



INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

**Limited Initiatives, Battle Reconstruction  
Afghanistan (LIBRA) Transcripts  
Volume 1**

William (Bill) Knarr, project leader

Mark Nutsch

MajGen Thomas Jones (Ret)

Carolyn A. Leonard

Sarah Collins

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## Executive Summary

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The United States, as part of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, enacted a number of population-centric initiatives to shape the battlefield and set the conditions for the Afghanistan government to successfully counter its insurgency.

The purpose of this project is to identify lessons for counterinsurgency doctrine and to develop a classroom-quality reconstruction (in the form of a multimedia DVD) of events in Afghanistan to be used in Joint and Service Professional Military Training and Education institutions. As a training and education resource, this reconstruction will support historical analysis, leadership development, and critical thinking skills; it will focus on three initiatives:

1. The Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multinational community to include interagency task forces and Provincial Reconstruction Teams,
2. Conventional/special operations forces coordination and collaboration, and
3. The unique stand-up of the Special Operations Joint Task Force and the development of the Village Stability Operations/Afghan Local Police programs.

Exploiting previous experience with reconstructing the Battle of Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, and the Battle for Fallujah and the Anbar Awakening in Iraq (hereafter referred to as Mazar, Fallujah, and the Awakening)<sup>1</sup>, this project provides a Limited Initiatives (the three above) Battle Reconstruction from Afghanistan (LIBRA).

The purpose of this document is to organize and archive transcripts of participants from various organizations who were interviewed primarily during Task 1, Project Design and Initial Collection.<sup>2</sup> Those transcripts form the foundation of the collection and address the primary research questions. Additionally, because the interviews were recorded mostly in video (but some in audio only), relevant short clips will be selected to build the narrative and respond to special themes as part of the interactive multimedia on the DVD reconstruction. The transcripts are published here so that other researchers and students can access all of the material, not just the clipped versions.

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<sup>1</sup> William Knarr, *et al.*, *The Campaign for Mazar-e Sharif*, (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, Nov 2004); William Knarr, *et al.*, *Seizing the Peninsula, a Vignette from The Battle for Fallujah, An Education and Training Resource Guide*, (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, Jan 2011); William Knarr, *et al.*, *Al Sahawa—An Awakening in Al Anbar*, (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, Feb 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The LIBRA project consists of five tasks. Generally, they are: Task 1, Project Design/Initial Collection; Task 2 Collection; Task 3, Reconciliation; Task 4, Reconstruction; and Task 5, Final Report. Additionally, Volume 1 corresponds to Task 1.



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# Introduction

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The evolution of the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 indicates that adversaries will continue to resort to asymmetric tactics in the foreseeable future. An adaptive insurgent avoids government strengths, remains in the shadows, capitalizes on non–nation-state actors in areas that affords him safe haven or concealment, and strikes when and where he chooses. Knowing he cannot compete with the United States on US terms, insurgents seek to exhaust the US national will—to win by undermining and outlasting public support. Such an adversary requires an adaptive, proactive, and creative counterinsurgency.

As part of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, the United States participated in a number of population-centric initiatives to shape the battlefield and set the conditions for Afghanistan to successfully counter its insurgency. This project, exploiting previous experiences of reconstructing the Battle of Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, and the Battle for Fallujah and the Anbar Awakening in Iraq<sup>3</sup>—hereafter referred to as Mazar, Fallujah, and the Awakening—provides a Limited Initiatives (listed below) Battle Reconstruction from Afghanistan (LIBRA).

In keeping with previous battle reconstructions, this project seeks to identify lessons for counterinsurgency doctrine and to develop a classroom-quality reconstruction of events in Afghanistan for Joint and Service Professional Military Training and Education institutions. As an education and training resource, the reconstruction will support historical analysis, leadership development, and critical thinking skills. In addition to reflecting the combined, whole-of-government and joint nature of the operation, the reconstruction will focus on three initiatives:

1. The Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multinational (JIIM) community to include interagency task forces and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT),
2. Conventional/special operations forces coordination and collaboration, and
3. The unique stand-up of the Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF) and the development of the Village Stability Operations (VSO)/Afghan Local Police (ALP) programs.

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<sup>3</sup> Mazar, Fallujah, and the Awakening are used as case studies at a number of professional military training and education institutions to support counterinsurgency training and education. William Knarr, *et al.*, *The Campaign for Mazar-e Sharif*, (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, Nov 2004); William Knarr, *et al.*, *Seizing the Peninsula, a Vignette from The Battle for Fallujah, An Education and Training Resource Guide*, (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, Jan 2011); William Knarr, *et al.*, *Al Sahawa—An Awakening in Al Anbar*, (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, Feb 2017).

Grounding the reconstruction are interviews of the participants from the military Services and civilian organizations such as the US State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

In accordance with the project design and scope, the study focused primarily on Regional Command–Southwest (RC-SW), Regional Command–South (RC-S), and Regional Command–East (RC-E) (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1. US Regional Commands in Afghanistan, 2010 to 2014t**

This document organizes and archives the transcripts of interviews conducted primarily during Task 1, Project Design and Initial Collection.<sup>5</sup> Twelve interviews were conducted dur-

<sup>4</sup> See William Knarr, et al., *Project Design: Limited Initiatives, Battle Reconstruction, Afghanistan (LIBRA)*, (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, May 2015). These areas were also highlighted as the Main and Supporting efforts in a DoD report to Congress: Department of Defense Report on *Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, November 2010, Report to Congress In accordance with section 1230 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (Public Law 110-181), as amended Page 45.

<sup>5</sup> Two other transcripts were added to this volume: LtGen Jody Osterman and COL Matthew Redding. Although interviewed during Task II, their stories are important to the continuity of the RC-SW narrative. For that same reason, the LTG Daniel Bolger transcript (Commander of the NTM-A/CSTC-A) was moved to Volume II.

ing Task 1 and included battalion through RC-SW commanders as well as members of supporting organizations like the Special Operations Task Force (SOTF), the District Support Teams (DST), and the Regional Support Command (RSC) that operated in the area. Transcripts comprise Appendix A.

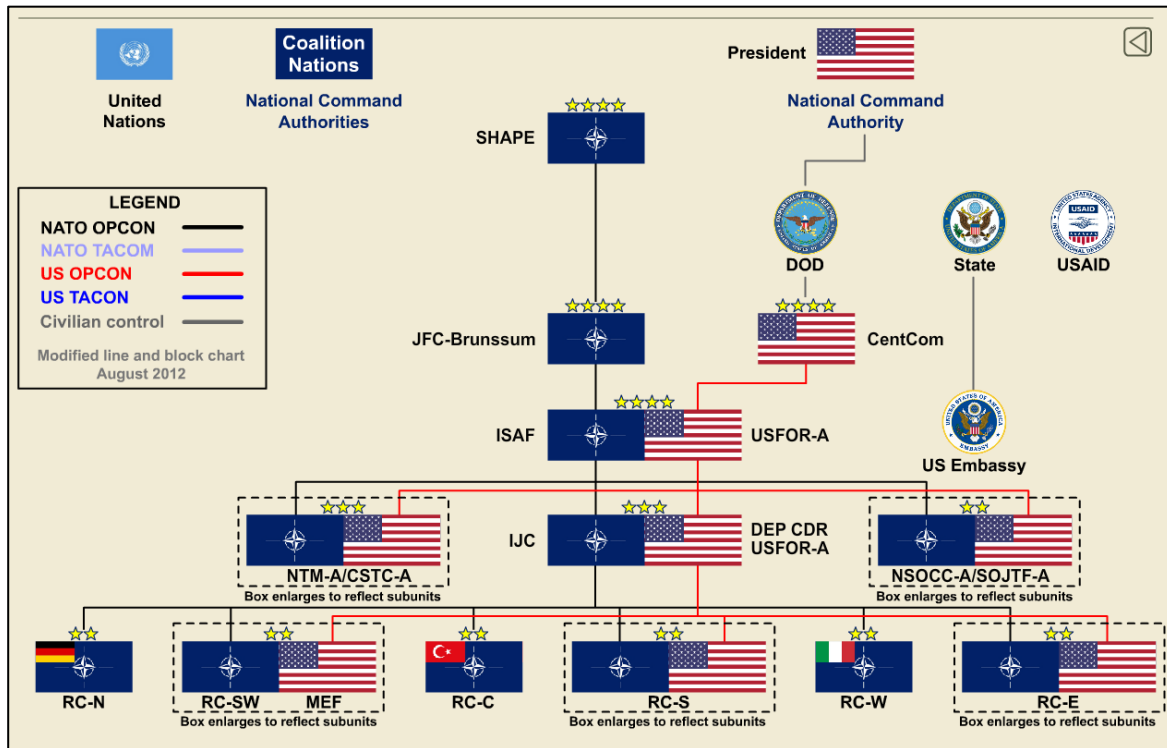


**Figure 2. Volume I Interviews operated primarily in the RC-SW area of operations (dotted box bottom left)**



## Appendix A. Transcripts

The following transcripts are of interviews conducted primarily from February to July 2015 during Task 1 of the LIBRA project.<sup>6</sup> However, for continuity, two interviews (LtGen Osterman and Colonel Redding) after that time were added in this volume because they were directly relevant to Regional Command–Southwest. The transcripts are sequenced in accordance with the interviewees’ deployment dates to help the reader appreciate the narrative in Helmand from Major General Nicholson’s deployment in May of 2009 to Brigadier General Yoo’s redeployment in October 2014 (see Table).

**Table. Interview Transcript Index for LIBRA Task 1**

| Interviewee*                 | Date Interviewed | Organization                      | Dates deployed    |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 01. MajGen Larry Nicholson   | 31 Mar 15        | Cdr, 2 <sup>nd</sup> MEB-A        | May 2009–Apr 2010 |
|                              |                  | DCoS Ops, IJC                     | Feb 2012–Feb 2013 |
| 02. Dr. Carter Malkasian     | 1 Jul 15         | DST                               | Aug 2009–Jul 2011 |
| 03. LtGen Jody Osterman      | 1 May 17         | Cdr, 1 <sup>st</sup> MARDIV (Fwd) | Mar 2010–Mar 2011 |
|                              |                  | DCoS Ops, IJC                     | Jan 2013–Mar 2014 |
| 04. MajGen Lewis Craparotta  | 1 Apr 15         | Cdr, 2 <sup>nd</sup> MARDIV (Fwd) | Mar 2011–Feb 2012 |
| 05. Colonel Matthew Redding  | 24 May 2017      | Cdr, RSC-SW                       | Sep 2011–Sep 2012 |
| 06. LtGen David Berger       | 30 Mar 15        | Cdr, 1 <sup>st</sup> MARDIV (Fwd) | Feb 2012–Feb 2013 |
| 07. Col Larry Huggins        | 13 Mar 15        | Cdr, SOTF-W                       | Sep 2012–May 2013 |
| 08. MajGen Walter Lee Miller | 28 Aug 15        | Cdr, RC-SW                        | Feb 2013–Feb 2014 |
| 09. LtCol John Lynch         | 1 Apr 15         | Cdr, SOTF-W                       | May 2013–Jan 2014 |
| 10. BGen Austin Renforth     | 23 Feb 15        | Cdr, RCT-7                        | Sep 2013–Aug 2014 |
| 11. LtCol Ward Cooper        | 11 Mar 15        | Cdr, 3/9 Marines                  | Oct 2013–May 2013 |
| 12. BGen Daniel Yoo          | 31 Mar 15        | Cdr, RC-SW                        | Feb 2014–Oct 2014 |
| 13. Col Chris Dowling        | 31 Mar 15        | OIC, OCCR                         | Jan 2014–Nov 2014 |

\*Rank at time of interview

<sup>6</sup> The LIBRA project consists of five tasks. Generally, they are: Task 1, Project Design/Initial Collection; Task 2 Collection; Task 3, Reconciliation; Task 4, Reconstruction; and Task 5, Final Report. Additionally, Volume 1 corresponds to Task 1.

Figure A-1 depicts the organizational structure of RC-SW (this is an expanded view of the RC-SW block in Figure 2); all of the interviewees were members of one of the organizations reflected in Figure 2.

Time marks, e.g., [00:52], are throughout the transcripts as an audit to the original audio/video file.

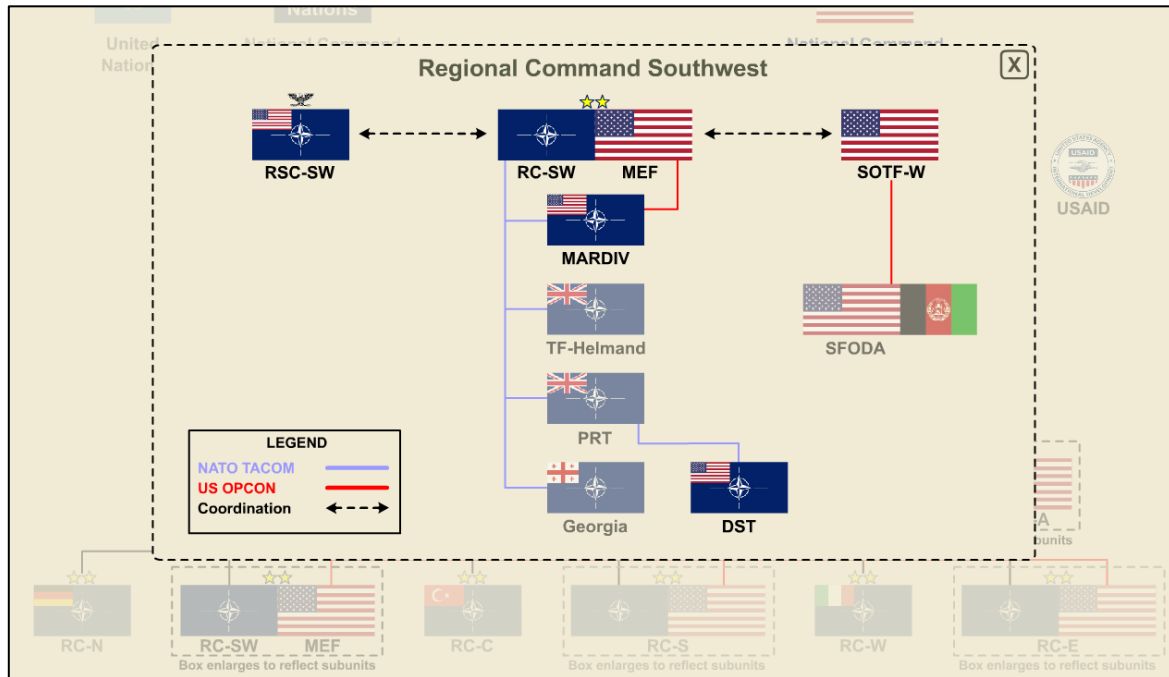


**Figure A-1. Organizational Structure of Regional Command Southwest**

Subject: Interview with Major General **Larry Nicholson**, USMC, former Commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade–Afghanistan, Task Force Leatherneck

Major General Larry Nicholson, USMC, is the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California. He commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade–Afghanistan, Task Force Leatherneck from May 2009 to April 2010 and returned in February 2012 for a year as the operations officer for International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Joint Command (IJC) in Kabul, Afghanistan.



**MajGen Nicholson**

Major General Nicholson was interviewed at his office at Camp Pendleton, California on 31 March 2015 by Dr. William Knarr and MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC, Retired.

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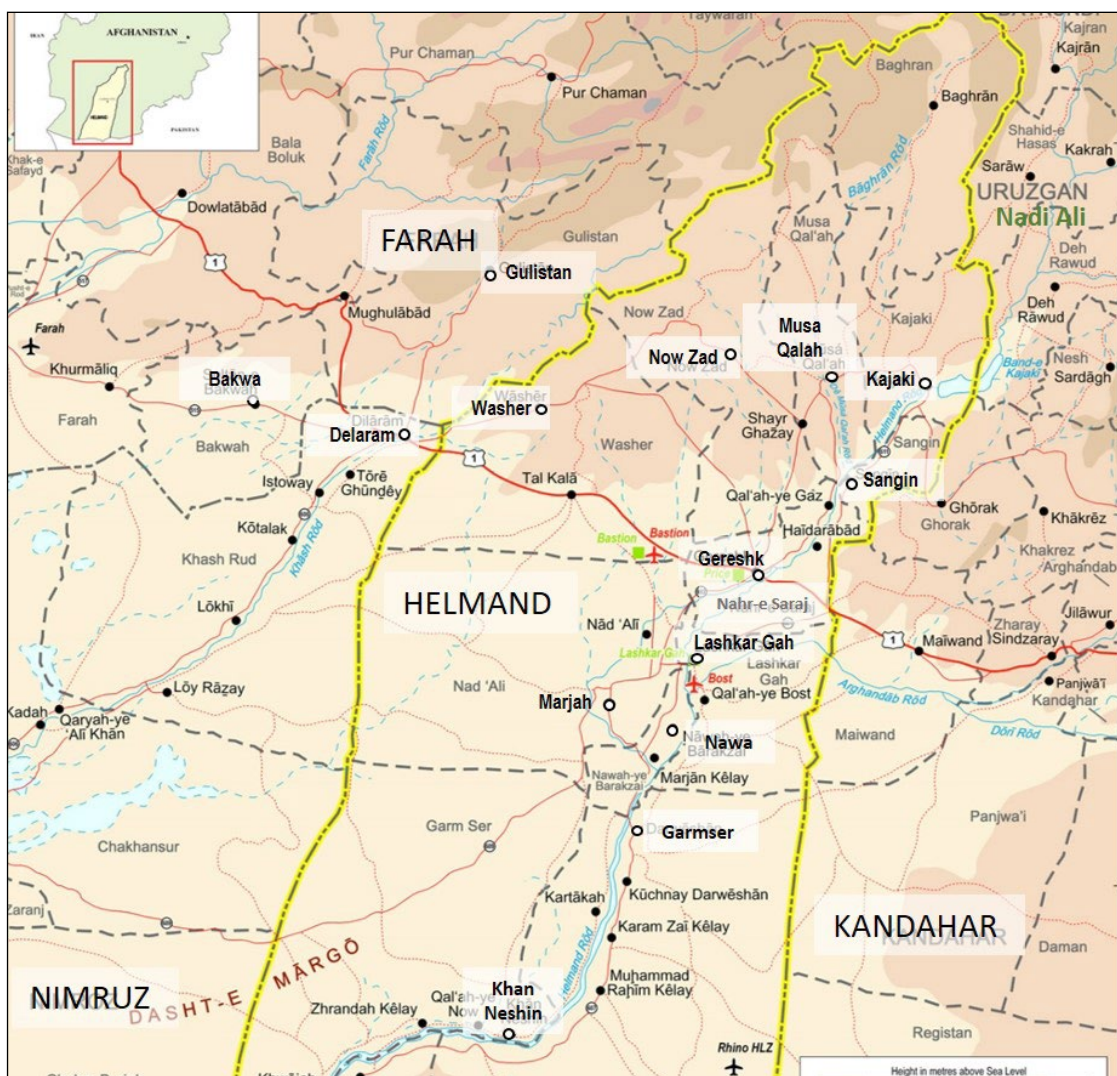
Dr. William Knarr: Please talk about your time in Afghanistan: First your deployment in 2009 as commander of the MEB and second your deployment in 2012 as the Operations Officer [OPSO] in the IJC.

MajGen Larry Nicholson: In November 2008 I was in Fallujah with General John Kelly and we were doing a site survey as part of the II MEF Team going to Iraq. We were preparing to go over to be that last rotation of Marines in Anbar. For me it was a little bit of a homecoming, because I had been a regimental commander in Fallujah '06 to '07 during the Awakening. Things were relatively quiet there. Our Commandant was kind of itching to move a MAGTF [Marine Air Ground Task Force] into Afghanistan. We had been in Afghanistan intermittently; but we had never really had an area of operations the way we had in Iraq where we had MNF [Multi National Force] West. We were looking for continuous battlespace where a Marine entity, whether it was a MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force] or MEB [Marine Expeditionary Brigade], would be more permanently assigned and not just deployed to plug holes the way we had previously done. So, when I was in Fallujah in November, just before Thanksgiving of 2008, General Kelly called me in his office and goes, "Hey, I just got a phone call. I don't think you're coming here. I think you're going somewhere else." So I got back to Camp Lejeune and General Hejlik, the MEF Commander, said, "It hasn't been decided yet, so keep preparing for Iraq, but..." It was mid-December when he put his finger in my chest, "Start forming a Marine Expeditionary Brigade. You're going to Afghanistan in the spring." So, that was quick work to put together units from the East Coast, to West Coast, to Okinawa, and the Reserves, build a staff and prepare to take on this mission.

In February I headed to Afghanistan to see General McKiernan; he was very generous with his time. As a young Brigadier General I had a chance to sit down with COMISAF [Commander ISAF] and he sort of laid out what he wanted us to do and where he wanted us to go.

The decision was to go to Helmand. I know there's been a lot written since that the Marines should have gone to Kandahar, because at the same time they were bringing in the Stryker Brigade, they were expanding up into outer portions of Kandahar. So, there's been a lot of revisionist history about, "that's where the Marines should have gone, but that the Marines didn't want to go there." That's not true. The Marines went where they were told to go. So, I presented my force list to General McKiernan. He approved it other than tanks. I had a company of tanks coming based on our time in Fallujah and based on the terrain in southern Afghanistan. General McKiernan approved everything other than the tanks and he said, "Hey, the US Army has no tanks here."

USFOR-A [US Forces Afghanistan], which was the Army, sort of, support infrastructure was tasked to support us. We felt very, very well supported by the organization. The only difference of opinion that we had is that he assumed our headquarters would be at the base in Kandahar, because there was a predecessor unit called Special MAGTF. It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment, Duffy White, and they had been working out of Kandahar in a couple of really cramped offices and had been the Regional Headquarters for a Battalion. It was 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Marines that was working in five or six locations. They were in Now Zad. They were in Bakwa [Farah Province]. They were in Gulistan. They were in Delaram [Nimruz Province]. Those were not great places, and I got a chance to go visit every one of them during my site survey. I knew at that point if we were going to work in Helmand, you have to be in Helmand. You cannot be at Kandahar. The tyranny of distance would not support a headquarters in Kandahar with operations in Helmand.



Defence Geographic Centre, Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom, 2011

**Figure A-2. Partial Map of Helmand Province**

RC South was commanded by a Dutch guy. A terrific officer. General Mart de Kruif<sup>7</sup> He had been to the Army War College, was very, very supportive and very excited to have the Marines, so he offered us some real estate there. The Deputy was Brigadier General Mick Nicholson, John Nicholson, goes by Mick Nicholson, US Army, he was the Deputy at RC South. They were looking around Kandahar for places where the MEB could headquarter. But, we were really not excited about that, so we decided early on that we needed to be in Helmand. We traveled to Bastion, the British Base, their Air Field [see Figure A-2, text in red west and southwest of Gereshk]. The Brits had offered a number of different little park-

<sup>7</sup> RC–South was commanded by Dutch MajGen Mart de Kruif (command rotated among British, Canadian, and Dutch officers, with an American deputy). Wesley Morgan, Researcher, *Institute for the Study of War: Military Analysis and Education for Civilian Leaders*, Sept 2009.

ing lots and gravel lots around their base. None of it really seemed like it would work for us. Literally, we climbed a watchtower and kind of looked out in the open desert and said, “Who owns that?” They said, “Well you do if you want.” So, literally, we walked out the gate. I had a CB [construction battalion] Lieutenant Commander with me. There were probably four or five of us, and we walked about a mile in one direction and about a half a mile in another direction and said, “Can you berm this? Can this be our Marine Base?”

We wanted to pick a name not affiliated with East Coast or West Coast units, as we had in Iraq; I wanted a name that was synonymous with all Marines. So we picked Leatherneck. We just said, “This is going to be Camp Leatherneck where all the Marines will come. This will be the headquarters for the Marines.” And the Lieutenant Commander said, “Yeah I can, we can start berming this tomorrow.” The Brits thought we were nuts.

I went back to Camp Lejeune and started getting through our staff training. Force flow started to Afghanistan in March; I got there in late April. It was impressive what we had carved out of just raw desert. A lot of wooden buildings that were popping up, a lot of tents were up. I’d sent people over late February, early March. We built comm [communications] infrastructure—just getting the basics of a base built. That was our start point.

I would inherit a force, the Battalion that was in the north, Dave Odom the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines. I would bring three other Battalions with me as part of the MEB. I would bring a composite air group of Harriers. I’d have an HMLA [Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron] of Cobras and Hueys. I would have three Squadrons of Lift Assault Support: two Echo Squadrons and a Squadron out of Hawaii, 53 Deltas. We knew that was going to be our life-line to our units as we moved. [11:13]

So, coming south from the Helmand River Valley, our first area was going to be Garmser. The Brits were going to leave Garmser and they were going to double down in Nahr-e Saraj and have some forces going up into Sangin. So, Garmser was the first district. The second district was Nawa where the Brits were pretty well surrounded. A good fight. In fact, even on our site survey we got into a pretty good fight down in Nawa. We had a LAR [Light Armored Reconnaissance] Battalion as well. So I had a battalion from the East Coast, 2/8 with Chris Cabiness. I had a Battalion from West Coast, 1/5 with Bill McCollough. I had a Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. The one place where they didn’t think we would go was a place farther south called Khan Neshin.

Khan Neshin is right there [pointing at bottom center of map along the Helmand River—also the name of the district]. It’s where the Helmand River Valley pushes west. It’s the first link where anything, lethal aid, all the problems coming in from the border of Pakistan. We always focus on the RC East, and certainly that was a problem. But this was a freeway, especially with the drug trade. If they could get into the Helmand River Valley they could go north and we wanted to stop that. So, we sent our Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion on a couple

hundred mile, open desert, movement to capture the town of Khan Neshin where the Afghan flag had not flown in many, many years. We did not even tell the Governor about that one.

So it was Nawa, it was Garmser, and they called this the Snake's Belly. The Snake's Head was up here [Gereshk, Lashkar Ga, Sangin]. And so this river valley, where the Brits were, in relatively small numbers, they were doing a good job, but they were very small numbers in Garmser. You could not move a couple kilometers out of Garmser without getting into a flight. The Brits called it the FLET, the Forward Line of Enemy Troops. The Government Center was in Nawa under British control, but you could not get in. So we had 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines and they were not going to leave Delaram, Bakwa, Gulistan and Now Zad, We worked with them and on July 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2009 we wanted to land Marine Forces at about eight different locations all up inside the Helmand River Valley.

The intent was wherever the Taliban were, wherever they looked they would see helicopters, they would see British or US Forces in areas we had not been in before. The orders I gave my company commanders were that you would not FOB [forward operating base] up for 30 days. For 30 days, you would be on the move. Different places every night until you knew your area and your district, and you knew where the population was, you knew what the issues were and at that point then you could establish where you thought the best place [to establish a Forward Operating Base]. If you are going to clear, hold, build and transition, where is the best place? Your job for 30 days was to clear. When we got through that then we went to the hold phase, and then the build phase. I wanted them in a place where they could influence and effect the population, so they had to be near the population. I did not want remote bases in the middle of nowhere. We used a squadron of Army Aviation CH-47s to move 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. We used a squadron of Marine Aviation to move 2nd Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines. So, 1/5 went into four different spots in Nawa District. 2/8 went into four different spots in Garmser District. L-hour was all between 0200 and 0500 in the morning. When the sun came up the Taliban were like, "Holy Hell"—everywhere they looked. We had the Brits moving to different locations as well. We coordinated this very closely with our UK partner. Brigadier Tim Radford was their commander.

It was called Operation Khanjar. Strike of the Sword. We wanted the Taliban reacting to us instead of us reacting to the Taliban from fixed positions that we just assumed from other people. Based on the chatter, based on what was going on, we thought we accomplished that pretty well. Interestingly, we sat down with the Governor, a guy called Gulab Mangal and we lay out a map of Helmand. We knew where the Government Forces were and where the Coalition Forces were. I said, "Governor, where should we go?" I think he was stunned at our question. He said, "Can I have the map. I'll give it back to you in a couple days. I want to sit down with my staff." So, three or four days later we went back to the Governor's office and he had circled the areas that he thought where we would have the most trouble, but where we would have the most impact on the population. *I never liked the term winning*

*hearts and minds*, I think that is a little naive, but *I did like the term earning mutual respect and support*. I think we worked very hard at trying to earn that mutual respect.

One of our biggest problems is that we did not have any Afghan Forces. There was one Afghan Brigade for all of Helmand and the Brits controlled it pretty well. They worked very closely with the Brits. Trying to extract any Afghan force to work with us was near impossible. The illusion that there were these Police forces in place, ready to help and support, did not hold up. The Police that we did run into early on were predatory; they were corrupt and based on what the population told us, the people hated them. We did not see a lot of good policing out there.

One thing I've learned from this, two years in Iraq, two years in Afghanistan is where you've got at least, it may not be great governance, but where you have governance that's not predatory, that is trying to support the people you've got pretty good security. Where there is good governance, there is security. Where there is bad governance, you have no security. That is where the Taliban were thick as thieves. The more predatory the police, the more sympathetic the population is to the enemy. You know the people have to believe that the government has something to offer that the Taliban do not. Schools, clinics, projects, markets that are safe to go to, and again a police force that is not predatory. So, and this will play later in Marjah.

We had two big operations. One was Khanjar, which was getting in and getting started, and then Marjah. After the President's decision, I got two more battalions. I got 1/6 and 3/6 to come in and we went into Marjah and...

Knarr: February 2010.

Nicholson: Yeah. That was a whole different kettle of fish. But, back to Khanjar, for that first 30 days we told the guys, "No FOB'ing up. You are on the move. Get out there. Meet people. See what is going on. Fight where you need to fight. Shake hands where you can shake hands. But, get to know your area." I wanted those young captains to be experts in those areas that they were going to be working; then they would make that decision as to where they were going to plant their flag and start building. I thought we had good success.

I think the one piece of advice that I got from somebody who had been in Afghanistan before is that this is an enemy that never likes anybody behind them. We used it to our advantage numerous times using helicopters. The Taliban were very tough force on force. I mean, they were very good at establishing a forward line of enemy troops. They used a lot of IEDs. They used a lot of mines, and they could canalize you into where they wanted you to go. They were very comfortable with that kind of standoff. But, if you got behind them, they unhinged very, very quickly. So, we worked very hard to get behind the Taliban at every opportunity. And, sure as hell they did unhinge in almost every occasion. They did not like anybody behind them. [21:13]

We continued to develop our positions in Garmser and in Nawah. The Washington Post wrote an article about Nawa.<sup>8</sup> They said if the success that was enjoyed by the Marines in Nawa could be duplicated around the country this war would be over in amount of months. Nawah became a boomtown. It is where we took every visitor to include Secretary Gates... I mean we took them all to Nawah and they could walk the streets with no flack [vests], no helmet. The markets were open. The schools were open. The clinics were open. We had good governance there. We took the entire police force out of Nawah and Garmser and sent them to school. In its place, we brought in National Police for a period of about four to six weeks. They were tough on the locals. They were not predatory, but they were rough. What we found, when we took, I don't know 60 cops out of Nawah and took them to school, about 20 of them quit school, didn't get through. Some of them were drug addicts. We were doing Marine Corps PT in the morning, I mean we—Terry Walker was...

Major General Tom Jones: He was my Gunner at 1/6. Was he a Marine or a civilian?

Nicholson: Civilian, Sir. He was a Marine for me when we were doing the same thing in Anbar. He was a Marine CW5 there; but he retired. I brought him back as a civilian and he ran our schools. Phenomenal success!

But by the time those police left the Police Academies we felt pretty good about them. We looked at them pretty hard. They went back and they understood our expectation, "If you want security you have to take care of these people." To protect and serve, I mean just trying to imbue that, the mantra that they are the first line of governance that people see, and if they stink, if they're corrupt, there's no hope. I could have the best governor in the world, but if the police around them are thugs there's no hope. So we worked very hard at policing. People were always asking, "Hey do you need more Marines?" I said, "Well, yeah we always would like to have more Marines, but what I really need is Afghans." Because, I did not like just patrolling as Marines. Wherever we went, I wanted Afghan faces in the crowd. So, slowly we were getting more.

The decision was made that there would be a Corps established in Helmand. The 215 Corps. There had not been a Corps, there would be a Corps but they were from Kandahar. The Brigade we had was out of the Kandahar Corps, the 205<sup>th</sup> Corps. By the time I left a Corps had been established. The 2/15<sup>th</sup> Corps with General Malouk [Major General Sayed Malouk]. So we had a pretty good increase. Even by the time we did Marjah we had an increase of Afghan soldiers. But, they were raw. I mean before I went into Marjah I got 500 Afghan soldiers, but I got no leaders. They came without Officers. They came without any leadership. And they were integrated directly into our platoons and our squads in 1/5 and 2/8, which is a challenge. The Marines gave every one of them nicknames and you see the film of Marjah, its integrated

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<sup>8</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "In Helmand, a model for success?" *The Washington Post*, (22 Oct 2009), accessed 12 Oct 2015.

squads on patrol. Not what we necessarily wanted, but we thought it was critically important especially going into Marjah, which for all intents and purposes had seceded from the union. There was no government in Marjah; there had not been for about a decade. [25:25]

Jones: That was Brian Christmas and who was 1/6?

Nicholson: Cal Worth with Randy Newman being the Regimental Commander. So things continued to progress positively in Garmser and Nawa for the rest of that year. Like anywhere else there were incidents, there were firefights, but things were coming down rapidly.

What we hadn't counted on was the benefit of that Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion being all the way down there in Khan Neshin, which had been kind of old western town, a smuggler's town.

Governor Mangal, who I still say in touch with, my sense is he was mostly honest. For Afghan standards they guy was 'Lilly White'. I mean he absolutely cared. He was not a Helmandi, but he cared and he worked very hard. He spent a lot of time and he put himself in danger constantly. Elders' meeting after elders' meeting, I mean he would visit every one of these small, hardscrabble towns that we got into. Always at great peril. You never know who is in the crowd or what is going to happen; but, a lot of respect for Governor Mangal.

We had a big flag raising down in Khan Neshin, a lot of media down there. And again, first time the Afghan Flag had flown there in a decade as well. And we started to see from that base at Khan Neshin they were able to go down, all the way down to the border, to a place called Bagramchah, which was really a tough, tough spot. And there was no border police, nothing down there. We started bringing in Afghan Border Police and Afghan army units. We started populating areas that we had been in.

So, back to the north now. The south is progressing pretty well, but by November we realized we had to do something in a town called Now Zad. Are you familiar with Now Zad at all?

Knarr: Only from maps and reading. [27:40]

Nicholson: That was the third largest city in Helmand and it was completely evacuated. It was a ghost town. We had a FOB in the middle of the city. The Brits had been in that FOB and I think the Estonians had been up there at some point, and then the Marines had it. There was no one there. The population of 30,000 people had all either gone to live with relatives or they were dispersed in the local area. There were some little refugee areas around that we would visit; but, the Taliban was pretty firmly entrenched in town. It became known that Now Zad, to the Marines, was the home of the double amputee. It was the worst place on earth. I remember talking to a Marine; this was a 3/8 Marine, "Sir, we patrol until someone gets hit. We medevac him; we come back to the FOB, and then do it again tomorrow. We never see the end." What a destructive...it's terrible. We had a change of battalion, 3rd Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines came in, a guy called Marty Wetterauer. I think he's taking 8<sup>th</sup> Marines. 29:15]

So Martin came in and we started talking about what can we do in Now Zad, how can we change the dynamic here. The status quo seemed almost like people had accepted it. As I start barking about Now Zad, I know my higher headquarters in RC South said, “Hey there’s not a lot of fighting going on there, do we really want to start a fight there?” It’s the third largest city. Metrics and measurement in a counterinsurgency are always very challenging—how do you know how you are doing? It is not body counts, it’s not the number of firefights, it’s not number wounded [30:00]. What I remember from just a little bit of time in the Balkans was that the return of the population was a metric that we looked at very carefully. When people come back to their towns after not having been there, that is a good piece of stability.

Two other things we looked at that you might find interesting. We *knew*, because we were actively recruiting from police and army, you know, young men in Afghanistan don’t watch the Super Bowl commercial and say “Hey I think I want to be all you can be, I’m going to join the army.” They join because their elder says it’s time to join. It’s group think; when the elder in a town says we’re going to join the government, we would see 200–300 young men from one little town all of a sudden, 200 guys from this town want to join the army. Well that was not an individual choice, the elders decided it is time, and they join.

So you have a map of [Helmand 31:08], the red, green, yellow, and there’d be green, green, green, yellow and there’d be a lot of red where no one had ever joined. We looked very carefully, where people were raising their hands to [indicate where they had] come from. So you could kind of tell in areas where no one had ever joined the army or police, that kind of told you what was going on in that town and where their sympathies lay. Then there were towns that were green because they had a steady flow. So that was a mosaic of Helmand that was useful for us.

Another one was schools, interestingly enough. Not the amount of schools, not the construction, the physical construction of schools; but school attendance. We used to monitor it through our PRT, and the Marines would visit the schools. The American public is so incredibly generous; we would send calls out for backpacks and the amount of school supplies we were getting from all over America was incredible. There was not a kid in Helmand for those couple of years that did not have a nice backpack or something that they were wearing [that was not from America]. Every kid had a backpack, sandals, little baseball cap; it was amazing the generosity of Americans [32:30]. So, all of a sudden, say down in Khan Neshin where we opened a school, and teachers were getting paid, all of a sudden school attendance went from 100 kids, 200 kids, to 10 kids, and the Marines come in and there’s only 10 kids in the class. It is like an old Western; somebody has ridden in to town and threatened the teachers. Because Afghan parents are like us and they are not going to send their kids into an environment where they think they are in jeopardy. So we would watch school attendance and that was a kind of litmus test as to the relative health of the district. When you saw a precipitous drop, it told you something.

[33:25] But back to Now Zad. I sense from RC South that there is a lot going on. Especially Kandahar [33:45]. So on a cold December day, pouring rain, the Taliban are good talkers on their little radios, and we are good listeners. We knew that the morale was low. We knew where they were dug in in Now Zad. And for about a week or two, we'd heard a lot of complaining from the Taliban that all their leaders had gone back to Pakistan, it was cold, they didn't have the supplies they needed, they were miserable, "What the hell are we doing here?" It was a lot of griping. So we took two companies over from 3rd Battalion 4th Marines and, again, using an old card in our book, we did a heliborne insertion behind what we thought were behind enemy lines. We had as much ISR as we could. Now you will recall I said that General McKiernan said we could not have tanks, and of course General McChrystal was there. So I asked for something called the ABV, the assault breacher vehicle. Because I knew that getting into where the Taliban were in Now Zad at their positions was going to be nothing but IEDs. This was the most heavily mined city I think in Afghanistan. Because they had been there for *years*. This empty city had existed for years. There is still laundry on the clotheslines in the town, three-legged dogs running all over town. It was a nightmare.

All the locals had told us that if you can get us back into town, we will come. I remember talking to the PRT about it, and they said, "Look people have moved on, have moved on with their lives." But that's a very American way of looking at life. This is where these people were born, this is where families are buried, and they are not the transitory population that we are. They are coming home; it is just a matter of when. And we really fundamentally believe that if we could make the city safe, clear the mines, and allow for a return of the population, *that* would send shockwaves through the Taliban. We believed that would instill more confidence in the population that things actually *were* moving in the right direction. Because Now Zad just sitting empty was emblematic of part of the problem there that we were not really getting after.

Long story short, on a cold December night [Operation Cobra's Anger], we landed a couple companies of Marines. I think we had an ODA team with us, a SOF team, and we got them behind the FLET [36:30] of a very discouraged and under-supplied enemy. The line broke. We killed some, others fled, and it took a couple days to clear those bunkers, the ammo, the lines where they had. We were dropping 500-pounders on these things. But we cleared it. Then the goal was to get our engineer effort, now we need to clear the IEDs. This is a big city and every street was just chok-a-block with either IED explosion holes or IEDs on the side of buildings that had not been cleared. I forget the name of the organization, but there is an international mine clearing organization that brought trainers in to train local Afghans with the Gumby suits to go out and find these things. Combat engineers went out. But before we even cleared the town, folks were coming back, and they were coming back in droves. We were really proud of that. Now the problem was now we needed to find police, now we need to find governance. We got along very well with the British PRT and the PRT was British, but we occasionally had artistic differences. Now Zad was one of those because they had already budgeted the money

for the year for all the districts, and there was no money for Now Zad. So we were going to USAID, we're asking the embassy, and again I'm working for an American in Kabul, but at this point it's a British RC South (it had turned from Dutch to British).

Knarr: Nick Carter.

Nicholson: Yeah, that is who I'd work for again when I went to be the OPSO at ISAF. So now Nick Carter is trying to help me with the PRT, but the PRT doesn't work for him either. The PRT works from London; just understanding the command lines of this was pretty complex, but we worked and we got enough money to get things moving. We got a government assigned, we tried to get the best guy we could, bring folks back in, establish the police force, incentives to open shops. You give a guy a hundred bucks to open a bakery, another couple hundred to shop owners, we were trying to let people know that if you open your shop, we're going to support you, we're going to give you some money, we're going to provide security. Things were popping, things were moving pretty well. [39:16]

Then we shifted in the new year after the president's decision. In early January two more battalions of Marines arrive; these were going to be Marjah battalions. What was extraordinary about Marjah is that it was largely built by the Americans in the 50s and 60s with USAID. Marjah was like Venice in terms of the canals and irrigation. Unlike Garmser, Nawa, Now Zad where there were indigenous, homogenous tribes that were all from the same larger family—and this is covered in detail in that book *Little America* by Rajiv Chandrasekaran—Marjah was a composite of people from all over Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> There were Hazaras, there were Tajiks, there were Uzbeks, there were Pashtuns from everywhere. There were little enclaves of people from Khost, little enclaves of people from Nangarhar. We brought in cultural anthropologists literally to map the human terrain in Marjah. We arranged before Marjah—and Governor Mangal [40:48] was instrumental in this—he arranged meetings with people who would leave and leak out of Marjah and come to Lashkar Ga for meetings. We knew Marjah was going to be tough. Every time we had any of our helicopters fly anywhere near Marjah, they started taking fire. I had a young LAV lieutenant who got disoriented and he got on the wrong road and drove into Marjah and these farmers with pitchforks started walking towards him and screaming at him, throwing rocks at him. And he's like "Holy Crap, where in the hell am I?" And then shots were ringing out, these were all farmers with old Enfields [rifles] shooting at him. This was going to be a tough fight.

We were open about the fact that we were coming. It was almost Fallujah-esque. "We're coming, there's nothing you're going to be able to do about it. You can stay and die or you can get the hell out of there, but we're coming." Large parts of the population did leave. We used feints and some deception operations early on; we had a big build up, a lot of engineer equipment. For months, we were staging where we were going to go in, we would do prob-

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<sup>9</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War Within the War for Afghanistan*, (Knopf: June 2012).

ing, running outside. We knew this was going to be very heavily defended. The Taliban were talking even more than we were about they were not going to surrender Marjah. But again, there have been no governments in Marjah for a helluva long time. It was a little autonomous Taliban republic of where all the opium was. And there were some mansions. Just looking at the ISR footage of these Columbian drug lord kind of mansions. But everyone else is pretty impoverished, pretty dirt poor. [42:20]

So on February 13, we, again, taking a page out of the Khanjar playbook, we airlifted two battalions, one using Marine aviation, one using Army aviation, using 47s and we landed those two battalions at 3 in the morning in Marjah. Every company in its own location. And as the sun came up, instead of fighting in we were fighting from the center, were going to fight out. We lost one Marine on day 1, although tragic, based on the worst possible scenarios, we thought it was going to be a helluva lot worse than that. We lost one Marine who had stepped on an IED and we knew there were a helluva lot of IEDs out there.

We knew, where we were going to go, had a lot of enemy. We came in and started shooting MCLC [mine clearing line charge] from the ABV. Back to Now Zad, I couldn't get tanks but I asked General McChrystal for the ABV, which is on an M1 [tank] chassis. It is a tank but without the main gun; it is an engineer vehicle. It shoots a line charge and it is a ferocious looking vehicle. It's survivable. MCLCs had been used before, but an ABV had never used in combat before. The Marine Corps only owned 15, and we had five of them. It took a long time to get them there, but our proof of test was up in Now Zad. We landed two companies behind the enemy in Now Zad and then we MCLC'd our way to their position so there was a convergence of the force, understanding there's a little bit of a danger there with geometry of fire. We did that successfully knowing that those MCLCs and those ABVs were going to be critical for Marjah, we were going to have to breach our way through.

Back to my days as a young lieutenant that is what we did at 29 Palms...45:05

We MCLC'd out way into the city center and established a ground LOC into Marjah. So that covers Khanjar, Now Zad, and Marjah. But the government in a box—I left in April, Randy Newman was there for another 4–5 months. Haji Zahir was the governor of Marjah; nobody wanted the job. He was a taxi driver from Germany. Early on, we had good success in Marjah in terms of getting the shops open, getting the schools open.

What was interesting to me was on day 8 in Marjah, my sergeant major and I were walking through with 1/6, and 1/6 has got a meeting of elders. My battalion commander, Cal Worth is out in front of this group of 50 *really* tough, right out of central casting-looking guys. He's standing there with an Afghan army colonel, and this one guy stands up, in a black turban and looks over at my battalion commander. There's a *Washington Post* reporter there and I'm kind of sitting in the back watching this session going on. And this guy says "I'm Taliban, we are *all* Taliban." He looks at my battalion commander and says "I don't know you,

but I will trust you to keep your word of what you said you will do.” Then he looked at the [Afghan] Army guy, “But I don’t trust you and I will kill you, if you do anything to hurt us.” It was one of those amazing moments when he said, “We are Taliban; we are all Taliban.” I am starting to think about the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and Sinn Fein, and Sinn Fein became the political wing of the IRA. Maybe we are getting this all wrong, maybe there is a place for the Taliban to enter government. Is there a place for this guy? To get him to the table as a representative of his group?

But there were other cloisters in Marjah as I’ve said, different ethnicities where they hated the Taliban, they didn’t want anything to do with the Taliban. They had been subject to Taliban rule for the last couple of years.

I remember that day as well because sometime that afternoon we started to see a line of tractors and vehicles coming back into the district, right through the district center. Miles long. Women in blue burkas and five kids on them. It was a flashback to the Balkans, they know something we do not know, they know that the fighting largely over or they would not be coming back. Something has caused them to decide to come home. We felt that was a good sign. Marjah went on for a couple more months and they were small skirmishes, but the large fight was over by about day 10. Again there were US Army units, SOF involved, British were involved, 3/3 was guarding five points, one of the main entry points. So this was a very collaborative [effort], a lot of folks were involved in it. Two battalions were actually going house to house, room to room. There was a large support net all around preventing anyone from going in; we did not want anyone to get in fighters to cause problems.

Then it was our obligation to get, as the PRT had planned, this government in a box. Haji Zahir came in, USAID, Interagency working groups, we established a government center. I think the highlight was when we had a big flag raising; it was the first time in a decade the Afghan flag had been flown over Marjah [50:00]. We brought in the national police, the NCOP, as we started training the local police, but this is where there was a real fear of the police. People said that they would shoot anyone wearing a blue uniform, because I guess before Marjah fell, the police had been so predatory ... they had allowed the Taliban to come in... [50:30] they drove any semblance of government away and it was a vacuum and the Taliban filled.

Interagency. The first time I ever worked with a Marine reserve battalion was in Fallujah. I was a regimental commander; I had never worked with Marine reserves before. I got 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, 25<sup>th</sup> Marines out of Boston and I didn’t want them. I went to General Zilmer, my boss and said “Sir, this is Fallujah, I need a regular battalion.” He thanked me for my interest in MEF affairs, and I could not have been more wrong. It was a group of Boston cops and fire fighters and New York cops and fire fighters—they were phenomenal. They were strangely enough at home in the urban environment of Fallujah; they did very very well. They had that street sense; they just got it [51:30].

First time I ever worked with an Army battalion was in Fallujah when the 3<sup>rd</sup> of 519th parachute infantry was attached and became one of my battalions. We had issues. The radios did not talk, their ECMs were different than our ECMs, but we figured it out and they did a fantastic job. They were terrific.

Of course in Afghanistan we were working with Brits, I had Estonian's attached, as I think now, I had tanks in Now Zad, I Danish tanks [52:05]. I am not sure I was allowed to do it but I pinned a Navy commendation on the chest of the Danish lieutenant who was the tank commander. Fearless. And the Marines loved these guys.

What we cannot do now that the war is over is all go back to our corners. With Marine reserves and with the Army, the first time I ever saw them was in the fight, and that's a mistake. So we're working with a good buddy of mine MG Mike Shields up in US Army Alaska. We're doing platoon exchanges. We are not asking big Army.

We have exchanges going on with US Army Alaska, we are sending reconnaissance guys up there to broaden that even more, and they're coming down here. That year I was in Kabul, I was the 3 [OPSO] and Mike Shields was the 5 [Planner]. So we are taking it upon ourselves, I would like to see more Army guys down here working with our units and vice versa.

Interagency. When I got into Fallujah they assigned me a Political Advisor [POLAD]. By the time I got to Afghanistan as a MEB commander, within my headquarters I not only had a British POLAD, I had a US State Department POLAD, I had DEA folks there; of course I had an OGA rep, I had Department of Justice folks helping us with Rule of Law. We had a large, non-uniformed government entity, and they were invaluable.

My SOF guys—I had a Ranger company assigned—they didn't work for me but they were assigned to Camp Leatherneck and they did tremendous work with us. I had British SOF—they were doing some brilliant work. I had Danish SOF as well, but I had a SOF cell as well run by Colonel George Bristol. George was my SOF coordinator. So we were really high in SOF and had great relations with SOF. As a regimental commander in Fallujah, sometimes SOF would go in and do a raid and we were left to clean it up a little bit. And sometimes that was the downside of it. The mayor of Fallujah would call me to say “Hey, what the hell? Why were you in here—last time you came in you snatched—you got the wrong guy. You broke this, you wounded that. Who's gonna pay for this damage?” We ended up doing something to clean up. But even in Fallujah, the relationship was good, and I think they never had to ask for permission to do something, but we did ask for coordination. “Let us know where you're going, do you need some kind of back up? Do you need a QRF?” For God's sake, let us help you. We are not here to approve or disapprove of your mission, but we know the city better than anybody and if you talk to us before you go in there, maybe we can help you get in so you don't have to do these dynamic breaches. Maybe sometimes you can just drive right up to the target at two in the morning without a gunfight, get in there and get what you need. So for me per-

sonally, I *learned* to work with SOF in Fallujah. That is where I learned it. I think we perfected it in Afghanistan. And then when we became the ISAF for the IJC working for General Terry [56:50], when I became his 3, of course the SOF team's and General Votel were there. I got to know everybody in the business.

Knarr: And of course by time you had the SOJTF... Tony Thomas... the CFSOCC with Ed Reeder?

Nicholson: Yeah, that's right. Ed Reeder, who was terrific and really was very supportive of the MEB and in doing everything he could to help us. I'm a big fan of what can be accomplished if you work together. But I've also seen units where the friction is bad for the entire effort. Where the conventional forces and the Special Forces are clashing at every occasion.

Knarr: Do you think that McChrystal brought that with him from Iraq? Having been in charge of the direct action, of surgical strike in Iraq, then coming to Afghanistan and seeing what needed to be done there, do you think he brought that change of "let's work together" between the numbered task force and the conventional force? [58:43]

Nicholson: It sure could have been. In Afghanistan, we started off working pretty closely with the SOF. I did not have any adversarial issues with the SOF guys. They were team players; we worked together. They were in my COC, within our COC. I had a whole wing dedicated to special operations guys. And having them in our COC was good for us because it was more collaborative in terms of what they wanted to do, where they wanted to go. DEA for example, had their own task force. DEA would go into these markets and find the most incredible things. By them doing their job, it certainly helped us. It got a lot of guns off the street, it got a lot of opium out of the markets. But, there's always a price, because you gotta use your aviation, you gotta have your quick response force ready to go in and help provide security. I think we learned to play well. From an Interagency stand point I thought the high water mark that I saw was our year in Afghanistan.

Knarr: Was the FBI with you too?

Nicholson: I don't remember... I don't remember the FBI being there.

Knarr: Did you have Nimroz at the time?

Nicholson: We did. We took Nimroz. Which was interesting because we used to fly to Zaranj. Of course there's not much in Nimroz. We flew to Zaranj quite a bit; once a month or so, we'd fly the governor right on the Iranian border there. [1:02:05]

Again, 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines, when I got there they had a platoon in Gulistan, platoon in Bakwa [Nimroz], a platoon in Now Zad, the Brits were in Kajaki, the Brits were in Nahri Saraj, the Brits were in Musa Qal'ah. We had a battalion spread between five or six locations. And then we moved into the Helmand River valley. That's Khan Neshin down there, right at the very tip of that. [looking at the map] That really is Marjah, that whole area.

Right before I left, 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines was on deck and we relieved the Brits in Musa Qal'ah. The Brits were going to consolidate down in Nahri Saraj which was giving them a lot of problems. They were going to double down in Sangin and Nahri Saraj. So the Brits were spread all over and then really consolidated. We were north of the Brits, we were south of the Brits, we were west of the Brits. And we allowed the Brits to thicken their lines and consolidate. The month before I left, we got a squadron of Ospreys. Musa Qal'ah has been a pretty good fight for the Brits. We took that district from them.

British tactics were a little different than ours because they were in squad houses, platoon houses, and they were spread all over. It was almost like Northern Ireland. I think it probably worked pretty well in Northern Ireland or in Ulster; sometimes I think the men were spread a little thin. As 1/2 went in there, LtCol Mike Manning and his guys decided that they could not assume all the positions that the Brits had. And so they consolidated into about eight or nine positions as opposed to the number that the Brits had at the time. There was a lot of pressure for us to go to Sangin. The future British Prime Minister came to see us. He sat in our office, it was just myself and my POLAD with the British brigade commander and Dave Cameron said "General I need you to go to Sangin. I need you to relieve our forces in Sangin." And I said "Sir, I have two battalions training/getting ready to go to Marjah." [The Marines could not assume Sangin at that time but would eventually take over Sangin in late 2010.]<sup>10</sup>

The Marines now had their own AO but we were not our own regional command until 1 July—I wanted to do it on 4<sup>th</sup> of July to declare independence from the Brits—

But on 1 July of 2010, RC-SW was carved out and was born. So now you had the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps in Helmand, you had RC-SW, you had a 2-star headquarters there which was great. And sometime during that year, the Marines did take Sangin. But I remember calling General Conway and asking for a little help...

Jones: That was 3/5 and then 1/5.

Nicholson: Initially 3/7. 3/7 went in first, Clay Tipton. 3/7 went in and then Jason Morris [3/5 Marines] and Tom Savage [1/5 Marines]. And recon was in there, recon had gone into Kajaki with Task Force Raider. They had done a great job up there.

Knarr: Sir we haven't hit 2012 yet. Do you have some time to talk about that? Can you talk about your position at the IJC and your responsibilities?

Nicholson: I was the OPSO [OPSO, IJC, February 2012 to February 2013] initially for LtGen Mike Scaparrotti, who's now a 4-star in Korea, and then for LtGen James Terry, who is now in Iraq as the CFLCC [Combined Force Land Component Commander]. I could not have had two years that are more different: one at the tactical level every day and the other more at the oper-

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<sup>10</sup> "Sangin: US Marines Take the Fight to the Afghan Taliban," 20 Jan 2011, BBC News, accessed 13 Oct 2015 at [www.bbc.com/news/uk-12241803](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-12241803).

ational, sometimes even strategic level. It was a great year of working on Corps staff, initially the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps. It was weird because it was essentially an Army staff with a Marine OPSO. The 5<sup>th</sup> Corps came in from Germany, it was going to be their last deployment, but I thoroughly enjoyed and learned a *lot* working in that, again, multi-national environment. The deputy was a Spaniard, the chief of staff was a Brit. [1:09:02] The way he did it was interesting, he took a Corps staff, but then a lot of the key players were either multi-national or joint.

That was a tough year, there was still a lot of fighting going on in RC East. RC East had become the main effort or the focus of our effort. We had some horrific incidents on the Pakistani border; if you'll remember that there was a night when 35 Pakistani soldiers were killed, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were at an all-time low. Horrible. The relationship between Pakistan and the US was in the tank. Because of the Osama bin Laden raid followed on by one thing after another. The relations were in the tank. Once a quarter we had to do a meeting, a 2-star meeting, a 2-star Afghan and me and a 2-star Pakistani. And we always did them in Islamabad, so that was an education. My counterpart was a National Defense University grad, sent his kids to Archbishop Carroll high school, it was phenomenal and we just hit it off. We just connected. So we had a little hot line on my desk to Pakistan and we would talk quite a bit and General Kayani who was the [Pakistan Chief of Staff] 4-star was always hovering around our meetings and would come in. [1:10:53]

A lot of hard work on the RC East area and as we're trying to draw down, as forces are starting to send some units home and we are spreading the force a little bit, we don't want to give up any of the areas, we just want to thin the lines. The Marine battalions were going home and we were spreading, same with the Army. So the draw down was on. PRTs were starting to close up, areas where we'd had a lot of influence in we started to wane a little bit. The Haqanni network still kept us awake at night.

Knarr: In fact you killed one of the leaders out there.

Nicholson: That's right. That was a big focus. There were a couple times in Kabul—I don't know how this occurred, but I was the OPSO and I was also the commander of crisis response for Kabul. There were a couple time where apartment buildings would be seized—large, under-construction buildings—and fighters would come in and of course they'd start shooting up the city. CNN...Every one of them...If you watch TV it looked like the Tet Offensive. It was one building but in the middle of the city. We were pushing Afghan special forces to get out there, because they had their own crisis response. I was working with the police chief of Kabul, a 3-star called Salangi, tough kind of a Tony Soprano kind of strong man.<sup>11</sup> He was dispatching his QRF, we had US QRFs kind of in the barn ready to go, we don't want to launch them unless the Afghans can't do it. So we had from three different locations, three US Army QRFs getting ready to roll, along with a British one and there was a Turkish one. Be-

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<sup>11</sup> Biography, General Mohammad Ayoub Salangi, accessed 14 Oct 2015, [www.salangi.com/Main/?page\\_id=6](http://www.salangi.com/Main/?page_id=6).

cause in theory, RC Capital belonged to the Turks. So we had five QRFs, all of the guys sitting in their vehicles ready to roll downtown and start this fight. You know we're all familiar with the term *suicide bombers*, but there's a term that I came to realize called *suicide fighters*. These are guys who go in a building like that knowing they're never coming out. These are guys who penetrate a camp bastion and know they're never coming out. These are guys who in a number of places in RCs the big truck bomb would explode and these guys run through the wire knowing they're never coming out. Their job is to fight and inflict damage, kill as many people as you can before you die yourself. There is no exit strategy, there is no hope for rescue, and you're there to die. You are a suicide fighter. [1:14:00]

What was interesting about that—and it took about another 18–24 hours before the building was taken, because it was a high rise and there is only one-way up. There was one ladder. The Afghan QRF, their tier one force was mentored and coached by Norwegian SOF. A lot of credit to the ISAF SOF. Tony Thomas and the guys who really held the whole SOJTF team together. During this period of time, it would rotate between the New Zealanders and the Norwegian's, but when this particular event happened, it was the Norwegians that were with the Afghan tier one force and really helped coach, push, mentor and they were up there in front with them, pushing them. Establishing grappling hooks, so you did not have to go up a ladder. It took a long time. There was Apaches flying around, looking for targets and we were coordinating all of that right there at the headquarters. We had a few high profile attacks like that we could always link pretty well back to Haqqani network. [1:15:30]

[Village Stability Operations (VSO) with the Afghan Local Police (ALP)] That was the year that VSO really came into its own. We were really proud of that, we were working really closely on that project. Again, where it was good, it was terrific; more often than not, it was a success. There were some areas where it went south, sometimes we empowered the wrong people. Sometimes you take the wrong locals, but by and large, I thought—and I still think today—that that program has been very beneficial to reaching out. It's not designed for the cities, but for those little local towns and empowering the locals there to be able to provide for their own security. I know Tony Thomas and others were instrumental in pushing that very aggressively. I thought that was a great addition to the program.

It was a year of transition. We were still fighting. There was still pretty good fights going on in RCs. RC North had largely been placated, there wasn't much going on up in the north. The Germans ran a pretty good ship up there. RC West was the Italians and Spaniards; always loved to go see them because you always got a great meal when you went out there to see those guys. Again, each one of these RCs, there was a lead nation where there were a lot of other nations. If you go up to RC North, there were Lithuanians, there were Latvians, there were Montenegrins, there were 52 nations supporting ISAF that year. And I got a chance to probably see all 52. We had Mongolians guarding the airfield in Kabul. But I think my most interesting times were in RC East going to see the work that was being done there.

Getting a chance to go on patrol with some of our great US Army units there on the border regions was terrific. Going to some of those special operations, smaller and even OGA locations, I cannot talk a lot about that, but again, Interagency at work doing great things in Khost and some pretty dangerous areas.

Knarr: Did you work with the National Directorate of Security?

Nicholson: Very closely with NDS. In fact, I was there when Asadullah Khalid who was the director of NDS [National Directorate of Security] when the suicide bomber walked into his office inexplicably and detonated, severely wounding Asadullah Khalid. He was the guy who came to Bethesda and I think President Obama went to see him. He's alleged to have been involved with some things that were not great, but my sense that he was working very hard to reform NDS and make it a respected work organization. I think it largely was, but again, just the nature of that business; there are always going to be suspicions and allegations. I thought he was a legitimate leader, he had been a governor before, he was smart, he was an English speaker, and he was educated. My sense was he truly had the best interests of his country, it was not personal; he was out there doing good work. [1:19:22]

We worked a lot with the International Red Cross too, because they were very upset about many of the local prisons. It became very restrictive in terms of where we could allow [an Afghan to be imprisoned]...if any of your 52 nations at ISAF apprehended an Afghan, it became very difficult in where to send him, where to hold him. Because there were a large number of hold facilities that the Red Cross had decertified and said we were not allowed to use. NDS prisons being one of them; the way you got into an NDS prison was by being picked up by the NDS. You could not go in the NDS prison because we apprehended you and turned you over to the NDS. Just understanding that matrix of what you can do. Also don't forget we had a president at the time, President Karzai. General Allen was COMISAF at that point. Every time there was a civilian casualty, it became another opportunity for President Karzai to publicly be very critical of Coalition efforts. And clearly we all felt there were numerous times where he went way overboard. We knew one of the Taliban TTPs was after every raid, whether there were civilian casualties or not, it did not matter, just allege that there are and the president will condemn the Coalition. I cannot tell you how careful we were...just having sat through some of the briefs before a special operations guys were going out, and they always went out with the Afghans. Increasingly over the year while I was there, the special operations forces, the ones who were going out and doing the HVI, they tried to have as many Afghans as they could on each and every one of those missions. More and more transition to the Afghans doing most of the work. I thought that was a very successful component of the greater transition. Painstaking detail about avoiding any civilian casualties. Almost to the point sometimes where we would have clear shots, I have ISR footage and we have clear shots on the individual that we would not take because of proximity to non-combatants. I think we were very attentive to that. Sometimes we missed some great opportunities on some pretty interesting targets. And for the

right reason, we didn't take the shot. I know it was frustrating to others that we sometimes let these folks with blood on their hands escape.

Knarr: What did I not ask that you think is important? You talked about country caveats a little bit already. [1:22:58]

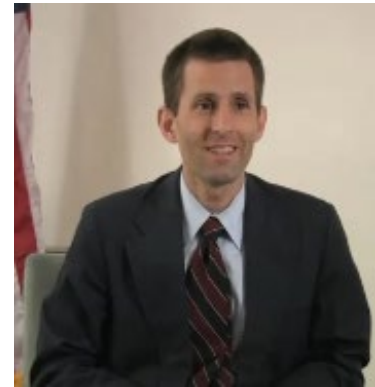
Nicholson: There is such a value in working together and understanding what other teams, other nations, other organizations what they bring. Again, for me, I would like to train more with the Army; I would like to train more with our reserve forces. I know when my battalions deployed forward they had ample opportunities to do multi-national training, but I'd like to do more here at the division level and certainly will continually look for opportunities to train with the Army. The Reserves are frustrating because it is just the limitations on their availability for training.

Jones: You mentioned a lot of names here...people that you would encourage Dr. Knarr to talk with, guys like Gunner Walker, some of those guys might be have perspectives that might add value.

Nicholson: Sir I think George Driscoll and Terry Walker would be invaluable. My POLAD would be pretty good, Kael Weston. [Others: Randy Newman, Brian Christmas, Cal Worth, Governor Mangle, Meluch, Haji Zahir] Other discussion: Ambassador Eikenberry and his wife visited Marjah, President Karzai visited Marjah. [1:28:03]

Subject: Interview with **Dr. Carter Malkasian**, former Team Leader, District Support Team in Garmser District, Helmand Province, and former Political Advisor to General Dunford, ISAF Commander

Dr. Carter Malkasian has spent a number of years in Afghanistan supporting the tactical through strategic levels. From 2007 to 2008 he deployed as part of a Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) team to work with and assess the contributions of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). From 2009 to 2011 he deployed to work with, and then lead the District Support Team in Garmser District, Helmand Province. During his most recent deployment, from 2013 to August of 2014, he was the political advisor for General Dunford, Commander, International Security Forces Afghanistan.



**Dr. Carter Malkasian**

Dr. Malkasian has also written a number of publications that document his work in Afghanistan to include: “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know They Work?” For the Strategic Studies Institute, in March 2009, as a result of his first deployment and *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier*, 2013, he documented much of his work in Garmser during his second deployment. Dr. Malkasian also has extensive experience in Al Anbar, Iraq. As such he published, *How is Afghanistan Different from Al Anbar?* for CNA in February 2009.

Dr. Malkasian was interviewed at the Institute for Defense Analyses on 1 July 2015.

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Dr. William Knarr: When did you write the monograph for SSI on the PRTs? I saw that it was published in March 2009; but it looks like you did the work when you were with CNA.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Carter Malkasian: That’s right. We wrote that in 2008. That was the latter half of 2008 we wrote that little PRT pamphlet. That’s very much like the PRT was in the East in 2007/2008, because later on things changed: The size of the PRTs increased; number of US personnel increased.

Knarr: You have been with CNA on and off?

Malkasian: I started with CNA in 2002, I worked in a variety of roles until 2009 and was with the State Department from 2009 to 2011, I was back at CNA for a little bit, then I was at State Department again for a year, then I was with General Dunford from 2013 to 2014 in Afghanistan. Now I am back with CNA. So CNA has been a great place to base myself.

Knarr: Could you start by telling us when you were in Afghanistan and in what capacity?

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<sup>12</sup> Carter Malkasian, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know They Work?” Strategic Studies Institute, Mar 2009.

Malkasian: I was first in Afghanistan in late 2007. I had gone there as a CNA analyst with a team and we were working on different PRTs. Those PRTs were all in the east, so I was in the Kunar PRT, we had someone on the Ghazni PRT, at the Khost PRT, and so we were there in 2007 for about 2 months. Then we went home and we came back in early 2008 for another 2–3 months depending on the person. That was my first introduction on the ground to Afghanistan with the people of Afghanistan and the same with the PRTs as well. [02:43]

After that, in mid-2009 I came back as a State Department employee to Garmser, and I worked there for nearly 2 years. During that period, I started out as a political officer in the district support team and I moved to be head of the district support team. I worked a lot with the Marines during that period; that was a very good experience.

After that, I came back in 2013 as a DoD employee and stayed for 17 months as General Dunford's political advisor, leaving in August 2014. I was based in Kabul, but I had a lot of chances to move around and see things. Of course by that time most of the PRTs were closed. When I first arrived in 2013, a few PRTs were still open, so I went to the Ghazni PRT, I saw the Helmand PRT again...I may be missing one, but shortly after I arrived all the PRTs except Helmand were shut down. The Helmand one shut down in early 2014. [03:55]

Knarr: In 2007 you went over there with CNA with a team—was it specifically to look at the PRTs?

Malkasian: Yes, it was to work with the PRTs. CNA works partly for the Navy and partly for other organizations. And the Navy had volunteered officers to go and become commanders of PRTs as well as staff, because the Army and the Marines didn't have enough personnel to put into those jobs, so the Navy and the Air Force volunteered to do that. And the Navy and the Air Force tried to get some high caliber people to do that, people who were going to go on to command; they weren't just sending people who weren't going to go anywhere in the Service. So they were sending good people. They had an interest in how things were going, how this could be improved, so they sent the team from CNA to work with those PRTs for a while. That is how I ended up working in Kunar with the PRT there.

Knarr: So the publication you wrote was kind of a close out report of your visit during that period?

