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Interview with LTC Kevin Farrell



Combat Studies Institute
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Abstract

The commander of 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment in Iraq from January 2005 through January 2006, Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Farrell and his unit were based at FOB Rustamiyah and had responsibility for an area of eastern Baghdad known colloquially as Tisa Nissan, home to more than 1.2 million inhabitants. "My mission," he explained, "was to promote stability and security, assist the Iraqi security forces in their improvement, and also to assist the Iraqi people and government in bringing about a stable, legitimate government and improving also the economy to the extent that we could." Among the many challenges Farrell faced was "getting an accurate intelligence picture of who was attacking us and why." What he ultimately concluded was that a very small number of insurgents, employing sophisticated tactics and often achieving deadly results, lived not amongst the populace but, in fact, were simply gaining access to 1-64's area of operations by means of the major highways, making killing or capturing them exceedingly difficult. Indeed, Farrell noted, "We went through so many of these neighborhoods and never had that eureka moment.... We never found a nest of opposition, a clearly defined neighborhood, or even an area that it was obvious they were targeting us." In this interview, he also discusses the media and embedded reporters; the Iraqi national elections of 15 October and 15 December; the rampant corruption he witnessed; as well as the training provided to Iraqi security forces, which ran the gamut "from atrocious to excellent." Holding a Ph.D. in European history from Columbia University, Farrell explains why the "most important preparation" he received "for assumption of command and leading a battalion into combat in this strange environment of east Baghdad" was his "graduate schooling and three years as an instructor at West Point."

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Interview with LTC Kevin Farrell

11 April 2006



JM: My name is John McCool (JM) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute (CSI), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Farrell (KF) on his experiences during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Today's date is 11 April 2006 and this is an unclassified interview. 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. Okay, sir, could you please start off by giving me a brief sketch of your military career and then we'll focus on your most recent deployment to OIF?

KF: I am a career armor officer. I graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1986 and was branched armor. I served as a lieutenant for three and a half years at Fort Hood, Texas, with the 1st Cavalry Division. I attended the Infantry Officer Advanced Course and, following that, I had company command time and staff time with the 4th Infantry Division (ID) which was then stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado. I attended graduate school at Columbia University in New York City for two years, from which I received the M.A., M.Phil. and Ph.D. in European history. Then I had a three-year teaching assignment at the United States Military Academy in the Department of History, following which I attended and graduated from the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) in 1999. Leaving Fort Leavenworth, I went to Schweinfurt, Germany, and joined 1st Battalion, 77th Armor Regiment (1-77) of the 1st ID and deployed to Kosovo as part of Operation Joint Guardian II, with then Lieutenant Colonel Tim Reese as my battalion commander. I served two full years in 1-77 Armor, one year as operations officer (S3) and one year as executive officer (XO). After that I was selected – somewhat against my will – to be the aide-de-camp to the commanding general of V Corps in Heidelberg, Germany. I worked for Lieutenant General James C. Riley. His duty assignment changed to command the Combined Arms Center (CAC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and I served with him in the same capacity for one year. Following that, I joined CSI, during which I had a tour as an advisor and training officer working with the Afghan National Army in Afghanistan. Then I returned to CSI where I was the Research and Publications team chief and then I assumed command of 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment (1-64), 2nd Brigade, 3rd ID in the summer of 2004. In the course of my command, the most notable event was a yearlong deployment to Iraq from January 2005 to January 2006 as part of OIF III. The area of my deployment was east Baghdad.

JM: First off, welcome back to CSI. Could you describe your unit's overall mission and task organization during your deployment to OIF?

