation. We were honest with each other about what we were going to do and not do at the company-grade level. I don't know what the colonels talked about.

LL: Did you have any contact with the media?

WW: No.

LL: Was there any contact with non-governmental organizations, the NGOs?

WW: No. There weren't any up where we were. There weren't as many problems up there so there wasn't as much of a need for them like there was down in Kabul. Our area was fairly quiet. I did see that the US Agency for International Development, the USAID, was doing some projects but I didn't see anybody else.

The British were more involved in that than I was. They had a provincial reconstruction team, the PRT, out there. We weren't a PRT so I don't know how many NGOs they were dealing with.

LL: Reflecting back on your year in Afghanistan, what would you say were the biggest lessons you learned and brought back with you?

WW: Try to know what you're going to do before you get there. You need to read up on what you'll be doing. If you're going to be a logistician, an S1, or an S3, try to be as tactically proficient as possible. You need to understand that a lot of what you'll be doing will be based on interpersonal relations. I would say that 90 percent of what got done was because of interpersonal relations. It wasn't a matter of being the smartest guy but it was a matter of how you got along with your peers and getting the mission done.

There were guys who were brilliant but they didn't get along with people. They sat in the corner and didn't get much done. There were other guys, though, who weren't the sharpest pencils in the box but they were team players and willing to gel with other people and make things happen. You're living with these guys for a year so you have to get along with them.

LL: Did you have a family readiness group, the FRG?

WW: Yes.

LL: How did that work out for you?

WW: They were actually pretty good. They sent out letters monthly. They had meetings and kept our spouses informed. I think the National Guard has a pretty good FRG program. I didn't hear any complaints about that.

LL: How did you deal with family separation?

WW: It was hard. I think a year is too long to be overseas. I think nine months is optimal. About that time you're pretty burned out. Your want-to-go-home factor goes way up around that time and you start being a lot more cautious and less involved in your job.

We did have computers so I spent a lot of time e-mailing my family, so I was thankful for that. The phones didn't work well so I was glad we had e-mail. That was one of the only nice benefits we had out there. If we hadn't had that, it would have been hard. The snail mail was nice to get also.

LL: If you could make recommendations to the Chief of Staff of the Army or the Secretary of Defense, what would you say?

WW: The mentorship and advisory role is a good mission but it really needs to be done differently. The teams are way too small. There were supposed to be two people per company but if somebody was sick or on leave we'd have to borrow people from other places. The teams needed to be about twice as big as they were. If you're going to support an Afghan battalion, you should probably have a company of regular US soldiers to reinforce them in case something happens. There should also be a US-only leadership structure in place to handle just US issues like logistics and maintaining your support. That would allow the training teams to go out and focus on the mission with the Afghans.

We try to do it on the cheap, and instead of taking us three years it's going to take us eight or 10 years. We're doing it slowly and we're not doing it with the right mix of personnel, equipment, and logistics. I can wear four hats or two hats but how much do you think you're going to get out of me if I'm wearing four hats versus focusing on the job you want me to do? It's a good mission but they need to look at it realistically and revamp how it's presented and operated.

LL: Do you know what your next assignment will be?

WW: No. I know I got a call from Washington, DC to go work at the National Guard Bureau or the Pentagon. They won't tell me what they want me to do.

LL: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your time in Afghanistan?

WW: I think the leadership needs to get more down into the weeds and talk to the soldiers. The soldiers know what's going on and what needs to be done to win. I've sat in on a lot of briefings where the general would show up for 15 minutes and get a canned PowerPoint slide presentation from a colonel. That's all he'd see and off he'd go.

I think the generals need to get down and talk to the sergeants and the privates and find out what's really happening. They should base their decisions more on what's going on at the tip of the spear in reality instead of getting what the colonels think the generals want to hear. I saw a lot of generals over there but I only saw them very fleetingly and nobody ever talked to me. I don't know what they're getting on those trips when they see those colonels but it would be nice to know that they're getting accurate and relevant information that they could go back and make decisions from instead of a 15-minute PowerPoint slideshow.

LL: Would you consider your year in Afghanistan a positive experience?

WW: Yes. It was probably one of the better assignments I've had. I have no regrets about doing it. I had a great time over there. I thought I was doing something productive. I worked with a good guy, Colonel Latif [ph] from the ANA. I knew he was an honest man so that made a big difference versus some of the other guys who had to work with crooks which made for a long year. I enjoyed my time there and I'd do it again if I needed to.

LL: Do you think things improved or got worse while you were there?

WW: They definitely improved.

We went from nothing to standing up a whole brigade. You don't really see it until after you leave and you look back at how far you've come. A lot of things could have been done a lot better. Unfortunately, I wasn't a decision maker in terms of how we got vehicles and things like that. Overall, I think we try to rush things too fast in terms of trying to get them up to speed. We had a goal of trying to get them to be a 70,000-man army. Well, you just can't make an army that fast.

We need to be more patient and methodical in how we do that. A lot of people are impatient to make things happen but you simply can't put the cart before the horse. Overall, we made good progress. I'm not sure what happened after we left but I know the ANA was better off when I left than when I got there.

LL: Thank you very much for your time.

Command Sergeant Major Jeff Janke
16 February 2007

LL: My name is Laurence Lessard (LL) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Command Sergeant Major Jeff Janke (JJ) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 16 February 2007 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Let's start with some personal background. Where are you from and how did you get interested in the Army?

JJ: I read a lot of books about World War II when I was in school. I found it entertaining. I looked into joining the military when I was getting ready to graduate from high school. My parents really didn't want me to. They wanted me to go to college. So, I went to college and the second weekend I was there, I was walking around town to see what was there and I saw a National Guard armory. I went and checked it out a few weeks later because I wanted to see what the military was like. I joined up and went to infantry school. I continued my college education and stayed in the Guard for almost 30 years. I didn't expect to stay in that long but I did.

LL: When did you enlist?

JJ: 23 I enlisted in October 1977.

LL: Since you had a college degree, did it ever occur to you to get commissioned?

JJ: Oh, yes. I was asked about that a number of times but to do the job right it requires quite a bit of time, especially as an officer, and I didn't think I had that time or wanted to commit the time to it. Knowing what I know now, I may have done it differently but it's worked out okay.

LL: Have you been with the same National Guard unit your entire career?

JJ: I've been in the Wisconsin Guard the whole time but not the same exact unit. I was in the same battalion for the first 20 years. Then I went to an aviation battalion for five years and now I've been in an artillery brigade for the last four years. I did a bit of moving around.

LL: When did you first find out that you would be deploying?

JJ: It was in the wind around the summer of 2005. We were looking for a mission for the brigade headquarters. The Task Force *Phoenix* mission came

up and we were vying for the spot that the 41st is doing right now, the *Phoenix* headquarters group. We thought we were going to be that but then that changed, we started looking for something else and the state got a requirement to put together a team. They went ahead and started getting volunteers for that. I didn't volunteer initially because I thought we might pick up something else.

Then the colonel called me about six weeks before we left. He said we were going to go over as trainers. We knew a little bit about that mission because some previous Wisconsin Guard guys had been on it. He said, "Will you go?" I said, "Sure, I'll go."

LL: When was this?

JJ: This was in November 2005.

LL: What was your position at that time?

JJ: I was the command sergeant major for the 57th Field Artillery Brigade, out of Milwaukee.

LL: Was this deployment just for the brigade headquarters?

JJ: Once the State did the team, they were looking for volunteers throughout the state. Half of us came out of the 57th. We had two battalions in the 57th, one of them had been mobilized in chunks to Iraq and we were suspecting that the other one was going to be mobilized as well but not the brigade headquarters.

We didn't see anything on the horizon for the headquarters, so we decided that this was our turn and we took it. We didn't mobilize as a regular unit identification code, the UIC, unit. They made one up for us after we came together.

LL: Were you mobilized under Title 10?

JJ: Yes.

LL: Given the relatively short amount of time between actually forming this unit and deploying, how much pre-deployment training were you able to do?

JJ: We did one weekend's worth. The first weekend of December 2005 which was our regular drill date anyway, we took a day to go to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, and the whole team assembled there. Half of them were there for the whole weekend going through familiarization training with each other.

We went up for one day of that. The next day, one of the members of the previous team came down to Milwaukee and gave us a brief. The day before, two other members of the previous team had given a briefing to the whole group. Half the group had known since October that they were going to go. When they did a second call to fill the group, that's when we jumped in. We just had the December drill before we left.

LL: Was there any particular focus to it or was it more of a broad, general training?

JJ: I'd say it was focused. We tried to get all our stateside business taken care of. Any of your family business or civilian matters, have those set so you could go away for a year and everything would be okay. We also had soldier readiness processing before that. It was a one-day thing at the headquarters.

We went through the process there making sure all our pay information was correct and that our dependents were all taken care of. We did wills and powers of attorney. That was pretty good. That was the thing to focus on.

We just got all that out of the way so we didn't have to deal with it when we were on the other side of the world and in different time zones. Some of the group did some of the military common task training or CTT and the colonel pretty much emphasized that we'd have time for that after we mobilize which we did. He said to spend our time doing the things we could only do here and now. Once you start thinking about it, there were a few things we had to get done.

LL: Once you were mobilized, what kind of training did you do in preparation for Afghanistan?

JJ: We had four days at home station and that was pretty much administrative. We got some equipment taken care of and hand receipts.

Then we went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. We were there for 45 days. We went through rifle marksmanship and individual weapons qualifications for the rifle and the pistol. We did iron sights with the rifle as well as close combat optics.

We did a day of foreign weapons training. We did a day of the mandatory CTT tasks they had. There were quite a few of them. There were folks from MPRI contract company there who had us do some battle studies. It was interesting but it wasn't time well spent. We never used it later on. We could have done things differently. We shouldn't have spent a whole week on that.

We did combat lifesaver training for about two weeks at night and that was good training. Everybody thought it was some of the best stuff we could have done, and it was. We did some small-unit tactical training. We spent about a week on that.

They wanted to do some life on the forward operating base or FOB training, they abbreviated it and that was fine. We really didn't need it and they didn't replicate it very well there anyway.

We did some land navigation and a lot of basic soldier skills. Depending upon your background, this was either time well spent or just plain time spent.

The 57th is a field artillery unit. We go to the field quite a bit. You tend to use those skills enough to stay reasonably current on them, if not pretty adept at them, so I don't know if it was really necessary. It doesn't hurt as long as you don't get into where you're pencil whipping it.

We did some driving skills with the up-armored Humvees but not much of that and not enough. It wasn't great, though, because it didn't replicate the roads in Afghanistan. The roads over there are rougher than hell. They just are. You have to get used to that and understand the maintenance you'll need to do on your vehicle.

The training really had an Iraqi focus to it because most of the trainers had either learned about Iraq or had been to Iraq. None of them had been to Afghanistan. I've never been to Iraq but from talking to people who've been to both, Afghanistan is not Iraq.

We spent some time working with interpreters. They were Iraqis. We did some cultural training, some language training. Overall, to prepare we did a lot of basic soldier skills stuff.

LL: Was there anything besides the combat lifesaver training that you felt was very valuable and you wish you'd had more of?

JJ: I think their training on weapons was pretty good for the individual weapons.

They broke us out into different groups and you had to pick people to do the crew-served weapons such as the Mk-19, M240, and M2. Everybody really needs to know that because at any given time anybody may have to get up in the hatch and handle that thing. Everybody should at least rotate through that position or at least work on the maintenance of the weapons. That could have been better. As for the foreign weapons training, I never taught anyone over there on foreign weapons. I mean, I knew enough. I could pull apart an AK which is pretty simple but I think they could have spent more time on the RPG [rocket-propelled grenade].

They probably should have spent some time on the specialties but you don't know exactly what you're going to be doing when you go in there. For example, if they had better visibility on that to say, "Okay, you're going to be teaching mortars. How many of you know mortars? This is what their mortars look like. Here are some live rounds. Here are the firing tables for them. This is all the equipment you'll need. We're going to go out today and spend the day on them." Some of that would have been good, because you don't want to walk in there and kind of fumble your way through it in front of the Afghan National Army, the ANA, while you're trying to teach them. They're not dumb. They'll know if you've never done this before.

Then you'll have to come back and build back your credibility, whereas at least if you have some familiarity with it you could be able to make things happen.

They only had two or three up-armored Humvees. We had some classes in a classroom situation that were, again, very Iraq-gearred. They needed to address how you do things in Afghanistan.

We had convoy training as well, and what you do in Iraq isn't what you should be doing in Afghanistan. When you're hit, you want to get out of the kill zone. You don't all hop out and return fire. The country is just one big ambush site and it can happen just about anywhere. You have to pretty much clear the area. Some of that training should have been geared towards that.

There also should have been more time spent on maintenance. Nobody likes to do it but you just have to beat it in to people. "You're going to do it. Everybody is going to do it. You're not just going to stand there and watch. If you're not greasy, you haven't done it."

The radios were a problem as well. They were hit by a resource constraint. They were begging for radios over in theater, so how many can you pull out to have for train-up? You need to do that, though. I think what they need to do that which is what the 218th did with their Humvees.

They brought their thin-skinned vehicles back with them. They're not the up-armored ones but at least they're closer to what you have. Have them with the radios too, instead of everybody using their cell phones. There are about four or five different flavors of radios over there so you need to be familiar with them and know what the limitations are of each. The tactical satellite, the TACSAT, radios especially. They gave us classes on the HF radios but we never used them. They're not amenable to mobile use. There was also the new multiband inter/intra team radios or MBITRs. They're nice because they're so versatile. Maybe you need to trade them off so everybody gets a chance to use them for more than just five minutes in a class. I think that would have been a worthwhile thing to do.

LL: Was there any part of the training that you felt was a waste of time?

JJ: The battle studies was a waste of time. You can always take something away from any training but I would say that the payoff from that was pretty low. If they really wanted to study that, then they should have gone into more detail on the books they gave us. They gave us "The Bear Went Over the Mountain" and every vignette is basically the same. "We went out, we got attacked, we failed and we came back." Maybe once in a while they were lucky and had success. You don't learn a lot from that except that if you don't do it right it isn't going to work.

These people are primitive, so to speak but they're good at what they do. If you want to learn it, go read "The Other Side of the Mountain" [sic] because it tells about all these attack sites. These names are awful familiar and you know why? They're using the same spots and they're doing a lot of it in the same ways.

Then you can understand their way of thinking better, too. You will learn that there are chinks in their armor that you can go after. There are spots in there where their stuff didn't work out either. Had we spent a day or two going through that, it would have been more worthwhile. As far as spending a week studying battles from the 1800s with the British? Okay, they're a tough people and as soon as there is a gunfight they're all there. It's the same now but it didn't take that long to do it. In my mind, MPRI should have still been used there but not in that role. If I was king for a day, I would have said, "MPRI is over there writing a doctrine for their army, programs and policies. What they need is a big pipeline, that as they gin that stuff up over there, it's sent back here and then you spend a couple days learning what their doctrine is and how much of it they have. They have these doctrines and here's what you need to know because this is what you're going to work with." Otherwise you'll have no idea.

They didn't have a Uniform Code of Military Justice, the UCMJ, when I got there. That would have been nice to know going in. It also would be nice to know going in now. "Here it is. It's only 20 pages long. We're going to read this. The fact is, I'm going to give you a test on it. Instead of just nodding that you know it, you're going to prove you know it before you go over there."

The other one, and they've started to do this now, is sending Afghans over here to work with us. We only had a couple Iraqi interpreters to work with for half a day, and working with an interpreter is a skill. You can't get good at it in a mobilization station but you can cut the edges off of it and get a better appreciation for what you're going to get into. Instead of trying to work with an interpreter and your Afghan counterpart and trying to learn two things at once, at least you can know a bit about the interpretation part. They started to do that.

They sent over a 30-man platoon from the 201st Corps, either to Fort Riley or the Joint Readiness Training Center, the JRTC, this winter to do that. It was a treat for the Afghans. They get to go to the US, they're bottom-end guys too. For us, the guys who are going over there, you'd be able to cut through the crap. You could actually talk to them and find out what they're like. Everybody likes to tell the stories that are the exception rather than, "Here's the mundane. This is the way it is. This is what you'll go through every day." It's not as good of a story but that's the way it is.

They sent over a platoon and the general from the Afghan corps who Colonel Cariello actually mentored. He came over for a visit and he spoke to different groups. He only spoke for an hour or so but an hour is way better than nothing. You could see what they look like and how they talk, so you'd get a little inclination about what they're like. That's one thing I would have liked. Thankfully they are doing that more now.

LL: When did you actually head to Afghanistan?

JJ: This was on 23 February 2006.

LL: How did your actual movement from the US to Afghanistan go?

JJ: It's a little bit of a moving target. You'd think things like that would be pretty much set in stone a fair amount of time ahead but they're not. We didn't really know for sure until the day or two before. It wasn't too bad. There were some challenges in that you don't know until the last minute how many bags you can take. There always seems to be a new directive coming down. It didn't change a lot in the end, though. It went back and forth a lot but it still settled out at about the same place it started. It came out pretty good and they kept issuing stuff to us at the last minute. They gave us a lot of stuff and I left a lot of it back because I didn't need it.

We went down to Gulfport. There was a chartered plane that came in and we loaded up on that. We went to Bangor, Maine, and then stopped in Germany. We then went to Manas and I don't know why they do that. Maybe if you look at a globe it makes sense but I couldn't figure it out at the time. We spent a couple days there and then we flew down into Kabul. We got lucky. We flew right into Kabul International Airport. All of our stuff was with us and our movement went well. We had a chartered plane.

We were not limited by passengers. We were limited by weight. There were quite a few empty seats, so for that long ride we had some room to spread out. It was a pretty good trip. The only ordeal of it was just a matter of bad timing.

We got to Manas and there were 132 of us in our group that had to get down to Kabul, to Phoenix, and they didn't take us all as a block. They split us in half, threw us in a C-17, and the next group was supposed to come in the next day but in the end it took them a week to get there. Part of the problem was that President Bush came in and that stopped all the flights. It was always one thing or another for a week.

They finally caught up to us and we should have only been at the base camp in Phoenix for a week, although we ended up there for two weeks just because we had to wait for the other half to get in.