Malkasian: It tied to a close out report, we wrote a larger close out report for the Navy about what the lessons were from manning and training, but part of it was also how effective the PRTs have been and what difference their projects have made, so that report that we put out was derived from those findings.

Knarr: The PRTs at that time, who was in charge of them? Was it the military, was it State Department? [05:38]

Malkasian: Every PRT had what they called a combined command element. It was supposed to be shared leadership between the PRT commander, the State Department representative and the USAID representative. But in reality, the military commander was in charge of those PRTs at

that time. Because the military commander was the one who had authority over all the military forces there and the PRT had about 70 people in it, of whom only 3–5 were civilians. It was more of a military organization. The funding primarily came through military channels for the projects they would be executing. It was more of a military commander of the organization, and that PRT commander he himself fell under the local brigade commander. It put it very much within the military structure. I'd say it was a useful organization in that the civilians benefitted; if they did things properly they gained more authority and more power, more maneuverability through working with the military on those PRTs than they would have had otherwise. It would have been very hard for the State Department to put a single person in Kunar and Khost and Jalalabad if they did not already have this military organization already there that was going to provide the force protection, provide the mobility, allow the representatives to go and do their work.

Knarr: When did you go to Muscatatuck?<sup>13</sup>

Malkasian: I went to Muscatatuck in 2009, I think it was early August 2009 or it might have been late July. Right before I went back to Afghanistan in 2009.

Knarr: So when you went back the first time, had you decided at that time that you were going to return? When then you did make up your mind...

Malkasian: I really enjoyed the experience in Kunar. I enjoyed getting a chance to work with the PRT there. They used me not just as an analyst, but they asked me to go meetings, they asked my advice on how the meetings went. Sometimes they would have me run a meeting. I was not really playing any key or critical role in that PRT, but I got to see what was happening, I got to experience what they were doing. I found that to be very meaningful work and that is why I wanted to go on and work with the State Department and go to Garmser.

Knarr: When did you learn Pashto?

Malkasian: I learned Pashto before I went because of my experiences in Iraq and my experiences earlier in Kunar. I kind of knew that if you had one of the local languages, it would make you much more effective. I got myself a tutor, and went for two months every day to learn Pashto. And of course at the end of two months, I didn't really know it, but I had made sure that he would teach me the grammar; I said "Don't teach me the pronunciation, I can do that when I'm there, just teach me the grammar." So he taught me all the grammar, I memorized all the grammar so when I went over there, I could study vocabulary, study the words and work on the pronunciation to get all that straight, because I had the basic framework already in existence.

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<sup>13</sup> PRT training was conducted at the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center, Indiana. News Up Front, "Muscatatuck Urban Training Center," <http://CALL.Army.mil>, accessed 15 Nov 2015, [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/call/call\\_nftf\\_young100100.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/call/call_nftf_young100100.pdf)

It took me a while once I was there, to actually become able to work and operate without an interpreter. Most of the first year, I had an interpreter with me for any discussion that really mattered. I could say *hello* to someone, I could ask them basic questions, which was also very useful. In terms of having a conversation with an interlocutor, with someone who was important that I needed to get things done with, I'd have an interpreter. Then over time, I did not need the interpreter anymore, I could do it all on my own. It's the benefit of being in an area and seeing Afghans every single day, all the time that enables you to do that quickly.

Knarr: Let me walk through something and please pick it up from there. The year 2008 was when we were starting to come back to Afghanistan. In fact, the Marines had turned over al Anbar in September 2008 I believe. So we're bringing all these troops home, Obama's running for president at the time, he's talking about the war of necessity, even in 2008, before he's elected he's talking about a civilian surge. In 2009, he's in office. In March 2009 he talks about his strategy and he pledges 17,000 troops. You were there in 2007/2008. How did you fit in to all that? [10:30]

Malkasian: The election and the decision that we were going to be putting more troops into Afghanistan set things up for the civilian surge. When State Department had an idea that the civilian surge was going to happen, they started organizing for it; they started reaching out to people who might fit in taking that kind of job. I learned what the office was that was sending people, I put my name in the hat and then they called me when it became clear that something was going to happen.

Knarr: What kind of status was that at the time? They were bringing a lot of people in. Was it permanent status on State Department? Was it a kind of contract status or what?

Malkasian: It's not technically a contract position; State Department's very clear on what's a contractor and what's a GS employee. You are a GS employee, but you fit under the 3161 hiring capacity, which means State Department can go and find people who are qualified for that job and hire them directly to be a GS. Now if they had gone through the normal hiring processes—to hire someone for a GS position takes a lot of interviewing, takes a lengthy process, but this didn't have that process attached. So you had to be a 3161 do that, and some of the 3161s, after they were in Afghanistan, were able to get jobs within the Department of State, but I didn't go that route. In general, a 3161 job is supposed to be for a specific job for the State Department in Iraq or Afghanistan; I can't remember if the authorities extend beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, if they can hire 3161s for other conflict environments. But the 3161 program has become fairly controversial since the civilian surge. [12:08]

Knarr: How come? It sounds like it was a great idea.

Malkasian: There is a lot of debate over whether or not the 3161s performed as well as they should have. A lot of debate over whether or not the program got all of the right people that it should have. I'll just leave it at that, saying that there's a lot of debate about it.

Knarr: Is the debate similar to the one they are having over the Human Terrain Teams? That comes to mind immediately, because I thought the concept was right, but there is a lot of controversy even today. Last week, US Today came out with an article saying they finally closed them out. What is your opinion on that?

Malkasian: I can tell you about the human terrain teams in a second, but the question of 3161s is tied to the question of the civilian surge. Was the civilian surge worth it? There is great debate on whether or not the civilian surge was worth it. I would say it was overall worthwhile. I would say that if we had not had the civilian surge, it would have taken longer to make the security gains, and the governance and development gains happen in Afghanistan. Of course, Afghanistan is still in a very violent situation, so it would be ridiculous to say the civilian surge succeeded in stabilizing Afghanistan. It did not do that. And neither did the surge as a whole.

Knarr: But it could not have without the military.

Malkasian: It could not have without the military anyway.

Knarr: When they started withdrawing, you did not really have much of a choice. [14:00]

Malkasian: Of course not. There was never any intention of leaving the civilians in after the military left. In fact, even if the military had stayed longer, the civilian number probably would have still decreased, because decisions had already been made that the civilian surge did not need to keep on going.

There is larger debate now too about whether it is best to have the civilian effort focused in the capital of a country or do you need to have people out in the provinces or the districts? I think the reaction right now would be that putting people in the districts would be going too far, and you should not have civilians in a district. That should really be something the government is handling, that you are getting too involved. I think there is a lot of merit to that argument. In general, you want to be working through local partners, not having Americans do things themselves. I generally would prefer to have local partners do things, I'd prefer that the government of the country itself was at the district and provincial level so you don't have to have Americans there.

On the other hand, if you have made the decision to send military to a district, that there is great benefit in sending a few civilians along. Once you have decided that things are so bad that you have to send the military there, that is a good indication that the local government is not going to be able to handle it terribly well. Sending civilians there gives you the ability to interact with the local authorities. The military can also interact with the local authorities and it has certain strengths in interacting with the local authorities, strengths the civilians do not always have. For example, the military is better at interacting with police and military forces than civilians are. But civilians are going to have certain other abilities to interact better with certain aspects of the government, certain aspects of the population. Civilians are adding

something. Civilians can give the military advice that is a valuable perspective on their operations. Perspective both in terms of “If you do this you’re going to cause harm,” or “I have a certain knowledge of the tribes or local environment that I can assist the local commander with.” In that regard, I’d say the civilian surge was beneficial.

Knarr: Quoting the papers, you went from about 300 civilians to about a thousand, is that right?

Malkasian: The number I had in mind was a surge of 500.

Knarr: The DSTs, the PRTs, something they called the Regional Platform, how and where were the civilians distributed?

Malkasian: I don’t remember the exact distribution of all the civilians. There was district support teams at the district level, and every DST would have, say, 2–4 Americans on it; there may have been other people on it, other contractors on it, there may be members of the USAID implementing partner on it. In terms of what you call the civilian surge, which would be State Department, USAID, and USDA employees, you would have 2–4 on a DST. Actually, probably 1–4 on a DST. I do not recall the total number of DSTs that were fielded. My guess would be something around 30.

Then you have the PRTs. Just about every province had a PRT; every one of them was not an American PRT, but every one of those PRTs probably had an American on it. And in some of the PRTs, the American PRTs like in Kunar or Jalalabad, they would have a larger American contingent. So it would be 10 Americans on that, even on the Lashkar Gah PRT was probably 10 Americans and that was a British PRT.

Knarr: That’s pretty big. With 10 Americans, it must have been a pretty big PRT.

Malkasian: It was. I think there were about 100 people on that. Probably more on the PRT itself, but in terms of government, British or US government employees, it was probably 100. All the PRTs became substantial over time because they were running the district support teams, both handling things in the provinces themselves. Over the PRTs, you had the regional platform. The PRTs would answer to the platform, the platform is co-located with the regional command. That would have more US civilians, maybe 20. Then you go to the embassy, and the embassy had about 500, but I’d have to double check those things.

Knarr: You joined up under this 3161 program, you went to Muscatatuck in August 2009, you then went to Afghanistan to a DST. When did you do that?

Malkasian: I arrived in Kabul in mid-August and I arrived in Garmser around 1 September, something like that.

Knarr: Had there been anyone in Garmser before?

Malkasian: Oh yeah, there was already a Marine battalion that had been operating there for a few months. Before the Marine battalion there had been British there. There was a British stabil-

ity advisor who was there running things inside the district. I ended up working very closely with the British stability advisor for the first not-quite a year. He was there until June 2010.

Knarr: What was his name?

Malkasian: Peter Chilvers.

Knarr: That's right, I remember that from the book. By the way, there was a guy by the name of Cuomo in there, a captain Cuomo—was he the same guy that was out in Al Qaim with Dale Alford in 2005 in Iraq?

Malkasian: He knows Colonel Alford very well. I don't remember him having been in Al Qaim then.

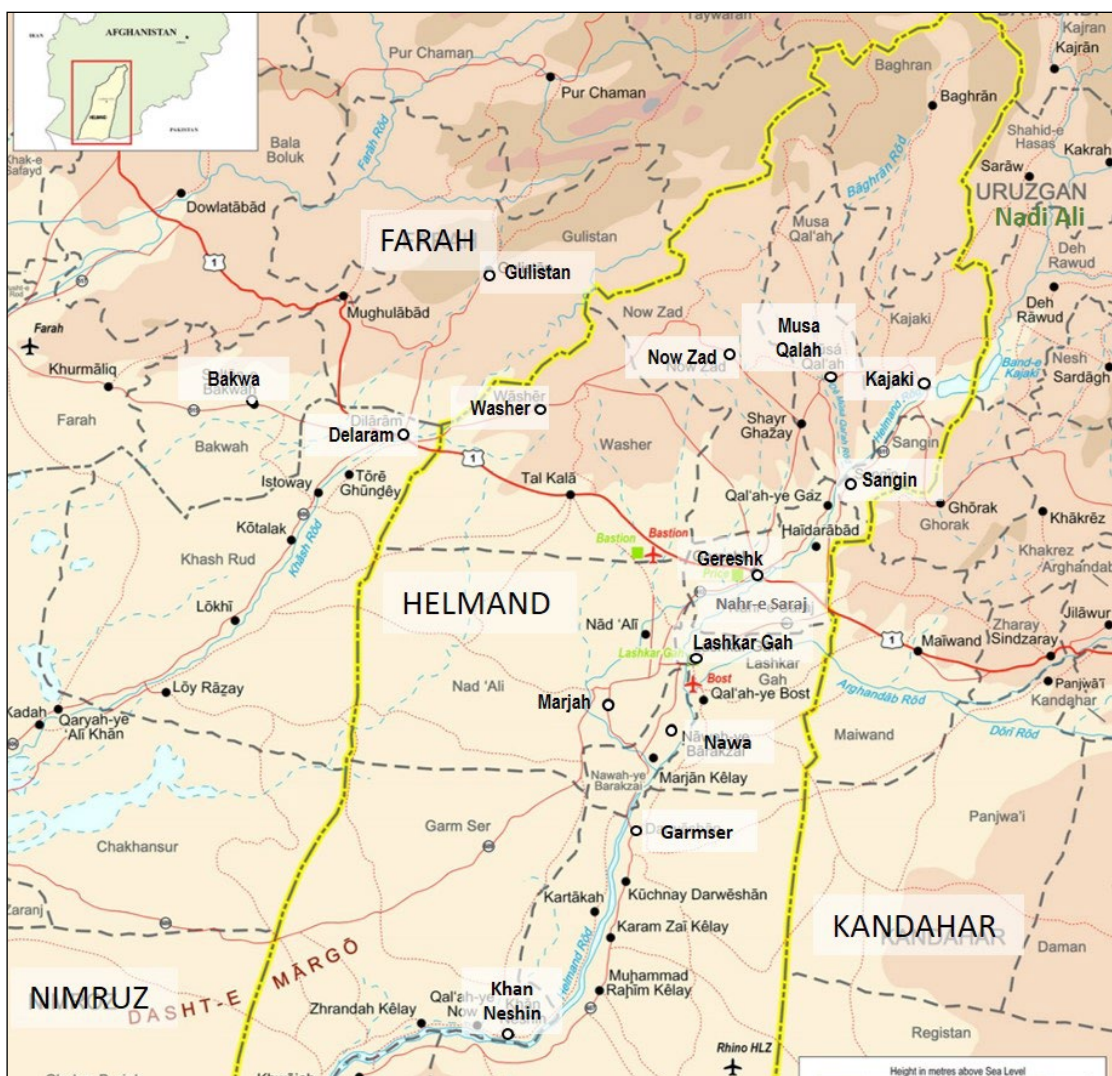
Knarr: I was just curious, because I think they wrote an article together.

Malkasian: Captain Cuomo and Dale Alford could have written an article. (Major Cuomo now.) Scott's around here these days doing a lot of work; he's very active.

Knarr: You have a battalion there in Garmser, in the district. Did they have a battalion per district at that time? [21:15]

Malkasian: During the surge the Marines put a battalion into Garmser and they put a battalion into Nawah. They put part of an LAR battalion down into Khan Neshin. Meanwhile they were waiting to move on into Marjah for that operation that happened February 2010. Rule of thumb was a battalion per district; not every district, but the districts that were considered key to operating, there was about a battalion per district. That varies in certain areas. I believe Musa Qal'ah didn't, Now Zad didn't have a battalion in it because it's too far up there, too far out. When Marjah first starts, there were two battalions there and I think after six or eight months, it goes down to one battalion. In Kandahar, most of those Kandahar districts during the height of the Surge, had more than one battalion in them. So Arghandab during the height of the Surge had two battalions, Zharey has something like 4–5 battalions, and Panjwayi has two battalions. Although you should be able to check some of those numbers, but I know each had more than one.

Knarr: Were you there when they split Southwest out of South?



Defence Geographic Centre, Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom, 2011

**Figure A-3. Partial Map of Helmand Province**

Malkasian: Yes. When I started we were South, and then we split into South and Southwest in 2010.

Knarr: Can you talk about Garmser? When you got there, a couple things I certainly learned from reading your book was about this appointment system.<sup>14</sup> Karzai was elected, but everyone else is appointed. Some of these district governors—or maybe it was the chief of police who was a great guy; but all of a sudden they brought someone else in for political reasons.

Malkasian: It's an appointment system in Afghanistan. So the governors are appointed, the district governors are appointed; the police chiefs are appointed too. People aren't elected into a position. From an American perspective, we look at it as, "That's wrong. You should elect your

<sup>14</sup> Carter Malkasian, *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier*, 2013

provincial governor and elect your district governor.” The district governor is akin to being a mayor. [The American view is that] The people should choose who that is, there shouldn’t be someone up on high who gets to say who’s going to run the people down in their homes. I think the Afghans look at it and say, “Well if you elect a governor for Helmand, who are you going to elect? Who’s going to win? The person who has the biggest tribe, they’re going to win.” They are going to manage to get their person in, and at least some of the other tribes are not going to be happy about that. They are not going to listen to the new guy, they may try to fight against him. What is worse is that most tribes have feuds between them, long running feuds. So when the new guy who gets elected by the majority gets in, he isn’t going to try to help the smaller tribe because he probably has a feud with them. You are not going to get an effective means of government if you do that. [24:40] They would argue that if you appoint someone, you appoint someone who is neutral who is not a part of these tribal dynamics, and then you won’t have that level of instability. Those are two sides to the argument.

On the ground, we saw people frequently removed who were doing good and who were fighting hard and making sacrifices, and new people were brought in and sometimes they worked out, but sometimes didn’t work out as well, and it caused a great deal of friction in our operations. The root of it was often the political dynamics and the competition that was happening behind the scenes that was very hard to control. We generally tried to stay out of it and not influence who was getting put in and not try to back one person over another; generally we tried to do that, but there are some glaring exceptions to that.

Because we did not press it is probably one of the reasons why we continue to have leadership problems in Afghanistan. There are not consistently people who are aggressive and committed to fighting the Taliban. The political dynamics put other people in, and we have decided not to weigh in ourselves on who should be there. I do not think the United States should—I think you need to be very careful with those kind of things. But if you see someone in place who’s doing *harm*, then the United States probably should have taken more of a stand on those issues.

Knarr: In Garmser, can you walk through some of the highlights during the time you were there?

Malkasian: When I arrived, they [the Government] basically controlled a 10km by 10km area in the north called the snake’s head of the district, it’s a long district along the Helmand River. It’s about 120 km long, and it was only the top 10 km that was under government control. Beneath that there was a lot of fighting. The Marines had conducted an operation right before I arrived to get further down into the district, from 10 km south into the district to another 20 km south of that approximately. There was heavy fighting going on in those areas to get control over that area. It took about months before that calmed and that area became secure. What the Marines did was they slowly went down and took area after area inside Garmser until after a year they had captured all of Garmser. While they did that, they established police; they got the Army to go down to these places to establish posts and distributed

themselves all throughout the district. Because they were so aggressive about it, because they were willing to stretch their troops, because they used the Afghans to good effect, they were able to do that with one battalion and get all of that done. Garmser's total population is 150,000, in the district as this was getting done it was probably somewhere around 100,000, and more came back once the district was cleared. Those were the major military events that were happening during our time there. You start out with not much of the district under government control, and you end with all of it in government control. It was fairly impressive.

Knarr: Was it General Nicholson?

Malkasian: General Nicholson was the Marine Expeditionary and Brigade Commander when we arrived. He stayed until about May or June 2010, and then he switched out and RC-SW, General Mills, took over.

Knarr: You were in Garmser even during this period of contention. So what were you during that period?

Malkasian: Working a great deal with the district governor. Because the district governor was concerned about the amount of insecurity that was happening, he was concerned about trying to make sure that things were progressing. So I was spending a lot of time with him, and a lot of time with the police chief and a lot of time with the community council. The council is a body that was essentially elected, and had about 18 people on it when we started and by the time we finished it had 35 people on it; we had a series of elections for representatives on the council. I would spend a lot of time talking with the governor and with the tribal leaders, and occasionally I would go down to the more southern areas to look at what was happening on the ground there. To see what could be done to try to speed up the advance of stabilization.

I started working with the district governor because he was interested in how we could bring stability to a greater extent. He emphasized the importance of working with tribal leaders, so we ended up talking to a lot tribal leaders and trying to convince them to work with the government, convince them to have their young men join the police, and for a few of them, to convince them to come back and work in the district. That slowly got moving; it took several months to get going too. But as the Marines are advancing, clearing areas, we were able to convince a few tribal leaders of power to go back to the areas where they were living. It was really the district governor convincing them more than me convincing them. All we did was kind of facilitate. Brought them back into those areas and they were able to convince the members of their tribes to work with the government more and not support the Taliban. They were then able to convince members of their tribes to join the police. At first, it was to join the early version of the Afghan local police and then after that, they went on to join the police. [31:24]

Knarr: The tribes?

Malkasian: Yes, members of the tribes.

Knarr: In the book, you mentioned Alizai?

Malkasian: Yeah, Garmser has two main tribes, the Nurzai tribe and the Alizai tribe. The Alizai are about 30% or so, and the Nurzai are something a little over 50%, and then there's a variety of different tribes, smaller tribes as well.

Knarr: You also mentioned the immigrants, the squatters.

Malkasian: There are different kinds of immigrants inside of Garmser. One kind is immigrants who were brought onto the land, they were given the land by the government. This happened in the early and late 1970s; the groups of immigrants came in and they became part of Garmser society. They were recognized as legitimate tribal leaders, although the tribal leaders who had been there longer tended to look down their noses at them. In addition to that, there were squatters. The Communist government and the Taliban on their own gave land to people; there are also people who just came and sat on land without anyone giving them permission to do it. But when the Karzai government came into power, they said "The Communist deeds don't stand and the Taliban deeds don't stand. You're on that land and we're not kicking you out, but that is not your land. We're deciding what we're going to do about it." Those folks had a reason to lean toward the Taliban because it was the Taliban who had given them their land in the first place.

We tried to work with all the different tribal leaders that we could, and tried to get them to come to the government. There were immigrants who came and started working with the government; there were some squatters who came and started working with the government, but there is no doubt that the traditional landed tribes were more interested in working with the government than the immigrants or the people who had gotten land from the Taliban were.

Knarr: Land reform is a big deal.

Malkasian: Land reform was an important issue but totally unrecognized, and remains largely unrecognized to this day as a problem in Afghanistan. Ghani probably knows about it. It is not something the United States has decided to delve into. The United States has decided to stay away from it because it is such a touchy issue. The Afghan government views that as their resource, that government land is theirs, it is their business. If we start asking about it, it is a form of interfering in Afghan affairs, so it is like a third rail. People do not want to talk about it or deal with it. I myself tried to pressure the Afghan government to do more about it; they got upset that I was mentioning those things. That is probably another issue that, at least in Garmser, we probably should have pressed harder. And in Helmand probably should have been pressed harder. Perhaps Kandahar should be pressed harder. That land issue is something in the south and in a few places in the east, but it varies in importance depending on

where you are in Afghanistan. In terms of how it is causing violence; it's a problem everywhere, but only in certain places is it a problem resulting in violence.

Knarr: What's the difference between your community councils and a shura?

Malkasian: A *shura* is an Arabic word for 'council', it's a group of people coming and talking. In fact, in Pashto, the community council was called the community shura. It's the same word effectively. The difference between the community council that we had and, say, a village shura is that a village shura would be a group of village elders getting together, maybe the whole village getting together to discuss a certain issue, to handle village matters. At the district level, this includes representatives from the major communities, if they were so elected, coming up and talking about issues. They also had certain powers. They were designed to have certain input into justice issues, into security issues in terms of monitoring what the various forces were doing. They were designed to have access to projects; we would funnel certain projects through the community council, and later on the government started having the community council give input into what kinds of projects the government would be conducting in places.

Knarr: I probably should have started with this—what was your mission in the DST?

Malkasian: The DST's mission was to foster development to help with governance and certain elements of security, but it was only that we were providing security to ourselves—it was more like helping with coordination of security between the district government and the leadership. What I saw our job as was to help mobilize the people against the Taliban. That is how I saw our specific mission, and that is how the PRT saw our specific mission. That was the overall focus. I did not see us building governance for governance sake or doing development for development's sake. What we were trying to do is get the people on the side of the government, to get them to stop letting the Taliban to come in. A lot of our work was focused on that for, better or worse. [36:57]

Knarr: You had an article comparing Anbar to Afghanistan, and you talked about the tribes, which I thought was interesting. You talked about rural versus urban—can you speak to that?<sup>15</sup>

Malkasian: I read over the document about a year ago, and some of the things we wrote I felt stuck really well, and some of them I felt did not stick too well. I think those two points about the tribes and the kind of role they play in Afghanistan stuck fairly well. In Iraq, you got all the tribes to rise up to fight the insurgency, to fight Al Qaeda in Iraq. I was saying that the structure of the tribe is very different in Afghanistan. You do not have the kind of centralization that exists in Iraq. It is going to be more difficult to mobilize everyone. In Iraq, a tribe generally has one person recognized as the sheikh, they may not actually have the power to be that, but they could; there are certain ones who do.

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<sup>15</sup> Carter Malkasian, *How is Afghanistan Different from Al Anbar?* CAN, Feb 2009.

It is rare in Afghanistan to find a single leader who has authority over the whole tribe. Tribal structure is not designed that way. There are bonds of kinship and tribes do identify themselves as tribes and they do see themselves somewhat as *one*, and especially when you get to the local level, where I was, tribes do define themselves as *one*. There is a cohesiveness. But if you want to try to get a giant tribal movement across parts of Afghanistan, it's very hard to make happen. All those tribes of different districts don't naturally conglomerate into one that's going to mobilize a giant army. I think that is pretty much what we saw in Afghanistan; it was hard to get the tribes to the ALP [Afghan Local Police] program or other programs, to get the tribes to turn wholesale against the Taliban. It was very difficult to have this kind of "Awakening" moment in Afghanistan. Maybe it was still possible, maybe there was more that could have been done, but it is still a big constraint on making that kind of thing happen.

On the rural versus the urban, I think we did some of the difficulties in a rural insurgency in Afghanistan. The amount of area you have to control—in an urban insurgency, if you can just control the city you're doing a lot of damage to the insurgency. There are a lot of difficulties to it—casualties and chances of civilian casualties, but in the rural insurgency you have to be able to control all of these different villages spread out over large distances. Especially in the terrain of Afghanistan, that was very difficult.

Knarr: You mentioned the ALP/VSO program—did they have an ALP set up in Garmser?

Malkasian: It got set up right as I left. There was a precursor to the ALP program that's fairly well-known in Helmand called the ISCI [Interim Security Critical Infrastructure] program, because you were allowed to recruit people to defend their villages. In Garmser, we carefully recruited people in coordination with the police chief and the tribal leaders with the idea that these guys would defend their villages, they would send people to join the police and slowly turn all these people over into the police force. The ALP program got started in Garmser in 2011. It already had its trials in Arghandab in 2010. By the time it got started in 2011, we already had these forces in existence, and in fact, of those ISCI forces that had been developed—I'm forgetting the exact percentage—but over 50% had gone into the police, so they were now police forces. There were a small number of ISCI remaining. When ALP came—the networks and the structures of the tribal leaders whom we had gotten together to originally support the police—ALP then went to them again and they provided more people to be part of the local police.

I think because the program in Garmser was always so well-integrated with the police and had a lot of oversight by tribal leaders and by the Marines, it has done okay so far. It has not had the problems that other places have had. There have been some problems associated with it, but not like other places.

Knarr: It was interesting, your comments about militia in the book. The number of people you allow on a personal security detail. Four is about right, but eight may be too many... I mean you do not want to give them too much power.

Malkasian: If you want a tribal leader to go back somewhere to work and try to bring people in to the government or to keep out [threats]—if it's the Islamic State or the Taliban, whoever it is—that tribal leader has to know he's not going to get killed. He needs a certain number of people to defend him. If you have fewer than four, it is hard for that to happen; the reason for that is when that tribal leader goes somewhere, he needs someone to be watching 24 hours. Generally, you do not want one person; you want two, so they can see what is happening. If you want to have them doing that kind of shift, you need four to make it work. You can have more, but for that particular mission you do not need eight. If you want to have eight to do a different mission, that is a different issue, but when you are first sending someone down, four was sufficient for the work you needed to do.

The other thing is that in Afghanistan if you have a tribal leader living in a big compound, and let us say there are 10 insurgents roaming around, you actually do not need 10 militia to keep those insurgents away from the tribal leader. If you have two guys with Kalashnikovs in their giant fortress home, 10 guys are going to have a very hard time doing anything against that home. It is not worth their while unless they are going to organize something larger, but if they organize something large, the local army police or Marine forces are probably going to do something about it. So the ending has a bit of a conundrum if you can just get these tribal leaders enough defense to prevent them from being killed at night in their sleep. It is very useful in that regard.

Whenever you are working with these militia forces, you just have to be cognizant of the chances of human rights abuses or something else happening. I would extend that to not just militia forces but the police and army too. They are involved in this war every day for years and we are not. So when they see one of their men get killed, it does them more damage than it does us. They also know that as they fight these insurgents, the insurgents are going to come after their families, so the incentive that they have to kill the insurgent rather than capture the insurgent is great. You have to be aware of that, to try to do things to stop that. Part of that is making sure that the insurgents captured actually go away and do not come back to the battlefield. [45:28]

You have to watch what they are [the militia members] doing, have an idea of what their operations are and give them set areas to operate in. You do not want them going into areas of other tribes, because that is how problems start, you have to understand what the tribal boundaries are in an area. You have to be wary of that fact that just because they have a gun that can make them want to take money from people or do worse. In the end, you are confronted with this trade-off of risk of abuse of the population compared to continuing violence. If you do not have locals working with you who know who's who, it is extremely difficult to put down an insurgency. If you have a huge number of troops you can do it, but it is very hard if you do not have locals. You are playing this game of "Do I not use them and so I

am not going to be able to stop the insurgents?” Or “Do I use them and then I have to worry that something could go wrong and I have to keep a careful eye on them?”

With the ALP program, and General Miller, I think that if you were to historically look at attempts to build militia forces that was probably *the* most responsible attempt ever. Even better than El Salvador, where we tried hard, but it did not really work out; there were far more human rights abuses in El Salvador than have occurred inside Afghanistan. The effort to make sure that the Afghan local police were vetted, the effort to make sure that the SOF were looking over them, making sure this was being done right, the effort to demobilize forces that were not working out well, showed a great effort toward responsibility. The fact that it was not perfect, and there were still a few problems represents the difficulty of working with militias in the first place.

Knarr: Sectarianism—did you have a problem with it? It seems to me they were all Pashtun in that area.

Malkasian: They were all Pashtun in that area, but there were Tajik, the Tajik army is there, and there is somewhat of a sectarian issue. You want to be careful talking about it because it is both there, but it is not there as it is in Iraq. So if you say sectarianism exists, people tend to think it is like Iraq; no, it is not really like Iraq. [Video 2] The Pashtuns view the Tajiks in a certain way that the Pashtuns deserve to rule the country, the Tajiks are not supposed to rule the country. The Tajiks view things as “we’ve been fighting since 1978–79 to keep out the communists and to keep out the Taliban, and we have given Afghanistan some amount of freedom, we deserve a right to have a chance to lead.” They also have a certain amount of distrust for the Pashtuns as those who have been backing the Taliban for so long. There is some friction there, but it is not like Iraq or other places.

Knarr: PRT and the platform. What was your relationship to the PRT in Helmand—where was the regional platform located?

Malkasian: The platform was started up in Kandahar and then it was at Bastion, the headquarters for the Marine and British forces inside of Helmand. I had a good relationship with the PRT in Lashkar Ga. I reported to the US political officer at the PRT in Lashkar Ga, and I had a good relationship with them, Arlan Hardinger and then Joe Burke after that. The British PRT, in my opinion, it was the most professional PRT in the country, and the most effective. It was a large organization that had very good British expertise on it and members of British government and the US put some of its best people into that British PRT. The British had flexible means of funding projects, they had well-developed programs for education, for health, for the community councils. They had people who were there for years, so they developed close relationships with the people they worked with and they put in place projects that lasted.

The community council program throughout Afghanistan was something that the United States and Britain, the ISAF as a whole—or the international community as a whole—executed. But

most of those fell apart after everyone left, after the project ended. The ones in Helmand did not fall apart, except some districts like Sangin has taken quite a hit because the Taliban has overrun most of it. Where the government is still operating security forces and the Taliban has not taken over, those community councils continue to function. That is one example of a fairly effective program that the British put through. Their program on education was also very effective. They were run by a civilian—they had a 1-star civilian equivalent in charge of their PRT, good people, good funding, good programs, experience, it worked very well.

I often think that we would have been better off, having three or four PRTs of the British type, rather than having at the end it must have been 15 PRTs or so of our own. The British benefitted, they only had one. They only had to worry about putting people into one and making one of them quality; we had to worry about all of these different PRTs. Fewer probably would have done us better.

Knarr: How many countries supported PRTs? The Brits led one, we led how many?

Malkasian: We started out running 12, but I believe during the Surge it rose to 15 or maybe 17. The British has one, the Canadians had one, New Zealand had one, the Koreans even had one, Turkey had one...up in the north I get a little foggy. In the west, the Italians had one, the Germans had one in Mazar; the Germans may have had another one on Badushan or Kunduz as well, they may have been running two or three. The Canadians were in Kandahar, but once they pulled out in 2011 I think? the US eventually took over that PRT.

Knarr: What about the platforms?

Malkasian: The platforms are located at a higher level; I would interact with the platform as well because it was kind of like I was OPCON to the platform but TACON to the PRT. A lot of my administrative stuff went through the platform. And the platform would come down to the PRT as well. They tended to be working on higher level things than the PRT.

Knarr: You spent almost two years in Garmser? And then you left in 2011? And then you went then to State Department?

Malkasian: I went back to CNA for a small amount of time and then I went to State Department as a part of their Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization operations. Then I was running a team there, I was directing an office there and that office had several teams; we had a team in Honduras, in Burma, in Afghanistan. I would go see those teams, see what was happening—although I did not get the chance to go to Burma. I went to Afghanistan and Honduras several times.

Knarr: You were still under the 3161 program?

Malkasian: No, I was a political appointee then. I did that until General Dunford asked me to be his political advisor, and then I joined him in Afghanistan. I got there in March of 2013.

Knarr: What was your task as General Dunford's political advisor?

Malkasian: My job was to talk to the Kabul-based leadership on key issues of concern to General Dunford. So I was either getting information for him or I was transmitting a message he wanted transmitted. That was part of the job; the other part of the job was going down to the provinces and understanding what was happening there. That was both transmitting messages for General Dunford and getting information and bringing it back again, but there was a different flavor to it. I would also accompany him to various meetings and things like that.

Knarr: When you say “Kabul-based leadership” are you talking about Afghan?

Malkasian: Afghan, yeah.

Knarr: So you interfaced with—

Malkasian: Members of their parliament, ministers, ministries, also other key power brokers or people who had been in government who were not anymore. Getting information, hearing what was happening, but also several of these people would be directly involved in, say, the elections, or directly involved in the signing of the BSA [Bilateral Security Agreement], or directly involved in peace talks with the Taliban. I would be getting information and putting information back out.

Knarr: I know some of this certainly is sensitive, but can you speak about the elections and the BSA? [video file 08:02; audio file 56:00]

Malkasian: Yes. The elections were more interesting than the BSA. The BSA was just a long slog—going to action and Karzai said he was not going to do it, and he did not do it. The elections were very interesting. Seeing the first round and the second round—the first round was a sense of relief on everyone’s part, that so many people voted, so many people were interested and the Taliban attacked, but it didn’t deter people from going to the polls. That was probably the happiest times in Kabul; it was a reminder that the Taliban were not as strong as people often painted them.

The second round was more difficult. You had the political crisis after that, so we were working very hard to try to do something about the political crisis, to try to prevent things from falling apart. Thankfully, they did not and we now have some kind of unity government; there are still some issues, but in July of 2014, there was really a risk of the country breaking apart politically. That could have spread to issues with security; there could have been problems in the military and the police if those political things at the top had not been resolved. And there was a point in July 2014 when it looked like they were not going to get resolved.

Knarr: [57:30] Can you talk about some of the people involved in that? You had Ghani, Abdullah Abdullah, you have Atta who’s backing Abdullah Abdullah—some of the personalities and some of the things you had to consider as you were working some of these issues?

Malkasian: Ghani and Abdullah—overall they wanted to see things come together. They wanted to see things work; they did not really want to see the country fall apart. But it was hard for

them because there were people in both their camps who were pressing very hard for one or the other to have complete victory. Ghani and Abdullah owed some of the people in their camps; their power was based somewhat on these people supporting them. A very important part of what they had to do was not just simply come to agreement with each other, but get their camps to buy in and go along with it.

Knarr: How did Dostum play in some of this? He pulled the Uzbek vote.

Malkasian: Dostum pulled a good amount of the Uzbek vote. The important thing that Dostum did was he filled up the first vice president's spot. By filling up Ghani's first vice president's spot, it was hard to do a negotiation where you could bring Abdullah into the first vice president's spot. He was not himself belligerent in any way, but by being there and being someone who was a power broker and of importance, it meant that bringing in Abdullah became a little more difficult.

Knarr: That is interesting. You are saying that [Abdullah being in the first vice president's spot] could have been a consideration had Dostum not been such a prominent figure?

Malkasian: Yes, I think it would have been easier had Dostum been a minor figure or a Tajik, then that negotiation probably could have happened.

Knarr: How did the Hazara figure in all of this? Mohaqiq and people like that?

Malkasian: They controlled a good swath of the vote. They got people to actually vote. The Pashuns were often upset, they said it wasn't fair that "the Hazaras double their vote because their women vote, and that wasn't fair." They punch above their weight. They are generally considered to be progressive, but they don't have the political power of the Tajiks or the Pashtuns. So you had Mohaqiq on one side of things, and then Khalili on the other side.

Knarr: Corruption?

Malkasian: Within the election? Or in general?

Knarr: Just in general. What do we do, what can we do about stuff like that?

Malkasian: First of all, we should define what we mean by *corruption*. If we mean corruption is everything, then we have a problem. If we mean that corruption is bad government, then we should not use *corruption* to describe that. If we are throwing human rights abuses into [the definition of] corruption, or killing people unjustly, summary executions, torture, that is not corruption as far as I am concerned. Those are human rights abuses or atrocities. I would take those things out, and they should be dealt with.

*Corruption* in terms of taking money out of the government or from the people and putting it into your pocket, or the government taking money from the people and then putting it into the right courses of expenditure, that is a very complicated issue. You are not going to fix all of it. You are not going to stop the police officers from taking money on the street. It is im-

possible. You are not going to form a police force that does not do that, you are not going to form an army that does not get involved in extracting some kind of taxes from the bazaars. You're not going to get district governors who aren't going to take cuts of the money here and there that are technically illegal, but these are laws that aren't enforced that much. Trying to do that is wasted effort.

There are bigger things related to corruption that you may want to deal with. The Kabul Bank—put some effort into that. Those people should be punished, or more importantly should find a way to get the money back. Those are symbolic events that deserve some kind of action. The other thing is our [US] money. You cannot protect all of our money, but we do give large amounts for development projects, we give large amounts for the Afghan security forces. We should try to be making sure that our money that is going to the Afghan security forces is not being wasted and going to Dubai or going to India or into people's pockets. We need to make sure bullets are arriving in places; we need to make sure new weapons are being purchased and vehicles are being maintained. If I care about an anti-corruption effort, I care about the monitoring of our money, to make sure it's going to where it should be going. We should be very careful about what is called "on budget funding": giving money directly to the Afghan government, for them to go and do the contract, for them to then go and spend it and do the budgeting. There is high risk that money will be lost.

Knarr: [1:04:55] you were with General Dunford for how long?

Malkasian: Seventeen months.

Knarr: When did you get back?

Malkasian: I got back at the end of August 2014.

Knarr: As you looked at the time when you got there originally, doing your PRT work as part of CNA, and you look back on all this, your view certainly got much bigger, simply because then you were in Kabul and you were able to look down on some of these organizations. Talk about your thoughts, the changes, what impressed you, what didn't impress you?

Malkasian: In terms of the military situation or in terms of the organization—?

Knarr: Afghanistan—how did it change? How much more needs to be done? We talked about some specific areas, but about your general feeling. Did you have a good feeling when you left?

Malkasian: I was very worried when I left, because we left and we did not want to leave. We left two weeks before the political crisis had been settled; the election crisis had been settled. We thought things were going to go okay, but we hadn't seen the end of it, so when we left we felt like "We hope this works out okay, because we've just spent a huge amount of time in this country and we want these elections to go through." We would be very sad for the rest of our lives if we left and everything fell apart. That did not happen, so that worried feeling went away.

In terms of my feeling about Afghanistan overall, I guess I am fairly pessimistic. This war is going to keep going. The Afghan government is not strong enough to defeat the Taliban. I am not sure if they can be strong enough to defeat the Taliban. The war is going to continue. There is a chance for peace talks to happen; it is a little bit of a long shot, but that is the hope. The greater likelihood is that we withdraw or the war keeps going on for years, and if the war keeps going on for years you have to wonder how long Congress will keep funding it, how long presidents will keep sending some number of forces there.

We have seen tremendous improvements. The Afghan military still holds a larger amount of ground than they did, say, in 2009 or 2010. They have had some little victories against the Taliban. I often hear people say, “What’s 10,000 troops going to do that a 100,000 couldn’t do?” And I feel that they’ve totally missed the point. What we needed 100,000 to do before was prevent the country from falling; what we need now is somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 to do things that need to be done. That to me is an example of success. We need far fewer men now to keep the country from falling apart. But then you still have to ask how long we’re going to need those troops there, how much money do we need to dump into it and what is it worth in the end?

I think we have probably underestimated the length of time you have to be involved and committed to these kinds of conflicts. We have underestimated the fact that the Taliban and ISIS have a natural advantage over the governments we have established: the government’s we have established are secular and they are connected to us. The Taliban and ISIS can naturally appeal to some warfighting minority of the people to go and fight because they have a better connection to their national identity and they have a better connection to Islam. I think you see that in the fact that the Taliban have reasonably high morale, and it is hard to mimic that morale throughout the Afghan forces. That’s not saying the Afghan forces have wretched morale—they don’t—but it’s the Taliban that are running guerrilla wars and urban insurgency in Kandahar and in Kabul. You do not see the government waging an insurgency behind the Taliban lines. That morale problem—the fact that these things inspire people to fight, makes it very likely these conflicts will go for a long time. And if we’re not willing to be there, it’s probably not going to go in the direction we want it to. [1:10:00]

Knarr: Looking at that chart, the complexity and all the people involved in this, you talk about your multi-national and intergovernmental work with the Italians out west and the Germans up north, it really is complex. When you were there, what kind of problems or challenges did you have in dealing with all the various governments? Caveats that they put on what they can do and what they can’t?

Malkasian: There are some problems that really matter, like whether or not the Italians or the Germans can do air support or if they have helicopters to take care of things, if their helicopters are permitted to go to certain places. Those are some real changes that make an operational difference, because if they cannot do that, we have to put something there. There are

other things that are more like a nuisance than a real problem. If you have so many countries there, every time a minister comes they want to see Karzai or they want to see Ghani, or they want to see Dunford; that soaks up people's time and just having meetings to keep people happy. That may be worth the contribution, especially because some of these countries put a lot of money into it. That is why I say the burden is small. It is annoying and maybe there is a bit of a burden to it, but you have to weigh that against the benefit.

[Having so many countries there] It does create a certain fragmentation of effort. Everyone has something that they want to do, some direction they want to take things, some program they want to do, and that can start adding goals for the command. Corruption is a perfect example. Because corruption is not well defined, everyone has different anti-corruption efforts and it becomes a broad thing that everyone is trying to do. How much does that really damage the effort? Not as much as people like to make out, because the cost of anti-corruption effort is not very much. Take the police. Various countries have different ideas of policing and how the Ministry of Interior should execute its policing, so there were lots of ideas of having crime labs or detective work or CSI-style stuff, community policing. Some of us would argue—I would argue that Afghanistan is not ready for that at all. We need guys on the ground who can patrol, who have a gun, but who aren't going to murder the population; that's what I'm looking to get. The rest of it is beyond it. The difference of opinion between me and the other people on that, in the end it does not matter that much because the cost of the community training or the CSI is not that great. The distraction is not that great. It is an issue of debate between us, but it does not really matter in the end.

Knarr: It's interesting you say that. I saw some of these programs like corruption and like law enforcement, and drugs—that there was a country that was somewhat responsible for that area.

Malkasian: I think that is more the way it was in the past. Before 2008, the British were responsible for drugs, and another that was responsible for policing, but that kind of went away because it wasn't working very well. Now there are certain countries that may focus on certain things like community policing or certain things they want to put their effort into, but there are not those same divisions that used to be there. Although it is probably because the United States has expanded what it has decided it is taking responsibility for. The United States is primary on police, the primary on the army, so that dictates a lot of the direction things go.

Knarr: Drugs?

Malkasian: The production of drugs is a very big deal in Afghanistan. It is very lucrative for the farmers. I think it is going to be hard to eradicate it; actually, I think that game is over.

Knarr: I would think a place like out west, like Zerkoh Valley—it just makes me wonder if it is worth everything we put into it. Does it really help the Taliban that much in a place like that?

Malkasian: No, we have totally missed that. It does not help the Taliban as much as people make it out to. It does help the Taliban, but you have to realize that a whole bunch of different groups tax that crop and take money from that crop. If the Taliban control an area and put poppy entirely in it, then by getting that money, that does help them a lot. But the way you stop that is by having the government control that area. Then the government can either eradicate the poppy there or do whatever, but the government presence there puts a big damper on Taliban taxation of that crop.

This is a controversial issue. Many people think that it does fund the Taliban to a tremendous extent; I think it is a much more complicated situation than that. I also agree with you that the costs and the difficulties of doing this are very high, so in a way, we lead Americans astray when we say that we are going to be able to eradicate the poppy in Afghanistan. Or that one of the outcomes in the war in Afghanistan is going to be the eradication of poppy and we're going to establish a country that isn't involved in the poppy trade. I think we are just leading people astray by saying that.

Knarr: Compare west to southwest as far as poppy. It seems to me that southwest is a bigger issue simply because it does fund the Taliban. Is that a wrong perception?

Malkasian: It funds the Taliban in the west as well, but the southwest and west are very much connected. Especially if you're saying Bakwah and Bela Beluch and Delaram [1:16:05] are part of—well Delaram shifts as to where it is, but certain parts of Farah are heavily Pashtun and those areas are deeply connected to Helmand. And they're deeply Taliban. So those are—as where the money is coming from poppy is probably going to the Taliban.

Knarr: So it is all the same as far as southwest and west are concerned.

Malkasian: There are other areas of the west that I am less familiar with: like the poppy around Herat I am not terribly familiar with. I would be surprised if the poppy around Herat is going to the Taliban. In the Zerkoh Valley it probably is, because the Nurzai there and other groups there have Taliban connections. And the Zerkoh Valley is, I believe, again under Taliban control, but I'm not 100% on that.

Knarr: This project is for PME institutes. One thing we look for is the strategic to tactical linkage, as such, I normally address policies and strategies. What have I missed? What do you think should be in here that talks to strategies or lessons that we have not talked about?

Malkasian: Are you talking about for generals, for colonels—?

Knarr: I am talking about intermediate level education, command general staff college or senior service/war college or even Captone. As an example, at West Point in 2009, President Obama presented his strategy for Afghanistan: “these are the four parts of my strategy.” It is a great way to start a discussion. And in February 2015 a new National Security Strategy was published. Can we link all of this stuff together. I can cover the top, but as I do that and

walk it down to the tactical, what is right and what's wrong, where should the emphasis be as far as education?

Malkasian: There is a lot of different things that address depending on the level where you are at.

We [the United States] spent a lot of time trying to build up armies and security forces over the past decade or so through advising. I believe what he did here was to build up security forces so a nation can defend itself is critically important. I do not think just because of the setbacks in Iraq or whatever problems we face in Afghanistan that we should think that building up a nation's army to secure itself is a bad thing, I think it's an important thing. One only has to look at Korea to see how you can have success in that.

However, we should also understand that simply training an army or building an army is not necessarily going to make it effective. Just because you trained up, if you train them for five years and then leave, what you have done is not permanent. There are all kinds of things that change; the training may not stick with people that long, or new people may come in who have never got the training. So you may not make that force permanently effective.

And the political dynamics change once you leave. Your presence there was making that force powerful, was forcing the government to keep it up, and was probably preventing certain abuses from happening. Once you are gone, all those things can change. Maybe the president does not want that American built military around anymore and therefore might be used as a tool of by the Americans. You really have to be there a while watching these things and helping these militaries along. If you leave them, they can go in the wrong direction. It is not a permanent solution to these kind of conflicts; many of these places have deep, embedded reasons to return to conflict. Us being there a few years isn't going to change that. You could make a similar argument about surges. Surges can change the direction, but once you are gone, the direction can go back. It is dangerous to think there are quick solutions to these conflicts, very dangerous.

At a lower level, I think understanding culture can help prevent doing harm, can help understand the things we are doing that are going to upset people, are going to drive people to fight, drive them to shoot at us. That is of tremendous value. The efforts we have made to control our use of force are laudatory. We are not perfect at it; we still, in my opinion, kill too many civilians. But we've made a lot of effort to control that, and some of those have been controversial. McChrystal took a huge amount of political damage for the tactical directive. But by doing those things we reduce the number of people who are trying to fight us and attack us. We are reducing the number of insurgents there. We are improving our relations with the country we are working with, and you really do not want to have bad relations with a country you are working with if you can avoid it or if it is not over an issue that is important. We do not want to let go of those things we have done.

Knarr: So that has gone in the right direction as far as limiting collateral damage—

Malkasian: It has gone in the right direction, it probably could have been a bit better, but overall it has gone in the right direction. The efforts that have been put into it have been a good thing.

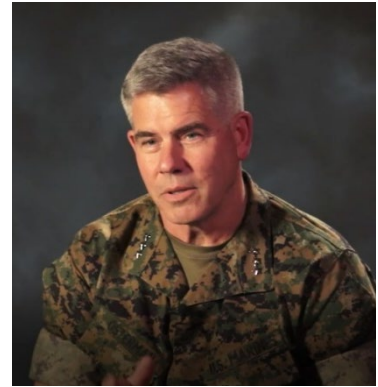
Knarr: Your comment on training the military—that is interesting because that really is it. We have trained them but not educated them.

Malkasian: You cannot change them. You can train them, you can educate them, but you cannot change them. And it's not because there's something wrong with the people we're working with, there isn't. That is their culture, that is their society, their politics—powerful things moving events in a certain direction. When we are there, we shift that direction a bit; when we leave, the direction can go back. It may go somewhat different, but that is a big leap to make it go exactly where we want it to go.

Knarr: Thank you very, very much for your time to pass on your thoughts, insights and experiences. Once completed, I will send the transcript to you for your review.

Subject: Interview with **Lieutenant General Jody Osterman**, USMC, former Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Forward, Afghanistan

Lieutenant General Jody Osterman commanded 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division (MARDIV) Forward in Regional Command Southwest from March 2010 to March 2011. This period was transitional and kinetic: Transitional because it was during the surge of forces to Afghanistan and the development/expansion of forces into Helmand as well as the development of RC-SW (split from RC South). It was kinetic because RC-SW, containing both Helmand and Nimroz was a major area of operations for the Taliban—clearing parts of Helmand Province was designated as one of the International Security Force (ISAF)/US Forces—Afghanistan main efforts.



**LtGen Osterman**

Additionally, LtGen Osterman was Deputy Chief of Staff, Joint Operations, ISAF Joint Command from January 2013 to March 2014, MARSOC commander from August 2014 to August 2016 and is currently serving as the Deputy Commanding General of US Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida.

LtGen Osterman was interviewed by Dr. William Knarr on 1 May 2017 at USSOCOM headquarters in Tampa.

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Lieutenant General Jody Osterman: It really began with General Nicholson who had 2<sup>nd</sup> MEB in there to be replaced by 1<sup>st</sup> MEB. In standing that up we literally got to the point of starting to put the headquarters together at Camp Pendleton. At that same time we had the surge coming about, so with the authorization for a whole lot more folks coming in, we basically went from a MEB to a MEF Forward in terms of the Marine Corps construct associated with Helmand. At the time, the division commander was Major General Mills, and he took the MEF Forward as a command and instead of taking a MEB, I then became a division forward, basically one of his subordinate elements. With the division, the airwing forward and the logistics group forward; that's kind of how all that came together.

Once we deployed into Helmand, it was just in the transition of moving from being all RC-South under MajGen Nick Carter, UK, to breaking out into South and Southwest. So part of the initial footprint as we went into Helmand was subsuming the things that were already there from a PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Team] construct and things like that, and also the enhancement of the Marine Corps force structure that was there—putting in a MEF Forward headquarters footprint which is pretty heavy. On top of that, we were developing the command relationship with Task Force Helmand, which was a British element that was still there. Very fast. I remember going in with a PDSS [pre-deployment site survey] with Gen

Nicholson and literally just the foundations of the two headquarter buildings being placed—that's all that was there for Bastion. Very small, went up very quickly. By the end of the second year of our being there, it ended up being an 18,000-person camp with a C5 runway and everything else in place.

From the Interagency perspective, it was interesting because our PRT was British. It made for some unique interagency, but also international, relationships while working with the PRT. There was British money coming in, and some US money coming in through USAID and organizations like that, but just like working with international military forces, you still had caveats that were peculiar to the PRT, which is not a military organization.

On top of that was the relationship with Task Force Helmand. They were in fact TACOM to the MEF Forward, so really the division forward was Task Force Leatherneck and then you had Task Force Helmand working side by side. Battlespace was doctrinally established so we all understood that, that was pretty clear. It became very interesting with fires though, as we worked in the international arena. Things as simple as [the fact that] off of US helicopters, precision-guided rockets were considered indirect fire, whereas off of British aircraft, they were considered direct fire. So when you talk about target engagement authority procedures it became interesting to see how the different forces worked together—completely interoperable—we would work with British aircraft or Marine Corps aircraft or Airforce aircraft. Sometimes it was better to have a British helicopter up there than a US helicopter for response times based on their rules of engagement.

About the same time I got there, we were also just standing up the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps. MajGen Maluk was my counterpart, so I worked with him on the force generation of the Afghan corps. And also once we got them onto the ground, [we worked on] how they were associated with our units that were on the ground. He had one brigade associated with Task Force Helmand and the other brigades, and pretty much their headquarters was associated, with the division forward and the MEF Forward.

Knarr: Did you know about the 30,000 Surge that was going to take place as you prepared to go in? Was that something that was up in the air as to how you were going to do that?

Osterman: It was up in the air. They weren't quite sure where they were going to apply the Surge. Was it going to RC-East, RC-Southwest? In the end, the decision was made to reinforce the Marine Corps effort primarily, so a lot of that [30,000] funneled in there. [6:00] The headquarters that I was forming for the MEB became the MEF Forward headquarters (my normal position was the assistant division commander to Gen Mills, so obviously I had a relationship already there). But he took the headquarters I had built for the MEB, blew it up a little bit to make the MEF Forward, then I went back and essentially pulled together another headquarters out of our division headquarters that was remaining in order to get a division forward. Very rapid. I can't quite remember the timelines on that, but literally just a matter

of months as we were trying to pull that together over the Christmas period, which made it even more difficult.

Knarr: [Referring to LtGen Osterman's earlier comment.] Was the call for fires the same? Or was it simply how it was treated, indirect versus direct?

Osterman: Call for fires were essentially the same. Medevac requests, all those were the same. Most all of our stuff is based off NATO standards anyway. As a result, it was very easy to work with them in that regard. We worked commonly to make sure there was no friction between the processes. When you called a medevac aircraft, you didn't know whether you were getting British or American, it could have been anything. They were always very responsive. Went back to a British Role 3 hospital at Bastion that was run by the British, but heavily augmented by the US. In the end, I think it was a shared arrangement, but it worked very well.

Knarr: You had the Georgians attached?

Osterman: I think they were OPCON to us, because they came to us with no national caveats to speak of. They started out with just one battalion that grew to almost a brigade-sized element. They were good troops to work with; they built experience that included having folks that had one deployment, took a break, came back for a second deployment with us. Frankly, well after the US drawdown occurred, the Georgians stayed and kept up a pretty heavy footprint. I think they were the second-largest contributing nation towards the end.

Knarr: What was your relationship with the Brits?

Osterman: Very positive. When we first got there, they had been there a while, so it was one of those things where as we gained capability and capacity, we worked with them [more]. They started coming under some national pressure because of casualties and other things to reduce their footprint or to consolidate their footprint. It wasn't that their numbers were dropping off per se, but during my tenure, we eventually took Kajaki from them, then Sangin from them. It was a positive relationship because there was a lot of concern and attention on whether they would be looked at as pulling out; they had obviously spilled a lot of blood there. But we worked it very well to allow them to consolidate down around Nahre Saraj, Nad e Ali, and the Lashkar Gar area, which became a smaller AO [area of operations] for the number of troops it had. That all came with us having a surge: at any given point in time, just the division forward had about 13,000 troops. Pretty significant combat capability.

Knarr: You said the PRT was British—who did they report to? [10:45]

Osterman: They reported up through to the British foreign office if I remember correctly. They worked hand in glove with the MEF Forward in particular. Working in good allied fashion, but as far as national lines, that kind of is where it went from there. It was not a formal military relationship, because they were not a military entity. There was no OPCON or anything like that, it was a supported and supporting type of relationship.

Knarr: I had talked to Carter Malkasian who was down at Garmser. Of course he was part of the DST [District Support Team] that was part of the PRT [11:25]

Osterman: We did have some US personnel there. It was somewhat nascent, but about three quarters of the way through my tour, the State Department put a footprint there as well. The idea was, they were spending US money, they wanted to have them in. They were not quite a PRT capability, it was just a nascent type of State Department outreach at a higher level. To be honest with you, it never really matured to the point where they were working closely with the PRT. Sometimes diverging views, but with the USAID money going in the Kajaki dam process, I guess they wanted to make sure US equities were being looked after that way.

Knarr: Kael Weston worked with General Nicholson I guess?

Osterman: He did. He was the POLAD [political advisor] for General Nicholson.

Knarr: Was that part of the regional platform?

Osterman: I think that is what they called it, yeah. I think it was called a regional platform, but it started with not even half a dozen people, so it was kind small. Like many of these kinds of organizations they were trying to find their way and purpose because it was something of a new concept. [12:52]

Knarr: You got there right after Marjah—I hate to say after Marjah because it seems that actions in/around Marjah never really stopped.

Osterman: No, it kept going. Yeah, right after the big push we had into Marjah under General Nicholson; that was kind of the last real big tactical event that he had.

Knarr: What happened after that? What was your direction, your guidance?

Osterman: Initially because of the gains around Marjah, [my guidance was] consolidating those gains. A lot of themes ran through, but the idea was to, more or less, connect the ink spots if you will, a typical counterinsurgency strategy, as well as to start to implement some of the community engagement activities. The idea being it would be more enduring. We had folks out to the west in Delaram, they were kind of an island out there, so we started connecting them through Washir, and there was a specific task to take over Kajaki and Sangin to allow the UK consolidation. At the same time, we pushed south along the Helmand River valley, down past Marjah, connecting to Nawah, and on down through what they called the fish hook and on into the southern-most part of the Helmand River. Part of that was that to hold that line, basically [with] the support coming out of Pakistan from down south would very difficult for them [Taliban] to get the resupplies up into the areas that they needed to.

After that we also looked to push a little further out into—the MEF had Nimroz province as well, didn't have a lot of activity out there, but a lot of that had Iranian influence that kept too many bad things from happening out there. As a result, a lot of that was episodic rein-

forcement with the government and police forces, just to show presence and help them when they needed it.

Knarr: So the threat was mostly from the south?

Osterman: It was a little bit of everywhere. It came up from the south, from Baramcha and that area. We conducted multiple raids down there to mitigate some of that. There was a lot of that was indigenous—just a typical insurgent environment where [they] essentially go to ground in many cases. There are also ungoverned spaces north of Kajaki, Badghiz province, as well as Maiwand Valley out to the east and up to Kandahar, basically a historic route of travel that emptied into the Sangin area. Those were the areas that [brought an] influx of fighters and material.

Knarr: What was the relationship with the CSTC-A/NTM-A [Combined Security Transition Command—Afghanistan (CSTC-A)/NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan (NTM-A)]? What were the SFATs and who supplied them?

Osterman: We did not supply the advisor teams in there. They were under a separate command, but they worked very closely—the teams with 215<sup>th</sup> corps were almost all Marine teams anyway from their original sourcing. So it made a very easy relationship with them. For me, it was particularly easy to work with them: my previous time in Iraq, I'd been the advisor to the 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Division. As a result, I was able to tie in a lot of those SFAT-type concepts with our scheme of maneuver. I pushed very hard to make sure there was full integration with those teams, using them as an extension of what we were doing.

Knarr: So the command of those teams came down from General Caldwell [Commander of the CSTC-A/NTM-A]? Was it a coordination between RC-Southwest and the NTMA side of it?

Osterman: I think they had regional commands associated with those. It was not a regional command long-term, but an RSAT or something. What you found was that through NTM-A, they provided those forces, they supplied them, they worked the man-train-equip part of the Afghan piece through those teams. But from an operational perspective, they were, for all intents and purposes, TACON to the RC commander, because employment of the Afghans was very important in terms of making sure it was coordinated with the RC coalition forces.

Knarr: I imagine they had to get some of the support from you? Fires support and things like that?

Osterman: Fires, definitely initially. That's where the SFATs almost acted as the FOs on an accompany mission. As they developed though, frankly, I think when I left, they had mortars and everything else, they were calling their own fires. Later down the road, eventually, [they were handling] artillery and things like that.

Knarr: I assume you had a Special Operations Forces Operational Battalion in that area...I don't think MARSOC had supported you out there by then, had it? [19:48]

Osterman: Not yet. I guess about half-way through the tour, maybe a little longer than that, they stood up a SOTF [Special Operations Task Force] in the area. That included southwest, west, and somewhat north and that whole crescent basically out to the west. We worked with some of them, they had established some village stability operations that were collocated around in the British Task Force Helmand sector for example. It was really kind of mixed in between a lot of different places there. Frankly, I initially didn't quite understand how they would work, they tended to work independently. We were trying to make sure that was coupled with what we were doing, but frankly it was so early in that development, those links weren't established. We had coordination meetings, but it was a growing capability.

Knarr: I am trying to think through the command and control—the CFSOCC-A [Combined Special Operations Component Command—Afghanistan] was not stood up until 2009 with General Reeder. But the OPCON of that still went back to SOCCENT. That changed, I don't know if when General Petraeus got in there all of a sudden the OPCON switched over from SOCCENT to USFOR-A [US Forces—Afghanistan]...

Osterman: I do not recall. To be honest, from 2010 to 2011 in Helmand, I was focused purely there [on Helmand]. All I knew is I had the SOTFs in there with me and the VSOs. Very late in the game, the ALP program started to become more formalized. I actually started the Afghan Local Police in Helmand as an internal organic [program] using CERP funds or something along those lines. We started developing zone indigenous police forces. Out in Helmand, it is hard to get soldiers out there, hard to get police to go out there; it is out at the end of the world from an Afghan perspective. The idea was, "How do we train and develop these local police to help augment the Afghan National Police in terms of maintaining security?" They knew the area well. It all came together pretty well. That generated, at least in our area, the seed corn that allowed a more formalized program with the ALP to come about that we then transitioned over to SOF, because they had the program being run at a national level.

Knarr: So you had already started something before the VSO became a program.

Osterman: We did. One of the things the troops on the ground saw was a need for local security, and half a dozen policemen in some of these areas wasn't going to cut it from the national police perspective. It almost hearkened back to the CAP [Combined Action Program] in Viet Nam—locals were trained and armed in a way that allowed them to take security into their own hands. The trick was to prevent them from becoming rogue and predatory on the local population.

Knarr: It also reminds me of the Desert Protectors out of Al Qaim in 2005.

Osterman: Exactly. There were a lot of folks involved in Helmand who had Iraqi experience; a lot of the Al Anbar knowledge transitioned over.

Knarr: We try to balance security, governance and development, I assume the biggest concern at the time was security? [6:30]

Osterman: Primarily concerned about security. We were spreading the security bubble in order to allow things like governance and economics to build. From a division-level perspective, I pretty much stayed focused on that. You cannot get away from the DIME [diplomatic, information, military, economic] approach in a counterinsurgency fight, but at the same time, a lot of the capacity and capability for doing governance and economic development resided at the MEF Forward, not at the division level. While we had some civil affairs capability that we would use, a lot of the heavy stuff was in G10 based out of the MEF Forward headquarters that would then cover the area as well. As a division, we were mostly looking at the security part of it.

Knarr: You were there a year, what are some of the events that stand out for you during your time there?

Osterman: A couple of things stood out. A very good relationship with the Brits in terms of working together there. Another thing was that the year we were there was really the expansion year—literally from Kajaki all the way down through the Fish Hook and out—and as a result there was a lot of activity to make that happen, which resulted in very high casualties relatively speaking. I remember it being a very full-on, kinetic year. Still trying to always maintain rules of engagement, but between the IEDs and kinetic action, and everything else, pretty significant.

I think the other thing that stands out was the response of the people to when security was established. No matter where we go, and Afghanistan is no different, the people in the street really just want security, they want to educate their kids, they want their kids to be a little more prosperous than what they are. That was the focus. In line with that was one of those paradoxes or dilemmas in Helmand was that in terms of family and family well-being, their cash crop is poppy. So all the 1950s irrigation projects were still being used, which was good, but a lot of it was associated with poppy; trying to get them off of that as a cash crop and into wheat or things like that was a cultural or community change in terms of their way of life.

Knarr: Were you part of the eradication effort or did that come into effect later?

Osterman: We had some of the eradication effort and we had Afghan forces there as counter-narcotics police to get rid of that. But that dilemma was that unless you could give them something else, eradicating without any financial offset just turned them into insurgents. They had no way of making money otherwise. They can plant an IED for fifty bucks. It's a very pragmatic way of looking at life sometimes.

Knarr: I probably should talk to DEA.

Osterman: Yeah, we had some DEA there. They were doing some programs, but it was actually a pretty limited footprint. There were just a couple of folks through the course of the year who

were there. Most of the eradication was directed out of Kabul; it just got watered down the further it went out. They probably were talking to the SOF folks who were advising 444 Team and folks like that; I think they were UK mentored.

Knarr: You went back to work on the ISAF Joint Staff in operations [January 2013 to March 2014], from that position, what changed, what made sense then, did a light come on?

Osterman: It was a great experience, being the Theater OPSO (OPSO for IJC or the DCOP OPS—Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations). First, it was very enlightening to see something other than Helmand. Understanding just how diverse, not only culturally but geographically, Afghanistan is. It really made a difference on [my perspective of] the nature of the fight in each place. I had Helmand in the fights that I was used to, you go to the mountainous east with its forests, totally different fight. The Tajiks up north and the influences there versus the Pash-tuns in the south and a much longer border with Pakistan, which became very interesting in terms of understanding the international dynamics. I think that was 14–15 months.

The part that really transitioned well was that from the beginning, it was a very heavy conventional force, ground maneuver unit perspective. With the drawdown we had in place by the time I left, [there were] RC commanders and the only maneuver elements on the ground were SOF forces. What was really telling was how seamless that was. I think it showed a highpoint of our SOF and conventional force integration. That worked very well.

During that time was also the creation of NSOCC Alpha, [NATO Special Operations Component Command] which was a combination of NATO SOF and the US SOF, to bring it under one entity. That played a big role; it was also very interesting in terms of the combination.

The other big thing was an eye-opening fact. We had some coalition partners—not only the Georgians, but the Danes who were working with the British, and some other folks out there—but when it came to the theater overall, huge number of nations participating. At a given time on any day it could change, but for example on my JOC floor would be 20–30 nations. As you look at that kind of coalition effort, it was impressive that it worked so well and so efficiently. NATO SECRET worked just fine; very seldom did we have to go to a US NOFORN. There are always some lessons that we always start to slide back from post conflict. Things like that I found very encouraging.

Knarr: Do you think the NSOCC-A could have been done earlier? Should it have been done earlier? Well, first of all, why was it done at all?

Osterman: It came about just before I got there, I think it was underway under MG Thomas. It was an understanding that as more NATO SOF flowed in, we were missing a lot of combined arms effects by having these pockets of SOF rather than a consolidated SOF effort. Then, frankly, on the ISOF [International SOF] side of it, they didn't have access to the ISR like the US forc-

es did, so sometimes they could have done more, but they were lacking because they didn't have the enablers. Those kinds of things brought it together.

Knarr: I heard that the four-star—General Allen or General Dunford—had said they wanted one person to talk to about SOF. There were too many nations out there and they just wanted one person. Do you think that's accurate?

Osterman: I did not hear that, but it makes sense. NSOCC Alpha reported directly to ISAF and not through IJC.

Knarr: What struck you most then about your tour as the deep cuts started? [17:15]

Osterman: What struck me pretty hard was that at that level [working] routinely with the Minister of Defense, chief of staff of the army on the Afghan side, a number of different entities, was how much work needed to be done with regard to what we typically call Title 10 functions. Some of these folks had never worked at that level. We were trying to apply US or Western processes—budget management and things like that, not real sexy stuff, but necessary. It was very important to have that to maintain the forces that were there, that had been created at the tactical level.

Another part where I probably learned more than I did as a division commander was when I was a target engagement authority for the theater. Understanding all of the legal implications and everything else that had to go into targeting individuals from a CT perspective was not only time-consuming, but also often required my immediate attention.