KF: I'll start with the task organization. It was a permanent task organization so we deployed as a battalion and didn't really have to modify to become a task force because of the modularity concept. We had two infantry companies, two armor companies, one engineer company, a forward support company in a direct support mode, and then a headquarters and headquarters company (HHC). Our authorized modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE)

strength was around 920 soldiers and we deployed with 817. We were posted at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rustamiyah, which is in eastern Baghdad. I had responsibility for an area known colloquially as Tisa Nissan, or Nine Nissan – named after the 9th of April, an Iraqi holiday. This area is also known as “New Baghdad” or east Baghdad. Most people are probably more familiar with Sadr City, which formed the westernmost boundary of my area. My mission was to promote stability and security, assist the Iraqi security forces in their improvement, and also to assist the Iraqi people and government in bringing about a stable, legitimate government and improving also the economy to the extent that we could.

JM: What were some of the major leadership challenges that you experienced?

KF: There was a pretty broad array. I think at the top of the list would be the difficulty we faced in the enemy not identifying himself. The mission we had was pretty wide-ranging and, to the soldier on the ground, the threat of attack from an enemy who did not identify himself clearly was difficult. There were frequent periods of no contact punctuated by sharp single-type events. Whether it's sniper fire, a car bomb, a suicide/homicide bomber or, the most deadly, which were the advanced improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that would target armored vehicles.

JM: Could you expand on this phenomenon where the enemy you were facing was not derived from or living amongst the local populace?

KF: That was a challenge we faced the entire deployment: getting an accurate intelligence picture of who was attacking us and why. There were a number of threat groups identified, some overtly hostile, some probably working more behind the scenes. Probably 1.2 to 1.4 million people lived in our area of operations (AO) and the boundaries changed significantly over the course of the 11 months that we had responsibility for the sector. We went through so many of these neighborhoods and never had that eureka moment – except for one time when we found a car bomb factory – but we never found a nest of opposition, a clearly defined neighborhood, or even an area that it was obvious they were targeting us. I believe the most effective means of enemy contact were those advanced IEDs, the explosively formed penetrators, and they were brought in from somewhere outside the battalion area on the highways, placed there, and then the insurgents would trigger them and leave. We did not experience complex ambushes or attacks in which they would follow up an explosion with small arms fire or a dismounted attack of any kind. They always remained hidden during the attacks.

JM: One of the things that struck me in the briefing you gave us yesterday was your observation that these advanced IEDs have changed the nature of warfare. Could you expand on that a little bit as well?

KF: Yes. I believe that to be the case because it's now inconceivable for our forces over there to travel in any vehicle that does not have armored protection. For many years now, the discussion of the contemporary operating environment has included the concept that the front lines and the rear area will be somewhat amorphous. But I believe we're now faced with a situation where all logistics vehicles and all our ground transportation must have armored protection based on the proliferation of the IEDs – and the most deadly of them are the kind that will penetrate even significant armor. The days of having a secure area where you can travel in a

soft-skinned vehicle without a full defensive posture ready to launch a counterattack doesn't any longer exist; and I think other potential enemies will examine what's taking place in Iraq and draw lessons from that. The roadside bombs are, for the enemy, an effective means of limiting our freedom of movement because you can't have single vehicles traveling: every vehicle must be a convoy, every movement must be conducted as a deliberate operation - a movement to contact or greater type of operation.

JM: What mechanism, if any, was available or in place for sharing tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) with other battalion commanders or with other units?

KF: At my level, we had weekly meetings with the brigade commander and the battalion commanders would share ideas and talk about things as much as the situation allowed. There was also a MARNET for the 3rd ID, an Internet site where ideas could be shared, but I'll tell you I never used it, I do not believe any of my peers used it, and I don't believe my subordinates used it either. Our predecessors, 1st CAV, had something they relied upon quite heavily, but I don't recall it being used much with the 3rd ID.

JM: How would you evaluate the effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces and were there any resources or personnel for training these forces that you lacked?

KF: It's a great question. Their abilities ran the gamut from atrocious to excellent. The first battalion we formed a partnership with was 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade of the Iraqi Intervention Force (IIF), and I would say this unit was up to the standards of an average American unit. They were that good. They were disciplined, they remained in uniform, and they were patriots in the sense that they were not subject to political or religious sway. They were predominately Shi'a, but not exclusively. They had Christian members and, more importantly, they had Sunni members. They saw themselves as defenders of Iraq and didn't identify themselves with a region within Iraq.

