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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 MAJ Jeffrey Allen



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Abstract

As part of the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team, Major Jeffrey Allen served as senior advisor to the 18th Battalion, New Iraqi Army, and leader of the advisor support team during roughly half of his August to December 2004 deployment in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Later, he transitioned to become the deputy team leader for 3rd Brigade, New Iraqi Army. By-name requested by General David Petraeus – then commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq – in these capacities, Allen coached and mentored the Iraqi leadership “on all aspects of being a modern military, from how to organize a staff and how to prepare for and conduct training, to how to take care of their soldiers.” Stationed at the Kirkush Military Training Base in eastern Iraq, he also worked closely with senior non-commissioned officers and junior mid-grade officers because he knew they would comprise the Iraqi Army’s future leadership. Among the many challenges he faced were the difficulties of building and maintaining rapport; working with very little logistical support; trying to instill an appreciation for individual initiative and decentralized decision-making; and dealing with the frictions that resulted from multi-ethnic units. ““You haven’t lost your family or your clan or your tribe that you’re a member of back home;” Allen would tell the troops. ““They’re still there, but now you’ve gained another family.”” Although temped to take command on a “daily basis,” he nonetheless called this “the most rewarding experience I can possibly think of, being in Iraq.” In addition to discussing being forward with 3rd Brigade for operations in Fallujah in November and December of 2004, Allen also gives advice on how advisors such as himself could be better prepared to perform these kinds of training missions.

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Interview with MAJ Jeffrey Allen

5 December 2005



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 Major Jeffrey Allen [JA] on his experiences during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Also present is Dr. Don Wright [DW], also of the Combat Studies Institute, who will be asking questions as well. Today's date is 5 December 2005 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, sir, if at any time you feel we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information. And if classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Major Allen, could you please start by telling me what unit you served with during your operational deployment?

JA: I served initially under the construct of the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team [CMATT], which fell under the Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq, MNSTC-I. I was the senior advisor to the 18th Battalion, New Iraqi Army, and team leader of the Advisor Support Team for about half of my time. Then I went over to 3rd Brigade, New Iraqi Army, and was the deputy to the brigade team leader. So I served with two separate units, essentially.

JM: What was the relevant time period of your deployment?

JA: August through December of last year, 2004.

JM: And where were you stationed during these times?

JA: Well, when I was with the 18th Battalion, I was at Kirkush Military Training Base, KMTB, in eastern Iraq. And then, when I moved over to 3rd Brigade, I went with 3rd Brigade forward to operations in Fallujah in November and December.

JM: From a chronological perspective, can you talk about the circumstances surrounding your deployment order, where you were and what preparations you made?

JA: I was stationed at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle. Then Major General [David] Petraeus, at the time, and Colonel Ben Hodges came to speak to the class. Ben Hodges had been my battalion commander when I was in 3-187, so I spoke with him in the Green Room where he introduced me to General Petraeus. At this point, General Petraeus was still commander of the 101st [Airborne Division] but had already been identified to take command of MNSTC-I. So while I was speaking to them, I told Colonel Hodges and General Petraeus that I would like to go support him in that mission. I got a tasking about two months later through G3, and then basically my chain of command and I think, eventually, General Petraeus sent a by-name request for me and, of course, by that point as a three-star general, you get a by-name request, you're going. I was project officer for the War College graduation, so the request was that I remain through the graduation of the class, which was June 30. Then I received my orders and deployed on 1 August for the CRC [CONUS (Continental United States) Replacement Center]

and spent five days at CRC. So I spent five days there at Fort Bliss and flew directly into Kuwait, two or three days in Kuwait, and then into BIAP [Baghdad International Airport], into Baghdad.

JM: And did you receive any special training prior to deploying?

JA: No, other than what you receive at the CRC. At the time, I think CRC training was to the lowest common denominator, so there were some things that were probably missing from the CRC training, but nothing specific for training indigenous forces.

JM: Did you know at this point that that was going to be your mission?

JA: Yes.

JM: You went with full knowledge of that?

JA: Well, there's always the chance that you get yanked somewhere to do something else, but my expectation was that's what I was going to do and, yes, that's what I ended up doing.

JM: How did you prepare yourself for this particular mission?

JA: Mostly a lot of reading. There's a Colonel Jeff Buchanan who had set up the training model. He also had been my former battalion commander at 3-187, so I contacted him and got as much information as I could on the program of instruction that the Iraqis were going under, so I was prepared. And I knew roughly that it was based off of the U.S. model, and in a previous assignment, I had been an XO [Executive Officer] at a basic training company for a year and a half, so I fully understood the POI [Program of Instruction] of infantry basic training and being prior service I had lived through it. So I had some understanding of that, and then tried to read as much as I could on the current operating environment as well as culture - things like that. So it was mostly self-preparation on both how to train basic training as well as melding that with the Iraqi factor.