Also, with each of the RCs and different geography, security, cultural challenges that exist, when you overlay the friendly aspect with different nations, different US militaries associated with each of the areas, it very quickly created a mosaic of management challenges. That affects how you look at each area and the fight that they're constructing. Trying to bring all of that together in a cohesive fashion was at times difficult, but people worked together well in that regard.

Knarr: When you became the MARSOC commander, you had the opportunity to see this evolution of SOF and how it worked, any reflections on what you thought?

Osterman: From a broader perspective, I can remember being in Iraq and having SOF come in, conduct a raid, and of all things they picked up a woman. It was in Fallujah, and essentially, [that incident was like] lighting a trash bomb that took three weeks to clean up from a relationship perspective in the area. Then fast forward to the end of my time as DCOSOPS in Afghanistan where, literally, SOF is the only maneuver force and the RC commanders are dependent on them. Could not have asked for tighter relationships and coordination. Amazing to watch how, in the course of less than ten years, our SOF and conventional force integration had come so far.

From my time at MARSOC, all my life having been a conventional force infantry officer, I was used to maneuvering battalions and regiments around the battlespace to achieve affects. It was an epiphany that in the SOF world, having individuals or small groups of individuals who could make strategic impact, took some mental agility on my part. It did not have to be a mass affect. It could be done, in terms of Phase 0, Phase 1 of operations; small units—well trained, competent, mature—could conduct shaping operations that would have strategic impact. The investiture that needs to be put into the development of those individuals is important, because every one of them has multiple functions on a team, therefore, requires some investment.

Knarr: If you were talking to a command and general staff seminar right now, what would be some things you would pass on from your experience in Afghanistan from about 2010 on? [22:45]

Osterman: It is critical to understand combined arms. In my mind, combined arms is not just kinetic: it is the cultural piece, it is the political piece, it is the military kinetic piece, it is the military non-kinetic piece, whether cyber, space or whatever else is involved. General Dunford has recently spoken about the multi-domain, multi-functional, trans-regional fight. That has to be understood. People have to immerse themselves in that. We do not have the luxury of, essentially, our second generation warfare troops online in boxed columns kind of thing. Nowadays, the fight goes global very quickly. If you think about fourth generation warfare, understanding that is going to be even more important over time in terms of dispersed battlefields, both geographically and functionally. That is what I mean by combined arms.

This is a little SOF-specific, but an understanding of the formations and echelons throughout, not only the military, but also the interagency, is going to be even more important. One of the things I have learned here in SOF being with MARSOC and now SOCOM, is that perhaps one of the most important weapons anyone has out there right now is authorities. Understanding what those authorities are, how they relate to rules of engagement, how to acquire different authorities when you need them—it is like different types of rounds for the Howitzer.

Then probably the last thing I would say is to have an understanding how to achieve optimal readiness. “A fight tonight” is the mentality that we have to have. The adversaries out there are so different, things change so quickly, you have to be agile enough to adapt. Rather than “Time to Build the Iron Mountain,” “Time to Build Your Force,” you have already lost at that point. Whether that is a violent extremist organization getting ready to do something or a peer-state competitor that makes a jump on you, you have to ready. A pure state of readiness includes not only training readiness, but being technologically savvy enough to know what you need on the battlefield in order to compete.

Knarr: Great, sir, thank you. Who else should I talk to?

Osterman: A good guy to catch is Colonel Pete Huntley, he’s got the Marine Raider Regiment right now. He’s getting ready to be the CJSOTF commander for Iraq shortly. The Task Force

Helmand commander would be good for an international perspective. On the broader scale, my successor was Dan O'Donahue and he'd be able to tell you about the drawdown piece of it. An Army officer who was pretty much the OPSO the entire time I was there as the ISAF OPSO was Jeff Banister.

Knarr: Anything else you want to add?

Osterman: Hmmm...doctrine works!

Knarr: That's good! I don't hear a lot about that.

Osterman: It does when you think about sticking to things like MDMP [military decision-making process], mission analysis, what your troop to task requirements are. I've found that when you get up to the theater levels, if you don't follow the prescribed command relationship definitions, you just don't have a common language.



Subject: Interview with **Major General Lewis Craparotta**, USMC, former Commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division (Forward), in Afghanistan

Major General Lewis Craparotta, USMC, is the commander of the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command at 29 Palms, California. He commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division (Forward), in Afghanistan from 15 March 2011 to 25 February 2012. In that capacity, he also served as the Commander of Task Force Leatherneck and the Ground Combat Element (GCE). MajGen Craparotta discussed operations throughout his area of operations starting in the South up to Now Zad, Musa Qal'ah and Kajaki. Additionally, he discussed partnering with the Afghans and working with the special operations forces, both Coalition and Afghan.



**MajGen Craparotta**

MajGen Craparotta, as commanding general of the 2<sup>nd</sup> MARDIV (Fwd) presented a series of six video presentations in 2011/2012, discussing actions and experiences in Helmand. Those presentations provided a good foundation for the interview.<sup>16</sup>

MajGen Craparotta was interviewed at his office at 29 Palms on 1 April 2015 by Dr. William Knarr and MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC, Retired.

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Dr. William Knarr: Sir, please start with who you are, what position you held in Afghanistan, the period you were there, and the conditions when you arrived.

MajGen Lewis Craparotta: I'm Major General Craparotta, I was 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division forward commander in Afghanistan from March of 2011 to February of 2012. I think when we got to Afghanistan 3/5 [3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines] was in the process of ripping out with 1/5 so that was complete. Up in the North we had people at Kajaki but we did not have Route 611 secured. We also had a battalion in the battlespace south of Sangin between us and the Brits; it was a surge battalion; 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 8<sup>th</sup> Marines. They were backfilled with 3/4 so we had that battlespace. Actually, the day I took over, we were conducting a large battalion-sized raid down at the Bahram Chah down south at the border. There were problems with [Taliban] infiltrating up through Garmser and there was a lot of wide open space down there that wasn't covered either by the Afghan border patrol or Marine forces or anybody else and that sort of sets the stage. We had two RCTs, RCT-1 over at Dwyer [02:45] and then RCT-8 was in position up in Delaram.

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<sup>16</sup> Those presentations can be found at [www.DVIDShub.net](http://www.DVIDShub.net) with a search for "General Craparotta."



Defence Geographic Centre, Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom, 2011

**Figure A-4. Partial Map of Helmand Province**

Knarr: I understand that the purpose of the initial operations was to disrupt the insurgents so that they could not get to a spring offensive. So you started in the south with RCT-1—if you could talk through that, your strategy and how you implemented that through the year you were there.

Craparotta: Going in I did not have a great feel for how the whole fighting season kicks off. One day you're harvesting poppy and scraping opium and the next day all of a sudden there's 10–15 attacks and that begins the fighting season. But the initial piece at Bahram Chah was to eliminate the bazaar down there and force the insurgents to move either back across the border or to just prevent them from using that as sort of an open line of communication. I think the difference between what we did in 2011 and perhaps what was done in the past is

that we stayed down there. So the LAR Battalion stayed down there initially for about a week, and then they actually set up a screen line well south of Khan Neshin. They put companies out there and they drove around the desert and they stopped vehicle traffic and did various checkpoints; they screened down there for more than a month, leading up to the fighting season. In fact, they rotated companies from Khan Neshin so that they could keep a sustained presence down there. I think that created a little bit of a different picture for the enemy who had historically come up through there and used the river valley to get into Garmser and the old Safar bazaar that had been a trouble spot down there when I think 3/1 was there. So Colonel Dave Furness [05:25] had a plan at the time to disrupt the spring offensive which was supported by this LAR efforts and I think worked fairly well.

Craparotta: Yes, he was the RCT-1 Commander.

Knarr: So Marjah was the next objective? Or were you really simultaneously hitting different areas?

Craparotta: Yeah, I think simultaneously. Marjah was actually in fairly good shape when we were there. They had a police force; RCT-1 had been working the local police issue there. General Mills before General Toolan had gotten permission from General Petraeus to allow conventional forces, in our case Marines, to train local police because previously they had been restricted to only SOF. So General Mills got approval that we could do it and Colonel Furness went running with it basically. At one point we had 500 Afghan local police operating in and around Marjah to the point where Marjah was, again, in pretty good shape during that period. To the point where, by six months from then, by the fall, we were able to pull a battalion out of Marjah and that's how we were able to get a force into Kajaki and open the rest of Route 611 between Sangin and Kajaki. There was a little seam between Marjah and Delaram between RCT-1 and RCT-8, I think they were able to close off that seam to a degree—RCT-8 working in the Washir area and a little bit south of the highway and then linking up with forces from 2/8 and sort of sealing off that pocket out there. Marjah was coming along fairly well at that point.

Knarr: You talked about ALP—had some of the ALP [Afghan Local Police], some of the village stability operations [VSO] already taken place in that area? Or was that the first time that somebody had come in and worked the ALP program?

Craparotta: We had one VSO site, which is different from the ALP I'm talking about, so this is the difference between getting the approval for conventional forces to train ALP versus the VSO sites that the SOF guys ran. They had a VSO site just north of where the Brits were operating. They inserted it before my arrival, let me see if I can find it on here, south of FOB Nalay [Sangin Valley 09:32], I forget the name of the FOB, but it was where I think it was 3/8. Farrell Sullivan was a battalion commander there when I got there, and then Rob Pid-dock and 3/4 came in and relieved him, and there were SOF guys in there but frankly the spot that they picked was not in a village [10:00]. There was not a lot of opportunity to establish ALP. We ended up closing the place down, and we designed a program I think where

we would put these guys into places with a little more opportunity to get people to join, and it was all done with the SOF guys north of Sangin. So that's the difference. We had one VSO site. Eventually it closed down—I don't really remember the timeline of when it closed down—but not very effective based on where it was located. I think they wanted to start the program and this was really the only opportunity that they thought they had, but after a while everybody realized it wasn't going to work in this particular spot.

Knarr: So what was your selection criteria for ALP?

Craparotta: In Marjah?

Knarr: Anywhere, as you develop this program, there is area selection, the recruiting and the vetting of people; the use of shuras to do that?

Craparotta: I think the SOF guys did most of that. I think my selection for VSO sites for the SOF guys to establish ALP was north of Sangin/south of Kajaki in an area that was most problematic, but where the district governor in Sangin would tell you "there's good people in there." So we just sort of...I won't say ink spotted it, but that's really what we did. We put a site in and we put another site in close by and places where they could have some success along [route] 611. We used it as sort of a precursor for the whole Kajaki thing. I will tell you there were thoughts of doing Kajaki right after we got there in the Spring of 2011, but there was much debate about whether or not we could pull people out of FOB Ouellette [Nahri Saraj District 12:35]. So Ouellette was between southern Sangin and where the British were, and the British were unable to assume anymore battlespace at that point. My thought was that we could perhaps leave a little bit of an opening down there and we would be well-served to open up 611 all the way to Kajaki. But we weren't able to get 3/4 out of there, so we had to come up with a little bit of a longer-term plan. We had to look across the battlespace—we had 500 ALP there being trained by the Marines, and working with the Marines, so we talked about how we would shift the battlespace, extract a full battalion out of RCT-1's AO. Took a lot of time, closing FOBs and shifting one company at a time and how we would eventually get established in northern Sangin I forget the name of the... FOB up there in the north of Sangin.

When I got there 611 was not open, but we had 1<sup>st</sup> Recon battalion up there operating sort of on their own in that seam. In my opinion, it was not an effective use of the force. They were in their own area, you could fly in and fly out if you wanted to. Travelling on the 611 was problematic, because it was not secure, and we were not gaining the support of the people—we were not really doing COIN stuff. So I moved 1<sup>st</sup> Recon back to northern Sangin, and then by the time the fighting season kicked off in May of 2011—I don't remember when 1st Recon ripped out, but they ripped out with 3rd Recon—we had a Recon battalion now with battlespace in the northern area of Sangin, which was adjacent to 1/5. So we had, no kidding, probably wasn't what they expected to do but we gave them battlespace and told them to get out there and figure it out and support the 1/5 because we still had a problem with people

coming down the river out of the what I called Zabruge [15:38]. There's a V there—the river goes this way, we had FOB Nalay on the other side of the river, but between there and Nowzad there's a seam up there, so there's a way the enemy was coming down in there. I won't say they had free access but they certainly had access into northern Sangin and it was a problem for 1/5 after 3/5 left. There was some tough fighting up there still in northern Sangin.

So we consolidated down there; eventually we went between 1/5 and 3rd Recon they sort of turned the tide; during this time, the guys who were working with the SOF to figure out where we could put these VSO sites. 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon probably played a big role in saying, "Hey there's opportunity in these areas." So that's what we did: we picked places where we thought, "it's close enough that we can help them in a pinch." We supported them, I brought the guys in there and said, "Okay, we're going to put you here, but we run convoys up there so we can re-supply or get your gear in to you, you're not going to be a VSO in the middle of nowhere." It's going to be mutually supporting positions if you will, with it, with an eye towards expanding the battlespace. Eventually we have to secure the road to Kajaki, we were still talking about fixing the dam, getting the hydroelectric power—this thing needed to be open sooner rather than later. We had guys this whole time up on the dam, we had the artillery battery that had been in there since RCT-2 was in command, but you could only get in and out of there by air, because 611 wasn't open. So over time the whole thing came together.

We shut off the infiltration, to a large degree from the south; Marjah was at a point where we could reposition some forces over time; we consolidated north of Sangin, we started to sort of ink-spot with two or three VSO sites to the north of Sangin. All that was sort of an enabling piece to the larger clearing of the route to 611. We actually used those VSO sites to get 611 cleared. The enemy got used to, I guess, us running convoys resupplying those VSO sites, so when we decided that no kidding we are going to move to the north, we just embedded guys with those convoys. We put a platoon or however George Benson did it—we had much discussion on this, we weren't just going to send an infantry battalion up the road and fight IED belt after IED belt. We would send a convoy up there, a platoon would fall off of that convoy, at night they would occupy a compound, they'd shoot up a G boss and the next morning the enemy would wake up and we'd have another position where we'd have a big eye in the sky, which is very useful. We expanded over time. [20:00]

Simultaneously we had significant help from the SOF guys in Kajaki Sufla—is what the guys called it—just south of Kajaki, where the market is and it's just a hub of enemy activity in between our position at the dam and Sangin. So the SOF guys did aerial reconnaissance for us, armed reconnaissance for us at night with AC130s. They soaked the area with ISR and created an enemy picture, and then, to their credit, they offered up support with Afghan SOF. So as we deceptively expanded moving up the road, the Afghan commandos went in there and did about a 2–3 day op. They fight a little different than we do, but they shaped the battlespace for us. I don't know if it was done anywhere else, but we basically landed a Ma-

rine company and did a battle handoff; the Afghan SOF was extracted, our guys were inserted, and the whole thing was sort of off and running. It worked better than anybody could have expected. The enemy peeled off across the river, they were in no position to fight.

They had a helicopter company, they had another company that went in there—I think it was Captain Trembly, PJ Trembly, who was just a brilliant company commander and he used deception and everything else. He is satellite patrolling and between the two of them the enemy had no choice but to get out of there.

MajGen Tom Jones: He was a 1/6 guy too? [23:11]

Craparotta: He was 1/6. George Benson's battalion. He is a former IOC instructor. I mean this is a guy who had his Marines patrol with the Afghans. He put them in green camis, the civilians would not even recognize there was a Marine or two in the patrol. He did all kinds of really thoughtful, tactical stuff. There is a ton of company commanders that did thoughtful, tactical stuff, but he is one that stuck out in my mind. The scheme of maneuver that he executed combined with the helicopter operation really made this whole thing work for us. [Video, 23:51]

Knarr: I think before that [in the video presentations] you talked about Nowzad and Musa Qal'ah. *Stabilize* might not be the right word, but getting into those areas to again put pressure on the insurgents before you moved into Kajaki. Can you talk a little bit about that? I think you also then cleared what you called Route Red?

Craparotta: We did. [See Figure A-5] We were able to clear Route Red a little bit [between Musa Qal'ah and Kajaki]. That was the logisticians who were on there for days on end trying to get back and forth and do convoys who were eventually able to clear that. That was another one where they sort of walked the force, established key positions, and Nowzad was always a little bit problematic because north of Nowzad was just open terrain. We had some outposts out there but we certainly did not have control of the area. That is where you get into that little V shape [the point of the V is at Sangin and the V shape is formed by the convergence of the Musa Qal'ah River on the west side and the Helmand River on the east]. You had Nowzad, you had Georgians and some other folks down here at [looking at a map; pointing west of Sangin]. I forget the name of the FOB but we had the Georgians and then we had some 2/4 folks a little bit north of that and then you had Musa Qal'ah. The thing people do not understand is that between Musa Qal'ah and Kajaki there is a big road and then that V that goes...the river is over here and then you've got some wide open space, that's what we called Zamendibar, and that's where we knew there was access and bad guys.

There's a main road that runs back and forth through there so the whole area that we didn't really own created a problem for us. [27:09]

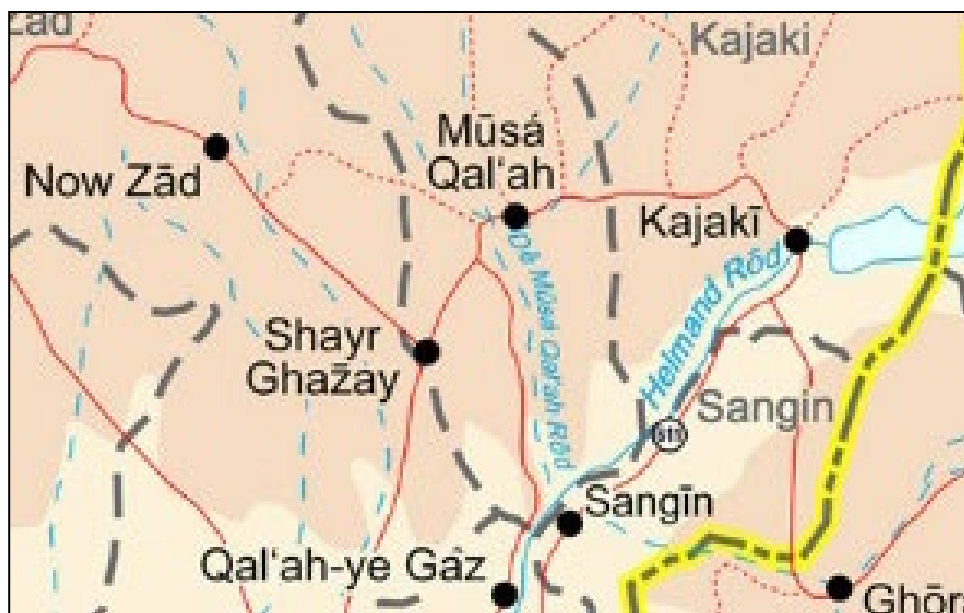


Figure A-5. Map showing the “V” formed by the Musa Qal’ah and Helmand Rivers converging at Sangin

Knarr: Up to the mountains...

Craparotta: ...was just a problem. So the more we could seal that off, the better. We get in to Kajaki sufa [south of Kajaki; 27:48], we clear the road, and we had the whole discussion about the dam, the third turbine, the electricity, and all that stuff. We learned a lot when we got in there just about the basics, charging for electricity, controlling the water. So the enemy had places in northern Sangin where they controlled the area where the little irrigation controls were, so they decided who got water for their fields and who didn't. The guys were able to maneuver through all that and sort of changed the dynamics there.

Knarr: That's interesting. You know, in Iraq we were always concerned about breaking the Hadithah dam or up near Mosul—did you ever had a problem or a concern about the insurgents damaging the dam?

Craparotta: We had it secured. We had an artillery battery up there with contract Afghan security as well, so they did not have access to the dam.

Knarr: Do you think they would have?

Craparotta: I think that may have been a reason, but its more about controlling the water.

The source of all power here is water, because farming is about the only thing people do. Electricity was not that important to these people, but control of the water certainly was.

Knarr: There is a couple things you said that I've heard part of before, but I thought it was interesting the way you said them. Instead of saying *hearts and minds*, you said *trust and confi-*

dence, which I think is a better way of saying it. Why trust and confidence and not hearts and minds?

Craparotta: I don't think these people were generally going to like us ever.<sup>17</sup> [30:00] But if they had confidence that we weren't going to inadvertently kill them and if they trusted that we were going to get rid of the people that were doing them harm, then I thought that was a more reasonable expectation if you will. That's really all we could ask: Trust that we're going to do what we say we're gonna do, we're probably going to do what you ask us to do unless it's unreasonable as far as occupying certain places and that type of stuff. I probably thought about that for a while, but again I do not think that these people are ever going to like us for the long... I'm sure there are plenty of Afghans that I like that I've worked with, whether they were governors or just local guys or army people, but for the population, I don't think it was about hearts and minds I think it was about trust and confidence. We can help with trust and confidence in their own government, in their own police, and their own army, because that is really what you need. A social contract is really what we need in this situation. They did not have that confidence, and you gotta have that confidence. Just as we are probably a symbol of America, we are also a symbol of the government for them because they allowed us to come in there and try to win this thing or turn the tide; however, you want to look at it. I thought perhaps we had an opportunity to win some trust and confidence and I think the guys did actually. Certainly at the local level, there are many places where they earned trust and confidence with the people that they worked with every day.

Knarr [32:00]: Another thing I saw was that you always said *insurgents*. I never heard you say the Taliban was the enemy. Was there a reason for that?

Craparotta: There probably was. There probably was a reason I made a conscious decision not to talk about the Taliban, because I think what we were fighting was the insurgents, the insurgency. It didn't matter to me who it was. There's probably a better reason that I can't think of right now.

Knarr: Let me maybe propose one. It wasn't necessarily that some of the Taliban—and some of the State Department say this—were extremists, some were ready for reconciliation. But it wasn't the Taliban, it was the insurgents we were fighting. It was those opposing the government. That's what I saw when you kept using *insurgents* and not *Taliban*. And there are others who said, "Hey look some of the Taliban say, 'I'm a Taliban. I'm a Taliban, but I trust you,'" and then it is back to your trust and confidence. That is kind of how I put it together. I did not know if you had thought through that and purposely never said *Taliban*.

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<sup>17</sup> This discrimination between "hearts and minds" and "trust and confidence" started pre-deployment as reflected in then-BrigGen Craparotta's initial guidance to his staff where he states: "We won't ever win their 'hearts and minds' but if we get them to agree that security and stability is better than violence and hatred then we'll continue to move in the right direction and set the ANSF and GIRA up for success. Our common goal should be to remove the requirement for US Military support in Helmand and eventually the country."

Craparotta: I'm sure I did.

Knarr: Here's another thing you said that I thought was good—you said, I don't want to call it *success*, I want to call it progress and not necessarily success. Which I think is probably right in an insurgency. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Craparotta: Yeah, I think everybody needs to be a little bit wary of claiming success, because shortly after success comes victory. So progress is good, progress is probably very good and might lead to success, but I did not like people talking about success. We were trying to make progress and we are always trying to win the fight, but realistically we are trying to give these people an opportunity. A window of opportunity, because everybody knew that we were not going to be there forever and nobody knew how long we were going to be there. You try to make progress and gain confidence so that they have confidence in their government and then you see how much of an opportunity you can give them for a future—an opportunity that they may not have had before and most importantly—and I've talked to Marines about this—an opportunity that they will need to take advantage of. At some point, they are going to have to make a decision whether or not they want to take advantage of the opportunity that we presented to them. And if they don't, that's their decision not our fault.

Knarr: You also used a metric that was about people returning to areas. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Craparotta: I think that probably goes back to trust and confidence. You know it is a society that is built on word of mouth. Simple communication. When things are getting better, people will want to go back if they lived there before or if they are in a spot that is worse than that. Perhaps they see an opportunity to go there and maybe live a little more peacefully or whatever the case might be. That was a big metric. When you saw people coming back because it was more than just things are okay, it meant that maybe they weren't worried about their kids getting blown up by an IED, maybe they thought they wouldn't get in the cross fire because Marines weren't shooting at everything that moved and were conscious of what was going on. And perhaps it was because through word of mouth, we had gained a level of confidence from the people we were working with who said, "it's going to be okay to come back here."

Of course you had to weigh that against migrant farm men, so some people were coming back just to harvest poppy. The guys had to be smart enough to know who the people were who were coming back to stay and who the people were that were just there to farm, because that's what they do and it takes a lot of people to harvest that stuff. I forgot about that. But we did track that pretty closely.

Knarr: And of course the opening of those routes, such as Route Red, contributed to people coming back because of access to markets and you mentioned something else that I'd never thought of. Prices go down when you open up those markets because there is competition.

New subject: Joint interagency, intergovernmental and multinational. Lets start with the multinational. You've already talked about the Georgians, and, of course you had Task Force Helmand. So what about the multinational aspects and national caveats?

Craparotta: We operated with the Georgians within their capabilities, and I think they did by all accounts very good. Some people will tell you the Georgians are at a disadvantage because your average Afghan thought they were Russians. But, the Georgians did COIN and over time, convinced people that they weren't Russian and that they were there to help. I think they got on board and our guys who were embedded with them did a good job. I think they did a good job.

Jones: Did that battalion commander lose his legs when you were there?

Craparotta: It was before I got there.

Jones: You worked with Eric Smith.

Craparotta: It was right before I got there.

Jones: Because I dealt with him a lot of times in the hospital. He stayed well over a year in Bethesda. And once Eric came back in the spring of '12 I believe it was, I know Eric came up to visit too and we went to see him together.

Craparotta: Actually that might have been right after I got there, now that you mention it. He was on second tour, and I went up there and visited the Georgians after it happened and talked to the new guys in charge and had a few moments where I said that he was loved. So now it's coming back to me.

I went there and talked to the battalion leadership and had lunch with him and talked ops and told him,, "Hey he would want you to make mission." They knew that he wouldn't want them to sit there sulking put their head in the sand, he also wouldn't want them going out and taking it out on the locals who they were trying to help so they actually persevered pretty well through that. Yeah, it was right after I got there.

Knarr: What about Task Force Helmand? What about the Brits in that area?

Craparotta: I think the Brits have their own approach to COIN. They called it *the protected community*, something that they had probably learned and perhaps perfected in Northern Ireland. I did not go in their AO so I do not know how well it was working or how different it was. I was disappointed that they were not allowed to assume the battlespace south of Sangin at FOB Ouellette [41:49] earlier, but they were sort of hamstrung. They were good partners, the commanders there worked well. They had a great working relationship between their seam and the guys in Marjah.

Knarr: What other countries were there? The Canadians were down in RC South. Did you have a relationship with them over there at all?

Craparotta: We did not. We did not have any Canadians.

Knarr: Okay. Any other nations in your area besides the Brits and the Georgians?

Craparotta: No.

Knarr: What was General Toolan's relationship with you, since he had a part of the NATO operation as well? He was your boss...

Craparotta: He was my boss.

Knarr: But he was also dual-hatted.

Craparotta: Right.

Knarr: Did he have teams? Had they developed the security forces assistance teams at the time or did they have the embedded teams down from the CSTC-A/NTM-A? [43:35]

Craparotta: I forget how we divvied it up; there were some teams that worked for the MEF more at the regional level like the regional police. He had people at the government center, his people were there with the PRT.

Knarr: He had a regional platform.

Craparotta: He managed all that stuff. I will tell you frankly—and I don't know if this will make the final cut—but the whole regional structure I was not a big fan of. Not the US regional structure. The fact that we made the Afghans marry up. I asked people "what is a region?" They had a regional police guy, we had provincial police chiefs and then we had a regional police guy. I could be wrong, but my impression was that the regional police guys were created by the coalition because we needed partners at the regional command level and those partners didn't exist. So the provincial system that they had in place wasn't good enough for us. My impression was, and again I could be wrong, was that we were trying to make them sort of mirror our chain of command, and I didn't see a whole lot of value in the regional police guy. I did not see a whole lot of value in resources having to come through the region before they went to either Saraj or Helmand [45:40]. I just didn't get that. I asked quite a few questions to the US guys as to why we had that, and I was never satisfied that it was working.

Knarr: Do you think they established the Afghan corps, you know the 215<sup>th</sup>, based on our establishment of those regions?

Craparotta: I think the corps existed in the Afghan army structure.

Knarr: I'm wondering what came first—did we develop the regions and then they structured or located their corps accordingly? Like the 215<sup>th</sup> corps?

Craparotta: I don't know either. But I didn't see a whole lot of value added with the regional police structure. I think there are people who are not comfortable with every provincial police chief having a direct line to the MOI or whoever he worked for, but I think that was their structure when we got there. "We" being the US—we sort of shaped it a little differently.

Knarr: Okay, what about other elements, interagency? The regional platforms PRTs were under General Toolan, but what was your relationship with them?

Craparotta: Support when I needed it. I think we were interested in their programs and tried to help them where we could and to facilitate what they were trying to do with good governance, but that was really about the extent of it. I had a G-9 that worked with them and everything from transition into different crop choices to the justice system...

Knarr: Did you have DEA with you or FBI?

Craparotta: Most of the DEA and FBI support was coordinated through General Toolan's headquarters. If they needed to get into an area in my AO, then he would tell me, his staff would tell me, and we would be an enabler for that. They would come down and plan with the regiment or the battalion and we'd execute.

Knarr: Did you have civil affairs teams that were out?

Craparotta: We did.

Knarr: Okay, did they then link up with the PRTs and the district support teams?

Craparotta: My C-9 had the civil affairs teams out there doing tactical-level civil affairs, and again trying to coordinate how it would be integrated at the provincial level with what they were trying to do.

Knarr: We have talked a little bit about SOF already. In Iraq they had a colonel that was in charge of the CJSOTF and he was kind of the senior SOF guy in country, at least for regular SOF. But they changed that in Afghanistan. First, they introduced the CJFSOCC with General Haas and they were trying to establish a unified effort with all of SOF actions being coordinated by him. I assume you were in Iraq, did you see a difference between how SOF operated in Iraq and how it might have operated in Afghanistan? [50:00] Was it better or worse, and can you attribute that to anything?

Craparotta: I did not have a lot of issues with SOF in Iraq like some guys did. They came in and did their job, and in some cases you had to clean up afterwards, but that's sort of the nature of the business. In Afghanistan, I had a wonderful relationship with the colonels, so I am not as familiar with the structure as you probably are, but I know I had *Eric Karilal* [50:40] over there for a while and I forget what group, he had one of the numbered units.

Knarr: Did you have a SOTF [Special Operations Task Force] in the area?

Craparotta: We had a company right there at *Bastion* [51:02], but the larger SOF guy came down and visited after I got there; we went up and visited them and we had a great relationship. I probably told my colonels right off, the RCT commanders, that I am not pushing back on SOF ops. So if he's carrying SOF baggage from Iraq it doesn't really matter to me. These

guys are helpful and we're going to let them operate in our AO and we didn't have any issues. I have some SOF experience from when I was a major, I was three years at a TSOC.

Knarr: Which one?

Craparotta: In Europe, EUCOM.

That was back before AFCOM. We had Africa, and Bosnia was still going on, and we did CSAR for the Kosovo campaign, so I know a lot about their capabilities from exercises with them. I am comfortable with how they operate, what they can do, and so I never had a problem. Sometimes you want to call them up and say why'd you let the dog loose because it bit the kid, and now I'm screwed because I gotta go to seven shuras to repair the damage because you let your dog loose and it bit a child. We had a couple hiccups with them, the good far outweighs the bad. Sometimes in the heat of the moment sometimes bad things happen and that's the way it is. I am a fan of SOF. What they did for us with the Afghan commandos I am convinced saved lives and shaped the battlespace in our favor.

Knarr: Great. What did I miss? What questions did I not ask you that you wonder why I did not ask that? Well I'm glad I looked at your movies because you had some good stuff.

Craparotta: Well, frankly that was our effort to sort of capture this. But that's why we did it. So we could remember it. And actually we did it so people could watch a short clip and have a discussion about it, not necessarily with me.

Knarr: And in fact I can see a seminar talking about trust and confidence. Just the questions I asked you; those are perfect seminar questions. Why did you not call them Taliban, why did you call them insurgents? I think there's good reasons for doing that.

Who else should we talk to? Who, both coalition and Afghan- who do you think we ought to talk to?

Craparotta: Have you talked to Dave Furness?

Jones: ...and Eric Smith; even George Benson maybe?

Craparotta: George is retired now.

Jones: Yeah but he is still at *Camp Lejeune*. I stay in touch with him. [55:00]

Craparotta: Yeah I knew George from Iraq. He had a MiTT [Military Transition Team] team there at Camp Ramadi when I was RCT commander so it sort of fell under me.

Jones: I found a picture of the [Georgian] battalion commander...

He's back in Georgia now. I think he came back to Walter Reed for some follow-on surgery. They were trying to put some maybe bone extenders on to help him when you're up high they put those bone extenders on it's been successful in a few cases. But I didn't get a

chance to see him again. I visited him a number of times. In fact he invited me to the Embassy when the couple of heavies came over, and I know Eric Smith came up to visit him.

Knarr: What did we miss?

[Note: We discussed additional contacts and later MajGen Craparotta provided his written guidance to his Marines—in particular his comments on “Hearts and Minds” as cited earlier.]

Knarr: Sir, thank you for your time and experiences—this was very helpful. I will send you the transcript for your review. Please make any changes you wish. I just want it to be accurate and for you to be comfortable with it. If you have anything you would like to add, please send it back with any changes to the transcript.

Subject: Interview/Discussion with **Colonel Matthew Redding**, former Commander, Regional Support Command–Southwest.

Colonel Matthew Redding commanded Regional Support Command–Southwest (RSC-SW) from September 2011 to September 2012. During his tenure, RSC-SW was under the command of the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A), initially commanded by LTG Bill Caldwell and then LTG Daniel Bolger. RSC-SW supported the Regional Command Southwest (RC-SW). During that period RC-SW was commanded by MajGen Toolan (March 2011 to March 2012) and then MajGen Gurganus (March 2012 to March 2013). General John Allen was the commander of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) during the period.



**COL Redding**

Colonel Redding discussed the development of RSC-SW to include the relationship with the Training Advisory Group; the incredible multinational aspects where the majority of his staff were from other countries, and the NTM-A and Afghan structures that consisted of 300–400 NTM-A personnel and 2,500–3,000 Afghans.

Colonel Redding was interviewed by Dr. William Knarr on 24 May 2017 at the Institute for Defense Analyses in Alexandria, VA.

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Colonel Matthew Redding: [video starts at 01:40] I'm Colonel Matt Redding, I was the RSC Southwest commander, that's the Regional Support Command Southwest commander in Afghanistan for the years 2011, 2012 best to my recollection. I'd have to check my ORB for the exact dates. But I was there for the tail end of general Caldwell's tour about 3-4 months with him as the commanding general for NTM-A and I was there probably for the first 9 or 10 months of General Bolger's tour when he came in and took the flag from General Caldwell. Southwest was an interesting place.

It's interesting how I ended up in the job because I had just graduated from the Marine Corps War College at Quantico, and when I got the call from General Caldwell that I'd been selected to command down there, I said, "Sir, I'm honored to be selected and I'm really looking forward to working for you." And he said, "Matt, I'm looking for someone who can speak a foreign language." And I said, "Sir, I don't really speak Pashtu." And he said, "No, I expect you to speak Marine." So it was an interesting revelation. He was joking tongue and cheek, because there was a very good relationship with the Marines kind of in general but there was a very different culture and from General Caldwell's point of view, the mission of NTM-A was such that it was focused almost entirely on the institution of the army and the police. And it was his assessment that in Helmand, the Marines up to that point had focused almost entirely on the operational war fight.

I didn't really realize how profound General Caldwell's joke to me was until about the first meeting I went to with the Marine Corps there, the higher up commanders, because the pressure to put resources into the operational fight, to ensure Afghan success, to build them up to a level of capability, was intense. I think at that point everyone had a sense that NATO and some of the higher up political decisions had said, "we've done what we can do with the Surge and there will be an off-ramp potentially in our future." What General Caldwell was doing was surging himself inside of NTM-A's stovepipe. It was a very functional stovepipe in terms of what appropriations we could use to build our partner force capacity as well as what doctrines were being employed and what the NATO mandates were inside of the NTM-A mission, which were very different from the UK Herrick rotations which aligned with the combat mission of Marine Corps and ultimately IJC. So it was like living inside of an operational world although you were kind of a Leavenworth or a Maneuver Center type person. So having islands of the institutions of the Army and institution of the police inside an operational war-fight was a very interesting little ink blot in and of itself. Very dynamic.

What General Caldwell wanted me to do was make sure that we could mend the fences between NTM-A and the forward MEF commander to ensure that the operational war-fight didn't suffer, and likewise to protect—my words not his—to protect the flow of resources from poaching. Because often times commanders would come to us with projects that we could not approve, largely due to the statutory language in the appropriation. We couldn't for instance build fighting positions and tactical infrastructure. Our construction portfolio was for training bases, training ranges and governmental –Government of Afghanistan infrastructure—so barracks, that was not tactical, headquarters facilities for brigade level and above for district and above, police headquarters. So what we were primarily focused on was the infrastructure, the training, and the professionalization of the institution of the army and the police. And that grew over time or morphed over time as General Bolger got into the seat kind of later in the game and as he began to have to set the stage for NATO's drawdown and pull out.

So there was always this tension, I remember from the first day, this tension between the institution of the Afghan army, and the operational war-fight. [06:40] In fact, one of the biggest debates that I remember in my first month there was whether or not the training centers ought to belong to the Corps. Now, a rotation after me actually did make that happen, to where in our sector in Helmand and Nimruz, the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps was the big daddy rabbit. General Maluk was in command while I was there and he always had his eye on the training base because they had an unimpeded flow of resources, to include supply lines direct from Kabul to outfit initially their trainees. We would arm them, they had their own arms room, their own medical training, their own doctrine, classrooms and facilities, and he really wanted to tap into that stream of resources to assist his combat forces in the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps.

Different scenario with the police because the British had been investing in the police mission since before my time. They had heavily invested with the Danish in the police mission.

And the general epiphany that folks came to was policing, civil policing, was the key to security in Helmand, having a credible police force that wouldn't shake down people at every street corner would not extract money to get from Lashkargah up to some of the northern districts along the roads and the checkpoints. Before it was sort of a catch as you can, very dependent on the district chief of police who had very loose ties, or in some cases very direct ties, to corrupt leaders in the Afghan government.

So on both sides of the equation, my mission was to make amends with the Marines, make sure we could agree to disagree where we had to and agree to agree on what our way forward was and find some of that common ground. But it was also very much to stay within the NTM-A mandate in terms of being the furthest from Kabul. Helmand and Nimruz were so far from Kabul that typically the stream of resources that we were able to husband all the way through the system were often times better than what the operational Afghan army or the operational Afghan police force was able to marshal. So there was always this tension in my experience that it actually translated to how the soldiers and the policemen felt also. Inside the institution inside the training base, Colonel Shawali Zazai was the training base commander in Helmand and he was a king in his own little world because of this sheltered pipeline of resources, whether it was boots for his trainees', uniforms, he had his own warehouse, logistics and inventory was a power. He had his own fuel farm in terms of maintaining his own vehicle fleet and teaching people how to drive. So this stream of Afghan resources outside of the influence of the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps was contentious in some ways. Because he didn't have an operational mission he had plenty of stuff on the shelf, which gave him a lot of *wasta* in the area in terms of how much influence and power he held relative to the corps commander, who was the senior Afghan army official. I would equate it to our TRADOC and our forces command structure inside the United States Army. Without a classroom and an institutional training stovepipe of funding, mission commanders would always reach across the fence and try to bring it to their motor pool, to their needs, to buy the ammo they need to do the training they needed, as opposed to investing in professional training institutions. So it was a very interesting first three months.

General Caldwell was a masterful storyteller himself. He would ensure that communiques, Facebook posts, social media was used to communicate not only to the Afghans who were fairly savvy with their little mobile phones at the time, getting online and checking things out, but mostly to shape to Belgium. [Particularly] the headquarters in Belgium, where the gains and the investment that NATO had made in the institution were very much a concern. In fact, some of the NATO nations, the Brits and the Danes especially, had large, relative to their national commitments, combat commitments to security and the IJC fight in Helmand. [11:43] But they also had significant national investments in the army institutional development as well as the police institutional development.

So initially I had to get my arms around three major portfolio items. First was the army training base, and there was a commensurate logistics depot that kind of supported the region, so it became kind of the training base and the depot which would supply, which was separate from the operational army. So the Afghan operational forces functioned within the Corps using what we would call organic logistics. But the Afghan National Support Command was kind of segmented from, and again I don't know what happened afterwards because again I believe they transitioned the depot to the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps, they made it like a corps-level depot, but initially it was an Afghan army depot underneath a national level Afghan army command from Kabul. And again, the idea was that the line and block for the depot would go all the way back straight to Kabul and the depot commander did not have to answer to the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps commander for fear that he would raid the coffers. That he would take everything, expend it and ask for more, as opposed to metering it out and sharing across the institution of the army: Humvees for the training base, uniforms for the training base, as well as uniforms for the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps. So that was an interesting development as well, so I had the training base, the infantry basic training functions, they had an NCO course inside the army, Colonel Shawali Azaai was my counterpart there. I had the Afghan army depot which was in its infant stages to begin with, very rudimentary, lot of empty buildings, it was still being built by the Corps of Engineers. It was only after I left that that was able to transition to full Afghan control because the construction was not done, and the shelves were bare, there was nothing there for them to issue. Everything was essentially a direct delivery from Kabul. So that was the army side. The police side had the Helmand police training center, which was down in Lashkargah and had been operated largely by the British with some help by their friends the Danes and some each's and ands from some of the EU countries because there was a significant EU presence in policing outside of the NATO influence. Uniformed policemen from European nations working in the police training center and making sure that NATO's program for instruction met all of the NATO requirements for human rights, transparency, and professionalism. It was designed to develop beat cops on the street to solve crimes and not be necessarily be a combat force but to provide accountability for people who had gripes with the government or the Taliban or anyone that was shaking them down. So that training center was again in a very rudimentary state when I arrived. I initially had a rifle company of Gurkhas from the parachute regiment assigned as the OP Herrick training force. So it's interesting how the British trained their people, which again was different from how we did it and how ultimately IJC did their partnering and assisting.

The British broke out their combat force through the OP Herrick and left them under the operational command of the British commander in the region. But as a subset of that, there was a training component which they would train and get special training and certifications back at home station, whether that was in Denmark or in the UK to become experts on the NATO program of instruction. [As an example], how to deliver professional police training during their exercises there through however many classes they would be in charge of. And the Helmand police academy was initially just for Helmand province. But it was kind of orga-

nized under the National Police as the Southwestern regional police academy where Kandahar was the larger of the two [16:37]. And it was able to develop more quickly based on many factors. One, the US kind of put a lot into that while they were the region's south commander, and the British just simply didn't have the resources that we were able to do. And second, I think in Helmand it became the regional, I forget the operational headquarters, it wasn't the 215<sup>th</sup> that was the army side, in any case the Afghan National Police had a sector a numbered sector, and again the same tension existed. Here was this island of institutional resources where they had a warehouse of uniforms, an arms room full of arms, some ammo, Humvees to train folks and rangers to train folks on how to patrol mounted dismounted, and the regional police commander was nominally General Maluk's counterpart.

[But] it was the provincial police chief who held the stranglehold on anything police and so there was this very political, because he was good with the governor of Helmand and remained while I was there he remained in power. I don't know if they finally shook him out of there or not but he had a stranglehold on the Afghan Police logistics. So while there was no designated police logistics depot, it resided at the district level for Helmand and that was right in the heart of Lashkargah, right outside of the downtown British base. We would fly down and then walk over to the police headquarters there in Lashkargah and essentially make sure they weren't selling outright the goods and services that the institution of the police, the Afghan National Police, had provided for them. So that was a bit challenging because the district police chief was not accountable through the Afghan regional police commander, although on the line and block chart he should have been. He was accountable largely to himself and to the governor of Lashkargah. And it's interesting, I actually helped some of the later Marine commanders, colonel and above, come to grips with that, because they thought "Hey, line and block he's supposed to answer to this guy."

Likewise, I think the British were trying to empower from Kabul the role of the regional police commander to do much like the army was doing with its corps in terms of operational, but it ended up being much more administrative. One of the biggest things that they ended up trying to help the region with was the headcount of police, because the fraud that existed in the police was not so much. I mean it was always fuel, it didn't matter which, army or police, it was always about fuel, fuel was the currency in Afghanistan, black market—but in the police case it was headcount. Pay was distributed to the region based on headcount. If you had ghost patrol men on your rolls or people who had died last year at the hands of the Taliban, the money was still disbursed to the region based on the latest headcount. So we had to do multiple headcount census-type operations to try to clean that up and that was a very ticklish subject with some of the Afghans because they knew that their rolls were wrong and they didn't want to jeopardize the flow of resources from Kabul. So a bit of an international dilemma in terms of diplomacy and pushing them for more transparency and accountability without unseating their authority or their slush fund of names on the roster.

So at the training center, much like the army basic training, we had basic patrolman training, we had a medical component that taught them basic first aid, combat lifesaver-type skills. Again very low, nothing we would equate to our own capabilities, but basic lifesaving skills, and they had a clinic, largely operated by the British and their medics. Again if you were selected for police training or army training, chances were you got some of the better medical care in the region because in the case of the army the Jordanians had given over a team of medical trainers and were operating the clinic on Camp Shorabak and teaching combat lifesaver skills to the army. And in Helmand it was the British, and then later the Americans threw in their medical team to kind of teach the basic lifesaving skills. [20:02]

But they would learn their patrol skills, and then the police depot which was separate from the training base, it was downtown in Lashkargah, I ended up having to spend an awful lot of focus there because again, the district chief had such a stranglehold on the logistics for the police in the area. Essentially no convoy from Kabul could come and go without his say so because it would have to be escorted, either by the contracted Afghan security forces or an Afghan police escort. So his influence over the logistical convoys led to some graft and some things ending up in his backyard that were destined for the training base, so that was always a constant meet with folks, three cups of tea, and then try to arrive at some happy medium, so a bit of diplomacy there.

And then we had this very large portfolio of institutional construction: infrastructure, brigade level headquarters, brigade level barracks in some of the regions, district level headquarters for precincts, precinct-type headquarters for the police, and then ultimately the training bases themselves. So even though the Corps of Engineers was in charge of Camp Shorabak writ large, those funds flowed through the NTM-A, the institutional side of the appropriations. And the audits and the IG inspections and the progress on these projects had to be overseen by somebody.

That's where we kind of get to my unique role because I think the way I would differentiate General Caldwell's focus is he was very focused on the training and the message and the mission of NTM-A inside the NATO context, and the CSTC-A Title 10 portion was very much a backseat, from my perspective. Again only three or four months with him. Whereas when General Bolger came on board, they at least reached parity because we had, in a couple of these diagrams, we had these training advisory groups, these are what TAGs are, so training advisory groups that were national. And that meant that the British Training Advisory Group for the Army in Helmand province answered directly back to the deputy commander for army in Kabul, who was a Brit. So when you divide up NATO, it's just probably the way NATO does business, people bid for these jobs, they say, "We'll give you a two-star up in Kabul to be the deputy commander of the army." And he was the maneuver center, for lack of a better term, he was the maneuver center of excellence commander during his time as the DCOM army. All things army doctrine, all things army tactics, all things army equip-

ping went through him. So all the FMS [Foreign Military Sales] and all the equipping that we did for the army was prioritized out and they would do unit set fielding.

So think of a cohort coming out of the training base in Kabul and then being equipped and then being shipped out to a corps. That was kind of the model initially. When we had the regional training centers, ultimately that became the springboard for, "Hey, when we graduate these soldiers, they will simply march across post and join General Maluk's corps." So it was an interesting dynamic when instead of centrally manning the army from Kabul only, the regional training centers took on new prominence and new importance because you had to wait for them, but by the time they came out all they had to do was march across post. They were recruited nationally, so we had people from all over Afghanistan, every province, every language and dialect that they spoke in Afghanistan at the regional training center where it was a mish-mash of capabilities in terms of language and infrastructure and all that. But the regional training center really began to show its prominence and usefulness to the corps commanders through my tenure to where we were turning out recruits for the corps.

So the Afghan army recruited nationally, they would farm out the recruits, ship them out to the regional training centers, then we could train them and ultimately bring them back later on and run their NCO courses. It was all part of this army doctrine from Kabul, the DCOM army. But then you would have national training advisory groups that would go out [25:00] and institute, largely through the IJC side of their hats, they would go out and make sure that, "Hey the Army is supposed to have three crew-served weapons per, you know whatever the basis for allocation was and they don't." So they would then sue for resources and oftentimes would get sideways with what the institution of the army was trying to enforce. So they would be beating up my guys in the depot going, "Hey this is the latest document from Kabul it says I'm supposed to have three machine guns but I've got two." Well in accordance with whose priorities? I mean that was the real problem and that became a big part of my role.

When General Bolger came on board he recognized that we were in some cases causing fratricide inside NTM-A because these training advisory groups were not in line with the local priorities. And so he flipped that around and said, "Ok, I have people who have been selected to command in these regions and they will be the face to NTM-A." So he took a much more enterprise approach, which was pivotal because it forced the training advisory groups to come to me as a central point of contact and then we would negotiate. Before going public with our disagreements we would negotiate in our command and staff functions uplinked to Kabul to make sure priorities could be met. And it wasn't a direct line where the Army guys in Kabul were doing their own blessed thing in Helmand or Nimruz, it then became coordinated through our command priorities at the regional level which was hugely helpful. That was one of the biggest things I think General Bolger did when he changed command is he took an enterprise approach to this. He said, "Okay these brigade level commanders are the

face to the field, they will speak with my voice and everyone else up here in Kabul that has a line and block to me has to kind of coordinate through them in order to have an effect.”

Now it does not mean that I was not given plenty of senior mentoring whenever the DCOM army came to town; I did, I got plenty of help. But it was at least in line with the command philosophy that says these brigade level commanders are pretty smart folks. They understand what the priorities are because again, the Marines would often time, not in a nefarious way tickle their ribs and say, “we could really use some more machine guns.” So DCOM army would say, “Why don’t they have their machine guys?” And I’d say, “well we don’t have any on hand” or whatever the answer of the day was. But then the Marines couldn’t play Mom against Dad either.

If I was the enduring presence as a commander and my organization was the focal point for the NTM-A enterprise, then it became a lot more unified in terms of intent, unified purpose, unified mission command, unified outcomes. That was one of the first things that General Bolger took on, and it really did empower the regional support commanders. Our immediate up-line was to what was called the deputy commander for support operations. This comes to the other side of it—so DCOM SPO was initially just the logistics of handing out infrastructure, overseeing some construction and some of the logistics aspects.

Knarr: Who was your boss?

Redding: Initially it was General [Thomas] Cosentino, Brigadier General Cosentino who has since retired here locally, he was the commandant at the War College, the National War College. I think he’s local here. Brigadier General Cosentino was a strategist. So I operated with him for about three months. He changed out right about the time General Bolger came on board and then General Hildner came over, who was the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Command commanding general from Fort Hood. And again, support operations was supposed to be logistical in nature, but General Bolger gave us a lot more umph on the NATO side because all these training advisory groups then had to link in with us as a coordinating headquarters to generate mission outcomes. [30:03]

So the training advisory groups for the army, and again in my sector was largely UK and Danish assets, were forced if they wanted to get fed and supported, because the resources resided with my headquarters. So they had to come through me and I welcomed them as part of the staff, as part of the enterprise and we would it was kind of a brigade-level enterprise meeting as opposed to a formal line and block command and staff. And again, the philosophy that I subscribed to was I don’t have to own it to influence it. And in this case, all General Bolger needed to say was, “He is my face to the field.” And all other debate largely just melted away. And it’s not that anyone was doing anything counter to what the mandates inside NATO were, it’s just that they weren’t joined up. They did not meet the priority of the hour of the day of the week. He wanted accountability as much as anything because NATO

and NTM-A in particular was getting its lunch eaten by US special inspector generals on accountability. So a lot of equipment and arms had flowed through these coffers and we had not done a great job record keeping, so I think he wanted accountability as much as anything for personnel and equipment in these areas.

So about two months into General Bolger's command, the insider threat really began to pick up, so this also solidified in his mind, the need to have a commander in charge on the ground. These training advisory groups would come and go on any C130 headed to Kabul. There was no accountability, they didn't sign out with anyone, nobody knew where they were, and God forbid something would happen to them [such as] plane crash, gets blown up, they get blown up on the road, you could hop any convoy you wanted with the Marines to go do something, and again there was just no accountability. So he fixed that by saying hey, they are accountable for all personnel. They were just as guilty from Kabul, they would come down and help us whenever they wanted and he put a kibosh on that because the insider threat was intense. And our advisory teams and our combat advisory folks on the institutional side were exquisitely trained to handle themselves in very vulnerable situations. But right about the time he took over is when the insider threat really picked up, there were a couple very high profile in Kabul in the National Training Center outside of Kabul in Herat, the Marines after there was a...

Knarr: Farah?

Redding: [35:35] Exactly. There was a serious insider threat where NTM-A advisors were vulnerable to the point of they had not been protecting themselves the way they should. So again I think General Bolger came in with much more of a let's get accountability for ourselves, let's be accountable to the NATO mission, I've got commanders on the ground that are going to be my face to the field, work through them or find another place to work, was basically it. For me, it worked great. I had a great relationship right when I got there with the training advisor groups. When they needed something I was able to provide it, largely.

The Brits down in my police training center suffered, it was a unique paradox because they were British soldiers, but because they were not part of the OP Herrick IJC, their logistics flowed through Kabul under the NTM-A. So they lived in some of the worst conditions. They were in terrible camel skin tents, they were terrible conditions. I was appalled. So because the Brits did not bring stuff to take care of their own guys because it was a NATO line item, we were trying to get logistics from Kabul. So in my Title 10 role as a commander, I had to reach back to the US army on multiple occasions and bring forward army logistics to support my British soldiers. In one case, they had basically run out of chow and water. And I had to sign an ACSA agreement with the Brits at Bastion to resupply their own British soldiers because logistics from Kabul were not forthcoming. [35:00] So it was an irony to me to come face to face with the fact that these are your soldiers, and they're like, "Yeah but we didn't bring any kit with us to have them operate in an acceptable living arrangement because NATO was supposed to do that."

So here I am, trying to fix my British soldiers' living spaces and finally was able to go back to Kabul through my army channels and bring in it was the greatest day in Helmand, these Alaska tents, I got about 20 Alaska tents, it was basically a force provider. They came with the generators, the air conditioning. I got a mobile kitchen, a containerized kitchen from Kabul from the US army. It all arrived on one day. Overnight, my second rotation of British soldiers, had stripped out all the canvas tents that were flea-bitten and ratty and completely untenable, and popped up this new base camp that was glistening, US ARMY on everything, and not only did their morale pick up but their performance on the mission just went off the charts. That was really probably the brightest day for me in all of Helmand, being able to re-supply the British and rebuild the FOB within a FOB to where they could function as human beings over a long deployment without having to worry about being in a flea bitten tent that was about to burn down on them. So it was kind of interesting.

Then as we go through the whole rotation, the army had always been out front. They were the most trusted service in the region, and largely because I think Maluk was kind of a force of personality. He was a very capable brigade commander. I had less regard for him than most everyone else in the region because I didn't think he was a particularly good corps commander, administratively, logistically, he couldn't handle the infrastructure he was falling in on in terms of his new headquarters, his new fleet of trucks. So it wasn't apparent to me that he was entirely cut out for corps level command, just given the administrative functions of it. But as a combat leader, second to none. Fearless, his men loved him, and he was really taking the fight to the Taliban in that region, so I think that was really good.

But the police had been lagging so far behind, largely because they had a really poor institutional training base commander, to the point where my British Gurkhas, although they tried to prop him up, there was no propping this guy up. He was largely a political selectee from the district. Our theory was that the district police chief had selected him because of his ineptitude. He was just reveling in his position and not doing anything to actually train people, so when we lobbied Kabul to have him removed and have a professional sent in, one day it happened. About six months in we got a new police commander, it happened. Sadly after a generator had gone out on the Afghan police side of the training barracks there and there was essentially a riot. The British soldiers had to go in and put themselves between the Ministry of Interior instructors and the students, who were rioting against the instructors because the air conditioning had gone out in the middle of the night. Rocks were thrown, shots were fired, the British had to intervene, it was a pretty dicey situation. So the next morning this commander found his way out of the organization and we had a brand new flown in special police commander who was extraordinary. I forget his name. It was just amazing what he did, very calming influence, took everything in stride and really revamped the whole program almost single handedly. He was a true professional, spoke Pashtu which was huge because again, all the police were recruited locally, as opposed to the army which were recruit-

ed nationally. So the police force in Helmand was largely from Helmand and despite the ghost rolls and ghost patrolmen and all that, they supplied members and trained both border police as well as national police. [41:38]

So we had a border police segment of the POI where we trained border policemen, which were more like Army interestingly. They had mortars. They could conduct engagements, indirect fire, heavier weapons. But they were largely to, not just fight Taliban because they were out on these lonely border posts, but also I believe the Pakistanis who on any given day and even today would cross over and do bad things to border posts inside their sovereign border zones. So the border police had beefier weapons systems and logistics chain to function more as an independent and capable force, should they be attacked. So that was an interesting component as well. They were trained to be patrolmen, but the border patrol component contained some of their indirect fire capability as well as patrolling, dismounted and mounted patrol, more of an army flavor to it.

And then finally, the institutional infrastructure. Had about \$100 million worth of projects, the logistics and the oversight for that was largely resident inside of my headquarters. So when you talk about how we were comprised, I had redhorse engineers on my staff, I had CB's [construction battalion] on my staff, I had army engineers on my staff, and they would go out and oversee modern building techniques. So we would contract through the local contracting command, these infrastructure projects that would build the district police headquarters in Sangin, the Lashkargah district provincial police, renovate facilities that had been torn up, then sustain them under contract. So we had a huge infrastructure portion of our portfolio. And we would have to typically go out and oversee these projects and check on them and make sure the contractor wasn't being shaken down too bad because there were surcharges inside the province. Any contractor could expect to pay anywhere from 10-15% of what they were taking in to whatever Afghan official was in charge around the area. Largely police, in terms of the corruption, but anywhere to 10-15% was kind of the going rate. And there was almost nothing we could do about that short of know it and publicly disavow that. It was just no way to enforce on a 24/7 basis folks who would get shaken down. There weren't enough combat forces on the ground to escort the contractors to and from their worksites. Even inside the training base, whether it would be the police training base or the army training base, contractors coming in to do work would have to pay a parking fee or whatever it was to the base commander because that's inside their Afghan salary structure they could not live at the level of prominence that their salary would produce. Very much a big deal for NATO to deal with because that's not acceptable, and yet culturally it's a patronage culture.

So if the commander had to throw a party for General Maluk or something like that, that came out of his personal funds, there was nothing in Kabul to help him do that, and yet culturally that's what was expected. So if you're a person of high rank and stature within an organization, there had to be a bit of a, I call it a surcharge, and on occasion we had to really clamp

down on what was getting exorbitant beyond cultural norms even. So we kept a very tight rein on that to make sure it stayed within culturally acceptable levels of patronage to allow the mission to continue. Because if you tried to shut it down as a puritan, you'd be swimming upstream against 400, 500 years' worth of history and that just was not going to fly.

So three main things: police, army and infrastructure. And that's where the story gets really interesting because I think at that point the drawdown, the epiphany that the police were really what we needed to invest in. [46:41] because we felt that the combat mission that the Marines, the Brits, the Danes, and the Georgians had done on the IJC side was having the effect we wanted on the Taliban. And so without high-fiving each other and declaring victory, we wanted to stabilize city centers and that meant police. So they really threw the switch hard inside NATO to focus on police, making them professional and credible. In my case, we did not have Pashtu speaking instructors, so about the only person who spoke Pashtu was the base commander, everyone else spoke Dari, which was a non-starter with the recruits. They simply could not understand their instructors. Which brings me back to NATO because again, the Danes and the Brits invested in multi-lingual instructors. So they taught their people Pashtu. They taught their people how to get in and backstop a Dari instructor, and did on many instances call their bluff when they were teaching something completely wrong, a British instructor, a Gurkha, or a Danish instructor would pipe up and say no, that's not correct, in their language, whether it be Dari or Pashtu. The language ability that the Americans did not bring, some of our allies in NATO did, which was pivotal. Again, we could not have done it without some of that backstop.

The other thing too, and I've mentioned it briefly before if General Caldwell was hard over on the NTM-A side, in his first meeting General Bolger said, "Here's your ISAF patch, you're part of ISAF." We had not, whether it was through omission or not, we did not wear the ISAF patch before. And that was a big fractious deal, that's why I had to try to make amends with the Marines because there was very much an us versus them, IJC versus NTM-A feeling when I got to Southwest. But when I slapped the ISAF patch on, and General Bolger said, "Look Redding"—he was talking to all commanders—he said, "Look, we're part of ISAF. And where ISAF goes, NTM-A is going to go. It's all one NATO command, we all work for the same boss, and if we can't work side by side with our IJC partners then our mission will suffer. If they can't produce the security that's required to get the logistics through to the institutional army training base, then we wither and die."

So he really took up more of a campaign himself personally by talking to folks like General Toolan, General Gurganus, on any case, on anything. He made his rounds around the country and he'd call us in with him and say, "Hey, if you have any problems with NTM-A, Matt is here, he's my face to the field. And he will bring me your concerns and we will find a way forward." The answer might be no, because he was bound as we all were by the statutes of the appropriations. On more than one occasion I had to tell General Toolan, "Sir I'm sorry

but that's outside the boundaries of what we can allow this money to be spent on." And he didn't necessarily like it but he at least had a broader appreciation of what the limits of the various pots of money could do inside his area. That was really a big part of my role to make sure the Marine commanders, the British commanders under them in terms of the OP Her- rick combat role they played, understood that you can't just run down to the training center in Lashkargah and grab the AKs out of the arms room if they lost them, because the next batch of police trainees won't have them. So educating on what the institutional mission was and how it supported their mission in the field. So we got a lot of buy-in with that approach, and I think General Bolger did a great job turning that ship, the symbology of just putting the ISAF patch on our shoulder really showed that we were part and parcel of what the IJC objectives were as well. So that was an important distinction.

About six months in when they started making a huge investment, or at least trying to get the police up to par with the army, because the army had progressed above and beyond our expectations. [51:39] We were meeting recruiting goals, the end-strength was in sight, we hovered between—I forget the actual goals—215 and 225, something in terms of the total army. But they were sustaining it largely inside the army ranks, I mean plusses and minuses, but the Af- ghan police were always suffering. If anyone wanted a respectable career, you wanted to join the army. At least that was what our recruits told us. If you wanted to become rich, you became a policeman because you could then shake people down. So even inside the Afghan institution, army and police, there was this dichotomy between hey the army is really accountable to the people, recruited nationally, trained regionally, and employed regionally. Whereas the police were recruited locally, trained locally or regionally, and then reemployed locally. So there was a dynamic there that we really struggled with and it wasn't until we kind of broke through this epiphany that the police really were pivotal, we started putting resources into them on par with or above the army. The army never really attained self-sufficiency, my estimate looking over my shoulder. But they had at least reached a par in terms of their combat capability to where they were holding their own and were a much more capable in the field force, even for a lim- ited duration. Whereas police were still getting overrun on checkpoints, border police very nascent force, and then the Afghan National Police, which was kind of the special forces branch of the police, kind of their counterterrorism force. Very capable but they were all trained and outfitted in Kabul, so when they would come blazing through town to take out some targets or whatnot, they would draw off of the regional stocks or the district in this case stocks. So they were supported logistically supposed to have been supported by the district, so that's where again because they were a combat force and they were partnered with IJC, they had to come to me for support from the institution.

So again they were rotational because they did rotations from Kabul into Helmand, they were not stationed, there was no ANP sub-station like we would have an FBI regional office, these guys were the Team from Kabul, "We're from Kabul we're here to help." And they

would do the high-end combat ops for a period of time, do their rotation and then rotate back to Kabul and refit. But while they were there, they were supposed to be drawing off the region, the ANP region, but because the region was crippled they had to go to the district and because the district was the power broker, they didn't give them squat. That was very fractious. So the Marines who were partnered with these ANP units, as MiTT teams, advisors, security force assistant teams, they were mad as hell. Their guys were going without food, water, fuel, and it was largely because the district police chief held a stranglehold on all the police resources in Helmand and to a lesser degree in Nimroz, because Helmand was first stop on the chain. So it was frustrating for them to realize that, "Hey guys I'm sorry but you're going to have to make sure that Kabul understands. And I'm sorry you're not going to go get to kick doors with these guys today because they don't have the ammo they need, but you're going to have to let them know that there's very little we can do until this police chief is removed from this position." So again, it ebbed and flowed. But there was always this constant tension between the operational side of the fight and what the institution was supposed to provide regionally to the fielded forces, even on the Afghan police side.

It actually became a little bit exacerbated when we started talking the Afghan local police. Probably near and dear to your heart as a project, truth and lending I dealt very little with the SOF forces except through the MEF headquarters. There is a chart in here where it describes the SOTF West dotted line to the MEF headquarters and then dotted line out here to me, we would meet in the middle at the MEF headquarters and discuss things. But they had their own line of supply. The AKs that would come to their program were through their own channels largely. They tried to keep them in Afghan police channels and account for the AKs coming through, and that was a struggle to keep it legit and auditable and that kind of thing. [56:38] Then largely, these were guys with road guard vests and very little institutional training. To try to replicate what happened in Anbar in the other war (which General Bolger would only call Iraq the "other war") because he was less a fan of this because the institutional assets that we had were being essentially channeled over. This would weaken the district police chief's stranglehold and it discredited him as the broker of power in the region. So it was a real problem for NATO even on the regional side to support it full-throated because the logistics that went into it were pretty significant, at least on the arms and ammunition side.

And then we had to buy motorcycles for everyone. So at one point in my police depot I had like 300 motorcycles, all Afghan-built, pretty nifty. We had them shipped in from Kabul, I think we had 300 motorbikes and I have one picture that I couldn't find for you that has all the Afghan motorbikes lined up and we'd go out there every morning and count them all to make sure none of them left overnight. But Afghan motorbikes for the local police program, which was their only source of mobility in some of the farther reaches of Helmand and Nimruz province. So the SOTF West did a lot with them, they worked very locally but it wasn't like they were actually doing beat-cop policing. They were manning checkpoints, they had

radios to some degree, they could report to the district headquarters in Sangin, but they could also not report, depending on which way the wind was blowing with the Taliban.

From an institutional standpoint the linkage was very loose; I think we struggled to support them logistically. We had a contract to build these motorcycles in Afghanistan and to just hand it over to them kind of discredited the institution of the police as we were trying to bolster them. I wouldn't say that it cut across purposes, but in terms of the security and creating a lasting effect, I'm not sure I was ever able to measure a tangible output other than it felt good to do it, it just never seemed to catch on the same way it did in Anbar province. Whatever local effects it did have, there was no, I mean if you didn't follow the Afghan patronage system, if it wasn't the district police chief handing it out, then he was not the one to whom the tribal elder was accountable. The accountability, because they were in the SOTF-west, their accountability was to Captain X, Y or Z, who was the A-Team commander and was handing him the weapon and empowering him to do something about the Taliban. So I'll probably have to buy General Bolger a beer later and talk about that, but in Helmand and Nimroz the local police program was vibrant, we supported it the best we could. My estimate is that it had limited if any benefit in terms of professionalizing the police force, building upon the institution of governance, which was the central pillar to Kabul. So I didn't see much benefit in it, short of having to jump through hoops to support it. [1:00]

The other thing that frustrated us was that with the insider threat there was also spikes and increases in the external threat. The Taliban were still very active right up until they broke through that one night with some help to blow up Marine Corps aircraft and all that at Camp Leatherneck, but Helmand had always been an economy of force mission. There were never enough combat troops to dominate Sangin district, which even today is still a hot zone of conflict. We could never secure the Kajaki dam long enough to make it function and produce power to an acceptable level. Because of their cultural differences with Kabul, again Dari speakers versus Pashtu, they would refer to folks from Kabul as Dari speakers and that was a pejorative statement, so it's like me in the Pentagon, "Hey I'm from the Pentagon, I'm from the Pentagon I'm here to help." "Well okay, thanks for that very much."

If you were not living, breathing, eating the troubles of everyday life in Lashkargah and some of the various districts, you could not come to grips with it. That was a very big stretch for a lot of folks, trying to build a link to Kabul. General Bolger did a lot of shuttle diplomacy himself, to the point where he got me a new police commander, He got the old guy fired and got a new guy in. On my last day, almost on my last day, it was the last four days of my command, I got a call from my British police training commander down at the training center and almost overnight 35 Pashtu speaking instructors had just showed up. In the waning hours, I cannot take much credit for it other than over the whole time I was there, 14 months or whatever it was, I had lobbied Kabul for Pashtu speaking instructors and they finally had made that happen, at midnight overnight. So there was a huge capacity to have Kabul make

things happen, it's just that it happened episodically, it wasn't a steady campaign. Things would happen, spikes or improvements would happen episodically, and then ultimately on the next rotation they were able to transition the regional police center to the Afghan government, and in my mind that was a lasting impact because that meant that Helmand province now had its part of Kabul firmly secured. So with Helmand province regional police training center under their wing and under Afghan control, that was their link to Kabul and that stream of resources and their ability to influence policy in what was a hinterland was really compelling for them. So I saw them get a big boost from that.