JM: Did you inherit these guys?

KF: No, but they were on the south side of FOB Rustamiyah and, ironically, Rustamiyah was founded as the British military academy in Iraq in the 1920s. They had a small museum there that had been looted and then rebuilt. So on the southern side of the FOB, the Iraqi Military Academy-Rustamiyah (IMAR) was in full swing, and that was under the auspices of NATO. We had no direct role with them other than force of personality. As the commander of the north half of this FOB, I met and established a relationship with the residents on the south side just to coordinate common issues of defense, know what they were doing, and let them know us so we could help each other out. Co-located with the military academy was this brigade of IIF and we basically reached out to them and did partner exercises with them. My good friend, Colonel Ali, the battalion commander, we went on numerous joint patrols and conducted combined operations frequently. That's the best case. We also had multiple operations with the so-called commandos, Tiger Brigade, the Defenders of Baghdad, public order battalions - and they all seemed to come and go with dizzying succession depending on how the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Defense was assigning them, and also how U.S. forces allocated ownership. So I never had a formal partnership. The IIF partnership was one we sprung up out of convenience. In May, they were moved out west to work for the Marines so we lost that and had no direct

partnership. We did have other Iraqi units operating in our battlespace, over which we had no control. They had these military training teams (MTT) that were assigned to work with them but, from what I saw, their interaction was somewhat sporadic. But since they lived in my battlespace, I wanted to build that relationship. That was one-on-one, force of personality, conducting combined patrols, and they did get better, but they were not professionals by any stretch of the imagination. There was a great deal of corruption in their upper ranks and also a difference between the rank-and-file and the officers. Some of the officers were members of the old regime and had extensive military backgrounds, but the rank-and-file seemed to be little more than Mahdi militia members in many cases. In terms of the mission, I assessed it as the most important thing we were doing: building our Iraqi allies so they could stand on their own. The difficulty was that, based on the mission load I had as a baseline – the most demanding of which was the route security mission – it was difficult to do all the required missions of the battalion and then develop and mentor these Iraqi units. This was a bit frustrating because these Iraqi units had full-time U.S. advisors whose only role was to do that mission of advising and mentoring them. The U.S. advisors would often not visit them or wouldn't leave the FOB I commanded more than one or two days out of the week; instead, they would just call the Iraqis on cell phones. The final months of the deployment, we had a permanent partnership with an Iraqi Army unit west of Sadr City in the Adhamiyah region. This was a very fruitful partnership. It didn't improve my situation directly because they weren't operating in terrain that I owned, yet I had to offer up a company commander and a security element to serve as embedded advisors with this Iraqi battalion. That was in a Sunni area of Adhamiyah and the Iraqi Army battalion was overwhelmingly Shi'a. That was a very fruitful relationship and we worked together very well.

JM: How do you account for the differences between the 1st Battalion IIF being so good and the public order battalions, for instance, being just really bad? What was different about them?

KF: I think it was the manner in which they were raised, trained and led. The IIF was composed of recruits that came from all over Iraq. They were either graduates of IMAR or carefully screened former Iraqi officers that were handpicked for this job. The national character of them not being tied to any specific geographical region and then having an extended train up period – they were formed in October 2003 and spent many months in training – made them a proficient force. I think also the manner in which we dealt with them, by treating them as equals, by doing combined operations frequently, by hosting dinners for them and inviting them over as honored guests, having the senior officers come, presenting them awards – and they in turn did the same thing for us. We related to the Iraqis on a personal basis and this carried great weight, whereas usually the American mentality is that we wait to see if a unit delivers and then we treat them as professionals. For the Iraqis, the personal connection is essential, so I tried to approach it in both ways. The personal connection, which went over very well, and the professional connection: doing the combined operations and sharing events with each other. When we had an organizational day – our first day off in about five months – I made sure we invited the Iraqis to come and play soccer and have a barbeque with us. Why other units had more difficulties – the public order battalions and the commandos in particular – is that they tended to come from narrow geographical regions, were composed of militia gang members, and their officers frequently got their positions because of political connections or some type of non-merited-based system. They may have bought their positions or it was through nepotism. Now, there's always a degree of that. I don't mean to make it sound as if the

