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A project of the Combat Studies Institute, the Operational Leadership Experiences interview collection archives firsthand, multi-service accounts from military personnel who planned, participated in and supported operations in the Global War on Terrorism.

# Interview with LTC Paul Yingling



**Combat Studies Institute**  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

## Abstract

After serving as executive officer of 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment in Operation Iraqi Freedom I where his unit reduced captured enemy ammunition and trained the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling returned to Iraq in March 2005 to begin a one-year deployment (the subject of this interview) as the effects coordinator for the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. "The job of effects coordinator is not a particularly well defined position in doctrine," Yingling admitted. "What I ended up being responsible for was information operations, public affairs, psychological operations, civil affairs and Iraqi security forces development to a certain extent. I also did some filler utility work in engineering, in ISF facilities development, and was the regimental XO when we had to do some split operations and the XO was committed elsewhere." Initially in south Baghdad and then sent to western Nineveh Province - at that point a major training base and sanctuary for the insurgency in Mosul and Baghdad - Yingling and 3rd ACR principally conducted Operation Restoring Rights in the summer and fall of 2004, a "combined area security operation, the purpose of which was to establish security in Tall Afar and the outlying areas so we could proceed along the other lines of operation. It consisted of the 3rd Iraqi Army Division of about 8,000 troops," Yingling explained, "as well as 3rd ACR, selected Special Forces, Iraqi police and also a brigade from the 2nd Iraqi Army Division. All told it was about 11,000 troops: 8,000 Iraqi and about 3,000 coalition forces in what was essentially about a three-by-three square kilometer area." Yingling discusses this operation in great detail, touching on everything from the key pre-mission advice given by Iraqi civilian and military leaders to the performance of Iraqi units in combat. He talks about detainee ops, unravels the complex relationship between al-Qaeda members and former Iraqi Army soldiers in the Tall Afar area, and explains why he feels that "our forces operating in close proximity and cooperation with the Iraqis is really the best information operations we can do." The "institutional Army," Yingling says, "has not caught up in either professional education or organizational design with the challenges of counterinsurgency ... [and] if I had to condense [my advice] into a pithy little bullet it would be: don't train on finding the enemy; train on finding your friends and they will help you find your enemy."

# Interview with LTC Paul Yingling

22 September 2006



JM: My name is John McCool (JM) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling (PY) on his experiences during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Today's date is 22 September 2006 and this is an unclassified interview. Also present is Dr. Rick

Herrera (RH), also of the Combat Studies Institute, who will be asking questions as well. Before we begin, sir, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information; and if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Could we start off with a brief sketch of your military career up to the present? How did you get commissioned, what units have you served with, what deployments have you been on, and then I think we'll want to focus in on your OIF III service.

PY: Sure. I was commissioned in the field artillery (FA) in 1989 through ROTC after graduating from Duquesne University. My undergraduate discipline was international relations. My first tour was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division (ID) and I served in the division as a fire direction officer during the Gulf War. After attending the FA Advanced Course, I was assigned to 41<sup>st</sup> FA Brigade in Germany. I took command of a target acquisition battery and deployed to Bosnia as part of the initial Operation Joint Endeavor in December 1995. Following command I attended graduate school at the University of Chicago and I studied international relations and taught at West Point. I attended the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) here at Fort Leavenworth. After that, I was a division planner with 2<sup>nd</sup> ID in Korea. Upon returning from 2<sup>nd</sup> ID, I deployed for OIF I as a battalion executive officer (XO) in 2-18 FA. We were responsible for collection of enemy ammunition and training the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC). I returned from OIF I and was a battalion and brigade XO. I then deployed for OIF III with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) in 2005 where I was the effects coordinator for the regiment. Now I'm the deputy commander for 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR.

JM: Your OIF III deployment was March '05 through March '06?

PY: Correct.

JM: Before we get into your OIF III deployment, once you knew what your position was going to be, how did your OIF I service prepare you for this upcoming deployment? Also, was there any special training you went through prior to?

PY: The job of effects coordinator is not a particularly well defined position in doctrine. What I ended up being responsible for was information operations (IO), public affairs (PA), psychological operations (PSYOP), civil affairs (CA) and Iraqi security forces (ISF) development to a certain extent. I also did some filler utility work in engineering, in ISF facilities development, and was the regimental XO when we had to do some split operations and the XO



was committed elsewhere. In OIF I, I was involved in training up an ICDC battalion that later committed to Najaf, and one of my challenges in OIF III was ISF development: essentially developing the staffs and systems for command and control (C2) and sustainment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Division, which was the partnership unit with 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR. The challenge we had in OIF I that continued on in OIF III – and that was not unique to those units, but rather was systemic – is the Title 10 functions for the Iraqi Army. The organize, train and equip functions to ensure the Iraqi Army is paid, promoted, fed, housed, sustained – all the operational logistics functions. The ministerial linkages between the Ministry of Defense (MOD) in Baghdad and the forces in the field, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) or the border defense forces and the forces in the field, are not well established. While the Iraqi soldiers were brave and reasonably capable, it was those Title 10 functions that were not well developed. Consequently, that proved a major challenge I had to focus on in OIF III that my OIF I experience was reasonably helpful in preparing me for. I have to be honest with you, though: I didn't have much professional experience dealing with the CA and PSYOP operations. I guess my background in international relations at both the undergraduate and graduate level and some research I did in SAMS on IO and non-lethal targeting were the only experiences I had in those areas going into OIF III.