So I talked about the threat on the insider stuff, we had to train really hard for that, and we were not a combat force. Our advisors had all been certified for outside the wire operations, and each of the NATO contributing nations had invested a lot of effort into making sure they could operate in a combat environment inside outside the wire. But it was extremely tenuous because we'd have to go in with no body armor, oftentimes only a pistol on our hip, and do engagements or teach classes and you just never knew when something would happen. So we adopted a lot of tactics and techniques using guardian angels and other. But I actually had an entire rifle company from the army, US Army, assigned to me as a security force, and I had to ultimately employ them as over-watch for my instructors in the various training areas. I split the infantry company in the latter part of my tour between the army training center and the logistics depot, which were conjoined. Sending a couple platoons down to bolster the British also because...

Knarr: The police?

Redding: Yes, the police that's correct. Because the threat had grown to a degree to where they just simply did not have enough rifles or pistols in their lightly armed FOB within a FOB to defend themselves if something really went bad. So it was a good move in the sense that the security force really wanted to be out on the open road operating but the mission of the day was to protect the training force and make sure the institutional trainers were safe. That meant that they had to train on reaction drills within the wire, if there was a shooting, medevac, so it became a real drain on our resources where I had to kind of back off all the outside the wire inspections I was doing on our infrastructure. I had to rely more heavily on the Marine Corps and hop convoys with them and say, "Hey can we swing by this on the way home?" and kind of leverage the IJC side of the house because they were the ones outside the wire who controlled the battlespace, cleared fires, handled troops in contact, medevac and so forth. And then we also leveraged the significant capability the Marines brought in terms of rotary and fixed wing air to get around the battlefield. Helmand's a big place. Afghanistan even bigger. It was a unique place to be because as a brigade-level commander essentially if I asked for it we got it, so we tried to be pretty judicious about keeping people off the roads, getting back and forth to do the inspections we needed to do, we used the training bases as hubs from which to hub and spoke out of and do our little infrastructure assessments. But the insider threat and the exterior threat

from the Taliban really did drain the institution because everyone had to worry about their own security. [1:05:10] It strained the trust we had between the Afghan trainees and the Afghan cadre that we were partnered. It ultimately made you focus on your own soldier skills as opposed to being exquisite instructor. So it was a bit of a drain.

A couple questions that you wanted to prompt me on here were toward the joint and the interagency. And I would say that this is the best job I've ever had because everything was joint and everything was interagency. The MEF headquarters they really masterfully brought together political leadership from the various nations in NATO, the PRT, the Governor's office, the State Department. All of that was part of the development plan for Helmand, again as the lead for IJC and the battlespace owner, they were able to meld that interagency team into a really high functioning team.

Now some of the projects that we came up with in Helmand were just destined to fail. Melons in Helmand. Some of the best melons I've ever had, but per hectare against poppy there's no economic argument. There's just no way. Some of the agricultural reforms that they sought to make were doomed to failure because poppy is black gold and there was no competing with the revenue it could generate in terms of what they could plant. Water distribution, not a very hospitable place, the Helmand River one of the few resources out there. It was an interesting place to try to do development because there was nothing to develop. I mean it was really a bronze age existence, which was also kind of a dichotomy because when the army would roll in or the police, they were at least 2<sup>nd</sup> world outfitted and had a better life, quality of life, which is why we drew some heavy interest in recruitment. The warrior ethos the warrior culture was very much supportive of that. But it never really bled into a second or a knock-on effect in the various communities because we were so segmented. Shorabak and the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps in the middle of the desert near nothing, so there's no boot shiner, there's no pay-day loans, there's no second order economic effect outside the base, short of the contracting, you know the log cap type contracting folks in the security industry that would ... so there was no real knock-on effect there.

But it was all joint, all interagency. I had as I said Air Force engineers, Navy CBs, I had Air Force communicators, I had naval intelligence officers, I had Marine Corps logistics advisors, I had Army logistics advisors. I had an army infantry company assigned to me as my security force, I had a Danish rifle company, a British rifle company, a Jordanian medical company. It was absolutely the most messed up awesome mission I have ever had. I have never been more challenged. You had to manage it all because even within NATO the Brits and the Danes almost went to blows over building space at Camp Bastion. The Danish army had hitched its wagon to the British army in a bilateral agreement to where almost exclusively the Danes do not have a CSS structure. They have only armor and infantry formations, largely tooth. But the Brits and the Royal Logistics Corps, under this agreement, would provide for the Danish forces. They would never deploy without each other. So it was interest-

ing to see how that bilateral arrangement played out in the field and when building spaces were measured and gripes were had somebody had to step in and adjudicate some of that stuff. So it was a remarkable experience to be a part of.

And then, just the pride that everyone brought with them, nobody had caveats. That's another thing too. So the Danes and the Dutch and the French, nobody had any caveats. So if there was shooting to be done, shooting would be done. What they did have was a national strategic objective. So the Brits had invested heavily in army institutions but in Helmand in particular, given their history in Afghanistan, the policing aspect. The Danes had an exquisite national plan for investment in the police, and some of the high-end capability we had in terms of SOF was not US SOF in Helmand, it was DanSOF, the SOS battalions and squadrons. I mean the British and the DanSOF would wipe targets off the map in the middle of the night and, no one even, the Taliban didn't even know they'd been killed. They were just unbelievable.

So the US SOF presence there functioned in conjunction with them. But it was largely what I would call a [regular] SOF mission. So it was the local police, the village stability operations, kind of the classic ink blot type of a strategy where the [Task Force] SOF was DanSOF and British SOF, high-end targeting. I mean they worked in conjunction because they used some of our PJ assets to do some extractions and some medevacs, very collaborative—but the high-end SOF in that region was largely British and Danish, pretty amazing. And then the Georgians provided a huge combat capability, and did some really knock-down, drag-out, slug it out fights with the Taliban over the course of very long deployments there. So very much a Coalition war fight for sure.

And then, when you got right down to it, what made the institutional advisory mission difficult is that you had what I would call conventional security forces assistance teams, assembled by the Marine Corps that would go out and walk patrols with General Maluk's team. They would walk police patrols with their partnered ANP units, so you had young Marines wondering why the institution couldn't support them, and they would, in order to build credibility with their guys, they would end up supporting them.[1:13:50] And say "Okay, you need fuel? I've got fuel. Let's go, we're going on patrol." And that would undercut the institution's ability to stand up behind the policeman. And the Afghans were masters of playing Mom against Dad. I mean, they would be like "We don't have any fuel, can't go on patrol. I'm sorry Lieutenant so and so." What Marine Lieutenant is going to say no? He's going to be outside the wire today, his commander told him so, so "Fuel up boys we're going for a ride." And they would do that habitually. My entire time there the IJC fight would fuel, feed, arm, equip, fix, their own mechanics would fix the Humvees, they would slide them parts under the table because we had it and they needed it. So they undercut the institutional logistics. They undercut the institutional training that we came up with. And that was a constant tension also. I mean I would never second guess, because I had done some work in Iraq on a previous tour with the Iraqi forces, I would never second guess the Marine Lieutenant. But when I'm out there and I was talking to

General Toolan, I said, “Sir, your guys are undercutting.” And he’s like, “Yep they are. Anything else Redding?” And I’d say, “No sir.” I mean you can’t second guess the commander on the ground or the Marine platoon commander on the ground; they have a mission to do. But that crippled the Afghan institution as much as the Afghan system did.

One of the things that we did not invest enough in was literacy. The Danish did and the British did. We had a huge national program but it was not accountable. In fact General Bolger may have had some scar tissue because we kind of uncovered a little cottage industry where they were cooking the books on how many students were being trained in these local programs and there were no students, there were no classes. So I mean there was a lot of opportunity for graft in this, but we didn’t focus enough on it. It would transform a trainee. When they could, at the end of their tour—it was really about a 6 to 8-week program in intensive literacy—when they could write basic sentences at about a third to fourth, maybe a fifth grade level, US standards, it just transformed them. They had education now that would last them a lifetime. It was like lighting a fire. You could see the human being in them come out at the end of their graduation. And when they would hold their certificate up and shout to the world, [01:15:00] not only their oath of office but their “I’m an Afghan soldier” creed, they had really earned something and it was largely because they could read and write where nobody from their village ever had. We failed because we tried to make a logistics system that depended on literacy. Any form you had to fill out had to be written. And if you can’t read or write beyond the fourth grade level or if you can’t operate a computer and read what’s on the screen, there’s no institution. And so what do you rely on? Patronage. The whole concept for the Afghan logistics network kind of fell down around its ears as we were trying to build it because literacy was the pivotal thing. These soldiers, they were now soldiers and policemen, they had emerged from bronze age village life where goat herding, poppy and whatever else you happened to grow in a subsistence economy was all you had. They had never been outside the boundaries of their... they never had to come to grips with somebody who spoke a Kazak dialect of Dari compared to your Kabul dialect. So they were really, the army was the melting pot.

But the police too, when they would emerge able to read and write you could see the human being come out from within them. And that gave me the most hope, so if I had to do it again, I would have doubled down on literacy, tripled down, all in on literacy. Let them read the Qur’an in its own words and we’ll see what happens from there because the power that brings, the thirst for knowledge, the thirst for more that brings with it is immeasurable. So I would have invested more in that. We had some success in the ANA log system in the sense that we stopped a lot of the graft and the black market in fuel.

We did in fact end up transferring Shorabak, the base and the police training center to them right, on the heels of my tenure, so that was a massive step forward for them. And again this is all because of the demand signal “Hey, war’s over, NATO is leaving.” So we were on a compressed timeline to get out of Helmand almost as fast as we had tried to build it up. So

even within my tour we peaked about in month seven and then everything became retrograde. How do we downsize? And the conditions had not sunk in deep enough in the institution to have any lasting impact.

The ANP academy with its leadership and Pashtun instructors was incredible, very proud of that place. And as far as I know it's still kicking around out there, they probably do get some help from the Coalition now and then but they were on a path to self-sufficiency. I talked about the literacy training—transformation. It really, some of the brightest spots during my tour over there was when an Afghan trainee would pull me over to the white board and write his own name and it was incredible to see. They were able to write their own name and really identify with it.

Some of the medical training we did also was really critical. Afghan police able to save their own soldiers' and patrolman's lives. Likewise, with the IED training we did, very effective. I think we invested a little bit too much in the high-end IED defeat EOD-type tasks, where what they really needed was a detect and a simple render-safe, either a shape charge or a mark and return. The institution of the army really invested in EOD training and again literacy. How do you understand a manual that is very technical if you can't read or write? And it was just doomed to fail.

Our interagency objectives. I say these are successes because in these meetings with the MEF we would agree to disagree to do something, but we would find the middle ground. I mean the State Department was not always in line with what the EU police commissioner wanted to see in a training environment. But we would thrash it out and everyone who was deployed forward worked it out through the middle ground and we sent whatever report we needed to, to the higher ups to keep them out of our business. Which is not to say we falsified reports, all the caveats hey they didn't agree to this but here's what we are doing given the resources that we have on the ground. [1:21:38] So I held that really as a good model, the PRT model where you had civilian authorities trying to lead the way and military objectives following in support I think were very key. I would just say that we rushed at the end. We rushed to get out of there, and look where we are today. We're going back in.

Then the intel fusion and sharing—I think I left Helmand province and moved directly into brigade command in Europe and I've never seen NATO function better than in Afghanistan. We had CENTRIX, we were sharing intel at the highest levels, we knew where the bad guys were, we were inside their thought process, again sadly in Helmand we didn't catch the guys who were inside the wire but we knew they were there. We had taken proactive measures to prep our personnel on the insider threats. We briefed our Afghan partners at the appropriate levels to say "hey, this is something we're concerned about. We need your help." And they helped us generate sources and cull out bad guys. So they realized this was a real threat to our partnership. So CENTRIX, the mission command system, the intel sharing was exquisite. When I ended up in Europe on my real brigade command tour we barely could talk to

NATO. We could barely function using BICES and cross domain, email. Everyone who had been to Afghanistan said why can't we just do it the way we did in Afghanistan. It got even simpler; we had some silly caveats on some of our US only systems and I said alright, because my British soldiers down in Lashkargah needed these systems to see where all the bad guys were, blue force tracker, red force. And the caveat that I was able to get through was as long as I had a US operator at the terminal because of our ACSA agreement on intel then it was okay, but I couldn't give the system to the Brits.

Knarr: Disclose but not release.

Redding: Exactly. It was silly to have to do that, it was draining on us but the ability to interoperate at the tactical level was compelling. It was really something.

And then in terms of what we would do different—I highlighted this but the IJC initially didn't equal NTM-A. We were in different worlds. And USFOR-A also. So the US force was a separate Title 10 Headquarters, and yet we had Title 10 responsibilities under General Bolger's CSTC-A hat because of the US appropriations. If we had thought a bit about that previous to the Surge, we might have had a better command structure. We were ad hoc'd to death, and I say that because NATO just didn't think through how to provide mission command for training advisory teams. Everyone was a single requisition. Every single billet was a single requisition that NATO had to bid on in their sourcing conference and if it didn't get filled that meant that the US would fill it. So we were always in a dynamic J1 scenario with, well my G2 position, my S2 position may not get filled so who can stand in and fill that billet. So that was tough, we ad hoc'd ourselves to death.

The language training, the US just doesn't do enough of it. We attempted to reach some of this with our AfPak hands, but then we didn't turn those folks loose. General Fontes actually is one of the few who's been in that region forever, she's the army expert in that region, spent all her time in Pakistan. But we have not even scratched the surface of what we need to do in terms of language training. No amount of specialization is going to come without a price. So hopefully these security forces systems brigades that we're trying to stand up inside our own institutional army will allow for some of this because if you have to rely on a linguist who is not a native speaker, you're going to lose a lot in translation and the nuance in the room and the vibe in the room. I was deployed to Iraq with native Arabic speakers who were US citizens and the value that they brought to my formation was incalculable. They could say, as I'd walk into the Humvee he'd say, "Sir, that guy in the back was lying. He was lying to your face. This is what the guy whispered in his ear." They could provide that kind of intel. Completely oblivious to me but they would be able to pick up on it. If you're contracting that out and you don't feel it's a core competency I think you're missing out on warfighting. [01:26:39]

We weren't able to mass effects of the institution. They were always being petered away. Someone always would chip away at it. Whether it was the Marines handing them fuel to go

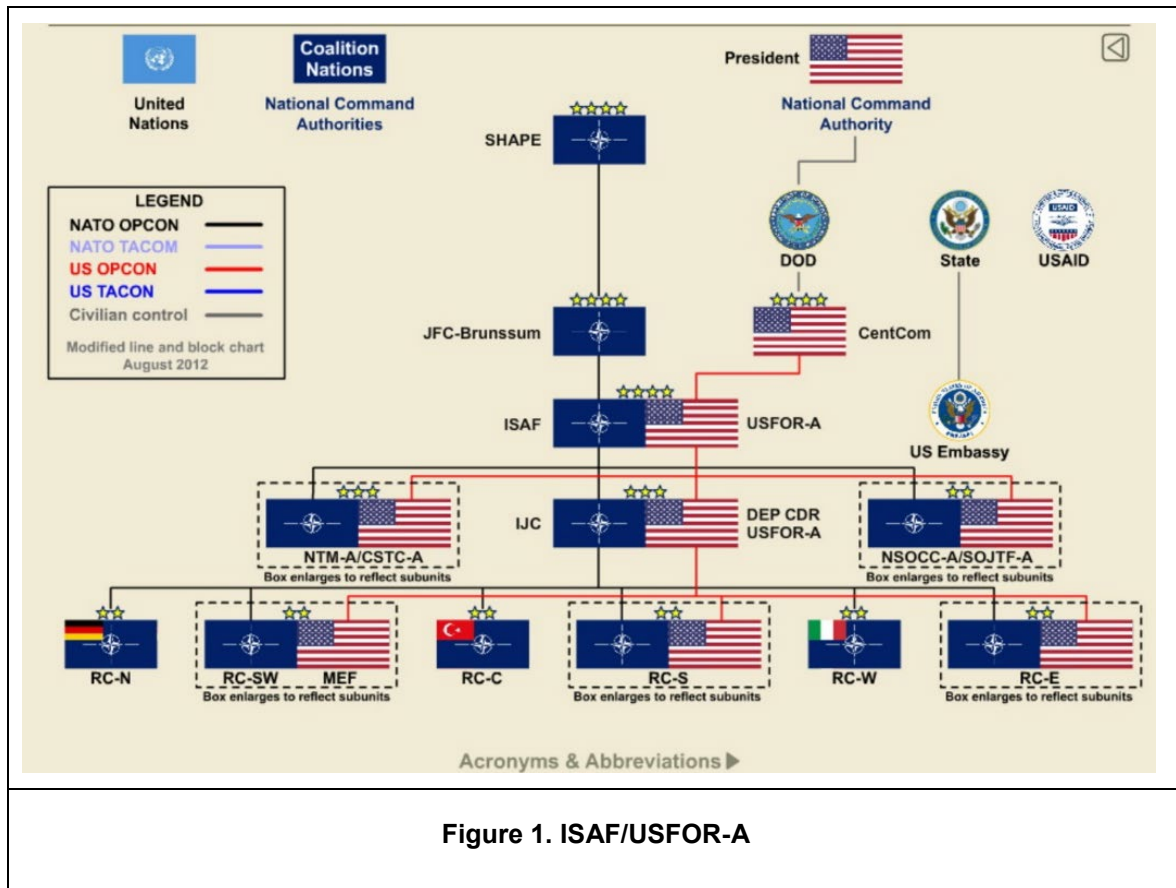
out and do patrols, but we never allowed the cup at the regional level to be filled with logistics to the brim. Kabul was always short something. The lines of supply were interdicted. We weren't able to mass effects and I think we see that now with their use of indirect fire if it can be called indirect fire. It will generally use a direct lay of a gun, mortar system, they use mortars very effectively. But in terms of massing effects over a period of time, a fighting season, for a campaign effect, that's just not the way warfare is fought over there. And I think we were trying to build a campaign-quality army and it just didn't take. We weren't able to stay long enough or do enough to make it a campaign-quality army or a police force.

It goes without saying but poppies, guns, and violence, that whole cycle was never even addressed. I don't know how many armies you would need to address it but that's what drove everything, in Helmand especially. Even eradicating crops, there is no amount of spraying you can do but until you break that cycle it will continue to grow just as the poppies do and it will continue to generate revenue that fuels evil. Nobody was willing to take it on. If that's not going to be part of it then how do you mitigate that? But there was no real strategy; I mean there were interagency designs, the UN was there, NATO tried, Europe suffers the same heroin addiction that America does, if not worse, and yet there was no real effort to stem that or break that cycle.

And then finally there was always this struggle between the tactical and the strategic. This is my comments from earlier about how "I'm here from Kabul, I'm here to help." "That's great, I appreciate your strategic plan for Helmand province but last time I checked, Kajaki dam is still not generating a whole lot of power." The tactical effect of a strategic input can sink an enormous amount of resources into something that's not required. Plenty of stories about that huge TOC we built that was all SCIF'd out, tens of millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars potentially, never even occupied by a US force, shuttered it, flew out and then we're trying to go back into Bastion to kind of open things back up again. We had spent so much on infrastructure that was not required because at one point we thought we were going to be there forever. When the winds of war changed, the strategic plan fell away in light of the tactical realities of Helmand and Nimruz, just very far from any place where you can have a strategic effect. I think General Bolger was good to us in terms of he would always say, "I don't even want to talk about that other war." Meaning Iraq. Because what the Army as an institution had learned in Iraq did not necessarily translate to Afghanistan. Those were some of the other lessons that I took away that we really needed to try and address and it really did draw us down because a lot of what we had learned. Ink blot, village stabilization, security force advise and assist, a by with and through, the marines who had come from Iraq had worked with Iraqis, the army guys had worked with Iraqis. I mean we had a muscle memory in the army during my tenure there that was undercutting the ability to build an institution that was able to stand on its own. And you have to sometimes let them fail misera-

bly and it's tough to watch them do that before they stand up on their own and do it themselves. That's kind of it, unless you wanted to prompt me in a different direction.

Knarr: Just some other questions. How many people did you have under you? Colonel Redding refers to charts in the read ahead, marked as figures 1 and 2 below. Both figures were developed from DOD reports to Congress. Note NTM-A/CSTC-A in dotted box left side.



Redding: It wasn't many. I don't recall the absolute numbers. I had at the height of my existence somewhere around 400. But it was interesting. [01:31:31]

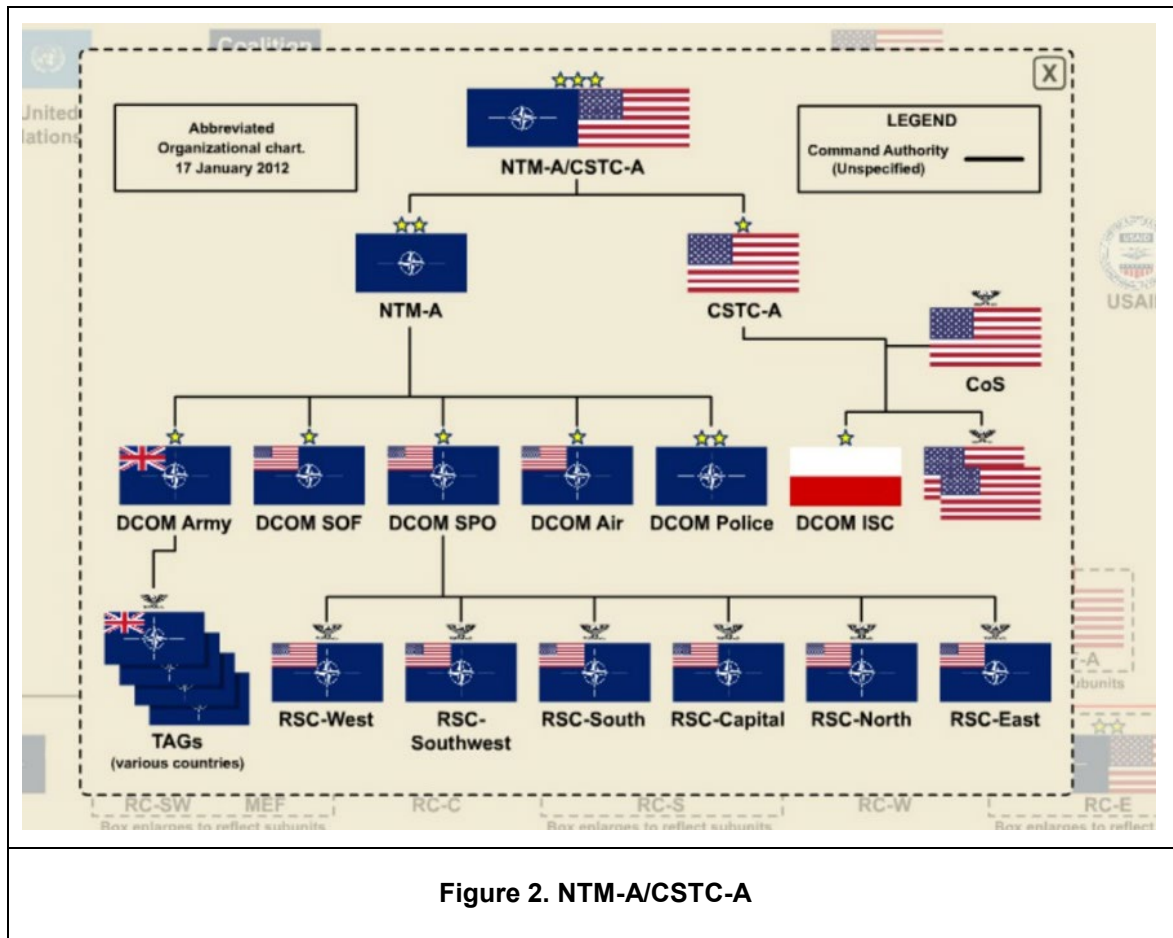


**Figure 2. NTM-A/CSTC-A**

We were derived from this matrix structure up here which was NATO only and then when General Bolger came in, he kind of fused us together and made us the focal point for the NATO training mission enterprise. So the advisory groups, the police advisory groups, they would all come together in this regional support command southwest structure, and we became an enterprise headquarters.

Knarr: I see what you mean, because he said you were the face.

[Note: Colonel Redding first refers to the Regional Support Command Southwest (RSC-Southwest) reflected at the bottom of Figure 2 and then redraws that block as the center of his discussion at Figure 3, the block with the X above it is RSC-Southwest, a brigade level command.]

Redding: Right, we were the face to the field because I had to interface with the MEF commander because he was on the IJC side of the house. And again, the power of putting the ISAF patch on our shoulder really made us part of the war fight regionally. Because the institution, and I put an "X" up here in terms of the brigade level structures, so there's an American flag here because I was American. I had an NTM-A hat, but I also had the CSTC-A hat because under

the Title 10 authorities the appropriations flowed through me for arming, equipping and about \$100 million worth of infrastructure. I had building projects all over Nimruz and Helmand provinces, it was district police and headquarters and all that.

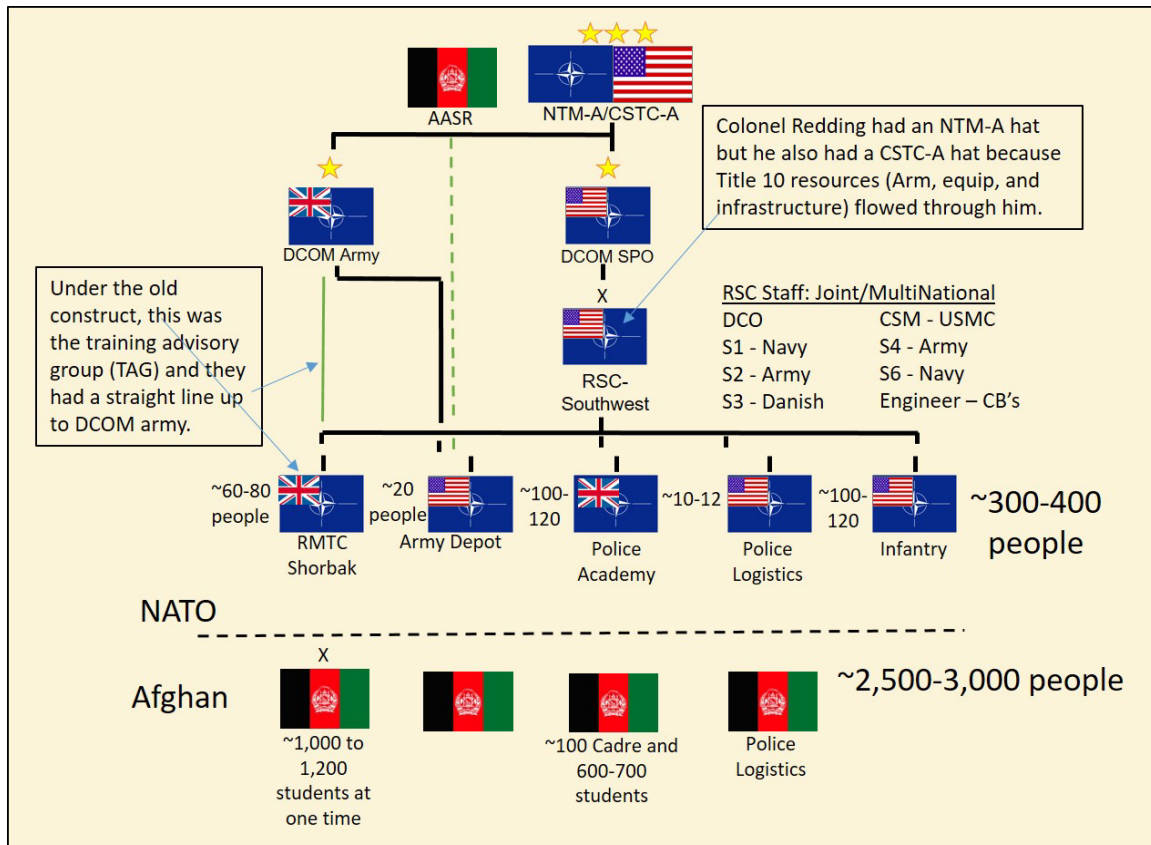


Figure 3. RSC-SW

So over here I had and this was kind of a company level set up it was a matrixed organization but this was the regional military training center RMTC which was Shorbak [Left block]. This is Army and under the old construct, this would have been the training advisory group so they called themselves that and they had a straight line up to DCOM army.

Knarr: Okay, that's on the left-side of that chart there.

Redding: They definitely dotted lined if not straight lined toward the end under General Bolger's guidance. I had to provide them force protection. We were the focal point for the intel, we had the resources for equipping, arming and the logistics depot. So along with this there was kind of a company level advisory group for the army depot. This is pure logistics and they had a straight line to really it was again it was army, DCOM. Army because the Afghan Army Support Command [AASR at the top of the chart], whatever they called it, it was the big depot in the sky, it was this big log in the sky flowed directly through. Again they firewalled

that in the Afghan system so that corps commanders couldn't poach. So it was a straight line Army depot to Army support command and then here you had DCOM army and this was the institutional side, so this was the National Army Military Training Center, or whoever the maneuver center commander was that was their main link, and all their doctrine, programs of instruction were flow down.

Knarr: How many people were in the TAG? Were they the teachers?

Redding: They were, so they were teachers but advisors. So we actually had an Afghan cadre...

Knarr: Another dotted line for you?

Redding: Well, it was. I mean the Afghan cadre, every one of these had an Afghan organization to it.

Knarr: An Afghan arm to it.

Redding: That's right. So this is the NATO arm, and then the Afghan arm. This was Colonel Shawal.

Knarr: That makes sense. Zazai?

Redding: Yes. He's a character, he was trained in Moscow, goose-stepping the whole way. He was classic Soviet. So he was essentially a brigade-level commander like a major in charge of this advisory group, and the NATO side, this was about between 60 and 80 people. This was an organization that on any given day in between cycles they had a cadre of about 200 and it would hold up to 1,000 students or 1,200 students. [lower left block 01:36:45] So we could have three concurrent classes there. So in terms of what I was in charge of for NATO, this was about 60-80.

The Army Depot was I say a company level advisory so I had a major or lieutenant colonel in charge of it, and this was US. So largely US advisors on the logistics side because it was an army logistics system that we were involved with. This was probably 20 people. And then we had my Afghan police academy, which was a rifle company from the UK, so this is police academy and this was probably 100 to 120, it was a full rifle company. Again, dotted line, solid line, however you want to do it, all the way up through.

It's interesting because I drew it solid line, but I think the technical term was NATO OPCON. Which would be like a TACON arrangement in our structure. OPCOM.

Knarr: You say OPCOM with an "M", OPCON with an "N", TACOM with an "M", TACON with an "N", because I couldn't distinguish when you were saying it.

Redding: That's exactly right. They do in fact mean different things. OPCOM with an "M" which is a tactical command level, but the influence that I had was bigger because of the money. The money flowed here.

Knarr: Sure, you had the resources.

Redding: Right, we had the resources.

Knarr: Now was there an Afghan component under the police?

Redding: There was. So you had a cadre of about similar about 100 to about 150 instructors, it was never filled that much. I'd say 100 is probably about as much as we had. With a lieutenant colonel in charge here as well. Then a couple of our classes had upwards of like 600 trainees at peak capacity. So 600 to 700 if you're going through a transition between classes. We ran three or four classes while I was there, so I initially had the Gurkhas, I had the British Tigers afterwards, and then I had the Welsh Guardsmen. I had three rotations in my police training center.

Knarr: Now you said you had an infantry company?

Redding: I did, those were in fact solid line TACON to me, TACON with an "N" because their brigade headquarters were located in Kabul, they were deployed as a US force and they had command authority to them but I had tactical control, operational control as well. So I had OPCON.

Knarr: You had OPCON?

Redding: I had OPCON with an "N" and I could use them, and I did. I split them out toward the end. This is about 100 to about 120 US infantry, MRAPs, mine rollers, the whole 9 yards, certified for outside the wire. But I ended up splitting them to provide security for my army training base with the most people, and the police training base. And then my staff, which is hard to line and block, we had a police academy here, so then we also had a police depot, I should write them in here, but this police depot...

Knarr: Because it was a separate log system from your army system.

Redding: Exactly. And Soviet. So all M-16s in the Army, all AKs in the Police and that was a nightmare. And so this was an American advisor group of about 10 to 12 people from my police log and then you had a police depot down here, was a colonel but he was the provincial chief so he was bigger than a colonel.

Knarr: So that's the Afghan counterpart.

Redding: Yeah. And the partner force arrangement here because they were a fielded force, the Marines IJC they had advisors there. But I had to put my American logistics advisors there because he was essentially taking all the logistics. So I had to work an arrangement where we had to actually station my advisors there so that they could keep track of supplies. And the Marines finally came to the realization that they're not going to get into my police advising lane. Redding's guys are here only for the log function. [01:41:45] But we could provide mutual support in terms of advisors supporting advisors, because the Brits were deeply involved, the Danes as well. So this was about 100 people at the police log structure, of which they were only ever filled probably to about 20%. Because, district police chief was the czar. And then my

infrastructure [top right]. I had a S1 that was Navy, I had an S2 that was army, I had an S3 that was Danish, I had an S4 that was Army, my S6 was Navy and then flipped over to Air Force, my engineer was a mix of CBs and Red Horse. No chaplain. So my S3 was a Danish initially Air Force officer but then an armor officer, a Danish armor officer. So we had US engineers from the Air Force and the Navy. My resource manager, we kind of shared them with Kabul. So an army finance type but we kind of shared them with Kabul and then my DCO, JR Donnell was a US armor officer and then I had a sergeant major, Sergeant Major Pilon, Marine Corps Sergeant Major. He was full-blown force recon marine and I earned a lot of credibility just walking around base with him because he was everything that you would expect of a force recon Marine, a Marine sniper and the whole nine yards. So he had been there and done it all.

So when you total it up, it's somewhere between 300ish to 400ish but when you look at what was below the water line, I mean this was, it adds up, the army, this was somewhere between 2500 to 3000 in between cycles as you're transitioning. But it was a lot. Then the money and the resource aspect was largely—the biggest part of that was in infrastructure I had \$100 million worth of projects. We were arming and equipping army and police forces. I can't even remember the dollar figure there. We would constantly receive store and then issue the equipment to them. These were all what we would call WYAS taskers, they were all single tour one each requirements and NATO would bid for them individually, just like they would bid individually for training, for logistics, and police and their sourcing conference back in [unclear]. So a little bit of a tangled mess.

Knarr: Makes more sense.

Redding: It was interesting because again they treated me, if they had a NATO if they were not US, they treated me as if I were the commander out of just pure respect for the position, but it was definitely OPCOM and not a higher level of command. So my police trainers had a direct link to the British commander in Lashkargah because they were in the British battlespace, made total sense. And I never got in between that.

Knarr: What was your relationship with the—where are the SFATs in all of this? They're over on the IJC side.

Redding: They are, and it's interesting, this is where on this chart you make the dotted line to RC Southwest, so this is the MEF headquarters here, so you've got the regional command Southwest and then the US MEF, so two hats here. You had the whatever the combat force was, so you had your marine infantry, and they would have battlespace, and the SFATs you know Company X, Company Y, so you have X, Y and Z Companies, they would partner with 215<sup>th</sup> Corps Battalion X so you'd have a company partner with a battalion, so these were the SFATs. [01:45:08] The Marines took a lot of that out of hide.

Knarr: Yeah and they did that in Iraq too.

Redding: Absolutely. But they'd organize for combat that way. They knew that they were going in this company was going to own battlespace, but they also had the additional mission of partnering with their sister battalion because a company would partner with a battalion, and that had its own challenges. Because what Afghan colonel or lieutenant colonel wanted to listen to a Marine captain, I mean they did if they knew what was good for them but there was a little age difference there.

But it got really spicy on the police side because all the police forces were fielded forces and yet they were part of the institution. So that's where my friction over the log bits was deepest because the district police chief had assumed the institutional role which was not his on paper of manning the log depot and keeping the log depot open for his own purposes. So it made him the big power broker there and it really wasn't his role. I think we had gotten that flipped to the region right on the heels of me leaving. Built a big regional police headquarters—again one of the projects we had initiated, a lot of money spent developing a regional police headquarters—and with it was supposed to be a regional logistics hub for the police, it was all in the plans initially. Don't know if that ever came to full fruition.

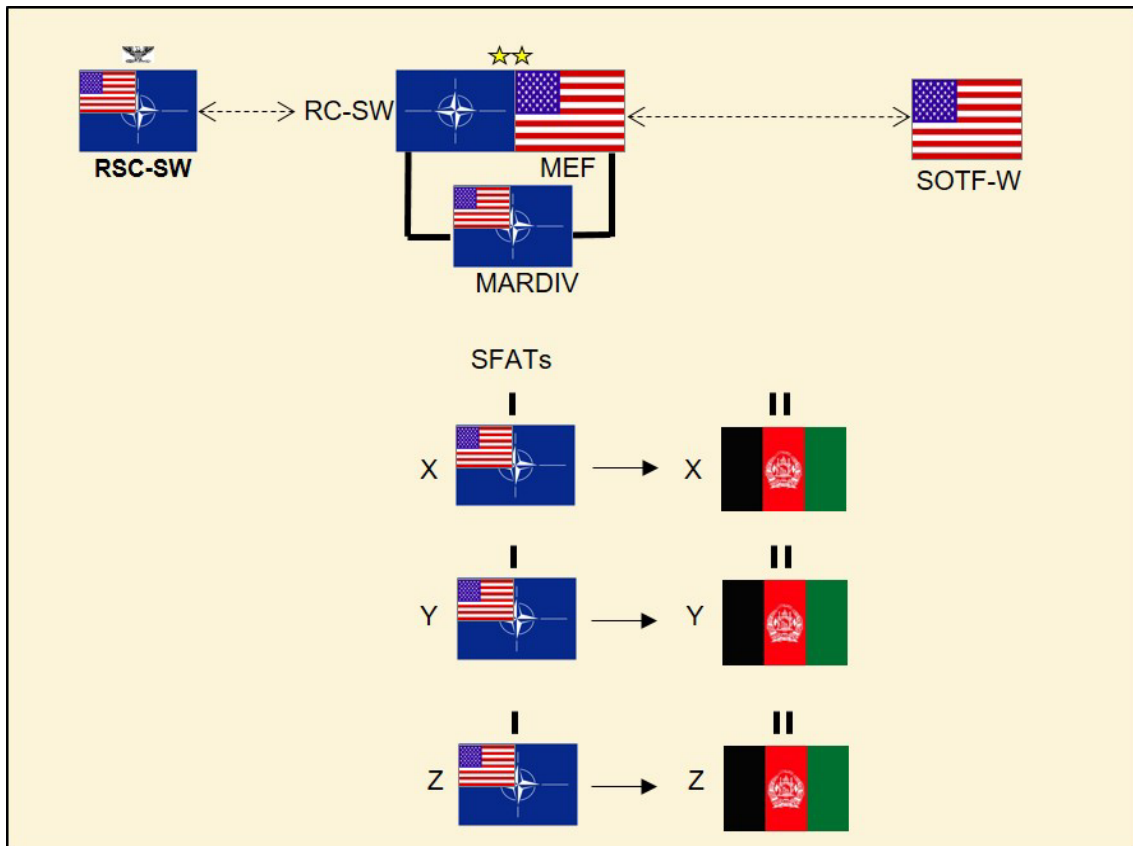


Figure 4. SFAT: US company partnering with an Afghan Battalion

Knarr: As Bolger would say, this isn't the "other war" but I can't think of this in terms of the MNSTC-I, the CMATT and the police underneath it.

Redding: Right, and that's where having, I mean this is where JR my deputy has a lot of experience. He was with the national police team in Baghdad and he can tell you why it didn't work and it was largely because those teams were not accountable to the battlespace owner. Much like the debate over SOF in the battlespace, [The Task Force] SOF would oftentimes come into our area in Iraq and mess it up big time and they would be gone before we knew it but we knew there was a mess to clean up. Now in this case, the battlespace owner took on the partnership role for both the police and the military.

Knarr: And that makes sense. Because he's responsible for security forces.

Redding: And who else can clear fires on their behalf, who has the big picture. That's right, exactly.

Knarr: That's a great chart, I'm glad you did that.

Redding: It was unique because on the logistics side so too for police it went straight to Kabul all to build a firewall around this resource pipe. And likewise here, the doctrine and the program of instruction was all dictated from on high. So when we would get the training packages and we would look around and say who's going to roll this out and does this make sense, because we only had 6 or 8 weeks to execute a training class. Thankfully my Danish and British so this was largely Danish and British on the army side, so we had UK and Danish,

Knarr: And I think on the graph I saw it showed the number of different countries associated, and in fact I think John asked me that and I said just, we'll hide all the rest and put the Brit thing on top...and call them TAGs

Redding: And that's like in West, the Spanish and the Italians were lead. In the South in Kandahar the US was the lead, in the North where Robin Fontes was, the Germans were in the lead. In East it was the US and whatever was further east of east, north of east, oh the capital. Capital was Turks. And the US kind of manned or actually it flipped between the Canadians and the Brits the DCOM Army. Because General Day wrote my OER.

Knarr: He was a SOF guy.

Redding: He was a SOF Guy, that's right.

Knarr: I need to get a hold of him.

Redding: He's quite a character. He's a legend in the SOF community. He's a good guy. So you had the IJC SFATs and the

Knarr: See that's where I got this thing that talked about the SFATs. [01:50:00]

Redding: Yeah, and that's a great guide. JR actually wrote the army version of that down at JRTC. So he's a wealth of information.

Knarr: I need to talk to him.

Redding: So this is where you had your SOTF over here. So they would operate out here doing the VSO and the ALP and only through coming to the middle would we get any synergy at all.

Knarr: So if I take that left side and I expand it to at least show some of the stuff, that would do it justice.

Redding: Exactly. This is all joint and multinational. Because I had Danes on my staff, I had Brits on my staff, my S4 was British. My S3 was Danish. My medical was Jordanian, I had a Jordanian surgeon, for the surge. Incredible capabilities that everyone had ponied up. So that was it. With all these straight lines, what General Bolger did was say face the field, he drew an umbrella and said we're going to get accountability of ourselves, nobody gets killed without us knowing about it, and we're going to make it work.

Knarr: That's amazing, the teachers weren't part of it. How could you be accountable for them?

Redding: Right! And oftentimes without nefarious intent, they were operating counter to the broader purposes of NATO and in some cases without any knowing about it. So again the idea that consolidate this. And again I had a straight line to the SPO which was support operations.

Knarr: You call that support operations, SPO?

Redding: Yes that's right. So this is DCOM SPO, and initially it was General Cosentino, then it was General Hilner, who actually tragically died one night. He was playing video games and then General LeMasters came in after him. General LeMasters is now in charge of TACOM, Major General LeMasters. And then he dealt with the drawdown in full.

Knarr: He's the CG of what?

Redding: TACOM up in Michigan. That's about it.

Knarr: I really appreciate it. I'm a structure guy, I need to structure my head sometimes.

Redding: Like I said, this evolved, we initially just had the depot and we had to do what we could, depot and infrastructure were our big things, we were an outlet for the money. But it was never formal until General Bolger came on board, formal dual hat. Because we did have the NATO mission face to the field then we have the Title 10 funding in order to execute the appropriation.

Knarr: He told me that later when we split it back out we still had to have the CSTC-A because we still had to have someone accountable for money and stuff. You were going to say something about Robin Fontes?

Redding: Robin is going over to be CSTC-A.

Knarr: Oh wow, so she's got that down.

Redding: She's about to take command in the next week or so.

Knarr: She sent me an email.

Redding: But Art Weeks is in the local area, he was the commander in central, he was RSC Capital. And he would be a good perspective. He's getting ready to retire this summer, probably have some time on his hands in Crystal City, the capital was an interesting place. So that's about it. [01:54:10]

Subject: Interview with **Lieutenant General David Berger**, USMC, former Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division (Forward), in Afghanistan

Lieutenant General David Berger, USMC, is currently the commander of the First Marine Expeditionary Force (I-MEF) at Camp Pendleton, California. He commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division (Forward), in Afghanistan from February 2012 to February 2013. In that capacity, he also served as the Commander of the MAGTF also known as Task Force Leatherneck. During his tenure he managed the redeployment of surge forces in his area of operations and the transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan National Security Forces.<sup>18</sup>



**LtGen David Berger**

LtGen Berger was interviewed at his office on Camp Pendleton on 30 March 2015 by Dr. William Knarr and MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC, Retired.

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Dr. William Knarr: Sir, if you would describe in what capacity were you there, the mission, and the conditions when you arrived.

LtGen David H. Berger: I deployed as the division forward commander and replaced another second Marine division forward commander, so [we had] similar roles, similar jobs. There was a complete ground combat element on the ground when I arrived. There was a much, much smaller one when we left. My role was the ground element commander within the air-ground task force. Within RC-SW I had an adjacent unit that was British, so in terms of real estate management, they were an adjacent partner on the side. There was a regimental combat team construct with two of them and then battalions, detachments, etc. below them in normal kind of fashion. My peers were wing forward commander and an LG [Logistics Group] forward commander; my boss was dual-hatted as the MEF forward commander and also the regional commander southwest. That was Mark Gurganus. [1:20]

I don't have the written one before we deployed, but the mission was not a new one, probably just an interpretation of where the campaign was at that time. It was to be the ground combat element for the MAGTF and it was very security-centric. It was clear to us from the beginning—and I think if you looked at our mission statement it was to set the conditions for hand-off to the Afghan Security Forces over time. It was not a surprise that was the going-in position: Support them, get them ready to take the lead. I think we knew when we went over they would be fully in the lead or pretty near it in most areas.

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<sup>18</sup> Part of President Obama's surge of 33,000 military service members to Afghanistan starting in 2010 to be redeployed by September 2012.

It was pretty fast-paced, we knew that going over there; we would push things to hand off. In fact, internally within the MEF Forward, if you talk to the others, we were going to push faster than we were comfortable with but that was the only way to see how it would be handled, rather than wait and try to hold everything you've got until the last minute and then give them the keys. That is not a good pathway for success in combat advising; it's better to give them the authorities and responsibilities early on. Even when it is painful, even when they get a bloody nose, let them sort through it on their own, unless it is just catastrophic and then be ready to quickly step in if you have to. There was some counterinsurgency, but mostly it was all about the advising and providing support to the Afghan Security Forces so they could take the lead.

Also in transition were the ANSF's capacity, it was still on a glide slope, growing, equipment-wise, manning-wise, size-wise they were still growing. For both police and the army. Helmand? I don't know where you would put it in relation to the rest of the country, I can't recall that in detail. Certainly within Helmand province there were varying degrees, like there always are during a transition, some moving along fast, some areas moving faster than others. "Fast" meaning they are ready for the ANSF in the civil structure to completely have the lead and for us to just support. The conditions were well on their way for that. My predecessor had already drafted up a very solid plan for how the force would shrink in size and in real estate. A fair portion of that was logistically driven in terms of equipment draw down and also the closure of all the locations where all the forces were and handing them off or consolidating them. He had a great start plan that we inherited and then adopted and modified. [4:40]

There were a lot of logistical service support aspects to it. The whole mind set being that we would probably go a little faster than we would like to go, but that was better. Then if they were going to stumble or fall, we would be not far off; better that than to hold all the forces we could until the last second. We were bleeding off forces all year long on purpose to draw down.

Knarr: What about the insurgency? Some of the things in the reports to Congress indicated that of the top ten most dangerous districts for insurgent activity, that eight of those were in Helmand. Had a lot of that subsided, by the time you had gotten there or were you or the Afghans still dealing with that?

Berger: I'm not one at all who's qualified to compare districts. I know what you're talking about, and I guess part of that is how you interpret statistics and what most dangerous district means. There were clearly districts where the insurgency was still deeply rooted, and tough to dislodge for different reasons, and as always there were different flavors of insurgents. Locals versus ones not from Afghanistan— there's a spectrum like always in an insurgency of the threats that you face, and no different in Helmand province. I think the Afghans were probably, if you were to put a scale on it, a quarter to a third of the way at handling things in the lead themselves when we arrived and by the time we left it was probably 90/10 at least.

[6:45] They were more in the driver's seat and making decisions on what operations they wanted to plan, what they would like to get from us, and we were determining what level of support we would give to them and when and who would make that call. Bleeding off the reliance, the dependency on the coalition, on us for support. Definitely pretty clearly a sizable threat there; it was not a homogenous threat.

Knarr: As you look back through that year, what is the sequence of events that occurred, that stand out in your mind? The drawdown, you had to make a certain mark by September of that year, because the President had committed to pulling the 30,000 back. So you really drew down quite a bit. You talked about the Bastion incident that occurred—one of the things I read about was Operation NAWAED—I think that was what you're talking about, they picked up the planning and execution portions. If you could walk through the year... [8:20]<sup>19</sup>

Berger: I think when we got there, that was maybe the first or maybe the first real year that the ANSF had put together their own annual plan. Of course, fed by a lot of coaching by mentors and Coalition folks who helped them craft it. I would suppose that is not abnormal either, and over the years I am sure more of the writing in it was theirs and less of it was coached by us. But in that year I would say a lot of it was contributed by us and put into their words and their sequencing. In the beginning of the year, when you do a turnover in the wintertime in that part of the year, any country in that area, generally the amount of activity is lower because of the weather. Especially there, where there was essentially a safe haven where the leadership for the insurgency, particularly the Taliban, could leave the country and, basically, go home for the winter. It is a lower level of incidents in January, February March timeframe, and you just know it is going to ramp up over time, and it did.

Close to home, drawing down from two regiments to one for us was significant; to try to figure out the span of control that command and control required for a regiment to do that. Handing off battlespace and control of that to the Afghans in a methodical manner, but always pushing them to take a more aggressive approach to managing the real estate themselves.

Some small things: their nascent ability to fire their own artillery and see it happen and see illumination and see rounds that they are producing on the ground. Although not always effective, it did not matter. So much of what we were doing, in other words, part of it is building capability, but frankly more important is the confidence that you can't qualify by it has to happen. You can give them the capability and they can build the capacity, but if their confidence is not there, if the young soldier's confidence in his colonel, his leadership does not exist, then you are not making real progress. [11:00]

Major milestones were not so evident to other people. There were small steps. A battalion commander, a brigade commander on their part making a pact with the local civil leadership

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<sup>19</sup> DoD Report to Congress, Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, July 2013, 11.

and police finally working things out. Weeding out bad people, bad people moving from one district to another; he would be gone from here and four weeks later he'd show up over there and now is the deputy mayor. Some of that kind of frustration for sure.

The attack on Bastion-Leatherneck clearly a major event for the year. In a lot of ways. The adjustments that happened after that from a security aspect.

Bleeding off the size of our force, leaves you with less and less and less in terms of fires, aircraft, close air support, so you're more and more and more concerned about your ability to react and support your own force when you get skinny. Can we still get responsive, accurate fires where they are needed? Can we still get a medevac aircraft out there? It almost seems like you are micro managing, but you have to because there is not enough to delegate and let other people manage those resources, you have to do it. Because if you have three sequential operations and all of them are gonna require something and you don't have enough, you have to prioritize, you first and then you and then you. It's a shift in leadership style where you're more hands one, directly managing stuff.

This is not an event, I don't know how you would characterize this, but the relationship between us as leaders and the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps leadership and the senior leaders of the police, border police, Afghan police, even the Afghan local police—but primarily with the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps, border police, and the national police—those relationships you just knew were going to be strained over that year, two year time-frame actually, because Dan Yoo had the harder part. [13:30]

Knarr: Why do you think he had the harder part?

Berger: We inherited the beginning of the drawdown, so there was a hand off also of very comfortable relationships and an expectation that when General Malouk needed something, he would just pick up the phone and call me or Mark Gurganus and things would happen. As much as you try to wean over a year's period of time, you just knew that Dan Yoo's year would be the tough year; he would have to say "No, No," repeated "No." *No* is more acceptable if no means I don't have it, but it's a lot harder to stomach when you can see helicopters out there or trucks or fuel or whatever and they're saying "no". And you see that they can, they *could*. Dan had the really hard part of telling them no, even when he had the capability to provide. That's hard, because the trust between you and the partner forces you're working with, that's when the strain comes. He can see you could do it if you wanted to, "Why are you not doing this?" We had to do it some, in the latter three/four/five months, I say *we*, Mark Gurganus and the other leaders. It was isolated occasions; Dan had to do it repeatedly, routinely. But you have to if you're going to wean them completely off your support. [15:15]

Knarr: [15:37] A tactical question: When you start drawing down forces, I always thought that was the hardest time for intelligence, because you don't have your people out on the ground. Can you comment on that?

Berger: I'll not disagree with that at all. Some of what folks—me and others—learned in Iraq (probably the same lesson people have learned before us), even on your best days with every resource you have at your disposal, your awareness, you're understanding will always not be equal to the local security forces. Their understanding is going to far exceed yours. You can put all the ISR planes and everything, you can have a constant persistent stare at whatever piece of real estate or person you want to, it will never match the local view. I think the inverse would be true. Were we uncomfortable with the amount of intelligence, the quality of intelligence? I would say certainly, yeah. During portions there would be gaping holes in it. But part of that frankly and honestly is that we had become comfortable, we had an expectation that we would have plenty of resources to get after the questions, the information requirements we had—that we would have enough ISR aircraft, enough whatever to get all the intel we needed. We built up those expectations ourselves. When you start to wean yourself away from it, you get more expeditious that's more normal, but you're not used to that, so we were a little uncomfortable with it.

You try to make up for it in some aspects, but there is nothing that can replace constant patrolling of Marines and Soldiers on the ground. Their sense, their ability to compare today versus last week just doesn't compare with something that's not human. Even a picture comparison of last week versus this week doesn't give you the fidelity of a human who says, "That just didn't seem right." You can't get that from a photo or a video. Good analysts, good interrogators ask them 12 more questions "Tell me what you mean by *didn't feel the same*." From that aspect on the ground side, the most obvious discomfort was much fewer foot patrols equals less of a finger on the pulse of things. You tried to replace it with other things, you try to coordinate with the Afghans and get their HUMINT understanding of things, but it was never going to replace three or four years of constant patrolling through the same villages. You knew going into it, you were going to lose part of that understanding and awareness both. *Awareness* meaning "I can't even see a difference;" *understanding* being "what does that mean?" when you're not physically present in areas for days, weeks you're not even aware, much less understanding. You don't know what you don't know. [19:05]

Knarr: Relationships. You had Task Force Helmand there with the Brits, you had a Georgian battalion down with RCT-7. Of course you worked with the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps. You already talked a little bit about relationships and red lines or caveats that other countries brought with them; how was your relationship with Task Force Helmand and the Georgian battalion?

Berger: I don't know how Task Force Helmand could be any better. I think even in my family, you know, you rub each other the wrong way and then it is fine tomorrow. Mark and I went over to London before we deployed and spent a week over there; we knew the commanders, they knew us beforehand. I think for me personally, the year in Kosovo working closely with British every day was very helpful. I do not know how you could improve on that, I do not know how it could be made any better. As I mentioned, people who had no experience work-

ing in NATO would get suspicious, would get frustrated, I knew that going in, so I just accepted that it's not bad, it's not nefarious. Even when things went bad at a tactical level—an engagement on their side bled over into ours and we didn't know about it and bad things happened in our terrain. Or the inverse where something we were pursuing entered their area and we couldn't coordinate fast enough and bad things happened over there, a civilian killed or a building destroyed—even in those [situations], in a phone call or something, you could put that flat very quickly. I don't know how you can improve on it.

I thought [working with] Georgia was very good. It seemed to me they absolutely wanted to operate with Marines; it meant a lot to them to operate with US Marines. Their leadership had a big variance in quality and experience level, which they knew and we knew. By the time we got there, it was their second or third battalion in there, so all were first-time deployers. Their indoctrination to counterinsurgency and how they viewed it was going to be new for the first few times until battalions would go back the second and third times. Then a lot of those sergeants and lieutenants would be on their second, third deployment and that is easier to understand. Battalion commanders were for the most part responsive, for the most part understood what we wanted and accepted that. Occasionally some challenges, but that is in any military. At no time was there such a big divide where it became a country-to-country kind of phone call, "This is not working out." Never got to that point.

Working with the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps was very good on a personal and professional scale, both. With the senior leader like we had worked with for several years like General Malouk, there is clearly mutual respect for competence and that your word was good. Others I would say are a mixed bag of trust and not to the same degree was with Malouk, clearly not the same.

Knarr: He's pretty good.

Berger: 'Good' but also we had been working with him for some time before that. For a couple-few years, two years I think before that...I can't remember when he got there, but he had already been there a couple years, through a couple of rotations of Marines. That trust had built up. He had made multiple trips back here to the United States to meet the next group, it was a routine. Personal relationships were going to need to be sound going into the final stages for Dan. If that was not on solid ground, if you are not locked in tight with their army leadership, at the tactical local level it was going to be a long, much harder year for Dan Yoo. [23:50]

I suppose if you ask somebody who was an advisor in Vietnam, they'd probably have the same type of response: There are times when you have to close the door and have things out. In my time there, it never got personal while I was in the room. If you can't do that, then you're not very good at advising, and their not very good at being advised. There were certainly times that we disagreed and closed the doors as leaders and worked things out. I never saw it get personal; you could keep it professional. Sometimes it was a disagreement that

wasn't at our level, but he would be pissed off about what our leadership was thinking or doing or the inverse would be true. It wasn't a local disagreement, it was "Your chain of command is screwing up and you're not getting the parts you need to fix your vehicles, what are you doing?" Something other than a local thing. Usually when it was a local thing it was because of a very localized issue, 'an incident' or 'a relationship', or something like that. In every case you close the door and work it out.

Knarr: You talk about Kosovo, and every time I look at this chart there's various chains of command, as an example there is an ISAF kind of chain of command and then of course the US forces chain of command. There is OPCOM, OPCON, TACON, NATO OPCON, etc. What was your relationship with General Gurganus? As a Regional Commander, his mission was a little bit different. Could you talk about that?

Berger: I don't know how many hats he wore, but he was my boss as a regional commander, he was my boss as a MAGTF commander, and I think at the time the senior Marine, so if there were Marine Corps issues, he was the senior guy in country as well. Nationally of course there was a chain of command up through him on the US side as you pointed out. It can be complicated if you're new to that game. Absolutely.

To illustrate: if you're in the room with me, Mark Gurganus, and the British general—at the same time, and the British general says "I think X". You need to make it clear if you talking about from national lines on the UK line, or are you talking about tactically within the regional command, because I need to know which lane you are in right now. If you don't even ask that question, you can really misread a Coalition partner. He may be speaking along British lines but feel differently tactically, locally within the Coalition. [27:25]. So my take away in Kososo was, If you aren't sure, ask him, "Is that the Spanish position or yours, which one is it?" And they will tell you.

Knarr: [28:25] That is a good take-away for me.

Berger: We have to do the same though. Fair play means if I'm working in a Coalition, and I'm General Gurganus or General Allen you have to tell them "I'm speaking now from the US position," or "I'm talking now as the NATO commander," because it can be two different perspectives. A lot of our miscommunication is not making that part clear. You can waste a whole lot of time, you can really create divisions when you don't have any.

Knarr: General Gurganus had all the advisory teams, is that correct? [29:15]

Berger: When we got there all the advisory teams worked underneath the division, because they were all on the ground side. There was a construct that took them up to the regional command headquarters that provided the policy for Helmand and what the advisor approach would be within the campaign plan, I think his G9. They set the policy, they advised General Gurganus; gave him recommendations, and they tracked the progress, all that kind of stuff.

The execution of it though was within Task Force Helmand and Task Force Leatherneck, which was us.

MajGen Tom Jones: Was Jeff Kinney there at that time too? [30:00]

Berger: Jeff was not there at that time. He went over with—

Jones: He went with Sparky then, that's right.

Knarr: When you say 'within the division' were you talking about within your division—?

Berger: Within the regiments, that's right—

Knarr: Okay. Because I'm thinking that advisory teams that go out to each one of the *kandaks*—what was the relationship then with your division?

Berger: You're hitting on one of the transitions that *needed* to happen during that year. From local battalion commander—meaning his team out of his unit working for him in his battlespace; that was the beginning construct because that's how you normally get started—to something where the local battalion was not in a chain of command anymore but he had to provide support to the advisor team. When we started out just like in Iraq. They were carved out of the battalion, owned by the battalion commander, that is his real estate in my area and my advisor team. But you had to evolve that—because you knew the battalion commander at some point was not going to be the battlespace owner, he was going to be the supporting commander to the Afghan Security Forces. It meant that he had to basically let go of the advisor teams in terms of command relationships, but he had to provide all the support they needed. That's hard for a battalion commander to work his way through. You're basically telling him "There's these three advisor teams, they're in your area, you don't command them. But you have to support them and if they need help, you have to get it to them, anything they ask."

That's a difficult proposition, but that's what has to happen to begin the migration from one construct to another. Where the ground forces are strictly in a support/react mode. Each battalion commander does not own those advisor teams anymore, because you are not going to get to any degree of standardization that you need to as long as they are owned locally and operated locally. If there are nine battalions on the ground and they all have their own advisors, you have nine ways of doing it. You have to move it to a place where it is more centrally run and the Coalition security forces are just providing the security and the logistics support.

The other reason why is that much of the advising has to transition to a top-down mode towards the latter stages, so that you can drive timelines, you can drive hand-off, you can make decisions on relative areas when they're ready to transition to local control or not. You cannot delegate that and manage a timeline. I suppose if it was purely conditions-based, you would probably be driven to that, but when you are operating against a clock as we were, you have to drive the timeline and you cannot just say, "You can transition whenever you're ready." In the end, I think under Dan Yoo and towards the end of ours, the command rela-

tionship went up to the top on the advisory chains, so it can be managed from the top along a directed timeline.

Knarr: When you say ‘from the top’, are you talking about from the RC commander?

Berger: Yes, from the RC commander.

Knarr: So then he is charge of those teams. [34:00] Okay, I see what you are saying.

Berger: When you have finite time. You have to drive it centrally.

Knarr: Interagency. You had the PRTs—they call it the surge of civilians—which was not anything like the surge of military, but still it probably did expand quite a bit. Can you talk about the regional platform? I do not know the relationship of the platform to the various PRTs or the district support teams that were out there.

Berger: If you could answer that question, you would be making a lot of money. The PRT in Helmand, as were the rest of the provincial reconstruction teams, signed up for by nations, ours was UK. The regional platform, which was in the provincial capital, was operated through the direction and the funding of the UK. The civil development within Helmand province was largely directed by the government of the UK in London. There was a federation of course, an overall construct that NATO had, but the decisions were made along national lines for the PRT in Helmand. I don’t know about before or after [I was there], ‘good’ working relationships between General Gurganus and the PRT lead, who was sort of the equivalent of an ambassador from the UK, a civilian. [35:40] But answering up through completely different chains. Therein lies the challenge. If you are not communicating back and forth, you can be on different timelines, different priority sets.

We needed to understand the platform’s plan and their priorities and their needs and their direction they were getting from London. They needed to understand our tactical concerns, our security timelines, how we planned to turn over areas within Helmand. Why? Because if you were not synched up, this is probably stating the obvious, then the platform might be working on a dam and a school and this and a highway over here, but that is one of the areas you’re planning to turn over first and you can’t give them security there. “We can’t operate there unless there’s US or UK military security”—“Well that’s the first area we gotta turn over.” If you are not coordinating plans, you can be completely out-of-synch with the civil development side that the platform represents. They change over every year or something like that. The PRT lead. There were US folks on there; it was an international reconstruction team, largely manned by and driven by the UK.

Knarr: Who was on your staff that maintained that connectivity? To keep you informed.

Berger: Each one of us had liaison officers who worked with them every day. And then just through regular meetings we would have either down there or she would come out to the re-

gional commander headquarters at the invitation of General Gurganus. She would sit around the table with us every week.

Knarr: We also want to talk to them to, get their perspectives.

Berger: They certainly had their own challenges and rewards, just like we did. Probably Mark Gurganus is the better guy to talk about the ins and outs of the personal relationships between him and his counterpart. I have been friends with Mark for about 30 years, so I would say ‘good, solid’, but again not always in agreement. Occasionally surprised? Yup. But always able to work it out.

Knarr: Did you have civil affairs teams out there that worked for you?

Berger: That’s right.

Knarr: So then they had to build that relationship with the PRTs in those areas where they had to work as well.

Berger: Exactly. The intersection point would typically be at district centers where the platform would have one or two reps, our civil affairs teams would be working. There were a couple of intersections.

Knarr: [38:50] I just started reading Carter Malkasian’s book. Was he was a part of the PRT—

Jones: He was with you?

Berger: I do not remember if he was there at the same time.

Jones: He might have been a little bit before.

Knarr: Special operations, the SOTF—let’s just talk about the SOTF that was in your area. You had one that was stationed there but he covered RC-West as well as RC-SW. Can you talk about the evolution of that? In fact, you even had an MSOB; I guess originally it was an ODA.

Berger: They had a schedule, a plan for whether the Army or the Marine Corps would have the lead for different segments of the two- or three-year timeline. Army’s responsibility one time to lead it, SOTF West would be MSOB, like you were saying. They alternated, two and one or three and one, something like that. If you could pick four or five areas where we made some marked improvements from Iraq, that would be one of the top ones. Stark contrast to the early days where SOF units would show up in your neighborhood unannounced, do something, leave, and you would inherit the mess—from your perspective—that you had to deal with over the next four or five days. Not their fault and not necessarily ours in Iraq, but clearly a big friction point. Certainly in Anbar while I was there.

Huge difference from Afghanistan. I never saw that. Everything was coordinated, nothing was “I’m going to plow into your backyard and stir the beehive and then fly out. Mission Success. And then you get to inherit the pile of crap I’m going to leave behind for you to po-

lice up with the locals.” I did not see any of that. Did we control what they did? No. Did they coordinate with us? Absolutely yes. There were no surprises that I saw; does not mean there weren’t any, but I can’t recall one. Never surprised with support they needed from us, shared intel back and forth. I flew over to Kandahar, probably four, five, six times during the year with a couple folks from my staff just to spend time with them, to make sure that we’re not going to get cross-threaded with them while they’re working a target and we are too. That was a huge improvement.

They did a fantastic job of developing the local police. They did not try to compete against us; there was some perception that the SOF guys wanted complete ownership of that portion of advising, they didn’t want the conventional forces involved in recruiting or training local police. Maybe it is just because a large number of them were Marines, but absolutely not—“You guys got a program over there? Is it working?” None of the competition, none of the, “You’re on my turf, I don’t want you doing that”, none of that. A great working relationship.

Knarr: In Iraq, they had a colonel who was kind of the senior SOF guy on the ground [CJSOTF].

In Afghanistan they established the 1-star CFSOCC position, and then later on, I think it was 2012, when General Thomas took over, they established the SOJTF to do both the numbered task force as well. That’s probably the organizational structure that allowed that coordination to happen.

Berger: You would get as many opinions on that probably as you wanted to do interviews. Part of it is just because it was different and it was a transition. Prior to General Thomas’ construct, it wasn’t his idea I don’t suppose, but prior to that consolidation under a single guy, if you were to ask the regional commanders, they would probably say “I had a lot more control and knowledge and ability to influence and the SOF were more supportive” and—you know what I mean?—than when they had the connection up to the top. Then it was from the local commander’s perspective, you lost some of the ability to link together conventional stuff he was doing with SOF stuff and have complete knowledge of everything because now there was this new chain of command. If you follow me.

Part of it was probably just an adjustment. And part of it, frankly, was there were some surprises, if there were some surprises, it was post that, where there were top-down driven things and top-down driven timelines on the SOF side that we were surprised by. Then there were also some differences of opinion on priorities or areas. We never had differences of opinion before because there wasn’t anybody to have a difference of opinion with. Now there were side conversations between regional commanders and Tony over this or that, that didn’t exist before because there wasn’t a Tony. [45:15]

Knarr: [45:40] Let me just comment and you can respond. It seemed to me that once they got the numbered task forces under control, it stopped that “all of a sudden, they’re here in my area.” That was the purpose of the SOJTF. Is that correct?

Berger: We didn't experience that. I didn't see that in RC-SW *before* Tony Thomas.

Knarr: Oh, okay, so in Afghanistan you didn't necessarily see that as a problem before the SOJTF was established.