JM: Now what were the main differences that you anticipated? How were you going to have to change your traditional training model to put it toward Iraqi use?

JA: Well, one of the big factors was language. I didn't speak Arabic, so I wasn't quite sure how that was going to work - and it didn't work very well. We tended to work around it.

JM: A lot of hand gestures?

JA: Yeah. The interesting challenge that I hadn't anticipated, but looking back I probably should have - I just didn't put one and one together - was the fact that I was going to be conducting basic training for my battalion over Ramadan, and so that obviously threw some interesting challenges into it. Essentially it was the latter half of basic training. I wouldn't have known this going into it, because I didn't know if I was taking a unit that was already through basic training, was just starting basic training, any of that timeline until I got there. But once I got assigned to my battalion and we laid out the calendar, we realized that Ramadan was going to

fall through the second half of basic training. The second phase is obviously getting the collective training, and the only way to get collective training – squad-level infantry training – is out in the field. Even if it's just outside the building in the quad, you still have to be outside. Based on heat and the Arab nature, you need soldiers to be well rested, well fed and well hydrated. None of those factors really figure very well into Ramadan. So we had to work around that where we basically trained really early in the morning for a couple of hours, let everybody eat, and then put them down during the day and tried to get some more training in later in the afternoon. So we'd start training prior to the time when they could eat and drink again so that we could train for two or three hours. Then we'd take a break, let everybody eat, and then train again into the evening. That was a workaround. We were constrained by the outlined timeline. We were required to graduate by a certain date and there was no flexibility in that whatsoever. Just because Ramadan was in there, we were expected to work around it. There was a challenge in that.

JM: What were some of the main cultural differences that you recognized early on that impacted directly your mission?

JA: There are really two. With the military culture, as it relates to the Arab culture, there are privileges of the officer corps. Like so many militaries I've dealt with in the past, the officer corps is a *class*. We are taught that you have to earn the respect of your subordinates, and you do that by leading the way, being out front, sharing the pain, showing your soldiers that you're not going to ask them to do anything that you wouldn't do yourself. That's counter culture to a lot of the Iraqi officers – and, personally, I believe that is also a factor of the Arab culture as it relates to the military. Something else that's related to that is information flow. Information is power and the more information you have and you keep to yourself, the more power you have. That was *very* challenging because we're trying to create a modern military with a professional non-commissioned officers corps and subordinate officers making decisions and decentralized control, and that was a huge challenge. I have to give you one quick vignette. The training schedule called for these various companies to be in various classrooms and the air conditioning wasn't working, and so it was even hotter inside than it was outside. Well, I made the recommendation that we move outside. And he said, "I can't do that because the training schedule says I'm here." And I said, "You're the company commander, it's your company, just do it. Maybe go tell somebody to tell the battalion commander that you're doing it, but just do it, you're in charge." "No, I can't do that, and I can't ask the battalion commander if we can, because now I'm challenging his authority." And I think a lot of that is culturally related because a lot of the junior officers were not prior military regime. This was a Kurdish company commander who obviously was not part of the former Iraqi Army, but the battalion commander was. So a lot of it, again, was the culture. He was seen as the hierarchical figure: you don't ask, you don't question, you just do as you're told. And so it wasn't so much a factor of this is the old way the army had done it. He was not prior Iraqi military; he was *peshmerga*. But it was a cultural thing; he was the leader, so you don't ask, you don't question or anything like that. So those were huge challenges to try and get the initiative and decision-making at a lower level. That's a huge challenge.

JM: The people who actually were officers, did they become officers based upon who they knew? Or was there a military academy with an OCS [Officer Candidate School] that they were going through?

JA: I'm not really the best person to ask because I was assigned my officer pool. I had nothing to do with it. I had numerous battalion commanders in the eight weeks I worked with the one battalion, but most of the battalion commanders were former regime officers who had served. I know the last one I worked with had been stationed down around Al Kut for most of his career. He had about 20 years in the former Iraqi Army; he was a full colonel. But a lot of the lieutenants and captains – well, the company commanders were majors. But I had at least one *peshmerga* company commander; I had one former Republican Guard company commander; I had one that had been a school teacher, and they had all been appointed through various means through the Ministry of Defense, but that had all been set up prior to me getting there. I do know that they were making huge strides. We've seen that with the military academy, to try to set that up and come up with a more equitable way of commissioning officers. But I had a complete hodgepodge, some with military experience, some without. But how they got there, and got their actual assignments, I can't answer that.

JM: You were an advisor; you were a team leader. What was your specific involvement? What were you doing on a day-to-day basis? Were you in the field with them? Were you developing training regimens?