IIF had none of that, but it was much closer to what we would accept and tolerate as Americans than what I saw, for the most part, with the public order battalions. They were also organs of the Ministry of Interior, which is a competing organization to the Ministry of Defense. The Ministry of Interior had responsibility for all police and internal security measures and the Ministry of Defense nominally manages the army for external threats. You would find that both types of units would operate in the same battlespace, and also the Iraqi police; and yet not any one of them have overall authority or responsibility for that space, or even know what the other team was doing.

JM: One of the other things I heard in the briefing was the opinion that the Iraqis could indeed secure their own country – just look at the elections, during which there were comparatively few problems. However, on a day-to-day basis they either couldn't or wouldn't do that. Is that something you saw as well? And if so, why do you think that was the case?

KF: Yes. I would say that if it was important to them they could do it, as they did prior to both national elections that we had a direct role in, the ones on 15 October and 15 December. It wasn't a well-oiled machine; there was great confusion leading up to the day of; rehearsals didn't go off that well; and there was conflicting guidance and shortage of supplies. But, on the day of the event and the days leading up to it, the Iraqi senior leadership was out checking on positions, ensuring soldiers were in uniform, that the roads were shut down, the no-movement order was in place, and they were checking on subordinate leaders to ensure everything was done. Day in and day out – manning checkpoints and doing routine soldier functions, for example – there was great resistance to doing these tasks to standard, and it played out in a variety of ways. They just didn't seem to have the interest or inclination to stay in uniform and do the unglamorous tasks of manning a checkpoint or being on a routine patrol. They were usually very zealous about searching houses, conducting very flamboyant sweeps and raids with very little to no intelligence, going into houses, and just kind of running around without achieving much – especially if these were of short duration.

JM: Can you tell me a little bit more about the neighborhood advisory councils (NACs) and the district advisory councils (DACs)? In the briefing, it came out that the average member felt little obligation to the citizenry, had little influence among them, and, in fact, the citizens themselves hardly knew who their representative was or that they even existed, in some cases. Can you expand on that and discuss what you think this says about the future of democracy in Iraq?

KF: First off, your comments are accurate. When we occupied the battlespace, we inherited 10 NACs and the DAC that oversaw the NACs in the Tisa Nissan region. What I learned from my predecessors was that these organizations had been created when the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) had responsibility for the area and they gathered volunteers to serve as representatives for the people. They received pay to serve in these positions and, at the neighborhood level, they were getting \$450 a month and at the district level they were getting \$600 a month – U.S. dollars. My predecessor said they really didn't provide much useful intelligence and they had little interest in the lives of those people they nominally represented. They would be very vocal for a project or some type of action that was in their front yard, but they never understood the concept of expanding influence or control to the larger area they were responsible for. I think the concept that elected officials are responsible to those who have elected them is an alien concept to the Iraqis. In the past, it was a dictatorship with a socialistic

type of economy. All sources of wealth came from the government – primarily oil money – and so any job or perk, any distribution of wealth or advancement, one always had to look up. So, as a result, these NACs and DACs looked to the Americans for handouts, for patronage, for contracts and money; and whenever we awarded a contract to a neighborhood, they believed they were entitled to a cut, which we would term graft. It was very difficult to break them of this habit. We always wanted to hire quality control inspectors, theoretically to supervise the quality of work being done. But really, the quality control inspectors would just be people on the payroll and the money would, in fact, go back to the DAC member. It was just a way for them to get a kickback for the job. The people did not know who their NAC and DAC representatives were; and, if they did know these organizations even existed, universally they would say they were just a bunch of crooks who just wanted money and were only interested in themselves, not in making things better. That's a very negative picture of the situation, but overall this was accurate. However, there were individuals that tried – within the limits of their cultural understanding – to represent the people and make life better for the Iraqis. But I think even the best among them could not break themselves entirely free of the concept that it was their duty as a breadwinner to take whatever they could for personal reasons, to provide for their family. Their first role and responsibility was as a member of their family and their tribe; and therefore, whenever contracts came in, they were duty-bound to get as big a slice of them as they could to provide for their family and their extended clan.