JM: Were you just the last one standing when the music stopped?

PY: Well, 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR has a habitual relationship with 212<sup>th</sup> FA Brigade – the brigade I was the XO for. Historically our 2-5 FA is deployed with the regiment for training exercises, deployed with the regiment in OIF I and Colonel H.R. McMaster was looking for a whole range of help on a lot of issues and wasn't getting a lot of help from Forces Command (FORSCOM) and the Department of the Army, so he asked for this effects cell. He wanted a school trained IO officer, an effects coordinator and basically some help with the non-combat lines of operation that the regiment was going to operate on. The modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) didn't support that. FORSCOM and III Corps didn't have much to offer either, so I volunteered to do that job. I developed an eight-man cell out of the 212<sup>th</sup> FA Brigade to deploy with the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR and fill some of those roles.

JM: What was your area of operations (AO)?

PY: Initially the regiment was in south Baghdad from March 2005 to around mid-May. At that point we got a change of mission and transitioned to western Nineveh Province. West of Mosul to the Syrian border and from the Dahuk border south to the Euphrates River Valley.

JM: Can you detail for us the overall regimental mission and how you fit into that?

PY: Broadly speaking, the regimental mission was to conduct combined counterinsurgency operations to enable development of Iraqi institutions in order to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1546. That was the macro mission. In terms of the regimental concept of operations, there were three components. When we first got into western Nineveh Province, the area was not well developed because there'd been a very limited force footprint since the departure of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Not through any fault of the forces that were in the AO, there just weren't enough of them to develop the intelligence picture and the civil infrastructure across all lines of operation. The first thing we did was conduct Operation Veterans Forward, which was an area reconnaissance operation to get a better sense of our AO.

Not just the enemy intelligence but also the civil factors, political development, economic capabilities and rule of law. What we found was that the enemy had been using western Nineveh Province as the Title 10 training base for the insurgency in Mosul and Baghdad. It was a sanctuary that was well suited for a couple reasons. Firstly, US and coalition forces were relatively sparse in that area. Secondly, the human capital was there. Mosul and Tall Afar are the home of a large number of retirees from the Iraqi Army. If you can imagine Arlington, Virginia, and Columbus, Georgia – it was sort of that mix: Mosul being Arlington and Tall Afar being Columbus. There were a lot of noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and warrant officers retired there and these were guys who were our equivalent of master gunners. These were guys who hold a lot of technical experience and bomb-making capabilities. They were a little older, were very capable trainers, and they were training insurgents for employment in Mosul and also elsewhere in Iraq. They had partnered with Al Qaeda in Iraq, who had a very good IO capability, access to external funding, an ideological base and religious appeal to mobilize the population. It was a very small but effective Al Qaeda leadership partnered with a very large and more capable technical and ideological base. These two forces combined to conduct these training activities and also to wage a very brutal campaign of intimidation and coercion against the population to keep them disengaged from supporting the Iraqi government. By the time of our arrival in May 2005, Tall Afar was effectively defended from coalition forces, especially the Sarai District of Tall Afar. We initially tried to reconstruct the Tall Afar police force and the other police forces in the AO but we weren't able to do that because of the enemy's campaign of intimidation and coercion. What Veterans Forward did was place Iraqi Army forces on the Syrian border and in proximity to Tall Afar, and from there we developed our estimate of the AO. What we found was that until we broke the enemy's campaign of intimidation, we couldn't proceed on the other lines of operation. We couldn't recruit security forces, couldn't encourage economic development, couldn't get contractors to come into the AO and we couldn't encourage political participation or sectarian reconciliation. So in August 2005, we began planning Operation Restoring Rights. This was a combined area security operation, the purpose of which was to establish security in Tall Afar and the outlying areas so we could proceed along the other lines of operation. It consisted of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Division of about 8,000 troops, as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR, selected Special Forces (SF), Iraqi police and also a brigade from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iraqi Army Division. All told it was about 11,000 troops: 8,000 Iraqi and about 3,000 coalition forces in what was essentially about a three-by-three square kilometer area. There were a lot of forces in a very small space. We isolated the town by conducting security operations in the outlying areas, established an obstacle around the town and established entry control points. We evacuated the most well defended part of the town – the enemy's ideological stronghold of Sarai – by using IO and PSYOP broadcasts to encourage the population to leave, and almost all of them did with the exception of the hardcore Takfirist groups defending the town. We conducted a security operation in early September, which cleared the town of the insurgents; and after that we established the Iraqi police presence throughout the city: that was the "hold" part of the operation. Then we brought the population back in and began to build a civil infrastructure. We were able to bring in contractors and the coalition provided about \$11 million in reconstruction funds, the Iraqi government provided \$37 million and we began to build the essential services, which would further isolate the insurgency from the population. As we were leaving in February/March 2006, we had a police force in Tall Afar that was broadly representative of the population. It was a Sunni/Shi'a mix: 60 percent Shi'a and about 30 to 40 percent Sunni. They were professionally educated and had gone to a police academy in Jordan. We had essential services functioning at the basic level in terms of food distribution and water,

and governance functioned at the city level. A city council was in place and functioning. Those basic functions were in place as we were leaving. I certainly won't say we solved or defeated the insurgency throughout the province. I will say, though, that with the help of very effective Iraqi leaders - Najim Abdullah Abid al-Jibouri, the mayor of Tall Afar, and Major General Khorsheed Saleem al-Dosekey, commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Division - we were able to establish the security conditions that allowed progress in security force development and essential services.