JA: Everything. We were an advisory support team. My clear guidance was to coach and to mentor but not to teach. You normally say coach, teach, mentor. My job, at least in a formal environment, was not to teach. Not to stand up in front of a classroom and teach the classes: the Iraqis were to do that. What we were to do was to coach and mentor the leadership on all aspects of being a modern military, from how to organize a staff, how to prepare for and conduct training, how to take care of their soldiers – and it really became all-encompassing. I had NCOs that were in the weeds on a daily basis with the S1 [personnel officer] and the sergeant major on how to do personnel accountability. That really took one of my NCOs an entire day, everyday, working through an accounting procedure, and there were various reasons for that. One, that it wasn't part of their culture. Two, we had no automated systems, and then there was the language barrier, etc. My biggest challenge, personally, as the leader of the team and the American face on all this, was the leadership aspect. Taking care of soldiers, dealing with the cultural infighting between Kurds and Arabs and the Kurdish officers feeling not respected and not accepted by the higher chain of command. All of those types of things. Getting reports from talking to soldiers. I'd walk around the training when they're on a break with my interpreter. I'd sit there and talk to soldiers, which was huge for them because their officers didn't just sit down and just shoot the breeze with them. And I would do that to show the officers and the NCOs that this is a good thing so that your soldiers can relate to you, respect you, and you can find out what's going on in the ranks. But also to bolster the American position within the ranks and have them say, "Hey, these guys are okay." Then taking that information and things I get back and then going and talking to the battalion commander, saying, "Okay, we've got some issues in the ranks. I want to know if you're aware of them." Almost like being an OC [Observer Controller] at JRTC [Joint Readiness Training Center], having that on-the-ground situational awareness and then going back and seeing how much the chain of command knows about it and what they're doing about it. Those types of things. It was a constant balance.

DW: Who exactly was on your team? What did the team consist of at the battalion level?

JA: I was authorized a 10-man team, which was supposed to be seven NCOs, two captains and myself. I had a five-man team. I had one captain and three NCOs. Two of the NCOs had an infantry background. One was an 88M [Military Occupational Specialty 88M: Motor Transport Operator]. They were all National Guard. As a matter of fact, I was the only Regular Army officer in the brigade team at the time. Some of the brigades were different, because it was a hodgepodge organization as they were grabbing people that they could. I know that the 3rd Brigade were mostly guys from the 7th ATC [Army Training Command] out of Grafenwoehr, Germany. But that was my team composition. At first it was a challenge – well, really it was a challenge the whole time, because I was undermanned. It was either focus on the staff or focus on the training. And I know, by my instructions, it was to focus on the training, but if the staff didn't function, the battalion wouldn't function. If we didn't have food, if we didn't get ammo, if we didn't get the weapons, if we didn't coordinate the ranges – training wasn't going to happen. Training was going to take care of itself, because the Iraqi NCOs knew how to conduct training, whether it was our model, their model, they were told what classes they were going to train on given days and they trained on those classes. Whether it was to our standard or not was relatively irrelevant. We wanted to get somewhat trained and disciplined soldiers, but we needed the staff to function because we knew eventually this battalion was going to fight. And if we didn't have beds for these soldiers to sleep in and uniforms for them to wear, or feed them properly or pay them properly, they would go AWOL [Absent Without Leave] and we wouldn't have a battalion to train anyway. So my four-man team, I assigned them both to a company that they were going to sponsor, supervise when they could, and then to a respective staff position. My NCOIC [Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge] was sergeant major S1; my 88M was S4 [logistics officer]; and then I had my captain and an infantry NCO that were my S2 [intelligence officer] and S3 [operations officer]. We predominately focused on the S3 early on because of training and all that. A little bit on the physical security piece with the S2 and then eventually tried to build the S2 up a little bit better as we progressed, so that's how I broke my team down.

DW: So just to clarify, this battalion was training as a battalion. This was a unit that was training, as is, to go out collectively and conduct operations.

JA: It was entirely cohort, and from my understanding, the CMATT was using that entire model. The cadre came in for a couple weeks of cadre instruction that was led by centralized training. It was the same people doing this training for all the officer cadre – and this happened for my battalion before I got there, so I wasn't party to this. They were assigned their staff positions; they were taught what your position on the staff does or company commander, or what have you. They were also instructed on the POI for the basic training, what was going to happen. They got paid, went home on leave, and they were supposed to come back on a certain date to stand the battalion up. Then about a week after they got back, that was when we started receiving the soldiers. The NCOs and the company commanders of the respective companies would receive their soldiers, house them, conduct the basic training for them, so it was all basically done at company level for the most part. And then, eventually, we would all go to combat together.

DW: Okay, can I keep on going, John?