Berger: From the top-down perspective, it's absolutely an efficient way to organize. Why would you have different tribes of SOF working on different chains—if we can get everybody to agree to one daddy boss up top, on the surface that makes a lot of sense.

Locally what I'm getting at is, if you're General Gurganus and you have a SOF team that's running an ALP platform in Sangin, and Tony wants to move that team from Sangin over here, and you're thinking "BS, that team needs to be in place another six months"—you can see the difference at the tactical level that the friction was gonna happen. Because he's moving around and disestablishing and establishing ALP sites in your regions and you can't have the last say in it. So you're calling saying "That's BS, it doesn't fit into my campaign plan, I need that site there," and he's saying "I got a bigger need somewhere else." And he probably did from his perspective. Before that construct, you just drove the timeline. That ALP site stayed in existence until you did not need it anymore, and you made the decision when to disestablish it. You were not negotiating with anybody. There was some friction. I don't think it was personal, just difference perspectives. [47:40]

Knarr: I was approaching it from a numbered task force: they show up in your area, direct action, and you're approaching it from the ALP, COIN, bottom-up, population-centric [perspective].

Berger: We had moved past the numbered task force surprise visit by the time I got there. At least in Helmand. It absolutely existed in Iraq.

Knarr: Out of curiosity, do you think McChrystal had a lot to do with that?

Berger: Possibly could have.

Knarr: Because when he took over—he wasn't there long in Afghanistan—but seeing both sides...I know it's an opinion.

Berger: I do not know. Partly it is a maturation. On the conventional side, we had to grow and learn that there is a relationship between conventional force ops and SOF ops. They are not in competition with us. If we can find a way to actually talk to each other, communicate and coordinate, holy crap we will make a lot more progress. Part of it was a maturation process.

Part was colored by, like you illustrated the early days when they showed up in the middle of the night unannounced— From Day 1 as a Marine leader or Army leader, you're belief is, "I'm given this piece of terrain. I control everything that happens in it," and now there were these units that would just parachute in during the night, make a big mess and leave. Where did that rule come from? They [SOF] needed to insure operational security, which is why they did not share anything with us early on. We just had to grow, both sides had to grow. I do not know

how much you could attribute that to General McChrystal. I did not see any of it in Afghanistan. I saw great work by Aussies and UK and everybody, lining up with bats to hit homeruns every time. It was great. It was just going to be different when you put a SOJTF on top, it was going to be different. Now you had to negotiate and you did not have to before.

Knarr: What did I miss? What are some of the things were some of the real lessons as you went through your tour that you would pass on to people at school and other commanders?

Berger: You touched on most of them I would start with: relationships, if they don't exist, it's going to be a long road to hoe.

When you work in a coalition environment, expect, going in, that not everybody has pitched in with resources, but that there will be national lines that run in to a NATO chain. You are not going to know everything, you are not going to agree with everything that every other country in the fight is going to bring. Get over it. That said, be ready to deal professionally with everybody else. There is a venue, if it gets out of whack and it turns not professional, there is a venue for that, but you have to approach it realistically going in. "Everything that he's telling me is probably not everything."

I would emphasize to make sure you know what perspective they are coming from when they are giving you advice or a recommendation or an answer, make sure you know which seat they're in right now—which hat they are wearing.

The shrinking part of a conflict is really, really hard. You are not going to avoid risk, you just going, at best, to know where it is, and manage it. You cannot eliminate it. It is going to happen.

In that stage where we were and where General Yoo was, I would tell people, "Where you're handing off responsibility will not happen on a timeline that you're comfortable with, and you will not have the resources you would like to have." If you do not have good relationships, it's going to frazzle them to nothing. It will be tested in a lot of ways. Early on, in other words, I was a novice at it and viewed it as though it was a dependency and we would be weaning them off of stuff. In a lot of cases we were providing stuff too fast, too freely and they were more like, "We got it." And we were surprised when they said 'we got it', because it wasn't the way we would do it, frankly. Most countries will manage on their own, but it may not be the way you would solve that problem, it will look a lot different. You have heard the same lesson: Trying to create other countries, other military security forces in your image is pretty much an exercise in frustration. The first, most valuable step is [determining] "How do they operate? How can they operate?" Then reinforce that.

Your situational awareness is different than your understanding and both are going to be less and less and less as you go forward. Which means more and more and more risk. But that's

what you get paid for. It's not unworkable. "Are you comfortable with that? Can you make decision or does that lock you up?" You should be able to make decisions.

[Another thought] You could make a case that when you are in a coalition conflict, some are in there "to win" and some are in there "not to lose"—nationally. I am not talking about locally, tactically. At that level that's a completely level playing field; everyone is in there giving a hundred percent. But nationally there are different motivations and incentives, "How much are we going to pour into this?" etc. The first goal is not to lose, not to look bad nationally, to do your part, to make it come out at the end a Win. The military and civil leaders who get sent to these conflicts have to carry those national priorities with them. They are expected to execute them. Dan can give you a fascinating perspective I would guess.

Knarr: Sir, thank you.

Subject: Interview with **Colonel Larry Huggins**, USMC, former Commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Special Operations Battalion, in Afghanistan

Colonel Larry Huggins is currently stationed at the Pentagon. Huggins commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Special Operations Battalion, and became the Special Operations Task Force Commander (SOTF) in Afghanistan from September 2012 to May 2013. His SOTF was responsible for special operations in Regional Commands Southwest and West. Although under the command of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) in Bagram he had to coordinate operations with RC Southwest (USMC in Helmand Province) and RC West (Italians in Herat) Commanders.



**Col Larry Huggins**

Colonel Huggins was interviewed at IDA on 13 March 2015 by Dr. William Knarr.

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Dr. William Knarr: Please identify yourself—who are you, what was your mission and when did you deploy to Afghanistan.

Colonel Larry Huggins: I'm Colonel Larry Huggins. I was privileged to lead 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Special Operations Battalion. That was from 2011 to 2013 and as part of that we were able to deploy as Special Operations Task Force across two RCs (Regional Commands). That was a pretty interesting time as with the rapid expansion of ALP, yet the political pressure to reduce forces out of Afghanistan. So it was a pretty interesting time. And then to also develop the Afghans to be self-sufficient. Additionally, as part of the SOTF we had three Afghan Command kandaks. We had to work real hard on sustainment operations to ensure that they were supported logistically from the ANA [Afghan National Army] Corps. Sometimes those relationships can be strained just as in the US Forces, conventional and SOF. It was no different with the Afghans.

So getting the commandos to be independent so they don't depend on us and they don't fail, especially in Helmand where we really relied on helicopters for moving because of the IED threat. They won't have helicopters, so getting them into ground assault, force formations and getting them comfortable in areas where there's not a high IED threat, so they'd be successful and understood the right employment of their force was a challenge.

Our operating area was Western Afghanistan, Helmand up to Badghis. The previous SOTF had just pulled all the SOF teams out of the Badghis Province. The Afghan Local Police [ALP] was very successful. But what we saw in this in other outer areas, the ANA and the District Chief of Police couldn't support some of these villages, so the ALP had no choice but to move to the District Center with their families or turn in their weapons. So those were some hard times, because it was a hard fought, successful operation to secure those areas,

but then you see the reality of the Coalition forces leaving and the ability of the Afghans to sustain what's out there.

So, before we went anywhere else we took a hard look at whether it could be sustainable from the ANA and the Provincial Governor and the Provincial Chief of Police. There was a push to get ALP into Kajaki. The RC wanted it, the Provincial Governor wanted it. We had several KLE's [key leader engagements] with the RC Commander, with the Provincial Chief of Police, and the Provincial Governor to ensure that this is something they really wanted. This isn't about what the Americans think they want, this is what they [the Afghans] want and it's something they will sustain and support from the provincial level. We told them what happened in Badghis Province. We don't want to do this to the Afghans and then lose weapons to the insurgency. They were on board so we did it. It was kind of a reverse of the traditional ALP establishment. Usually a team would fight their way in, push the Taliban out, and then get to the grass roots, assemble a Shura, you know Sons of the Shura stand up, train them and let them defend their [Kolay's] or their clusters of villages. This was different in that we put the team in the District Center and made the District Chief of Police do all the work. So, make him bring the Shura together, because we just didn't have the time to fight our way into villages. And so it was kind of a reverse process; put more ownership on the Afghans. And, you know, it seemed to be working pretty well. [04:26]

Knarr: When did that happen in Kajaki?

Huggins: I believe that was about March of 2013.

Knarr: When were you there? When did you have the SOTF?

Huggins: We showed up in the end of September of '12 and then we were relieved by two SOTFs. We turned over the west around May of '13 and then we turned over RC Southwest in the beginning of June, or the very end of May of '13.

Knarr: So when you went there your SOTF replaced one SOTF? But then when you left you were replaced by two SOTFs? That's interesting because the Coalition was downsizing and you have two SOTFs replace you.

Huggins: Right. I think the Commanding General saw how pressed the SOTF Commander was moving back and forth; hundreds of miles to touch all the different teams and he really wanted two SOTFs especially at that time when you're transitioning. It made a lot of sense.

Knarr: How many teams did you have out there then?

Huggins: It varied. We had eight MSOTs and six to eight ODAs and one SEAL Platoon.

Knarr: I guess you had Herat with the Italians. Were they responsible for the Herat area?

Huggins: Right, so they were RC West, an Italian One Star.

Knarr: What was your relationship with the RC Commanders? Were they the battlespace owners?

Huggins: The RC Commanders were overall battlespace owners for the provinces. Where we had SOF we would have an Ops Box. That's how we de-conflicted the ROE and provided battlespace coordination. That allowed us to not have to go through the RC to clear fires, to coordinate any kind of patrols or movements or operations. And then for Commando Missions we would turn on an Ops Box so it would be de-conflicted with the RC and subordinate battlespace owners so when the commandos came in with the Advisory Team you had your own Ops Box within their battlespace. That worked quite well.

Knarr: You mentioned the commandos and the kandaks, so how many Afghan Commando Battalions worked in your area?

Huggins: We had three.

Knarr: You had three. Ok. Were they numbered?

Huggins: So, yes, 9<sup>th</sup> was out of Herat, 4<sup>th</sup> was out of Shindand, and then 7<sup>th</sup> was out of Helmand.

Knarr: Was the SOJTF [Special Operations Joint Task Force] in place when you arrived?

Huggins: It was and Major General Thomas was the commander.

Knarr: Ok. So you've got the CJSOTF [Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force], you've got the One Star that was the CJFSOCC [Combined Joint Special Operations Component Command] commander, the SOCCENT [Special Operations Command CENTCOM] commander and the SOJTF Commander. How did that work? Did you see that evolution during the times you were there?

Huggins: On a previous deployment I was a Special Operation Planning Liaison Element , (SOPLE) for General Miller as the CFSOCC-A and I was assigned to RC Southwest to the Marine RC. So I did see the CFSOCC-A construct over the CJSOTF. I came back again pretty much right after the SOJTF stood up and they had turned over between Miller and Thomas.

As the SOPLE it was really myself down there to interact with the RC to help de-conflict CONOPs, to ensure we helped the RC run their own ALP. They had a program called ISCI [Interim Security Critical Infrastructure] and it was completely a Marine Battalion generated ALP and so one task that was real important was for us to ensure the RC was doing it in accordance with President Karzai's decree; that was something that General Miller really pushed. That is SOF ALP ensured Sons of the Shura were responsible to the District Chief of Police and vetted by the NDS, the whole deal. We didn't want to have that and then allow the RC to train random people, Afghans, locals...

Knarr: They had to follow the same rules.

Huggins: And so what we found was the Marine Battalions had a real disciplined force, but we had to ensure that they understood the expected role of the ALP, not offensive. The intent is not to have them chase insurgents across the province. They are supposed to be local defense

forces, responsible to the District Chief of Police, not in competition with. It worked out real well. General Miller was great. Him and Commander [Sweitzer] I believe, SEAL, he was the J-35, they did a great job to where the RC ran the ISCI program. The RC really did not know a lot of the background of the ALP program, so we were talking to General Miller in one of those ONIs and said, "Hey, we really could use an ALP 101," and he said, "Do it. Set it up." So, we flew leadership from the RC there and General Miller just being who he is...super Commander. He was able to pull in from COM ISAF [Commander ISAF] and COM IJC [Commander ISAF Joint Command] for them to provide their intent for ALP. So you have the ISAF Commander giving his intent of what it should be. It was perfect. It was exactly what they needed. The RC came back and said, "Ok, we're on it." Next we got the in-processing teams down. The RC supported us moving them around. So it worked out real well. It really transitioned their programs into what, I think in SOF we considered legitimate ALP that could be sustained beyond us being there to support it.

Knarr: Well how many ALP locations did you have that were not run by SOF? [12:15]

Huggins: Marjah was one, Musa Qal'ah and Sangin I think had some ALP. The British had some ALP at Nad Ali. The Italians didn't run their own ALP program in the west, so it was just in the Marine RC, in Southwest and Helmand.

Knarr: That's something. I know they were expanding. I was there in June of '13 for about a month or so doing some work for General Miller. You must have just left. So, your tour there was what, seven/eight months?

Huggins: It was eight, I think just over eight as the SOTF.

Knarr: I guess there was another SOTF up in Mazar-e Sharif?

Huggins: There was.

Knarr: We visited several SOTFs when I was over there, and of course several ALP locations. You know, part of this is about the inter-agency, inter-governmental and multi-national, did you deal much with the Italians out west? What was the multi-national relationship with your guys?

Huggins: We did. The Italians were a polar opposite from the Marine RC, because Marines were very controlling with the relationships. So for me to go to talk to a Provincial Governor I had to go with the Two Star, or the RC Commander—it is their battlespace. That is the way they run those relationships, that's fine as long as they're willing to let us engage, which they were. General Gurganus was the RC Commander. I'd worked for him twice before. Super officer. So that wasn't a problem to get access to the leadership at the Provincial level. Vice in the west we just set up meetings. And largely in the west our company commanders would maintain those relationships with the Provincial Governors, and then the SOTF Commander would touch monthly or every other month to make sure everything was good;

We didn't want to under-cut the company commander's relationship. Really the polar opposite: The SOTF Commander with the Two Star to engage in Helmand and then you have a company commander, AOB commander, MSOC commander, owning those relationships in the west for the three governors out there.

Knarr: During the period you were there, what are some of the notable events that occurred in your area during that period? [14:55]

Huggins: There was a place called [Maktab] which is Pashtun for school. It was a school built by the British years before and it wasn't successful for whatever reason. It was right outside the green zone right. Task Force Helmand had a little patrol base there. We put in a SEAL platoon in there to relieve them as they were starting to pull back towards Lashkar Gah and that platoon was incredibly successful. They went into an area that was completely controlled by the Taliban and did a classic success story for establishing ALP and CMRG from the local village. They ended up closing all the way down to the Helmand River so they actually locked down the green zone during their tour. The insurgents did not like that obviously. So their ability to do that in such a short period of time. It came at a cost, but very impressive. The SEAL Platoon was very impressive.

Directly across the river we had an ODA in Zumbelay and that was another British PB, Patrol Base that SOF had taken over. It had a nascent ALP program. But that ODA expanded. I think one of the keys there was an NDS [National Directorate of Security] substation right outside their little compound. And so with the ALP being successful and pretty well led there, the success across the river with the SEALs blocking all the way down the river, just complete lockdown, that was a real key area. But what we needed to do, in looking at, "Hey we're going to leave here," the ANA had pushed probably within four kilometers of the SEALs and we pushed hard to get them to expand out two more kilometers in order to support the ALP once the SEAL Platoon left. That was incredibly difficult to do. Because, you know, from the, that was the Brigade Commander General [Sheerinshaw]. Real good fighter, real good officer, had been in Helmand for years, but his forces were stretched thin and so just two kilometers seemed simple but his PB line was just a little out of reach. That was one thing we turned over to the units that relieved us to keep pressing to get that moved forward and then across the river in Zumbelay to augment that NDS substation. The British were great and funded some Police Stations, some mud hut type of Police Substation to get the ANP in there. That was right when we were turning over to get those in. So again it would be, the ALP is established, it's functioning, they're successful in keeping the Taliban out. So again, how do you sustain that when the teams leave? And so I think the only way it is going to work is with the ANA, ANP and NDS all working together.

But you have challenges. Simple things that you probably don't consider: The District Chief of Police is supposed to be responsible to support the ALP. We're doing the right thing in training and equipping them. And so, from the Police perspective they have old weapons,

broken down vehicles and then all of a sudden the SOF Teams provide good training to these local villagers, brand new guns, brand new motorcycles, and it creates a tension that you may not expect. So, if there's a way to field equipment, new equipment at the same time, I know that's extremely difficult, so that the Police don't feel second class. So you don't create an undo tension that you didn't expect between the two forces.

Knarr: You said green zone. What was the green zone?

Huggins: The Helmand River runs down a series of canals to provide water for all the agriculture, so anywhere along that area. When you fly over Helmand Province you see green on either side of the Helmand River as far as the canals will reach, that's what everyone refers to as the green zone. [19:36]

Knarr: Now were there any areas where the opposite happened, where you simply had to leave?

Huggins: We did and that's where General Renforth really helped us out. He was the Regimental Combat Team Seven Commander, RCT-7, and so there was an area called Shurakay, it was actually just about ten kilometers north of [Maktab]. It's what we called the upper Gareshk Valley just south of Sangin. Sangin again was very successful and VSP Puseh incredibly successful. I mean you can walk around with no gear in the village. [20:30]

But at VSP Shurakay there was a big fight to insert a team in there. Very well intended, I think there was some elders that were on board that were living in Gareshk that once security was established were willing to come back. My understanding one was killed, one was kidnapped and the third one figured it was time to leave, and so the ability to generate ALP became a challenge without any kind of elder support. So for VSB Shurakay there were several attempts of recruiting ALP. Afghans, I said, were from the area, offsite training, fly them in because it got to a point where you couldn't drive in because of the IEDs, fly them in and usually within a day or two they would essentially evade back to Gareshk. It was just too dangerous for them. Even the CMRG guys, because of the number of IEDs, would go off and whichever wasn't killed the rest would get cold feet to be there. As far as the locals in the area, what the team found was most of them were essentially migrant workers, so that the locals weren't even in that area. So they were migrants and not interested at all in even talking to the team. We were working with the RC, RC Commander really wanted us to put more teams in that area and essentially clear from [Maktab] all the way up to Sangin. That's doable if we're going to commit forces and not just US Forces. What we needed was the ANA and ANP in there.

General Gurganus was great. We flew him and the Brigadier, the Deputy Commander got to see the team, smell the dirt as I say which is important for commanders, and then he really got an understanding and saw that this is different than probably most places and we need the ANA. So he was pressing the Corps Commander to get in there. Went all the way up to a Rock Drill and it came time to execute and they weren't going to do it. That was the time when two Marines had already lost legs out of there. So, the locals weren't interested, the

Afghans weren't interested, they weren't going to go in there. So the guidance to the team was don't give up your white space until the Afghans get in there. Don't try to engage any-more with the locals. It's not working. We won't have long-term success without Afghan involvement, the Police and ANA. So, keep the insurgency off your VSP. That's my job now to work with the RC to get the timings to where the Afghans commit and we pull you out. That's what ultimately happened. That's where General Renforth, he was completely onboard with working with us and getting our guys out without a scratch. It was like a seven day, pretty high intense shoot out to make that happen.

Knarr: Was it a full team in there?

Huggins: It was an MSOT.

Knarr: General Gurganus was the RC Commander?

Huggins: He was.

Knarr: Was there a task force or a Task Force Leatherneck Commander too?

Huggins: At that time Task Force Leatherneck had transitioned out, so you didn't have a one star, it was General George Smith. I think he was more of a SFA role. So when the RC went from two RCTs to one I think that was kind of the pivotal moment where Task Force Helmand transitioned, that one star transitioned to a SFA role.

General Smith was great. He came in later in our deployment. We took him to [Maktab] and he was a sponge for information. Real interested in what was going on the ground, the dynamics between the Police, the locals, the ALP, how to make these things long-term successful.

Knarr: What was the relationship between the MEB Forward and MARDIV Forward and the RC commander and Task Force Leatherneck commander?

Huggins: I think it varied by one MEF or two MEF of how that Command relationship was established. But generally, a two-star was the RC Commander and a one-star commanded Task Force Leatherneck and was overseeing the two RCTs.

Knarr: Who was your boss? [26:29]

Huggins: My real boss was, and this is the uniqueness of SOF, my real boss was Colonel Fletcher. He was a CJFSOTF Commander in Bagram. But between him and General Thomas, it was very clear that whatever the RC wants from SOF they get from SOF. He's the guy to say no, General Thomas is the one to say no. And so our marching orders were very clear to support the RC. And that worked very well. So across the different deployments, my first deployment, '08 time frame was with the Joint Task Force as an individual augmentee and I was working at USSOCOM. The relationship from a CT Force and a CJSOTF was probably tense at times. Coordination was probably not where it should be for a variety of reasons. And so we were under General Miller and as a SOF that was all changing. So, RC Com-

manders were briefed before any operations are conducted, not for approval but for concurrence. And of course, if they have an issue with it they're going to call GO to GO and work things out. That worked quite well. I think it was appreciated.

I think that was the transition to where it was more transparency, where it should be all part of a unified effort. When you look at how planning is done over there, COMISAF has a campaign plan, and then you have RC Campaign Plans, and then you have RCT or Brigade Combat Team Campaign Plans, next thing you know have Platoon Commanders talking about lines of effort and operations. I think there should be one Campaign Plan and everyone else has an Operational or Tactical Support Plan to it, and then that way everyone is rowing together. At least you know what the overall Commander's intent is and how you fit in to that.

Knarr: You said you were there in 2008?

Huggins: Yes, I was there as an augmentee as the DJ3 and I worked in Bagram under General Harwood.

Knarr: Now, back to when you were talking about the de-confliction, isn't that what the SOJTF brought to the fight is this coordination between the CT fight and...

Huggins: Absolutely!

Knarr: Ok. So you saw the difference?

Huggins: Absolutely. It's a combination of that role and then it's really the senior leaders cooperating together, I think egos didn't come in to play; not to imply they were before, but I think it was, "Everybody's in this together supporting COMISAF." But even at the SOTF level and so to be successful, I think with integrating operations and supporting a battle space owner it's more than an LNO exchange or providing an LNO or a SOFLE. When I look at the SOTF it's having access to the Commanding General, so you're a Lieutenant Colonel but if you don't have a regular relationship with the two-star then it's probably going to be challenging to support him or for him to support you. So our OPSO would have regular, if not multiple times a week, meetings. As an example, every Saturday he would go eat dinner with the RC C3. So a Major to a full Colonel. That relationship is important. So our future operations planner attended the RC OPTs and provided the SOF perspective to make sure they're not planning in a vacuum or more importantly, we're not doing things without knowing where the RC wants to go.

I think those things are critical. For SOF/conventional interoperability and support to one another I think it's got to be more than an LNO exchange. I think technology can explore that through VTCs and everything. But I guess the concern I have is that was a very mature theatre, yet proximity was important. Additionally, a lot of people have experience on the conventional side working with SOF and the reverse, so as we leave Afghanistan do we lose those types of techniques to work together. We see it, I know from the Marine Corps per-

spective, we see a lot of interaction with the TSOCs and cooperation. I think a lot of that comes out of Commander to Commander and LNO exchanges, which is great, but I'm not sure how much staff interaction there is right now that we found very, very critical to making sure we were all moving in the same direction. [32:14]

Knarr: That's a good point. The interagency side, what kind of contact or relationship did you have with things like PRTs and Regional Platforms?

Huggins: In RC Southwest with the Marine Corps a lot of funds, a lot of effort in that regard, you know you have Civil Affairs Officers, you have the Regional Platform, so we really weren't as engaged other than small projects where our SOF Teams helped boost interest in ALP and support to ALP. Something as simple as ALP widows, setting up a small business for them to be able to sustain themselves. Those were more the types of projects we would do in Helmand.

Opposite in the west to where there was a lot of opportunity for our CMOCs [civil military operations center] or Civil Affairs Company to be value added to the RC, and also for the Consular. Ms. Burns was the Consular in the Herat Consulate. We had a USAID employee who worked on our SOTF staff, so she was our development advisor and the connection in to what USAID was doing in the west, what the Consulate wanted to do, and what our Civil Affairs Soldiers could do. That worked very well and that's where we applied our effort because there was a need in different areas. We interacted quite a bit with the PRT in Farah. In Herat we generally worked through the Consulate. And Shindand was pretty much our Civil Affairs Company working things.

Knarr: You really had some very different areas. Generally, what were the differences between the various locations that you had to deal with?

Huggins: In the Herat area your biggest threat was kidnapping for ransom. I mean you could go through the city in Herat and there would be jewelry stores, markets everywhere, and they were very secure, unless you were a wealthy Afghan; then you'd be targeted and grabbed for someone to make money of you. Shinand was relatively secure. Although you would have a lot of assassinations. So if you had an ANA Soldier, a Police or Commando go in to the city, into the market it was not uncommon for someone on a motorcycle to drive up and kill them. Once you dropped a little south of Shinand into the Zereko Valley, again where the reach of the ANA and the Police stops, that's where you'd have a lot of kinetic activities. And for several years there were two VSPs established in Zereko, generally in the northern half of the valleys where there was white space. Eventually an ANA unit got into the north side and that was good. The Police would sometimes come in there. Again, trying to pull them into that, and then to extend further down south of the valley was just too much. So, what would typically happen is the ANA, Commandos would routinely run operations in the south of the valley just to keep the pressure off of the ALP in the north. And then there's the tribal dy-

namics. If you don't factor that in. When things start going off kilter there's a lot more to consider than just what the insurgents are doing.

Knarr: Addition considerations were the drugs. Zereko Valley was horrible, but so were parts of Helmand.

Huggins: Right. I think the drug challenge in Helmand was probably pretty high. Farah on the back end, that spring, the last spring we were there Farah became a pretty good producer of poppy and opium. But Helmand, especially in the Nad Ali area, there was a lot of activity. And then police involvement. There's money to be made in the millions of dollars. To be a Checkpoint Commander, you pay for that position; to be the District Chief of Police you pay for that position, and then you're going to be threatened to be fired unless you pay more money. So when you talk about corruption it's just kind of how that system works, at least in that part of Central, North Central Helmand. I think we had five Chiefs of Police in Nad Ali during our eight-month rotation.

Knarr: That's terrible!

Huggins: So, when you talk about ALP being supported by the District Chief of Police, being accountable for them, and having a connection to the elders so that the elders can be held accountable for the ALP it becomes incredibly hard when it's just a revolving door of leadership.

Knarr: You had mentioned some of the names of people that I should speak to, but you mentioned one of the Governors that was here I believe or?

Huggins: I'm not sure where Dr. Sabah is.<sup>20</sup> He had been the Governor in Herat. He was, I believe, a professor in a University in Arkansas. A great individual. He was just worn down fighting corruption. We talk about a good Afghan Governor, in it for the right reasons I think Dr. Sabah is one. A background in geology so he really had an interest in finding sustainable industry in Western Afghanistan. The iron ore out there is on the ground and the different minerals that are available. I think that might have frustrated him. Plus, he was pretty successful so I think he was probably viewed by someone comparable as a threat, a political threat. I think in the end he'd probably had enough.

But a great individual, easy to work with, supportive of the SOTF and what we were doing. If there was a CIVCAS [civilian casualty] event we made sure he was aware, and then work it with him. Because he would take a lot of heat from Afghans if something went wrong in the city or in the outskirts of the Province. But we really had a good working relationship with him.

Dr. [Kapalik] was the Governor in Farah. He was very easy to work with, very, a big supporter. Interesting little vignette—he had a PSD and we had an ODA out there set up a Shura, I be-

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<sup>20</sup> Follow-up email from Col Huggins indicated that Dr. Sabah had become the Minister of Mines and Industry.

lieve in Bala Baluk [a District in Farah Province]. The District Governor out there needed help bringing in some elders. So the ODA helped him get organized and have a big Shura by bringing out Dr. [Kapalik] and different Provincial Leadership to talk at the District Center. We went there and there was this large crowd. This is when a lot of the Afghans and Security Forces were killing ISAF and SOF individuals. So we instantly picked up on four individuals with leather jackets, non-standard uniforms, AKA Magazines on their belts, rifles that were kind of tricked out like the Taliban has with the flashy foil on them and everything. They kept looking at us and they were nervous. So, we postured. They postured. It wasn't funny at the time, but it was almost at a point where someone drops a soda can and it would have been like a shoot-out at the OK Corral. And finally the ODA Captain, a really good Officer went up to one of them and was like, "Who are you and what are you doing?" And they were like, "We're the Governor's PSD". He was like, "Well why are you nervous?" "Because you are all nervous." He was like, "Well why don't we all stop being nervous and work this out?" [42:08]

Knarr: So they were the good guys?!

Huggins: They were. You'd think they were just sizing each other and preparing to engage. But on the flip side they took advantage of that and started training them.

So, in Farah they would run the range for them and teach them how to do moving security to protect Dr. Kapalik. Just doing something simple like that the ODA gains favor with the Governor.

The NDS Chief in Farah was very good as well. He was a Brigadier General. I think the ODA had a good relationship with him as well.

Knarr: What about the advisory teams? What kind of contact did you have with them?

Huggins: They had one advisor team in Delaram. It was more of a de-confliction. So our team didn't have a Commando kandak up there. It was interesting, they went there, the Italian RC was getting ready to pull out of Gulistan and they wanted us to commit a team to Gulistan and try to establish ALP. This was right before we redeployed. We committed a team to Delaram to do the assessment in Gulistan. They went up there a couple times. But we were within 60 days of leaving so this was not the time to set up another ALP location, because all we were going to have is a SOF Team isolated with no way to get in and out other than helicopter.

The Afghan Leadership up still had one toe in because they knew that the RC was pulling out of there. But we ended up not committing that. The Italians probably didn't like that, but again it's, "Will this be enduring?" That was our role as a SOTF to give an honest assessment. And that went up, that's where the SOJTF Commander provides the back stop for you, because that was at the COMISAF level because the RC Commander wants this, but the SOTF Commander won't provide it, so that gets adjudicated at that level. It was for the right reasons in my mind as it was not likely to be successful without the Afghans committing forces which they weren't

willing to do. The Corps wasn't going to go up in there. The Police up there were sketchy. And whether that would hold and be enduring was questionable. That was uniform Police; there was no ALP in place. It just wasn't going to work without a significant commitment of resources at a time where that just wasn't an option. So we kept that team in Delaram. The RC Advisory Team gave them the ANA Recon Platoon as a partner force. That was a time when the fuel convoys going around the Devil's Elbow were getting repeatedly attacked and so the Company Commander in the West on that team and that was just, "Ivan [the company commander?], make that stop" that's all he had to say. And with the great Intel collection capability of a MSOT, or MSOC, within just a couple weeks they had the network laid out. Then, the MSOT in Delaram with the ANA Recon Platoon just cleaned that whole situation up. As part of their network there was a drug nexus so they ended up recovering and destroying a lot of Black Tar Heroin and Marijuana as well as weapons caches.

Knarr: That's great! You have covered a lot of material. What didn't I ask that you think is important, that ought to be part of this?

Huggins: I think the biggest take away I have out of this experience is Commanders come and go, and everybody wants to achieve success, but I think before you really lay that out it has to be tied in to an overall strategy. Again, what is the one Campaign Plan? And then do you understand the environment? So that's the Governmental Leadership, how effective it is, for what reason are they in it, how does that whole system work, how do those relationships work with each other? That could be the Governors, the Chiefs of Police, the ANA, the NDS, the village and the elders and their relationships with the Afghan Government and the Security Forces We need to understand that level of detail. So when the conventional battlespace owner wants to do something, secure an area, or sweep an area what are the second and third order of consequences? Are you going to make the situation worse?

And I think most importantly before a conventional unit does something in a COIN environment, will the host nation support that long term? Because you can secure an awful lot of area, but you're not going to be there forever. So you've got to secure an area that fits an overall strategy that makes sense and it will be supported long term by the state, their Security Force and their Governor. So they have to have skin in the game. And it has to meet what they need, not just what we need.

Knarr: Good point. Were you in Iraq?

Huggins: In Fallujah in 2005, literally a month and a half after the second clearing of the city. We were advisors to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the Iraqi Intervention Force. They were mainly a Shia brigade. The Brigade was in EFIC, East Fallujah Iraqi Camp and one Battalion was in Hab-baniyah around Ramadi and then the other two battalions were in the city of Fallujah.

Knarr: What regiment were you a part of at the time?

Huggins: I was on INI duty, which is your active duty cadre with our reserves, so I was at 4<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion as an OPSO. We got to a point where all of our platoons and companies were deploying or deployed and couldn't train. So I just asked the boss, "Hey let's go do a MiTT [Military Transition Team]." He's like, "What?" I said, "We have no job right now, so let's go." He said, "Okay, let's go." So we got to go over on deployment. That was real rewarding.

Knarr: I'll bet it was.

Huggins: Colonel [Rad] was our Battalion Commander. Real good fighter, good leader, he ended up losing his legs. I started out in the Brigade and near the end of deployment went down as the Battalion MiTT to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.

Knarr: How would you compare the environments?

Huggins: The Iraqi's were more educated. Just simple things like writing, reading. Nutrition was better. Lifestyle. When you go to a village in Afghanistan in January in a Province that's in the middle of nowhere, and you have children that are walking around barefooted and your feet are cold in insulated boots and wool socks, you just think of how tough the Afghans have it.

Knarr: I agree. Thank you. I think we have covered everything. I really appreciate you taking the time to discuss your experiences and provide your insights.



Subject: Interview with **Major General Walter L. Miller**, USMC, former Commander, Regional Command South West (RC-SW)

Major General Walter L. Miller, USMC is the Chief of Staff at the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in Tampa, Florida.

During the period 28 February 2013 to 5 February 2014, MajGen Miller commanded RC-SW and II-MEF (Fwd). Under his command were approximately 6,000 US Marines and 6,000 other Coalition forces, mostly from the United Kingdom as Task Force Helmand, and the Republic of Georgia. He also had a State Department led Regional Platform assigned to the RC and a UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) for Helmand Province. His tenure has been characterized as a period of transition as responsibility for security was passed to the Afghan National Security Forces and as US Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A) were redeploying in accordance with President Obama’s exit strategy.

MajGen Miller was interviewed at his office at USSOCOM Headquarters on 28 August 2015 by Dr. William Knarr.



**MajGen Miller**

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MajGen Walter Lee Miller: [video 04:37] Probably the best place to start is with the first PDSS [Pre-Deployment Site Survey] that went in the summer. It did not have my deputy, because the Brits send them through a selection process and he had not been selected yet. I met with Mark [Gurganus], his staff and got a good start there; went to Kabul and met with General Allen and got a good run down. What I didn’t get from Mark at the time (and I’m not sure if it just hadn’t gotten down to him yet) was that there was going to be a change in how we were going to do business, from being the gun fighter to forcing the Afghan national army into the fight as the lead. We would be behind, advising. That, I started to understand from General Allen.

We returned and went through our pre-deployment program. Paul Nanson who was my deputy, incredible Brit, did get assigned, went over did his PDSS. He did work with the Staff, but really got focused with Task Force Helmand, so he had his arms around how they were operating. He took a look at the reconstruction team as well and how that Brit piece and the US piece were working together, which was pretty well. They were doing a good job together. Came back, then we went through the rest of our work-up period, into the actual exercise at the end and we had General Natonski [6:30] come in as a senior grey beard to take us through that.

As for the training piece—the United Kingdom ensured that the key billet holders I was going to have were there for the whole month of November into our actual exercise, which went in December. We assimilated them. They did show up for three specific phases of training as well. The early one, which was a week long, the pre- where we laid out intel and what we’re

looking at, then the mid-term work-up, and then rolling into the exercise. That worked real well, though I think Paul, if he were to talk to you, would say had he the ability to do it again is that once they're assigned, he would send them and not bring them back and take them through the whole program with the team and go back out.

If this is being used in schools, then...if I can get across to anybody who is going to build a coalition, you have to give a little bit. You have to look at your principal positions, which ones are you are willing to give up? You have got to give up some key positions. The positions I gave up to the UK or to NATO forces was my five, the C-5 was UK. You would call it a J7 to-day, but I'd call it the "advise and train team." We separated them out a bit, put them originally under General George Smith, but we knew we were going to send him home because I was going to flatten the staffs as we were out there. I was going to start weaning with general officers, and I started off with George in August; this hurt, but the intent was to start getting us down to the numbers we needed and George was going to be the first to go. He knew that.

I brought in Baz Bennett, Colonel Baz Bennett, who had been his deputy and he took over that section. Did a tremendous job for the remainder of the time we were there. Jim Donnellan as you know, Stretch was our three [Operations Officer], and then we had a couple twos [intelligence officers] while we were over there, and then I had Paul Nanson as a deputy. It was a great team to operate with.

When we went in there we were in combat. Throughout the time we were there we were in combat. However, General Dunford now in charge, said it is going to be time for us to transfer lead responsibility, and that time is going to be in June, so figure it out. That comment was not just to RC Southwest that was to the RCs at large. We took a hard look at how we were going to make that happen. The one key thing is that you cannot wait until June to let the ANA corps know, "Hey, you now have the lead." You have to talk to them ahead of time; you have to start prepping the ground. I did that as soon as I hit the deck, got the word from General Dunford in February; I told General Malouk, "Look, in June you're going to have the lead." Now did they fully take the lead in June, no, but in their mind they had the lead. We still had to keep prodding them a bit.

The areas that we could not give up for them, and I did not while I was there, were aviation support where it was required. In particular for medevac [11:25]. That is another issue you, or a young leader is going to run into. There is a difference in culture and thought process. One of General Malouk's (who was a very religious individual) biggest concerns was getting his soldiers who were killed on the battlefield home within the first 24 hours. So, where you and I would triage differently, he wanted to triage them first, then go down the line that we would have gone down. Most serious on down to least serious. That was a little battle, and you have to stand your ground. They will listen. I said, "If were heading down that road, you're not getting aviation to pull people out. You have a choice. You either do a triage my way, or we ain't doing it." He finally acquiesced, but we made sure we got all his people off the battlefield eve-

ry time we could possibly pull it off, to include his dead. So you'll have a cultural thing there, aviation will always be an issue when you go into a country that needs that type of support.

The transition to having them fully in the lead took the whole summer. Part of that was because it was fighting season, but they clearly were in the lead. We got questioned a lot on the number of soldiers they were losing and their attrition rate. I would have to pull out figures from years before where the NATO forces had lost almost as much, probably 90% of the number that the Afghans were losing that summer of '13. So while Congress and others were very concerned about the numbers, what they didn't understand was, it wasn't equal to, but it was on par with what we had lost previously in other years. That will be something that you will deal with while you are out there.

We got through the fighting season, I know that General Toolan hates that term; all year long was really a fight, but specifically the spiked times were from March into October. Once it started getting a little bit colder things started moving off the battlefield a little bit. I thought the Afghans did a great job, and their training had been tremendous. The area where we missed the boat in our thought process, not just in my time but previous to, before I left we never got them to where they could really provide the logistical support and be able to sustain themselves, even to learn how to drive properly. George got all that in place, but I really wished it had been in place two years earlier at a minimum. It may seem that it would have been impossible; I do not think it would have been. I think it would have needed to have more and more emphasis on it, which General Dunford did put his foot down on it and get the emphasis on it. Everything from training them how to drive dozers, to get parts, to PM [preventive maintenance], to train not so much surgeons but medics, those kinds of things, to drive a Humvee without burning the generator out, those kinds of things needed to occur. So we had that going on.

But concerning warfighting skills—number one the Afghans can fight. That is what they do. Getting their infantry skills down, I think we did a great job at it. I think the guys prior to us did a great job, but that's what we like to do. We like to get our gun on and get out there and do that kind of thing. Doing the hard job, the one that is critical, is where you gotta get after it. That is even teaching them comptroller skills. Probably jumping ahead, but what I got to was where my staff, the RC staff, now advised the corps staff by individual. The comptroller worked directly with the comptroller. The judge worked directly with the judge. Drug him in to the Afghan courts so he could actually meet the civilian counterpart that was there, those kinds of things were going on.

I talked about flattening your staffs. I do not believe in big staffs. Where you can flatten I think you should, and where maybe you're a little bit queasy in the gut about flattening, if you have to weigh a trigger puller and a staff officer, which way are you going to go? Me I tend to go for the trigger puller. I will send somebody else home and somebody is going to work a little bit harder. I had mentioned that I wanted to start flattening at the general officer

level. I started that in training. I did not take a division forward [division (Fwd) headquarters]. I had made that decision back in October of '12, and we tested it through the MRX [mission rehearsal exercise]—it proved that it was sound. We were down to two regiments at the time, I was fully capable of commanding and controlling those two regiments, so I made the decision not to bring the division staff forward.

Knarr: I sent you a little diagram that talked about the RC Southwest staff. In fact it showed you as 2 hatted [18:05], because you had US forces and then of course you had the NATO forces; underneath the US Forces it showed the MAGTF. Were you the Commander of the MAGTF?

Miller: I was.

Knarr: Okay. That answers that question.

Miller: I was. I had made the decision not to come forward at all with the division. It caused a lot of angst, there were a lot of questions from the grey beards at first, but then I got pulled in by one who said “hey, you need to move out with what you’re comfortable with, period.” That’s what we did, and I believe it worked. Now the staffs I did have forward had general officers. I take it back, I did not have an MLG forward. I took a colonel forward. But I did have Lurch Thomas [BGen Gary Thomas]. The wing was intact. I opted that way for really for the reason that I had NATO, we had very close ties with the UK, and they had agreed to put their forces underneath Lurch. So I did not want to rock that boat, never even thought about rocking that boat; I felt I needed that general officer there. So Lurch came forward as the ACE [Aviation Combat Element] and had all the UK forces under him. Now if you at a look at a line and block, you won’t find whether it’s a dash, dot or straight line there [command relationship] but it was clear; they reported to him. Now would the Minister of Defense [MOD] say that he had said that it was okay? We’d probably walk around it; but I did have some long talks with the MOD in the UK about what we needed to move out.

Knarr: As compared to Multi-National Force West in Iraq, the multinational, intergovernmental command structure in Afghanistan was incredible with NATO and the various national caveats.

Miller: We had Jordanians, Guamanians, Danes, we had obviously the UK, the Georgians, two battalions of them, and they were good. The Marines have done a great job training those guys. We did send one of those battalions home before I left, but only because it was time to draw down. But I’ll give you a quick example we had Georgians we had...UK helicopter, I can’t remember whether it was a little bird or a 60; but towards the end, the UK helicopter tail rotor stopped spinning, and he dumped his load and dumped his fuel and was able to land the aircraft.

Knarr: So he lost it in flight?

Miller: He lost it in flight.

Knarr: I'm a helicopter pilot too.

Miller: Oh really? Fairly hard landing, but he was able to land it and there was a mayday call, Jordanians are on patrol, Georgians are on patrol, and we had a standby [quick reaction force]. They are moving out to the helos to fly out to secure that aircraft for the UK. Before they can get there, the Jordanians found the fuel and the ammo and they were already securing that side. Georgians had already secured the aircraft and the pilot and then we launched and got out there. So all this stuff happened without anybody making the call. I mean they just automatically reacted and operated—that is a coalition team. And I put the US captain in charge of the crew until the next morning when we could get out there, or the UK could get out there with a US lowboy and pick the thing up and bring it back. And so everybody walked away fine. That is how a coalition can operate if you bring them in, understand what they can and cannot do, do not baby them and let them do their job. It will work.

Knarr: You were talking about the Minister of Defense. You meeting with him tells me that they felt very strongly about their involvement and our involvement.

Miller: They want to look you in the eye. It is just what we would want to do. I would want to know if I am giving you my daughter to command, I want to look you in the eye and make sure that you are in the ballgame and you are going to do everything you can to make sure that individual is going to come home or is going to do the right thing. That is exactly how I felt every time I got visited, the times I talked with the Minister of Defense, the times I talked with the president of Georgia. They are looking you in the eye to make sure that you're going to take care of their people. That is what it is all about.

Knarr: When you talk about your command as RC Southwest, that was the NATO forces; and as commander of the US forces you had your two RCTs and other—

Miller: Two RCTS, the ACE and MLG [Marine Logistics Group].

I did not see that line block chart until you sent it, but in my mind my two hats were RC Southwest, II MEF Forward. What may have created that was originally they didn't know whether to call me a MEB, whether it equates to the numbers, MEF FWD, okay, we'll just split the baby. So originally, I was MAGTF-13; that may be where that came from, but that died pretty early. I went back and the commandant called me and I said "Sir, what they understand right now in theater is MEF forward; my recommendation is to call it a MEF forward, leave it alone, and people should not be thinking about numbers one way or the other. If you want me to be a MEB fine, but make that call early so I can explain it." And he went with MEF Forward.

Knarr: Got it. Because I noticed when General Yoo came in, he was a MEB-A.

Miller: Right. But that was easier to equate to when Larry went in, because when Larry went in it was a MEB-A.

Knarr: Nicholson?

Miller: Right. Then it grew to a MEF forward, stayed a MEF forward, and then I knew there was somebody coming in behind me.

Knarr: And in fact that's kind of how I saw it. I saw General Nicholson come in as a MEB-A, then all of a sudden I saw the MEF forwards: I MEF the II MEF then I, then II, like that. But then I saw the MARDIV forward come in as kind of the MAGTF, is that right or wrong [wrong]?

Miller: In my mind's eye, I don't think the MARDIV was ever the MAGTF commander. I believe under Mills, under Toolan, under Gurganus it was always a MEF.

Knarr: That's interesting. You know I got those charts out of a DoD report that went into Congress.<sup>21</sup>

Miller: So we confused the hell out of Congress.

Knarr: *[Laughing.]* Probably.

Miller: We're good at this. *[smiling]*

Knarr: They put those reports out every 180 days, and they cover about 200 pages about what happened in Afghanistan. They also have a report called the ORBAT—I don't know if you've ever seen these. They are published by the Institute for Study of War [ISW]—

Just as an example, here is the March 2013 edition. They call it the order of battle report for Afghanistan. *[30:00]*, they produced the list from open sources to reflect what was in Afghanistan during the period. So I've gone through RC Southwest, I've gone through SOJTF just to get an idea of what types of forces were there, and certainly the transition. Like you say, the MARDIV is not reflected there, but it is on the other ones.

Miller: They're also not showing the logistics group.

Which is kind of sad. The one piece they line up joint aviation group UK as if it's equal, and in actuality it wasn't. However on legal terms in their reports back to the UK they wouldn't wind up this way.

Knarr: Okay. I see what you're saying.

Miller: What this got us by them working for Lurch was we became much more efficient. I was able to work with a great Royal Marine, three-star, you may have met him in the past... he's now I believe a four-star... he was a lieutenant general, he was in charge of their joint force command back then. But he'd come visit and we'd discuss with Paul, myself, and him and Lurch, and whichever one of the UK aviation commanders that was in town, we'd sit down and the aviation community had already put together where we could gain efficiencies be-

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<sup>21</sup> Extracted/modified from several documents: Department of Defense Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, dated April 2011, and submitted to Congress IAW section 1230 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (Public Law 110-181), as amended.

cause somebody was going to have to send something home. All the while, we were doing what we were doing in combat, in transition. We were also doing retrograde, [because] with the amount of gear that was over there, if we hadn't started when we first got there, we were not going to get it out by the time Dan Yoo left. So we had to start immediately moving things out. We were looking at our aviation and where we could gain efficiencies and what we could send home. They operated together—they literally flew together with mixed aircraft on combat missions—but where the US could not meet a mission, the UK would pick it up. It was smooth; it worked.

Knarr: That is really neat.

Miller: Yeah. All the while we were retrograding aircraft home to either the UK or the US just by making agreements there at the table.

Knarr: That's great.

Miller: General Neller was in there as well. He was the MARCENT commander at the time. Yeah, and his counterpart was this three-star, JFC commander.

Knarr: Okay. SFAT, your security forces assistance teams, you had them. I had read this book that talks about security forces assistance, but you had the teams, I believe you had the teams underneath you as RC commander. Is that correct?

Miller: I did, but they were working for George [Smith]. And George was working for me.

Knarr: And when he left in August they came under?

Miller: They came under Baz, Baz Bennett.

Knarr: Was LTG Bolger there when you were? Was he the training command guy?

Miller: I think he was early on.

Knarr: But he had the NATO training mission in Afghanistan NTM-A, and he had the Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan [CSTC-A]. [35:00]

Miller: I think he had just left. They brought in General Tovo and General Tovo didn't stay very long. I think because General Dunford was starting to flatten his staff. And a two-star Canadian was in that billet when I got there.

Knarr: And they took a one star and they put him in charge of the NTM-A I believe. Somehow they broke that command apart. But those [SFAT] teams, were they trained by the NTM-A and then given to you once they were trained up?

Miller: We trained them here; in Camp Lejeune and now at Twentynine Palms—I forget the name of the training teams, but they trained the SFATs. You go through your preliminary training at Camp Lejeune and you would get all your skills honed even tighter by a group at Twentynine Palms; they would bless them and then they would go forward.

The group at Lejeune came out of hide [36:15]. There was a tax to everybody to provide that crew and we made sure that the officers in charge had experience; they were handpicked to take over so you got a lot of continuity—and most of the individuals that were trainers were returnees from doing the advising forward.

Knarr: Were those teams down at the battalion level?

Miller: They started at battalion level. As we hit the June timeframe, they mandated that we start to move off of the battalions. It varied by brigade and battalion on when you could do that, but back off of the battalions, and your district teams were to start moving back towards regional so that we got back into the brigades. Because the fighting season starting to dwindle, I believe we were out of the battalions by October of '13 and back at the brigade level providing the support there. Now we could go forward periodically on specific skills if we needed to and work with the battalions, but I was trying to force them [the Afghans] to understand that they have the lead.

Knarr: Caveats? You talked about the many nations that you worked with. One of the things the congressional reports talk about is the different caveats that various countries brought with them. What kind of caveats did you see and which ones were challenging?

Miller: They were actually opportunities. When you get the Georgians, they follow pretty much our caveats, the US caveats. With the UK, there were a few things a little different but not much. And where we weren't allowed to do things, you would find another country that was allowed to do it. Not sure I want to go further than that, but with your NATO hat you can make things operate. Jordanians had caveats but they were good inside and outside the wire. I was impressed with the Jordanians. And as I said earlier, I was extremely impressed with the Georgians. I had had the opportunity to see Georgians early and watch them stumble a few times, I was able to watch them grow and get stronger. I will tell you what; I would take them anywhere today. Both of those battalions we had.

Knarr: Now into the special operations, the integration between your special operations forces and conventional forces, you had a SOTF West located near you?

Miller: It was basically co-located. SOTF West was Larry Huggins [in command]. Couple of things that he did was reach out to me early on before we even went forward, asked me to come take a look at them as they were going through their evaluation up at Bragg, which I did do, which built a bond right there. By no means did I direct the special operations forces. That came strictly under, originally Tony Thomas and then Scotty Miller; however, I could influence, but did not need too much. They stayed engaged with me.

I had an LNO from each of the countries' SOF forces that I met with every morning in my office with Stretch and Paul Nanson. They would give me a rundown on where they were and what was going on, and if I started getting concerns than I'd talk to the commander. I would

bring him in and we would sit down. I also had close relationships with the commanders that were forward, so when they had issues, they would come see me. I consider them part of the team. Not only in making sure they knew what I was trying to accomplish—particularly when I was talking to the governor or when I went out to a district governor, or when I went out and sat in on a shura—to make sure that they knew where I was headed. In many cases in places like Musa Qal’ah or Sangin or Kajaki, they were already there and they were the ones that helped set up that meeting. So their OIC that was in that city, that town was sitting in the shura with us and knew the direction I wanted to go. There was a couple times where the SOF forces wanted to have one direction, however I’d already laid the groundwork to go another direction. I brought them in, we talked about it, I’m sure they went back to their command and we went the direction I felt we needed to go. So I always felt that there was one commander in town, one individual running the show in Helmand and Nimroz.

Now, there was no line-and-block that came to me from these guys. They did not have to come see me. We could have had a lot of animosity [between us]. We did not. Part of it was because any time they needed something, we made sure they got it. All that my chief did was ask them. I’m sure it was Stretch who would say, “Hey look, we don’t have time for last minute requests. Think about your request early, you’ll get it on time.” They did and we made sure it happened.

Knarr: Before you got there, that they went through this evolution of commands. At the beginning, the in-country commander was the colonel at the CJSOTF and the [a one-star] CJFSOCC that was under SOCCENT and then he came under the ISAF commander or the USFOR-A commander. And then they went to the two star, the SOJIF commander to consolidate all the special operations forces. What did you think of that evolution? Did we finally hit the nail on the head by doing that? Or did it not make much of a difference?



Defence Geographic Centre, Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom, 2011

**Figure A-6. Partial Map of Helmand Province**

Miller: You're talking about falling underneath Tony and Scott?

Knarr: As they moved to the two-star, yes.

Miller: Yeah, it worked. I think it was the right thing to do for where they were, for the ISAF commander they were working for. General John Allen had them work that way, they reported directly to him. General Dunford did the same thing and they reported directly to General Dunford the whole time they were there. I do know personally about the IJCs; those commanders really felt they should fall under the IJC [ISAF Joint Command]. They had good reasons as well; but for me out there as an RC it worked for me. It was good to go for me. I think there is still going to be discussion on whether it was the right thing to do or not. My opinion, it was. I thought they were very effective. That is the whole NATO piece as well.

Knarr: Yes. Bringing in the NSOCC [NATO Special Operations Component Command].

Miller: Task force 66, the Brit SOF forces [44:51].

Knarr: That is interesting when you say the IJC, I did not even think about that.

Miller: [45:00] You can make a compelling argument that they should have worked directly for them. Did they get things done for them through their RCs? They did.

Knarr: That is a good point. What about the Afghan local police program? The VSO village stability operations and platform?

Miller: That is another one still yet to be seen. It worked for me. Did I have some concerns? Yeah, I still have concerns as to which way these guys were going to go when all is said and done. But so far I've watched it pretty closely because I made some very good acquaintances out there. There were some guys in really tough spots who we made sure got ammo while they were under fire. They are running low, we're making mad dashes to make sure they got what they need to continue the fight. But it's yet to be seen as to whether they will turn the other way and become a warlord somewhere along the line. Because they take care of big swaths of ground and they got a lot of fighters underneath them.

Knarr: Of course one of the concerns was it that it would become a local militia instead of retain their connection with the central government.

Miller: But from what I am reading, I am not seeing where it's really occurred anywhere. They are still ALPs. But I still think time is going to tell.

Knarr: Would you have done it any differently?

Miller: With the ALPs?

Knarr: Yes Sir.

Miller: No. I do not think we could have been successful with the police force. To get a professional police force takes a while to train them. We needed people to be on the street that knew their area. If you fall under regulations, the ALP is supposed to operate within six clicks [kilometers] of where its home is. That means they know everybody in the area. If you do not look right, you do not belong there, they are the ones who identify that.

I don't know how it is today, I gotta believe it's better. Some of the things that could get better would be the regular police force accepting and working closely with the ALP. In some districts while I was there that was very strong. The money comes through your regular police force, the ammo those kinds of things come through them to the ALP. In some districts, it was a little bit corrupt; some of that stuff was not getting out to the ALP where it was supposed to be. So there are still some things, or were things, when I left that needed to be worked out.

Knarr: That goes back to your comment on logistics and sustainment. Regional platform. Was it run by the State Department?

Miller: It was State Department run. It did have some contractors with it in order to beef it up. They did a great job, worked well with the provincial reconstruction team, the UK team. In fact, they coordinated where they had people working on each staff to keep things running. The PRT was physically located in Lashkar Ga and the regional team was there right in a building next to mine. So we coordinated daily and they sat through every one of our briefs. They were members of the staff, if you will.

Knarr: When we started you talked about your female engagement teams. You had them over there with you?

Miller: I had them in Iraq.

Knarr: They didn't have them in Afghanistan?

Miller: No. We did not have them out there. They were there earlier; we were in that transition piece so we were really out of that business by the time I got there. The closest you had to that would have been members of the regional team, regional platform as well as members of the PRT, because they were out and about with security.

Knarr: Okay. You talked a little bit about Iraq and Afghanistan. Can you compare the two? On lessons—cultures are certainly different, the environment is different—but what are some of the similarities you could compare? [50:00]

Miller: One of the similarities is that when given a choice between tribes or the government, they are always going to go with the tribes. That is in both areas. I am not sure that is ever going to change. I think one of the differences would be that in Iraq, I am not sure Iraq will ever be one [nation] again. I can see three separate nation states there if things do not change rapidly. I cannot see that in Afghanistan. I do not see it splitting up. Whether it settles down or not, will be questionable. But I don't see it allowing itself to be split up into two different nation states.

The cultures are totally different. I can sit here with my feet like this in Afghanistan [legs crossed, soles of feet facing the person]. I can't in Iraq. They are different cultures. Similarities? Other than some of the leaders, who you are fighting is the same type of guy. It's a military-age guy who doesn't have a job. He is the farmer; that is who you're fighting in both areas.

Another similarity is the leaders. The Taliban leaders, the ISIS leaders, the Sunnis we were fighting in 2004 and 2005, those leaders? Their religious ideology philosophy is BS. I do not believe they really believe it. They are using it. Those below them though, you can see their ideology; they are very religious. That farmer. The leaders are pulling those strings really well.

Knarr: What didn't I ask you that you think is important for the schools to think through?

Miller: Number 1, a MAGTF is not a wieldy beast. It is only a wieldy beast if you allow it to become one. You can shift; you can make changes. We were in combat the full time, but there was a major transition to transfer lead responsibility, so our period was transition the whole time. I decided, and you need to make it early, in this case not to go with a division forward. That was a significant emotional moment for a lot of people. While there, we got down to one regiment—one RCT and that was Sparky. And I made a decision to send that regiment headquarters home in July. That's a significant emotional moment for people. But your staff has got to be ready to flip it and take over as the lead dogs to help the battalions that are remaining. All this was to save trigger pullers while we were out there.

Knarr: So you were sending back headquarters, and retaining the fighting battalions.

Miller: Exactly. When you start talking about a division [1:00:00] headquarters and a regimental headquarters, you're talking about a battalion's-worth of people, or a battalion minus. I felt we needed the trigger pullers more, because we still had Nowzad, we still had Musa Qal'ah. With our timeline, it was not time to pull back from those districts, so I needed units that I could put forward to provide security so the PRT could do its job. The guys like Stretch, the guys like your chief of staff, the guys like my deputy, had to pick up the slack in advising these battalion commanders who in turn advised their company commanders on how to operate.

Knarr: That is a good point. What else?

Miller: One of the things that we are chewing on now here at SOCOM, that I saw while I was out there concerns how we talk about fighting in phases. Phase zero; that is where SOF belongs. Phase 1, 2, 3, and 4—I'm not sure we have it right anymore with today's conflicts. Or, we need to understand that all five phases can occur, and in many cases are occurring, at the exact same time. It is not as easy as it used to be.

In Iraq, it took a while but we were going from Phase 2 to Phase 3 and here are the ROEs for that change. In Afghanistan when I was there, that was not the case. We were building a school in Marjah, and I am in a gunfight in Sangin. It covered the whole spectrum. And all the while I'm retrograding tons of gear back to the States and withdrawing personnel back to the States. So we were in all phases at once at that time. I think we need to go back to the drawing board and take a look at that and see what that really means.

Maybe at the company level you still can break it down to that level if you are focused. A unit is in Marjah doing work, while another unit is in Sangin or Musa Qal'ah in the middle of a gunfight.

Knarr: You had some very different areas. In fact when I went through the news reports to Congress I think four of your districts hit the top ten—

Miller: The whole time I was there!

Knarr: That is right. They said these are the top ten. It was Musa Qal'ah, Sangin, Nowzad, I'm not sure if Kajaki was in the top ten or not...

Miller: Kajaki was originally in it. A warlord was in charge. He did not live there, he lived in Kabul, but he had his minions keep that one under wraps. I'm still not seeing Kajaki, I'm seeing Sangin, today I'm seeing Nowzad fell, Musa Qal'ah fell or is falling, Sangin has always been a hot bed, that's a crossroads of drugs, but Kajaki north of there, and north of Kajaki is no-man's land. But Kajaki seems to be fine.

Knarr: That is interesting.

If you were king, what would you have done differently? If you look at all of this kind from the strategic perspective—2009, President Obama says our emphasis on Afghanistan, we had the surge and he also listed the timeline—we're going to start withdrawing by a certain date; we are going to be out. What would you do differently?

Miller: The biggest change that I would do, if I were king, is that I would have come in with a whole lot more emphasis on the logistics training. I would pull in my lead grunts and say, "Look, you're not the king here now. My logistician, or my teacher, my instructors are the lead dogs and you will ensure they're successful." I wish we had done that two to three years earlier, because it takes a long time to get that piece put together so they understand how to control their tail. There is no question that ISAF filled those warehouses. Getting the gear, the widgets, the pieces and parts you need from the warehouses down to your different regions is like pulling teeth, is extremely hard, down to your corps, so they can put it to work. And it's like a lot of things in the Middle East: as it rolls down the road, Route 66 to wherever it's going, they get sniped and pieces and parts start blowing away. So I would get my logistics training started earlier so that they can actually sustain themselves. Our problem is that we really love to go to what we know best, and that is how to fight. But you gotta be able to sustain your fight to be a real professional. We saw that on the beaches in WWII and Korea.

Miller: Hopefully this has been helpful.

Knarr: It has been very helpful, because every year was different. Every RC commander had a different problem set, a different environment and subsequently a different way of meeting those challenges; from General Nicholson up through General Yoo.

Miller: I would say another thing I would do if I were king for the day—we keep running away from the fact that we will never go to war without going with our partner the United Kingdom. We bump heads every once in a while and all that kind of stuff, but we gotta get better at how we build our teams. I think Paul and I did a good job, but the fact that we had to pull it out of our butts to figure out how to do it is by now kind of ridiculous. Our two governments, our two militaries, organizations, need to figure this thing out. While I was there, I asked General Neller to charter a study with CNA on how we need to get after this better, and he did. They

should be coming out with this shortly; it has been in draft for a while. But I do believe we need to pull our head out of our butts and realize that we're not going to war alone again. It will be with the UK. If they do not roger up, or we do not roger up, the other one does not go. So let's just make it so we can do it a little bit quicker.

Knarr: Sir thanks, this was great. I will send this to you when it is transcribed..



Subject: Interview with **Lieutenant Colonel John Lynch**, commander of the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion and Special Operations Task Force West in Afghanistan.

Lieutenant Colonel John “Jody” Lynch, USMC, is currently commander of the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion at Camp Pendleton, California.

He deployed to Afghanistan as the operations officer for the 1st MSOB from May to December 2010. He later deployed as the Commander of the 1st MSOB from January to October 2014. MSOBs were responsible for Special Operations Task Force—West. Initially their area of responsibility included Farah, Herat, Baghdis and Ghor. In 2010 they added Helmand and Nimroz provinces—a huge area.

During his periods of deployment, he saw both the surge in forces in 2010 and the drawdown in forces starting in 2013 through 2014. He also saw a maturity in the SOF/Coalition approach, in particular when compared to earlier years of 2004. In the earlier deployments, they were developing partner capacity with a focus on targeting, but in later years, they were developing partner capacity to support other lines of operations such as governance and development. Even the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program was designed to support governance and development.

LtCol Lynch was interviewed at Stu Segall Studios in San Diego, California on 1 April 2015 by Dr. William Knarr and MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC, Retired.



**LtCol Lynch**

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Dr. William Knarr: Please talk about your first entry into Afghanistan as part of SOF, as part of a SOTF. [video 02:31]

Lieutenant Colonel John “Jody” Lynch: I’m going to go back to May of 2009, we got the order that we were going to send a Marine SOTF into country. So we started building the operational plan, the direction, how we wanted to go, what was the current footprint, how was it focused? At this time we’d already been sending Marine Special Operations Companies into the country both from 1st MSOB and 2nd MSOB for 2007. For about two years straight, we’d been running at the company level, and 2009, would be the first time we’d put an 05 [Lieutenant Colonel], Marine SOTF in [First critical event was the deployment of an MSOB].

The first to go was Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Tuggle with Marines from 1st MSOB. They deployed roughly November of 2009, and we would replace them in May of 2010. So we came in May of 2010 and Lieutenant Colonel Pete Huntley was the CO. I was his operations officer. About 30–60 days before we came into country, probably about March/April of 2010, they shifted the battlespace from a SOTF perspective and they combined Helmand into SOTF-West reach. So early on SOTF West was basically Farah, Herat, and Baghdis provinces. Ghor was in there as well, but very little was being done in Ghor. As far as footprint, the

focus was Farah, Herat and then up into Bagdhis. At the time, we were very focused on two points in our build up: Zerkoh Valley, which was critical within the Farah and Southern Herat Province. Then in Bagdhis, we were looking at Bala Murghab Valley.

About the April 2010 timeframe, they started to shift and moved the battlespace for SOTFs. They took what SOTF South normally worked (Helmand), but with the MEF-Forward taking over all of Helmand, we inherited Helmand as well.. That was a quick spin up in terms of just learning and understanding how we were going to operate in that area. Understanding the environment, understanding the threat was not necessarily the issue. It was the complexity of the tribes. It was the complexity of the personalities, the history behind it, the history going all the way back to the Akhundzadas and the relationships between numerous battlespace owners both on the US and the British side. And then, understanding what we were going to try to achieve.

The second thing that was critical in our work up was that General McChrystal had taken over at that point and really started to put more of a counter-insurgency perspective on the focus. Going back to my first deployment in 2004, from a SOF perspective, we were focused on FID, we were building capability and capacity, but at the same point we were doing it as a means to target, and to target the network. It would be very bold of me to say that we were focused on all lines of effort associated with counter-insurgency that early in the fight. Historically, even talking to the Marine Special Operations Company commanders between 2007 and 2009, I think you would find the trends the same. Whereas SOF was playing more of the line of effort of targeting within counter-insurgency, but as far as reaching out and looking at governance, looking at stability, looking at economics, looking at development—a lot of that was not necessarily taking place across the SOF lines. It was mainly the targeting as a supporting effort to a larger counter-insurgency fight.

In 2009, and then definitely in the summer of 2010—Colonel Don Bolduc was the CJSOTF Commander, and from my perspective as a SOTF OPSO, he was the first commander that I felt really pushed all of us as SOTFs, and pushed down to the companies that we had to change our mentality. We had to look at every area from all lines of effort associated with counter-insurgency. For the first time we heard “We can’t kill our way out of this thing.” So, how do we have more effect? How do we empower the small Special Operations Teams to do what they need do, which is to organize the population?

That quickly led into what we would all know as the Village Stability Operations. Where were those critical areas, going back to your development of your NAIs and your TAIs? How were you going to go about the fight? Where were the critical areas that we had to influence, and gain trust and confidence within local populations so that we could organize and stabilize the population across all fronts? [08:46] In the summer of 2010, that [concept] drove a very hard look at the Zerkoh Valley and then Bala Murghab River Valley up north within Bagdhis.

The third [thing that was critical to our work up] was the Gereshk River Valley, Upper Gereshk, Lower Gereshk. When we talk about Helmand in 2010/2011, the MEF was very focused on Marjah, Garmser, down south to Fish Hook. Sangin was just starting to get some focus. As Sangin was starting to get some focus, we were looking in that Nahr-e Saraj District—specifically into southern Sangin and into that Helmand River Valley and that Upper Gereshk River Valley—as an opportunity where we could kind of set the stage. In general, when we first started talking about VSO it was going to be about re-establishing governance at the local level. That is where we wanted the focus. This is where the teams would go back out, get off the FOBs, and start living in the communities, start living in the local area. Re-establishing the local shuras was the goal.

Early on, ALP's intent, the Afghan Local Police, at the tactical level was to support the development and the stability of governance. It was not to go in and build a local police force. It was to go in and stabilize a governance; then as that stability occurred and the Shura started to come to power, and you started to get the right representation within the multiple sub-tribe systems within that area, *then* the ALP was a tool to help with that development. It was not intended to be the main effort. The main effort was about that governance and stability. The goal was to get the local shuras back in power and tie them to the district. The concept was to get the outlying areas, the village level, if we could get them connected to the population centers and the district centers, then we could possibly have success. That is where we felt that from a Government of Afghanistan perspective, that is where Government of Afghanistan could reach down and the people would recognize "We have a government." If we could not get them attached to those district levels, then we knew we were going to struggle.

With that we started a very, very aggressive assessment. We made mistakes along the way, there is no doubt about it. We made mistakes in assessing where these villages stability platforms needed to be located.