LL: Once you got to Afghanistan, what did you find yourself doing?

JJ: I've been to third world countries before but I was just trying to figure out how things worked. We spent some time organizing things and figuring out where we were.

We had to in-process and make arrangements for the follow-on half to come along. The colonel spent time working out assignments for where people were

going to go. We really just went through the processes of how Phoenix worked and what you needed to know. They briefed us up so we had a little bit of a clue on how things were going to be.

We moved downrange and ended up convoying down to Gardez. That's where I went. We took a bunch of brand new up-armored Humvees down there. They needed drivers and we were all there so we helped them. It snowed when we went down there and that was an immersion right away into the whole situation. Once we got there, they still needed to figure out exactly where we were going to go once we got to the corps then, too.

We knew that night where we'd be going and that next day we started to work with who we were going to replace. We were shown around the area and introduced to the people and places that were there.

LL: How would you say the handoff went between you and the guys you were replacing there at Gardez?

JJ: It wasn't too bad. I lucked out in a way because the guy I replaced was actually filling two positions. So, I moved into one of them and he just stayed full time in the other. He was always there anyway for the next several months, so it wasn't like I was left hanging. There were some things that could have been different and I think we improved on them with our briefings and receptions to the folks that came in later on. "Here's exactly how this place works and what you need to do."

We didn't get that when we got there. We were left with a lot of questions in our minds and they didn't have a lot of answers anyway. It took a while to figure things out but any new job is going to be like that. It takes you a while before you make it your own. You figure out where your boundaries are, where the real work is and what you need to spend your time on. In that way, it's probably not any different than any other job I've ever been in. You always think you know everything about it before you get in it, and then once you get in, it's like, "Oh, I didn't know this was going to happen."

LL: What did you find yourself spending most of your time doing?

JJ: I worked with and mentored the corps sergeant major mostly but I did some other things as well. I tried to coordinate different things. I had to fix sometimes minor problems and work on setting up more major things. For example, working with the corps sergeant major, if somebody came up to us and said they had a pay problem and they couldn't fix it. "Did you talk to the officers?" "No. I cannot talk to them." "Let's go. They'll listen to me. They know I'm enlisted but they also know I have US Army on my uniform so they'll do whatever."

We would go over there and spend time working through something like that but we also worked on getting a system in place so they could send their NCOs to schools. We'd spend time thinking about how we were going to generate an order of merit list, how we were going to get them to Kabul when they have to go.

Everything took longer than what you expected and it seemed like you could never fix something to where it stayed fixed. You had to monitor it all the time. It just happened that way. At the stage they're in where they don't have an institutional history, everything is still being built and is new and maybe it's only been done once. That doesn't set a tradition or a pattern yet for a lot of that kind of thing. So, you have to spend more time going back over that sort of thing. You also have to develop systems. I can do fixes of one or two but then all you do is fix things one at a time. At that level I was trying to look at things, "Okay, he has a pay problem. I know he can't be the only one. Let's see how many more there are and then let's look at how we're going to keep this from happening at least 99 percent of the time."

We worked through that and had to try to keep them motivated to work through those kinds of things. That was quite a bit of it. "I know this army has problems but it's young. Let's work on these things." In my particular case, I spent quite a bit of time on that.

LL: Is there a big cultural difference between the US Army and the Afghanistan's ANA over how NCOs are perceived and utilized?

JJ: Definitely. For whatever reason, their NCOs are treated and perform more like they did in the Soviet Army than the American Army. In the American Army, NCOs have a lot of authority. They also have a lot of responsibility in things they have to do or there will be repercussions for it. Over there, a lot of those things that we'd have our NCOs do, they have officers do. There is a lot of inflation in their officer ranks. There are a lot of officers on staff there and I think it's a way to increase a person's salary. Make them an officer and they'll get more money. Whether they're qualified or whether you need an officer for that particular position or task is almost irrelevant sometimes.

It's a problem with two sides to the coin. I got this a lot from the NCOs, "Officers won't let us do that. Officers do not give us authority. Officers do not respect us." "True, but you can't use that as an excuse all the time. If they tell you or ask you to do something, you better belly up and perform." There were times when I wouldn't have given them any authority or responsibility because they wouldn't have come through. As a group, they're more educated than the officers. There's a higher literacy rate among the Afghan NCOs than the officers. It's much more of a merit-based thing but not 100 percent because connections and money can still get you things over there but there is a higher literacy rate in the NCOs.

I think there are also more English-speaking NCOs than there are officers. There's just more of a willingness to learn English as well. More of them would be in the classes or at least try to work through it than a lot of the officers would. The officers haven't learned that giving NCOs power and authority doesn't weaken their position but it strengthens it. If you not only give them the authority but you put the responsibility on them, their success is your success and it makes you look better. Trying to get the NCOs to realize that, "It isn't your job just to look good for yourself. It's your job to make your commander successful. That's what we have to go about doing."

We spent days fighting that. That's just a cultural thing that takes time to change and it did while we were there. The corps commander was really starting to understand it. At first he said he did but I'm not really sure if he did or not. He didn't really give the NCOs much authority or pay them much mind because he wasn't going to spend a lot of time working with people who didn't come through. He would just ignore them and move on to the next one. Maybe he just didn't have the appreciation for it but in the end he was trying to get the NCOs more involved in stuff. I think the next year will go even another step further. As long as they don't disappoint him, they will progress. So, there are two parts to that whole thing.

LL: What would you say was your biggest challenge mentoring the ANA corps sergeant major?

JJ: Working with him to just keep him in the army. He was a very idealistic young man. He was there and his dream was for a better Afghanistan but he was not necessarily real patient with it. He wanted to see it happen faster than how it was happening. He was a very honest and equitable individual which put him at odds with other people in that organization. He wanted to see all the soldiers treated the same and correctly and to see the NCOs fall into their proper place. The army just wasn't at that stage yet though, and that would get very frustrating for him. There would be days where he would throw up his hands and was ready to walk out the door. "I'll come back when this is fixed." Instead of saying, "I've got to keep working to fix my part." and realizing that it probably will be a slow process.

The other part of it was that he was an educated man. He went to the Kabul University and had a degree in journalism. So, he has other options. He could speak English pretty well. I never needed an interpreter around him. In fact, he would be a good interpreter. He could do financially much better leaving the army, turning around and getting hired as an interpreter for US forces. He knows the military and he's very fluent in English. He'd be a great interpreter for somebody.

It would be a challenge sometimes just to keep him going. He'd get into a head butt with an officer and just by the nature of it all it would be a head butt

rather than, “Hey, let’s work it out.” Sometimes I could appreciate his frustration. I could go back to the US side and not worry about those issues but he had to live them 24 hours a day. That was one of the bigger things. Some days he’d take off, just be enthused as heck about something and we’d formulate a policy or start a program. It would go pretty good for a while, until there would be an episode where someone would insult him or not treat him how he thought he should be treated, and off the edge he’d go. We’d have to get through it until he spun himself back up again. Fortunately, every time he would.

To his credit, he cared a lot about the soldiers. Soldiers would get cheated out of things because of someone somewhere along the line. For example, the dining facility. He knows they get so much money to buy the food and he could tell it wasn’t being spent on that. He could see the soldiers were getting cheated and somebody was putting that money in their pocket. That would really upset him, and rightfully so. It’s a big problem to fix, however, although we were starting to do it.

They just got the UCMJ there this last year and they threw the garrison logistics officer, the S4, in jail. They found out that he was part of the problem. He was still sitting in the lockup when I left. They hadn’t gotten to his trial yet. There was only a small legal staff and they were burdened with all the work they had there.

So, keeping the sergeant major focused on things was important. I had to remind him that it wasn’t as if we could write a policy today and tomorrow all of his dreams would come true. It just doesn’t work that way. I think sometimes the amount of work just became overwhelming for him.

Also, trying to get to where he got the stature he should have as a corps sergeant major. The commander he was working under before the guy he has now kind of spoiled him. He gave him more authority and responsibility than you should be giving the corps sergeant major. It’s not that he wasn’t capable but those aren’t the duties and responsibilities that come with that job. He was like the deputy commander rather than the corps sergeant major and there’s a big difference between the two. He was used to that, had lived that for a bit and liked that. Now he wasn’t getting that anymore. That was always hanging over everything, I think. He was a very promising individual. It was worth working with him because when he put his mind to something, it was good and he was very talented. I liked him.

LL: You used the word “young” to describe him. That word isn’t usually used to describe sergeant majors.

JJ: Yes, he was 28 and had three years in the army. He was a sergeant major before he even had a year in service. That was one of the drawbacks for the NCOs in the senior grades in that they’re not senior in time. By the time you get to be a first sergeant or a sergeant major in our Army, sure you’ll blow corks but you kind

of know when to do it. You don't just do it at everything. You've learned to roll with the flow when necessary and when to stop the flow when necessary. There are just going to be some things that you grit your teeth on and bite your tongue and you know which times to pick your fights. These guys, though, will come out of basic training as first sergeants. I think that's what happened to him and it's just because of the expansion of their army. There isn't a lot of military experience there.

I'll tell you he was in some ways wise beyond his years with his understanding of how some things should be. He was very literate in English, *Dari*, and *Pashto*. He could also speak *Urdu*. When I went over there, I took a couple of the NCO field manuals with me. I took one to him, showed it to him and he said, "Can I have this?" I said, "Sure, you can have that." I know he read that whole thing. Every once in a while, things would come out and I would know where he got it. He read that FM and he took it to heart. I think he must have studied it and just sponged it up. He knew what was right and how things should be for the most part. It was just that matter of experience and time that was missing. That's what he has to work with so he has to do the best job he can. He was very young.

If he wasn't a first sergeant when he left basic training, it happened not too long afterwards. Then he became a garrison sergeant major within his first year of service. Then he became a corps sergeant major maybe six months later. That's rising up.

LL: When you showed up, was that ANA corps on a red cycle or a green cycle?

JJ: They were on a green. When we got there a year ago, though, it was winter. Things slowed down. They didn't shut off but they had slowed down depending on where you were in the corps. It may have been very quiet or it may have still been fairly active.

They were still doing combat operations. There were two brigades. 2d Brigade was all in Gardez. They had come that previous September and they had not yet been pushed down further.

They were working through their plan as to how they were going to station them. 1st Brigade was spread out all over the place in the corps area. In the spring, 2d Brigade would move out. When we got there, 2d Brigade was doing mostly local operations and their operations tempo was quite a bit lower than 1st Brigade which was covering the rest of the corps area. Every day they were being run pretty hard and 2d Brigade was a bit lighter. Even 2d Brigade wasn't red but they were still new and doing training. They were probably on an amber cycle.

LL: Did you end up going out with these units on operations or was the headquarters fairly static?

JJ: The headquarters was fairly static. I went out on a few with them in the early part that I was there and we did unit visits. I pretty much went wherever the corps sergeant major went but he didn't do a lot of traveling. Part of it was that he looked at himself as being able to fix every problem right away. He still had that mentality where he felt he had this authority and power where, "If I say make it so, it will be so." That just wasn't the way it was and that's not the way it is in our Army either. A lot of generals will say, "Make it so," and they come back a week later and it still isn't so. He didn't like going down because he couldn't fix soldiers' problems either immediately or otherwise.

They'd come to him and say, "I don't have boots." "I don't have uniforms." and things like that and he couldn't fix it. It was embarrassing for him to go down there. He didn't want to be a phony. He didn't want to say, "Okay, I'll fix this stuff." and then not be able to do anything about it. He basically would avoid it. When you took him down there, he did like to visit and he liked to see his troops. He knew many of them by name. He knew his corps pretty well and they were always glad to see him but once you got past that welcome, it got down to the nuts and bolts. "We don't have any boots." "This needs to be taken care of." Unfortunately he didn't have the ability to fix a lot of that stuff. If I go talk to an S4 or a S1 personnel officer, I can at least work through something as the brigade sergeant major. I won't order anything but I can make sure something happens as the commander's representative. He didn't have that kind of ability though, and that was frustrating for him. That would limit how often he'd go out. In retrospect, I wish we had gone out more just to stay in tune with what was going on but it's not like we should have gone out every day or anything because that's not his job. He was responsible for everybody, not just onesies and twosies.

We probably didn't get out as much as we should have but a lot of the brigade sergeant majors would more, depending on their personalities. A lot of it was personality-based. When I did go out on combat operations though, he went along.

LL: When you went out on combat ops, what did you see and how good was the ANA?

JJ: I think in the combat ops they were pretty good. They pretty much know what to do. When they get out there and it gets into the small-unit tactics, even up to the battalion-level, they seem to know.

They're pretty good at that and it varies. You have some commanders who are very good at that and some who are not. It's just like in our Army. That part of it was pretty good. The formal planning varied a lot but was more weighted towards the lower end of things.

The same was true with logistics planning. There weren't too many shining stars with that. They're still suffering with that but that's why we're there, to

help them work through it. The ANA are in their own country. They know when something isn't quite right. I always felt pretty darn comfortable around them because they would know when something was up. For the most part, they'd react to things pretty well. When the bullets started flying, you wanted to be with them because they knew what was going on.

LL: So it seems that they don't really need the mentorship so much on the tactical side of things. It was more on the institutional side of things?

JJ: Yes, I think the thing that will keep this army growing and sustainable is to get those institutional things taken care of and getting their UCMJ as a regular part of life.

They need accountability. That way if you do something wrong and it's a criminal thing that people will pay for. If it's a judgmental thing or a procedural thing, maybe there will be some career ramifications. Your connection with some general somewhere isn't going to get you through this. Getting their logistics system to the point where they can account for things and where you can break that hoarding mentality they have. It has a very good basis for being there. If you don't know where your next shipment is coming from or if you don't have confidence that you'll get more than you'll hoard what you have. That's just been life in Afghanistan.

We also had to get them to understand that soldier-caring is important. There were a lot of attitudes in the officer ranks that, "If the soldiers go, the Kabul Military Training Center, the KMTC, will send me more." That isn't the way it's going to work, though. Officers were told, "If you can't keep the ones you got, why would we send you more?" It was starting to sink in slowly. Somebody is going to have to take a tumble and then the rest will wise up. They're not that dumb. Those kinds of things will keep that army as an attractive thing for recruiting. It will keep that retention up and they'll go forward and be able to increase and maintain security in that country.

Do they know how to fight and do counterinsurgency? For the most part they do. Maybe not to the point where we think they should but they're not starting at zero by any means. They've come a long way. Can things be improved? Of course but we all keep going to school too. That's not the long pole in the tent, so to speak, right now. It's the logistics, the judicial, and the soldier-caring things that will keep that institution there. They need to reduce the number of AWOLs and attritions.

LL: How was your support in Afghanistan?

JJ: I think it was pretty good. Everybody will always want more. That's just the nature of things. When we got there, we drove down about 15 of the 30 new up-armored Humvees they had gotten for the corps. They only got up-armored Humvees at all just six months prior to that.

Some of our shortages were equipment things like radios. Because of the mountains, the single channel ground-to-air radio systems, the SINCGARS, don't work very well. You have to get back to the TACSAT. They were the nicest ones to use. The chronic shortages were TACSATs and heavy weapons. We were a little short on crew-served. We didn't have one for each gun truck so we'd float them around. I don't think it really limited us, though. I think it was just that it would have been more convenient if we had more but it wasn't a limiting factor.

Maintenance support was another issue. If you were an embedded training team or ETT and you were at the corps, maintenance was good.

We had a LTF [logistics task force] and FLE [forward logistics element] down by us, so we didn't have any problems there. It seemed like they could get parts fairly quickly. Down at the brigades it got a little tougher.

We did get contract trucks in there while I was there and that helped. If you get to some of the outlying *kandaks*, though, it was hit or miss. For example, Lieutenant Colonel John Schroeder was in Ghazni or Sharana where there was another provincial reconstruction team [PRT] and another US installation there with one of the 10th Mountain groups and they were pretty good at supporting. You come in wearing the same uniform and they'd take care of you. I never heard of any problems like that. More accolades than complaints. However, if you get down to someplace like Karakul, there was a US unit there.

They'd help them as much as they could but when they weren't there, if something breaks, it's a two-hour drive to anywhere. Orgun-E was like four hours away. You just hope that the vehicle is actually drivable at least. So that was a challenge. It was harder to fix. You just have to get more maintenance folks, more contract trucks and put them in a circuit. Then, once you get there, you can't be out running missions. The vehicles have to be there, so you get into this whole chicken and egg thing. "I need to use it." "But I need to fix it." They'd go back and forth on that.

As far as food goes, that was good. Even in places where they had to cook for themselves, they didn't seem to mind it that much. They just made a rotation and went with it. We had KBR where I was and that was good. For a while, one brigade in Sharana didn't have any dedicated cooks. They had about 40 people there so they would trade off and that took quite a bit of effort. They finally got a couple Navy and Air Force guys in there as cooks and life became good.

ETTs spent too much time working US support issues. About halfway through, they brought down some Air Force brigade support teams, the BSTs. At first I thought, "Geez, this is just more people to take care of." It didn't take me long to figure out that they were there to take care of us. That was a good move. They didn't have to do mentoring. They just had to take care of the operations there.

Even what they did there could trickle down another layer or so and help the folks below them. That's where they got the cooks for Sharana. So that was good.

They know how to do that stuff and it unburdened a lot of the overhead, even for operations. They ran the tactical operations center, the TOC, for us. Maybe we'd have one ETT guy in there but the rest would all be Air Force or Navy. It made your output as an ETT much better as an organization. The other thing was transportation. There's never enough aircraft, and when you do have them a lot of times they're limited by weather. Moving people around country could be a challenge but I can't complain. It wasn't bad.

LL: How were you set up for interpreters?

JJ: They had a contracting company called Titan. I think they were under the same parent company as MPRI/L-3 Communications. They were the contractor there for quite a while during my time there.

We had a lot of interpreters. I don't know that we ever had a shortage. We never had all the staff positions full but there was always somebody on leave so their interpreter wasn't being used and interpreters weren't being used all day because you were only working with the ANA for a half day or three quarters of a day. You could spring them loose. A lot of times it was a matter of convenience, "My interpreter is gone. I have to go work it out." That would be the thing that would be the drawback of it.