JM: Sure, go ahead.

DW: Going back to the question Mr. McCool had about preparation, looking back, do you wish there was something you had done before you arrived in theater or that your team members had – in other words, would it have been helpful to have a two-week, six-week, six-month advisor course before going in?

JA: Absolutely. Any more knowledge or training tailored on what we were going to be doing would have been beneficial.

DW: What would you put in the POI for a course like that? If you had endless, countless resources, what would that POI look like to prepare somebody like you to go in?

JA: I'd have to start with a couple assumptions. I'd have to start with the assumption that the people who were selected to go would know how to do training, training management, understand training, those types of things. That being said, most of that is done now. All the battalions are trained. Now there is a schoolhouse, kind of like we have here – you know, basic training that's done with a replacement individual augmentee as you take casualties or whatever. The battalions are formed and now you fill in one-sies and two-sies as they come. So the model now is a little different than it was. But working off the model I went through, again, the assumption that the training methodology was fairly well understood. You would have to have courses that were focused on the culture and the capabilities and interacting with the Iraqis – or whatever culture you were dealing with. So language, cultural training, you got a little bit of that at CRC but not nearly enough – that would have been critical. If I could have gone in and had a conversation with an Iraqi in Arabic – and I don't need to be proficient. I'm not proficient in Turkish, but if you spoke Turkish, I could talk to you and get my point across. There was no language training whatsoever. So that would have been critical, because of the fact that interpreters were a commodity and in very short supply. Probably a review of training methodology, leadership, be, know, do – all those types of things. But very basic, just to get your mind back into doctrinal expectations of leadership, because the biggest challenge was leadership and the role of the officer and the non-commissioned officer. A lot of it's intuitive because we've lived it. But it's very counterintuitive to them, the professional non-commissioned officer corps. I've trained with a lot of former Soviet republics and militaries, and it's obviously counterintuitive to them. They don't have professional non-commissioned officer corps, and I know that that was one of the factors why a lot of former Soviet republics had to wait so long to get into NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], because it was a prerequisite for NATO – and we worked with Romania and other countries to do that. So those types of things, to set the advisors up so they have the big picture. I anticipated it because I'd worked with former Soviet republics, but there are probably a lot of other guys that would have gotten over there and been, "What do you mean you don't have a professional non-commissioned officer corps? You don't trust your NCOs? Why don't you trust your NCOs?" Well, it's because they don't have a professional non-commissioned officer corps. They don't train them. They don't trust them, so it's a very centralized hierarchy.

DW: If you take an historical look at Americans in advisory roles – going back 50, 60, even 100 years – one of the things that is constantly emphasized to people like yourself is that you need to build rapport between you and your counterpart. In this case, the battalion commander or commanders, as you said. How important was that rapport and were there any downsides to that? Were you able to successfully build rapport between yourself and your counterparts?

JA: That, without a doubt, is the biggest factor. It was my focus, my interaction with the battalion commander. I advised, I mentored everywhere else that I could and touched things that I could, but the battalion commander was the center of gravity for me. Especially in such a centralized hierarchy, he sets the tone for the battalion. My challenge was, I think, unique – maybe not entirely unique – but I went through seven battalion commanders in eight weeks. Some quit, some were fired, some were promoted, some never showed back up and we never found out what happened to them, so I had some unique challenges there. I wound up building a very, very good rapport with the guy that consistently was the battalion executive officer and acting battalion commander in the interim when we didn't have a battalion commander. He happened to be a Kurd, *peshmerga*. Our rapport was such that he was in tears when I left. The last I knew he was still the battalion commander. He'd been promoted to lieutenant colonel and was serving as the battalion commander. And by building a good rapport with him, the battalion S3 and the sergeant major, I was able to work around the difficulties I had with the battalion commander. There was one battalion commander I had for the majority of the basic training, for about three or four weeks, and he and I had a love-hate relationship. We did the typical Arab smile, greet, chitchat, drink chai. I don't smoke cigarettes, but I would smoke a cigarette with him – you know, those types of things – and then our conversations would turn ugly. To give you a brief example of that, we provided them two desktop computers. That's all I could provide them. They were authorized ten and two laptops or something like that. Ten computers overall. They had two. We're trying to build this battalion so I wanted one to go to the S3 for doing training calendars and all those types of things, and one for the S1 for all of his accountability, but it would have to be shared amongst the staff. One of those two computers sat on the battalion commander's desk for weeks, not turned on, collecting dust. It was a status symbol for him. He had a computer on his desk. He had no idea how to even turn it on, but it didn't matter. It was sitting on his desk. Everyday it was, "Sir, when are you going to turn that over to the S1? Sir, I'd really like that to go to the S1." So finally it got to the point that, "Sir, I gave you that computer. It says property of the U.S. Government on the side of it. If that computer is not in the S1's office tomorrow morning, I am taking it back because I could use it on my team." So the next day it was finally in the S1's office, but it was the threat of losing it. The next computers we got in, one went to the battalion commander again. It came to threat and coercion sometimes to get my will across.