Defence Geographic Centre, Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom, 2011

**Figure A-7. Partial Map of Helmand Province**

In 2010, we were running with 15 or 16 Special Operations teams, two companies, two MSOCs. One MSOC was collocated in Herat, the second MSOC headquarters was down in Bastion-Leatherneck, actually at Camp Calero. The SOTF maintained at Camp Lawton in Herat. We had 15 teams in the area but two of the teams were working a different mission. We provided a QRF capability for those two teams, but they were not tied to us. So it was 13 teams that we actually ran across the board.

When we looked at the assessments and where the problem sets were, one way we looked at them was: where the critical points were; where the insurgency was having an effect whether it was just moving goods, collecting money, running/controlling the poppy, controlling the trade.

The second way we looked at it was where are the pressure points from the hinterlands? Where do they have the most freedom of movement, freedom of action? Where are they disrupting the district center the most, because they have a place to come back to? As the conventional forces moved into the larger population centers, they [insurgents] still had all of this freedom of action; areas to pull back to. They could time their attacks, they could time how they wanted to operate within that district center because of this freedom of movement, freedom of action from and to these hinterlands. So we looked at it from that perspective: where could we go to start applying pressure? Where can we remove that freedom of action, freedom of movement so the conventional forces could work within the district centers and then we could work at the lower level I mentioned earlier. That was absolutely the overarching intent. That's why places like up north in Bagdhis, the top of the Bala Murghab, there was FOB Todd which was a large conventional base that we worked out of. We also pushed into the southern part of Bala Murghab River Valley as well, which was Dariboom [Dar-e Boom or Dar-I Boom]. Dariboom was a small town at the very base of the Bala Murghab River Valley. Going back to 2009/2010, there was a lot of focus on the Ring Road because it was connected to the question of how GIRoA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan] was going to be attached to the people. The road was designed to be built up through Bala Murghab River Valley, (which was another driving point of why Bagdhis became very important). Dariboom was a solid stronghold for insurgent activity within southern Bagdhis. Those were two critical areas that we looked at quickly.

Zerkoh Valley was a no brainer. As you look at the Pashtun lines-Taliban supported lines, they run up out of Helmand and come west, as they come through Farah and cut north, they come right up Zerkoh Valley. So we knew we had to go to Zerkoh Valley. There were two VSPs, or Village Stability Platforms, planned for Zerkoh Valley. We planned two for Farah: Pashtrud and Kakisafed. The point there was, again, when you follow how the insurgency was supported all the way north into Bagdhis, all the way back down utilizing their LOCs, all the way into Helmand, that's what we were following. As we followed it, we looked at those population centers where conventional forces would be focused, so we could hopefully a collaborative effort and a supporting effort to a larger security effort that they had ongoing. [16:58]

So from the two [VSPs] in Farah, we pushed into Helmand. In all of these areas, it was very difficult to get them [VSPs] to catch on. Of course, the Afghans do not trust US forces, they don't know what this is, they don't know what is going on. Early on, there were spots that we fought our way into a village to build a platform. In a perfect world you'd be invited in. But there were platforms that we invited ourselves into. There were some that were successful, but it took you six months to get where you probably should have been on day one had you been invited in. There were also areas where the locals absolutely were ready to invite us into from day one and they were very, very smooth transitions and caught on very quickly. Dariboom was one that we fought our way into and then upper Gereshk Valley, and in

Nahr-e Saraj. The first one we put in was in Mirmandab. That was a fight. That was a fight until it closed down.

Success-wise, I think we absolutely faced challenges early on, especially as the Afghan Local Police caught on. And you sensed it down to the tactical level with the political push to sell the program. It almost became like, in order to get the program validated as a true concept of operation, the first thing that had to get flushed out was, “What is the size of the ALP force? Why are we creating another security element, another security force within Afghanistan? How do you pay them? You’re creating a local militia that they will use to their advantage. What is the cap?”

So the political focus quickly became about ALP. The spotlight moved from stabilizing local governance and getting the Shura, the key leaders, and the key subtribes involved and back in power. When you run your ALP program, the intent is that the Shura is vetting and vouching; of course, we’re vetting on the backside, we’re right there with them the entire way, but *they’re* bringing the ALP force together. But once we started to talk about it in terms of an official program linked to GIRA, the politics became the Afghans were power-brokers for what districts and provinces got what, because it is all based on money and power, and tribal alignment and things of that nature. In my opinion what it did was, it forced the ALP to grow probably faster than SOF leaders wanted it to. They wanted it to be a secondary program. [21:32]

Once cap numbers started getting discussed, once you got Afghan politicians involved, then you had provincial governors representing their people as any politician would. He wants a certain amount of ALP, because that is a certain amount of money coming into his province. So it expedited the process and drove that cycle faster. Discussions started to become focused on ALP, not necessarily VSO. I think multiple teams did an exceptional job of maintaining focus on the VSO, but there were teams that got more pressure in terms of numbers—“The numbers have to come up or we’re going to lose, or they’re going to shift Tashkil and then Tashkil not used here will be shifted to there.” So, now you have provincial and district leaders applying pressure to increase numbers. There’s no doubt that they’re ghosting things and skimming money off the top, so it’s just working within an Afghan environment. That became a huge challenge. It did grow the program very quickly.

Not all for bad. There were some legitimate areas where you could see the entire village stability operation [VSO] concept work extremely well. Over the next year and a half, I maintained good contact with it just from the standpoint of knowing we were going back. You could see it grow. It grew faster in some areas than people were comfortable with, but it was still managed. That is the thing I want to highlight. Even though it grew faster, it forced movement. You only have so many SOF teams, so if you want to create an additional ALP footprint 15–20 km or maybe even just 4 km north of where you are now, you need to physically move up into that area to get it started. To physically move up into that area meant you had to get the one you were leaving stable enough. We would always want a little bit more time to get it a little bit

more stable before we made that jump to the next platform. In reality, it is probably never going to meet the standard that we really want. By no means was it a failure when the ALP portion got accelerated. But in some of those development/economics pieces, where you had teams sit for a while, you really saw it start to take root and stabilize the area. The ones where we had to jump quickly, we never fully got away from that transition. We found ourselves going back. We found ourselves coming back because those things had to be addressed. You had to maintain a touchpoint. You had to be very careful not to get too stretched out. [25:23]

What I'll focus on now is, what we were trying to do in the Upper Gereshk Valley. It's been documented how important the area of the Upper Gereshk Valley and Helmand River Valley is. Back in 2010 going into 2011, there was a lot of discussion about going into Sangin. Musa Qal'ah Wadi was of concern and we had troops up there, but, Sangin was going to become the next big focused area. This goes back to what I said earlier about, "Okay, there's a lot of freedom of movement between Nahr-e Saraj where you turn off of highway one and head north on route 611, man there's a lot of freedom of movement all the way up to Sangin." So we thought, while the Marines and British units are trying to get a hold of Sangin while maintaining Nahr-e Saraj, let's develop a concept that puts us down in these seams and just starts to restrict insurgency's freedom of movement and the freedom of action. We have to make it more painful for them.

When you look at VSO back to the roots of what it was supposed to be, you would have to say on paper from a metrics perspective, none of those sites worked. When you looked at it in terms of the ALP and ANP working together to keep pressure off of the Nahr-e Saraj district center? From that perspective it worked. But when you look at it from stability, when you look at it from Shura standing up, Shuras attached to the district centers and building their [legitimacy] and stability taking hold, it didn't happen. I think it is shortsighted to say it didn't work, because the one thing it did do was assist the conventional forces in their fight in the big district centers. The second thing it did do was it allowed us to stabilize the area enough to get Highway 611 built and paved. That was a huge undertaking. Going back in 2010, once you turned north off of Highway One— [see Figure A-8].

There are grid lines that the contracted companies could not get north of when building this road. With that road being dirt, the IEDs were insane. When we would push teams up to FOB Robinson right in Sangin, it would take roughly 36–42 hours to get them from FOB Robinson back to FOB Price based on clearing routes for IEDs. I don't know the hard metric, but I'd be willing to bet we lost at least one vehicle to an IED per movement when that road was dirt. When we finally got it paved all the way up to Sangin, to FOB Robinson, in an hour and ten minutes you could make it from FOB Robinson all the way past FOB Price on your way to BLS and you'd see nothing but the markets moving. You would see nothing but goods and taxicabs and cars and trucks, and everything moving. Our freedom of action and your freedom of movement when that road got built was incredible. [30:03]



Figure A-8. FOB Price, bottom left near Gereshk and FOB Robinson, center, near Sangin

When we left in 2014, the ALP and the Shuras in place in the Upper Sangin Valley were still up and running. Last year when Sangin came under siege, the Afghans, the 215th Corps, did about 95% of the work on their own. We were still partnered and pushing operations in a supporting mechanism to them during those offensives. Even when Sangin was in a fight, when the 215th Corps was in a fight, that extended about five to six kilometers north of Sangin. Then you got into Upper Sangin Valley, which is the [Puzeh] area, and again you had ALP that actually had that zone completely locked down. They had it locked down all the way into Kajaki until you got northwest of Kajaki and started getting into some areas that were hubs of insurgent activity where, unfortunately, we lost the ability to put constant pressure in that area just based on the draw down.

In January 2014, when we came back in, what we were running was one company headquarters and seven teams. So we had taken a company and six additional teams out of the SOTF West AO. That was just, again, the draw down.

The company headquarters in Herat moved south to Shindand. All of Bagdhis was gone, transferred. We did not have a single team or a force up in Bagdhis. We kept one team in Herat with the 9th Special Operations Kandak. We kept a SOCCE that consisted of guys from my headquarters that did a command and control element liaison directly with RC West. I would travel out there weekly for a day to two days. Then we had one team and the company headquarters at Shindand Airfield with the 4th SOK [Special Operations Kandak] and the 2nd SOB which became the 2nd Special Operations Brigade, which is a one-star billet. Then the SOTF in Bastion Leather Neck. Then we had one team with 7th SOK at Camp Antheneck also Bastion Leather Neck complex. And then another team at FOB Price. That is what we shrunk down to. Whereas the high point may have even gone above 13. I think in 2012/2013, it may have expanded up to about 15–16 teams. I would have to check the data on that, but I think it actually even grew in terms of the number of Special Operations Teams underneath SOTF West.

We absolutely lost a lot of touch points with the forces associated with ALP in the 2014 timeframe. We could still get out and run KLEs. We did that a lot. Me and a team, or team commander, we would push out, organize a KLE, have guys meet us. We went to Sangin numerous times and met within the district center down at Marjah, down within Lashkar Gah proper. There were numerous spots that we could still get into in terms of a tactical movement. So we'd move in, do a KLE, try to gather as many atmospherics as we could, constantly working the phones. We did all of those things, but we didn't have that daily touchpoint. And when you're dealing with Afghans you really want that daily touch point to vet and validate the truth of what's going on with the atmospherics. That became a challenge but we worked through it.

The ALP program actually held strong in all areas except for Zerkoh Valley when we lost the continued presence; we still had touch points going in, but when we transitioned the site it was slowly influenced by key leaders. Bottom line was that members of ALP were also members of the insurgency. So they played both sides and they played it extremely well. You've got to

give credit where credit is due. They played both sides extremely well. Once our connection left on a persistent basis, they basically utilized the program to get back into nefarious activities. Again, you have to look at Zerkoh Valley differently than you look at Helmand. [36:15]

Helmand is about money and controlling the poppy and all the fields. There's no doubt about that. At the same time, when you look at the network in terms of Taliban senior leadership, their presence is felt throughout the area. It's not nearly as strong as Zerkoh Valley. Zerkoh Valley is a much simpler nefarious drug running, money-moving area. Different problem sets all together. Much more criminal-based in Zerkoh Valley than insurgent methodology-based like you would see in Kandahar and Helmand Province. So that's where that just kind of backslid. During General Miller's time we looked hard at the Tashkil [personnel authorizations in the ALP]. The numbers came down; at one time the height of their numbers in Tashkil was 300. At about April of 2014, that number was down to 100. And we had good reason to believe that it was going to drop below 50 based on what was going on. So we made the recommendation to cut the ALP Tashkil in Zerkoh Valley so that the money wasn't laundering into the bad things. We cut that down to 50, which was manageable by the district chief of police perspective. The additional 250 was shifted back so the SOAG ALP headquarters could beef others up where they were successful.

I think it turned out to be a success story. One thing I have to give credit for is they moved that Tashkil around pretty smartly. But how that's going to happen when you don't have US oversight, will be interesting. With the ALP, SOAG, Special Operations Advisor Group leadership there in constant communication with us, us having constant engagements with District Chiefs of Police, ALP Commanders and being able to influence and move Tashkil around where it made sense. If you're having success in an area, increase those numbers, but being able to cut away where it's failing helps so we're not having money siphoned away. From that perspective, it was pretty flexible. Due to some good leadership, we were afforded the flexibility and the bottom-up information push to say, "This is the right thing to do. We need to do this because it is not going to stand and we no longer have the footprint to go in there and fix it." So from an ALP perspective that was the approach. That was absolutely a main line of effort in 2010, all the way up until about summer of 2013. As the numbers came down in terms of SOF teams, we changed our perspective to where each Special Operations Kandak on the Afghan's side had a formal partnership with one of our teams.

We were also able to put teams with the ANASF, the Afghan Special Forces Units. But the projection was that when SOTF-West left on 1 October '14, there would be no SOF footprint in Herat, Farah or Helmand. We would go to zero. Under General Miller's guidance, we prepared our partner forces to operate independently for that lift off. We did that by focusing, again on partnered operations, but then starting to get the partnered operations to run across lines that they could sustain after we left. Very, very difficult thing to do. "Limited success" would be an optimistic assessment for some areas, but great success in other areas.

As an example, we had to get them off the helicopters all together because helicopters were going away. You have Afghan Air coming online but not enough so that you can sustain commando operations in an effective, efficient manner. We had to get them out utilizing vehicles. We had to get them back in their vehicles. We had to get them back out on sustained operations. We had to get away from the 24-hour strike hunting, and we had to get back into pushing them out, spending multiple days in critical areas building rapport with locals, fighting the insurgency and doing those things across all the lines of effort. They were going to be the lead. [42:15/40:00 audio]

The helicopters are going to be critical. But they're [the Afghans] not going to be able to hold the optempo we were holding with heliborne operations. So that's why we had to get them back into their vehicles. The other thing: We also needed to get their vehicles moving enough to see what their maintenance cycles were going to be. So we could start to see some of the logistical problems they were going to have when they didn't have US personnel there to support them. All those efforts are what we focused on [towards the end], which was a big shift.

The other thing we recognized is within the commando units is the leadership was very solid. The trust was there. Just as we needed to grow our relationship with conventional forces, we needed to get the commando units to grow their relationships with their Afghan Corps counterparts, because they were an ignitor and they brought so much positive energy to the corps when they operated with them. The Corps Commanders loved them. They knew they would fight. They knew they could put them out front. They knew they could be trusted.

But you had to be careful because the SOK Commander would feel that they would just become that ramrod for the Corps. As we worked with 215th and 207th, I would talk to the SOK Commanders and the SOB Commander General Farid quite a bit. Their concern always was, "Well they're going to use us to do all the dirty work so that it cuts down on their casualties, but my casualties are going to increase." Some things you just had to work through. You had to work through leadership. You had to work through coordination. You had to get them to understand that in nine months I am not going to be here to coordinate an operation, or coordinate between the Corps Commander and the SOK Commander. They are going to have to do that on their own. Or, you as General Farid, as a SOB Commander, you're going to have to make this work. This is a supported/supporting relationship. They do not own you; however, they need you and you need them. Right? So we have to get these relationships right. We were successful on that part. I think some of it was that they were not going to fully do it until we left because they just knew—

The other one we tried to pull in was the NDS [National Directorate of Security]—"How do we get NDS as the intel driver for commando operations and then for the Corps overarching areas that they want to focus on and how they fight. And how do we utilize what we envisioned?" Again, the SOK Commanders were really strong characters especially the 7th SOK Commander in Helmand. He was very well respected. He was very well respected not just

by General Farid, but by the 215th Commander, General Malouk (Faluk was his Deputy). I can't tell you how many hours myself and Colonel Dowling spent with Maluk and Lieutenant Colonel Zabula, who was the 7th SOK Commander, talking about the importance of this relationship and balancing this relationship. It was fascinating. We would laugh because we were trying to train them to do things that we sucked at for so many years! We just thought, "Can you please just press the fast forward button, learn from our lessons and get this right?" So we put a lot of effort into that. We tried to get them to where, not only they could operate independently, but where they could draw their own intelligence. They could have their relationships, utilize the ANASF as the teams to kind of take over the Village Stability Platform mindset where your ANASF teams, or your smaller teams, built rapport with the locals and they started to build their information systems and understand what was going on and work closely with NDS.

We got it to the point where we had NDS personnel actually going on commando operations, police going on Afghan operations and we tried to get them to work in that manner. I think we were successful. We fell under the same thing that everyone falls under: we just wanted six more months, but it wasn't there. At the same time, if we had six more months, we would have wanted six more months. At some point, the Afghans got it. Now, do they have the will to do it? We cannot teach that. In another six months you're not going to get that. On paper they understood what it was they had to do and how they had to work together in a collaborative effort. It was up to them to do it. [47:11]

The other reason those relationships were extremely important was because there are two lines of logistics for the SOB. There is the ANASOC, which is just your specialty weapons and sights and NVGs and things of that nature. But when you look at HMMWVs, tires, glow plugs, you name it, all the little basic things, that is all coming through your Corps. So if your relationship is not up to snuff with that Corps Commander, you're not getting your common logistics items.

Another thing was the leave plans. So when you're talking about getting soldiers from Helmand, which oh by the way in 7th SOK none of those guys are from Helmand, so you've got to get them back to Kabul and get them on leave while they're running their own program. And the 215th Corps absolutely owns who gets on that plane. So if you're relationship's crap you're going to end up with a company of 120 guys you're trying to get on leave and he's going to give you four seats a flight which is an average of maybe a flight every three days. So good luck with that plan before everybody heads out and hitchhikes home for the last time.

So, from the sustainment aspect, we had to we had to really work at the rapport piece. We also could not allow the operational tempo to become ineffective or inefficient. We knew we had another tough fighting season coming up, we had the double elections, all of these things going on. So you could not just call an operational timeout and focus on training and building staff integration. You had to do it on the run. [49:32]

While we focused on the ALP, it was absolutely secondary in comparison to working with the 2nd SOB and its kandak s. It actually has four SOKs underneath it, The 3rd SOK was in Kandahar, so SOTF South managed that and did a great job at that relationship. We controlled the 7th in Helmand, 9th in Herat, and 4th in Shindand. The other thing that was very positive about it from my perspective is that you could not do it without the RC [Regional Command]. We were figuring out how to work with the MEB at the time, and with General Yoo and his staff. We were taking lessons learned on relationships between a SOTF and a MEB—the supported/supporting relationship—and we were applying them to the 215th Corps, the 7th SOK, the 2nd SOB, and of course pushing it out west as well. Out west, both MSOCs did a superb job. They really were on their own, because they did not have that relationship with the MEF; they had the Italian Headquarters [in Herat] but at that point the tactical units were not out in the battlespace anymore. So that SOK and those teams out there were it. They ran the west. At least within Helmand, we still had Task Force Belleau Wood and still had a lot of support.

Knarr: Can you give any examples of that?

Lynch: We still had a lot of the aircraft, we were supported by the CJSOAC; the MAG came through big. The MAG put us as a top priority in order to run our partnered operations and keep the pressure on. We did back off on the JPEL hunting mainly because the ISR platforms were less available. Because we were lifting off, we were a lower and lower priority, so with the ISR we had, (we use the term blink) we would blink too much for it to be effective at JPEL hunting across the board. So we went back to those historical hot spots, where we could do short-term disruption and at the same time, the 215th Corps did movements. So that's how we employed the SOK and that's how we tried to teach them to do it, is to do disruption operations for a larger operation going on by the ANA. We also conducted numerous disruption operations to support the MEB as they pulled back. As they came out of Sangin, as they came out of Lashkar Ga, we absolutely ran US-driven, partnered operations to support those movements and support those plans.

Again, the command relationships were paramount. You didn't get on the plane with a big smile on your face because victory wasn't guaranteed. That will haunt a lot of us for years to come. But when you look how much we retrograded out of that country, all of the relationships that we continued to develop with the Afghan Forces, the MEB relationship, the unity of effort, the things that happened, it was gratifying from that perspective. But you still felt that it wasn't over yet. It felt premature. [54:40]

Knarr: Could you quickly talk about some of the key events while you were there?

Lynch: This one was real quick, and as I see it, is a huge success story. I don't know if this is going to be a success story in 2016, but we did do a couple operations down in Marjah and they were the quietest operations we did. As soon as we got in we would have ALP, we would have the ANP, and anybody local would be on our sites by 0800 in the morning. We

would have a Shura and we would talk. I mean you could see government vehicles driving all over—"Are you talking about going back in to block nine"—the whole nine yards. When you look at the stability that was still in that area, it was superb.

Same as you go down south of Lashkar Ga. Numerous reports of insurgent movements especially when Sangin came to a freeze. Sangin got hot and heavy. 215th Corp really fought hard. 7th SOK in support really driving a lot of operations. Then it kind of stalled out a little bit, so you saw the insurgency try to do two things: they tried to start stirring the pot in Musa Qal'ah unsuccessfully, and then they tried some sort of movement down in Garmser and even south of that and they got crushed.

Knarr: What year was this?

Lynch: That was 2014. You have no US Forces down there. I mean there's nothing left. So those units on standalone were absolutely holding their ground. That was not the main effort of the insurgency. The main effort of the insurgency was in Sangin with a base up northwest out of Kajaki. Yeah, those areas were toe to toe. They were stalemate for days at a time. Anytime they tried to shake something or do something else they didn't have the [momentum]... This is just a snapshot. I'm not in tune with what's happened over the last year.

When you look at it from a perspective that the insurgency could not fight multiple locations at one time within Helmand Province in 2014, they absolutely had to focus their efforts. They did not have the capacity to fight a multi-front fight. The Afghans had that pretty secure from that perspective. This will be a very interesting time. [57:57] I thought that was very interesting in terms of just all the bloodshed and all the effort that went into Marjah and the Fish Hook area and everything else over the years.

The second thing I'll highlight is the elections. The first round in April and then the second round are well covered, but they did it all on their own. They absolutely did it all on their own. Yes, we supported them with partnered operations up until about 72 hours before, but those were very short. We focused on major routes into the District Centers, where we could disrupt [insurgent] actions aimed at throwing things off for Election Day. We wanted to prevent any significant event that might shut the people down from coming out and voting. But I mean very, very, small. I had two teams operating in Helmand at that point. Then of course, every other SOF Team in the country was trying to do it as well, but when it came down to Election Day and securing the population centers, the Afghan Forces did that on their own.

That was a sign that when it is time to do it, they know what needs to be done. They know who needs to be talking to who. They know the provincial governors, the provincial chief of police, the district chiefs of police, the NDS Agents, the key leaders like Maluk and Farid and these guys. What it boils down to is how long will the will [last] and is it worth collaborating over? I think they viewed these elections as critical because everybody knew if the elections failed, the US would most certainly pull out.

[In relation to whether the United States would pull out or not,] there was an absolute misunderstanding on the Afghan side all the way up to at least the one Afghan general I worked with, General Farid. They really thought as soon as the BSA was signed, we were not going to leave the country. We were not leaving. You could not get through to them. I cannot tell you how many personal conversations I had with General Farid; he would ask me, "Why are you driving independent operations so much?" It wasn't so much that we were driving them toward completely 100% independent, it was just that I needed to get my guys out of the lead and they needed to develop their own cycle. We wanted our guys working to assist them in building the cycle, but then also be a little bit further back in the formation. Let them develop the situation. Let them develop how to conduct the operation and actually conduct the operation. We will catch you if things get bad. We are not going to leave you without MEDEVAC. We are not going to leave you without fire support. We will push into the fight if it is required for us to push into the fight. But we were really trying to build their confidence. I used to say it is kind of like teaching your kid to ride a bike. Eventually you do not say anything, you just take your hands off the bike and they have to figure it out. Literally, on September 30th, General Farid asked, "Why are you leaving? The BSA is signed." I said, "I've been telling you since January!"

Knarr: He had not heard you!

Lynch: Yeah! "You're not listening to me. It's the draw down." I would walk him through the Resolute Support Mission. I would say, "You know, all the Marines are going to be out of Helmand. In another 30 days it's all gone." It is just a lack of wanting to grasp that and understand that.

But, like I said, the elections were absolutely superb and they did it. On some of those movements we had commando units conduct three/four day movements in their vehicles to set up district security and be QRF for district leadership in some of the most remote places you could ever put them. They did those movements on their own. They had some rough days. They got in some fights. The MEDEVAC platforms are not there to the extent we had them, and certainly not to the range that we had and so some of that stuff was a hard pill for all of us to swallow. It was also a sign of what was coming in terms of reality. [1:02:55]

Knarr: Talk about MEDEVAC. Did they have the same rules we had? The golden hour?

Lynch: That is the problem. The number one problem with the MEDEVAC is that we trained them to a standard they cannot sustain. [Part of that challenge related to MEDEVAC involved] their mobility combat vehicle (it looks a lot like our LAVs) and we were trying to train them to pre-stage those. They were scared to death to use them because they did not want to get them blown up by IEDs. There came a point where you're like, "Well you can't blame them because they know it's going to go in a graveyard when it's done." They loved these things, but they did not want to risk them, because they knew they had a limited amount of them and it was going to be very hard to replace them. We tried to get them to utilize them as last cover and conceal position and set them up as CASEVAC, so if you had some fighting going

on you could get that guy back in one of those vehicles. We were teaching them to set up little triage sites and work it that way. They actually have good medics. I mean they can sustain a casualty for quite some time, but the problem is they still have to get the casualty to a Role 2 hospital within 12 hours.<sup>22</sup> My big concern was that when the MEDEVACs went away (which they did not until we left), how far are they going to be willing to push knowing that when they have these casualties they cannot get them back to a support center? The 215th Corps has a superb medical center that was built for them, it's fantastic.

General Tom Jones, USMC (Ret): Dowling and General Yoo both mentioned Captain Coll. Did you work closely with him at any time? He was an American doctor from Chicago who was very instrumental in advancing some of the medical—

Lynch: I did not, I knew of him Sir, but I did not personally work with him. To be honest, at the SOK levels, the SARCS did amazing work. That is what it boiled down to. They just did amazing work teaching these guys to do it themselves.

[The challenge] was absolutely about their tactics. There were three supporting efforts where we were trying to boost their confidence [The first effort concerned] their own organic weapons, indirect fire weapons systems, and 81-millimeter mortars because CAS was going away. We were prepping them to be able to effectively and efficiently use their 81's and their 60's. [The second effort] was the MEDEVAC. We had SARCS just working around the clock to truly teach them a sustaining capability that they could utilize in the field.

[The third area was] counter-IED, the biggest one. We were working the counter-IED. Let me tell you a couple of side note stories. I had the opportunity to go out a couple of times and see it for myself. When we run these heliborne operations into Sangin and upper Gereshk Valley, we would go in at 0100 in the morning. When we would come off the helos the Afghans, the Commandos, would lead all the way, all the way to the compound of interest. We got to the point where they did everything to control the movement, the counter-IED of the movement, utilizing the sweepers, all our electronic means, electronic counter measures. They did everything. They marked the route. They were doing it all on NODS, all on lasers. They are marking the buildings. They are securing the buildings. Only when the buildings were secured would we move in and set up a hasty C2 within a courtyard, within a building that we would be invited into. But they ran every movement from the time the helo hit the deck.

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<sup>22</sup> *Role* is used by land or air forces to describe the stratification of the four tiers in which medical support is organized, on a progressive basis, to conduct treatment, evacuation, resupply, and functions essential to the maintenance of the health of the force. It is defined on the basis of capabilities and resources, and is not specific to particular medical unit types. Role 2 support is normally provided at larger unit level, usually of Brigade or larger size, though it may be provided farther forward, depending upon the operational requirements. In general, it will be prepared to provide evacuation from Role 1 facilities, triage and resuscitation, treatment and holding of patients until they can be returned to duty or evacuated, and emergency dental treatment. *NATO Logistics Handbook*, "Chapter 16: Medical Support," October 1997, <http://www.nato.int/docu/logi-en/1997/lo-1610.htm>.

Same thing all the way back out to wherever the extract was. Usually on insert we would try to get as close to the X and we could, but on extract we would do anywhere from five to 12K offsets for extract and they would do all of the movements. They would lead everything. It came down to their ability, their confidence to understand how to do it. I do not think there is a unit in Afghanistan that can truly understand how to defeat IEDs as well as the 7th SOC. Unfortunately, it is through years of lessons learned on our side and on their side. It goes back to when it's important to know, they know. They were superb in how they executed that portion of the mission.

It goes back to logistics. How many night vision goggles do they have? You know we have them on M4s. We have them on .556 Ammo. We have them on lasers.

Knarr: You were talking about the common items coming through the 215th Commander, but I assume that includes things like fuel.

Lynch: It does. Everything. The only thing that does not come through the 215th Corps is weapon systems that the 215th Corps does not have.

Knarr: You have talked about the Afghans, but what about some of the other forces you had to work with. You had the Brits at Task Force Helmand and you had the—[1:08:40]

Lynch: I did. Again, all superb relationships for the most part. Were there absolute frustrations with caveats and some of the political things of what could and could not be done? Absolutely. I'll start in the west, Task Force 45, which is Italian SOF. When you look at the RC West in general, the Italian General was very thankful for what we did and were doing. On the first deployment, there were so many American task forces out west that it was less apparent. You did not see some of the caveats and some of the things the Italians had to really deal with politically in order to operate. On the second deployment, it opened your eyes to all the things the Italians were dealing with on a political side of why they were limited in what they could do with their forces.

Our personal relationships with the units out west were very good. They supported us on everything we wanted to do. They had CONOP approval on any operation we did. However, when you look at it from an Afghan perspective, it drove tension because the Italian's were not equipped to support the Afghans as well as we could support them. That creates favoritism right there. [1:10:54]

Even if we didn't own the relationship and it was an informal relationship where we were coordinating with them, the first thing the Afghans want to talk about is, "how can you support us? We don't want to work with the Italians anymore." At the end of the day, it's not because the Italians don't treat them right or they don't understand foreign internal defense. It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with money. It has to do with giving them stuff and supporting them from that perspective. Those were very difficult things to work through. Especially when

you were dealing with the Provincial-level governance, the NDS Chief, the provincial governor, the chief of police. They just knew who really had the vote. These guys were savvy and smart, they knew who was making the calls. They knew who is influencing in Kabul. They knew it wasn't the Italians, so they wanted to work closely with Americans, which is something we had to work through. I would say we had to work through that on both deployments.

As far as Italian Forces fighting, it was never about whether Italian Forces would fight. Heck yeah they would fight. But they were limited to how they could fight. That was frustrating for us on the first deployment when we were doing so much offensively. Then, of course with some of the government and political caveats they had, the RC Commander was very cautious in his decision to employ his force. [1:12:36]

Knarr: Under Rules of Engagement, the US uses "intent." Many other countries do not. It puts them in a defensive posture when it comes to Rules of Engagement. Is that what you mean about offensive versus defensive?

Lynch: Yes Sir. If they got attacked, they fought. They're trained military, they're going to fight. Those men and women are not scared to fight. But they're not just going to proactively push the fight. They are not going to go shoulder to shoulder with the Afghans. They are not going to go into the Shawan's of Farah. They are not going to go into the Daribooms. They are not. They want to come in as soon as you get it stable, they absolutely want to come in. They want to help be part of the solution. There was only so much risk they would take. In my understanding, a lot of it goes down to civil liability that the RC Commander could face back in Italy and what they could be held accountable for based on the loss of an Italian life. I just don't see how in the world that's not going to affect any commander when he's got to think through second and third order effects like that.

But there were always fights, always troops in contact, especially during the surge period in 2010 and 2011—violent actions on a daily basis. That was the kind of challenges we had from a multinational perspective. [1:14:39]

We had ISAF SOF. We had SOJTF, General Miller who was also dual-hatted as NSOCC-A. Then he had the CJSOTF underneath him, he had the Task Force, and then he had ISAF SOF. Was it effective? Yes. Is it something I think we need to constantly look at as we go forward with NATO Forces and NATO Missions worldwide as it addresses unity of effort and command? Absolutely. Is it perfect? Far from it. When you have structure like that you can find yourself in a position just like SOF finds itself in a position with conventional—those commanders need to sit down and talk. For me it was clear, the RC is the battlespace owner. At the end of the day during my time as a commander, General Yoo was ultimately responsible for answering all questions of what did and did not happen in Helmand Province. It was my goal to say, "Okay, this is what I bring. Understanding your desired end

state, what you want to do, this is what I can do for you. How do I work lines of effort in direct support of your overarching plan?”

But that can easily not happen that way. [As an example,] I do belong to the CJSOTF, I do belong to the SOJTF, I could find myself stove-piped—and not doing a truly supported effort to the battlespace owner. When you are running an ISAF SOF regardless of how much coordination we do, we absolutely have increased risks if we are running stove-piped efforts. I think that at a very small tactical O5 Command level, there were times that we did have that with Task Force 45. We sat down and worked through everything. It's not battling for supremacy of ownership. It is utilizing your assets correctly. If Task Force 45 is working collections and working an area here, then I do not need to put assets towards that. I need to shift my assets. So if you don't drive that communication line and you're not constantly engaged in understanding what their priorities are and what they're working, and then you de-conflict those efforts, it is a waste of assets.

It was the same thing down in the RC, when you look at ISR. I can request ISR National Regional Assets through CJSOTF. But if I don't develop my ISR engagement plan right, I'm going to sit right on top of what the RC's collecting on or what the Brit's are collecting on. You've got this vested interest to get the coordination right so you're utilizing your assets to their fullest capacity. When you have chains of command like this, you're creating the opportunity for the stove-piped efforts that create overlap and misuse of assets. I think that is where frustration comes in. It just drives additional work. Some of those things should be automatic and we should not be having a discussion about them. We are going to have a two-hour or a half-day discussion about how to get after this problem set and make sure we de-conflict it correctly.

One of the biggest problems we had with the Brits was sharing information, sharing intelligence. It was not us to them; it was them to us. Going back to command structure—you have RC Commander run by a US Marine General. You had the Combined Targeting Center, which is run by Task Force 19, the Brits. General Yoo is approving authority for any strike these guys are going to do. We were utilizing ISR assets. They are collecting in certain ways. We are collecting in certain ways. There are certain times that they are collecting, but they cannot get a strike. I could, if they would push the data to me, but they can't push the data to me. So I would talk to General Yoo about how we can get this right. How do we share assets? How do we get US personnel involved from a standpoint that we can get the information, we are targeting correctly, and we are actually going after actionable intelligence and we're doing it in a manner that we're maximizing our ISR. I do not want to put words in his mouth, but he struggled with this. Although he had approving authority of all the strikes they did, he did not have the ability to just say, “Hey listen, I own the overarching collection plan in terms of intelligence, in terms of ISR laydown within RC West.” In my mind, there were too many hands in the pots. There were too many people that got a vote or could over-

ride or influence it being used differently. For the most part we got it worked out; it was just the hours you put into it to try to figure it out and get it right. I'll just never forget how difficult it was to get intelligence collected by the Brits pushed to us to use. We missed critical opportunities at critical times. And that's not personal. We all liked each other. We were all trying to get stuff done for the most part.

Knarr: Now when you said Task Force 19, are you talking about their Special Ops or are you talking about targeting?

Lynch: This is where you start getting into weird chains of command. The CTC was a Combined Targeting Center. The lead of that was a Task Force 19 member and he would run the CTC. There were as many US Marines sitting in that CTC as any other organization in there. I offered to put guys from the SOTF in there. Anything it took where guys could talk to guys that would make it legal to transfer information and move information quickly so we could make faster decisions. But we couldn't move it fast enough because of the political caveats. I feel ignorant talking on the subject because I can't, I still can't determine to this day why we couldn't get it, why we couldn't get it smoother and why we couldn't just transfer information faster and cleaner to make quicker decisions. [1:22:57]

Knarr: I am glad you mentioned that. One of the special themes we're looking at is information sharing. In fact, we thought it had improved because of the "Five Eyes" (FVEY), because McChrystal and his centers had opened up the kimono to everybody.

Lynch: Absolutely we did, and we still do! We share information.

Knarr: But they [all of the other FVEYs or just the Brits?] don't?

Lynch: It's not necessarily always reciprocated, that's the problem!

Knarr: That's a good point. What about Interagency?

Lynch: As we were drawing down, we talked to some of the active teams, OMEGA Teams, but from an operational perspective we did absolutely transfer everything we had to them. That was easy on the US side. From an Interagency perspective, I'll use Helmand as a case because it was always the hardest. [But first let me talk about the west.] The west is just easy. For example out west you had the US consulate in Herat that got attacked in...in the summer or late '13 I think.

Knarr: Yeah, I believe so.

Lynch: We, being US SOF, played a huge role in assisting the consulate through that and through the rebuild. We inherited from the SOTF before us a relationship with them that was supportive. We even housed them in our little FOB in Herat and then supported them out. Then of course they had an entire Task Force that support them. Again, those were all very positive things, so from an Interagency perspective when you looked at Fusion Centers and

things of that nature, fantastic. It really did work. I had one of my strongest intelligence officers actually running my SOCCE out west. Absolute superb open lines of communication. If we wanted to meet with somebody out in Herat or wherever, it was always approved, you know it was just a good relationship. I cannot speak enough about it across multiple lines.

And before I even get to Helmand, let me go back to 2010 because the Interagency started to shrink in terms of how we worked together because of the draw down. When you look at it from a DIME perspective within COIN—your diplomacy, your economics—those are things that started to drop off first because we are leaving last. We are holding the security umbrella where everybody else starts to pull back and get out. So in 2010, when we started with the VSO concept, we had a very positive relationship with the Interagency piece in terms of diplomacy, in terms of economics, development. Very effective. Once we had VSOs up and running, we had them come out and visit all the time, assist in certain ways. Even intel sharing was overall very positive. When you got to Helmand though, again it was nothing personal but the relationship with the Brits was very tough. [Mentions Joe McGraw his predecessor SOTF commander] [1:27:27]

Knarr: Well they ran the PRT too.

Lynch: They did, that is the key. For example, there were multiple relationships we wanted to develop, not because we were trying to influence but we were trying to understand. We were trying to understand the environment. So the Brits—through the PRT and their PRT Team that had US personnel involved—had their HUMINT network of who they wanted to engage with and everybody that they were engaged with in building relationships and reporting and everything else. To meet with anybody outside that agency they thought was a threat to their relationships. [Perhaps we had] to meet with a power broker who's not an honest power broker, but you need to meet with him because you need to have enough of a relationship to understand how are other's thinking? There were numerous times we would try to meet with certain personalities, specifically Sher Mohammad Akhundzada who the Brits did not have a great relationship with whatsoever. To the point where, when we were scheduled to have a meeting with him, they ran it all the way up to their embassy, that came over to our embassy and said, "Please shut this meeting down."

Knarr: Wow!

Lynch: Absolutely. It wasn't that we were secretly trying to meet with him. I've talked about the trust and the development of information and sharing of information. I'd never sat in the room and felt that everybody at the table truly trusted one another and was truly being transparent with all their information every time I met with the PRT. It was their agenda and it was a protected agenda. Nobody, to include ourselves, was truly laying it all on the table the way it needed to go down. Absolutely. It was very aggravating and very troubling.

Knarr: What about the Regional Platform?

Lynch: Regional Platform was good; very supportive of what we were doing. They came over and got briefs all of the time from the SOTF. They were getting an update from us on a monthly basis. I would meet with the Regional Platform OIC; I would see him every week at the MEB headquarters. He's a former ambassador and I'm drawing a blank on his name but he worked out of Kandahar or Kabul. Bottom line is, the Regional Platforms were reporting to him. When he would come out, the first place they would bring him is to the SOTF and we would give him an overview on everything going on with our engagements, ALP, the whole nine yards. He loved what we had to say. He absolutely understood what we were up against with the PRT in Helmand.

Knarr: Do you recall his name? Sounds like someone we ought to talk to.

Lynch: I will look. I have the names. I will give you RP's name and the ambassador's name. It is probably going to hit me as soon as I leave. They fought for us on this. They understood what we were trying to do.

Knarr: This was an American?

Lynch: Yes.

The bottom line is—and I am going to over simplify this—but within Helmand's tribal dynamics, you have predominant tribes aligned to GIRoA, and you have some tribes that are aligned to the insurgency. A lot of the tribes are well represented in GIRoA. The one major tribe that runs throughout Helmand that has no ties anywhere in GIRoA is in Achakzai. So the Achakzai become enablers for insurgent activities because they're not on the cut. It's all about the movement of goods. It is all about the kickbacks. It is all about the money. So the Akhundzada family and everybody, regardless of whether they're in power or not, they're absolutely influencing whose getting money off of the movement of poppy and movement of the goods in and out of Helmand Province. And the Achakzai are not in that loop in any way. Again, it's much more complicated and there are so many subtribes. I have an unclassified little document that my intel guys drew for me that has the connectivity of the different tribes. I mean it is a spider web. And that was the point. That is the complexity of what you are dealing with.

Knarr: I would love to get a copy of that.

Lynch: I can pull that off for you.

Knarr: That would be something I would like to reflect in all this so people understand the complexity.

Lynch: I can get that for you.

Everything is sides. Everything is a team. We've got some players out there that are causing a lot of pressure and a lot of stress on the government. The PRT is of course supporting all the GIRoA personnel. So are we. But at the same time, we had these guys like the Akhun-

dzadas that are linked to government in a kind of third order effect, but are huge power brokers. He [Sher Mohammad Akhundzada] is a former P-Gov and although he's working some GIRoA billet within Kabul, what he's really focused on is his power in Helmand. So the PRT doesn't want anybody discussing anything with him because they don't want it to look as if US Forces are empowering this Akhundzada character that's going to counter these engagements that they have going on. Truth be told, that's exactly what they're doing by only engaging this tribe. You are driving him to find nefarious ways to counter what you are promising. So the complexity was amazing.

Back to your point about the Interagency, early on there was a lot of red tape to get things approved. You hear about all this money that's coming in and it's for development and you think, "Okay, well we're going to build this road and this building. This road's going to cost \$1.5 million but we've got it mapped out and it's going to give 250 Afghans jobs." However, it is going to take four months to get the money. Those are things on our side. Those are red tape accounting things. Nobody wants to hear anything else about roads and wells, and I understand that, but sometimes you've got to use what you've got. And at some point you've got to use something to get yourself a little bit of trust with the locals. I understand in may not have the strategic value that we think it has sometimes, it absolutely has a short-term value, but just like any relationship, somebody has to go first with the trust. And usually the person that's got to go first is the person that needs the relationship the most. There were numerous times that we needed the relationship the most. So we better be willing to show that trust even though it may bite us in the butt, because that guy right now doesn't really have a need to trust me. [1:36:40]

Knarr: That is a good point. I have got a 1:250,000 map that I would like you to use to mark some locations.

Lynch: Okay. Master Guns, is there anything I missed?

[MSG]: You might add that in the 2009/2010 timeframe we did a lot with the Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA].

Lynch: You are right. I did not even think about that. The DEA. Absolutely, huge enabler for operations. Again, when you start working what you can and cannot do and how you can prosecute from a targeting perspective, the interagency opens up your avenues. [1:38:25]

On Figure A-8, LtCol Lynch marks

- FOB Price
- Route 611.. Dashed line indicates paved area in 2010. Horizontal black line above Haidarabad indicates where pavement stopped and dirt road started. They wanted to pave the road to Kajaki.
- Green Zone

- Marks the canal with a dashed line west of Route 611.
- ALP location at
- Fish hook area is Khan Neshin up to Garmser [1:40:52]
- Musa Qal'ah Wadi. Musa Qal'ah is located at center top of the map and the wadi runs south from Musa Qal'ah.
- Ganamarie [insurgent controlled area] is marked with an oblong shape west of Kajaki.
- FOB Robinson. South of Sangin.
- Puzeh. Marked on map southwest of Kajaki.

Lynch: This is a major zone [marked Green Zone]. Here's another key piece that I didn't talk about earlier as well. One of the reasons ALP did not stick in this area [pointing to Haidarabad] is because you need to get those Shuras going. You need to get all the tribes represented. Another thing in this area: none of the property owners live in this area. Your population is migrant farmers. They do not own any property. They do not have any say. All they want to do is farm the fields, make their money for the year and go away. Migrant farmers just look at us and they go, "Hey, you're going to leave. May be tomorrow. May be a year from now." "I'd rather pay these guys [insurgents] my little tax, clean my field and carry on." I am simplifying, but that was another reason. This is a lesson when you put in a Village Stability Platform. We had some very good short-term effects that enabled a lot of operations, a lot of good things to happen: Route 611, Sangin, these things. But when you looked at it long term, from a stability perspective, you're not going to get stability with a bunch of migrant workers—ever.

Knarr: Makes sense.

Lynch: These went all the way up. So we ended up [Chinah—second small circle] all these areas ended up becoming VSPs [small circles along the river in Green Zone]. We basically just leap-frogged up. Then you had FOB Robinson, which sits about right here. The team that we put there was working VSP from FOB Robinson; they were working out this way as well. So they were working down, we were connecting that line here.

Knarr: You were trying to connect the dots.

Lynch: Right. Once Sangin really got going and we got forces in, then that's when we pushed all the way up to... Well we had teams in Kajaki.

There was a success story in an area called Puzeh. This area, 'til about right in this area here [pointing to map] all became under ALP control. The tribes were predominant in this area, which is why the ALP started to catch on in this area. That is why you started to get some influence. First, you weren't dealing with a lot of Achakzai in this zone here. Second, you weren't dealing with multiple tribes were power-broking one another. They unified pretty well in this area. That went all the way up to Kajaki.

We had a team work Kajaki and then collocated with Marine Rifle Company up in that area over the years. The goal was to blow this thing open, get that commerce, get everything coming down from the power plant. We wanted to get into the population centric areas. We didn't have nearly the capacity to get into the population centers, so that is where the conventional forces came in; working with them simultaneously is what we wanted to do.

Knarr: Did you ever work up in Musa Qal'ah or in Now Zad?

Lynch: In my time, we never had any teams in there. We did a lot of disruption operations up there, but we didn't do anything where we had sustained SOF up there. I don't think we ever really got past where the Musa Qal'ah Wadi came into the river. I'd have to go back and check my notes.

Knarr: Alright, let's see, names of people?

Lynch: I will get you the name of all the key players as well.

[We are looking on the smaller map of Afghanistan for the other places outside of Helmand such as Bagdhis Province, Herat, Shindand, Zerkoh, Farah, (marking the northwest of Afghan map) Dariboom ('D'), BMG, Bala Murghab, "So this was the Bala Murghab River Valley that this is where, in 2009 this is where Ring Road was going to come up and go right up."]

End of interview



Subject: Interview with **Brigadier General Austin Renforth**, former Commander, 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment

Brigadier General Austin “Sparky” Renforth is currently the Commanding General, United States Marine Corps Training Command at Quantico, Virginia. Renforth commanded Regimental Combat Team 7 (RCT-7) in Afghanistan from September 2013 to August 2014. His mission was two-fold: 1. Security force assistance and 2. To transfer area responsibility for Helmand Province to the Afghans.

BrigGen Renforth was interviewed at the Training Command by Dr. William Knarr on 23 February 2015.



**BGen Austin Renforth**

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Dr. William Knarr: Sir, when did you deploy to Afghanistan, with what unit and what was your mission?

BGen Renforth: I deployed to Afghanistan in September 2013. Our mission, in a nutshell, was security force assistance. That was at a point in time when we were in a transition to security force assistance. We still had the security bubble that we had to create around Helmand Province and we had to bring the bases down to zero by the time we left.

Knarr: What unit did you replace?

Renforth: We replaced Regimental Combat Team 6. Regimental Combat Team 6 was there but we also replaced Regimental Combat Team 5. We essentially replaced two regiments.

Knarr: In what area were you located?

Renforth: Our headquarters was in Task Force Leatherneck, but our area of operations was all of Helmand Province.

Knarr: Did you also have part of Nimroz at the time?

Renforth: Nimroz was out west and that was part of the RC Southwest security area.

Knarr: If they went from two RCTs to one RCT, they were downsizing when you moved in?

Renforth: Right. At that point in time they thought it was time to bring it down to one regimental headquarters who then became the ground combat element (GCE). We not only got rid of a regimental headquarters, we also got rid of a division headquarters which was Task Force Leatherneck at the time, so the GCE became Regimental Combat Team 7.

Knarr: When did you leave?

Renforth: We stayed 11 months; we left in August of 2014.

Knarr: Was there a one-star commander at the time that had the RC?

Renforth: No. The RC Southwest commander was a two star. The first one was Major General Gurganus and then he was relieved by Major General Miller. But then they brought in a deputy Commander for Security Force Assistance which was a Brigadier General George Smith who was the commanding general for all of the Security Force Assistance Teams (SFAT).

Knarr: Since you had the RCT, what was your relationship with the ISAF?

Renforth: They were not a traditional partnered unit. We were the battlespace owners, so the ISAF lived within our battlespace. So we had security force assistance which we defined as case-vac/medevac, kinetic/non-kinetic fires, ISR, so we provided them those enabling functions that they couldn't provide on their own and we did that through the security force assistance teams which we supported logistically and administratively.

Knarr: So the command of those teams belonged to...

Renforth: General George Smith. But the care and feeding of those teams were my responsibility.

Knarr: How many teams were in your area?

Renforth: 25 to 30 at any given moment, because we were bringing them down as well. [04:49]

Knarr: Did those teams come from your organization?

Renforth: No. Actually, when the regiment got there, some of the teams were ours, but they were globally sourced throughout the Marine Corps. They were police advisory teams and infantry advisor teams. Really a novel idea how it was done. A bit confusing. I personally believe that the battle space owner should own everything within his battle space, but we made it work. If it wasn't for General Smith and I having the relationship we have, who knows.

Knarr: Who was your commander?

Renforth: My commander was the RC Southwest commander. General Gurganus and then General Miller. [06:00]

Knarr: When I see the line and block chart, as an example this one of the ISAF headquarters, I see General Dunford as the ISAF commander, but also dual-hatted at the US Forces Afghanistan commander as well.

Renforth: You are bringing up a good point, it was non-standard and non-doctrinal as that is, where is it tied? You have to learn to work in that environment.

Knarr: What were the challenges for you?

Renforth: There were many challenges. Anything that happened within the battle space and the reporting procedures within that. As an example, for the security force assistance teams, for those things outside the care and feeding, they thought they had their own reporting chain up to General Smith, which was not a command and control with a combat operations center where they could control fires. That was quickly fixed through communications. They knew

that if anything happened within the area of operations that we owned that they had to go to that unit that was closest to them, or whichever zone they were in, and call for fire support or casevac/medevac or other combat support.

Knarr: Did you take three battalions with you? [07:18]

Renforth: Three battalions were already in theater, we did not take any of our own. We had one of ours from 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment always coming in and out, it was always located in Sangin: 1/7, 2/7....3/4 [07:40] And then we had two Georgian battalions.

Knarr: Now we are in the IIIM part. What kind of battalion and how many people?

Renforth: They were more like a light infantry battalion with about 500 members or a little bit more. We augmented them with a Georgian Liaison Team, which were all Marines. At the time that was 98 Marines that we gave them to provide those enabling functions that they needed to assimilate into our battle space.

Knarr: Did they have the same area the whole time?

Renforth: We kept them up north the entire time, up in the Musa Qal'ah, Now Zad area. And they were conducting COIN like everybody else was.

Knarr: You mentioned that they have different cultures and objectives; what about things like rules of engagement?

Renforth: They operated under the same rules of engagement as us. It was a concerted effort for us. We would go up there en masse with our entire staff every time a new battalion would come in and sit there with them, with an interpreter and even translate the tactical directives we had and go over it line by line with them until they understood.

Some of that is done through the RSOI [Reception, staging, onward movement, and integration] process but there is only so much of that you can do, but our regiment made a concerted effort to ensure they were armed properly. And yes, they were under the exact same ROE that any Marine would be under.

Knarr: I was reading one of the reports to Congress and they discuss the contributing countries to include the different caveats that they might be under. Have you heard that term "caveats" before?

Renforth: I have. Georgians didn't have any caveats, they were all in. [10:00]

Knarr: You had the Brits with you?

Renforth: The Brits were our adjacent unit. We had Task Force Helmand which was led by a Brit one-star. If you look at a line and block chart, it was non-standard. You see RCT-7 with the associated battle space and then you had a piece carved out around Lashkar Ga and Nadi ali, all those areas around Task Force Helmand. The Brits operated in there exclusively and they

had national caveats as well. There were places that they could and could not go. So we had everything that was outside of that. You had the Marines, you had the Brits; we can get into JIIM now and go down the list.

You had the HPRT, the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team which was considered their foreign office. The on our side you had the Regional Platform (RC) which was the State Department. We had AID as well. But on the Brit's side you had DFID, Department for International Development. So, their Foreign Office is their State Department and DFID is their USAID. They were located right there in Lash. So essentially the Regional Platform and the PRT had the GovDev LOO (line of operation). [12:00]

Knarr: If you were the battle space owner, were they under your command and control?

Renforth: No, they were under a British one-star and they were the battle space owner of their area.

Knarr: You mentioned they had caveats, there were places they couldn't go. What did you mean?

Renforth: I probably have a better insight into all this because as soon as I got back from Afghanistan I was sent to the UK Higher Command of Staff College; what was brilliant about this was I was able to sit with these guys who were over there. It was awesome. What was incredible to me was, they had people from their, I would guess it would be our, Joint Chiefs equivalent, and their foreign office talking to that one-star directly; telling him what he can and can't do. They had the ability to talk to their powers, so to speak, back home! You know we would never even consider that! So, I understand why they just weren't allowed to do certain things or go certain places. Their public was not going to stomach any more casualties for something that they didn't sign up for. So there were certain areas within Afghanistan they were no longer allowed to go because of their national caveats; they said, "Hey you're not going there." It wasn't their fault, because if it were up to them they'd have done all of it.

But there was one example. There was a failed VSO, Village Stability Operations, in a place called Shurakay [also spelled Combat Outpost Shir Ghazay<sup>23</sup>] which our Special Ops guys were in. They weren't failing, but the people in that area weren't coming to the table to join the Police Force. It wasn't in our area of responsibility, it was in the Brits, but it was in an area called Gereshk which they were no longer allowed to go to because there, been some heavy fighting there and a lot of casualties. RCT-7 was tasked with going in there and getting the SOF team out; pretty kinetic. Again that's the high end of COIN if you want to call it that. So there you are in a period of transition, people think you are just migrating out of the country, and yet we fired 22 plus line charges to get these guys out. The tally for enemy dead was over 100 with multiple tank main gun rounds; emergency resupply a couple of times. I mean it was on! I got

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<sup>23</sup> Hope Hodge Seck, "Marines in tanks unit decorated for bravery in Afghanistan," *Marine Times*, 25 Jan 2014, accessed at <http://archive.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20140125/NEWS/301250004/Marines-tanks-unit-decorated-bravery-Afghanistan>.

these guys out with all their equipment, and all good.<sup>24</sup> It was not our area of operation, but that is just how it was. We didn't think twice about it; but those are some of the things that you have to consider when dealing in the JIIM so to speak. [16:30]

Knarr: Was it a MARSOT [Marine Special Operations Team] or ODA [Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha]?

Renforth: It was a MARSOT. Great guys! I mean they were working hard. Every day they were in a gunfight, every day! Man, they were very appreciative too when we came and got them out. They were awesome.

Knarr: The Georgians, were they under your command?

Renforth: They were.

Knarr: The VSO ALP, from what I saw on one of the maps there were about five VSO ALP sites within Helmand. What was your relationship with those guys?

Renforth: Well they lived right in our FOBs. I've had to eat my words on this one, because when they were initially put there I was like, "Hey I'd rather they were outside our FOB because they come with their own care and feeding and they can do all that." No, it worked out way better when they actually lived right inside our FOB. First, they came with a lot of toys that we could use. And, they were good at their job. And they were another asset to get into the leadership, the elders within the village, you know they helped immensely with the KLE's. At this point in time we'd been doing it for so long, there was no parochialism. It was like, "Hey we're in this together, let's get this done, we know what the mission is." So they knew we were the battlespace owner, they knew we had that. They knew we called the shots with all those things that comes with being a battlespace owner. They did not try to be the battlespace owner. The biggest thing was coordination of their movements within the battlespace to make sure that we didn't talk past each other, or deal with different agendas. There was none of that. Every time I would do battle field circulation and go meet my commanders, I would bring them along. I mean, "Hey let's talk about this. How do we want to do this?" I knew they had a different chain of command. They knew they did. We never played mom against dad on each other. It just didn't work that way. There was no reason for it to work that way. But again, that's something that I think any exposure we can have, such as training prior to deploying would be great. Turns out one of the VSO's just showed up, young man that was the commander was one of my lieutenants when I was a battalion commander, just worked out. So there was that instant trust that was built, that was already established. And that's the key, you build that trust, and then we all work together, everything works out really well.

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<sup>24</sup> Lance Corporal William Kresse, CLP to VSP Shurakay, B-Roll of CLP in support of Operation Dynamic Partner, Helmand Province, Feb 14 2013. CLP supports RCT-7 in extracting equipment from VSP Shurakay to facilitate its demilitarization. Accessed at [www.dvidshub.net/video/282217/clp-vsp-shurakay#.VbYpX3\\_D-70](http://www.dvidshub.net/video/282217/clp-vsp-shurakay#.VbYpX3_D-70) on 27 Jul 2015.

Knarr: One of the questions that was asked before was SOF/Conventional Force Integration and VSO ALP that's part of it, but then it even goes beyond that.

Renforth: Yeah, and we had a number of task forces in addition to the VSO ALP sites such as Task Force 19, Task Force 66, Task Force 15. And we would have QRF responsibilities with those. We would augment them with forces at times. They all had their own agendas as well, and national caveats depending on who they were. So, again, first figuring out what they can and can't do, figuring out what their mission is that they're going after, and how can we facilitate that within the battlespace? And does it work with our overarching end-state? Does all that work? We didn't want to just start popping targets out there and have it not all tie into something.

Knarr: You were there then when the SOJTF [Special Operations Joint Task Force] stood up.

Renforth: The SOJTF was there.

Knarr: What was your relationship with them?

Renforth: Prior to deploying I never said the word SOJTF.

Knarr: Many of us hadn't to be quite honest!

Renforth: I was very fortunate that a Marine that I happen to know was in charge at that time, He didn't work for General and he didn't work for me, but operated in our AO. His name was Larry Huggins. He is local and would be another good guy to talk to. Now this is how close Larry and I got over time, when he made Colonel he asked me to promote him. And I never met Larry till I got there. So, to the point about building relationships quickly—when you build relationships in combat it's like dog years. You get really close under those circumstances. But, Larry educated me in how that all laid out, how it worked, how to work it to our advantage, how to work it to the overarching advantage and how we could help each other get to the end state. That was really important! And the Army guy that followed him was equally as good as Larry and understood that it was about relationships. And they say all the time it's not command relationships, it's the relationships of the commanders.

That is the most important part when you deal in an uncertain environment like this with all those extra players.

[Lieutenant Colonel Larry Huggins was the Special Operations Task Force West (SOTF-W) Commander for Helmand and west—see his interview and that of Lieutenant Colonel Lynch who followed him in command of the SOTF-W.]

Renforth: He was at Calero the base over there and all the Special Operation Forces within Helmand fell under Larry. He was the commander; he was good. [22:56]

Knarr: Did he pair up with the Afghan National Army Special Forces under the Minister of Defense as well as some of the special units under the Minister of the Interior?

Renforth: And I think they were, 444, 528 and 66. But we would augment them at times. As an example, if they would do actions on the objective area we would do the cordoning on the outside to ensure that no forces came in. But remember, I said the overarching mission was transfer of lead security responsibility to the Afghans. So, we were trying to step back as much as we could. Meanwhile, as we stepped back, we were getting them to step up. We wanted to close the FOBs across the AO and let them handle the responsibility across the board.

But at times when we tried to make that transition, there was friction with Gov-Dev, PRT, Regional Platform and the Marine Corps because we became tied to terrain as we were stepping back and the Afghans were taking over. But we would drive to advise. We would drive to the regional centers, the district centers, and advise to the government, we would advise the Police, we would advise the Army at times, you know they would be staying with us and our job was security of them, and provide the security forces assistance enabling functions that I spoke to earlier. Well there were times where we believed all the conditions were met to lift off that area and close the FOB, which was a major logistical undertaking; many times the PRT or the Regional Platform would disagree. They thought more government education was needed within the region before we could close. Well if they were not willing to leave, we had to provide the security for them, so we had to stay. Right, so, who breaks the tie? There were many times I didn't want to bring it up to my higher headquarters, "I don't think they're right. I'm right." Well, who am I? I'm a Marine Infantry Officer. So, you better get real smart on what the metrics are from a government perspective, so you can go in and properly articulate your argument to the commanding general. I would try not to ever get to that point, but I did at times. So, somebody had to cut the baby in half at times and it was tough.

Knarr: I'll bet. You were down in the 215<sup>th</sup> area. [26:09] So, where was their headquarters located and what was your relationship with them?

Renforth: Well the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps was in Shorabak [or Shurabak], which was right adjacent to Camp Leatherneck, General Malouk.<sup>25</sup> But General Malouk's legitimate advisor was General Smith. But, the RC [Regional Command] Southwest Commanding General was really his counterpart. And yet, I had to have some sort of relationship with them because we owned the battlespace and we were transitioning that battlespace to them. Those Security Force Assistance Teams were doing wonderful work down there with the battalion commanders of these Afghan Forces; but they could only give them so much. These commanders knew who the battlespace owner was, so if they needed something, to a certain level they knew who to go to—that battalion commander that was there. In order to make this system work we tried to get them to work through that Security Force Assistance Team.

Knarr: Wow.

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<sup>25</sup> Afghan National Army, Major General Sayeed Malouk, the 215th Corps commanding general. Also spelled Maluk or Malook.

Renforth: Yeah, that convoluted things a little bit, too.

Knarr: So how many Security Force Assistance Teams did you have?

Renforth: General Smith would know exactly, but I counted around 25 at the time give or take one or two. But that is something that he was doing. I think it was a good call that he was there at that time. He put his full energy and effort into getting that down to zero at the point in time where we had to lift off completely. I don't know if we would have given it the kind of attention that he was able to give it. And he had the star which helped him really wield some power around there.

Knarr: Now he had a Security Force Assistance Team out at least at the battalions, probably, certainly at the brigades and at the 215<sup>th</sup>. Who else did he have them with?

Renforth: He had some squad-sized elements with platoons. Platoons, companies and kandak [battalion].

Knarr: What did General Smith have as far as headquarters, and where was it located?

Renforth: Well that's what made it a little hard. He had like a five man staff, but he had access to the RC Southwest staff. But they all worked for the RC Southwest Commanding General. But he still was a voice injected right into the RC Southwest Commanding General.

Knarr: Interagency, you talked a little bit about it and you talked about the guy with the...

Renforth: Yeah, his name was Paul Berg actually. B-E-R-G, who if he was sitting right here I'd say the same thing—a bit of an eccentric fella. You know, but the guy understood the process. He understood what was required to meet the conditions for lift off. He had a tremendous amount of experience in the State Department, and he was an asset. You know, [he was] nothing like any Marine I have ever met. He was nothing like too many other people I have met; but he was a valuable asset. I think if we allow [ourselves] to think that we are only going to work with similar people in those environments and you're going stay with people that either wear your uniform or speak your language, I think you're going to sell yourself short and you're not going to meet your mark. Working with guys like Paul opened my eyes to really understanding that it takes all kinds to make it work, and you don't turn away from any resource that's out there. He really educated me in a lot of that process. [30:30]

Knarr: Now was he a part of the PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Team]?

Renforth: He was part of the Regional Platform, the RP, which is the US State Department and he was located right there on Leatherneck. I may be misusing the terminology, but he was the assistant head of the regional platform.

Knarr: Well that's interesting. You know, there are so many people out there it's incredible.

Renforth: Oh my goodness, and then people started showing up. You will have the State of Georgia Agricultural Development Team National Guard come and work for you. And the State

of South Carolina Agricultural Development Team will come and work for you—do great things, find a way to make it work.

Knarr: As part of that Regional Platform?

Renforth: No, they became a part of 7<sup>th</sup> Marines.

Knarr: They just came down to help. That's amazing. I know you were trying to enlist people from agriculture to come, but I thought they would put them as part of the PRTs.

Renforth: No, no, they were actually a big part of the RC. They would be further delegated down to us because they would be in our battlespace. So we had to find room for them and then provide security for them as they were a part of the battlespace.

Knarr: That's the big deal I would think.

Renforth: These are great Americans. These are patriots who were out there trying to do their job. They were National Guard with different expertise than a Marine Infantryman, but they were great. They just wanted to be a part of the team.

Knarr: What else would you say on interagency that you think is important?

Renforth: Well, I think the key is trying to expose yourself to the interagency players prior to deployment. Or at least expose yourself to what they bring to the table—who is going to be out there, and what they can and can't do for you. They have their own chain of command, their own biases, their own cultures, but you have to work together. And you've got to try to understand why they believe they are there. And they need to understand why you're there. In many ways, I guess, if you look back on it, I think, essentially we worked for them. That's who is really calling the shots at the highest levels. So, if we think we're the military and we're calling it here, you had to get over your ego pretty quick and understand what the State Department mission and agendas are while they're in country.

Knarr: Did you have any UN or UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] down in your area?

Renforth: No, not where I was. Some NATO, not much intergovernmental. I didn't have that at our level.

Knarr: Ok. Anything else you would add about multinationals? We talked about the Georgians, the Brits. I guess that's the two that we mostly talked about.

Renforth: Well, the Australians were out there as Task Force 66. Yeah, but they were all coming with their caveats. I would rather have them with caveats than not have them at all. I don't think caveats are a bad thing. At least they are there.

I found out pretty quick those Australians are pretty aggressive, pretty tough, and didn't have too many caveats. They work hard. But everybody had their own niche of what they were go-

ing after. We even had the DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency], there going after the drug smuggling and things of that nature. We would facilitate their operations as well, and they went after specific target sets across the AO and not just Al Qaeda. [35:05]

Knarr: Did you do a lot of work in Sangin?

Renforth: Yeah, a decent amount in Sangin. Down in the south, Marjah, Nawa, Garmser is where a lot of the drug routes would come from—down from the south up to the north. We interdicted those ratlines quite a bit through aero interdiction force with DEA in [the] back of helicopters as we were identifying these guys. [We] dropped down in on them, and they had good success.

Knarr: Was the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] working in your area also?

Renforth: We did not deal with FBI much; DEA mostly.

Knarr: This nexus between drugs and insurgents and everything else is just incredible. We talked VSO [Village Stability Operations] ALP [Afghan Local Police]. I would like to get a hold of Larry Huggins if possible and Paul Berg. You have some notes, please, talk to those.

Renforth: I was trying to collect my thoughts as you were asking me some of these questions. I first had to get together, what were we comprised of as RCT-7, who are our adjacent units, and what did the AO look like? And that's when I made that comment to you earlier—the most challenging thing we had when we were out in Helmand Province was the joint inter-agency, intergovernmental, multinational actors that were all there, who I'd never worked with before, who I'd no exposure to before. I didn't know what everybody's equities were, the decision making bodies that were involved, and how it affected what I considered our mission to be at RCT-7.

I talked about the Regional Platform, State Department, US Department of Agriculture, US Agency for International Development [USAID], and US Army Corps of Engineers. DEA, which we had support with QRF [Quick Reaction Force] missions; Georgia and South Carolina Agribusiness Development Teams, various Intelligence Agencies detachments that were aboard Camp Leatherneck, and the Republic of Georgia Liaison Team embedded officers and the Special Operations Forces. All that made up the combined team that was out there.

All this while doing what we considered the non-doctrinal piece of the Security Force Assistance, which for the longest time we were trying to define. We defined it for what it wasn't. And then we defined it on what we can deliver to the Afghan National Security Forces. And then we had to also deal with the force manning levels. So, we started with 7,600 across the board for Marines for us to get down to 4,200 by the time we left. So when you do a mission analysis on problem framing, the end state of your mission analysis is usually a task organization. Well, when you're hit with force manning levels, you've got to work backwards. So, this is what you have, tell me what you can do. And that's how we had to make decisions.

This is not how any of us were ever raised, but that's what you, as a Marine, figured out and you do it. And that's in addition to dealing with all these actors. So, we even had our own agendas. As we had some of these FOBs [Forward Operating Base] we wanted to shut down, we found out as our manning levels went down, our criteria to shut the FOB down maybe went down a little bit. But there might be other reasons to keep it.