We had a pretty good staff at corps as well as on the FOBs. From time to time we'd have spot shortages but we worked through them. One of the ETTs had to be the interpreter person. I'm glad I didn't get that job because that could potentially be a lot of work. We did end up having an on-site manager come from Titan which helped a bunch. We didn't have to deal with the day-to-day things in there. The interpreters lived in their own compound adjacent to ours.

We had hired a contract caterer so they didn't have to cook either. They had their own little mess hall to eat in.

We got to know who they were pretty well. They were an invaluable resource. I won't say they could make or break you. They'd break you only if you let them. They were an important part of your success. There's no doubt about that. You could learn a lot from them and you'd want to. They could give you a lot of insight into the culture and what was going on. You had to learn to manage them, too. You couldn't let them run the conversation. You had to do that. There's a lot of skill involved in working with an interpreter or working with your counterpart through an interpreter. There were a lot of English-speaking Afghans because of the proximity to Pakistan where the official language is English since that used to be a British colony. There are a lot of English speakers around that area, more

than you might think at first. There were a lot of applicants for the interpreter positions but a lot of them don't have the necessary skills. Some think they can speak English but they can't do it well enough to be an interpreter. I don't really have any complaints on that. There wasn't anything more than you'd expect to have to work through and I think in a lot of ways it was less. The interpreter service was pretty good.

LL: Did you ever encounter any kind of cultural barriers in trying to work with the ANA?

JJ: Of course. Let me give you some examples. One of them was cleanliness.

We had to work with them on their food preparation and sanitation. That's really not so much a matter of Islamic culture but it's more a culture of poverty thing. They have never had nice kitchens like we're used to. They had dirt floors in their houses. They spread a mat out to do their preparations on but they're done on the floor. They don't have plumbing. Soap is expensive. It's used sparingly if at all, so a lot of things are just rinsed instead of washed.

The way they operate their guard rotations is different as well. If there was a guard post or an observation post they had to man, they'd put the whole crew out there. Everybody who was going to have a shift then would go out all at once. Their thinking was that, that way, they were close by in case they needed them. Well, yes and no. It just doesn't work that way because most of them don't have their weapons but they're lying down and doing whatever.

They're not really "available" as much as you might think. You might end up with only one guy working out of 10. If you're rotating, there should be three guys always working. It was just things like that. If you go read some books on the Soviet Army, they operated like that then as well. It became very intensive in manpower when they did things like that.

Driving was an issue as well. Getting them to drive correctly and have discipline when they drive was difficult. Most of the soldiers couldn't afford a vehicle so many of them had never driven before in their life. It was all either full gas or full brake, one or the other. If they crashed something, there wasn't any responsibility for it. They're thinking was, "The ETT should bring me a new one. This one is broke." The biggest cultural thing and it was a little bit manipulative was, "*Insha'Allah*" or "God's will." "That happened. I'm not responsible for it. It's what God wanted." So, you'd have to work through that one. It was used as an excuse. Fortunately, I never had to work through that with Sergeant Major Fasil. He never said, "*Insha'Allah*." He was not a dumb man. He knew he could have done something about it so he would just get mad if things went bad. He understood that it was people he couldn't control, not God. That would come up a lot with the soldiers and officers who'd just basically say, "Oh well." But it's not, "Oh well," and we had to get them to understand that.

The cultural barrier is evident when you have a tribal society. How does a person have power? Part of it is age and part of it is also the awarding or withholding of favors. You see them trying to use that system as well. Authority in their military didn't necessarily come from your rank but from your ability to award and withhold favors. We had to break that down and get them into an institution where rank means something. You have authority and responsibility when you do that and it has to be used correctly. You'd see that underlying some of the motives, decisions, and actions that were taken. The same thing happens in our Army with the supply sergeant who does this or that, for example but it tends to be infrequent, at a pretty low level, or with small things. In their army, it was the basis for a lot of things.

What always amazed me when I walked into their TOCs was that things always looked nice but they didn't ever update things. They used them as a showpiece more than anything and it takes a while to change that. That's one you have to stick on them every day over an extended period of time.

They have a reluctance to use forms to drive administrative things such as their requests for supplies. I'd swear that sheet of paper weighed 10,000 pounds because you couldn't get them to fill one out and take it up there. "That's all it takes. Use it." It was a struggle to get them to do it that way. You run into those things and it helps you to get around it if you understand the roots of it. Is it a culture of poverty? Is it an Afghan tradition? Is it an Islamic thing? It's an Islamic country but it's not the same kind of Islam as you'll see in the Arab cultures. It's not practiced as strictly. At prayer time, everybody doesn't drop what they're doing, get out their rugs, and start praying. A couple of them will, two out of a hundred maybe. They're all Muslims but it's not as strict.

LL: How do you think most of the Afghans viewed you and the rest of the American Army?

JJ: Most of them either support you or don't care. They either support you actively or passively, maybe passively by not supporting the *Taliban*.

They know we're pumping a fair amount of money into their country and, unfortunately, the surveys have shown that they don't see the government doing these things for them. They see the Coalition forces doing it for them. The challenge there is to work it through their institutions to empower and legitimize them. By and large, they're pretty benign.

I've heard it said, "You can buy an Afghan but you can never own one." That is true. They'll do things for money. As soon as the money stops, they don't have any more loyalty for you. It turns pretty quick. As long as you're doing something for them, they're your friend. When the money stops, though, they're gone. Once you work with the ANA soldiers, there are motivations of loyalty that go beyond that. I felt pretty safe around those guys. I would say they were loyal to us because they

appreciated the fact that we were coming there and trying to make things better. I don't think we were seen as an occupier. We'd tell them, "We're not staying here forever. Let's get this done because we want to go home." They appreciated that, I think.

The people who don't want you there are *Taliban* and a lot of them had their own sources of income set up that would be at odds with an organized government. Maybe it's drugs or some kind of racketeering scam, something like that. Maybe they felt that if the government was in power, they were going to lose something because they were possibly a village elder, they controlled what goes on and they didn't want to share it with anyone else.

We'd get waved at a lot, from kids especially. The only time we'd get cold stares was in particular villages but you knew the *Taliban* must be around there or they actively supported the *Taliban*. You can sense that pretty darn quickly when you go into those places. Most of the time, however, if they weren't overtly friendly they'd just ignore you.

LL: When you left, how well did your handoff to your replacement go?

JJ: Were there things we could have done differently? Yes, I thought we had a lot of time and then all of a sudden we realized there were a lot of things going on and we didn't have as much time as I thought.

We forced ourselves into it. I passed off as much of the historical stuff as I could to him. Fortunately my replacement wasn't coming from the US. He was coming from the brigade level and just coming up a notch. He knew half of the corps already. He just didn't know the other half or the corps per se but he knew a lot of the people he'd be working with. That was an advantage for us.

We sat down and set aside time to go through things. The fact was that we had two handoffs. I had one to my permanent replacement, plus one with another brigade sergeant major mentor who came up to fill a gap because my replacement was going on leave. Before I even left country, he went on leave. There was another intermediate which filled the gap for a month.

We all just sat down together and went over things. They were familiar with quite a bit of it already. After I left, I remembered some things I should have told them so I just shot them an e-mail. As I was doing things, I would copy them on all my correspondence so they would know what was going on. I had things I wanted to finish up and he had started new things already while he was there. There were more things we could have done but I think we got about a 75 percent solution, maybe even 90 percent. The people to ask would be them. You should ask them if there were any holes. I take that stuff seriously, even on the civilian side. When I leave a place, I make sure everything is laid out so the guy who's walking in there knows what the deal is. I don't like walking into a mess and having to spend too much time figuring it out.

LL: Did you spend much time working with other US services or Coalition forces?

JJ: Yes. In our corps area, we had Navy. They were the garrison mentors and came in later as part of the support group.

We also had Air Force as part of the support group as well as being mentors for some of the logistical stuff.

We had Marines down in one particular *kandak* as a mentoring group. However, the people I didn't spend a lot of time with were the Marines because they were two levels down. I didn't interact with them a lot because of distance and organization. I worked with the Navy a lot, though, mainly from being the sergeant major of the US group that was there and from being the mentor. I worked with the Air Force on ANA logistics issues as well as on the US side, not so much logistics issues but FOB operations issues. I monitored a lot of day-to-day stuff. When he came in, I didn't have to do it anymore, I just had to know what was going on which really made life good.

We had Romanians in our group. The Romanians were two levels down organizationally. They were located on our FOB so I worked with them on FOB operations and in an administrative role.

We also had the contract companies of KBR, MPRI, and RM Asia there as well.

LL: Did you have any problems with any of those groups?

JJ: There were little personality problems that we worked through. We also had some problems in the beginning trying to figure out whose way we were going to run things. That was more of a person-type thing than it was an institution thing. "We're going to do it my way." and he just happens to be from the Navy. The groups I worked with for the ETTs that were setting up the logistics were so helpful.

There are just a lot of talented people out there. The Navy folks were a good group to work with and had a lot of talented people. There are differences between the services. The Navy is a platform-based service whereas the Army is a personnel-based one. There are different ways of approaching problems and that causes issues at times. Once you realize this, you can move forward and get things done. In our corps area we got out of the "us versus them" thing. There will always be some of that between the services but it will be there within the Army as well. "I'm infantry and you're artillery. It's you artillery guys who are causing the problems." I would say that it was no greater than that kind of thing. When those Air Force folks came in and I figured out what they could do, I was happier than heck. It was really a great day.

LL: What about the contractors? Did you have to deal with them a lot and did you have any problems?

JJ: I dealt with them a lot. The MPRI guys were the doctrine experts and they did some mentoring. I thought they were a great resource because they didn't need to worry about any operational issues on the US side. All they had to do was worry about the ANA.

They could just keep turning out training products and things like that. They could research stuff for you and that was enjoyable. I had a particular person I worked with who was also an NCO mentor and we got to where we could get things done very quickly.

We talked all the time, every day. "What are you going to do today? How are you going approach this? Which part are you going to do? Which part am I going to do?" He was a good person to work with. He had a good personality. I was sort of the FOB mayor until the Air Force came in and then I didn't have to work it as much. During that time I worked with them on different maintenance issues or FOB improvements and things like that. That was in conjunction with the camp engineer and a little consortium of folks to take care of the day-to-day things on the FOB.

We also had a formal meeting every week to see what we needed to work on. KBR was good to work with. The guys down at Khowst were fantastic as well. They were there to support the troops and they knew it. That's what they wanted to do. The same thing was true for the ones up there in Gardez. They'd do as much for you as they could. Sometimes they'd kind of stretch the boundaries of what they were supposed to be doing just to help you out but I never wanted to do anything that would put them or their jobs in jeopardy. Some of them had military experience. Their managers had been in their game for quite a while. This wasn't their first trip around the block. A couple guys had been in different places around the world. I worked mostly with the KBR managers and they were a good bunch. I have a lot of respect for those guys and what they were able to do with the labor pool they had.

The only ones who were a little more of a challenge which was easily overcome with more communication, was RM Asia. They were a little secretive in what they did, so you were kind of wondering what they were getting done and then you'd go see for yourself and you'd find it was some real good stuff. They were the contractor for maintenance of ANA vehicles and they also maintained all our pickup trucks that were really ANA vehicles, too.

We'd get a lot of KBR cooks from Eastern Europe. The trades tended to come from the US. They all wanted to do a good job. They really did. There were a few we had problems with but they weren't there very long once they became an issue.

I suspect that was a pretty lucrative operation for those groups and they wanted it to stay that way. They were an asset. Get the facts before you get upset because you'll probably find out that you shouldn't be getting upset and it could probably be fixed with communication. Ninety nine times out of 100, that's what it would be.

LL: Did you have any contact with the media?

JJ: Yes. While I was there we had a reporter come down from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. She had stayed with troops in Iraq a couple times and then she came down with us. At first we felt it was just another thing we had to take care of. That was always my first reaction but when we met her, we realized it wasn't going to be that bad. She did everything herself. She went around and did interviews. She went with us on visits to other units. I don't know if she went on any operations. I know she didn't go out with me. She did daily reports and she'd share what she was writing with us. She was the one I was most involved with. There were a couple others. They'd be there for short periods of time. She was in country for about 20 days and I think she spent 10 of them in our corps area.

LL: Was Gardez where all the Wisconsin National Guard soldiers were?

JJ: No, when we first went over there, we were split between two corps areas of Kandahar and Gardez.

They were further broken down from there. Originally we came down to Gardez, and for a while there were about five of us there. Once they did the spring stationing, where they broke the 2d Brigade out and pushed them out in May and June, for quite a while I was the only guy from Wisconsin there. In the end, when the *Phoenix* 5.0 guys came in, they wanted to get the States back together as best they could. It wasn't practical for the previous groups so they didn't care. You could go anywhere back then but they tried to change that and keep team integrity a little better.

They started to group them back. All the guys came up from the south into our area and even then they still ended up divided between five locations. At least we were still in the same corps area. At that point, there were five of us at Gardez.

We also had a book author come and visit as well as a TV reporter from Oregon. That reporter was there around Christmas but he had to leave for an emergency back home. He wound up showing back up after that business was taken care of. In those 11 months, I think we had maybe five reporters there at the most and they were only there for short periods of time, maybe a week. They were mostly pro-military.

LL: What was your biggest accomplishment while you were there and what was the biggest thing that was left undone?

JJ: The biggest accomplishment I had while I was there was that the corps sergeant major stayed in the ANA. There were some days when I really thought he was going to bail on me, and I know he came close to it a couple times. It had to be a hard decision for him, especially since he wanted to get married and had finally gotten engaged. That is not a cheap proposition and at the pay scale he was at, that was very difficult. He was talking about going into debt for a number of years to pay for the wedding. It's that big of a deal, especially when he has the ability to earn a much greater income as a civilian than he would in the ANA just because of his skills in English and his degree. I worried about that every day. I don't think I can look at one particular thing but getting a number of things at least partially institutionalized in there, for example their school system within the corps and their promotion system. We didn't get a lot of guys promoted but we did get some. There were big fights on that. I don't know if there was just one thing, just raising the water level overall. Status is very important and getting the role of the NCO raised.

I think we did quite a bit of that and also getting them to use the logistics system. Those were probably the biggest things. I didn't finish it by any means. I don't think there was anything there I finished. I got it further along. That was the best I could do on a lot of it. There were a lot of things I think I would have done differently, knowing what I know now. There were challenges to overcome of just raising the status and the authority of the NCOs a couple notches.

We still have a long way to go but it got better. The seeds were surely planted in a lot of places. I could tell that by the answers and the things they would suggest without any prompting that that was happening.

LL: If you could make a military recommendation to the powers that be, what would it be?

JJ: I think we're going to see more of this in the future rather than less. I think this whole program of mentoring, nation-building, and developing is not only for foreign armies but for foreign police forces, too. If you don't do all of it, none of it will work. I think it all has to come together. That has to somehow become more of a priority in our Army because we're going to be doing more of that in the future. Should it become a skill identifier? Do we need to make it so people go through ETT school where they learn how to teach others? Maybe it becomes something like what we have here at Fort Leavenworth, where we set up an institution of ETT studies. It may not need to be that dramatic but something.

The Army spends a lot of time studying how to teach people things. We have a good education system in teaching people what they need to know. I think ETT should be another branch or course that needs to be done and it would be worthwhile to do. We've stumbled over there and, fortunately, I think we've learned from our

mistakes. I feel that Major General Robert Durbin surely has. He isn't one to keep beating his head against the wall. He'll react to things in a very rational way when he sees that things aren't progressing like they should or not turning out the way they should.

I have seen that from just the year I was there. People have been working in this. I thought of that when I was over there but they didn't show up because I thought they should. Somebody else thought so. Having the ANA come over here to the US and that may be because I thought they should. I gave some input to some of those folks who came over to ask us what we thought of our training.

We had four different groups come over to ask us about the training and by the time the third one came over I told them that we should send the ANA over to the US. I doubt that was the reason. There was probably somebody else with more influence which made it happen but things are definitely changing and getting better. That role is going to come away, in many cases from the Special Forces, the SF, who traditionally did that because it's so much different. You're not standing up a militia or a village protection unit. You're trying to stand up an enduring institution which in many ways is beyond what SF is missioned to do, prepared for, or wants to do.

Maybe it should be mandatory for all officers to spend some time on an ETT. I hesitate on that one because not everybody should be on an ETT. You have to be very tolerant of people, understand that they're not going to jump when you bark. You need to understand their motivations and why they're doing what they're going to do. You're going to have to appreciate and be willing to do some things that you might have been uncomfortable with before, things like how they express their appreciation, gratitude, and familiarity. You need to be able to indulge in their cuisine and understand the way they live. It's not for everybody, to be sure but it's something to look at. How can we get really good at this? I think we've started on that. The new counterinsurgency manual will play a big part in this. If this is going to be the new face of conflict for the next generation, then we need to get good at it now. I think this organization has the means to do it.

LL: Do you think that National Guard and Reserve Soldiers are more suited for the ETT mission than the Regular Army just by the nature of where they're coming from?

JJ: I think there are certain strengths they bring to it that give them an edge in some areas over the Regular Army. I think the Regular Army has strengths that we don't because it tends to live it more than we do. Their expectations will be more stringent than ours are as far as military discipline and how things should go. That's more of a strength for them but I think the Guard and Reserve bring a little more in that they are not only military but they all have a civilian occupation, too. That definitely helped us out there.

We had small groups out there and you picked on people's skills a lot from the civilian side of the world, be it law enforcement or information technology. We had an infantryman come over who knew a ton about IT. In fact, that's what he did in the civilian world. He could network and stuff. He didn't like it but for his first four months that's what he ended up doing. He was our IT guy. That was very valuable. You won't get them to the level of professionalism that the Regular Army has. It goes back to my first comment.

They live it every day. We all set our standards to the Army standards. We know there can't be Guard standards and Regular Army standards because that just won't work. I think sometimes we're more likely to cut corners than they would be. At particular stages you need to accept that from the counterparts you're teaching and don't let it frustrate you so much. Since I've been over there, though, I'm thinking that that's just not as important and after seeing some of the other Regular Army units, I don't think that's necessarily so true either. It's just like anything. There's a whole spectrum out there. I can point my fingers in any direction and find that without too much trouble, so that isn't such a matter of importance.