RH: As you read articles about Restoring Rights and references to it in works like Tom Ricks' *Fiasco*, almost everything I've read has almost overwhelmingly praised the conceptualization and execution of this mission in Tall Afar. Can you discuss how effective you think the operation was in the short term and also in the long term? There have been reports lately of car bombs going off and 20-plus people being killed.

PY: I think the model that Colonel McMaster used to visualize Restoring Rights - the clear-hold-build model - is effective. The way he visualized the operation was to examine previous operations in the area and taking lessons learned from them, specifically Black Typhoon that took place in November 2004. As we examined these previous operations, what we found was that the enemy started a campaign of intimidation in the summer of 2004. They destroyed the police force and expelled civil authorities from the town of Biaj on the Syrian border. They next transitioned to Tall Afar in September 2004 and then Mosul in November. In each case the model was very similar. The insurgents would mass on small isolated police stations, kill or intimidate the police into quitting their posts, destroy the police stations and the other symbols of government authority, and then proceed with establishing an intimidation campaign throughout the city. When the coalition launched Black Typhoon in September 2004 to defeat the insurgents, the insurgents scattered along kinship lines to outlying communities. At the same time, they appealed to their allies both in Iraq - specifically in the Iraqi Islamic Party - and outside Iraq with the government of Turkey to convey the IO theme that this was an unjust assault against the Turkmen population of Tall Afar. Having seen that model in the past, Colonel McMaster visualized the operation as first we had to prevent the enemy from displacing along kinship lines. To prevent this, we brought most of the squadron we had on the Syrian border and used them to conduct security operations and build up the police forces in outlying areas - Avghani to the northwest of Tall Afar and other smaller communities around Tall Afar. We first established security there before we converged forces on Tall Afar. Based on the advice we got from our Iraqi allies, we established these deliberate obstacles around the town to include a berm and entry control points. This way, when we did decide to evacuate the population to prevent collateral damage, we could screen the population as they left. Although we didn't really understand it at the time, we did it anyway and it turned out to be a very good thing to do. That berm had a very powerful psychological effect on the population.

RH: The berm was an Iraqi idea?

PY: It was. We got that advice from Mayor Najim and Major General Khorsheed as well as from some Iraqi legislators whom we were in touch with. Although we didn't quite understand it and it wasn't something doctrinally that we anticipated doing, it was very good advice. One of the lessons I learned from this was to step outside of my Western skin and see the problem through the Iraqis' eyes and take their advice when conducting operations because they have a perspective that we just can't fully appreciate.



JM: Was there any other advice they gave for the planning or execution of this operation?

PY: There was a lot. Every part of the operation, to include the naming of the operation, was conducted in partnership with the Iraqis, with Major General Khorsheed and Mayor Najim. I will have to say that, in some sense, we got very lucky because we had two very capable partners in those two leaders. Not every unit in Iraq has been that lucky, so we felt very fortunate to have these very courageous and capable leaders to partner with. They advised us to place Iraqi Army and police partnered together at the entry control points, because the police had a very good sense of who was in the city but they did not have a good reputation among the population. The police could identify insurgents but the police often frightened the population. Partnering them with the Iraqi Army and coalition forces, then, kept the population from being intimidated by the police, but at the same time gave us a unique on-the-ground capability. As the population was displacing through entry control points outside of the city to displaced civilian facilities we had established or to their families outside the city, the police could identify the insurgents. We had insurgents try to dress as women to escape. We had insurgents try to grab the hands of small children and claim to be their parents and the police would catch them. So, relying on this local expertise was key, because we just don't have the cultural sensitivity to see who doesn't belong and who does. Only the police had that and so we were able to leverage that and that was based on the advice of our Iraqi allies. That ability to deny the enemy the ability to hide in plain sight among the population was probably the most important thing we did. Colonel McMaster encouraged us at the regimental staff level, as we were working on security operations, to look ahead to the essential services line. Even as we were beginning the security part and doing the security operations, we were working with the Iraqi government to provide us with reconstruction funding. We thought it was important that all the reconstruction effort was an Iraqi effort. Even when we were spending coalition money, the IO theme was that the Iraqi government was restoring essential services to the city of Tall Afar. That building of essential services and security forces was clearly important, so I think the clear-hold-build model is a very good one. I think, though, that Tall Afar was unique in some ways because it was such a small area. It was only a three-by-three kilometer city that we were able to mass our large amount of forces in. I don't know enough about the rest of Iraq to say that it would necessarily be replicable in Baghdad or Mosul or the cities in Anbar Province. But on the scale we operated on and with the forces we had available, I thought it was very effective. Having said that, you asked about the longer term. I don't think you can say success or failure in an insurgency can be measured by single events. There are going to be attacks in Tall Afar and, in fact, I'm really surprised there haven't been more. It's been spoken about by President Bush as a success story and, after he gave that speech, I was really worried that the insurgents were going to react by attacking the institutions in Tall Afar. If the institutions hold and grow then I think we can say that Tall Afar was successful, even if there are isolated events. But if the police force or the army in Tall Afar doesn't hold or if the essential services progress doesn't continue and the population stops believing the government has their best interests at heart, then we won't have long term success. The security just buys time for those other more decisive elements to take hold. So if security forces don't continue to develop as a professional and capable force and essential services don't continue, then Tall Afar could slip back to where it was - and that would be heartbreaking, but it is possible.