So it's just not as simple as saying, "Hey, we've got to keep this here so we can talk to the district governor." There may be other options to maintaining an area. As an example, "I'll fly you down once in a while. Or I'll drive you there." So my staff would work so hard to find work-a-rounds and saying, "Ok, maybe we don't have to be co-located. How about three of these entities come to this centrally located FOB that we can protect with the amount of manpower that we have, and we'll drive to advise with the proper security. Can you do that?"

Well, some of these civilians [have] duty/care responsibilities, too, that you have to take into account. [14:35] Ok, they can do that, but we have to give them a hot shower here or whatever. Ok, we can do that for you. So, there was a lot of negotiating happening and meanwhile all we're thinking is that this thing needs to shut down. All I know is there is an end-state to this thing, and we are leaving, and this all has to go back to the United States. But you just can't let that blind your judgment. You still want to leave it correctly. And these guys are patriots. They are out there working hard themselves and will do the right thing.

I think [that] covers it overall. We talked about SOF Integration and that was another piece I wanted to mention.

Knarr: The VSO ALP, you mentioned that some were on FOBs. Were there any in the villages?

Renforth: The one we had extracted. There was one in the north of Sangin that was out in the village. That was the intent initially, to put them all out there. And I was totally on board with that, personally. I had to eat my words a little bit when we started embedding in Marine established FOBs. Security was already there. They would help here and there. And all the assets that they would bring—intelligence assets that we didn't have access to. And just another group of critically thinking people that could help solve the problem. It really worked out. [41:53]

Knarr: You may not have had an opportunity to look at this, but what did you think of VSO ALP in general? And what did you think specifically as far as its purpose: from the bottom up develop the local security as a temporary measure until the government was able to get institutional security down to them?

Renforth: I liked it. I think it is great. I mean it worked, too. They had the skill sets to interact with the elders, to get the elders to vouch for some of the locals, and to take the locals and vet them. They would vet them and get them into the academies. They had a good recruiting effort. Much better than we can do. They had guys that were trained up to do just that from

across all the warfighting functions. And they came as a readymade unit that required very little care and feeding if any. So, I thought it really worked.

Well, another reason we liked it is because—at the time we were transitioning and losing our eyes and ears out forward. So, as we're getting tied to terrain and getting pulled back and turning over more battlespace to the Afghans, we no longer had that intel source of our individual Marines collecting while they were walking around. So the VSOs gave us another intel source out there. So there were just ways that we had to get creative to paint an accurate picture of the battlespace, and that was just another way we could paint the picture. That's the way I looked at it. [43:41]

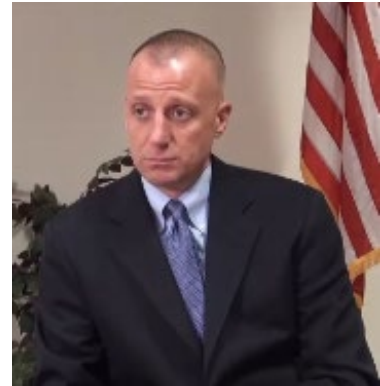
Knarr: That really is important. You're right. We'd lose our eyes and ears out there. When you start pulling back into an area, you have no sources.

Renforth: No. And we knew that. We were even pulling back our intelligence assets, everything. But our number one collector is that Marine on the ground walking and when he's getting pulled back, he's not collecting. [44:15]

Knarr: General Renforth, thank you so much for your time and comments. What an incredible tour. I will send you the transcript for your review. The intent is to incorporate it into a document and multimedia DVD for education and training [just like you saw in the Awakening project].

Subject: Interview with **Lieutenant Colonel Ward Cooper**, USMC, former Commander, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment

Lieutenant Colonel Ward Cooper is currently a student at the National War College, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. Cooper commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment in Afghanistan from October 2012 to May 2013. While there the battalion was attached to Regimental Combat Team 7 (RCT-7). His battalion was responsible for the five southern districts in Helmand Province: Marjah, Nawa, Garmser, Khanashin, and Dishu. He had company teams occupy all but Dishu. The mission was to enable stability within the central and southern Helmand River Valley and was organized against three lines of effort: 1. Further development of the Afghan National Security Forces, 2. enable the Provincial Reconstruction Team, and, as conditions permitted, 3. conduct retrograde and redeployment of Coalition forces.



**LtCol Ward Cooper**

LtCol Cooper was interviewed at IDA on 11 March 2015 by Dr. William Knarr.

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Dr. William Knarr: Please identify yourself—who were you and what was your mission and when did you deploy to Afghanistan.

LtCol Ward Cooper: Lieutenant Colonel Ward Cooper, United States Marine Corps, deployed to Afghanistan as the commanding officer of 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines. We deployed in October of 2012 and then redeployed in May of 2013. While there, we were attached to Regimental Combat Team 7. To put in context the time that we were there, I believe it was May of 2012 the President made the announcement through a speech on the future of our mission in Afghanistan with specific interest on some draw down timelines.<sup>26</sup>

Prior to our arrival in October of 2012, there had been a draw down within the southern half of the province. So when we arrived our battalion relieved a battalion that preceded us; over the course of those three or four months the numbers of Coalition forces in the southern half of Helmand Province had been reduced from one battalion per district to just one battalion. So when I refer to the southern half of the province, I am referring to the five southern districts of Marjah, Nawa, Garmser, Khanashin, as well as Dishu. Over the preceding summer, there had been infantry battalions responsible for each of four districts excluding Dishu. The battalion that preceded us through a series of reliefs took that down to one. So, we deployed just a few weeks after that final battalion had been relieved. We organized with company

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<sup>26</sup> White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama in Address to the Nation from Afghanistan,” 1 May 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/remarks-president-obama-address-nation-afghanistan>. President Obama met with President Karzai and signed the Strategic Partnership agreement and after that addressed the nation (US) from Afghanistan.

teams in each of those districts as opposed to battalion teams. The overall purpose of our mission was to help, enable enduring stability within the central and southern Helmand River Valleys and we organized to cross three principal lines of effort: The first was further development of the Afghan National Security Forces. The second was enabling the Provincial Reconstruction Team. The third was, as conditions presented themselves, to conduct retrograde, and redeployment of Coalition forces. Early into our time, almost coincident with our arrival, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps that was responsible for generally the same area that I just described, the five southern districts, was transferred lead security responsibility and was the first brigade in Helmand to do that. [03:56]

This transfer of lead security responsibility would really define the time that we were there. What that meant to us was that not only did we transfer lead security responsibility to the Commanding General of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, that also transitioned the nature of the fight. Transition, as I view it, was not something that started in the summer of 2012. Transition started when the first Marines arrived there several years earlier, every Marine Unit that was in Helmand Province was focused on transition as a process not necessarily an end state. What that meant to us is, transition of the nature of the fight. I'll explain what I mean by that. Certainly, during preceding years the Coalition force capabilities came to define the nature of the fight. Early on, it was Coalition force capabilities that maintained overmatch of the threat and gradually, over time that was enabled by the growth and development of the Afghan National Security Forces as well as advancements in governance. By the time we were there, our assessment was that the Afghan National Security Forces maintained overmatch of the existing threat. Because of that they no longer required certain Coalition force capabilities. As we transitioned, our thoughts were: we have to transition the nature of the fight in such a way that the capabilities that they have, are sustaining and sustainable to the point where they can continue to maintain overmatch of the threat. There were some capabilities the Coalition forces had that the Afghans would not have in the near future. Again our view was if we continued in such a way that provided those capabilities it would undermine the development of their sustainable capabilities. [06:24]

Along the first line of effort that I discussed our focus was how do we help the Brigade establish those capabilities that they can control and they can sustain. Early on, the fight had been predominantly Coalition forces, to support the growth and development of Afghan National Security Forces. And we went all the way through initial operations through partnered operations through combat advising, so we just took the next logical step which was during the few first few months that we were there we walked away from combat advising. So the Afghans were doing wholly independent operations. We would at times, when it was required, provide them some critical capabilities be it fires, be it intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance [ISR], be it explosive ordinance disposal, those were the three principle ones that we would provide on occasion, but the most significant one was medical capabilities. The medical capabilities

that we provided were at any one of our bases, if the Afghans brought a casualty to us, we would certainly treat it just like it was ours. However, since we were not combat advising anymore and we didn't necessarily have Coalition forces with the Afghan units, we were not able to provide helicopter borne casualty evacuation at the point of injury. One of the things that we attempted to do was to help the Afghans develop their own ground casualty evacuation procedures to get the wounded into some point of the Afghan Healthcare System. We were moderately successful in doing that. However, we would continue to treat them just as if those casualties were brought back to one of our facilities. So, that was really the thrust of what we did. We found out that not only did the Afghans meet our expectations, but they exceeded our expectations on their ability to not only fight but be successful independently.

When I use the term independently, I don't mean independent Army Units, I don't mean independent Police units, they worked together. There certainly was a focus on developing capabilities within the Afghan National Security Forces, but I would offer that the most critical capability is coordination. Coordination between all the various elements of the Afghan National Security Forces be they Army, be they Police and then the certain elements within the Police. By the time we got there, the coordination within the districts was already pretty good, in some districts better than others, but coordination between the Army and the Police was pretty good within each of the districts. Where there was less coordination was across the districts. And the enemy was taking advantage of the boundaries between units and certainly the borders between districts. This is where I will give all the credit to CG of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, he understood that as well. His energy and leadership helped organize the security forces across the districts. He also certainly had influence over the district governments as well. So, we saw an increase in coordination across the districts. That was principally our focus on Afghan National Security Forces and we certainly did things over the course of the seven months that we were there to enable that, but most specifically the Afghans really took the fight and they performed pretty well.

The second was our interaction with Provincial Reconstruction Team [PRT] which was led by officers of the British Foreign Commonwealth Office; it was a British led PRT. There was a US led Regional Platform, but in terms of the governance development, it was led through the Provincial Reconstruction Team. Their extensions into the districts were the district's stability teams that were placed in each one of the districts and had members of not only the Provincial Reconstruction Teams but the Regional Platforms and other actors as well. During the time that we were there, the stability teams changed to Transition Teams and just as Coalition forces had consolidated, so did the extension of the Provincial Reconstruction Team. And there was one District Stability Team for the southern half of the province and their representatives within each of the districts were District Transition Officers which were Afghans, not necessarily locals, but Afghans who were again employed by the Provincial Reconstruction Team that would monitor and assess the District government's capabilities.

We still had advisor teams, Military Advisor Teams, Police Advisor Teams who were continuing to do security force development along those lines that I spoke of. During the summer of 2012 and into the fall, the responsibilities of the District Transition Teams were to monitor and assess, and they would identify capability gaps or resource gaps, and they would package that and provide that to the Provincial Reconstruction Team, who would in turn provide that to the Provincial Government for their further analysis. And again, for their determination on how within the province they were going to allocate resources to get after some of the issues that were still existing within the district governments as they continued to grow. Unfortunately, there was high turnover among the governors in all districts except one while we were there. The district governors turned over if not once, twice.

Knarr: That's fast!

Cooper: Yeah. But, the district governments to that point, because of the political space that the Security Forces had provided, they did maintain political dominance. There wasn't a wide margin, but they could out-compete the insurgency on providing the basic services. So that was what I would call the second line of effort in enabling the Provincial Reconstruction Teams to continue to make those assessments. [13:56]

The last line of effort was retrograde and redeployment. After the President's speech, there was a clear date for the full draw down, but during the back end of 2012, first part of 2013, it was still conditions based and there was still plenty of flexibility. Over the course of those seven months the conditions we assessed were such that we could redeploy all Coalition forces out of the districts. We left in May, so by June, if not the first part of July all Coalition forces were out of the districts and the remaining Coalition forces in the southern half of the province was at Camp Dwyer one of the larger bases in the south.

In terms of how did we get there within the joint, the inter-agency, the inter-governmental and the multi-national? Within the Regimental Combat Team General Renforth built a team that was focused on generally the same, I won't stay end-state because that implies a terminal solution, but we all had a common perspective of what we were trying to achieve. He did that at his level, not only with the Regional Platform, but the Provincial Reconstruction Team, and with the Afghan National Security Force leadership, both the Army and the Police at echelons above ours. He was able to bring them into a team. So despite each one of those entities, our battalion only being one of them, having their own understanding, operation processes, expectations, and visions of what success would be like, we were able to come together as a team and really kind of align our goals. Now, that was assisted to a certain extent by the fact that we had very clear drawdown dates. But again, like I said, at the time we had the flexibility of being conditions based.

Knarr: So you had the five districts to the south; what other battalions were around you?

Cooper: In terms of battalions, there were none, there was not another one. So we had company teams in four of the five districts to the south except for Dishu. However, we supported a couple of Afghan operations into Dishu District while we were there. Just north of us, we bordered the British Brigade.

Knarr: Task Force Helmand?

Cooper: Yes, Task Force Helmand. Above that was what I refer to as the northern part of the province and I don't recall exactly how many battalions were up there when we first got there, but over time the draw down in the north looked like the draw down in the south. It was just on a little bit of a later time line.

Knarr: Let me ask you about command and control. I pulled this chart from one of DoD's reports to Congress. This one is November 2010 so it is a little dated but I think it was still applicable. It shows RC Southwest. I'm curious, what was your relationship? You worked for the RCT. The RCT worked for the MEF Forward. The MEF Forward Commander was dual hatted as the, I believe, as the RC Southwest Commander. Is that right?[18:36]

Cooper: That's correct. And that had been, just as it reflects here in November 2010, that was the same command structure. But what you can see here is the MAGTF, the Marine Air Ground Task Force. Shortly after we arrived there was a division forward level ground combat element and that transitioned to a Regimental Combat Team level ground combat element.

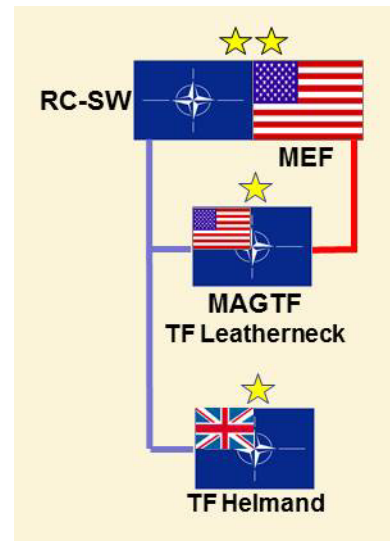


Figure A-9. RC-SW Relationships<sup>27</sup>

Knarr: Did your Regional Commander also have control of these advisory teams.

Cooper: He did, and I'll speak to those. So in terms of the MAGTF and how it was organized. After we got there, there was still a Marine Air Craft Wing Forward. We just mentioned General Renforth was in command of the ground combat element as Regimental Combat Team 7, and then there was a Marine Logistics Forward that, while we were there, transitioned to a regimental level logistics combat element.

In addition to those MAGTF forces there was also Task Force Helmand and there was an advisor structure. In the southern half of the province, as we first arrived, the Police Advisor Teams, of which there was a district level Police Advisor Team in each of the districts, report-

<sup>27</sup> DoD Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, Nov 2010, 13. This is an extract from a larger chart depicting the ISAF Organizational Structure.

ed directly to the battalion as well as to Border Police Advisory Teams, in the southern half, in Khanashin District the southernmost district reported to the battalion as well.

There was, if not a full team then a liaison element at five of the six battalions, kandaks. So there was six battalion level organizations, six battalion level units within the brigade. I'm trying to recall if it was five or four, at least, liaison teams that were advising those kandak or battalion level commanders. Again, they were principally organized along district lines. So, within a district then what the company team was comprised of, although when I say company team that does not imply that they were all organized under that that company commander, they weren't. In many cases the company commander didn't have any authority over, not only the Advisor Teams or the element from the Regional Platform or Provincial Reconstruction Team, but the team concept worked.

So at the district level there was typically a kandak level Advisor Team or an LNO Team, a Police Advisor Team and some extension of the Regional Platform and/or the Provincial Reconstruction Team. So, while we were there that transitioned and all the advisor teams, whether they were Army or Police, reported up a separate structure that terminated at the regional command level and there was a general officer who was responsible for, and exercised command authority over all the advisor teams. So there were battalion level teams, brigade level teams, corps level teams and for the police there was district level and provincial level.

Knarr: How was the 215<sup>th</sup> organized?

Cooper: The 215<sup>th</sup> is a corps; it had four brigades, and the four brigades stretched across, not only Helmand Province but part of Nimroz Province as well.

So the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade is the brigade that we supported and they were headquartered at Camp Dwyer in the south and there were six kandaks, there were four, what we'll call Infantry kandaks, there was a Combat Service Support kandak and there was a Combat Support kandak that maintained artillery capability, explosive ordinance disposal capability and a few others. But each of the four or five kandaks, even the Combat Support kandak, maintained some battlespace. After transition of Lead Security Responsibility they were the battlespace owners as the Brigade Commander organized it.

Knarr: You mentioned Regional Platforms. What were they?

Cooper: Well the Regional Platform, as best I understand it, was the US Embassy's extension into the provinces.

Knarr: Okay. Separate from the PRT?

Cooper: Separate from the PRT, but they worked with the PRT. [25:00]

And the Transition Teams at district level were originally District Stability Teams and the named changed to Transition Teams. While we were there the District Transition Teams completed

their consolidation so there were two members of the British Foreign Commonwealth Office that established their headquarters, if you will, collocated with our battalion headquarters. They monitored and assessed and influenced the districts through their Afghan or District Transition Officers. Those were the Afghans, that I spoke of earlier. This really proved to be a successful program. Although they weren't local Afghans, they lived on our bases and we supported them, everywhere they went Marines escorted them and protected them and got them back - but they still had greater access into the district level government actors and collected on a different perspective than others could. It turned out to be a pretty effective program, at least in the south.

Knarr: You talked about the greatest challenge you found was dealing with the varied and different organizations. [27:10]

Cooper: In terms of the challenge, it is exactly that, building a team, because it's not a clean task organization. I exercised command authority over very few of the individuals outside of our battalion within the southern half of the province. However, because of the conditions set by General Renforth and the Regimental Combat Team, we were able to get beyond that and generally focus on the same perspective in what we were trying to accomplish. Additionally, we were able to work well together to do that. We did not compete with each other. There may be a potential where you have competing entities, but we were able to get beyond that and generally move in the same direction because we built that as a team.

Knarr: On the combined and intergovernmental side, what were some of the nuances in working with Task Force Helmand? In general, what about the joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational (JIIM) aspects?

Cooper: We did not have a whole lot of interaction with Task Force Helmand, but we did have cross border coordination with them. We certainly had interaction the organizations I mentioned such as the Provincial Reconstruction Team or the Regional Platform, we certainly had interaction with the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade and their five or six battalion level organizations. We had interaction with district governments led by district governors and certainly the security forces, police within those districts. And then there were other US forces that operated in the southern half principally to support our battalion with both combat support and combat service support as well. And on top there was another layer, all the contractors, not only to fix vehicles, but to support some of the services at a couple of the larger bases, kind of rounded out the team in the south. [29:40]

Knarr: I didn't even think of the contractor support, I mean that had to be significant. Any other multi-national forces in your area besides the...

Cooper: You mentioned SOF integration. There were Special Operations Forces that would operate at times in the southern half of the province. The one organization and I don't recall now if it was British or Danish, but they were advising Afghan SOF. Through coordination at the corps

level and the brigade level the Afghan SOF would sometimes conduct independent operations and then sometimes operations in support of the brigade which implied a certain level of coordination with the US forces that were still in the south.

Knarr: Did you have any relationship with the SOTF that was in the area, or any of the Afghan Local Police (ALP)?

Cooper: By the time that we were there, there were no Village Stability Operations going on in the southern half of the province. So, there was no SOTF growing the local Afghan Police. It was certainly Afghan Local Police, but by that time the Afghan Local Police, the uniform police, were advised, principally through the District Chief of Police and we had a Police Advisor Team supporting him.

Knarr: Contact information, who do you think I ought to talk to, both Afghan and US, to get a different perspectives on this?

Cooper: I would say the first one is Brigadier General Shujae [name was spelled] who was the commander of the First Brigade in the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps.

And he had an advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Phil Treglia, for most of the time that we were there, and then right towards then end Lieutenant Colonel Luccio I believe. So they were the close advisor to the Brigade Commander and advised his staff as well.

Knarr: So, who followed, who did you, who preceded you, your unit into the area?

Cooper: 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion/8<sup>th</sup> Marines preceded us and the CO was Lieutenant Colonel EJ Heeley. And then the battalion that followed was 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion/8<sup>th</sup> Marines and that was Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Clarke. 2/8 spent maybe two to three months in the southern half of the province. There was one remaining base that 2/8 closed about a month after we left. I believe that battalion transitioned back to Leather Neck.

Knarr: That closed out quick. I guess from what I read, the Marines left a little earlier than originally scheduled. They were talking about shutting down in December of 2014, and left in November. General Yoo?

Cooper: Yes, General Yoo was the last regional Commander.

Knarr: Was this your first time in Afghanistan?

Cooper: Third. It was the first time in Helmand Province.

Knarr: Who were you with before?

Cooper: The first deployment I provided security at the Embassy in 2002. I was with a rifle company. I went back with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion/8<sup>th</sup> Marines in late 2003 and first half of 2004 and what came to be known as Regional Command East. Regional Commands didn't exist when we first got there and they were established while we were there.

Knarr: Were you in Iraq also?

Cooper: I was. I did the last go around in Iraq in 2009, the last MEF Forward that was in Iraq.

Knarr: Could you compare your time in Iraq with the tours in Afghanistan?

Cooper: Sure. You know, 2009 in Iraq and 2012/2013 in Afghanistan, different operational environments, different set of conditions, but in terms of the draw down and transition some similarities. In Iraq, very similarly, you had at one point brigades and then that dropped down all the way into companies in some of the areas, some of the districts. Very similar to Afghanistan. And not only the drawdown of US forces commencing with the growth of the Iraq forces as in Afghanistan, but also the drawdown of Provincial Reconstruction Teams. But in Iraq it was the US led Provincial Reconstruction Teams for that drawdown as well.

Knarr: So the ones in Iraq were all the PRTs US led?

Cooper: The ones in Anbar. I can't speak to the rest of the country, but the ones in Anbar. And there was a Provincial Reconstruction Team at the province level that was partnered with the multi-national force, and then there were district level teams and I believe some teams at echelons below the district in some areas.

Knarr: That's a lot of deployments.

I think we've hit all three areas of interest. After you returned home were there things that struck you differently that you didn't realize when you were there, but when you got back you thought, "Wow, I didn't know that" or "Had I known this it may have made a difference"?

Cooper: No, nothing pops to my head. What I did do while I was there was read as much as I could on some of the current works that had just been published that kind of chronicled the first part of the Marine Operations in Helmand Province, or US operations across the rest of the country. So, sometimes you can lose momentum over a campaign because there's so much turnover and the continuity just gets lost over time. So reading some of those recent publications, at least gave me a sense of what had transpired two, three, four years prior to getting there.

Also, the way Marine forces deployed, battalions from a certain division within the Marine Corps would all deploy to the same location, so the battalion commanders that preceded me in Afghanistan, I knew all of them and certainly had a chance to spend time with them when they got back, so through that I had somewhat of a perspective. And certainly there's historical records that you can read through. I mentioned that we had company teams at each one of the districts that had previously been occupied by battalions, so certainly all the campaign plans and the op orders that were written. As I would travel I had a chance to look through those and get a sense of what had transpired a couple/three years and what the expectation of, or the definition of success was, and where we were at in terms of potentially meeting that. [40:29]

Knarr: What books did you read that you found most helpful?

Cooper: Graveyard of Empires and Little America, and others.

Another point, I know you are kind of focused on the JIIM, and I think I put some comments in an email back to General Renforth that you may have had a chance to look at.

Knarr: Yes, I have.

Cooper: When setting the conditions ahead of time, establishing those pre-need relationships, maybe not person to person, but to gain a greater appreciation of the various organizations and entities that you'll operate with is important, because invariably this is going to be a pick-up team. And you'll continue to show up with different organizational cultures, different resources limitations, different perspectives on what success is...building those relationships in advance of that goes a long way to try and to set the conditions for a successful team when you're deployed.

Knarr: How would you have done that?

Cooper: You can't do it six months prior. In terms of professional military education, transforming our institutions into incubators for the interagency. There are some limited opportunities to exchange, mostly military serving in other departments, but those are typically long term. I think there's a way to do shorter term, even if it's 30 days, 90 days, at various points over your career. You may not get to a point where somebody you knew as a captain just somehow ends up in the area that you're operating in, but you gain a greater appreciation of those entities and how they work and what their perspective is and what they're trying to achieve and how you could better align your goals.

Knarr: At what grade should that start?

Cooper: Where we are now, you're operating at the company grade level and you don't need a three-year exchange tour in, pick your department.

Knarr: Maybe a one-year fellowship?

Cooper: Even less than that. It's, you know, 90 days here, 180 days there can really give you an inside perspective.

Knarr: Colonel Cooper, thank you very much for your insights. I will send the transcript to you for your review.

Subject: Interview with **Brigadier General Daniel Yoo**, USMC, former Commander, Marine Expeditionary Brigade—Afghanistan and Regional Command Southwest.

Brigadier General Daniel Yoo, USMC, is the Deputy Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California. He commanded the Marine Expeditionary Brigade—Afghanistan, and Regional Command Southwest (RC-SW) in Helmand and Nimruz Provinces from 5 February to 26 October 2014 when he turned Camp Leatherneck over to the Afghan National Army's 215<sup>th</sup> Corps. Additionally, from July 2009 to April 2010, he commanded the Regional Corps Advisory Command Central (RCAC-C) 3-7, 201<sup>st</sup> Corps, Afghan National Army.



**BGen Yoo**

BGen Yoo was interviewed at his office at Camp Pendleton, California on 31 March 2015 by Dr. William Knarr and MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC, Retired.

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Dr. William Knarr: Sir, Who are you and what was your mission and when did you deploy to Afghanistan.

Brigadier General Daniel Yoo: My name is Dan Yoo, Brigadier General, United States Marine Corps. I went over initially as I MEF Forward, Marine Expeditionary Force Forward out of Camp Pendleton, CA. Once we took, transfer of authority [TOA], I became Marine Expeditionary Brigade—Afghanistan with the larger responsibility as Regional Command South West, which was a Joint, Coalition, Inter-Agency Task Force in the southwest portion of Afghanistan, particularly responsible for Helmand and Nimroz Provinces. We actually took TOA on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, with the original intent to close down 31 December based on the transition from the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] mandate to the Resolute Support Mission. But based on conditions on the ground and guidance from COMISAF [Commander ISAF] we moved to the left [on the schedule] to 31 October, with the flexibility to close down and transfer full security responsibility to my Afghan counterparts within a 10 day window from 31 October to 21 October essentially. We actually did the End of Operations Ceremony for that particular RC on the 26<sup>th</sup> and we flew out on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October. [02:07]

Knarr: And what was your mission?

Yoo: There were multiple missions. The two major lines of operations while we were there were: Security Force Assistance and then what they called Force Posture, which is really a combination of Coalition retrograde and redeployment of personnel assets, as well as transfer of major infrastructure, both tactical and operational. Underneath that there were several lines of effort in order to continue the transition to RSM [Resolute Support Mission].

Initially, when we took TOA, there were three lines of operations and they were security, with the line of effort Security Force Assistance, with Governance, and then the Force Posture piece. But as we got there, the departure of the Inter-Agency and non-Government organizations, in some cases pre-dated our arrival. Their capacity was definitely reduced. Other than preparing for the elections and supporting the Afghans, the Governance line was really not a major portion of our deployment there with the PRT and the Regional Platform already retrograding to Kabul for centralization.

Knarr: As the Commander of Regional Command Southwest, how were you organized?

Yoo: When I got there, we had two major areas of operations [AO]: All of Helmand and Nimruz. But that was really broken down into what was a US led portion, which was the majority of Helmand and Nimruz, and then the UK, which had Task Force Helmand. At the time, I took TOA they were NATO TACOM underneath my authority. Later they disaggregated. They took the one-star level command level out and they became NATO OPCON underneath my command. Just because of the FML, Force Manning Level, requirements and to facilitate retrograde and redeployment. [04:45]

Essentially, there were eight different countries not including our Afghan partners. The US provided the preponderance of force. I had a one-star UK Deputy and a very integrated staff, mostly UK but we had some of the other NATO Partners, such as Danes, and the Estonians as part of the staff. We also had Tongans, we had Bosnians, we also had Georgians and Jordanians as well underneath this combined staff. So, it was a pretty interesting staff from the perspective of the Multi-National aspects.

We also had Inter-Agency partners participating as well and all the services, the US services and the reserve components in some regards because of the National Guard Reserve participation. There was a huge civilian population in support with LOGCAP and some of the service they provided, as well as contract, both Government employees and contract services. So when we initially got there we probably crested at about 20,000 people all together. Much larger than people really read in the media because of the mixture of the Coalition aspect and the civilian support to the Coalition.

Knarr: You mentioned Inter-Agency. What about Inter-Agency? [06:10]

Yoo: When we first got there, we had elements of law enforcement, we had other Government Agencies, Department of State primarily, but that capacity had been reduced quite a bit by the time we got there in anticipation of the transition from the NATO Mission to the Resolute Support Mission, the ISAF Mission I should say. We also had Inter-Governmental Organizations meaning UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan], ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] and then you also had a Helmand PRT, which was a British-led Provincial Reconstruction Team. So it was a unique Command and Control relationship; probably not ideal when you talk about unity of command. People talk about a unity of effort;

that was probably more realistic. The goal was unified action to make sure that we could plan deliberately, synchronize, coordinate, and integrate both governmental and non-governmental organizations in support of the military campaign.

When we started the Campaign in 2001, which I was a part of with Task Force 58, it was really a very small conventional force and a very large SOF contingent. Then we went to the Civilian Surge, which was also underway. The civilian surge probably never manifested itself to what people anticipated, but the transition of who was in the lead at that point was starting to move toward the civilian capabilities there with the military in support. But near the end because of the retrograde and redeployment aspects, the military was brought back to the forefront because of the logistical aspect, to get everything out of there in a timely, safe and complete manner. [08:28]

Knarr: Sir, could you go over these charts?

Yoo: Sure. These are a couple slides that we used and to give you a perspective of where we were. [09:00]

**The first slide shows us in May '14**, and this is really the NATO Strategic Command and Control structure. It is pretty basic. I think the key things to point out here, at the time of this particular slide General Dunford was COMISAF and then my immediate operational headquarters was COMIJC, and that was a combined command. He was Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson, United States Army, the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Commander. At the same timeframe, you had a US Air Force element, AFCENT [Air Force CENTCOM] who was the CFACC [Combined Forces Air Component Command] and he also wore a NATO hat as well. You had the USFOR-A which was General [Dunford], that was his other hat executed by a Two Star that had both the advisory capacity [MAG] and a CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command—Afghanistan] hat.

And then the other one of significance is the SOF two star command element in NSOCC-A [NATO Special Operations Component Command—Afghanistan]. He had a US hat as well as a NATO hat. And then the Regional Commands as you can see lined up in here. The NATO Training Mission Afghanistan [NTM-A] was really the force generation institutional development similar to what we would say in the Marine Corps is a Training and Education Command and similar to the Army as TRADOC and Fort Leavenworth.

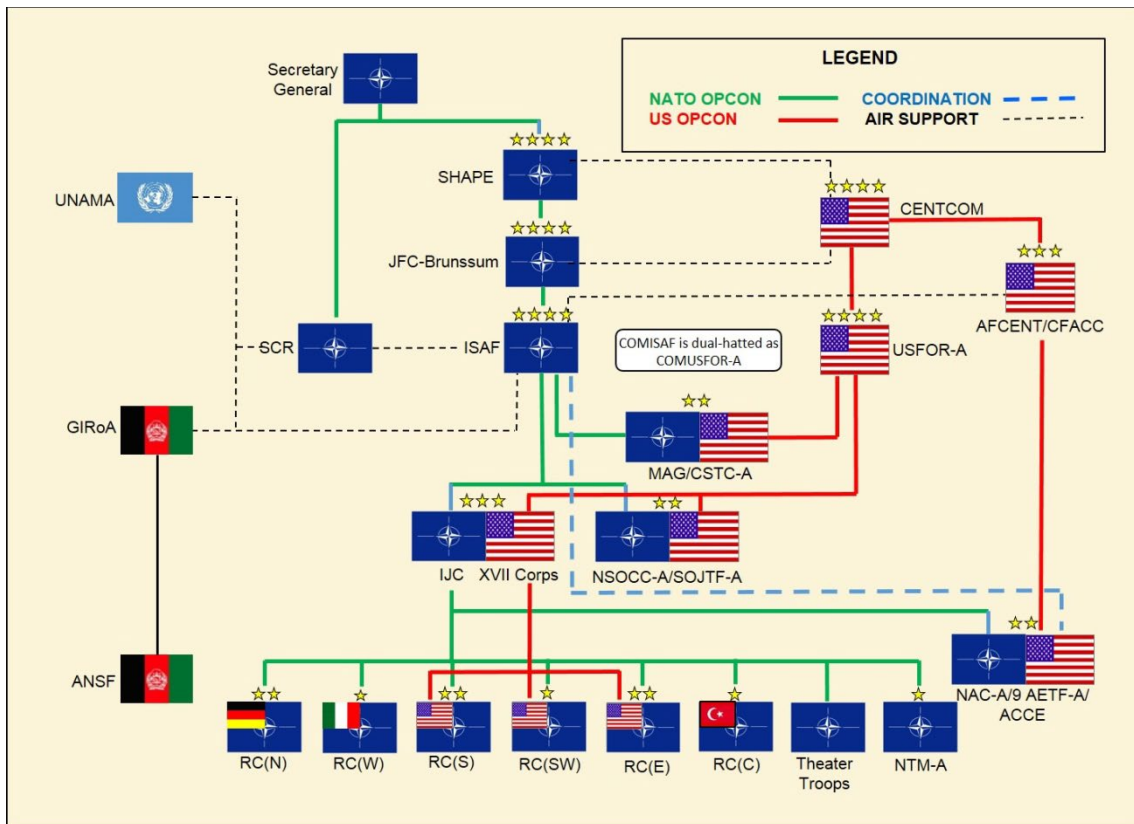


**Figure A-10. NATO Strategic Command and Control (as of 1 May 2014)**

Knarr: Can I ask you something about this real quick?

Yoo: Absolutely.

Knarr: Normally I see the NTM-A up here [dual-hatted] with CSTC-A on a lot of the other charts. And here I see it split, with CSTC-A as a two star in the middle of the chart and NTM-A as a one star down here. Was I wrong?

Yoo: I think initially when we started the CSTC-A really was Force Generation in that it was a single entity. But somewhere during the campaign, I think probably 2013/2014 they broke out in the NATO Training Mission Afghanistan in anticipation of the reduction of the US contribution. And so the CSTC-A was the US contribution to the overall support and the NATO Training Mission Afghanistan was really the Multi-National component. And then you'll see in the slides as well, NTM-A moving to the forefront. Because, there were inefficiencies at different command elements reporting to vertical vice horizontal. The intention was to make the supporting establishment, the force generation commands more responsive

to the operational chains. So I think it was probably the right decision to do at the time of the campaign especially after close to 10 years of participation in Afghanistan. [12:05]<sup>28</sup>

So as you see the transition here [looking at a second, more detailed slide not shown here], again, to start with the question that you just had. The CSTC-A organization worked for USFOR-A on the US side. The real Multi-National organization for force generation was NTM-A. And the NTM-A responded directly to the IJC Commander, therefore, there was accountability from an operational perspective when you talked about sustainment and making sure the Afghan Corps had timely logistical support. And the ministers were all in support of that. So as you can see this is a little bit from macro to more detailed with the different task forces that were out there.

For us down in RC Southwest things did not change dramatically other than NTM-A reporting directing to the IJC Commander. So therefore, when we would have our commanders' huddle I think there were some efficiencies and much better coordination collaboration because of that. For instance, when we were talking about force generation, each of their regional commands actually had a boot camp where we actually force generated the ANSF. At one time, they wanted to centralize all that in Kabul; from a demographic or geographic piece you just couldn't do it. At the same timeframe by having it down at the Regional Commands, we had more influence on the product that came out. What we wanted was centralized standardization, but de-centralized execution. And having NTM-A working directly for the operational commander facilitated the coordination where they weren't making changes in POI, or *tashkil*, which is the same as MTOE for the Army, table of organization, and equipment for us. Therefore, there was more discussions on what the second and third order of effects were, especially this late in the campaign. So that worked out really well. And again, I don't think any of this changed dramatically other than the size of the organizations and the reduction. As we got closer to the end of 2014 the goal was setting the conditions for Resolute Support. That way the RCs either transitioned to a training, advise, assist command [TAAC] or in our case the decision was made to close down RC Southwest and transition that to the Afghans. So that's what this one shows. [14:50]

Knarr: That's interesting, according to the chart, the numbered task force [TF 94-7.1] are under the SOJTF-A...<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> On 21 Nov 2009, the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan was established and the Commander of the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) was dual-hatted as CSTC-A/NTM-A. Previous commanders were two-star generals. With the NTM-A's establishment, the position became a three-star position with LTG William Caldwell taking command from MG Robert Durbin. In about the spring of 2014, the NTM-A split off from the CSTC-A. The NTM-A position was reduced to a one-star position with Brig Gen Hetherington, Canadian, taking command of NTM-A in July 2014. See Afghanistan Order of Battle, Institute for the Study of War, Aug 2014; about that time MG Kevin Wendel, USA took command of the CSTC-A under USFOR-A. Also see, LTG Daniel Bolger, USA (Ret) and former commander of CSTC-A/NTM-A, interview, Volume II.

Yoo: Well, there was a TACON relationship [between the SOJTF-A and TF 94-7], but if you look at the US OPCON it still went back to TF 94-7 [that was OPCON to CENTCOM] and there were really two different missions. There was the counter-terrorism mission and there was the train, advise, and assist mission there as well, as far as advising the ANASOC [Afghan National Army Special Operations Command]. So, it was still a US OPCON with a TACON relationship with the two star SOF Commander. And again, that was for unity of effort, unified action. There was always that relationship to some extent. It may have been a coordination line, but the TACON line there I think facilitated cohesion.

Knarr: Another question and it may be on a different chart, these Security Force Assistance Teams, the SFATs, what was their relationship with you? Didn't you have so many of those within your regional command?

Yoo: Yes. Again, some lessons we learned. We used to have a lot of ETTs [embedded training teams] in the SFATs. They were located throughout the battlespace. They were in what we would call, and probably not accurately, from probably late in 2000's we called them Coalition Battlespace Owners. They really weren't the battlespace owners. The Afghans were the battlespace owners. They were really the dimension managers. We started changing the term because it was probably more accurate with the Afghans in the lead. And so, you had all these ETTs running around that worked for CSTC-A at the time, which was a training organization, not an operational organization. But because they were partnered and embedded with the Afghans there was an operational aspect. And because of that, it wasn't very efficient. And quite honestly, it caused a lot of friction operationally, especially when an Afghan organization with Coalition embedded trainers got into contact; in some cases, it was catastrophic.

So, what they tried to do was realign these, and again, it gets back to where I think we had two campaigns. We had the advise, embedded training teams that were building partnership capacity for the Afghans. You had the larger conventional forces in there that were trying to clear, hold and build initially before it went into the counter-insurgency aspect of the campaign. And the two were not synchronized. And I think when we went from the embedded training teams and went to partnering, where we had conventional forces that were actually partnered with their counter-parts, maybe not to the same size or capability at that point, it matured during the last couple of years, with some advisors that facilitated that partnering, we saw a unity of command. Not just a unified action, unity of command. So in my case, in RC Southwest, all the SFATs worked directly for me. They were all OPCON to me. And for the British counter-parts and some of the Coalitions they either came with the NATO TACOM, or actually OPCON in some cases.

Knarr: Ok. So you transitioned the ETTs into the SFATs.

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<sup>29</sup> There is a good discussion of Special Operations command and control and specifically the Special Operations Joint Task Force in Afghanistan in Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations, 16 July 2014, III-19.

Yoo: That's correct.

Knarr: Somewhere along the line they realized that even through CSTC-A had their hands in it they ought to belong to the Regional Commanders.

Yoo: I think the Marine Corps learned a lesson. We had a battalion back in 2007 that was there for a police-mentoring mission. They worked under TACON to CSTC-A, but CSTC-A did not have any resources. As an example, medevac and fire-support and QRF came from the battlespace owner. So it was a hard lesson that I think everybody realized. And it was a complaint, I think, from across the RCs that you had people moving through the battlespace; not just non-government organizations that you're always concerned about that you may be tasked to go support. It was really the military organizations that were trying to do the same thing as far as building partnership capacity and establishing an Afghan National Security Force that was capable of taking the lead and responsibility for security. So, I think it made sense. It definitely made sense in RC Southwest [20:00]

At the same timeframe, instead of going from parallel operations, supporting/supported to partnered operations, to where we started transitioning lead security responsibility, to eventually full security responsibility, we went to different levels of advising. Level One advising was when you were right there side by side, shoulder to shoulder so to speak [See bottom half of Figure A-11]. Level Two was more episodic when you would come in occasionally and help them plan an operation, make sure that their vehicles and all the equipment they needed were maintained in a state of readiness so they could kick-off the operation even though they were still going to do that unilaterally. Level Three advising was where you would stay more at the institutional level, at the headquarters level, and provide that advising/advice down at the tactical level as we were doing in Level One partnering. That really was what we were doing in Afghanistan about probably from 2001/2002 timeframe up until about 2013. And then we started transitioning.

Now in some cases SOF maintained a Level One relationship because of the CT nature of their mission. And even today, I think in some cases, they're doing Level One, Level Two. But, most of the conventional forces, certainly from what I understand now and what the intent was when they came up with the training, advising, and assist command, was going to be Level Three Partnering.

Knarr: Thank you. [21:50]

Yoo: This [discussing Slide 3, not shown here] just gives you a more macro look at RC Southwest. This is what I took as I transferred authority from II-MEF as RC Southwest on 5 February. And as you can see, pretty significant force in here. I think the key things to understand here at this time is the relationship I had with my British counter-parts. It was TACOM and all the US Forces were OPCON to me. And as you can see, the eight Coalition countries are represented in here. You had Task Force Helmand, which was responsible primarily for

three districts of the 14 within Helmand and it was Lashkar Ga, the Provincial headquarters where the Governor was, Nahr-e Saraj right there, and really those were the two main areas that they really focused on.

For us at Bastion Leatherneck in Shorabak where the ANSF were located, we were up in Washer District [for location see map at Figure A-12], which was just to the northwest of the Provincial Capital there, and you can see we had theatre assets as well that belonged to us and, obviously, the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps was our counter-part with the Corps Commander there. And we had the other pillars of Afghan National Security Forces primarily located in Lashkar Ga where the Provincial Police Chief was and that included the ANP. And when you talk about the ANP, you're talking about the Afghan Uniformed Police, the Afghan Border Police, and the Afghan National Civil Order Police, the ANCOP. And what transitioned from the Village Stability Operations was the ALP. So those are really the Police aspects of the two major forces when you talk about ANA and ANP within the AO. Quite a significant force, and I'll show you on a subsequent slide where we went from very, very few Afghan National Security Forces in RC Southwest to where when I inherited it, it was a pretty significant capability that the Coalition facilitated during the course of the campaign. [24:16]

Moving on to this slide [Slide 4, not shown here]. This shows what I had at TOA. And the significance here is because of the force-manning levels in preparation for the transition to RSM and also the retrograde and redeployment, we had to shrink the capacity. In some cases, eliminate some capabilities; that required a change in Command relationships as well.

I had an integrated headquarters with elements of the Coalition. The British, instead of having a one-star separate commander that worked NATO TACOM to the RC Commander, they actually got rid of the one-star headquarters and the Maneuver Battle Group [MBG], which was a Lieutenant Colonel equivalent (it was a Task Force for better US understanding), he had a pretty robust capability and he came underneath me at NATO OPCON. NATO OPCOM still belonged all the way back through the national chains. And nobody had, other than the NATO Commander had FULL COM. So when you talk about NATO OPCON, it's essentially similar to our TACON for US Forces.

Obviously, National caveats were very important as well, too. There were certain restrictions, especially with the British. If I wanted to use them outside the previous AO of Task Force Helmand, which was really the Gareshk-Nada Ali, Gareshk-Naz area and Lashkar Ga, and the protection of Bastion-Leatherneck and that surrounding security area, we had to go up through the national chain to get out of area authorities for them to participate. An example: When we wanted to conduct the northern retrograde out of Sangin that was considered out of area.

So there were some challenges, but understanding the national caveats facilitated deliberate planning and putting these requests up. But, from a decision perspective, I looked at ways to mitigate that and tried to do it with the resources I had vice go out of the area—only because

of the political aspects. So I did have NATO OPCON with them. With that I didn't have the authority to re-task individuals to a subordinate commander. As an example, we had assets from the UK that we passed NATO TACOM to the Task Force Belleau Wood Commander for protection of Leatherneck in Bastion. At the same time, from the relationship with the JAG [Aviation Group], which was their equivalent aviation element (a significant capability), I never had anything besides NATO TACOM with them. They had a unique relationship with the 903<sup>rd</sup> that passed through their Air Component Command, which was co-located with the CAOC, in Qatar.

Knarr: Sir, when you say "TACOM" what do you mean?

Yoo: TACOM and TACON is something a little less than US TACON. The key about OPCON is really the facility, the time and space for certain missions. So, ideally OPCON is what you want, because it is like our US TACON. You would like to have OPCOM, but I don't think you would get that just because of the relationships and their National Command Authorities. [28:41]

And so, a lot of the assets that were once under the Maneuver Battle Group or under Task Force Helmand belonged to me directly. For instance, their artillery capability, their EW capability, their UASs, which increased what I had internal to the RC and US provided ISR that we owned without going to the theatre. So, we had a lot of resources within the RC for tactical level operations. Again, what at one point during the campaign where I had, where the RC consisted of three major elements of the Marine Corps, all led by a one-star is you had a Ground Combat Element, which was normally a division minus reinforced. You had a Logistical Element, which was a MLG, Marine Logistical Group, which was a one-star capability with all the functions of logistics. And then you had the Aviation Combat Element, normally with a one-star with a variety of type, model, series from assault support, to rotary wing CAS, to fixed wing CAS.

As we started shrinking this down and we started bringing the UK Forces directly under my command from an OPCON perspective we deployed a O6 level MAG Commander because the Aviation element was a little bit smaller, really task organized for the mission we had at the time. The Logistical Combat Element went from a Group Level to Regimental Level, down to a Battalion Level reinforced with all the capabilities that were necessary for us to get out of there. So, as you can see, very, very interesting command relationship. [30:44]

And then we had an R4OG, which was really a US Marine Corps Title 10 organization under the CMRE, CENTCOM Material Readiness Element, and that was to facilitate retrograde and redeployment in an orderly fashion, from a US Title 10 perspective. So the R4OG worked through my component headquarters, but was in direct coordination with me. So, they facilitated a lot of the destruction of gear that I didn't need, and the retrograded gear

that was going to get reset back in our depots. So that was very beneficial for us as we started to draw down as well too.

And the last thing I show you, obviously was the SOF capabilities operating in the area. We went from a dedicated SOF element for the RC. Actually the SOTF West was, at one point, SOTF Southwest, but as the Conventional Forces started to reduce, the SOF footprint also started to reduce. As a result, SOTF West was supporting both RC Southwest and RC West. In this case the SOTF was a Marine Special Operations Battalion out of Camp Pendleton.

We also a British Capability that was not located in the RC from the headquarters perspective. Task Force 196 was located over in Kandahar. However, they did have elements of their Task Force that were working Lashkar Ga; Task Force 17 was working with Bost 170, which was an MOI Special Operations Organization. We also had Task Force 528, which was working within out battlespace with a partnered force [Afghan Task Force] ATF-444. [32:30]<sup>30</sup>

Earlier in the campaign, when I got there we did have a Task Force South Element, which was part of the US OEF Capability, but also partnered with Afghan Force. We had Team Bastion and Team Kandahar. Team Bastion was co-located with us at Bastion/Leatherneck and supported partnered operation with the Ktah Khas [Afghan Strike Force] doing Afghan raids, and eventually they collocated with Team Kandahar. So halfway through the deployment I lost that capability from a colocation perspective, never direct support, but coordination during that timeframe.<sup>31</sup>

[Looking at Figure A-11] This gives you macro to micro look at where we were when I RIP'd. There were two operations orders that drove our mission. This first one was Steel Falcon. It was part of campaign continuity that was started by my predecessors from II MEF and that really carried us through the elections. Post elections, right before the summer fighting season, we transitioned in June to Steel Horizons. [34:07]

Steel Horizons was really the Phase Three and Phase Four. Phase Four is not depicted on this. Phase Four was the actual redeployment. Phase Three was all the conditions we did in order to get there. This included going from shaping to retrograding the equipment, getting ready for redeployment, to decisive operations to set the conditions for the lift off, to the actual lift off. So we had multiple stages within our Phase Three, with multiple steps, in order to get there.

What this shows you though is, as you look at those OP Orders that bounded our operational construct, and our operation construct was really built on three things: Internally to me, on a day-to-day basis I had to balance people, equipment and infrastructure because part of the

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<sup>30</sup> See also ISW, ORBAT August 2014, Endnotes 3 through 6.

<sup>31</sup> The Institute for the Study of War publishes the *Afghanistan Order of Battle: Coalition Combat and Advisory Forces in Afghanistan*, for 2009 to 2013 and provides names and locations of Afghan and Coalition Special Operations Forces as well as conventional forces, accessed 26 Nov 2015, [www.understandingwar.org/report/afghanistan-order-battle](http://www.understandingwar.org/report/afghanistan-order-battle) .

responsibility was a responsible transition. And some of it required closure of tactical operational infrastructure and some of it required transition to the Afghans: what was sustainable and what was agreed upon. With that infrastructure I had on Bastion/Leatherneck, remember that Bastion was a UK base, and with their authorities as far as what we could gift and what they did not want to gift, and what the US had. This was the infrastructure and equipment and people in order to maintain capabilities to support SFA and the Afghan National Security Force development piece and Force Posture, meaning protect the force as we retrograded out of there. [35:40]

So there was a balance of three things; making sure that I could do them in a timely manner. This was all based on the unknowns about strategic lift that could come in, either GLOC [ground lines of communication] which at times were held up for political reasons through Pakistan or because of logistical issues with the Afghans and fuel costs, and then the strategic lift that we used from both the Coalition and primarily a USTRANSCOM facilitated movement.

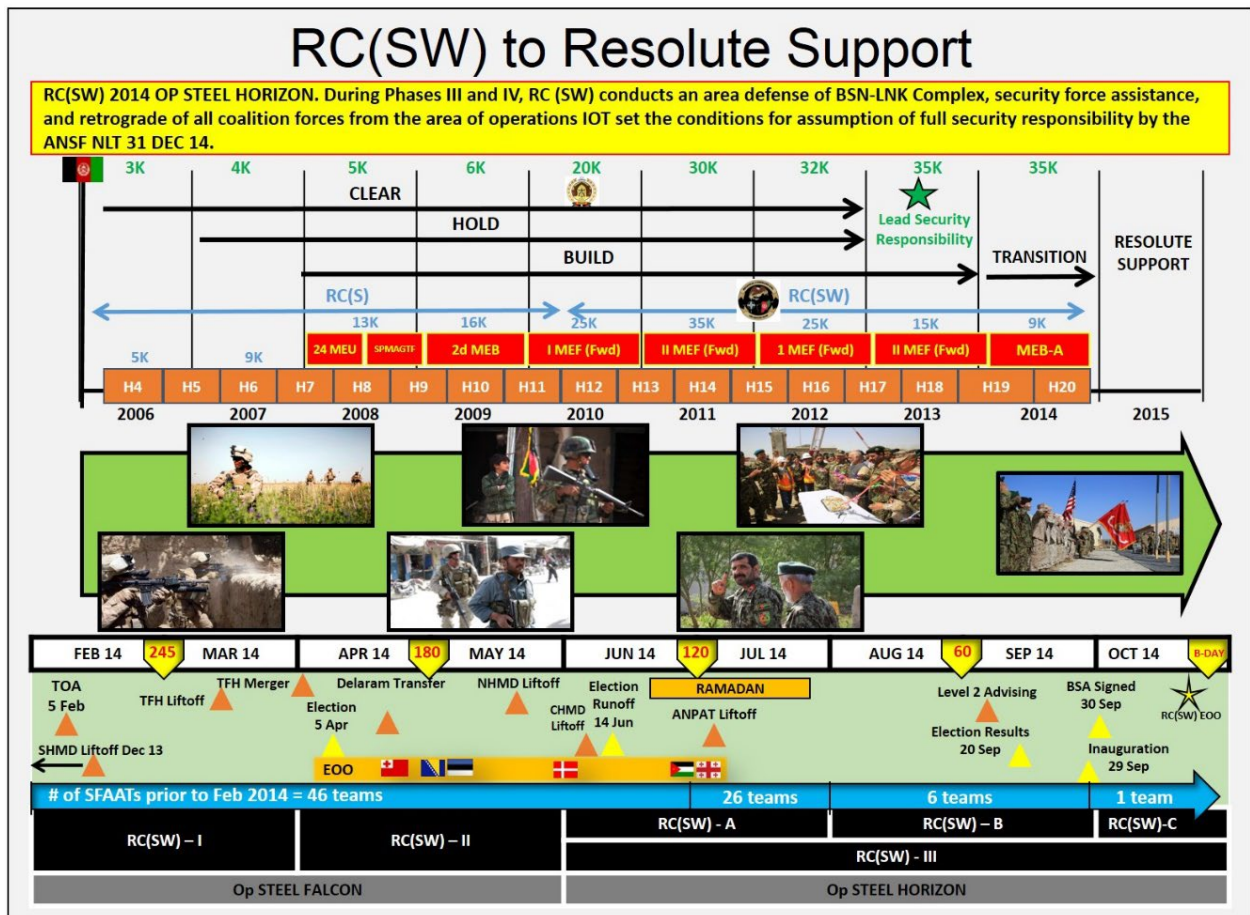


Figure A-11. Timelines to Resolute Support

All that was bounded on a daily basis of three things: 1) The summer fighting season and we didn't know what that entailed. Especially with what some people anticipated with the transition and the abandonment narrative where there may have been incentive for the insurgents to surge in that timeframe. 2) We had the ANSF unknown factor meaning would they be able to step up and take that responsibility as we transitioned battlespace to them and they were the only ones out there, whether they could provide the deep security and maintain stability at the District and Provincial level. And how they were going to react with us, because there was a big concern on green on blue as well too. And 3) then you had the retrograde and re-deployment. So those three things impacted the internal construct on a daily basis.

So when you looked at this right here, you can see the, when we RIP'd in you can see from the month of February to October, all the significant events from the TOA to the lift off of the Brigades. Because, when we showed up in early 2014, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of 215<sup>th</sup> Corps down in Garmser had already been transitioned to lead security responsibility. That was based on the Lisbon Agreement and was supposed to be implemented as we started drawing down in 2011.<sup>32</sup> We actually didn't really start drawing down and transitioning infrastructure till 2012, but the actual lead security responsibility was supposed to be 18 June 2013 throughout the theatre in some areas. In RC Southwest, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade down in Garmser was lifted off where they didn't have partnered force, any advising, they were all on their own and actually did very well, down in south portion of Helmand. That happened in December of 2013. So when we came in there we had Task Force Helmand lift off, like I said, right before the elections, we had the merger, and then we had different transfers of infrastructure and lifting off. The milestones that drove some of these were the April 5<sup>th</sup> Elections, and from what we saw in the 2009 elections, an anticipated run-off.

So, it gets back to the people, equipment and infrastructure. I and my staff had to balance the capabilities because if we started retrograding equipment and capability too quickly in the summer fighting season, or the elections did not turn out as anticipated, then I think we would have increased risk. And then you had the actual elections results and inauguration and then the BSA [Bilateral Security Agreement] signing. The same timeframe this was going on you also had end of operations of the Coalition Partners, and we had to get them out of the theatre as well.

So as you can see, the red triangles show you all the major milestones of when we started lifting off. So, for instance, right after the Task Force Merger and the April 5<sup>th</sup> Elections, I lifted off of 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Delaram because of the capability of that particular Brigade. It was the newest Brigade, but based on where they were located in the battlespace and based on their capabilities we could take risks there. Plus, the fact, where they were in the northwest, I needed to get all that capability equipment in and redeployed.

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<sup>32</sup> Text of the Lisbon Summit Declaration found at [www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_68828.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm).

Then right after we finished in May and we knew that the poppy harvest was done, and they would be busy doing the poppy harvest, there was an opportunity for us to pull off on Northern Helmand and that was Sangin. And we took a deliberate risk there understanding that we had the elections run-off in June. But it was a calculated risk based on what we saw on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April where the Afghan Security Forces really were in the lead. And in some cases, I think they had full responsibility for security. Because of some of the restrictions levied on us from a higher headquarters, we went to Ops minimized during the elections so that the Afghans were doing everything. And based on what we saw on the April 5<sup>th</sup> Elections I was willing to take risk and lift off the Northern Helmand piece. Only because it gave me an opportunity during the poppy harvest where a lot of the insurgents would be more concerned about the poppy harvest. At the same timeframe, I had confidence in the Afghan's ability to help us with the retrograde. So, it really was a seminal event. They were really the supporting force and we were the supported force as we did that ground movement from Sangin all the way back to Bastion/Leatherneck. And it really gave me an indication of their capability. So we lifted off knowing that we wouldn't have anybody at the District Center up in Sangin for the run-off. And I think we made the right decision collectively based on our assessment. [41:47]

Then right after the June election we lifted off the last SFAT in Lashkar Ga and that was the Combined Police Mentor Team where we took what used to be multiple -SFATs and consolidated them under one Super SFAT with all the ANP Pillars and they were collocated in the Provincial Police Chief's location. What you have to understand too is in reality when we did the Task Force merger and the lift-off of Task Force Helmand, we moved all British Forces out of Lashkar Ga, Nahr-e Saraj, and Nadi' Ali and they all relocated to Bastion/Leatherneck. See the only thing I had in Lashkar Ga was the US ANPAT [Afghan National Police Advisory Team] Team. There were a couple British Soldiers a part of that ANPAT Team, but they were the only ones there and we had SOF Forces that belonged to MARSOC [Marine Special Operations Command] and to Task Force 196, so it was a very small footprint in Lashkar Ga, but really, it was the Afghans securing that whole area. I think that says a lot on the conditions established by the RC and Task Force Helmand in that area, but more importantly the confidence we had in our Advisor Teams in order to continue that mentoring and provide that confidence for the ANP to understand that we were still with them at that point.

Then, right after the elections run-off we lifted off the ANPAT team during the Ramadan period where traditionally the kinetics don't drop significantly, but they do in certain portions of the day and that allowed us to bring them back. And then, as you can see, we went to Level Two advising. In reality, because of colocation with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade [of the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps] that was there with the Corps Headquarters in Shorabak we were able to do Level Two advising to a large extent. We were not going out on operations with them, but we were right there on a daily basis, helping them do the deliberate planning, helping them do crisis action planning, helping them make sure that the readiness of their equipment was there up

until we started transitioning and removing people. When we transitioned the Regional Corps Battle School, which was very important, we did that in September so that they would be able to continue that after we left even though we were still collocated we wanted to break that tie up until we lifted off. [44:29]



Defence Geographic Centre, Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom, 2011

**Figure A-12. Partial Map of Helmand Province**

[Figure A-11 see H- numbers] What you see here, and I think a picture says 1,000 words, what the H numbers; hotel numbers represent the Herrick rotation. Although the US was in there 2001, in RC Southwest, particularly Helmand, the UK was there prior to us as part of RC South. And these are Herrick rotations, kind of like our I-MEF, II-MEF rotations, and

MEF Forward.<sup>33</sup> You can see that the size of the British Force back in 2006, the Coalition presence was about 5K. As the US Marine Corps came in there, whether it was just a Battalion or a MEU or Special Purpose MAGTF [SPMAGTF] to where we came in with General Nicholson with 2<sup>nd</sup> MEB in 2009 timeframe, to set the conditions for the RC you can see the surge numbers. At the height of the surge, we had 35,000 Coalition Forces in there. As I started retrograding, we went down below 4,000 on the way out of there. We were down to less than 1,000 when we actually did the liftoff.

But inversely [Top of the chart at Figure A-11] if you look at where the Afghans were, they had partnered forces to some extent, but they really weren't, they had imbedded training teams doing operations. When General Nicholson came in with 2<sup>nd</sup> MEB, he took a Brigade from 205<sup>th</sup> Corps in Kandahar, and that was the nucleus of the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps and they took a Brigade Commander from 203<sup>rd</sup> Corps by the name of General Malouk and made him the Corps Commander. You can see the significant size of not just the ANA, but I think at the same timeframe, around the time of General Petraeus and General Allen, we realized that the key to long term security was not the ANA it was the ANP. We put more emphasis on generating a professional Police Force, moving from counter-insurgency to a more community policing. And all of those good initiatives such the ALP program were coming to fruition. So, when you look at the *Tashkil* or the table of organization between the ANA Corps, Four Brigade Corps with all the capabilities of every other Corps within Afghanistan, the ANSF SOF capability, and then the ANP and all the pillars, we had about 35,000. So when you talk about the elections in 2009...to what we witnessed in 2014 for both elections....Now that's significant, because again, when I lifted off from the Brigades and started retrograding people I truly was the supported force from the Afghans. And the relationship was very, very strong up until the end. So that's what this shows you.

Knarr: That's a good chart; particularly the timelines for Coalition and Afghan forces on the top part of the chart.

Yoo: When it was an economy of effort theater what you see is the RCs and CJSOTF operating with a couple of separate battalions and maybe a division headquarters that were primarily in the east and the south to where we went to the RCs. As indicated at the top of the chart, we went from shape, clear, hold, build and then transition. When you looked at when General Nicholson came in there and it was hot stability; security was what he was looking for. Then it went to District stability and District sustainability. We transitioned from a COIN perspective to more of a SFA, "by, with and through" partnership capacity building and letting them take the lead for security responsibility. This was based on all the things that we had done from not just a confidence perspective and not just from the ANSF perspective, but

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<sup>33</sup> UK operations in Afghanistan were conducted under the name Operation Herrick. British Army website, accessed on 3 Sept 2015 at [www.army.mod.uk/operations-deployments/22800.aspx](http://www.army.mod.uk/operations-deployments/22800.aspx).

more importantly from the local populous that had confidence in their Police Force and their Afghan National Army. I think, it was long in coming, but I think because we had, for a variety of reasons, from C2, to some inefficient organizational structures for the Afghans that it started to migrate to where we would see success. And I think that's one of the reasons why we see the discussions about maintaining some partnership there. I think the Afghans have shown they are capable of doing that. But it's really about the political aspect of leadership there that we were seeing as well too.

Knarr: That's good. Thank you! And again, those charts are extremely helpful. You talked a little bit about VSO, Village Stability Operations, then the ALP and how that has grown. You talked a little bit about the SOTF in your area. It was a MSOB [Marine Special Operations Battalion] and I guess it then transitioned down to probably something much smaller by the time you left. [50:11]

Yoo: Let me talk about the SOF. I cannot say enough about the SOF capability.

Having been the G3 of MARSOC in 2007, I think the vision of the Commandant, the SECDEF, and the SOCOM Commander, and definitely MARSOC Commander, General Hejlik, was that one day we would have a Marine Conventional Unit on the ground sharing battle space with a MARSOC organization, whether it was a company, or battalion, or SOTF in this case. And I saw it come to fruition. It didn't have to be a MARSOC unit. It could have been an ODA, an SF Battalion, the same thing. Very effective. At the same time, we had national assets that were working there too. And the coordination, unlike what you heard about prior to Iraq and Afghanistan, was phenomenal. It was as good as what I saw in 2001 when I was there with Task Force 58. We composited two MEUs; came in with General Mattis and we had a handcon relationship with then-Captain Harwood, USN, Task Force KBAR, because all the aviation assets belonged to Task Force Dagger in the north with Colonel Mulholland. So he had to rely on Marines conventional aviation for movement, QRF capabilities. So, the coordination was there.

When you look at the Village Stability Operations, a lot of people were not in favor of the program, because it was seen as arming militias to some extent. But I think when we professionalized the ANP apparatus, meaning that we created a Lashkar Ga Training Center, not just the uniformed police had to go through there, but also the ALP. They had to come down, get biometric'd, and vetted to make sure we weren't arming certain power brokers up in northern Helmand. I think what makes Helmand somewhat more unique than the other AOs is the nexus of the criminal aspect of the poppy and the tribal system.

The tribal dynamics are incredible, especially in northern Helmand. When you look at Helmand you talk about the north, the south and the central, probably the most contentious area is the north. Those are places like Sangin, Kajaki, Now Zad, Musa Qal'ah, and then you talk about Baghran which really was no man's land up there. When you talk about northern Hel-

mand, the tribal dynamics define the situation. What defines the fighting really is a nexus between the insurgency and the criminal aspects. As you know, throughout Afghanistan it's about understanding the cultural aspects, and the tribal influences, the patronage networks, and it's not just the tribes, it's the sub-tribes, it's the clans and the family ties. And what was unique about this is because of the continuity that the SOF had up there and the continuity the RC had at that time. We were also very, very efficient as far as sharing information, as far as synchronizing operations.

I think at one point throughout the CJOA [Combine Joint Operational Area], but definitely in RC Southwest, there was a lot of [whack-a-mole] going on. When you talked about the night raids, you talked about the kinetic strikes, and you talked about the actual conventional operations, SOF operations, everybody had their own HVI [high value individual] list, their own objectives. It was not an efficient use of resources from ISR to aviation platforms, to QRF and all those things you had to do. There was coordination but it was not very efficient. I think, when we had the capacity it was okay. But as we started changing the operational architecture in Kabul all the way down to the RCs, and we came up against the force manning level restrictions for the Coalition Forces, but more importantly when we saw a capacity and a capability increase of the Afghan Security Forces we were able to become more efficient. We were able to support their operations not just from a planning and providing them some fire support aspect but at the same timeframe, from shaping and disrupting and interdicting to allow them to be successful. All of that, and coming up with certain targets and making sure that the right assets were applied to that target, meaning from a SOF capability to a conventional capability, provided dividends. We certainly saw that in the last portion of our deployment there.

And I think the problem with the ALP is that it can't be the ALP itself. It gets back to Community Police. We saw a lot of checkpoints and it was a pretty static force. What we were trying to do was some rationalization of checkpoints. We saw a lot of tactical actions that caused some strategic consternation by the Afghan leadership in Kabul, because you'd see checkpoints change hands on a regular basis. They were small tactical actions, anywhere from 12–14 insurgents coming over, taking over a checkpoint. I think what we were advocating was some consolidation of certain checkpoints. Ideally you want the ALP there who can identify the "outsider" of the village. And then you want the AUP to respond to it. But the AUP was doing COIN operations which they weren't trained or equipped to do that and they took a lot of casualties. The ANA needed to be doing that. And so in some cases you would want consolidation of checkpoints where, especially in key terrain areas that you knew traditionally were important to the insurgents as well as the local governance and population, where you would have the ALP. And the stuff that the AUP could not respond to, the ANA would be right there. But instead you had separate checkpoints. In certain areas that is probably acceptable, but not in Helmand. By doing that [mutually supporting], you get an economy of force and you have more assets available to become a maneuver force or QRF

to go do other areas as well. I think that was our goal, that was the discussion we had with our Afghan counterparts as we were getting ready to lift off. [57:10]

Knarr: One of issues associated with the ALP is legitimacy. One of the stipulations Karzai had in establishing the ALP was that it had to come under the Minister of Interior. The rationale was to establish or maintain legitimacy between the central government and the local government. Developing those relationships among the ANA and ANP supports that legitimacy. What do you think?

Yoo: I think there is still some inefficiencies within the ANSF structure. I think the international community is committed through '18 to provide the resources for them. I think we already realize that we built a force that they cannot sustain at the 352,000 level when you talk about cross-pillars. I think the targeted number is 228 based on the monies that have been pledged by the international community. I think you need to probably consolidate some of these. You still need the different pillars between ANA, the ANP, the intelligence apparatus like the NDS, and you need a SOF capability as well too. Right now, even in SOF, you have too many different organizations that have different task forces that work directly for a certain minister and at times become his own militia to some extent. You could probably consolidate some of those things. And at the same timeframe, when you look at the ALP, the structure needs to be rationalized and brought into a more professional force under the AUP as well too. So maybe one Afghan Uniform Police. It's the same thing we do in New York City. You have a very international community and the police Departments is looking for policemen from the local area, from that ethnic or racial group there that understands the environment. You could do the same thing in Afghanistan and professionalize the force under the Afghan Uniform Police.