DW: This is an excellent segue to my next question. If you were so focused on building rapport, what leverage do you have to get them to go a certain way, because you could endanger the rapport by doing exactly what you said, threatening his possession of the computer?

JA: Some things were easy. "Sir, really it won't hurt you. Just do it. We're trying to do some things here, please work with me." And sometimes that worked. On larger things, it really came down to threat and coercion. But really the threat and coercion was mostly *stuff*. They knew the U.S. military was providing them everything, from the contract for the food they were provided to all of the equipment that the battalion was getting. I was fortunate that, going back again to my NCOs, my 88M was [the character Sergeant] Peterson from [the 1968 movie] *The Green Berets* personified. That man could find water in the desert and he scrounged everything. So I would walk into the battalion commander's office on certain days, or even late at night sometimes, with arms full. "I've brought you office supplies. I've brought you pens." There was no logistical system at all, both on the Iraqi side and for the CMATT side. So I would walk in bearing gifts and then, basically, tell him how I will take these gifts away if you don't do what I

ask you to do. They had a copy of their MTOE [Modified Table of Organization and Equipment] and they knew what they were authorized and what was coming. And that was one of my biggest battles outside of the battalion, and all of ours, was trying to get the stuff that both the advisor support teams were authorized and the Iraqi battalions were authorized. And there was a *huge* disparity between what the staff at Baghdad thought we had and what we actually had on the ground. It took us flying to Baghdad and looking people in the face who thought that we had this stuff and explaining to them, "No, I don't have this. No, I don't have that." It really got painful for awhile, but that was how I personally leveraged getting what I wanted done or what we wanted done in the battalion. Bribing them is probably not the appropriate term, but, "If you do this for me, I will work on getting you X." He desperately wanted this Thuraya satellite phone that he was authorized, so I worked diligently on getting him that, and then when I finally got it, the cards to recharge the minutes became a leverage tool for me. "Sir, if you do this for me, I can get you more cards." Because he couldn't use it without the cards for the minutes, so that's what it came to because I was never briefed on any other real authority over him. This was after 30 June, this was after the transition, and they were in charge. I couldn't order him to do anything. I was an advisor, so how I got him to do what I wanted was with stuff.

DW: You talked about trying to impart new values like initiative. You brought initiative up. How successful were you and do you think ultimately that is something that American advisors should be trying to do with non-American armies? In other words, is it better to try and build on the American model or adapt to another culture and maybe take a little bit less than what you really want?

JA: Oh, I think there's no doubt than you're going to get less than you what want. We're not going to ever train them to our standard. There's no country that's the same as us and I don't think we want that. What we're doing with the federal government, with the Iraqi constitution, is that we realize that we can't have a true democracy that's totally secular in Iraq. There's going to be some religion in it. But that's okay, because if it works for them, that's good. So what we tried to do was impart the modern military model of the professional military corps, decentralized decision-making, those types of things. I worked with battalion commander as much as I could on that but I knew the man had over 20 years of military service under Saddam Hussein. He'd seen how it worked. My focus was with the senior non-commissioned officers and the junior, mid-grade officers in the battalion, because I knew we weren't going to change the mindset overnight. But these guys, five or 10 years from now, were going to be the battalion commanders and the brigade commanders, and so if they could remember back to their time of working with the American Army, they'd say, "These guys were always talking about initiative, and when I was a company commander, all I wanted to do was to be able to make my own decisions and do what I wanted to do, so when I'm the battalion commander, I will allow my company commanders to make decisions and trust them." That type of thing. And again, we do that here in the U.S. Army today, in that I remember the battalion commanders that let me make mistakes, let me fall on my face, but let me make decisions for myself. I've never been a battalion commander, but when I was a lieutenant, I remember a company commander who was like that, so I tried to allow my lieutenants to do the same thing. But if I'd come up under a company commander that was centralized, hierarchical, dictatorial, I might have been that type of company commander, and I hope I wasn't. I hope I was effective and allowed that initiative. So again, I was trying to work with the guys that were next to try and change the system. The