So, this is strength and it will give you an advantage in some cases but I look at the Marine group that we had down there and they were all full-time Marines. They did a hell of a job and they were good mentors. It had more to do with expecting more and being more demanding of them, and they rose to it. There were things they did that, looking at it with civilian eyes I wouldn't have done it that way. It may have been more efficient but I don't know if it makes or breaks you. I do think that it's a good tour for Guardsmen and Reservists, especially for those in senior ranks. I think it's a very fitting tour for them. Why? Because at that level and when you're trying to grow an army like the ANA, you can do the job just as well as your full-time Army counterpart. Maybe there's some advantage to this here and there but the bigger thing is that they can do the job just as well. The tolerance thing comes into play at times because I could see some units that we were partnered with who were almost afraid of the ANA.

They wouldn't get out of their trucks and they wouldn't mingle with them. I don't know if that's a Regular Army thing. If you go into a room with a lot of strange people you don't know and you don't have much in common with, you're just going to be very hesitant, whereas if you're there every day with them and you know them, it's no big deal. I don't know if there is a lot of difference now that I've talked it all through. I will say it's a good tour for senior reservists and guardsmen.

LL: Can you talk about family separation?

JJ: I'll tell you that it sure makes it easy when you have a good spouse. I saw folks who had family issues and I just thanked God every night that I didn't have to go through all that. It's hardest when you have young kids. I have a couple of them.

They're 11 and 12 years old now. That's harder. You miss them. There's no two ways about it. Some of it is alleviated by being able to communicate with them by e-mail. I e-mailed every day. Voice makes a lot of difference as well. There's where it probably swings the other way. Regular Army families are used to separation more. Unless you have a civilian job where you do a lot of business travel and even then it's not like you'll be gone for months at a time. This was the first time my family had to go through this. It was eight months before I saw my kids and took leave. That's a challenge but it's just something you endure. You think, "Well, I've missed parts of their lives." The other part of it is, though, that this is a duty we should do for the country. My wife and I like to think of it this way. Think about the active duty folks such as that guy who goes into a submarine, sinks for six months at a time and then comes up. Think about these Regular Army people who have these extended deployments, not just one but a series of them, and then they're moving from base to base. They have to uproot the kids all the time. On the civilian side you might do that too if you're a career person with a company, you might get moved quite a bit. By and large, though, it doesn't happen like that. In the military it's more of a way of life.

In the Air Force, they know that every third year they're going to see a new house. I think that kind of tempered it for us. You have to have a mature relationship and if isn't steady when you go, it isn't going to get better when you're gone. Hopefully you have some financial stability and you've been married for more than a year. Now, it will depend upon the person as well. One of the guys got married when he went home on leave. I assume everything is pretty good. I haven't seen him much since. I think it can happen, it just depends on the maturity of the individuals and you have to keep that long-term goal in mind. "Why am I doing this? I have these young kids. If I go now, maybe they won't have to go later." That's another thing you factor into it. Six months would be too short of a tour. Six months is a long time to be away from your family but it's too short of a tour over there. There's a lot of argument that nine months is the way to go with this. It looks like the Guard and Reserves are trying to get to that.

They'll mobilize you and then you have a year. What the Army does with you during that year is up to them. It isn't like now where it's a year of boots in theater. You have to add on the front end to that. I'll tell you this, going back to the Regular Army and the Guard there is a definite difference in mentality on the use of time. Time is money to me in my civilian job. I will not waste people's time because it will cost the company money if I don't get a product out. It isn't unique to the military. Any budget-driven organization whether government or inside certain businesses, there's this kind of a thing where output isn't nearly as important as being there and having a head count. Then if you just need more, you go beg for more money and resources.

In my civilian job, working in a factory in management, I have to live on what I make. I'm not going to get it from anywhere else, except from customers. I have to produce. You tend to be more efficient and worry about getting things done on schedule, not because your boss wants to have it but because that's how I'm going to eat. I think you tend to bring a greater sense of urgency in general as a Reservist than you do with the Regular Army folks. Sometimes the Regular Army mentality can be, "Well, there are 20 years to my retirement. If I don't get it done today, I'll do it tomorrow." I think that mentality is there. Now, after you've been there for six months, it kind of gets into you, too, no matter where you come from. At least at the start, you tend to be a little more aggressive on things you want to do. You can always find exceptions to that anywhere you go. Like General Durbin, he has these benchmarks he's got to hit and he wants them done. The leadership is underneath a magnifying glass for that whereas the lower ranks are not. There are a lot of examples on that but there's definitely that mentality difference to varying degrees.

LL: If you had the opportunity to go back to Afghanistan and do a similar job, would you go?

JJ: I probably would. I'd love to do it. The only reason I'd say no would be my kids. I'd miss being with them more than anything. I actually had a grandson born while I was over there. I'm anxious to see him. I missed being in the younger kids' lives. As far as what I was doing over there, yes, I could see myself doing it again. Looking back, I see there are a lot of things I would have done differently and, in general, I should have been more aggressive on everything. I backed off because I was afraid that someone would take off on me. I would have done less of the lower-level things and tried to influence more people. I would have tried to work my role better than I did. You always want a chance to try and fix that stuff. It's a great mission. Those people grow on you after a while. I think it's a noble mission as well, what we're doing over there.

LL: Is there anything else about your deployment to Afghanistan that you'd like to add to this interview?

JJ: I'm glad to have had the chance to come back and talk to other people about it. My experiences were not the same as everybody else's. I was glad to have the opportunity to do it. My only hesitation was, "Can I do a good enough job on it?" Now I know that I do know enough to go over there and do it. It's just a matter of doing it. A lot of the things I wanted to see done in training are being addressed. There's more I think could be done on that and I have a suspicion that a lot of it will get approved. It was a hell of an experience. It really makes you appreciate what you have here and the country we're fortunate to be blessed with. You feel bad for the few people we did lose over there. I always keep them in the back of my mind. There are families that are now left without husbands and fathers. It's a

good thing we're doing, though. I do believe we will finish this one out and I think it'll be successful.

LL: Thank you very much for your time.

Master Sergeant Michael Threatt
20 September 2006

JM: My name is John McCool (JM) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Master Sergeant Michael Threatt (MT) on his experiences during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or OEF. Today's date is 20 September 2006 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Could you start off by giving me a brief sketch of your military career up to the present and then we'll focus in on your OEF deployments?

MT: Sure, I've been assigned to 3d Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg since 1990. I started out in 3d Battalion, 3d SFG, I did a Special Warfare Center tour for about 20 months, and then I came back to 3d SFG and was assigned to 1st Battalion. That was in November 2003 and I was there up until July of this year. Now I'm here at Fort Leavenworth in the Combined Arms Center, SOF cell.

JM: You had two deployments to Afghanistan for OEF?

MT: Yes.

JM: Can you tell me what those dates were?

MT: Roughly from January 2004 to August 2004 and then June 2005 through February 2006. The first rotation I was in Regional Command-South, the RC-South, in Kandahar where my battalion was habitually regioned during their alternate rotations. The second rotation I was attached to 2d Battalion, 3d SFG, which had the RC-East picture which is considered the border fight for Afghanistan.

JM: What were your duty positions in each of these deployments?

MT: Initially I started the first rotation as the company operations sergeant which migrated into operational detachment alpha, the ODA, team sergeant.

JM: Was this in Charlie Company?

MT: Yes, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion. The second rotation I was the ODA team sergeant throughout the whole rotation.

JM: Let's proceed generally chronologically. Can you describe the circumstances surrounding your initial deployment and any preparations you made prior to deploying?

MT: For the first rotation in 2004, the unit was already on orders to go months before. When I got to the unit, they were already in the final preparations of deploying and were pretty much ready to deploy. It was at the point where all the pre-deployment activities were taking place, the training. The only thing left to do was palletize and that was done around 6 January.

We had that pre-deployment cycle of aircraft that would go until the end of the month and we ended up in Kandahar around 20 January. It was kind of weird the way that rotation was broken down. Obviously there's a continual transition of firebases in both RCs. In RC-South there were only five or six firebases that were still going to be under SOF control. Those teams that were going to those firebases were dedicated ahead of time and they knew where they were going. Once we landed at Kandahar and did the transition with the outgoing unit of 3d Battalion, 3d SFG, those ODAs were immediately sent out to the firebases to finish the transfer of authority process. That started on 23 January. It's a very rapid process at the ODA level. The remainder of my company ended up staying based at Kandahar and we didn't have what we call a place to live as far as being assigned to a specific firebase.

We were used as a general purpose force for most of that rotation. When I say that, I mean there were a lot of long range-mounted vehicle patrols, numerous air assault operations against medium-value targets or MVTs and high-value targets or HVTs, and we shared in some training of the Afghan National Army at that point. The ANA we had at Kandahar were already trained by the previous battalion in the rotation before us. It was hard to stay mission-focused on any particular thing during that rotation because we were really never given a defined area to operate in. When there were no HVT or MVT targets on the platform for targeting, my ODA, which consisted of 10 guys, and our three ground mobility vehicles were sent out to an area such as Deh Chopan, Musa Qaleh, or areas like that and we would just drive around sometimes for what seemed like weeks at a time trying to develop intelligence on the region. I wouldn't say we were ever sent somewhere blindly. INTEL always led us to go to these places. We didn't pick the locations. The locations were dictated to us. Once we got on the ground though, what we did within that area was up to the ODA.

We did have priority information requirements, the PIRs, which we were trying to satisfy for the command. Most of the time we weren't able to answer a lot of the PIRs we were handed but we were able to generate other types of INTEL. You can't go into any town or village in Afghanistan and talk to the local population without someone telling you about bad guys, so we ended up generating a lot of INTEL all throughout those operations. A lot of them ended with us capturing low-level leaders or people who were associated with the *Taliban*. I don't think on that first rotation we ever caught anybody who was a confirmed *al-Qaeda* member. Rather, they were low-level *Taliban* operatives.

That whole process of doing operations that way was very unsuited for a Special Forces, the SF detachment, because we're used to having a piece of ground we own with INTEL that can be developed consistently day after day. That wasn't the case in this rotation because we weren't given a solid piece of ground. For a period of one week or two, we may be in one province and then called back to Kandahar, stay there for a predetermined amount of time, and then we'd be sent to another area. It was pretty frustrating for the ODA.

JM: Is this how 3d Battalion, 3d SFG was employed also?

MT: No, they all had pieces of ground, and I'm not sure why we didn't assume the same role they did. I think it had a lot to do with the realignment of bases with infantry units and things of that nature. A lot of the bases were closed down. I think what happened was that there were a certain number of firebases operational in RC-East. Some of them belonged to the infantry guys. The majority of them belonged to SOF. During that previous rotation before us, the decision was made to shut down a certain number of those firebases and at some point in time relocate them to other areas but those areas hadn't been designated yet. So we had an excess of ODAs on the ground versus the number of firebases. What we did was when one ODA at a firebase was out on a mission and needed reinforcements or just more people to help execute a mission, ODAs at Kandahar from my company would get sent out to those guys to help augment. That happened a lot. Not really from my ODA. My ODA was generally focused on the Deh Chopan area which is a very mountainous area and a very bad place in Afghanistan.

We were sent there originally to confirm or deny some INTEL reports that we'd gotten about 400 to 600 active *Taliban* operating and also staged in that area. Because we were at that spring transition period between the snow and good weather at the lower altitudes, we had a hard time getting into the area because of the amount of water runoff from the higher elevations when the snow was melting but once we did get into Deh Chopan, we confirmed that there was a heavy *Taliban* presence and that they were holed up there for the winter. It was isolated from any US bases. There was generally one good route in and one good route out of the Deh Chopan area, at least by vehicle, so it was a good place to be holed up for those guys. As we started operating in there, we started stirring them up.

They planned numerous attacks on us and none of them were ever successful, primarily because we never stayed fixed in one place long enough. At this point we were 100 percent mounted. We didn't have tents or anything and we were probably covering 20 to 50 kilometers a day. Logically we would hit population centers within Deh Chopan of about 20 to 200 people. Not a whole lot of people there but we kept making those rounds into the population centers, building rapport with the local leaders. Despite how isolated these people were from the rest of the country

and living in the interior portion of the valley and cut off by these mountains that were in excess of 12,000 feet, one thing we found very unique was that the local mayor of Deh Chopan knew we were coming two days before we got there.

That first trip up took us about four days because the routes we initially went in on were mostly impassable because of the mud. When we talked to him, we asked him how he knew we were coming two days out and he said he had a pretty good security system that he had organized for the local people. I don't think he had ever taken a hostile role against the insurgents in that area because they were outnumbered. It was primarily to protect against local thugs and normal crime. He had a hand-drawn map in his office that had all the little regions in Deh Chopan and who were the leaders he dealt with at that level. It was amazing for a hand-drawn map. It had all the passable routes drawn on it, very realistic for something that a couple people just sat down and drew with pencil and paper. It was pretty unique. He was able to give us a lot of information about local *Taliban* operatives and even MVT *Taliban* operatives that had habitually used Deh Chopan as a refuge.

They would go into provinces within the southern region of Afghanistan to operate and when they were out of ammunition or just tired of fighting, they would retreat back into Deh Chopan because the mountains and cave complexes in the area were so enormous that we'd never find them. It was a hole-up spot for these guys.

JM: Were there any significant operations you conducted in the Deh Chopan area?

MT: Well, I won't mention the name of the operation because it might be classified but we ended up getting into one big operation there where we actually engaged about 400 Taliban, not just my ODA.

We got up there, found the support network in the area for the Taliban and realized it was a place for these guys to hole up. The little indicators we were picking up and the big INTEL picture we were getting on the ground from the locals helped a lot as well. Plus, we also had a dedicated INTEL team with us that was able to hear *Taliban* traffic on radios.

We put all that information together and realized there were a lot of *Taliban* in the area. We sent that information back to the forward operating base, the FOB, which was our higher headquarters, and they came to the conclusion that, as soon as the weather gets a little better, the *Taliban* were going to start moving around and getting active. The FOB then sent another ODA up into a different part of Deh Chopan and they got ambushed on their way there. Lucky for us, no US personnel were hit but two vehicles were shot up pretty good.

Little incidents like that over the next two or three weeks led to a company-sized SF operation with about 70 to 90 ANA and a couple embedded trainers from the Marine Corps. The company commander planned a two-part operation. We needed to have people on the ground in vehicles to keep generating the radio traffic so we could pinpoint *Taliban* units in the area and my team basically filled that role. Once we generated exact locations on the ground, then they started to bring other ODAs in by air around Deh Chopan in blocking positions.

We would move through the valley hoping to push the enemy together and it was actually pretty effective. My ODA was never decisively engaged with small arms fire, however several ODAs were. They were actually able to ambush *Taliban* trying to move out of the area. At this point, we had interrupted their mission cycle.

They were holed up there with limited supplies of weapons and ammunition and this was not a region where they habitually fought in. It was a refuge area for them and we interrupted that process. I don't think they were actually ready to engage US forces at that time. We kind of pushed them into it. Like anywhere else in the country, they always like to pick and choose the place and time of the fights and this did not afford them the chance to establish a plan against us.

We moved them around the mountains and engaged them every chance we had. It was very successful as far as interrupting their daily life. I don't think we killed as many insurgents as we wanted to over the seven to 10 days we were up there. It's hard to say how many we killed because a lot of aircraft were used and the aircraft were used to bomb positions high on the mountains that we couldn't get to.

We could, however, use optics to guide aircraft into the area. In that particular operation, one night my ODA was still on the valley floor level about 2,000 feet below but we had optics on the side of a mountain around a cave complex that had active guards outside. Well, we tried to get an AC-130 Spectre gunship up there to engage it. They wouldn't do it. The aircrew wanted to engage but they did not get permission from their higher to go hot on the target, even though there were actually five to eight guys outside that cave actively pulling roving guard on the entrance, they clearly had weapons, and the company had been in a moving gun battle with these guys at this point for three to five days. Anyway, the aircrew positively identified the number of people and the number of guys who had guns but what they didn't have was an element of hostile intent from the aircraft side. Because we weren't actively engaged in a gun battle at that point, they weren't cleared hot.

They were bad guys. Everybody knew they were bad guys but it's at this point when an operation starts to linger on where the rules of engagement don't necessarily change but it gets harder to do certain things, especially when you're

dealing with aircraft that can do enormous damage and generally destroys whatever it attacks. Somebody at some level didn't want them to engage that target. Not at our level, of course but these bad guys were at a point where we couldn't really get to them and if we did try to get to them, they have observation posts out as well and they would have been long gone by the time we got there.

We were actually trying to devise a plan to get to these guys since Spectre could not engage but it would have required having Spectre on station for hours past his station time and for some reason we couldn't get that. I think at one point he had to go back and refuel.

We were trying to get him back on station to keep eyes on the guys as we maneuvered to them which would have taken hours but I think there were other troops in contact somewhere else in country that pulled Spectre away. So we lost the momentum on that and we didn't get those guys. Looking back and putting two and two together, that's probably where Mullah Omar was holed up. It's a common TTP [tactic, technique, and procedure] when there's a HVT around that he's in a very defensible location with active guards and that's what we saw.

The operation finally ended after about 10 days because we'd pounded them so much over that week that they just left the area. Like they will anywhere else in the country once they lose momentum, they just drifted away in small numbers and melted back into the population until someone reorganizes them again. That was the biggest operation we did that we actually saw results from. I would say that, during this rotation, we did 15 to 20 air assault operations with the ANA and the 10th Mountain Division. All those were fruitless.

We never caught intended people but for every operation we always brought back a couple detainees who were associated with some other operation, just named people not MVTs or HVTs. A lot of those guys were questioned by the Defense Intelligence Agency, the DIA, and released. The ones who weren't released were turned over to the holding facility at Kandahar. They were normally held for one to three months and then released. Not a lot of excitement in that department as far as my unit was concerned.

JM: What were some of the tangible effects of your unit not actually owning a piece of ground?