RH: During the operation, were there any key decision points or dilemmas that stood out or any key elements of the outcome of the operation?

PY: I think there were a couple key points. Prior to the operation, we had to convince the Iraqi government that this operation was necessary. The enemy had a very effective IO campaign both domestically and internationally, and they used it very effectively during the Black Typhoon era. To counter the enemy's disinformation campaign, we had an embedded State Department representative who was writing daily cables to the embassies in Ankara and Baghdad explaining what we were doing. That kind of neutralized the enemy's IO towards the Turkish government. Obviously if a key NATO ally feels that we are maltreating ethnic Turkmen, our own government would have to be sensitive to that and might have to reconsider our operation. We had to make it clear to the Turkish government that we were proceeding in a very deliberate and careful way - and obviously that's not a military function. We had a very capable State Department representative who was able to portray the situation in Tall Afar very accurately. We also had to worry about the enemy's domestic IO campaign, specifically the Iraqi Islamic Party and the Iraqi Turkmen Front campaigning in the region. Those two political parties were lobbying the Iraqi government not to conduct Operation Restoring Rights, and their IO theme was that this was an assault on ethnic Turkmen because of internal tribal disputes that had nothing to do with the larger insurgency in Iraq. They were very well coordinated. Within an hour of the prime minister making the decision to proceed with Operation Restoring Rights - before we even found out about it - our forces were under fire in the Al-Khadasiyah District of Tall Afar. I'm a little embarrassed to admit this, but their civil-military linkup and communications were better than ours. Once they found out that they weren't going to be able to stop the operation through their IO line of operations, they began transitioning to military force. Prior to that, the insurgency dropped almost to nothing because their IO theme was that this was an internal dispute to be solved internally, so the degree of central coordination within the city and the IO linkages to Baghdad and Turkey were very sophisticated, much more so than I would've thought going into this operation. I really didn't understand that until we were actually in the operation. That was a key decision point along the IO line: to clarify our intentions to both the Iraqi government and to other regional players so the enemy's IO campaign couldn't be effective. That really set the conditions for security operations, which were quick and decisive. The enemy tried to defend the Sarai District. Through a joint and combined effort we had AC-130s, the first use of Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) unitary rounds in combat, AH-64s, OH-58Ds, two armored cavalry squadrons, two Iraqi Army brigades and a brigade of special commandos all operating in the city, in a relatively small district, and with very little collateral damage. We really overwhelmed the enemy with overwhelming force in a very short period of time - and considering the amount of forces involved, it was relatively quick and decisive. The next point, which involved a significant amount of coordination with the Iraqi government, was the allocation of Iraqi reconstruction funds. The \$11 million of coalition funds was lined up and ready to go, but as far as the Iraqi money was concerned, we had problems. The prime minister made the commitment of funds relatively early, but the problem was that the ministerial functions weren't well established. The process of the Iraqis allocating money was very complicated and we didn't understand it. It also took longer than we understood it would, primarily because Saddam didn't want local governments to have autonomy and autonomous funding because he wanted all the functions to run back to Baghdad because they were instruments of control for the Ba'ath Party. As we would think, the logical thing to do if you were going to reconstruct a city is to allocate funds to the city government and then they can get on with it. The Iraqi system, though, worked through each individual ministry. An example of how this worked was that the Ministry of Water stovepiped funds to the director general of water in Mosul who fixed water



in Tall Afar. This occurred throughout every function, so navigating this system was very tough. We actually had to bring a delegation of Iraqi officials that represented every ministry to Tall Afar and escort them around the city. We presented them with some proposals, they reviewed and refined them, and then the funds started flowing. The complexity of that system was something we learned in stride. But once we got that money flowing, it really broke loose intelligence. We got lots of intelligence on the insurgents at that point. Once the police and the Iraqi Army were in place inside the city, once people felt secure and they started seeing their daily lives getting a little better, the intelligence just poured in. These people were just despicable and they were hated, but they were also feared so people wouldn't report on them until they felt it was safe to do so.

RH: Did you have any difficulties when it came to screening the population and conducting detainee ops?