real challenge is that, with that kind of system, you've really got to attack it from both directions because, yeah, it takes awhile for it to bubble up from the bottom and these guys that you really need continue to get beat down from higher. We really needed strong advisors that were advising the division commander and the brigade commander to say, "Lighten up. Don't worry about the battalions." And that was where the biggest challenge lay, and my experience was that our brigade team was weak - the American advisor team - in particular the brigade team chief. So basically, anything that the brigade commander did that was questionable ethically, he would just say, "Well, it's his brigade, what am I supposed to do?" Those kinds of things, and that just filtered down. So the battalion team chiefs - myself and my two other peers - we were at a crossroads, because we were trying to instill these junior leaders, trying to get the battalion commander to lighten up, but meanwhile the battalion commander is getting hammered by the brigade commander and the brigade commander is just doing whatever he wants. Literally. There were some directives out from MOD [Ministry of Defense] that no transfers of officers could be done without MOD approval. The brigade commander did whatever he wanted to do. "Let MOD come down here." And he came down and took all the guys that were smart on how to use computers and took them up to brigade. Clear violation of MOD policy. The advisor support team leader for the brigade should have said, "No, I want them transferred back to battalion. You don't have that authority. It's right here in black and white from your own MOD." He just said, "What am I supposed to do? I'll just report it to division." "Just tell him no, sir, and make it happen." So that was a challenge. I think I got a little bit off your question there.

DW: You answered the question perfectly as far as I'm concerned. How successful, sitting here today, do you think you were in imparting a different model that they might adapt to, at least partially, one day? Something different from their own. Do you think you were successful?

JA: Oh, absolutely, because they were so insular before. What helped was the Kurds, the *peshmergas*, and their influence, because I know the officers talked on their own and the *peshmergas* were a lot closer to us than the Iraqi Army was as far as the ability to decentralize, the ability to make decisions, that kind of thing. Less dictatorial type of leadership, less of the stick and more of the carrot. These junior officers and NCOs, they would ask: "How do you do this in the American Army? What's the relationship between an officer and an NCO? What type of jobs or roles or decisions can a non-commissioned officer or a company commander make?" And I would explain to them, completely candid, to the point of almost making it sound better than it was at times, because we wanted them to see that this model is so much better. Whether it is or it isn't, part of my mission was to try and get them at least into a modern military mindset of leadership and structure. I think we were very successful in that and we planted the seed, if you will, of, "Hey, there's a better way to do this." Of course, I'm speaking from the context of the U.S. Army and Major Jeff Allen that our model was better, but I certainly think anybody in the U.S. military would agree that it's better than the way that they do it. That's my own little disclaimer there. But I certainly think we were very successful at least in planting that seed with the junior officers and the non-commissioned officers. The senior officers saw that as a challenge to their authority and a threat to their very existence and so they did not like it and that was the crux of the problem. Battalion commanders on up - in particular brigade and higher - did not want their junior officers making decisions on their own and so we were successful in planting a seed. Where it goes from there, I don't know. But I think it's critical to the fight that we were going to get the battalions into - that they were going to be in a decentralized fight, companies and maybe platoons doing operations. You had to be

decentralized. Even when we got communications, they were very poor. And so in a decentralized fight, a lieutenant or a captain might not have the ability to reach back and talk to the battalion. So trying to impart that decentralized decision-making was critical to their survival and their mission accomplishment, in my opinion.

DW: My final question, at least on my list right here, is can you tell us a little bit about how the ethnic and sectarian differences pose challenges, some of the dynamics of how things played out?

JA: I think they did a very good job of trying to – at least the idea was that all the units were an equal mix, and it was something that we tried to look at.

JM: Is it an equal mix or a proportional mix?

JA: I'm sorry, a proportional mix. Twenty percent of the population was Kurd, so 20 percent of each of the units should be Kurd, and so on. We did face a challenge early on that, as the battalion filled – they would come from recruiting centers and I gave very clear instructions early on that as the soldiers started arriving, fill the companies equally. So if a busload of 40 soldiers comes in, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie and Delta each get 10 soldiers. They didn't do that. That did lead to problems down the road because of the fact that, on a certain day, we might have gotten all of the guys from Baghdad. Tomorrow we might get all of the guys from Mosul. So you put all of the Mosul guys in one company and that created some challenges, especially when you had all the guys from Mosul under a guy that was former Republican Guard. That's huge, huge problems. After our mid-cycle break, I had them reshuffle the companies. I didn't realize they had done that that way – again, because of the language barriers and everything else – until we had started basic training. And so we're totally reshuffling everybody in one day, and tomorrow you're in a different company. We said, "We're going to go on leave and when you come back, you're going to reshuffle the companies." And I thought that would do a couple things. One, realign them so that it was equitable. Two, potentially break up any little cells of less desirables that might be forming, which we did have. We had insurgents that we detected and arrested in the battalion that were planning an operation against me and my team. So that helped. This is something I'd trust to my team and then asked them to use the same model, that when the soldiers were on break and you're observing training, to grab the interpreter or somebody that speaks English – because we were short interpreters – and talk to the collective group. Try to impress upon them that, "Look to your left and your right: These are the guys you're going to combat with. It doesn't matter if you come from Basra or Mosul or Baghdad, because you have to trust the guy on your left and right and they are now your new family. You have gained another family. You haven't lost your family or your clan or your tribe that you're a member of back home. They're still there, but now you've gained another family. You've gained in this process." Try and take the Iraqi and Arab culture of belonging to a clan and translate that into a military context. Sure, there was still infighting, there were still challenges with that – and my Kurdish officers always felt downtrodden – but they were dedicated to staying the course because this was their hope for a new future for them. Those challenges were always there, but we face those in our Army, too. That was one thing I always had to remind myself of was that, when our soldiers go on break, the black soldiers all go and hang out with each other and the Hispanics all hang out together, and there's not necessarily anything wrong with that, as long as when we need to work and train together we can do so.