MT: We'd become pretty frustrated and worn out and that's probably because we didn't own a piece of ground. SF guys are notorious for taking a piece of ground, molding it and shaping it into what they want it to be. Every ODA has the ability to develop its own INTEL and obviously some do it better than others but the INTEL you get from a specific piece of ground that you're operating on every day is the INTEL that matters. By the time you often get INTEL from the higher echelons, it's old and a lot of times you don't even know how old it is so it's usually

not actionable. It's the INTEL you gather on your piece of ground that you can action on a lot of times with effects.

We saw that lots of times on the second rotation. We were that SF detachment and we had our own piece of ground on a firebase. During that first rotation, a lot of good things happened for other ODAs but as far as mine was concerned, we just drove around the countryside trying to develop actionable INTEL which didn't happen a whole lot.

Then we did a relief in place, the RIP, with 3d Battalion, 3d SFG again. We were just a mounted team so we didn't RIP with another team per se. The guys at the firebase did, though. Let me go back a little bit. During that rotation, we were actually given a mission to go back into Deh Chopan, probably a month later. The command was mulling over the fact that there were a lot of bad guys in the area. There was no police network established and no ANA camps, and so we needed to put a US/Coalition presence around Deh Chopan. So we were given the mission to go up there and find a good piece of ground to build a firebase on. We were on the ground for about 10 days and came up with primary and alternate contingency sites for firebases, taking into account the environmental effects, force protection and accessibility. We had a matrix to go by.

We came up with three good locations and turned them in. From what I understand, the rotation after us actually built a firebase around southern Deh Chopan. I'm not sure if they chose one of the locations we found. I don't think it was actually a hard firebase that you would expect to see in the rest of the country and I don't think they had the intent to leave it there and man it throughout the progress of the war.

They took HESCO barriers, made a defensive wall and the guys up there lived in tents. I'm not even sure if SF guys manned the base. I want to say infantry guys did but I'm not 100 percent sure. I do know that a firebase was built in that region based off information that we had put together. The intent was already there to build one; they just wanted somebody there with eyes on the ground who knew what the area was like to do the initial planning for that location.

JM: How were you resourced as far as interpreters went?

MT: We had a local category 1, the CAT-1, interpreter or 'terp that we had used during our whole mission cycle. He wasn't the only one but he was the main one because he spoke several dialects, was fairly educated as far as the Afghans were concerned, and he had a fairly decent ability to interpret back. We could understand him, his English skills were pretty good, and so he was a good person to bring with us. This guy lived with us everywhere we went. He was on my commander's vehicle and he had access to everything we did.

We didn't do anything that was really classified, though. Most of our operations were presence patrol type operations that maybe escalated into something else, capturing guys or developing INTEL. I won't mention the area because this was a DIA operation and is probably classified but we were in this area and close to a target that was a DIA-vetted target. From information that was given to us on the radio, we learned that the guy was in the area we had been in for three to five days. His name came back up and they knew he was there in that area but we didn't have any INTEL on the guy.

We didn't know what he looked like or where he lived and there was actually some confusion about where he lived. Anyway, they flew a helicopter in with a DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] source and he could positively identify the guy and the compound he lived in and this source actually came with a hand-drawn map he had made. Originally they wanted to send just the map out to us but we told them that wouldn't do us any good because most sources we'd used from DIA didn't draw well enough for us to go into an area that we don't know. DIA and our command wanted to take this as far as they could though, so they sent the source and the DIA agent out on the bird. The DIA agent gave us a five-minute overview, left the source with us, and then he took off. The next day we were going to hit the compound, and this was around 2200 or 2300 at night when we actually got the guy.

We talked with the source the rest of the night, came up with a plan, got a little bit of sleep, and the next morning we briefed the ANA. Finally, we went to the target and captured a couple low-level guys in the compound but the guy we actually went to get we had missed by 30 minutes to an hour but no one on the target knew we were coming to get him.

So we went back to the site we had stayed at the night before and it was at that point that the DIA source told one of our ANA guys who could speak a little bit of English that the interpreter we were using was a bad guy. "Well, what do you mean by bad guy?" What had happened was that when the detachment commander was telling the ANA through the interpreter just what we were going to do and who we were going to get, the interpreter was telling them something different. He was telling the ANA not to engage targets, not to capture people, and things of that nature. I don't think the interpreter realized that one of the ANA guys could speak English, enough to where you could understand him.

Anyway, we started talking to the DIA-vetted source a little more and he basically said, "You need to have that interpreter checked out because he isn't working for you, he's working for somebody else." Being that this information was coming from a DIA-vetted source who had done countless operations with a handler, he obviously had some legitimacy so we took his word for it and didn't let on to the interpreter that we suspected him until we got back. Our normal process was to drive back into the front gate of Kandahar and go by what we called the

'terp shed. That's where all the local CAT-1 'terps would hang out until a US guy would come back and get them for an operation. This is where we'd usually drop them off. This time, though, we told him we were going to go right back out, that we only needed to get fuel, food, and reload vehicles and then we'd be going out again. We told him just to stay with us and so we took him back into the SF camp.

We'd already coordinated with the intelligence officer, the S2, to have this guy interrogated and they were going to use Marine interrogators who were on loan to our FOB.

JM: What were the interrogators able to find out?

MT: They worked him over for about two days and I think it came out that this guy was actually working for either Pakistan or Iran. He was a source sent in. Although this guy never had access to classified operations or classified information (we never really shared any information with the guy until it was necessary) having a guy like that embedded in your organization who you're relying on, who's working for the wrong people, is very detrimental. He's probably reporting operations as they happen.

We'd use this guy for a week at a time, bring him back and drop him off at the 'terp shed. What does he do? He goes right back to the people he's working for and he tells them, "Hey, they're doing operations up in Deh Chopan." He knows the names of people we're targeting because you have to tell him so he can tell the ANA. He sees way too much. I don't know a way around that.

Obviously there are not enough CAT-2 interpreters in country to farm out to every maneuver element on the ground. I wish there were because you have about a 99 percent chance that those guys are legitimate. The CAT-1 interpreters, on the other hand, are only genuinely motivated by one thing and that's money. Most of these guys have only learned English since the US has been operating in Afghanistan and they realized that guys who learn English are getting paid good money. I think our average 'terp was making about \$1,200 a month which is a lot of money, especially for a young Afghan guy 16 to 23 years old who's never done anything but farm dirt before and has never made a decent living at all. It's a lot of money. It's very easy for these guys to start working both sides of the fence once they become embedded with a unit.

What happens is that you find an interpreter you like and can work with and you tell him that he's now your 'terp. Even when you're not using him, you keep paying him because you don't want him farming himself out to another US unit. You generally keep him on retainer, so you're paying money every month to keep him on standby because it's hard to find an interpreter you can work with. This guy would just hang out, collect a paycheck, and be there when we needed to do operations and then come back and report. Well, bad guys see this process. It's not

covered up. It's in the open. They see US guys going out, picking up the 'terps, going out to do operations and then bringing them back afterwards.

They realize these guys have a lot of information, because they're working with guys who're doing 80 percent of the work in Afghanistan, especially at MVT levels. Why not target these guys? They're motivated by money, so what's stopping these guys once your hands are off them from being approached by someone from *al-Qaeda* or the *Taliban* and getting paid to tell what they know about the Americans? Or maybe they threaten them or their families.

JM: Do you know what this guy's motivation was?

MT: I'm not sure what his motivation was. I know he was sent there but I don't think he was forced into it. I think he was probably trained to do that job. He had firsthand access to numerous types of operations, even operations he didn't participate in. He overheard radio conversations of just local chitchat between US and Coalition forces about people, places, and times. At some point in time we could have easily become a target for a deliberate ambush, a sophisticated, deliberate ambush based on information this guy knew. Luckily we never were but that's something people have to think about.

We've gotten so wrapped around the axle, once we've been given a mission, about getting outside the wire to where our target area is and doing the operation that we pick these 'terps up at the front gate and don't even think twice about it. Guys need to be very selective. There are ways to vet interpreters. If you're going to use a CAT-1 'terp, give that guy's name and all his personal information to the S2 and have them do an extensive background search. Every major element operating in Afghanistan has access to a database of named people. You have a white list, a black list, and a gray list. Run his name and see what comes up. Use English-speaking ANA guys or partner forces who speak English to help vet those guys. It worked out for us that time and obviously it was just too late in the operation. Have CAT-2 'terps vetted through normal conversations. One thing we did on my last rotation was to take tape recorders and tape record everyday conversations when the interpreter was on missions in his interpreting role, hand it to a CAT-2 'terp on the firebase and have him listen to it, see if anything he says raises flags. That's how we caught the first guy. He was telling the ANA to do the exact opposite of what we were telling them to do.

We were very security-conscious, both actively and passively. Things you can do actively to vet that guy, you need to do. A lot of people will say that you can't tape record a guy without him knowing about it. Yes, you can. US law doesn't apply everywhere you go. That's something a lot of people don't understand. We have laws in the US that protect US citizens against illegal wiretaps and things of that nature. In most states it's against the law to tape record conversations unless you have consent but that doesn't apply over there.

We videotape guys in interviews because you don't have the ability to vet them on your own. You don't speak *Pashto* or *Waziri* or whatever is spoken wherever you're operating in. Use the tools you have in your tool bag to help you do that. You don't have the ability to have a CAT-2 'terp everywhere you go. However, I promise you, if you're in your firebase there's always a CAT-2 'terp who just does normal stuff such as translating documents or whatever. Use those guys. They make a lot of money and they're a good asset to have. On the second rotation, we didn't have any instances where we thought anybody was dirty. There were times when we had indications that someone may be dirty but our vetting process proved that they weren't. They just turned out to be uneducated and were not able to interpret things that we wanted them to interpret.

JM: It seems to me that the only surefire way to prevent that is for US forces to have enough of their own *Pashto* and *Arabic* speakers. How were you guys situated as far as language skills?

MT: When you look at a SOF unit, they all have a language capability. I came from 3d SFG and my target language was French. I know 3d SFG has an internal language lab that teaches *Pashto* and *Farsi* but not to a graduate level although at the operating level. The problem you have in SF units is that we have the assets there that are good assets and we've even intended to do it several times but it's just having the time to do it. What you're looking at is a six-month rotation on the ground but you have that month before and month after for RIP and then getting in and out of country. You're actually on the ground nearly eight months. You're going into a 45-day refit and recovery period followed by a block leave period, then you have two to three months of train up on ranges, vehicle training, and all that other stuff you need to do to get ready to go back and then you're back in the combat zone again. There's just no time. My detachment took the level-zero *Pashto* course offered at our language lab.

We probably learned 50 words but those 50 words helped. With all this technology available now there are CDs and interactive language programs on the computer and the big Army is starting to get big on that. People need to take advantage of that whenever possible. It's hard for the SF guy to do it though, because he's so time constrained but if you could learn 50 words, you're going to be 50 words better off than you would be if you didn't know those 50 words. Choose the words carefully. Choose the words you're going to commonly use. Make them military-oriented words and you're going to do okay. Pick up a lot of words in country. In the SF world, we work one on one with Afghans more so than Americans. At my firebase on this last rotation we had about 120 Afghan security forces, the ASF, and a company of ANA that eventually turned into a full battalion. This interaction allows us to pick up a lot of *Pashto*. They may laugh because my accent sounds really funny in *Pashto* but it motivates them to interact with you and it's a great rapport builder.

JM: With respect to working with the ANA, the ASF, or just with the population in general, what were some of the other rapport building strategies you used that you felt were particularly effective?

MT: There are two areas we can talk about concerning rapport. One is at the level with the military which is dealing with your Afghan counterparts or Iraqi counterparts. Rapport is a process of becoming someone's friend. Not his buddy but his friend. You build a respecting and trustful relationship but you also need to understand that there are boundaries within your relationship. At the SOF level, we build rapport with people to get them to do what we want them to do. How do you get people to do what you want them to do? Make them your friend. Whether they're your friend or not, when the rotation is over with, you have to make them believe they are and you do that by treating people with respect regardless of who they are. Just because they're Afghan doesn't mean they don't know what respect is.

If you look at Afghan society, their entire life is built around relationships. Everything they do is relationship oriented. All the males will get together in their villages every Friday for prayer. Americans tend to be standoffish, so you have to assume a different role when you go over there. You have to embed yourself with them. There's a term "gone native" but you don't have to go native and if you do you lose sight of what your actual goal is and what you're trying to accomplish. You don't want to become an Afghan but you want to get embedded with them enough that they believe that when they wake up in the morning, you're going to be there. That relationship has to be built upon every day.

They're going to look at everything you do and how you do everything. They already had a preconceived notion of what Americans were like before we even set foot in Afghanistan in 2001. Now that they've worked with us for the last five years, they know what America is about and they've seen a lot of us.

They know there are different attitudes and quirks that Americans have and they realize now that Americans are people too. The primary thing you can do to build a rapport is to partner yourself with that person you want to build the rapport with. You want to act as much like them as you can while still maintaining your perspective as an American.

They hold Americans in very high regard so when you do something, especially if it's contradictory to what you're telling them to do then they're going to notice it. They may not say anything to you but now you've built a mental block in that person's mind who you're trying to partner with every day. For example, we had a military role with the ANA guys and my team leader, a captain, would partner with the Afghan officers. He would sit down and have *chai* with these guys. He would train these guys. He actually showed genuine interest in these guys and very good

rapport building. I would take the senior noncommissioned officers, the NCOs, in the unit and build rapport with those guys. I would show them how to do my job and they'd show me how to do theirs. I'd show them how to make their job better and it wasn't done in an authoritarian style.

They don't want to feel like they are inefficient, especially the senior leadership and the officers in the military. They believe that knowledge is power and if you take knowledge away from them, they feel like they have no power. You have to understand that to effectively build culture with the Afghans or the Arabs you have in Iraq, you have to understand their culture as much as you can. You're not going to be able to understand it all but if you understand enough, when your boots hit the ground with the guys you're going to be working with, you're going to make friends. You're going to make good friends.

When you work with these guys, you need to show them every day that you care. If you make a promise, keep that promise. Show him you're not just concerned about him but how he does his job as well. Give him the tools to work with. If he screws up, don't go bashing him on the head and telling him he's all screwed up but show him the right way to do things. Always give this guy a way out. Never make him feel like he's a failure because if he feels like he's a failure, it's not going to work out for you because now he's going to be embarrassed to deal with you every day. He's going to feel like he's let you down. It's the reverse in our military.

We talk about mentorship in our military but our mentorship is crushing somebody every time they do something wrong. Well, that approach doesn't equate over to the other side when you're dealing with Afghans or Iraqis. They don't live their lives that way and when they have lived their lives that way, it's been under an extreme regime like the *Taliban* or Saddam Hussein and they don't want a part of that. Now they're free nations. They want to operate like free nations.

They want to be free thinkers and a lot of these guys are free thinkers if they're given the ability to do so. Another good way to build rapport is to not segregate you from your partner force. That's probably the worst thing you could do. There's an article out there titled "A Camp Divided" about the military training team, the MiTT, role the big Army has in Iraq and it's a prime example of how not to build rapport.

Our firebase was probably 300 meters by 150 meters, very small. In that space we had 400 ANA, 120 ASF, 10 SF guys, a couple CAT-2 'terps, six to eight Marines, and an artillery battery. It was pretty crowded for a firebase and living like that forces you to live with your counterparts every day. You don't have to go native and live your life by their code. That's not what they expect you to do but what you don't want to do is have your side of the camp, where you're living like kings and be separated by a wall from the rest of the camp where they're over there

living like scum which Americans are famous for. That's one thing the SOF side of the Army has figured out and known for a long time. It's hard living but that builds a relationship between you and the guys you're going to combat with every day. It fosters an environment that allows these guys to believe that you're as much a part of their unit as you can be as a US soldier and that's what they want. There are going to be counterparts who don't like you. That's just human nature but if you look at the whole scale of things, you'll have guys who are more devoted to you than even your own soldiers.

I've heard this a lot at a couple conferences I've been to recently about being SF advisors and trying to give guys advice on how to be advisors. The biggest question that comes up is, "If I'm at a FOB with 450 Iraqis and there are 10 of us, how do we effectively perform the force protection role?" Obviously they're looking at it in a linear way. "I have 10 guys. I don't have an infantry platoon for security. How do I protect myself?" Well, you do this through your building relationships. The rapport you build with your counterpart is your force protection. That's an uncomfortable answer for the big Army because they've never had to operate like that but now they're getting forced into that role and they don't have any tools to work with or any experiences to draw from. SOF has now become the big learning tool. Every place I've been in the last couple months, I've heard, "This is the way SOF does it." It's not like we're special people. I don't think we are. I've been in SF for almost 20 years now and I don't think we're special in the aspect of how we do things. I think we're special in how we're perceived by the big Army. Throughout an SF guy's career he's been taught how to work on the small element level. That's his job. Big Army doesn't do that.

We go into the mountains of Afghanistan with just eight or so SF guys. Sometimes I'll have two SF guys out with 50 ANA or 20 ASF in some of the worst parts of Afghanistan that US soldiers could go and they'd be perfectly fine. That relationship you build and the rapport building process that you have to engage in every day is your force protection. On the ground in Afghanistan during that second rotation, if one of my guys would have gotten shot it would have simply been a freak of nature. When gun battles ensued or the rockets were flying, my guys were surrounded by Afghans. It's considered an insult for you to get killed.

Remember, building rapport is a two-way street. While you're building a rapport with them, they're trying to do the same with you. You have to be aware of that because that will obviously strengthen your friendships and your rapport building process. Once you establish that, you don't have anything to worry about. There's always the chance for someone to do something stupid such as a suicide bombing attempt or something similar but there's very little defense for something like that. You just have to watch for the indicators. Chances are, though, if you have a good relationship and a good rapport that you build on every day with your

partner unit, anything that may become questionable as far as force protection will become answered on the host nation side usually before it even becomes noticeable to you.

They don't want anything like that to happen. They understand the friendship and rapport process too, probably more so than the Americans because they are a rapport based society. They don't understand rapport as we do but they do it every day. Their whole life is about making friendships, trust and dedication.