PY: Another one of the enemy's IO themes was that we were unjustly detaining Sunni males based on sectarian allegiance. They spread the word that charged us with being essentially an instrument of the Shi'a population and the Shi'a government. So we had to work to convince the Sunni population that this was a security operation *for* Sunnis and not *against* them, and there were a couple important ways we did that. First, we met with all the Sunni sheiks prior to the operation and showed them the evidence we were finding of arms caches in the city, and that the insurgency was using the city to train insurgents for attacks elsewhere. Because the city is so small - 200,000-plus people in nine square kilometers - it was impossible that they could not know about an insurgency that was literally right on their doorstep. We took pictures and evidence files of every detainee we had. We captured about 1,400 insurgents during the course of the operation and we let the sheiks review each file and allowed them to submit contradictory evidence to free that person. We actually had some cases where the sheiks would say that certain detainees were innocent, and we would tell them that if they would vouch for them in writing and confirm their innocence, we'd release them on the sheiks' honor. That would often make them change their minds very quickly - "Oh no, that guy's a terrible person!" - and they'd back away from it. In some cases, though, they would vouch for certain individuals, they would have legitimate cases backing up their innocence and we would release them, both as a sign of good faith and as a means of building trust between us and the local sheiks. That detainee assurance program convinced some of the Sunni sheiks that this was not an arbitrary process. We showed them the evidence against their kinsmen so they would know that these arrests were not arbitrary, and that helped to persuade at least some of them that these were just detentions. Invariably, though, we would pick up people who were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. We would bring them to the regimental interrogation facility and would find after questioning them that they truly were innocent. Before we would release them, we would have one of our PSYOP NCOs meet with them and explain what had happened. We would say that, in the process of doing security operations, we picked them up but confirmed that they were not involved in the insurgency. We would then ask for their help in rebuilding Tall Afar and restarting the life of the city in terms of governance and the restoration of essential services. We would ask them to be a part of that. There's obviously still some resentment when you bring someone in who turns out to be innocent, but I think that took the edge off some of those concerns among the Sunni population. We showed them that we were doing our best to sort things out and that we could do even better if they would identify for us those few insurgents who remained in the city. I think the meetings with the sheiks, the

detainee assurance program and the follow up on the people who were detained and later released helped to take some of the edges off detainee ops. I will also say that controlling outside forces was also a challenge. We had introduced into the city, at the insistence of the Iraqi government, an MOI special police commando brigade and these were not well disciplined forces. They defaced property in the city and we had allegations of rape, although we couldn't substantiate them.

RH: Was this the Wolf Brigade?

PY: Yes. They were bad actors. They were not well disciplined and we asked for their removal and got it midway through the operation because they were creating insecurity rather than establishing security. They were a source of concern. We didn't want them in the first place but the Iraqi government thought it would be wise to introduce them - and we later found our fears confirmed.

JM: You didn't want them because you knew they had a bad reputation?

PY: Yes. When you talk to Sunni Turkmen in Tall Afar about Operation Restoring Rights, the Wolf Brigade was involved in that and it was seen as an anti-Sunni, sectarian attack against the Sunni Turkmen of Tall Afar. It wasn't seen as related to the insurgency. Some of that was the enemy's IO campaign, but there really was an insurgent base in Tall Afar although the introduction of sectarian forces that were not professionally trained and not well disciplined just reinforced the enemy's IO campaign and so we had to get those forces out. Among the Shi'a population of Tall Afar there was a continuous agitation for the reintroduction of those forces. A sheik who had ties to the Badr organization was continually agitating the prime minister to bring back the Wolves. He would argue, "There's insecurity in Tall Afar. Bring in the Wolves." We had to continue that dialogue with Baghdad through Multinational Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) and let them know that the security situation in Tall Afar was well under control and that bringing in these Shi'a commando forces - unless they were well disciplined and professional - would actually make matters worse. I have to say that Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey was very helpful with that as well as Major General Brimm who was the deputy commander for MNF-I. They really helped us convey accurately what was going on in Tall Afar and kept those forces from being reintroduced.

RH: Were the Wolves in Black Typhoon?

PY: Yes. They were also in the beginning of Restoring Rights but were quickly sent back out.

JM: Could you explain to us the various roles of the 8,000 Iraqis in this operation?

PY: For the most part we had an Iraqi brigade partnered with an armored cavalry squadron. The task was area security operations and the purpose was to deny the enemy the sanctuary of Tall Afar. Typically we would further break that partnership down to where each cavalry troop was partnered with an Iraqi Army battalion and we had SF advisors with Iraqi Army companies. At every level there was coalition partnership to coordinate the use of firepower and ensure that the forces were disciplined and professional. We had really complementary capabilities. We had lots of firepower - tanks, Bradleys, howitzers, OH-58s and AH-64s - but

we had a limited number of dismounts. The Iraqi Army was a purely dismounted infantry organization, and so they were able to go into every culvert, on top of every rooftop, through every room and provide us with that dismounted infantry capability that we didn't have organic to the regiment.

JM: How would you overall assess the performance of these Iraqi troops?