JM: How optimistic are you that that habit can be broken?

KF: It's going to take a long time to break them of that notion, and I don't think it will be done gently. It is deeply rooted in their culture from what I saw and in my experience trying to work through the issue. As a possible parallel, think about American civic organizations, businesses, elected officials: we take it as a matter of principle that we should look beyond family connections and uphold the blind scales of justice. We are duty bound, when we hold high office, not to show favoritism to anyone because of personnel connections but, instead, to be objective and fully function within the law. I think the degree to which we have that ingrained in our society, it's to the exact same degree but in the opposite direction in Arab culture. If they're the head of a tribe, a sheik or the provider for that family, not only is it acceptable to take that cut for their family, in fact it's an *obligation*. And if they fail to take that bribe, or at least do everything they can to get it, they're letting their family down and they're failing in a fundamental way as a man.

JM: You mentioned you earned your Ph.D. in history from Columbia. Did that education or just that general appreciation of history help you in any way? Were there any historical parallels you were able to draw from?

KF: Certainly. As I prepared for the deployment and went through it, there were a number of events in my career that I believe prepared me for this challenge. The most important preparation for assumption of command and leading a battalion into combat in this strange environment of east Baghdad was my graduate schooling and my three years as an instructor at West Point. To be trained in advanced intellectual concepts and, even though my area of influence was modern western European history, to be able to understand and accept the complexities and differences of other nations, cultures and evolutions of societies, and to take part in advanced scholarship. Another formative event was my deployment to Kosovo as an

operations officer, dealing with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), dealing with Serbs and Albanians in the former Yugoslavia, dealing with American and allied units and the complexity on the ground. Again, we went in expecting one set of circumstances – thinking we were going to rescue the Albanian people oppressed by the Serbs – and we found out, in fact, that it was the Serbs who were being terrorized by the Albanian majority. Another formative experience was my operations in Afghanistan, dealing with another Islamic situation. Kosovo is a different type of Islam, you could say, but the Islamic part of it, and certainly Afghanistan and the challenges there. My career as an armor officer, dealing with mechanized high-intensity training, the various platforms, tanks and Bradleys, and being able to shoot, move and communicate at high rates of speed. I had almost two decades of preparation for that, and all these experiences were essential in preparing for this. In terms of historical study, I was familiar with the British experience. An area of some expertise of mine is the British colonial experience, so I had a sense of the challenges the British had in that region of the world. They actually created Iraq; they drew the boundaries, you could say. So I was aware of those things and that the British rolled into Iraq fairly easily with minimal opposition. It just didn't turn out quite as well over the long run for them as they had thought initially. I had expectations that we would find some interesting things on the ground, and it was because of my historical study that I knew this would be the case. It didn't mean I would have the answers necessarily or even be able to ask the right questions; but my mind was fertile and open to novel solutions to some very complex problems.

JM: What do you point to as some of the major battalion accomplishments for this yearlong deployment?