They're professionals at what you're trying to learn. If you build a strong relationship with your partner unit, you don't have to worry about force protection. They'll protect you.

JM: What about the tactical abilities of the ANA? What were your experiences with that?

MT: That's a hot topic. What you have to do is stand back and think about who they are. As US guys, we spend most of our careers training on how to do a task. For me this task is light infantry stuff, SF type tasks, and infantry guys will get tasked to do things. They spend their whole careers learning how to be infantry soldiers, so they can say they're proficient at it. What they don't understand, though, is that the guy they're getting embedded with is right off the street most of the time. He's either motivated by money or patriotism or both. He doesn't have any training. There is no basic training, as we know it. So they have to be responsible for these guys' training. You can't expect to see Afghans running around doing things like infantry squads in the US Army because it's just not going to happen. They're not at that point yet. There was a battalion commander who talked to a team one time and he said, "Let's not make these guys American soldiers. That's not our job.

We're trying to train them to be soldiers. We're trying to train soldiers who don't have any training at all." If you could train them up to a 1940s or 1950s military, isn't that good enough? Some people will say, "No, that's not good enough. That wouldn't work today." Well, I don't agree. Look at the level of training for *al-Qaeda* and the *Taliban*. It's not as sophisticated as ours. It's better to train them to a level where they can execute properly and do things right than trying to train them beyond their abilities, to a level where they can't execute at all. So if you look at it like that and you see them out doing training and you see them out doing operations, they're really not that bad. At least they all have their guns, the right gear, and the right mentality.

JM: On your second rotation you were involved in actually training Afghans, is that correct?

MT: Yes, on our second rotation, a key task for us was to train these guys to a suitable level. What exactly was that level? I don't know but we just kept training

them as well as we could and we'd set the standard where it needs to be. When we got there, these guys could operate. Were they good? No, were they good to an Afghan standard? For soldiers who really didn't know anything about being a professional soldier, yeah, they weren't too bad. If you look at it through that prism, it gives you creative ways to make them better. First of all, you have to understand how they do things as a military.

They don't have a professional NCO corps. Who does 90 percent or more of the training in the US Army is the NCOs. NCOs are trained and professional and that's what they train their soldiers to be. It doesn't happen in those armies.

They have officers. You have a company commander and he's the boss. He tells people what to do. He's responsible for training and all the admin functions and everything. You say, "He's an officer and a company commander. He should be responsible for those things." Well, I agree but responsibility and the act of doing are two different things. In our Army, company commanders are responsible for the same things but they task different things down to lower levels of authority. Platoon leaders get tasked. Platoon sergeants get tasked. Platoon sergeants task squad leaders. Squad leaders task team leaders. You have a multi-echelon process there to ensure our soldiers are trained to standard.

We have doctrine, we base our training off that, and our doctrine says that an infantry squad or an SF detachment should be trained to do certain things at a certain level of proficiency, and we train to that proficiency. The ANA doesn't have doctrine like that. It will probably be years down the road until they have doctrine. The only doctrine they've ever been introduced to is what we've handed them through our open sources such as things like the Ranger Handbook, Infantry, FM 7-8, or FM 7-10 but all those books are written in English. They can't read them. Some SF guys have gone as far as having Ranger Handbooks interpreted into *Pashto* and having copies printed off to give to key leaders of their partner units. That's an awesome idea. Another great idea is to have interpreters translate the classes you want to formally give. Don't just go into a unit, evaluate them as screwed up and say, "I can't believe my leadership is making me go to war with these damn people!" People with that attitude will never make that unit any better. What US soldiers don't understand but what SOF does understand, is that what you have is all you have to work with and so you can either leave it like it is or you can make it as good as you can for your eight months. My personality is that if you give me a piece of crap, I'm going to take all the time I can dedicate to fixing that piece of crap and I'm going to make it into something useful. If nothing else, I'm going to make it better than it was when I found it, at least for my own protection. You're going to combat with these guys almost every day. There's no downtime on the SOF side.

We don't do five days of operations and then 15 days in the firebase. In this last rotation of 280 days or more on the ground, we spent all but 23 days outside the firebase doing operations. At the same time, you have to train your Afghan counterparts. You didn't have time for team training because your team training time was used to train the Afghans. All the other administrative functions of running a firebase must be maintained as well and you had 10 guys to do that with. You were burnt. You had 18 or 23 hours in your days sometimes and there could be two or three days go by when guys wouldn't get any sleep but you can't lose focus on what you're doing. Do that initial assessment of where the ANA are and know that unless they've done two or three rotations with a good MiTT team, with an SF detachment or with embedded trainers, they're not going to be trained. So when you get over there, you should have already convinced yourself that you're walking into a bowl of soup and you need to be determined to make something solid out of that bowl of soup before you leave. If you go in with that attitude, you will leave a better trained unit.

JM: How did you approach the training and development of Afghan NCOs?

MT: The only way you're going to make these guys better is by making them run the training themselves and what we did was pull out NCOs. We would talk to the officers and show them that there were things they just couldn't do without the help of their NCOs. They simply couldn't ensure that every soldier under their personal command was effectively trained. They just couldn't do it. They can't be there for every training event. So we laid out the process and we used ourselves as an example.

We convinced the officers that this was the best way to do business. We showed them what they were responsible for but then we showed them what they actually were supposed to do every day. There were certain things that should be delegated down to a lower authority. Their job as the company commander was just to oversee it all, make sure it meets their intent. These foreign officers don't always understand that and so they had to be trained.

I took the senior NCOs, the first sergeant and platoon sergeants, and showed them how to build an NCO corps and how to do business. This was just NCO professional development stuff. It forced them to become trained at the tasks, and it also forced them to become the trainers and evaluators of the task. My team guys would then work with the squad leaders, team leaders, and the soldiers at the squad level. I would say that within two months on this last rotation that we had the ANA squads and ASF squads out there doing squad and platoon-level operations under their own control. The squads and platoons were very effective at it and really knew the big pieces of doing it but they just didn't know how to bring it all together. You can't operate a squad or platoon without all those levels of leadership. Platoon

leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders all need to do what they're supposed to do because their soldiers are just like our soldiers. They'll walk around with their heads down and weapons slung and all those things unless someone forces them not to. You had to start imposing some professionalism on their army but the key was to use yourself as the model.

We're the perfect model. We see our organization as being screwed up a lot of times but compared to them we're the perfect training model. Just make sure when you're out there in front of these guys that you're doing it right. If you're showing them how to do a task, make sure you're showing them how to do it right.

JM: You can't have any, "Do as I say, not as I do."

MT: Exactly, that's what they're used to. To get them out of that, you have to start forcing them to do it the way you want them to which means you have to start holding yourself to a higher standard as well. A lot of times to demonstrate a squad attack, we'd take my detachment and we would do the squad attack in a walk method so they understood all the moving parts. We would rehearse it also to make sure we were doing it right because there are a hundred ways to do anything.

We just made sure we did it the exact way the guy who was teaching the class was going to teach it. They saw us, we were the model for it, and they gained confidence in themselves and saw that they could do it as well. They finally were able to understand what their roles were as squad leaders and soldiers in the organization because they saw us perform these roles and it made things very clear to them. That's what they want.

They want someone to show them because they're visual learners. Most Americans have many different learning styles. We learn from reading books, we learn from watching TV, a presentation, or we're hands-on. The Afghans are visual/hands-on learners. If you can understand this and give them all the information you want them to absorb in this training manner, they'll absorb it but you can't expect to go up to an Iraqi or an Afghan and show them a 50-slide PowerPoint slideshow on how to do a squad attack. You may as well just put them all in bathing suits and tell them to go jump in a ditch. They'd get more from that.

They don't have that type of technology in their country, so don't force technology that's 500 years ahead of where they are. Pencil and paper and drawing in the dirt, is something they relate to because that's how they do business every day. They understand that and they can learn from that.

JM: You were in RC-East during your second rotation?

MT: Yes, I was at Firebase Bermel.

JM: This was in Paktika Province?

MT: Yes.

JM: Obviously this area was very close to the Pakistani border. Were there any different or more intense security threats you had to deal with? Did the nature of the enemy change at all?

MT: I'll give you a little history on Firebase Bermel. It was established just a few months before we got there but there was a big gap between Shkin and Lwara, probably about an 80-kilometer gap. It doesn't sound like much but when you're talking about a porous border region, that's a big area for insurgents to infiltrate through and have ratlines and things of that nature.

The bazaar in the town of Bermel was one of the most notorious arms trafficking areas, smuggling weapons from across the border. To stop that process, what do you do? In the past, guys from Shkin went up there to the bazaar but it's still a 15-kilometer drive. By the time they leave the firebase, all the bad guys have time to get the weapons out of there. You can't sneak up on anybody in Afghanistan. Don't ever think you can. Well, in order to keep that from going on in that area, you have to permanently base something in there, something that's going to prevent them from conducting business as usual, so you build a firebase. The 1-508 Infantry started it but somehow during the transition it got turned over to SOF and my detachment actually finished the firebase while we were there.

We actually took over the firebase when it was about half-completed from where it stands today. By virtue of putting US and Afghan forces there, you deny that piece of terrain to insurgents but mostly smugglers. You clean the area up just by putting US forces there. You don't get rid of the problem but you just move it somewhere else or make it more difficult for them to do business as usual.

Within our battlespace, around 15 kilometers around the firebase and actually it was a lot bigger than that, there was Mangretay Valley and Malaksha which are two major mountain valleys that lead into Pakistan. They were high avenues of approach for anyone coming out of Pakistan. The next one was further south of us and the border control point at Shkin. Those two valleys were notorious safe havens for anti-Coalition militia, the ACM, which is what I guess they're calling them now. It changes about every rotation. Anyway, we referred to Mangretay as Ambush Valley because I don't think there has ever been a successful US passage through there that didn't result in a gunfight or an ambush. It's a nasty area. It's a very passable valley with a defined road easily traveled by large and small vehicles. It's more like an interstate going through the mountains but you have extreme high ground on either side of the valley. From the beginning at the western end of Mangretay Valley to the eastern side which dumped out into Pakistan, was nothing but ambush positions from one end to the other. Lots of people have died in Mangretay, lots of US forces, SF, infantry, and some of the other task forces such as ANA guys. It's just a bad place.

We focused on Mangretay for two reasons. One was that I personally know guys who were shot there and guys who were killed. The second reason was that it's a major passageway from Afghanistan to Pakistan and it has literally gone unchecked for five years now. So we wanted to know how we could affect Mangretay. When you look at a campaign in COIN [counterinsurgency] terms, you know that bad guys have to survive by how they live by the population. It's easy to drop in and out of Pakistan but once you get into Afghanistan you have to have a support network if you're planning on staying for any period for time. The people who lived in Mangretay were the support network for the *Taliban*, the ACMs and they were forced to do so. They would do it because they would be killed or harassed if they didn't. The bad guys owned Mangretay Valley from the Pakistani border well into where it dropped out into the Bermel Valley and the large population center.

JM: Was this *al-Qaeda* as well?

MT: I don't think we ever had any defined *al-Qaeda* operatives but there was a lot of foreign fighter influence which are usually sent there by *al-Qaeda*.

We knew we weren't going to take Mangretay in eight months but we knew we could at least make a start by taking the population away from the *Taliban*. How do you do that? You increase security. You go in and you treat them like people. In the past, these people haven't been treated well by anybody. US forces have treated them badly because it's been a *Taliban* safe haven.

They go in there and every time they go into Mangretay they're kicking down doors and ripping people's stores apart looking for bad guys and weapons. Of course they find them. You can't go into any village in Afghanistan without finding weapons. It's a part of their culture. It doesn't give them the right to hold rocket-propelled grenades or bulk explosives but they all have small arms and AKs.

JM: Was this regular Army that was going in there kicking down doors and such?

MT: For years it's been a little bit of both, Regular Army and the SOF side. I don't think they ever went in there with the intention to undermine the civilian population but there were never US forces based in the vicinity of Mangretay. They always had to drive long distances to get there so they were only sent there for specific reasons. So when the troops get there, they're in a purely combat mode.

They're there to find insurgents and they know the population supports the insurgency because that's how they survive. When they go there, they're going through specific compounds, they start generating ground intelligence on what's going on, and people are pointing fingers in every which direction. Well, these soldiers are moving all over the little populated villages around Mangretay and

they're making enemies every time they do that. I think searching compounds is successful if you recover something that supports the reason you're there but 90 percent of the time that's not the case.

Success is not going to an Afghan compound and pulling out an AK because everybody in the country has an AK. Success is finding ACM documentation, plans of operations, operative lists, bulk explosives, and IED-making components. Those are successes. When you take things like that from a compound and the people see you do it, you really haven't destroyed rapport. You've actually reinforced that there really were some bad guys there.

JM: Can you comment as well on building rapport that occurs with the local populace?

MT: Yes, and that's part two of the building rapport, not only building rapport with the military guys you work with every day but the civilian population as well. If the civilian population doesn't have any faith or trust in you, they're not going to help you. What the civilian population in Afghanistan wants is someone to provide them security. They don't want cars and things like that.

They're not a want-based society but the few things they do want include personal security. If you provide them security, it gives them the opportunity to live better in their culture which is a relationship based culture. That's all they want. Most of the people in Afghanistan don't like the idea of helping the insurgents but what are their alternatives? They're affected by insurgents every day but most places in Afghanistan only get affected by US or Coalition forces at sparse periods of time.

They know you're coming in with great combat power and that you'll run the *Taliban* out of the area but they know you're only going to be there for a day or a week and as soon as you leave, the bad guys are going to come back. Lots of times, they'll be even worse than before because they'll want to know what people told the Americans. So you have to have permanent security in every region you want to affect. Putting Bermel where it was located probably had more effects than most people realize. I think they initially planned Bermel as a safety net for the Bermel bazaar, for the big part of the town, but they didn't realize how much it was going to affect the outlying areas.

We went to Mangretay and we lived there. We did our initial intelligence preparation of the battlefield, the IPB, when we got there and talked to the ASF and ANA guys who had worked in the area for years. We asked them, "If you lived here, where would you want to start operating? Where do you see the bad guys?" They don't know how to read maps but they'll tell you, "They're at this mountain, this mountain, and this mountain." Well, you start to connect all the dots and you can see this is not just one or two guys running around, it's a whole network of operatives and it's engulfed this whole village.

We needed to stop abusing the people and start to make friends with them, so we started to interact with them on a daily basis on some level and it was easy to find out what they wanted or needed because they would tell us. What they wanted was someone to just keep a permanent security presence in the area.

They didn't want a security post in their village. They just wanted a presence that came through there more that once or twice every two or three months. That's what they had before. You're doing it for them but you're doing it to deny the terrain which is the people, to the ACM. When you start running constant security patrols through the area, whether you live there or not, guess what? You disrupt what they do every day. Now, the insurgents don't have a security blanket they can count on anymore so they have to move. They have to either move deeper into the mountains or find another isolated area that's not been influenced by Coalition or US security and set up shop again.

We did search compounds. You can't go into any village without searching compounds but there's a way to do it. You don't just go up to it and surround the damn thing with big guns, start kicking down doors, and drag people around by their hair. That's not the way it's done. What you don't know at that point before you search the compound is whether or not there are really any bad guys there. Do they really have illegal weapons or contraband that they're not supposed to have? That's the premise for your search. People say, "That is soft knocking stuff and we're Americans so why should we be soft knocking? That's not what we were trained to do." You're right. We're not trained to do that. That's one of those things you have to learn, especially now when the primary mission should be COIN instead of that kinetic and forceful combat role. That was great in the initial stages of Afghanistan and Iraq but we've migrated beyond that.

We're dealing with small numbers of people but large numbers of population and how you make or break those guys determines the outcome of your mission on the ground. So we'd go up and just knock on the door. A lot of times, when you pull up to a compound with gun trucks and armed soldiers, the male of the house is going to come out. Go up and engage in conversation with him. Talk to him for five or so. Whatever's going on in that compound isn't going anywhere. You've got it surrounded. If there are bad guys in there, yeah, you're giving them time to prepare but that doesn't necessarily give you the upper or lower hand in the deal. You made rapport with that guy and if anything else happens beyond that point as you're searching that compound, it's now on him. Ask him specific questions. Get to know his name and a little bit about him and who he is. He may be a guy who has lived in that village for 50 years. He may be the guy everybody comes to. He may be a village elder. He may be a *mullah*. You don't know until you talk to him. Build a little friendship with him and then tell him what you're going to do and why you're there. Ask him whether they're holding illegal weapons or insurgents

or whatever the case may be. Of course he'll tell you they're not but what you perceive as being illegal is not necessarily illegal to them.

They never had any rule of law in that country. It's never been against the law to have an RPG in that country. It's never been against the law to have a rocket they dug up or found on the side of a mountain or to have an IED they dug up on the road. To them it's not illegal because they've never had any rule of law. So you need to ask the right questions.

They'll tell you right off the bat that there's nothing illegal going on, so you need to ask them specifics. "Do you have any RPGs? Do you have any land mines?" Land mines cover a big area, basically anything with explosives. You say land mines and they'll generally offer those up. Whatever his answer is, just tell him you're still going to search the compound and, if you find anything, you're going to come back and deal with him because he lied to you. Now you start relating that particular search and why you're there to their culture.

They don't like to be made into liars and they don't like being lied to. So now you're appealing to his culture. I can remember numerous times on the ground when we approached it like that and the guy would say he didn't want to be known as a liar and so he gave up what was being hidden in the village.

Then you keep asking questions. "Who else is in the compound?" Make him name the people in the compound. "How old are the males? Why are they here? Are they related to you?" Males don't normally come into the compound unless they're part of the immediate family or unless they're really good friends. Get the whole picture before you go in. Then when you're going through the compound, have him come with you.

JM: Were you also doing these sorts of things jointly with Afghan forces?

MT: Yes. Another technique we used was to take the American face off the Afghan population. It's impossible to do to a full extent but when you're dealing directly with the population, the population needs to see you and your partner force side by side. When you go into a compound, have the ANA go in with you. I'm not saying you don't have to go in but at some point you'll have to but don't make it look like it's a US-led operation. Some people say the Afghans aren't capable of doing it. Well, they're only not capable of doing it because you haven't trained them to do that task competently. You have to put restraints on them too because they'll kick doors and rip things off the walls and slap people around too, so you have to train them not to do that. Remember, you need to relate to their culture. This is all they've known. This is how they've done business their whole life. Every time they've dealt with the military or police in their country, that's what's happened to them.