It's not because of ethnic or racial divides. I tried to explain that to them as well, that it's okay when you're done in the evening that you sit there and associate with your clansmen from back in Mosul or whatever. But while we're in uniform or while we're training or fighting or whatever, it doesn't matter: as long as you're wearing this uniform and you have the battalion patch on your shoulder, he's your brother and you're going to do whatever you can for him. So that was my technique. That was my model. It wasn't always successful but, again, you're trying to change essentially hundreds of years of culture, and at least 30 years worth of repression, with these young 19-year-old, 20-year-old guys. And some of my privates were older than I was, in their forties and fifties and had a family. So you're trying to change that type of mindset in the construct of a dictatorial or hierarchical military environment, where you've got a Sunni whose company commander's a Kurd from the *peshmerga*, or you've got a Kurd whose company commander is former Republican Guard, and try to explain to him that doesn't matter, you're all here for Iraq. It's tough. It's very, very tough. But there were guys that were dedicated. I don't think that that piece of it - it might have sparked some of them to think, but so many of them were in it for their own reasons. Some were patriots and saw this as a way for a new Iraq. Some of them, it was a means of living. It was the only choice that they had, just like we see even in our Army. So I hope that that influence, or that type of teaching or preaching to them, swayed some that were fence sitters, some that were thinking about going AWOL and quitting and saying "To heck with it" and decided to stay the course a little bit longer to see it get better. But I really had no matrix to determine whether I was successful or not.

DW: This is all very subjective so, yeah, that's exactly what I wanted was an impression of how this worked.

JA: I think we were successful. I know that some of the officers I spoke to, company commanders, were getting disillusioned. One of the Kurds pointed out that there's not a battalion commander involved in the New Iraqi Army that's Kurdish, and just about that time they appointed a Kurdish either battalion or brigade commander, and I was able to point that out to him: "See, just have a little bit of patience and the opportunities will exist." And eventually, the battalion XO, who was a Kurd, moved on to becoming a battalion commander. So I said you've just got to keep your culture and all those things that are a part of you, but while you're here in uniform, you are part of the Iraqi Army and that's what I tried to impress. "We all bleed green" is what I always said about my command philosophy with my American soldiers. They needed to all bleed red, green, white and black of the Iraqi flag.

JM: You mentioned that you uncovered an inside plot against you and your team. How was this screening process conducted and what were some of the holes in it?

JA: Well, we didn't conduct the screening process. I was just a trainer. My understanding was that it was done through local recruiting stations, just like we have here, in various cities. I don't know who those people were other than they worked for the MOD. They were supposed to screen recruits and then they got vetted, there was paperwork, they took an oath, and all those types of things. But just the sheer numbers of people that were coming in and we heard reports, rumors that were started - and I won't go into too much detail about them and I can't speak firsthand - that there were guys that were turning it into a business. "You pay me X amount of money. I'll take care of all the paperwork, get you an ID card, get you orders, and you'll show up in Kirkush." So we'd have busloads of guys show up that were on no MOD roster that

thought they had enlisted in the Army. They'd paid 500 dollars or whatever – I don't even know what the amount was – to some recruiter and they had orders that looked like our orders. It was a photocopy of the letterhead and handwritten the rest of it, but they didn't know any better. So those were just some examples. And again, with their culture and history, there's certainly nepotism and corruption with the recruiting officials. Who screened the screeners? Who knows that the screeners weren't part of an insurgent force or, while they were working the job, that we didn't accidentally kill members of some guy's family and he's now gone over to the dark side, if you will, and nobody knows because he's been vetted before? So all those things were factors and they were in the backs of our minds all the time. There's no way to be 100 percent sure. You never know what's in somebody's mind. We've had that problem in the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and other places. The most secure institutions we have and we've had traitors. So you just put faith in it and faith in our ability to react appropriately when something happens. How the screening took place? I don't know. Was it perfect? Absolutely not.