KF: The most important things we did would be the two national elections. There were several U.S. battalions in and around Baghdad and we somehow ended up with 25 percent of the polling sites. The fact was that both the 15 October and the 15 December elections went off largely without incident. We saw no evidence of people being denied the opportunity to vote and there were no successful insurgent attacks on any of the polling sites. Those are the kinds of thing I take away as the most significant contributions. And really, I say we took part in history because there had never been national elections of that type in the history of Iraq. The next thing would be the development of the Iraqi forces. I painted a fairly bleak picture of the public order battalions but, that being said, I think they did improve. I'd like to believe the IIF became a better unit because of their exposure to us; and conversely, our junior soldiers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and leaders were better because they dealt with a broader range of challenges and saw someone else doing it. They were training others at the same time they were conducting their own operational missions. I'd like to think we helped the lives of many, many Iraqis – both in goodwill and in bringing improved security to many neighborhoods. Sadly, we weren't able to bring complete security and there were many challenges that need to be resolved. We helped oversee construction of municipal facilities, shelters and employment centers. We improved roads; the medical civil affairs program (MEDCAP) people got out and helped some pretty seriously ill children; and we distributed school supplies. I think we won over many of the next generation of Iraqis by them seeing the kindness and genuine hospitality of Americans. Young children that had never seen an American before came away with a positive exposure. Finally, I think it improved the combat readiness of the battalion as a whole and provided valuable individual experiences for every member of the battalion. It was a long, difficult year in a very challenging environment. We had significant losses on our part and also

significant achievements in terms of killing and capturing many insurgents and their equipment. All that made every member of the battalion a more capable soldier or officer.

JM: One of the things briefed at length earlier today, in the discussion of your Operation Traffic Stop, was the issue of the media and how they misinterpreted the aftermath and basically gave a completely false image of what actually occurred in terms of the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack that killed the Iraqi children. Do you have any recommendations for other battalion commanders or other leaders on how to deal more effectively with the media?

KF: The thing is that the media gets it right when they're embedded with you. There's a great reluctance - and I felt it too - to let the media in too close because, if you do, they might show that image you don't want shown or they might report on you in a negative fashion. But the four different cases in which I had an extended embed working with us - and by extended, I mean five days to several weeks - they got it right because they were out on patrol, they were with the soldiers, they had the experiences the soldiers had, and they faced the same threats and challenges. So in doing that, all they had to do was report what they saw, and they were very eloquent in doing that. I was very pleased, especially, by Hugh Sykes from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). He did a magnificent job of reporting the achievements of both the 15 October and 15 December elections, and he had no agenda. He wasn't coming to be a mouthpiece. He wasn't working for Voice of America or anything; he was just reporting on the situation in Iraq. But because he was with us and because he was allowed access to Iraqi civilians and Iraqi military and was just out and about without restraint, he told it like it was and it was a very powerful story, a very positive outcome for the whole situation. The same went for an *Army Times* reporter, a National Public Radio (NPR) reporter: they got it right because they were there for more than just a soundbite. Where it went wrong - and there were several of these cases - the most frustrating was Rory Carroll, the reporter from the *Guardian*. He had an agenda to show that snipers were sapping morale. He misrepresented himself and said, instead, that he was coming to talk about electronic communications and how we email back home. He later wrote a hatchet piece, which was picked up by insurgent websites, that misquoted me and other members of the battalion, to try and show that the supposed sniper out there was sapping our morale and affecting our operations when, in fact, that was not at all true. But he just did the drive-by, did a quick snapshot interview here and there. Subsequently, he was kidnapped later by the Mahdi militia in what appeared to be a staged event. Sadly, though, that negative story got legs. I can't tell you how many times that article was sent to me in Iraq or I would be queried by higher because I was mentioned in it. He misrepresented much of what had been said. Another example would be the VBIED case you referred to. In that case, there were Iraqi reporters or informants on the ground that fed directly to the U.S. journalists or through a quick telephonic interview where you're trying to make your point and tell them what actually happened. They weren't there, they didn't see the scene, they weren't part of the lead up to it, nor did they see the aftermath; so they just told their soundbite and, not surprisingly, they got it wrong. I think the best advice is to take the embeds and embrace them. Have the journalists stay with you for an extended period. Yes, there's overhead involved, you have to have a place for them to live, and you have to give up a seat for them on your Humvees. You'll also find, though, that the reporter who's willing to go out into danger repeatedly along with your men is going to be impressed by that experience. He'll know full well what he's

writing about because he has lived it and I think that's a good way to ensure that an accurate message gets out there.