They've been jerked around and slapped around, so they perceive it as just the normal thing to do. You give them some cultural awareness training and some sensitivity training. No one likes that word "sensitivity" but they need a little bit of that too and you need to do it because you're working with these guys every day and they can screw up the rapport for you as badly as you can do it yourself. Even though they're Afghans, the population knows why they're there and they realize we're there as a control measure. Have them do it the right way. Give that head guy the ability to go in, be escorted by Afghan soldiers, and get all the females and children and put them outside the compound in a safe area if you suspect that bullets will be fired. It depends on the tension of the situation. Have the Afghans do the search. Don't let them tear things up, and sometimes it's hard not to. In Afghanistan, I've never been to a compound that didn't have some sort of locked chest or box and they never seemed to have the key for it. Give them an opportunity to get the key but let them know you're getting into it even if you have to break the lock off. There's a good possibility you're going to force the guy to come up with the key. He probably doesn't have anything in there but if he does it's probably personal in nature so let him open it up. Let the Afghans sort through that stuff. You may come across a Koran or religious scrolls or something like that and that doesn't mean anything to me or you but to them it's very sacred. It's best to let those guys go throughout the process, then, if anything is destroyed or damaged, talk to the guy personally and come up with a means to make him happy. Just because you tear a door off the hinges by accident doesn't mean you have to build him a brand new compound. Find out what the going rate is to rebuild a door in Afghanistan and give him the money on the spot. It keeps him happy. You don't look like an aggressor anymore. You look like a professional person. You've also just given the ANA some legitimacy as well. Historically, the people are used to seeing Afghan soldiers come through the villages and just tear things up and walk away and they wouldn't pay for it.

They don't have the money to pay for it anyway. We're the bill payers over there. So if they tear something up we need to pay for it. It's all about building rapport. The next time that guy sees you, he's not afraid of you anymore, "Yes, the soldiers came in and searched my compound but they treated me and my family well. They tore my door up but they fixed it. These are not bad people." No one has ever done anything good for an Afghan, especially on the Afghan side. So that's how you build friendship over there.

JM: You mentioned the interpreter situation. Were there any other resources, personnel or assets you felt were lacking? Did you have enough money? Were there any equipment issues you had over there?

MT: On the SOF side I think we were pretty much covered. Every asset we were offered we took. We didn't turn anything down. At my firebase during our

second rotation, we had a 105 howitzer battery under our control, the SOT-A guys who are your intercept guys, we had three CAT-2 interpreters, a civil affairs and psychological operations detachments, and a radar detachment. I was probably better off than any other detachment I know. A lot of the SF guys didn't want to take in all these people because of space and logistics requirements but I felt these guys were just as much a part of our mission as the Afghans were.

We just didn't put these guys up and make them Class I consumers. We used these guys every day. Our CA guys were actively engaged every day. When you have all these other entities out there that you can bring into your mission, they can directly support every operation you do.

Going back to the rapport building process with the civilians, we had a CA detachment at our firebase. They worked for my detachment commander and me. They did whatever we told them to do within their limitations. What's a good way to build rapport within a society? Give them medical treatment. Send them into Mangretay and Malaksha and we don't send a combat patrol up there with them but escort them with GMVs and guns and looking like we're ready to kill somebody because you want people to show up. You send them up there in their up-armored Humvees but they don't look like the combat guys. The locals as well as the bad guys can tell the difference.

Send two squads of ANA with them for security, have them set up in the middle of the town, get all the local leaders together, and tell them why you're there. Tell them to bring their children and if we can treat them, we'll treat them. I promise you that you'll make instant friends. Ninety percent of the people you'll treat are kids. Many kids at some point in time may die from simple bacterial infections that they can't control in the isolated nether regions of Afghanistan but a little shot of penicillin or another type of antibiotic is going to save this kid's life.

We treated tons of kids with teeth infections which at some point probably would have become life threatening. To them you've become a miracle worker now. It takes a couple hundred US dollars in medical supplies and eight or 12 hours of your time once a week or once a month, whatever you can do. Those are rapport builders. You talk about key terrain and America is all about taking terrain but in today's world, especially in Afghanistan, that population is the terrain because the bad guys can't operate without them. So every good gesture you do towards the population, you win them over a little more to the Coalition side and you take them away from the bad guys.

JM: What was the nature of the PSYOP contributions?

MT: The PSYOP guys were in there for all the governing relations. The governor had a pretty good plan for the election process, how the voting polls would work, and getting ballots to different areas which was already embedded

in the higher levels of US planning as far as creating legitimate voting stations and ballot delivery and things of that nature. What they didn't have was a means of disseminating that information effectively. So we used our PSYOP guys to generate messages to lead up to the government elections.

We printed up documents to show where the female polls and the male polls were going to be in all these different areas. We carried them with us on our operations and we'd go into the villages, stop and have the PSYOP guys broadcast over the loudspeakers. This is kind of a way to prep people to vote. In Bermel alone, I think we had like 18,000 people show up to vote and people were expecting maybe 900. I think a lot of that was due to the CA stuff that had been going on in the smaller towns and villages, especially in the areas that had been overwhelmingly occupied by bad guys. The PSYOP campaign that was run locally from our firebase focused on getting people out there to vote. The biggest problem they had in getting people to show up to vote was security.

They didn't want a military presence for security. What are you supposed to do? They don't have local police. So what we did at the detachment level was to devise a plan. Bermel was good because it was right there about 600 meters out the front gate of the firebase so we just sent a couple ANA down there as eyes on the ground. This is Margay and it's four or five times the size of Bermel and is 20 kilometers from the firebase so it's fairly isolated. There were numerous ACM activity routes into the area and it had been targeted by the bad guys or at least the local leaders anyway.

They had two male and two female polling stations there because a lot of people came up from throughout the mountain regions there to that central place to vote. The message came out prior to the elections that they didn't want any GMVs sitting out front of polling stations. We agreed with them, because it wouldn't give the appearance of a legitimate election. An Afghan election should have an Afghan face on it 100 percent. So my detachment had to try and figure out how to provide security for Margay and, at the same time, keep ourselves out of the voting situation. What we decided to do was surround Margay.

We took an ANA unit up two kilometers outside of Margay but on a route where if something was to go on inside the town they could react to it. We put one GMV up here with about 15 or 20 ANA and I had my vehicle down here which was like two kilometers south of Margay with about 15 or 20 ASF. We just sat there. We emplaced local police that we had trained and equipped into the town proper to provide that immediate local security at the polling station and we gave them integrated communications, the ICOM, radios.

They couldn't talk to us but they could talk to our ANA or ASF counterparts, so if anything went wrong we were literally five minutes away. Essentially since the

town was here but everything around it was open, you had it blocked off. President Hamid Karzai put it out about five days before the election that no vehicles would come within a thousand meters of a polling station but it didn't say anything about tractors. Well, a lot of people have tractors in Afghanistan. It's the primary means of transportation in some areas. What we did was sit up here to be able to cover the major ingress and egress routes and we blocked traffic.

We stopped vehicles, and not everyone got the word. They don't have a public broadcast system. Every vehicle we stopped, we searched and we didn't find any bad guys. One of the reasons we decided to place ourselves two kilometers out was because if anything was to happen, it probably was going to happen against a US or Coalition force. So if you're in the town, then you directly involve the population.

We were easy targets but we would be the target instead of the polling stations. While we were at there, we were shot at by small arms fire and I think six rockets. One of them landed about 50 meters from my vehicle. We would just move another 300 meters to mess up their targeting. It throws their Kentucky windage off. They don't have very good targeting systems anyway. Most of the people outside the village never knew what went on out here. People in that country hear explosions every day and unless it's in close proximity, they don't pay it any attention.

We were out here being the target while people were coming into the village and voting. Within Bermel Valley there were 12 polling stations and some 18,000 people voted. That's astronomical. It means 18,000 people walked in for miles and miles to vote because they couldn't drive.

JM: With respect to this second deployment, what do you look back on as major accomplishments? Obviously the elections you just discussed but were there any significant operations you conducted, for instance?

MT: We really didn't do any major operations. Our focus was denying the insurgency a place to work and every mission we did focused on that.

We needed to take back key terrain which was the population and put an Afghan face on everything that went on. In order to accomplish both of those, you have to have some kinetic ability. You still have to be able to operate in kinetic mode. When we were engaged in populated areas we always had a friendly approach to everything but once we got up into the mountains of Afghanistan where we weren't engaged with the civilian population, that terrain was primarily used by woodcutters, shepherders, or *Taliban*. There was very little to no civil influence and once we got up there, we were full kinetic. That had to be done to deny them the influence they wield from those safe havens in the mountains. This was key terrain to them because they could hold influence over the population by looming over them from mountains above their village.

They don't have the population center anymore but they're that looming dark cloud all around in the high ground. You have to take that influence away from them and give it back to the population. When we went up to the mountains, it was 100 percent kinetic. We weren't worried about building rapport or losing rapport because there was no one there to build rapport with except the *Taliban*.

We became so effective and we were so aggressive in our kinetic role when we were operating in those isolated areas in the mountains, that the bad guys felt they couldn't get a break and our SOT-A guys actually heard them saying this and I read the intercept transcripts. Prior to this, they were used to guys coming into Bermel every two months, as a pretty weak element, and the *Taliban* would hand their asses to them in a couple days. So it gave them a pretty strong posture and a sense of accomplishment on the *Taliban* side because they had been 100 percent successful in the past. They didn't have that with us. They would shoot at us but it didn't matter. Everything we did, we did it right.

We didn't accomplish anything great there. I don't think we did. What we did though, was the basics and we did them right every day. When we were up in the mountain and dismounted, operating at the levels of squad and platoon, we did it right. We used planning, reconnaissance, patrolling, and security. All those things you learn as an infantry guy that should apply to everything you do, we applied those fundamentals every time. That's what the bad guys hate.

We're always ready for anything we come across and they're not. They don't have the training or the experience we have. They have a lot of fighting experience but their fighting experience is not that kinetic and it's not that violent. They like those standoff engagements, so when they start to lose the upper hand, they can slowly withdraw at their convenience on their designated routes and get away and go back to business as usual. When we did this, we denied them that ability.

We always had more than one dismounted element. If you only have one element, the bad guys like that because they only have one place to focus. They can rearrange their forces to ambush you and get you drawn into a bad situation as far as IEDs and things of that nature but when you have two dismounted elements that complement and work in concert with each other, the enemy doesn't have that advantage anymore. It takes more coordination for us. It's harder to pull off but in theory, it's easy to do.

Every operation we did was at least two maneuver elements, sometimes even three or four working in concert. The bad guys did not have a defense mechanism for that. They don't have training to reinforce that type of operation. So once they realize we have two or more maneuver elements out there, their leadership gets together on the radios and they say, "They're too strong and they're prepared for armed combat. They aren't just prepared to react to whatever we were planning to hand them, they're prepared to destroy us."

We heard that several times, and that method of thinking on their behalf became more profound as the operation went on because they'd taken so many casualties. The biggest incident that happened in Bermel was when we were in Malaksha which was another area like Mangretay. Everything I said about Mangretay applies to Malaksha.

Anyway, we were going to do a border operation in Malaksha. We had a planned Pakistani military checkpoint meeting on the eastern side of the Malaksha Valley. The primary objective of that mission was to go in and do dismounted patrols of that area. We were to find, fix, and target any *Taliban* we could find. As we went in, we were ambushed by 60 to 80 guys.

We had two dismounted elements of a squad-plus each on the high ground as a clearing party for the mobility part of going through the valley. We got to a point where our southern clearing party had to come down the hill and go to the next piece of high ground which took some time. The northern clearing party held in place and they got to where they were going because they were providing over watch but we were using jammers in the vehicles which blocks out most of your communications. My detachment commander didn't get the word that they had to stop and so he kept going. Finally, he didn't see guys on the clearing party so he stopped.

We were about a kilometer in front of the clearing party on a bad piece of terrain, on a ridgeline that was about 600 meters long. We had two ASF HiLux vehicles and three GMVs in a 300-meter stretch of this ridgeline. This ridgeline was barely wide enough for a GMV. You had a flat road and then it starting sloping off. On the north side it was probably about 100 feet and on the back side about 200 feet. It was a perfect ambush location.

We were stopped and had guns pointed in all directions to wait for the clearing party to get up on the other ground, and that's when they initiated the ambush from about 150 meters or closer. They were on the same level we were, same type of ridgeline we were on about 150 meters across the valley. That firefight lasted about 40 minutes. Initially it was two HiLuxs engaged and the two GMVs. The two GMVs had .50 calibers. I was in the trail vehicle on this piece of low ground over here coming up on the ridgeline when they initiated the ambush.

I pulled up and was able to put my vehicle at a vantage point that looked down the ridgeline at an angle where these guys were directly across from us. They were only able to see and engage what was directly across from them but I had the optimal position and I could see and engage the whole ambush line with my .50 caliber. There were only three people in my truck. My medic was driving and we had an Air Force tactical air controller or TACP on the back with a M240 and I was on the .50 caliber machine gun. That firefight lasted about 40 minutes and we had

no casualties. That was an important event over an eight-month rotation because that's something the bad guys had never done before in the history of that area. Looking at all the ambushes that had taken place and the conditions of each, this is the first time I'd ever seen or heard about the bad guys standing toe to toe with a US force at that range.

JM: Was it because you didn't have air on station?

MT: We didn't have air, and air will obviously force them into hiding as soon as they hear it.

JM: Did they know you didn't have air, or wouldn't have air?

MT: They can always tell. A-10s fly at 10,000 or 12,000 feet and their hearing is a lot better than ours.

They can even hear the bombers up there, or see them. I'm pretty sure they knew we didn't have air and that's probably one of the reasons why they stayed there so long. Even beyond that, that's the first time they'd ever stayed in a continual engagement at that level and they were suffering heavy casualties.

They'd always had perfect vantage points during an ambush. For example, if you're in the valley most of the time they're so high above you in almost a near vertical ascent that your guns won't elevate to the height of their ambush locations.

They did it intentionally, they picked spots like that, and throughout time they modified their ambush locations to defeat your capabilities on the ground but this time, we were eye to eye fighting these guys. The only thing separating us was a big valley that went straight up and then straight down. Obviously we didn't have the ability to maneuver on them and they understood that but still, with our weapons superiority, our quick reaction force, and indirect fire assets, it was amazing that the engagement lasted that long. Most engagements lasted two, three, or four minutes and then they were over with. That engagement killed probably 40 guys.

JM: You said this was an ambush they initiated?

MT: Yes.

JM: So they didn't have some HVT they were guarding or anything like that?

MT: No, this was a deliberate ambush set up for us. It was quite an elaborate ambush. You didn't just have 60 to 80 guys lined up along an ambush position on that ridgeline you had three separate elements on that one ridgeline that had a distinct separation. Each one of those positions had machine guns and numerous RPG gunners. Throughout that whole ambush they probably launched 80 RPGs and I don't know how many bullets they fired. The only thing I think I'll never understand about it was that they showed a distinct will to fight despite suffering

heavy casualties at that close of a range. After five or 10 minutes into it, we started to maneuver ground forces against them but it didn't scare them away. Our guys had to directly maneuver across that low ground and then come back and hit them because there was no other way to get to them.

They saw that. They realized they had about 30 minutes before our guys could get there but if you show your ability to take the offensive role, that usually ends the ambush. It's over. Well, not in this particular case.

They were taking a lot of casualties and the volume of fire they were able to put against us was going down while ours was sustained. My vehicle carried 1,500 rounds of .50 caliber and M240 ammunition so we were never going to run out of ammo but to me and everybody in my detachment, that was a profound day. Most of those bad guys weren't very well trained at all and there were obviously some key leaders involved which we found out later. All told, it was a pretty historic moment for those guys.

JM: Obviously this was an anomaly up to that point but did it continue to remain an anomaly or did this represent a change in tactics?

MT: Months later looking back, you can say it was just one of those times when they just felt stronger than they were but at the time we thought it might be marking a different type of TTP for these guys where they were going to stand and fight because that wasn't something they'd done in the past in that region and against the size of the Coalition force they were going against. If we were a squad or something, I could see that. From a team sergeant perspective, the guy who's responsible for my guys every time they went out, I was concerned. I approached my team leader about it and said this wasn't anything we've encountered before. This wasn't anything I'd read about and it's not a normal method of operating for these guys. Was it a sign of things changing? Was it a sign of their combat force being a lot stronger than we believed it to be? When you're on the ground there, all this higher INTEL was getting dumped down on you. Intelligence summaries and situation reports and things of that nature. I don't know how many times I've been at the firebase at midnight and, at a lot of times, that was when I was just coming back from an operation when we'd get a call from the S2. He would say they had all these indicators that we were going to get attacked by 300 guys tonight.

We never saw anything like that but it was around this same time frame where ACMs were supposedly planning an attack with 300 to 400 on a firebase, either Bermel or Shkin and the fact that we ran into an ambush like that and those guys stayed to fight despite the casualties they'd taken, we thought that maybe things were going to change. In the end, it was about a month or so before we realized that this was an anomaly. Maybe they just didn't expect it to work out like that and I don't think they ever anticipated us to be on this ridgeline. The road we came in

on took us right into this valley that separated us and them after the ambush was initiated but we didn't go into that valley. We went up on the high ground. It was harsh terrain but we still had some advantage over there.

We got over there just by mission planning and presence of thought and we took that route. If we would have gotten down into this valley, there's no telling how many people we would have lost. I don't want to even think about that. At that point, I don't think we could have elevated our machine guns because that was almost near vertical terrain. Once we got lined up on that ridgeline and were waiting for our clearing party to get caught up because their next point of clearing was the actual ambush line we got ambushed from. That's where they were en route to. At that point the ACM leader had to make a decision. Should he pull off right now and we'd never know they were there because he knew we had clearing parties or was he going to stay and engage us on the ambush line? Would he continue to wait and fight the guys over there and then fight the dismounted element? Would he ambush us now and only fight the guys directly across from me because the dismounted guys were going to be 30 minutes before they could get to him?