PY: The 3<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Division was very professional and very tactically competent at the company level and below. They didn't have enough time in those early stages to coordinate battalion and brigade operations. The division commander, who was a 40-year veteran of the Iraqi Army, understood that completely and wanted and directed his subordinate commanders to maintain those partnership relationships for command and control (C2). In terms of communications, staff development and command posts, the Iraqi Army above the company level wasn't really well suited to coordinate those large operations. At the company level, though, those guys were very brave and reasonably capable. When we partnered them with our guys, especially the SF advisors, they were first rate. That said, we never resolved to the regiment's satisfaction or to the Iraqi Army's satisfaction the Title 10 functions and the ministerial links to Baghdad. We still had pay problems when we left. We still had equipment and food contract problems. There were base sustainment issues. It's my understanding that, since I left theater seven or eight months ago, they've made some progress, but there are still issues. At the company level and below those guys were first rate, but as you progressively moved higher things were not as well developed because of equipment shortages and the lack of those linkages.

JM: You said you had an eight-man cell working for you. Is that correct?

PY: Well, yes and no. I took eight soldiers over there but we didn't operate as a team. We had four of our folks working the lethal delivery of fires and they were essentially involved in the fire support element of the regiment. That was very good. In the Sarai District of Tall Afar, where the most intense part of security operations took place, it's only a 400-by-800 meter box; and in that box we had AC-130s, close air support (CAS), GMLRS, cannon fire, mortar fire, OH-58s and AH-64s. Just the Army airspace C2 issues were extremely complicated and, to our credit and the credit of the regiment's aviators, they really deconflicted that ballet masterfully. There was an awful lot of metal in the air in a very small space and we brought all those fires to bear without any fratricide. That really goes to the credit of our NCOs. We had an officer and an NCO up with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Division working security force development. They did a terrific job. Major Robert McGee (ph) and Staff Sergeant Colburn (ph) were very savvy in living every day among the Iraqis and developing close personal relationships with them; and it was those relationships that really paid dividends when we got into security operations because we'd worked with them every day and they trusted us and we trusted them. We were friends and that made cooperation much easier. To complete the team, one of the captains and I worked the effects: the politics, the economic redevelopment, the IO and the CA. We really reinforced the regimental staff rather than staying together as one coherent eight-man team.

JM: What kind of IO, PSYOP and CA assets or resources did you have at your disposal and did you think they were adequate?



PY: Before I go into the task organization, I want to say that I truly believe that our forces operating in close proximity and cooperation with the Iraqis is really the best IO we can do. It bolsters the credibility of the Iraqi government and the ISF. It also conveys the image of partnership and builds the reality of partnership every day. In the regimental commander's mind, that was more important than any particular theme or message that we put out. That close partnership was the most important thing we did in both IO and CA. Every press conference and every statement was done with the mayor at the center. Major General Khorsheed was in the position of honor to the mayor's right and Colonel McMaster was in the lesser position of honor to his left; and Colonel McMaster only answered questions posed directly to him. Everything else, to include the evacuation messages and the announcements of reconstruction, were all done by the mayor. The Iraqi Army initiatives were done by Major General Khorsheed. In every step we were seen as background cast and the supporting effort. In terms of the task organization, we had a tactical PSYOP detachment with the traditional three-team setup with loudspeaker trucks. We had a civil affairs team B (CAT-B) with CAT-As for each of our subordinate squadrons. We took the civil affairs officer (S5) out of hide: a 26-year-old captain named Elizabeth Heller (ph) who was positively brilliant and who had no previous training or background in CA or governance. In conjunction with our Iraqi partners, though, she really carried the Iraqi election in Nineveh Province on her back and made it a success. There are a million stories I could tell you about brilliant young officers doing things they had no formal training on. Elizabeth was just the most obvious example of that. Another one was Jesse Sellers - a cavalry commander of a troop in Tall Afar. He actually had a child named after him in the city. He never left the city. He lived there. He walked the streets every day. He stopped by every house and shop. One way to tell the story is of the macro operations at the regiment, but there are a lot of micro stories of those young leaders - the sergeants and captains who just did brilliant things with their Iraqi counterparts - who really carried the day. There are a million of those micro stories and I wish I could tell them all.

JM: Did you have any follow-on ops you were able to do as a result of the intelligence you gained from these 1,400 detainees or from the actual searching of homes?

PY: Yes. There were a couple different follow-ons. After the security part of Restoring Rights was over and we went into the reconstruction phase, we brought in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 325<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantry Regiment and their AO was the Sarai District. One of the typical measures of effectiveness, at least on the combat line of operations, is the number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) found versus functioned.

JM: You don't want to find them the hard way.

PY: Exactly. The typical success is when you break even or get above 50 percent. But because 2-325 was a highly capable force commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Chris Gibson and located in a very small space and partnered with an Iraqi Army brigade, they were finding about nine to one. The population trusted us, we had a very large force in a very small space, and we were partnered with an Iraqi Army brigade. The enemy had wired that place throughout. There were IEDs every few hundred meters throughout this neighborhood. Again, this was the Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Columbus, Georgia, of northwestern Iraq. These people understood how to make bombs. What 2-325 was able to do was work closely with the Iraqis to find these things and exploit the intelligence. We'd established security, we'd built trust and now the people

were just lining up to turn over those IEDs. I think that has helped. It's made it harder for the enemy to come back into Tall Afar. There's no way to make it impossible, but it's certainly made it harder because we got a lot of the explosive ordnance out of the city through those follow-on exploitation ops.