JM: One of the major takeaways I've personally had is that an individual's perspective, in Iraq especially, is completely molded by what time they were there and where they were located geographically. That said, are there any universal lessons you took that can be applied across the board?

KF: Yes, and that's a great question. I've said it many times all politics are local, all insurgencies are local. Remember, 35 to 40 percent of my battalion were OIF I veterans – and their experience in OIF I was *very* different than what we faced in OIF III. The way I approach the challenge was to focus on certain themes that would make us able to function wherever we went, and I boiled it down to discipline and cohesion. Each soldier has the self-discipline to respond appropriately to the situation. To overcome the fear or the sorrow of a wounded comrade. If his task and duty is to return fire or treat the wounded or report or evacuate, he would do that. Hand in hand with the individual discipline goes the unit discipline. Every man on the vehicle and on the team knows what his role is, so they function as a disciplined team – because without the discipline, they are simply a mob with weapons. The other part of it is the cohesion, that every soldier must have trust and confidence in the competence of the man to his left and right, and also up and down. If you have those fundamentals, you can respond as the threat changes. You can deal with the broad open areas where it was largely farmland, lightly populated with dirt roads, and not as threatening an environment but you still have to be alert, versus the built up areas where the crowds might turn hostile or it might be a very receptive environment. It does vary so widely. Even during the time we were there, atmospherics would change in neighborhoods, and our boundaries and missions actually changed in the emphasis of what we were doing. It's a cliché, but it works.

JM: Are there any other issues we didn't bring up, any parting thoughts you think would be of potential value or interest to other soldiers or other leaders?

KF: One thing that would be a big help to any unit that deploys would be a good line of communication with the unit they're going to replace. We did not know where we were going until several days before we got there. When we left the United States, we had a general sense that we were going to this region of Baghdad. We thought we might be replacing 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment. We did end up replacing them but we also assumed the missions of others. It sure would have been useful for us in the train up to know where we were going, who was there, and what their lessons learned were so we could start training on that and acclimating ourselves – at least in the general sense – before we got there. Also, the soldiers and junior leaders need to understand that there are going to be significant cultural differences where they're going. There has been some talk about language training, and you're not going to be able to learn Arabic in a matter of weeks before you go. But having some regular classes and regular instruction and, for junior officers and senior NCOs, some assigned readings in the history of the region you're going to and the current situation – that would pay huge dividends.

JM: Did the unit replacing you know in sufficient time that they were replacing you?

KF: No, and in fact we didn't know for sure that anybody would be replacing us until they showed up. It was an uncertainty up until they actually came; and then what role they would have and what portion of the battlespace they would have wasn't ironed out until we actually started the left seat/right seat ride. I know from talking to a good friend of mine that, prior to their arrival in country, their planned battlespace assignment had changed three times, each being a significant departure from the other. So by the time it came close, of course they're in a state of disbelief. It would be nice to know where you're going to be but, for whatever reason, I don't think our Army is going to be able to identify sufficiently in advance where units are going. That's why I come back to the basics, the concepts of discipline and cohesion. If your unit is well trained and it's cohesive, it will be able to respond to the threat. In line with that, I think initiative is key. We are a centralized institution and there's a great demand for information to go up. With modern communications, it's extremely easy to both demand and receive large amounts of information instantaneously. Many times, because of the linkages of communications, I would get a call from higher headquarters after an attack before the unit on the ground was even able to report to me. But we need to ensure that subordinate units have the initiative, because it's the soldier on the ground, it's the platoon and squad that's out there routinely in these neighborhoods, that has the best sense of what ground truth is. We need to listen to their recommendations and take the intelligence and information they provide to higher, instead of what I saw all too often, which was a cookie cutter top-down approach. I go back to the example of the bubble. "You have to have the bubble around your convoys." That might have worked well in other areas but, for us, that was bad training that we had to unlearn pretty quickly.

JM: Okay, sir, thanks very much for your time today. It's greatly appreciated.



END OF INTERVIEW

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