We think he weighed his options and took the only logical course of action he had which was to try and destroy the five vehicles and all the guys right in front of him and be out of there before our dismounted guys could get to him. I think he took that option. It didn't work out.

We lost two HiLuxs that got hit with RPGs and riddled with bullets. The GMVs got riddled with bullets. We didn't have any US or ANA casualties and I don't know how we pulled that off. This whole incident changed the way we thought about the *Taliban* in that area.

We knew they had good leadership. What we did not know was how coordinated it was and how much actual combat power they had. I think that was a demonstration but I don't think they walked away with the benefits they expected.

JM: What short or long term impact did this fight have on the overall security situation?

MT: After that ambush, the area went dead for about a month, other than the rocket attacks that happened almost every day. As far as direct engagements or hearing guys talk about pending attacks on US forces which were waiting to ambush guys that aspect of the operation on the ACM side just disappeared. I think it was a month before we heard any of the key ground leadership talking about anything. Over the month, we gathered INTEL from ANA and ASF and over the radio. One of the key leaders got on the radio one night from Pakistan and was talking to one of his junior leaders still in Afghanistan. He said, "Put all your guys to bed and take a break. I'll contact you when it's time to form back up. This last engagement with the Americans took too big of a toll on us." He gave us key names of guys we'd

been looking for in months who had been killed in the engagement. He basically said we killed upwards of 40 guys and there were guys they still couldn't account for and this was a week or two afterwards. One of the ASF guys at Shkin, who was home in Pakistan on leave, said that in his village he was sitting in a little restaurant and heard some of the bad guys who were in the engagement talking about what had happened, trying to figure things out. The estimate he came back with after hearing their conversation was that there were almost 60 dead.

We never knew how many were actually killed. It was hours before we actually got to the objective where they were and by that time they had dragged bodies off. We found blood trails and drag marks down to the road behind where they had loaded all the dead guys in vehicles. Some of that was probably going on while we were there.

We got into a running gun battle for four hours after that and eventually brought in AH-64 Apaches who were directly engaging ground troops. We kept our momentum but we failed in one major task and that was to clear the objective.

We talked about that. To us the objective was cleared because we weren't getting fired from it anymore. The problem was that we got too engaged in chasing these guys and trying to cut them off before they got to the border. By doing that, we lost sight of the bigger picture, of going back to the objective and putting the pieces together. We should have done that immediately.

We had the ability but what we lost focus on was all our moving parts. Things were happening very fast, guys were moving and we realized we had to run after them or we were going to lose them. We ended up catching four guys who were involved in the ambush. Two of the guys we caught in a village. They basically went into a village and told the villagers that the Americans were going to be coming here and if they told us that they weren't part of their village, they would kill all of them.

We went in there, started asking questions and we saw that people wouldn't talk so we knew something was up. We were just in this big firefight and they were all saying, "We didn't hear anything." "Oh please. It was like Armageddon over there for 40 minutes and you're 1,000 meters away. What do you mean you didn't hear anything?"

We knew something was up so we started pulling the males and females out and, finally, this female told us where the bad guys were. The men were all telling her to shut up because they were afraid but she was like, "This is my family. I'm not going to let them come in here and threaten my life and my family's life. I'm not going to let them make the Americans think we're bad people. We're not bad people. We're good people. These are the bad guys."

They came from over there. Their radio is over here. The weapons are there. The ammunition is over there.” She fingered them both. The other two guys we caught, they surrendered at the last minute before they were going to get blown up by AH-64s because they’d already killed the other eight guys with them. There were two left, the AH-64 is still above my head and he’s fixing to shoot some more rockets when they surrendered. In a combat operation, though, you always secure your objective.

We didn’t feel the objective was hostile towards us anymore. We were pretty sure they had fled away from the objective. Of course hindsight is 20/20 but if we had just sent two squads to that objective, the importance could have been immeasurable. We could have counted bodies, recovered the machine guns we knew they left behind (at least seven were counted) and we could have picked up excess ammunition, radios, and maybe gotten some frequencies we didn’t have before or simply some documentation. It was still a hostile environment and it would have taken our guys another 30 to 45 minutes from that point when we started chasing the bad guys to get up there.

We had such a huge area to cover and there were a lot of egress routes and it really took everybody we had. I wanted to go back to the objective because I was there but the captain wanted to keep chasing guys. I don’t fault him for that. He was just thinking a little differently than I was. The battlefield is fluid and things happen so fast. You have to be able to react to certain stimuli so fast that you forget about things that should be second nature to you, and that’s what happened to us out there.

JM: With respect to how SOF was employed during your two deployments, how do you see things going forward? Can they be better integrated with conventional forces? What is the right mix of forces to accomplish the goals we as a nation have for Afghanistan?

MT: That’s a touchy subject. We’ll start off with the conventional integration. There’s a lot of room for improvement there. There are two perspectives you have to take into consideration. You have to take into account the SOF perspective that’s used to doing things on their own, being the lone warriors, being the “rebels” per se.

We operate at the small team level and we do things the conventional Army doesn’t engage in. SOF doesn’t like the big Army way of doing things. They think there’s too much bureaucracy on the big Army side and that they waste more opportunity than they create by having a large number of forces. Then you have the conventional side looking at us and they think we’re a bunch of rebels just running around doing whatever the hell we want to do. I believe I’ve heard that 1,000 times over the last two years from conventional guys. They say we’re just

a bunch of rebels that we have no control and no focus on what we're doing, and that's really nowhere near the truth.

They just don't understand what we're doing and how we do business. As far as the integration piece, if you look at company and platoon level, I think it's there. The pieces that need to be improved on are at the battalion, brigade and task force level. There is no integration. You take a platoon sergeant, a platoon leader, an SF detachment, a team sergeant and all their little minions, get them to come together on the battlefield, tell them what needs to get done and, using common sense and with no resistance towards each other, they'll work together. The platoon leader and platoon sergeant will say how they do business, the SOF guys will say how they do business, and once everyone understands how each other operates they can all move forward. I think it's easier however, for the SOF side to understand how the conventional guys operate because at some point we were all conventional guys. Most of those guys have never been exposed to SOF, though, so they have no idea what we do or how we do business every day on the ground. In my experience at the platoon level up to semi-company level, we've been fairly successful because we've had leaders on both sides which were willing to work together and willing to put aside any ill thoughts or feelings they've had towards each other.

They're willing to make it a team effort. At the battalion level and above though, is where your problem is. From my perspective this is what you have. You have a battalion commander on the infantry side and he doesn't have a good understanding of SOF and sees them as a burden. He sees them as a bunch of troublemakers running around the battlespace just doing whatever the hell they want to do. He employs and controls guys every day who only do what he tells them to do. That's just the way the conventional Army works. The battalion commander gives the company commanders task, purpose and intent and that's what they work with. That, in turn, keeps going down the line. On the SOF side we get a lot of the same thing.

We have a battalion, we have advanced operations bases, the AOBs, and in that AOB you have however many ODAs that work for that AOB. You have the same processes coming down, using an operations order or verbal guidance to that AOB commander who disseminates it out to all the ODAs but at the AOB level, the understanding is already there that no area is the same.

They already know that they can't take one single task, condition, and purpose and apply it to Lwara, Bermel, Shkin, or all the other firebases. It's not a cookie-cutter process but on the conventional side, that's the way it's treated. The ODAs are given an enormous amount of latitude to develop operations.

We were handed that operation of putting together that FOB because it was time sensitive, information sensitive and it was in our area so we had to do it.

We've had those and there will always be those operations but for the most part, the ODA is given the capability to develop that area as they see fit. Not as a bunch of rogue warriors but there is a task, intent and purpose behind it. At the FOB, the initial task, purpose and intent may not resemble that of the conventional side but that's because we think differently, our doctrine is different and our operations are different. It's at that level where I don't think they mesh.

You have two battalion commanders in charge of a large force in a large piece of battlespace and a lot of that interaction is determined by personality. You take two battalion commanders who are equal in pay grade, equal in authority, who essentially have the same mission on the ground and in the same battlespace but what they don't have is any rapport with each other. Most times when they talk together it's usually not in a friendly manner. There's a guy who works here at Fort Leavenworth who had a meeting with a couple generals and a few conventional brigade commanders. He was doing an interview with them for an organization here on Fort Leavenworth and if I say what it is it'll give him away, so I won't. Anyway, he asked them how many of them had worked with SF and all of them raised their hands.

Then he asked the brigade commanders what they thought of that experience. Two of them said, "SOF is screwed up and they don't know what they're doing. They're a bunch of rogue people running around, doing whatever they want to. All they do is to create problems for us in our battlespace." When he asked the other brigade commander what he thought, though, he said, "I think they were great. The problem was that I didn't know what they were capable of doing until months after we were integrated. Once we were integrated, I had that ODA come into my staff and we would plan operations together and we would share information. We had a great relationship." I don't think the others ever wanted to integrate with anyone.

It's hard for the conventional Army commanders at battalion level and above to perceive an SF detachment commander with as much authority and control as he has. I don't think it fears him. I just don't think they comprehend. You literally take a detachment commander and give him almost as much responsibility, especially in Afghanistan, as a conventional Army battalion commander would have, just not the number of troops. That detachment commander develops operations based on the INTEL he has or has been handed to him.

Who develops operations on the conventional side? It's usually the battalion commander. I think a lot of it was just stereotyping. There are numerous success stories where the relationships between the infantry guys and SOF guys were great because they were willing to integrate themselves. I've also heard some horror stories where they despised each other and would walk 1,000 miles just to avoid each other on the battlefield. I think there was just some general stereotyping going

on that wouldn't allow people to work together but you have to in this day and age especially now when the joint special operations area, the JSOA, is going away in Afghanistan. The country is owned by the big Army. SOF is operating in JSOAs or AOs that belong to Army battalion and brigade commanders, and it wasn't that way a couple rotations ago. SOF used to have its own battlespace. That doesn't exist anymore, so now you have to integrate to be effective. No one completely owns the battlespace anymore because you also have the International Security Assistance Force, the ISAF, and NATO forces involved so there's a lot more sharing on the battlefield that needs to go on and the only way to make that happen effectively is to integrate at the individual level. I think it's there at the detachment, platoon and company level of infantry guys because they're used to working together on the battlefield.

They've done it for years but the interaction at the battalion headquarters and staff level and at the FOB headquarters and staff level is not there. I think they need to put those fears away and start learning about what the other side does.

They need to start learning that it's not a command relationship. No one is forcing them to work together but inevitably they have to work together on the battlefield. There are two distinctive command relationships but who says you can't integrate? Have liaison officers that share information and things of that nature. Have staffs that talk to each other about operations. Start involving SOF in conventional operations and conventional guys in SOF operations at battalion level.

During my first rotation in Afghanistan we were with Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Slemph and he had a good understanding of how to do this. Every air assault operation we did, we had 10th Mountain Division infantry guys on board with us. They weren't the guys assaulting compounds generally but they provided other levels of support that you had to have to do that type of operation. You had to have outer security, inner security, and blocking positions to chase down people who were fleeing from the target area. They also provided security for the landing zones and that stuff. That takes a lot of people, especially when you're talking about five or six aircraft landing in one small area at one small point in time. That's also a big target for the bad guys.

JM: How are all these integration issues manifested or considered over where you work now at CAC SOF?

MT: At CAC SOF, everybody's on the rowboat of conventional and SOF integration doctrine. There is some that exists out there but it's not very well defined. It gives perspective, I think. I just got it a couple days ago and haven't had a chance to read it yet so I don't know for sure but it doesn't say that battalion commanders need to do this and company commanders need to do this. It's just

general perspective doctrine covering key areas that need to be addressed towards integration but it doesn't appoint people to do the integrating and I think that's what somebody is looking for. I don't know if they'll ever get that. First of all, I think the people who need to develop that doctrine are on the battlefields. In their previous rotations they've worked together and it has to be a lessons learned type of thing.

They should get together and figure out what they learned about themselves on the battlefield but if you go and develop doctrine based off what we already know and people here at CAC are willing to jump on board and create a doctrine. I don't think they have the information and background, though, to develop that type of doctrine. The Center for Army Lessons Learned, the CALL, is getting new information every day and they're starting to do that integration type analysis, the same with what you guys do here at the Combat Studies Institute every day. That's what's going to be the framework for any doctrine that's going to come out. A lot of people need to be involved. I think you have the right audience here with the Command and General Staff College, all these guys who were company commanders on the conventional side or team leaders or maybe even company commanders in SOF units. You have a good audience for getting the right information needed to develop any doctrine that needs to be developed but a lot of people I've talked to on the SOF side are leery about doctrine, because doctrine is only good if people read it and understand it. People I talk to, when they hear about doctrine say there are other means of bringing about integration before we go out and create doctrine.

We can create doctrine all day long. It doesn't mean people are going to read it and adhere to it. You have programs at the Battle Command Training Program, the BCTP, and warfighters and things of that nature. Let's start getting guys integrated at that level and then use that as another venue to help create doctrine. At some point, you have to start integrating training to make it effective on the battlefield and there are venues to do that but if you look at the conventional Army's combat and training rotations, they're planned 36 months out. If you take the SOF side and look at a 12-month calendar, though, you see how they're deployed for eight months of that, and then there's a recovery and refit period and finally a train up period. Extend that another month or two and then they're back into a combat zone. Conventional and SOF never line up on the calendar. In fact, we looked at this in the office the other day. BCTP was trying to figure out why SOF isn't participating and it wasn't clear to them until the CAC SOF assistant director went over and talked to the BCTP guys and told them why it didn't line up. He drew it out on the blackboard and showed them. BCTP didn't realize it before that. There needs to be a lot more information sharing as we go on so people understand more about each other before we arbitrarily start creating doctrine that we really don't

understand, doctrine that leads us down a path we don't need to be going down or doctrine that has already been tried before in a past rotation and didn't work out.

JM: Looking back as a veteran of two deployments to Afghanistan, what's your outlook for the country in the months and years ahead and what role do you see SOF playing?

MT: One thing I would like to say is that I think people need to understand what our role is, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. There are no armies left to defeat in either one of those theaters. We defeated those armies.

We're going on our fifth year in Afghanistan and a lot of it is worse today than it was three years ago. Something is on the Internet or in the newspapers every day and I've seen it firsthand on the battlefield. The *Taliban* in Afghanistan are stronger and they appear to be more effective. NATO is trying to take over and the thought behind bringing a 15,000-man NATO force in was to withdraw the American forces but that's not the case. Now NATO is asking for a few thousand more forces and there's still no end in sight for drawing down on the US side as far as I know. It's because we're fighting an insurgency and a lot of people don't understand COIN.

They don't understand the concept of COIN or the doctrinal aspects of COIN and a lot of people are having a hard time on the ground. You read the COIN manual but how do you actually conduct COIN on the ground? You need to remember that the population is the key terrain and in order to deny key terrain to the insurgency, you have to win the population away from them. Everything you do affects that population. You have to be careful when you're shooting mortar rounds and engaging in firefights in a populated area. I don't think any American wants to walk away from a gunfight. It's considered cowardly or something along those lines and it's easy to perceive that from a US standpoint.

As an Army in Afghanistan and even in Iraq, people need to be more aware of the population and the effects of everything you do on that population. If you kill a civilian, they lose one civilian and that doesn't seem like much in the grand scheme of things but how many enemies did you make in that process? Usually in a village, when you kill a civilian you turn that whole village against the US forces because everything is about relationships to these people. Everybody in that village, especially the smaller the village gets, is related along personal relationship lines. That's where the priority lies, with the population. It's not about blowing things up or destroying things anymore. You'll still have your opportunities to do that along the way but think about the population in everything you do and use your partner force to do it with. That's the only way we're going to get out of these two battles, to get them to the point where they can do it and do it effectively.

JM: Thank you very much for your time. It's greatly appreciated.

About the OLE Project Team

Mr. Michael G. Brooks retired from the US Air Force in 2003 after having served as an enlisted weather forecaster. Before coming to Kansas to work for the Combat Studies Institute in 2005, he was a technical writer for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Anchorage, Alaska. Mr. Brooks has a Bachelor of Science Degree in History from the State University of New York.

Mr. John H. McCool was an administrator, editor, and senior interviewer for the Operational Leadership Experiences (OLE) Project—an oral history enterprise based at Fort Leavenworth’s Combat Studies Institute. The OLE Project team conducts, transcribes, and archives interviews with military personnel who planned, participated in, and supported operations in the Global War on Terrorism. Mr. McCool possesses a Master of Arts Degree in History from the University of Kansas and has a demonstrated background in both public and oral history. He has participated in several collaborative historical projects to include web-based development endeavors. Mr. McCool has focused his research and writing interests on a wide variety of modern American political, diplomatic, and military history topics.

Mr. Laurence J. Lessard was an editor and interviewer for the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He has a Bachelor of Science Degree in History from the US Naval Academy, a Master of Arts Degree in History from Ohio University, and is a doctoral candidate in history at Ohio University. He is a former Marine infantry officer with combat experience in Panama and the Persian Gulf, and has worked as a trainer for the Saudi Arabian National Guard.

Ms. Colette Kiszka acts as the Project Technician and Transcriptionist for the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute. She uploads the completed oral interviews onto Fort Leavenworth’s Combined Arms Research Library website. She has an extensive administrative background that has led her to work in and around the US Army for over 25 years.

Mrs. Jennifer Vedder was a Military Analyst charged with transcribing interviews for the Combat Studies Institute’s Operational Leadership Experiences Project. Mrs. Vedder possesses a Master’s of Science Degree in Health Care Administration and has previously served as an officer on Active Duty in the Medical Service Corps.

Contributing Interviewers

From the Command and General Staff College: Major Marty Deckard, Major Shawn O’Brien, Major Bradley Helton, Major Conrad Harvey, Major Glenn King (New Zealand Army), and Lieutenant Colonel James L. Evenson (USMCR).

From the CSI Contemporary Operations Study Team: Ms. Lynne Chandler Garcia, Mr. Jerry England and Dr. Lisa Beckenbaugh.