JM: How did the Al Qaeda members and these local ex-Iraqi Army guys work together? Was there a C2 structure? Were they able to integrate themselves well and cooperate?

PY: When we first got there, they were very specialized. They were former military men and they called themselves the "Battalions of the One True God." The Arabic word for battalion is *kateebah* and they were organized into four *kateebahs*. Each one had specialized cells within it. There was a bombmaking cell, a mortar cell, a direct action cell and a beheading cell for intimidating the local population. There were very specialized functions within these *kateebahs*, including an IO cell through the summer of 2005 that would do things like conduct an IED attack, film it and then transmit the film onto Al Qaeda websites. We would actually get same-day visuals of attacks against our forces in June and July of 2005. The attack would take place one evening and by the next evening it was playing on Al Qaeda websites. They would use text messaging on cell phones. As part of their intimidation campaign, they executed a city councilman named Suliman. They dragged him from his car where his wife and children were and executed him in front of his wife. Then they text messaged around the city that he was dead because he cooperated with the occupiers. They also beheaded a Sunni imam for preaching tolerance in his mosque. So it was a very effective and specialized IO cell. When we started operating in the city and started killing and capturing these guys, they lost many capabilities. The first was their mortar capability because it was very detectable to our technical assets. We could identify them through a combination of counterfire and attack aviation and we were able to defeat that capability very quickly because it was the most detectable. Just through the security operations we were able to go after the IED cells. We did cordon and searches of the neighborhoods and found the bombmakers and cache sites. We were able to remove the cache sites and break down the whole structure. Towards the end we still had IEDs and sporadic small arms fire, but it was the less well trained insurgents, and their funding was disrupted and their Al Qaeda links were disrupted because those guys mostly fled. What you were left with were the younger, less experienced, less well resourced insurgents but who were still ideologically committed because the enemy took over the mosques and schools in Tall Afar. There was a very strident IO appeal especially to the young men; they just weren't well trained. Once we were able to get to that level of the insurgency, it was much easier to pick those guys up because they were not the warrant offices and senior NCOs of the Iraqi Army. They were younger, ideologically inspired but not particularly well qualified soldiers.

JM: What was the senior-level leadership of this group? Was it Al Qaeda?

PY: The clearly traceable Al Qaeda links were on the religious side. There was one guy, not really an imam, who took over a mosque on the eastern side of the city in the Sarai District and began spreading this hatred. That was in November 2004 when they destroyed the police force. He was the most direct link to Al Qaeda. The way Al Qaeda operated in Tall Afar was kind of like a venture capitalist. They had a very small leadership cell with lots of money and specialized expertise in IO and religious dogma. It was a relatively small cell made up of Iraqis. They weren't Syrians. We found a very small number of foreign fighters in this area. We found

lots of folks who would go back and forth from Syria mostly transporting money but not foreign fighters per se. These were the guys with the Al Qaeda links. They would transit back and forth with money from Syria and they had these IO capabilities. They would inspire all the local guys with military experience to become radicalized. The disbanding of the Iraqi Army is what left these guys without pensions, paychecks and without social status, and so they were angry and ripe for these religious, ideological appeals. Those guys in turn would recruit the laborers, the guys who would emplace the IEDs and all that. We only captured a handful of the Al Qaeda inspired guys. Mostly when the security situation got tight, they fled. We captured a lot of the senior leaders with technical expertise and some of the more committed direct action guys. The rest of the direct action guys kind of faded into the woodwork and we really didn't pursue them that hard. We understood they were involved in attacks against Iraqi and coalition forces primarily for either ideology or money; and our goal was to win them over by showing them that participation in the Iraqi government, in elections and economic reconstruction of the city was where their future was. We didn't have an interest in pursuing each individual triggerman.

JM: Was there a competing vision of the future? Did these insurgents have a long term vision that they were selling to the people or was it just getting the Americans out that mattered?

PY: The most extreme Al Qaeda true believers viewed the Shi'a as apostates, they viewed us as occupiers and they called the ISF stooges. They had a name for each of us and their IO theme was that by provoking attacks against us they could drive us out and lead to an Iraqi civil war, which was part of the restoration of the caliphate in the region. That didn't have a mass appeal. For the most part the population in western Nineveh Province was very poorly educated - less than 40 percent literacy rate. In a lot of cases they were happy to participate in what they saw as revenge attacks against the Shi'a whom they saw as their enemies because of the sectarian tensions that Al Qaeda had stirred up through their sectarian attacks. For the man on the street, he was not sufficiently politically sophisticated and had no larger vision of how Tall Afar connected to the larger Iraq or the larger Middle East, so there was no competing political or ideological vision at that level. But at the leadership level, both the Al Qaeda and the alienated Sunni Turkmen population - who had the military expertise - saw the insurgency as a way to drive us out and restore their positions of privilege that existed from the old Iraq. That was only at the senior level, though. The man on the street was basically angry and felt victimized and these guys were offering a way to strike back at his enemies.