Knarr: Wasn't that the overall objective? I guess the *tashkil* is up to 30,000? And then reduce those numbers as the AUP develops their capabilities?

Yoo: Right. And I think, for instance the Afghan National Civil Order Police, when I was there in 2009 they were really the poster child for a professional force. They were the pros from Dover that would come into a district and relieve the AUP so they could go out and do the sustainment training. Therefore, they came in, they did not have any tribal, family, or patron's ties and they were providing the security while the cop on the beat, so to speak, went back and sustained and trained, to continue to professionalize. What we saw throughout the whole CJOA with the ANCOP, and it was a frustration with all the RC Commanders, is that the ANCOP became nothing more than a checkpoint organization. In some cases, the professionalism degraded to the point where they were shaking down the locals as well. So, maybe we need to get rid of the ANCOP and absorb them or change them. And that would go across the board as you continue to look at the evolution of the Afghan National Security Forces. Like the Border Police, the Border Police in some cases were too far inland to really do their mission. They were ill positioned in some cases, because they had such a large and porous border that you had to put them in the right locations. So you have to look at it from the perspective, "Is the ANA fo-

cused for internal security and counter-insurgency, or is it a national sovereign defense force, and what is the AUP doing,” those types of things. And what can they afford to do?

Knarr: You were also the Regional Corps Advisory Command Center, RCAC 3/7 in the 201<sup>st</sup> and you did that in 2009 to April, 2010. Was that part of the advisory effort? [1:01:33]

Yoo: It was.

Knarr: So, what did you do and how did that evolve?

Yoo: I think you had two different organizations. At that point you had the different RCs and we were going through 10 years of one-year campaigns. A new Division Headquarters would come in. They’d change the names of all the COPs and the FOBs in their area and they would change the main effort on what they were looking at. When the IJC came in they were too small to be completely effective; they were still getting their sea legs so to speak. But one thing they did provide was campaign continuity, direction to the Division Commands that were coming in to assume their area. They would tell the RCs, “No, you’re not going to change the names. This is the main effort that we want you to do and these are the areas you want to focus on”. So I think when that happened we saw a transition for the better.

At the same timeframe, they realized that CSTC-A and the advisors were more effective when we went to partnering, and the whole CJOA realized that we needed to go to unified action (and not just from the military perspective, but from the non-governmental and the inter-agency perspective as well). When we went to partnering I think we saw a significant change in the campaign.

So from my perspective in 2009/2010 it wasn’t unified action. You had people focused on different priorities. At the ETT level, it is pretty simple because you lived, ate and worked on a day-to-day basis, 24 hours a day with the Afghan counterparts. It was all about building partnership capacity. And quite honestly, your survival was based on that. I mean, if you did not have a [unified] force you were out there, in some cases, in very bad areas like up in the Korengal; unless you have a relationship and you knew the capability of that force you were not going to survive. This was opposed to what we saw when we went to partnering and an expanded capacity. I think across the Coalition it helped accelerate the development of the ANSF. And that was a huge difference.

When you looked at Southwest, they put some of their best people in the advisory teams. You didn’t always have that. I was fortunate because I took a Regimental Command in Okinawa and I was allowed to bring certain people that I had a relationship with, so it was not an ad hoc organization. And most of the ETTs that we brought in were from Infantry-based as well as from certain organizations, so you had continuity in capability in those teams as opposed to some of the ETTs who were IAs [individual augmentees] that went to, I think, Fort Riley, Kansas. A lot of National Guard Units with different specialties, and they did not have a lot of ex-

perience. When we went to partnering, and certainly in the southwest, we took elements outside battalions to make Advisor Teams. So they had the relationship with their battalions and they also were very capable individuals. I think that synergy facilitated taking essentially a Brigade, like I said, from Kandahar to make a full corps. If you look at the CJOA the youngest corps [215<sup>th</sup>] in Afghanistan in one of the most dangerous Provinces in Afghanistan was the first to be lifted off. I think that statement itself is pretty significant. Although it is not perfect, and there's a lot of kinetics still going out throughout the CJOA, but they seem to maintain governance down there [in Helmand] and security to a large extent. [1:06:14]

Knarr: Well then you saw the transition from the ETT to the SFAT?

Yoo: Yes, absolutely.

Knarr: That's a wealth of experience there. What did I miss? What didn't I ask you that you think students should know?...

Yoo: Well I think the JIIMs piece is really important. The Joint Inter-agency, Inter-government and Multi-national. I think the key here is that you are never going to get unity of command in a multi-national operation even as something as developed as an AO right now. The key is Coalition cohesion. It gives you credibility. You cannot go alone anymore, unless it is something that is so vital to your national interest that you are willing to do that. I cannot think of any scenario except for maybe the nuclear option piece. Other than that, I think you have to fight in some kind of Coalition, multi-national organization. I think at one point we had 56 nations there.

In some cases, my closest counter-part and a US counterpart, the UK had more caveats than the Georgian Battalion that I had that had no caveats. The Jordanians that we worked with, they were not allowed to go outside the wire unless they had a three to one ratio with US Forces accompanying them. And so, when you look at that perspective, you've got to understand that everybody comes with some kind of national caveats. And you need to make sure you employ that force when you do your troop to task where you can minimize those caveats to get the max benefit. So I think that piece is huge. The other piece, was frustrating for me, is when you look at the inter-agency and inter-government organizations. When you look at what Helmand and Afghanistan was like in the '50's; you see when we built the Kajaki Dam, the irrigation and Lashkar Ga was known as little American at the time. People are bringing their families over, you had women swimming in bathing suits with Afghans observing and the security they had there and compare it to where it went during the Taliban rule and to now. When you look at projects like the Kajaki Dam Project that was really started prior to the height of the surge when we looked at the COIN pillars and economic development. The Kajaki Dam was a development project that had strategic implications, certainly for security. [1:09:58]

And when you looked at it from the perspective of where it was located. Everybody gets focused on the third turbine because there were only two turbines, and some herculean efforts

to get that third turbine moved from Bastion/Leatherneck up to Kajaki (where it still sets; was not put in). It was a USAID Project, but it was multiple projects. One of them had to do with irrigation, one had to do with the turbine in order to generate more power, but the most important piece of it was the southern electrical power systems. It was like in the United States, anywhere else, we have old infrastructure. And if they were able to finish that project, what people don't realize that right now even if we didn't get the third turbine in by having that infrastructure upgraded the efficiencies of those turbines would put out better electricity. And if you get that third turbine put in, 80% of that additional power in electricity was going to go to Kandahar, which would have huge implications of giving legitimacy to the government. Everybody benefits from it. Even with the two turbines up there. We knew in the north the Taliban were shaking down the locals for electricity bills. So the locals would have benefited. And quite honestly, when you look at Kandahar, which is a very important piece, I think, to long term stability there, they would have benefitted from it as well.

There's another development project, the Kamal Khan Dam in Nimroz. That one provided the power for them to have cold storage. Afghanistan certainly in the south has potential when you talk about agriculture. The problem is they don't have cold storage capabilities. So, a lot of the produce that they are able to garner they put on trucks, send to Iran, Iran keeps it in Zaranj in cold storage and sells it back to Afghanistan at a higher cost. This gets back to the inter-agency piece. When we were leaving they were going to close down that project. The project went from about 150 million, to where it doubled in cost with multiple projects underneath it. The increase in price was about security contracts, civilian security contracts. When we were getting ready to leave, and as we were working with the Provincial Security Councils, with the Provincial Governor, the PCOP, and all the pillars, and to some extent the District Leadership as well, we emphasize that this project would benefit the Province and neighboring Provinces and provide legitimacy to his governorship. They realized that. And they were willing to provide security for the contractors there so they could get this project done. So we were able to bring the Ambassador designee McKinley down. When he saw the potential of this, and how close we were to providing some tangible evidence of governance to where the new administration, meaning the Ghani-Abdullah Administration coming in, that this would be a quick victory for them if they were willing to continue to do that. As I said, at one point the State Department and the Helmand PRT were going to write off that project just because of the security concerns of northern Helmand. So, I'm hoping that they'll be able to go ahead and implement that piece.

Knarr: That's the third turbine in Kajaki.

Yoo: Really the southern electrical power system. [1:13:55]

From Tangi down that goes to the Tangi Duri Junction. And the problem is the insurgent actions around those areas where the workers can't work. So, the ANSF, it should be the Police, provide security for the workers in order to get that completed. And there's some un-

skilled labor that the locals could benefit from, and then you'd have to bring in some skilled labor to do the more technical aspect of it, but it's got to be managed by Kabul. And so, when you look at the inter-agency, inter-governmental piece, there's a time when the military has to do it all because we had the capacity and capability. But in that project itself, and the Command relationships were immense. What you didn't see in that is where they were. As an example, you had the Regional Platform that worked for the Department of State, worked for the Ambassador; you had the Helmand PRT that worked for the UK Ambassador under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO, and so you had a coordination line. The best you could ask for is what General Toolan and General Mills signed, which was the Helmand Plan where there would be unified action, economy of force/unity of effort in order to get these things done. When you look at the pillars at the PRT and those organizations that normally come in, you know the security piece is our piece. When you talk about the rule of law, you talk about human rights and governance, and then you look at the third pillar, which is really about economic development everywhere from education to healthcare and agriculture development. Those things the inter-agency needs to do. And security can only provide the foundation, but for long-term stability governance needs to provide that framework. And if you don't have governance, I don't care how large of a security force you have there, it won't be successful. Security can support short-term gains, but we will lose in the end. And the Afghans will lose unless they have that piece.

Knarr: Thank you. Who else should we talk to? Was the Regional Platform still there along with PRT when you were there? [1:16:42]

Yoo: When we showed up the PRT was down to about a handful of individuals. The Regional Platform was one person. The PRT and Regional Platform were collocated with us in Bastion/Leatherneck. So they were there when I got there in February. And then they lifted off, actually we were able to extend them through the first elections, but they lifted off after that. But they really were ineffective. Other than having a phone relationship, or if we flew out to pick up the Governor to bring him back, they had that relationship, but I don't think they were that significant. If they had stayed in force and were able to mentor the Governor and those individuals through the elections like they had in 2009 they would have been a contributor. My Regional Platform had a retired Ambassador that was out at Kandahar and he was responsible for RC South and RC Southwest. He came over episodically. But really, at the end of the day, it was coalition military that was doing those other lines of operations. The governance piece for the elections, the development piece for Kajaki, and making sure that we were tied to Kabul.

They went to a centralized model that eventually, I think, even from a Security Force Assistance model will eventually go from the TAAC [Train, Advice and Assist Command] to a central location. So, one of the things we did because we knew when they looked at the four corners, meaning they would have Kabul, and they'd have TAAC Southeast, north and west;

north and west obviously were the Italians and Germans and those were politically driven. It gets back to the Coalition cohesion. Are they as important as the southwest? Some could argue probably not. But, based on the restrictions on the force manning levels we knew Kandahar was important, we knew Nangarhar especially with the Corps Brigade was important. And so, the intent was, in order to maintain some contact with the ANSF so they knew, and the political leadership, knew that they had some support in Kabul we created a Regional Corps Advise and Assist Cell. We originally called it the SWAAC, Southwest Advise and Assist Cell. It was located in Kabul, collocated with ISAF RSM Headquarters, right next door to the MOD and MOI where they could walk across and coordinate. And they could VTC via Afghan means back to the Corps Commander in Helmand. And we left a Lieutenant Colonel; it eventually turned into a Colonel. We brought a one-star in there. He would be the advocate in Kabul for 215<sup>th</sup> Corps and the other pillars. And we left an advisor that was actually part of the advising team, to get through November, December, January until they had personnel to do that, preferably somebody that had served in Afghanistan in southwest before so they would know the personalities. Therefore, when the leadership took leave from Helmand and went to Kabul they would stop in and see them.

So there was a lot of this Level Two, Level Three advising, and in some cases they had Expeditionary Advisor Packages where they could fly in to Shorabak with the security element to sit down and do Shuras with them. This was a great concept that General Campbell adopted; eventually all the cells are creating this Advise and Assist Cell; eventually, I think, where we want to go to with Afghanistan is to an ODC Model, Operation of Defense Cooperation, and would be Kabul based.

But we left certain expertise with this Advise and Assist Cell. We left a logistics person back. We left comptrollers where they could do the planning and programming budget execution. We left an operational guy back to help them build, deliver plans as they got ready for the winter fighting season and the summer fighting season. And then some kind of leadership/mentorship as well too. So, I think, as you look at this and you look at adaptive organizations it really gets back to troop to task and looking at what you think is important for long-term sustainment.

As we transitioned, my two focuses were Security Force Assistance and the narrative. First, making sure all the conditions were set for full security responsibility. The second was information dominance, the narrative. We did not want the abandonment narrative. We wanted the Afghan National Security Forces to provide legitimacy and confidence to the populous.

But, there were multiple lines of effort underneath those two lines and the Advise and Assist Cell was very important to that piece. We wanted to make sure that the Afghan National Security Forces, from a military line of operation, would continue to sustain the force, train the force, and project the force. [1:22:24] As we pulled out we wanted them to continue the force generation process; that they could maintain the equipment and everything we gave

them; continue to train the people, and then continue to put people in the battlespace. That meant institutional development, meaning that they maintained the Regional Corps Battle School, kind of like ours, to make sure the Boot Camps happened. That their advanced level training was going to continue to happen to include collective training. Maybe not initially from Shorabak; but eventually where they could send MTTs [Mobile Training teams] to the Brigade locations to help them. [1:23:05]

Everybody talks about the ODC model, Operational Deployment Cycle where you have Red, Amber, Green. You are in the fight, you come back, you extend the training, then you go on leave. That may work for a small force like a SOF Force, and that may work in other Provinces, but when you talk about Helmand, and you talk about ANA Soldiers that have been in Helmand, in the fight in northern Helmand for five continuous years, it does not work. You are really getting a fight and leave cycle. What you want to be able to do is send a MTT up there so they can sustain the training capabilities while they are coming off the line still in the battle space. So, that was important for us. The Regional Corps Battle School was critical. That is why it had to be de-centralized. And that's why a Corps Commander had to put some of his own NCOs in there in order to sustain it. So, it came at a cost to him. And I think we sold, at least the previous Corps Commander, the importance of that.

The second piece is we needed to make sure they had a Role Two Hospital capability and we built that. The problem was they did not have the medical capabilities. Professionals, nobody wants to go to Helmand. The Afghans had a saying that they only people that get sent up to Helmand are the people that their mother's hate, and they would joke about that. So, we convinced the leadership at Kabul to take professional medical doctors from Kabul, bring them to Helmand where they would do a two-month, three-month rotation cycle and go back. It was good training because of the type of surgeries they performed. At the same time, it helped develop the capabilities of the medical facilities.

Knarr: And morale. [1:24:00]

Yoo: Absolutely! And their will and confidence. The other aspect that was very important was the airfield. So when we transitioned; it was huge. Bastion Air Field was a 12,000 foot runway and supported the Afghan Air Force for CASEVAC and for the close air support. Prior to that they were convoying from Bastion-Leatherneck, which is about 75 clicks to Bost Air-field in Lashkar Ga. Nothing more demoralizing to a soldier going on leave, or coming back from leave, to get hit by an IED or roadside bomb. And so we had contract air where they were running their own airfield to where they could sustain that. We were looking at those types of institutional sustainment pieces.

The other piece we talked about was operational capabilities. We wanted to continue with the integration of the Afghan Air Force, which we were getting MI-17s and in some case MI-35s out to Helmand; they were based there even though they belonged to the wing in Kandahar or

in Herat. And so they would have a CASEVAC capability, and they would have the close air support because we started arming the 17s. The 35s were there, but the 17 would make up the preponderance of their fleet there. And so they would have that capability. [1:26:11]

And, as I mentioned, we wanted to continue to come up with some kind of modified ODC capability.

The final thing we wanted was security normalization. What we were talking about was the OCCR and the OCCP. I saw that in 2009. There was a big push to make sure we had these for the elections. And then after the elections, they atrophied and nobody cared about them. And then when got ready for the elections again when I came in they were very important and we saw the benefit. I saw the difference between the effectiveness of the OCCPs and the OCCRs, the Operational Coordination Centers where they had all the pillars represented at the district level and at the provincial level. And it facilitated Security Shuras to where collaboration happened, resource allocation where it was more appropriate happened.

It was very effective when they came up with a ring of steel concept for the elections. The inner-ring would be around the polling stations. It would be the Police. The Security Ring outside that would be the ANA. And then, the larger ring, in 2009 was the Coalition Force. For the '14 elections, it was the ANA supported with Coalition enablers, meaning that I would use my helicopters to do assault support to bring in a QRF to an assistance platform from which they could respond to support forces in the battle space. [1:27:45]

So, when we talk about security normalization, we wanted to make sure they used this framework, and that they saw how successful it was and transition, not only from the coordination but the checkpoint rationalization I was talking about. And going from COIN Operations from the Police to Community Policing and let the ANA work the COIN piece.

When we walked away from Afghanistan in RC southwest, if you looked at significant achievements, you look at the elections piece. You look at the transition of lifting off at the Brigades. No matter what you heard about the kinetic fighting season right after the elections where people have said there were 8,000 insurgents in northern Helmand and there were out of area fighters. It happens every year, they're really out of district, out of province fighters that come in there and there were probably 300-400 vice the exaggerated 8,000. And the ANSF maintained security up there for the whole fighting season. As you saw, we had already pulled off. We were sitting in Bastion-Leatherneck.

If they didn't have their MI-17s or 35s we would fly our CAS Rotary-wing assets for a show of force, show of presence. Because of the CDE [collateral damage estimate] restrictions and not being able to fire without a JTAC on the ground, we couldn't fire. And so we provided confidence for them. And they did a great job of maintaining security. So those were firsts for them.

As another first, they were forced to reallocate their forces. In the summer, they had elements from the 205<sup>th</sup> Corps, the 207<sup>th</sup> Corps. They brought elements from the Capital Division. They brought tanks down to Sangin. And they pushed MI-35s. They also put additional SOF Forces in there, and they had a different command relationship where the Corps Commander actually had some kind of operational control of the SOF Forces much to the chagrin of the SOF Commanders. But, I think the leadership in Kabul realized that they had to take responsibility, that we weren't going back up there. And it shows you, if they want to do it, they can do it.

When you look at optimization, and some of the things that General Campbell wants to do as we get smaller and smaller, it is just like any other developed military in the world, you make choices, you prioritize and you make resource choices on a daily basis. And we saw that happening. And so when you look at, from the perspective of the north, the central and the south, I would say the north was good, the central was better, the south was best based on the development of the pillars. And so you look at the elections, you look at where they are today. I think it is a good news story from a security line of operations. There were some missed opportunities, as an example the developmental projects of Kajaki. But, I think everybody, especially all those that we lost over there and their families, from the military perspective it was a very, very successful transition. And I think that's a big take away.

Jones: How do you see the future? [1:32:05]

Yoo: All counter-insurgencies end with some kind of political settlement. And so, when you talk about reconciliation, reintegration, you didn't see a whole lot of it. You saw some discussions on whether it was a significant measure of effectiveness of the future, but I'm not sure about that.

I think in Helmand there will be coexistence to some extent. And again, you can't put our cultural lens on there. Corruption is still going to be there to some extent. I think what we want is the rule of law, transparency, human rights to some extent. I'm not sure women's rights are going to take root there completely. I know we had a lot of expectations from the international community and you hear and read about it all the time. There are positives. As an example, there are some essential services provided to the population so the population has some connection with the government. We build a model of a strong central government. But it's the sub-national level that we need to empower; people realize that; they're going to have to come up with some mechanisms to do that. But it's a higher educated population than I saw in 2001, certainly in 2009. A lot of that has to do with cell phones. Everybody has a cell phone. The news, they are getting is from cellphones. They could be illiterate to some extent, but they understand what is going on. So, I think "coexistence" is probably the best way I can describe it, where you put the right people that have the tribal and the familial ties there that do believe in a sovereign Afghanistan, that is a partner in the region, that has the interest of the population they govern down there. And so, that's why I think the Provincial and District Elections are all very important. [1:34:20]

I'm still somewhat skeptical, but maybe optimistic about this new government. I mean, in the history of Afghanistan they have never shared power. And it was a foreign apparatus that we created. I think in the near term they will work together because of the resources. They are all smart enough to realize that if they don't make it work the pledges made in Chicago and Tokyo are going to disappear. So I think in the near term to at least 2018, that this new government will work. But during that timeframe, if we really want a stable, secure Afghanistan that's a partner in the region, the international community needs to continue to invest in Afghanistan. This is provided Afghanistan can ensure the security for these non-governmental organizations to where some sub-national governance takes root and where the locals believe in national leadership. And I think that's the way it's going to go. [1:35:28]

But, my perspective is subjective and based on the relationship I have with Malouk and the people that are there. He was not the best commander that I have ever seen, but he was certainly a lot better than a lot of the other Afghan Generals I saw. Was he corrupt? I am sure he was getting some kind of kickbacks like all of them do. But, I think the shoulder-to-shoulder partnership between all the Generals and the Marines and service members that have been over there, and the Brigade Commanders, the ones that had continuity there, that mentorship had a positive effect. I used to watch him, and I honestly believe it. Because I'm a glass is half full type of guy, but when it comes to advising and understanding the cultural aspects I'm somewhat skeptical to some extent. But, I watched him. I think he had a sincere affinity for those young soldiers that were missing arms and legs. And I think because of watching us and, I think to a large extent, him being there five years. No other Corps Commander spend five years in a kinetic battlespace and watched all these young soldiers die. I used to go to Ramstein on a regular basis. And then when I'd see him in the hospital, I think he has PTSD because of that. And when we were getting ready to leave, they thought he was going to go up to Kabul to maybe, hopefully get a third star, but they offered him the 201<sup>st</sup> Corps. And then they offered the 209<sup>th</sup> Corps. So, there's a lot of confidence in his abilities, but you know, he's seen so much carnage that I think he needs a break...[1:37:19]

But, I'm a huge Malouk fan because I saw from firsthand he was a reliable partner. And we couldn't have done what we did without his support. And I trusted him. There were times at the very end there was a lot of stuff going on up in Sangin. So I flew up there just to take him so he could see what was going on, because he was hearing all these things about checkpoints getting overrun, the District Center was going to fall. So we went over for a VR [visual reconnaissance] and I put him and a couple of his leaders up there with myself, Chris Dowling my Sergeant Major, one PSD [personal security detachment] and my aide into two Hueys.. And you know the capacity of a Huey. It can only take up eight people. So, we flew up there. He wanted to go down so I landed in Sangin at the COP that we transitioned to them, with two Hueys, no PSD, just the Afghan pillars. And we sat there the whole afternoon

had lunch with them. And I don't think you would have done that unless you know that you can trust these guys.

Knarr: You had confidence. [1:38:26]

Yoo: I had a lot of confidence in his abilities and that showed them how much confidence we had in them as well too. It was a huge morale thing for the Afghans to see their Commander up there like that. So, at the end of the day, when we lifted off, every District Center was still intact. The lines of communications were still intact. There were bazaars that were still intact. There was still fighting going on in pockets, but the leadership was intact. [1:39:05]

They have made some changes, I think, from the provincial leadership down to the district leadership from the civilian side as well as the military, and from the MOD and MOI. And I think those changes were warranted based on getting new, fresh eyes in there. And especially up at 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, which was in Sangin, where the, most of the fighting will continue just because of the Taliban senior leadership they hail from those districts, because of the resources that are garnered from the criminal aspects of it. And because the RAT line facilitation routes that go east/west that come from the northern spine down, come from [Baram Shau] in the north/south and the tie to Kandahar that goes back and forth. So, I think, it's a good news story to a large extent. [1:39:56]

I think the true test is when they lift off of TAAC South. And then you have from Zaranj to Spinbald right there. And then you have all the north/south, the lines that come through at Bahram Chah to come down through Mywand and those areas. You'll see whether it holds. But, that's probably a long way to answer. I think, coexistence.

Stability will be controlled and metered based on the political accommodations that happen with the leadership they put in there and the influence they have on the locals; not just the governance piece, but the elders that are still very strong in there. I mean you've got guys like the Akhundzada family, the Alakozai.

When you look at Sangin it's kind of interesting, because, you look at the Sangin District and that's traditionally Barakzai and Nurzai, but if you look at how we describe the southern Green Zone and the northern Green Zone that surrounds Sangin you have Achakzai that are down in the southern Green Zone, but the northern Green Zone all the way up to Kajaki is the Alakozai. [video 1:40:38] Then you had the Alizai that are in western Kajaki into Musa Qal'ah and Zamindawar. And then you had the Musa Lamani area 1:41:14]. And so, traditionally what happens is you have the facilitation routes that come up through the northern spine, through Delaram, come across and shoot down into Musa Lamani and Zamindawar. And what they do is based on the Helmand crossing point right around Puseh there's a crossing in the river where you could take the lethal aid and narco aid that goes back and forth and you can cut down the facilitation routes right into Kandahar. And that's why it's such

key terrain from the enemy perspective, from the criminal perspective, and certainly from an Afghan Coalition perspective.

So, when you look at the tribal dynamics the Achakzai don't want, any kind of governance. The Alakozai are somewhat more acceptable, the Alizai because the Akhundzada and the history of the family there and him being a Provincial Governor, his brother in Zaranj as well, in Nimroz. They have a lot of ties up there. And so, again it gets back to making sure that you have some kind of relationship with the power brokers that will maintain family ties there. Unless you resettle them which is not going to happen. They have to be somewhat brought into the government, which SMA was, he was an elected official. But, they've got to have some kind of say in the governance and the relations have got to be there. It is a fascinating area. A lot of hard labor and it came at an expensive cost, and not monetary cost.

When I look at this slide [RC(SW) to Resolute Support slide] says it all—what everybody did collectively as a Coalition. And more importantly, what the Afghans have stood up and taken. Now it's really up to them. [1:43:25]

Jones: That's a great slide.

Jones: What about Dr. Cole. The guy you mentioned, Naval, Chris mentioned medical.

Yoo: Yeah you need to see him, but he's in Chicago. But he'll come out.

Jones: Yeah, I can make contact with him and see what his schedule.

Yoo: If I was king for a day, in retrospect, I would probably put more emphasis on the SFA piece that we ended up doing. Primarily with the development and professionalizing of the Police Force. I would have spent more time on the medical capability. I would have spent more time on the aviation enterprise. Because, if you look at the geography they need that, especially with the proliferation of IEDs. And then the other piece was the logistical apparatus.

We built them in our own image. It is no fault to anybody, but we tend to go to our comfort zone. And our comfort zone was the military. We spent a lot of time developing the ANA to where they got pretty efficient. But, we probably should have spent more time on giving them a framework for logistics where they could plan and budget accordingly, and then procure it, and push it out instead of a pull system. Because you have graveyards of vehicles that are not running. And we didn't spend enough time training those guys. But, based on what I saw in 2001 and what I saw in 2009 and then this most recent tour, that's where I would have placed my emphasis.

The SOF piece you have to have. I think the capability that they provide from a national perspective is valuable. But, at the end of the day, the people that maintain stability there are the pillars. The police and the ANA. Because, the size of Afghanistan, 34 provinces over 400 districts, and the demographics there with all the ethnic groups is incredible. [1:46:05]

Jones: You made a salient point about the inter-agency piece and the Kajaki dam. Who can we talk to that they would give a perspective of their decision-making process. Who were some of the American members of the PRT that might be good to talk to?

Yoo: I think the best representative might have been during General Toolan's timeframe. Maybe during General Gurganus' timeframe, because the surge happened during Toolan's timeframe and then General Gurganus continued, but he was really the one that initiated the drawdown and transfer of bases. I mean, the heavy lifting during General Gurganus' timeframe was phenomenal because of all the infrastructure, they turned over.

I'm not sure how happy they were with the Regional Platform. It was a daily collaboration in order to make sure you were most effective with what you were doing. The PRTs and the CERP money sometimes worked at cross-purposes to each other. The military tends to look for rapid return on what we want to do. The PRT, especially the British PRT, looked for long-term achievements. The long-term achievements only work if you have long-term continuity in mentorship. And I think there was probably a seam there.

If you are not going to be in for the long term then you probably need to do as much as you can on the front end and work to provide some capability for the Afghans when you lifted off.

When you talk about COIN you went from population centric to enemy centric to what we were doing when we went in there to relieve the British. Because, they were essentially trapped to their FOBs. They just did not have enough combat power. So when we sent the Marine Battalions up there in the north, and we had a Regimental Combat Team reinforce up there. When I got there, we had one Battalion that had all of northern Helmand. But, at one point we had almost four Battalions of combat power up there. Where it was leader centric, decentralized and we let the commanders on the ground focus: to disrupt the enemy. But at the same time when we got into this clear, hold, then the Afghan Forces would come in to build. We relied on the small unit leader, and the company commanders and battalion commanders—those guys that knew the area best. I think that is why we were so successful at Sangin where the British did not have that capability.

It is about understanding the population, the culture, the intelligence apparatus, and making sure that you can secure and separate the insurgents. And that's always tough. But, I think what we saw up in Sangin was very effective at the time we were there. [1:50:10]

So to get to the State Department officials, I've got to find somebody because I want to make sure you find the right guy. I was not very pleased with what we had when we inherited it. And, it's not to malign them. I think it was just where I came in in the campaign. They had already made the decision to pack up and go. I had one person that I did not have a lot of confidence in, my predecessor didn't have a lot of confidence in. You have this Coalition cohesion but at the end you start going on national lines because you've got certain things that you're concerned about. And I think the British narrative may not have been completely aligned with

the RC narrative because of the cost to the country. And I was very sensitive to that. There is no doubt about it. But I didn't agree with some of the stuff. I mean, because we were staying and the Brits were pulling out as a framework nation, and there needs to be a balance between risk averse and risk aware [1:51:17]

Jones: Everyone we have talked to has commented on national caveats. You just have to learn those, live with those, and sometimes they cannot be changed.

Yoo: I think the best cohesion we saw, and it was a reflection of the Bastion attacks, is people went out of their way to work around the Bastion-Leatherneck Security apparatus and the relationships, because of what happened. And it's all documented. If you get the redacted investigation General Gurganus identified some of these issues. And because of that there was a MOU signed by the UK and the US in order to come up with these command relationships for Bastion-Leatherneck. But, at the end of the day, there were some areas that I didn't necessarily agree with. And I told them, "Hey I own the risk. If I own the risk this is how we're going to do it." And it worked out ok. But, the best Coalition cohesion happened as a result of that catastrophic event. [But it seemed characteristic that] at the beginning, you have a strong Coalition. Then as you look to see where the campaign is going on, you have national caveats come in, and then at the end as you are trying to retrograde, again those national caveats shape the narrative.

So, I think we did a great job at the tactical level and the regional level with the strategic narrative for the elections. When the summer fighting season started and the Afghans started panicking because we had pulled out, some of it was manipulation on their part because they really wanted us to go back up there in northern Helmand and we knew they were trying to leverage that. This went all the way to President Karzia who asked General Dunford for us to go back up there. The local press picked up on those tactical actions I was talking about, small checkpoints and over inflated enemy situations. The governor and his media team and all the things we did with radio Tamadon to help them, got behind. When we were doing all the security shuras for the elections they were all on TV talking about what they were going to do, build confidence and that is why we saw such a great turn out for the elections and very little kinetic activity.

But, when you looked at what happened in the summer fighting season, they were panicking and they wavered in their confidence and abilities. But, it was all predictable. It happened during the same timeframe, end of the poppy harvest you'd see a spike, it'd continue through Ramadan, it would spike again during Eid and then it would go into the winter fighting season that they fell behind on the narrative. And we did not get a lot of help from the national leadership either, because, again I think it was manipulation as well. They were balancing the Coalition withdrawal, the BSA, the runoff, and so I think there was some manipulation and probably bad calculus at the Afghan Leadership in Kabul. I believe this caused a lot of casualties in the southwest and other areas. Had they been more confident and got out in

front of this piece from both the national and the local level like they did in the elections, we probably would have seen a different fighting season than we saw in the summer of '14.

Knarr: You said radio...

Yoo: Tamadoon. It was a UK IO [information operations] initiative to get them their own capability to project to the local populous.

This was a lot of information to cover and I hope I was not all over the map

Knarr: No, it was great! It was unique and that is what we wanted.

Yoo: I have a deep appreciation for everybody that served in Helmand, because, there is one thing that is constant in Afghanistan and that was change. Every day was a new day. But, a great experience, a great team.

Knarr: Sir, thank you for sharing your thoughts, experiences, and valuable time. I will send the transcript back to you. Please make whatever changes you wish, I just want it to be accurate and for you to be comfortable with it.

Subject: Interview with **Colonel Chris Dowling**, former Senior Advisor and Officer in Charge of the Operational Coordination Center—Regional for Regional Command—Southwest

Colonel Chris Dowling is the operations officer for 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division (1<sup>st</sup> MARDIV) at Camp Pendleton, CA. From January to November 2014 he deployed to Afghanistan as the Team Leader and senior advisor and officer in charge, for the Operational Coordination Center—Regional (OCCR) in Regional Command Southwest (RC-SW) under the command of Brigadier Daniel Yoo, Commanding General of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) Afghanistan and RC-SW. This was a significant time in Afghanistan as the Afghan National Elections were held in April and the run-off elections were conducted in June. Additionally, Colonel Dowling saw and helped lead the downsizing and lift-off of Coalition force advisory capacity and transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghans in RC-SW during that period.



**Colonel Dowling**

Colonel Dowling was interviewed at 1<sup>st</sup> MARDIV on 31 March 2015 by Dr. William Knarr and Major General Thomas Jones, USMC, Retired.

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Knarr: When you were in Afghanistan, what was your position, the capacity that you were filling when you were there?

Dowling: Just prior to going into Afghanistan, I did a 14-month advisor tour in the United Arab Emirates for the Presidential Guard. I had finished that tour in July and then I picked up a new team that prepared to be the OCCR [Operational Coordination Center—Regional] for Afghanistan in Helmand province under MEB-Afghanistan Brigadier General Dan Yoo. We deployed in early January 2014 for our mission.

Knarr: What was the mission?

Dowling: The OCCR is the coordination center for the region, which includes two distinct provinces: Helmand province and Nimroz province. It included two major international borders, one with Pakistan and the other with Iran. So [with] the tribal dynamics, the leadership, and the criminal narco activity also in the area to include the Taliban, we had a very dynamic environment. I was the OIC of a 13-man team originally. We stood up in July. We finished up our final Advisory Training Group [ATG] training at 29 Palms 23 December, took our two weeks leave, and deployed in January 2014.

Our campaign plan at that time included the elections, the elections, the elections. As soon as we hit the ground, we started planning for those national elections in Afghanistan.

Let me back up, prior to that, our ATG and our training was under a very compressed timeline. We modified our training plan to fit this unique role that we would play in the political

realm, and to support the command and control structures necessary in Helmand and Nimroz. We spent a great deal of time with radios; I am an infantry officer by trade, but I brought in comms [communications] gurus and several FACs, JTACs [Joint Terminal Attack Controller], to support the team. In addition, I had some logistics SMEs [subject matter experts] on the team to help with facilities management, etc. We spent three and a half weeks going through a 6-week syllabus of Dari; we spent time in San Diego State University, we practiced about 10 hours in the classroom and about 2.5-to-3 hours every night in our BOQ running our own lab. We also incorporated into our language classes culture and history; we understood from the guys who were out in the field that it gives you a leg up if you understand the culture and you understand the history. If you can recite some of the historical perspectives of what happened in Afghanistan, it immediately draws you into a conversation.

We focused on Dari vice Pashtu because Dari is the official language and we were dealing with general officers and colonels, so they would be able to talk with us. [4:10] We went through that course, then we took our language test. I wanted our guys to take the language test to see where we stood; we had guys who were category 1—I zoned out at a 0+, which was pretty good. That is what I was shooting for—but I had guys who were immediately able to get in the country, write it, speak it, and have these conversations with the leadership in Helmand. That played a huge role in our success.

When we got in there, we relieved Colonel “Smoke” Kraft who was the current OCCR OIC. Smoke and his team set us up for the success that we were able to step into; they started working with helicopters, they spent the summer in Sangin during the summer fighting season, so they had a very strong relationship with the Afghan army and the police. More importantly, they had established a COC, with the Afghans and that played a role for us to build upon the OCC and the OCCR, which had the local police, the national police, and the Afghan army and the border police. That OCCR was rather robust in many things. We had 13 OCCRs throughout the districts in the provinces. That included all the way out to the Iranian border in Zaranj [in Nimroz]. We went all the way out to the Iranian border itself. They had those OCCs out there for the police to be able to communicate to Nimroz, and then in Helmand all the way up to Kajaki on down.

Knarr: Who was your boss?

Dowling: I worked for several masters. Obviously, my Marine Corps boss was Brigadier General Yoo, the Commanding General of MEB Afghanistan—

Knarr: In what capacity? As the MEB commander or as the RC-SW commander?



**Figure A-13. Briefing at Camp Shorabak, Afghanistan<sup>34</sup>**

Dowling: Both. The interesting thing about General Yoo was he had advisor experience. He understood our hours, he understood the relationship, and he brought a lot of immediate support—a lot of commanders sometimes don't appreciate or fully realize until you've been in that advisor role. Before we went out there, both General Yoo and General Neller were pretty selective about who they wanted to bring in. The brought in Billy McCullough who had been an advisor in Iraq and was an XO of an RCT in Fallujah; they had Mike Langley, General Langley, who was the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps advisor. The three of us all had advisor experience and we were all 06 commanders or already selected as 06 commanders.

The first day that we got there we ended up going up to Sangin, and we spent almost two-and-a-half weeks up in Sangin during the wintertime, the winter fighting season. It was just the three of us and that really solidified [07:45] our relationship; as the new guy in January, I was able

<sup>34</sup> Description and photograph courtesy USMC, accessed 4 Jan 2016 at [www.marines.mil/Photos.aspx?igphoto=2000795541](http://www.marines.mil/Photos.aspx?igphoto=2000795541)

Camp Shorabak, Afghanistan - Front row, L–R: BrigGen Daniel Yoo, commander, RC-SW; MajGen Sayed Malouk, commander, 215th Corps, Afghan National Army; BrigGen Zamen Hassan, chief of staff, 215th Corps; Brigadier Robert Thompson, deputy commander, RC-SW, and Col Christopher Dowling, senior advisor and officer in charge, Operational Coordination Center–Regional. Being briefed on the movements of the Afghan National Army during the final retrograde convoy of US Marines and sailors out of Sangin, Afghanistan at a Rehearsal of Concept exercise aboard Camp Shorabak, 1 May 2014.

to see their relationship with their counterpart and how each of the general officers reacted. I was able to meld with the advisor teams and with those general officers both police and army. There were a couple of things that came out that were real fruitful for the experience itself.

Knarr: You went there in January 2013 and you left in November 2014?

Dowling: Yes sir.

Knarr: You said there were a couple of efforts that were fruitful, which ones were they?

Dowling: The national elections. The facilities that were built during that timeframe and the management of them—everything from the consolidated joint operations center right there in Helmand for the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps, the new trauma center, their new maintenance center, and their logistic chain, to them assuming the fence of Camp Leatherneck and allowing us to safely withdraw from Leatherneck.

Knarr: [9:25] Since you were doing the training, what was your association with the NATO training mission in Afghanistan? Was there any association?

Dowling: The way it was broken out was that I had an association with them, but we also had another tier within the command that worked directly for General Yoo; he was a primary staff officer. That was our SFA [Security Force Advisor]. That officer worked with Kabul in Kandahar and other organizations to facilitate and support my needs and requirements. As we went along we had the OCCR, we had the police advisor group, and we had the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps advisor group. At the end of April Colonel Langley left [10:30], and I assumed the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps and the OCCR, so my team grew a little bit. When Colonel McCullough left I assumed those responsibilities [Afghan police] with his team that remained. That became the consolidated corps advisor team. We had approximately 500 people on that advisory team at one time. That comprised British, American, contractors, and linguists. The British advisor teams were everything from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade British advisor team to the medical advisor team that worked for me that did the trauma center, to the police, to the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps itself. During that time we had already pulled ourselves out of 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade out of Delaram, and we had pulled ourselves out of 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade that was right there, and we had lifted off out of 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade in Sangin in May and 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade had left in December. We were already starting to pull ourselves out of the brigade-level advising and focusing ourselves on the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps and higher echelons in the Afghan military and police.

Knarr: When you first got there did those teams ever go below brigade or were they down to the kandaks

Dowling: The kandaks were already done. They were strictly at the brigade level at that point.

Knarr: When you walked in, they were pulling the teams out of—

Dowling: They were already out of the kandak s, so they were still at the brigade, but we had them at the 4<sup>th</sup>, we had them at 2<sup>nd</sup>, we had them in 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 1<sup>st</sup> was already getting ready to pull up. They had already pulled out in December. It was a fast movement, yet we were still responsible for the construction both in Delaram and in 1<sup>st</sup> brigade's AO. Busy times.

Knarr: I'm looking at the narrative of events that might have occurred during the period you were there—do any stick in your mind as you reflect on your time there?

Dowling: The first part was when we got there and started appreciating the stages: where they were and then how we stepped into preparing for the national elections. As you know, we had to go through two national elections. The run off itself—and Helmand is a dynamic and dangerous environment; it is probably number one or two in kinetic and Nimroz was not that safe. Our goal was to ensure that there was an election in the areas established by the International Election Committee, to ensure that the ballots were delivered and to maintain a sense of security in that they were distributed and the elections themselves were conducted in a safe environment. Then to collect those ballots and return them to Kabul or wherever they were returned to. There were several stages, lots of planning and preparation took place. On both of those occasions, we were able to get the elections ballots distributed to their locations, and provide a security ring that the Afghans did themselves. We provided some intelligence support and ISR, but they set up a 3–5 ring security for each of their election posts; they were able to do it safely without any IED attacks or bombs going off, or killings or intimidation. That was the hallmark of the OCCR and a phase during that part of the deployment.

The second one was the planning and execution of assuming the facilities, the third one was the summer fighting season, and the fourth stage was pulling out of Bastion Leatherneck and the Afghans assuming that responsibility. There was a relationship over those 11 months we probably would never have seen before had it not been for other units before MEB-Afghanistan, General Yoo's command: Miller's, Gurganus, General Mills, and General Nicholson. They had all set the conditions and those foundations to build upon. I think the greatest testament is, you'd knocked out a national election, you built up an army base, and you were able to allow them to assume our battlespace and watch us retrograde, [15:50] bringing our forces out of there safely. That is the testament to success in my opinion.

Knarr: Now they call them TAACs? Train, Advise and Assist Commands. What replaced you guys?

Dowling: Nothing. We were one of the first units to pull out. It was interesting because the summer fighting season was a tough one; close to 400 men were killed during the summer fighting season, and probably 600+ people were wounded during that timeframe. Interestingly enough, the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps never lost a checkpoint during the summer fighting season, not one. The police lost them, but the army was always able to go back, regain those checkpoints and hand them over or partner up to maintain them. It was not unusual for the police chief or the [Army] generals to go right up to the president of Afghanistan and say, "Hey, Sangin's

fallen, Marjah's fallen, Musa Qa'lah's fallen;" then they [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan—GIROA] would come right back to us and ask, "What's fallen?" We would respond: "Nothing's fallen." GIROA: "Are there actions going on?" OCCR: "Yes." GIROA: "Are people being killed?" OCCR: "Yes." But the place has not fallen as they were announcing or advertising." It was a dynamic summer fighting season.

It was a test of the confidence, it was a test of the government system, it was a test to see if the army could really maintain security. In the end, they were able to do that. We watched MSOB [Marine Special Operations Battalion], the special forces guys, roll out of there. We watched an ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha] team come in there at the same time, towards September, and we watched the dynamics of the personalities come in there and then we pulled out.

Knarr: Did the ODA stay there?

Dowling: They did stay there for a little bit. We kept a team in Shorabak up to the December timeframe.

Knarr: But they eventually left?

Dowling: Yes they did.

Knarr: You said MSOB and ODA—the MSOB had the SOTF [Special Operations Task Force] there, right? Was it an ODA or an ODB?

Dowling: It was an ODA at the time.

Knarr: [18:15] You said you had time in Iraq, did you work with any of the military transition teams when you were there?

Dowling: I was the operations officer for 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. We were up in Al Anbar in Haditha, al Qaim area. Went to Fallujah as the CO of 3/5, and assumed Fallujah battlespace in [18:35] in 2007, 2008.

Knarr: I ask the question about the MiTTs [Military Transition Teams] and the PTTs [Police Transition Teams] in Iraq in order to draw a comparison between the advisory work we would have done in Iraq versus what you did in Afghanistan?

Dowling: I think we've learned from those lessons. I think Marine Corps lessons learned played a pivotal role, I think experience played a pivotal role, I think the experience of the officers played a role.

Starting with Marine Corps lessons learned, you can go back and see what the advisors did then and compare to where we are today. Is every situation the same? No. But it gives you a foundation to build upon. In December 2013 when we went to ATG, we had a formal school. We had a guy, Jeff Kenny, who was with me when he got injured and hit [in Iraq]; he had experienced both Iraq supporting 7<sup>th</sup> marines and then again supporting General Yoo when

he was the commander of that advisory group up north in Afghanistan. Jeff had had two unique experiences as an advisor. He had the school house in Twentynine Palms and was able to recruit a lot of Marine officers, staff and COs and NCOs who were former advisors to run the training.

We were able to tailor the training for our specific mission, and he was able to build that training plan for us. When we went into our testing at ATG, we only spoke Dari and we were able to forge ourselves as a team and develop working relationships with the Afghans. We were able to test our skills and our understanding of the culture. We really got throbbed by Jeff Kenney and his team in order to understand and learn from the high points and the low points each and every day [ 20:50]. The ATG, that formal school house was a very positive step.

The third part was that I was able to steal a couple of guys who were former advisors. I had an intelligence chief who was with the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps at one time; my logistics officer was a former advisor in Iraq. These guys brought that unique experience. I had guys who were just brilliant. They were able to use their skills, learn it and apply it every single day when they were living in the COC, or working JTAC missions, or bringing fire trucks and teaching how to fight fires at Camp Bastion in the Leatherneck airfield. They were able to do all these things. Those were the high marks.

From Marine Corps lessons learned to ATG to the experience level that we had [was key]. I also think my unique experience with both Bill McCullough and General Langley helped solidify a campaign plan within a campaign plan. Although it was not written, it was verbal and we understood what each other did. I became the center point each night for conversing with Bill McCullough or talking with General Langley about what each unit was doing. In my OCCR report, I would highlight those items for the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps and the OCCR; Bill McCullough and his SITREP aligned exactly, telling or sharing a story with General Yoo and his staff, so they understood. If there was an issue, they could come to us right away. Then obviously sitting down with General Yoo almost every single night, saying "This is what we did. These are some of the issues we see."

Knarr: What was Bill McCullough's job?

Dowling: He was the police advisor.

Jones: Did he have 1/5 at one time?

Dowling: He did sir.

Jones: He preceded [22:50] Tom Savage...

Dowling: He did Sir. Bill went into Marjah. So Bill also had that experience too.

Knarr: What was General Langley's position?

Dowling: He was initially the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps advisor. Then when he left end of April, I assumed the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps.

I had the OCCR, General Langley had the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps and Bill McCullough was with the police.

Knarr: And all that came together ...

Dowling: ...in Sangin during the winter fighting season. Us being up there together for those two-and-a-half weeks.

Knarr: And General Yoo was in charge of all of you.

Dowling: Yes sir. He's RC-Southwest, so it was his responsibility.

Knarr: One of the things we are looking at is the interagency, intergovernmental, of course multinational—did you deal with Task Force Helmand at all?

Dowling: Yes, we did. They, Task Force Helmand, broke down in April/May timeframe. Then we assumed the regional Corps battle school, the BAT that was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, the British medical advisor team...I think those were the three UK groups I dealt with, that belonged to me at the time as the CCAT. [24:30]

Knarr: What other countries were there?

Dowling: For us, there were the Afghans, the Brits, and there was the US. In my team I also had several AFPAK [Afghanistan-Pakistan] Hands too. I had two Army officers, an Air Force officer, and at one time there was a British naval officer on the team too.

Knarr: What did you think about the AFPAK Hands program?

Dowling: I thought it was tremendous. We benefitted from it greatly; I had some phenomenal guys who had done the experience before in different locations and they really enjoyed the role they played. During the election season we realized that a lot of guys didn't know how to use the computers, and computers were playing a pivotal role for us because we were putting them in the OCCs throughout the 13 districts. So we quickly starting teaching computer classes on our camp. We learned a couple things. You've got to make sure that the American alphabet is not on there, make sure you put the Dari alphabet on there.

But we were able to teach them and we started bringing in some of the senior officers to participate on the computers; we put in under the auspice of 'okay, we're going to teach you how to do it,' but we know that they wanted to Facebook with their kids or to send an email. To us, that is a win. If you start playing with the computer, you start to learn how to use the computer. One of my AFPAK Hands would teach these classes three times a week to various individuals who were with the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps, the OCCR and some of the police guys. Even if they weren't going to use it in the OCCs, they were going to use it somewhere else. So we brought them in and cleared them; they'd come in and we'd have juice, chai. We tried to

make it a social event and we'd treat them with a certificate at the end. We did six iterations of these types of classes during that three-month course. It was pretty neat to see them start using the computers [26:45]. We started to see their briefs get professionalized also. I had a British lieutenant colonel who was the operations liaison to the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps, and at the end, he would sit down with them but he made them do the briefs. They were doing the briefs themselves with him just providing oversight. Small steps, but significant in nature.

Knarr: Did you have any dealings with the regional platform or the PRTs, the district support teams?

Dowling: No, the SFA did most of that for us so we could focus solely on the groups that we were with. The OCCR, the police and the 215<sup>th</sup>.

Knarr: You talked a little bit about the MSOB, what kind of relationship did you have with them?

Dowling: I had a great relationship with them. Jody Lynch and his team...it was not as strong a relationship that you would expect at the beginning. [Afghan] SOF forces on one side and the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps on the other. It was at a point where it was becoming a detriment; there was no coordination. So one night I said "Okay, we're going to bring them all together." He said "They're not gonna meet. The three [Afghan Army] generals are not going to meet with my [Afghan SF] lieutenant colonel." And I said "Yeah they are because you're coming and I'm coming and we're gonna host it." So we bought some pizza and we all sat down in the garden. The rule was we were not going to talk any business. And we didn't talk any business for the first three hours, then afterwards, we started to bring up a couple things. We started small. In the end, Jody's team became a central force within the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps and they did not want to do anything without Jody's team and the Afghan SOF team that was there. Another benefit was that SOF lieutenant commander was a Marine graduate from TBS and EWS. In fact he was Dave Borden's roommate at TBS. He was an Afghan and he understood the Marine ways, he understood everything about us. So we just needed to work with him and build that relationship.

Knarr: When you said "the three generals," I lost that.

Dowling: General Malouk was the Corps commander, General Farouk was the deputy Corps commander, and General Hassan was the chief of staff, and then General Todakil was the OCCR general. [29:45]

Again, having General Yoo at that time, who understood advisors and understood the pressures, he understood about the insider threat, he understood about how you went outside the wire and when you did, how to interact—it was absolutely critical to our success. By the time we went into Sangin, probably August timeframe, we started off going in with a TRAP force and then when we left in September/October timeframe, we went in with just two Hueys. And when we left in Sangin at the camp, we dropped our PPE. It was interesting, the first time we did that General Yoo was there. General Farouk came up to me and said

“Where is everybody?” I said “What do you mean General?” He said “Where is everybody to protect you?” I said “You’re protecting us.” He looked at me and it was almost as if it changed the dynamics of our relationship. It was a stepping-stone. I said, “We’re part of your family and you’re part of our family. So if anything happens to you, it’s my fault, if anything happens to me, it’s your fault.” They understood those phrases and they understood one another. Sitting down with them and just laughing with them, sharing a story, letting them share a story with you. Not being so quick to do business. There are days when you just did not do business, and you just had to roll with those punches and say that is how it is here.

Knarr: When you speak of SFA, *security force assistance*, it sounds like it is unique from what you did?

Dowling: Colonel Morgan Mann was in charge of the SFA for us. Morgan had a couple Brits that worked for him and they would work making sure we had generators for the facilities, hand-overs of equipment. They were the ones who got the fire trucks, the crash fire trucks for Bas-tion so that the Afghans could fly in their commercial air when we came in there. My JFAC was the one who trained with another guy who became the SME. My JFAC [Joint Force Air Controller] just happened to be a UCLA grad and his major was airport management. Again, it was the perfect guy for the right time and the right place. I didn’t care if I had a captain and [his normal job was something else such as JTAC]. [I told him] “You’re not doing JTAC missions anymore, you’re now teaching these guys how to call in a commercial airliner and run a tower,” and also do fire truck management and paramedic service and how to keep those vehicles running, because they’re maintenance intensive. Morgan is the one who got all that equipment for us. He worked training programs for us so that we could take care of the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps or the police or the OCCR. [33:50]

Knarr: Who did Morgan work for? Who was his boss?

Dowling: General Yoo. Morgan was the special staff officer to General Yoo. Every morning he stood right there in General Yoo’s office and they talked. Morgan had the authority to go straight to General Yoo if there was an issue. There was never a time when I thought that Morgan was standing on my property or vice versa. It was a good relationship because we all understood the mission. Again, General Yoo and his staff were pretty good to work with, so it was pretty simple. There were no bulls in the china shop, someone trying to one-up someone else. It was a great staff to work with.

Knarr: It sounds unique. I am trying to envision the different staff jobs and where the authorities and responsibilities come from.

Dowling: You deal with Tony Henderson. Tony Henderson was the operations officer. You could go to Tony and say “Tony I need to make sure I got air for this portion.” Tony would say, “Okay, got it,” and he would get his guys to start working aviation support for us. Go to the 2 [intelligence officer], “Hey can you get ISR support?”

During the elections we were able to pipe unclass ISR into the COC, into the Afghan COC. The CG brought in his jump [Tactical Operation Center], so that that jump could pipe that information into the COC. The dynamics, the dialogue, everybody understanding each other's missions, and understanding the overall scheme really supported us getting out of there. Who would have ever thought you could leave Helmand and multiple serials [aircraft loads] without anybody shooting at you? The biggest fear was that someone was going to shoot you down, an aircraft. That did not happen. I was moving with General Hassan, putting Afghans in the fighting positions in the towers as we went along, as we pulled Americans and Brits off those sites. By the time we lifted off it was fully manned by the Afghans. That is a testament for the guys who went before us and the guys who set that up for us.

Knarr: How many brigades did they [215<sup>th</sup>] have?

Dowling: They had four brigades.

Knarr: Okay, so you had your teams out to each one of the brigades.

Dowling: For a while, and then we pulled those off. I think the last one was 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade and that was in the May or June timeframe.

Knarr: Wow that was quick.

Dowling: The whole idea was to get the Corps to assume [36:45] responsibility. It was done systematically. General Miller and his team started to say 'No' to the Afghans, and then when General Yoo came in he was able to say "Hey, that's status normal." When he gave something to the Afghans, the Afghans appreciated it, and I was able to say that was a one-time deal the General was able to do this, so use it. They understood this was not going to be an enduring task.

Knarr: I read something in one of the reports about "tranches," what is that? They talked about the first tranche—

Dowling: The first tranche was in 1<sup>st</sup> brigade down in Musa Qal'ah. 4<sup>th</sup> brigade pulled out then 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade out of Sangin, and then 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade was the last one and that was done in September timeframe. That was the last one.

Knarr: So the tranche is when you pulled back your teams and handed over full responsibility to the Afghans?

Dowling: By the time I got in there, 1<sup>st</sup> brigade had already lifted off. 4<sup>th</sup> brigade was the next one to come out, then 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade out of Sangin, then 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade out of Shorabak.

Knarr: What didn't I ask you that you think is important to this study?

Dowling: I think one of the things we failed to talk about that gave a great deal of confidence to the Afghans is that we—the Americans and Brits—allowed the Afghans to use our level 3 and level 2 operating rooms. When they got hurt they would fly right into Dashing [39:37] and they would be taken care of. Once they were stable, they would be put on a CAMAIR

flight and they would be flown into Kabul or Kandahar for recovery. One of the things that we worked hand-in-hand with General Yoo—surgeon Captain Cole happened to be a #1 trauma surgeon out of Chicago, a reservist, who happened to be the guy who did the surgery on Dave Borden in Ramadi. [39:35]

And they didn't know that until they started talking to one another, and Dr. Cole said "Hey, I'm the one who did that surgery." We had the top trauma surgeon in the United States right there in Camp Leatherneck. He assumed the role of gathering equipment and building this new trauma center right there in Shorabak. The British medical team started increasing their proficiency with the doctors teaching them how to do certain surgeries. I remember the first day I went in there and they did surgery with them, there was a kid who had wounds in the back from a bullet. They did a local anesthetic, cut into it, dug the shrapnel out, the bullet and some of the broken bone, some of the trauma muscle, cauterized it, put gauze on it, set the guy and said "Move, next guy." Their proficiency improved to actually doing surgeries, amputations and their medical care. It became probably one of the top morale-building factors for the Afghans, knowing that when we lifted off, they were not all by themselves. They had doctors and a first-rate medical facility right there in Shorabak. As we were leaving, we had a hospital being built to take care of Helmand itself. That is a story that does not get told, and it was all because of Dr. Cole and his expertise, and the British advisor to the medical team.

The summer fighting season was traumatic, chaotic. It was "who's telling the truth?" There was a guy that General Yoo and General Malouk 215<sup>th</sup> Corps would sit with on a regular basis, saying "What's the real story? This is what I'm hearing, what are you seeing?"

And then the final testament is the withdrawal. That tells the other story about how far we have come from when we first went in there with General Mattis' task force to when we withdrew from Helmand where our relationship was with the Afghans.

Knarr: What about PRTs?

Dowling: No go. By the time we came in, we were only at the brigade level and no one was going outside the wire to engage with the local leaders. We would make sure we did a shura at least once a month or sometimes we did two in one month because of what was going on in Sangin or some other place with the national elections. We would bring in all the leaders and sit them down and first we would just sit around and drink chai and talk. Then we'd go into official discussions and host a lunch afterward and make sure we had ice cream at the end. We would have chicken and lamb and ice cream and everyone would go; sometimes we let them go to the PX and they'd buy stuff there.

Knarr: Who else should I talk to?

Dowling: Bill McCullough, Michael Langley could tell you up to the point when he gave me the reigns of the 215<sup>th</sup> Corps. General Langley is in DC. McCullough's right here. He's got the special MAGTF. He's got 1<sup>st</sup> Marine regiment.

Knarr: What about Afghans?

Dowling: We still talk to General Malouk. We go through our linguist and he'll call up and we still talk to him. He's waiting for orders right now. He's up in Kabul waiting for things to stabilize and then he'll get his orders. If you want to talk to him, I'll get the linguist and you can converse with him.

Knarr: I intend to be going over there so maybe before I do that I can contact you and try to set that up. If he is in that area that would be great.

Dowling: That is a great thing for you to talk about. One of the things that General Yoo had and [when] the SFA played a pivotal role, was we knew we were pulling out and we still had several projects to be managed but we were not going to have anyone at Shorabak or at Bastion or Leatherneck. So we took guys from my team who still had boots-on-ground time and sent them up to Kabul; they became the advisor team up in Kabul where they could reach out and pull and act for information. We took two of our linguists who were intimately familiar with the AO [area of operations], had been there for a while, and they went up there. They are still up there. They dealt with vehicles, generators, fuel, finishing up the hospital, those types of things that were necessary for Shorabak. They are still doing that now. Brigadier General Lebidine is up there honcho-ing all these teams now.

Dowling: When I left they were still running the Regional Corps Battle School [RCBS]. The 215<sup>th</sup> Corps is still up and running, the police departments are still going. Is there still tribal and criminal narco activities going on? Yes. There were rumors that Daish was there, ISIL, but that was quickly discounted. [48:05]

Jones: What about some of the social gains, for schools, for civilians, the Afghans themselves. Any dynamic you can see?

Dowling: The schools are still running from what I understand sir. It is still a very bucolic area. From what understand in Lashkar Ga the schoolhouses are still running, Sangin the schoolhouse is still up there by the canal. A couple other places are still going.

Knarr: You talked about Daish, but said it was discounted?

Dowling: Via conversations with the linguists, we understood that they tried to get a foothold under the auspice of Daish but it did not get any hold in Sangin itself.

Knarr: So you are speaking of Helmand and Sangin. How about in the southeast?

Dowling: I had not heard anything more than that. It is pretty strong out there in Helmand and Nimroz province, it'd be a tough one to break in to. I think the tribal dynamics are just too strong to allow another organization to come in, even under another name or guise. [49:50]

Knarr: Colonel Dowling, thank you so much for time and comments. This was invaluable. I will send the transcript to you when it is completed. Please any corrections or changes you wish.

## Appendix B. Abbreviations

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|          |                                                                                                |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ALP      | Afghan Local Police                                                                            |
| ABP      | Afghan Border Police                                                                           |
| ANA      | Afghan National Army                                                                           |
| ANCOP    | Afghan National Civil Order Police                                                             |
| ANP      | Afghan National Police                                                                         |
| ANSF     | Afghan National Security Forces                                                                |
| AO       | area of operations                                                                             |
| AFPAK    | Afghanistan Pakistan                                                                           |
| BCT      | brigade combat team                                                                            |
| BSO      | battle space owner                                                                             |
| CALL     | Center for Army Lessons Learned                                                                |
| CENTCOM  | Central Command                                                                                |
| CIA      | Central Intelligence Agency                                                                    |
| CARL     | Combined Arms Research Library                                                                 |
| CAS      | Close Air Support                                                                              |
| CIR      | Critical Information Requirements                                                              |
| CIVCAS   | civilian casualties                                                                            |
| CFSOCC-A | Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command Afghanistan                               |
| CGSC     | Command and General Staff College                                                              |
| CMATT    | Coalition Military Assistance Training Team                                                    |
| COIN     | counterinsurgency                                                                              |
| CONUS    | Continental United States                                                                      |
| CSC      | Command and Staff College                                                                      |
| CSTC-A   | Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan                                               |
| C2       | command and control                                                                            |
| CTC      | Combat Training Center                                                                         |
| DARPA    | Defense Advanced Research Project Agency                                                       |
| DOTMLPF  | Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership and education, Personnel and Facilities |
| DCoP     | District Chief of Police                                                                       |
| DOW      | Decade of War                                                                                  |
| DEA      | Drug Enforcement Agency                                                                        |
| EOD      | explosive ordinance disposal                                                                   |
| ETT      | Embedded Training Team                                                                         |

|         |                                                       |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| FID     | Foreign Internal Defense                              |
| FOB     | Forward Operating Base                                |
| FOC     | full operating capability                             |
| GPF     | General Purpose Force                                 |
| GIRoA   | Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan     |
| HVT     | high value target                                     |
| IDA     | Institute for Defense Analyses                        |
| IED     | improvised explosive device                           |
| IG      | inspector general                                     |
| IJC     | ISAF Joint Command                                    |
| ISAF    | International Security Assistance Force               |
| ISIL    | Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant                  |
| ISIS    | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria                       |
| JCOA    | Joint Coalition Operational Analysis                  |
| JFSC    | Joint Forces Staff College                            |
| JIIM    | Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational  |
| JSOU    | Joint Special Operations University                   |
| KLE     | key leader engagement                                 |
| LIBRA   | Limited Initiatives Battle Reconstruction Afghanistan |
| MAG     | Military Advisory Group                               |
| MCU     | Marine Corps University                               |
| MEDEVAC | medical evacuation                                    |
| MNF-I   | Multinational Forces Iraq                             |
| MOD     | Minister of Defense                                   |
| MOI     | Minister of Interior                                  |
| MOS     | military occupational specialty                       |
| MSOT    | Marine Special Operations Team                        |
| NATO    | North Atlantic Treaty Organization                    |
| NCO     | non-commissioned officer                              |
| NDS     | National Directorate of Security                      |
| NDU     | National Defense University                           |
| NSOCC-A | NATO Special Operations Component Command Afghanistan |
| NSC     | National Security Council                             |
| NTM-A   | NATO Training Mission Afghanistan                     |
| OCC     | Operation Coordination Center                         |
| OCC-AT  | OCC Advisor Teams                                     |
| OCC-D   | OCC - District                                        |
| OCC-P   | OCC - Provincial                                      |
| OCC-R   | OCC - Regional                                        |
| ODA     | Operational Detachment Alpha                          |

|           |                                                      |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------|
| OEF       | Operation Enduring Freedom                           |
| OPCOM     | operational command                                  |
| OPCON     | operational control                                  |
| OCONUS    | Outside the Continental United States                |
| PCoP      | Provincial Chief of Police                           |
| PDSS      | pre-deployment site survey                           |
| PME       | Professional Military Education                      |
| POI       | program of instruction                               |
| PPE       | personal protection equipment                        |
| PRT       | Provincial Reconstruction Team                       |
| QRF       | quick reaction force                                 |
| RC        | regional command                                     |
| RIP/TOA   | relief in place/transfer of authority                |
| ROE       | Rules of Engagement                                  |
| SA        | situational awareness                                |
| SFA       | security force assistance                            |
| SFAAT     | SFA Advisor Team                                     |
| SFAB      | SFA Brigade                                          |
| SHAPE     | Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe            |
| SOCCENT   | Special Operations Command CENTCOM                   |
| SOF       | Special Operations Forces                            |
| SOFA      | Status of Forces Agreement                           |
| SOJTF     | Special Operations Joint Task Force                  |
| SOP       | standard operating procedures                        |
| SWAT      | special weapons and tactics                          |
| TAA       | train, advise and assist                             |
| TACOM     | Tactical Command                                     |
| TACON     | Tactical Control                                     |
| TCN       | troop contributing nation                            |
| TDY       | temporary duty                                       |
| TECOM     | Training and Education Command                       |
| TTP       | tactics, techniques and procedures                   |
| UN        | United Nations                                       |
| UNAMA     | UN Assistance Mission Afghanistan                    |
| USAID     | United States Agency for International Development   |
| USD (P&R) | Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) |
| USASOC    | United States Army Special Operations Command        |
| USFOR-A   | United States Forces Afghanistan                     |
| USMC      | United States Marine Corps                           |
| VSO       | Village Stability Operations                         |

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| REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                  |                                 | Form Approved<br>OMB No. 0704-0188                                                  |                                                   |                                                                       |
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| 1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)<br>31-10-2017                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                  | 2. REPORT TYPE<br>Study (Final) |                                                                                     | 3. DATES COVERED (From - To)<br>Oct 2014-Oct 2015 |                                                                       |
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| 6. AUTHOR(S)<br><br>William (Bill) Knarr, project leader; Mark Nutsch; MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC (Ret.); Carolyn Leonard; Sarah Collins                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                  |                                 | 5d. PROJECT NO.                                                                     |                                                   |                                                                       |
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| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)<br>Joint Advanced Warfighting Division (JAWD)<br>Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA)<br>4850 Mark Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22311-1882                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                  |                                 | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NO.<br>IDA Document D-8679<br>Log no. H 17-000478 |                                                   |                                                                       |
| 9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)<br>Mr. Charles F. Drummond,<br>DASD (FE&T)<br>OSD P-R (US)<br>4000 Defense, Pentagon<br>Washington, DC 20301-4000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                  |                                 | 10. SPONSOR'S / MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)<br>DASD (FE&T)                                 |                                                   |                                                                       |
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| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES<br>Unclassified                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                  |                                 |                                                                                     |                                                   |                                                                       |
| 14. ABSTRACT<br>The purpose of the project is to identify lessons for counterinsurgency doctrine and to develop a classroom-quality reconstruction (in the form of a multimedia DVD) of events in Afghanistan to be used in Joint and Service Professional Military Education and training institutions. As an education and training resource, this reconstruction will support historical analysis, leadership development, and critical thinking skills. The project focuses on three initiatives: 1.The Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multinational community to include interagency task forces and Provincial Reconstruction Teams, 2. Conventional/special operations forces coordination and collaboration, and 3. The stand-up of the Special Operations Joint Task Force and development of the Village Stability Operations/Afghan Local Police programs. The purpose of this document is to organize and archive transcripts of participants from organizations who were interviewed primarily during Task 1 of the project, Initial Collection. |                  |                                 |                                                                                     |                                                   |                                                                       |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS<br>JIIM, PRT; Joint Interagency Intergovernmental, Multinational; Provincial Reconstruction Teams; Special Operations Forces; PME, Professional Military Education; case study                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                  |                                 |                                                                                     |                                                   |                                                                       |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                  |                                 |                                                                                     |                                                   | 19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include Area Code)<br>wknarr@ida.org           |
| a. REPORT<br>U                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | b. ABSTRACT<br>U | c. THIS PAGE<br>U               |                                                                                     |                                                   |                                                                       |