JM: You said there were a number of operations prior to Operation Restoring Rights that you may have learned things from. Was Operation Rifles Blitz one of those? The operation 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR did back in November 2003 in the Al Qaim, Husaybah border region with Syria.

PY: I think at the squadron and troop level, probably, because a lot of our junior leaders were veterans of OIF I.

JM: This was when Colonel David Teeple had 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR.

PY: Right. So the ability to integrate combined arms - all our troop commanders were very comfortable bringing in attack aviation and doing security operations, partnering with Iraqis. Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hickey was an absolutely brilliant squadron commander in Tall Afar



and Lieutenant Colonel Gregory Reilly was another terrific one on the Syrian border. They had both trained their guys to a very high level based on that OIF I experience, so I certainly think it helped. I wasn't there for OIF I, so all I can say is that those junior leaders were extremely well trained by the time we got to OIF III.

JM: Are there any other thoughts or lessons learned you took from this deployment that you think are worth passing on? Also, is there anything you think contributed to your professional development in a positive way that you're going to take with you to battalion command?

PY: The thing the Army institutionally is still struggling to learn is that the most important thing we do in counterinsurgency is building host nation institutions - building security forces, building local government capacity - and yet all our organizations are designed around the least important line of operations: combat operations. There is a real danger in over-determination based on the organization's design. There's the old saying, "If you give a man a hammer, he sees every problem as a nail." Similarly, if you give a unit tanks and Bradleys, they see every problem as a movement to contact. That's an oversimplification, but it is a problem. I've now had two combat tours where I was involved in developing ISF and I've been to every Army school you can go to as an officer, and no one has ever talked to me about that challenge. No one has ever given me any classes on how to do that. Thankfully there are a lot of great Elizabeth Hellers (ph) out there and other smart people who are just figuring things out because there are problems and they just have to be solved. The institutional Army, though, has not caught up in either professional education or organizational design with the challenges of counterinsurgency. So as I go into battalion command, I'm going to focus my troops on those tasks and give them the mental models that will allow them to anticipate those problems and solve them. Eventually the institutional Army will catch up and they'll get that stuff into schools and there will be MTOE positions for security force development and civil-military operations; but until that day I think individual commanders will have to solve that problem on their own, because when we get into theater we *certainly* have to solve it. Waiting until we get there to understand that those are the problems we have to solve creates a lot of heartache. Our task as senior leaders is to anticipate those challenges and train for them before we have to go fight. That's my big takeaway on the US side. On the Iraqi side, there's just no substitute for having great Iraqi leaders whom we were just lucky enough to have. In Malaya the British said, "First you need a man, then you need a plan." Well, Mayor Najim and Major General Khorsheed were the men and the plan was clear-hold-build, and certainly the most important part of that was the men. We could have done everything exactly as we had done it, but without those two the results would have been very different. In that sense, we were very grateful for their leadership and that was probably the most important part of all this.

JM: Do you have any thoughts about how US leaders can make their own luck in these situations, so to speak? How do you train a good Iraqi leader?

PY: I think you probably *find* a good Iraqi leader. You're looking for somebody with the courage, integrity and capability to run a large city or an army division, and we Americans can't train those leaders because they have to grow them organically from their own society.

JM: And you can't just pull somebody out of line and tell them they're now going to command a division.

PY: Right. We couldn't do it any more with them than we could do it in our own society. I do think there are ways we can help, though, by establishing organizations and growing the capability to conduct counterintelligence operations within the ISF, which lets us know who the bad actors are and lets us spot a corrupt or incompetent police officer. That way, when we do pick a chief of police we pick the right one. Before we had Najim we had a guy named Rashid, and Rashid was complicit with the anti-Iraqi forces (AIF). He was the mayor of Tall Afar prior to Restoring Rights and he was the only man in Tall Afar who could walk freely through any part of the town with absolute impunity. Anyway, one day he gave us some intelligence on SA-7 missile sites in the Sarai District that we absolutely had to action. We relied very heavily on our aircraft so we could not fail to action on that intelligence. Well, it turned out to be a complex ambush and we lost two soldiers that day. Rashid was absolutely complicit in the deaths of those men. After that, in conjunction with the Nineveh Province governor, we were able to get Rashid replaced and Najim, who was then the chief of police, moved up to be mayor. I do think that having organic to our institutions the ability to develop intelligence - to collect on our friends, if you will; to be able to find our friends - is extremely important. Because once you find your friends, finding the enemy is very easy. In a city of 200,000, there are people who know who's complicit with the insurgency. So I guess if I had to condense this into a pithy little bullet it would be: don't train on finding the enemy; train on finding your friends and they will help you find your enemy.

JM: That seems like a good place to stop. What battalion are you taking over?

PY: 1-21 FA (MLRS). Not exactly the ideal counterinsurgency outfit, but you never know.

JM: Thank you for your time.



END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Jennifer Vedder, 25 September 2006