JM: Did you ever have an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of these units in the field, how they conducted operations?

JA: Yes, because during the latter half of my tour, I was in Fallujah with the 3rd Brigade. It wasn't the battalion that I'd trained – I went with a different brigade headquarters – but I was with them on various operations in and around Fallujah. Saw some of it. Didn't see as much as some of the advisors that had been with them for longer or guys that there are now, because that's all they're doing. They're done with basic training. All they're doing is operations. So I have limited experiences with that.

JM: What was the range of operations that they could feasibly do and how effective were they in accomplishing various missions?

JA: They predominately would do presence patrols as well as limited direct action attack, mostly at the company level. Saw very little at battalion and above, and that's because of when you get up to a battalion, you're talking about its ability to reach back, reach higher, and they really didn't have that capability. They still had a very limited logistical capability, intelligence gathering and processing capability, etc. So, really, battalion was out of the equation while I was there. It was mostly a company-level fight, so again, what's a motorized infantry rifle company capable of conducting, especially one that is fairly new and not necessarily properly trained and equipped? Presence patrols, some direct action, somewhat limited, definitely no combined arms fight, but they were very effective. They were not afraid to fight. They were not afraid at all, which obviously created some problems because fire discipline, fire control, target discrimination was not always the best it should have been.

DW: Did you train, though, in marksmanship?

JA: We did, yes.

DW: Did they use those marksmanship skills that you trained them in?

JA: It was a constant battle. Still to this day, I'll watch a video clip of insurgents in Iraq and see someone firing an AK-47 from the hip or firing from your shoulder but looking over the sights –

and that's just a huge, huge fight, from day one of basic rifle marksmanship on through operations in Fallujah, was getting them to place well aimed shots, single fire. Part of it is the construct and the bigger picture of why an AK-47 is designed the way it is and how all of that came about, with mass armies and mass amounts of lead downrange. It is so much easier to go from safe to full automatic on an AK-47 than it is to go to semi, because you just push down on the selector lever. It's just easier to go all the way down than it is to stop with that single shot. So everybody fires on full automatic. But we had an operation outside of Fallujah where the company was getting ready to form up to go back out of this village that we were in. So the majority of the company was massed in this parking lot and, from where I was sitting - I'm facing the Iraqi company I was with - behind me, we take like two shots. We hear like two shots ring out. Just about everyone in that company fired on full automatic directly over my head. And luckily I was in my up- armored Humvee and I yelled over to my NCO driver, "Get us the hell out of here!" We drove around them and then got a ceasefire dismount and started maneuvering against. But we were in what was essentially a retirement community for former Ba'ath Party or Iraqi Army, I'm not sure which. There was a mix of elderly and young people and kids and everything, so I'm not really sure how it's a retirement community. In the center of the city was a police station, a little hospital, a mosque and a small market. Everything else around it was apartments. It was an apartment community. So they're firing into the apartments and they were just all full-on automatic, spraying about 180 degrees. It was, "Stop! Cease fire!" So that was the first thing we had to do. That was still challenging for a unit that was rated C-2 or C-3, I don't remember which, but that was fully committed to offensive operations. These guys had just gotten done with a couple weeks of battling in Fallujah and now we're doing sort of smaller scale mop-up operations, so when they took rounds, they just unleashed with all the lead. Fire control, fire discipline - in the fight, that was a huge challenge.

JM: Were you able to get a sense of how were these units viewed by the local population? Were they seen as legitimate?

JA: I can't really answer that question. That's outside of my lane. How do I perceive that they were received? In the east, generally fairly well. There were constantly little issues that you'd hear about when a guy came back off of leave, of threats to his family. But when we were out on patrols, we would get tips from locals of caches or insurgents, that kind of stuff. Operations in Fallujah and the villages outside of Fallujah? Totally different because we're in the Sunni Triangle and the Al Anbar Province and, basically, anything that had an American flag associated with it was the enemy, and so I fully believe there the New Iraqi Army was considered a pawn of the U.S. military. But any one of those young males we saw in the street glaring at us could have been involved in an operation against us the night before and was just working in his dad's repair shop during the day. There's really no way of knowing until you engage that particular individual in a fight. So my two perceptions are totally disparate and I saw both. I saw fairly well received and building a rapport with the local officials. Operations in the east, patrols in the east, the Iraqis were great; they did better than we could have done, because you've got an Iraqi talking to an imam or talking to the sheik of a local village. He knows, just as soon as we pull into this small village with 20 or 30 houses in it, who he needs to go find. He knows which house it is. Not that he's necessarily been there before, but it's a cultural thing that he understands better than I do. It's the one in the village in the center that's got this. Key indicators. We pull into a village - something I wouldn't think of necessarily right away - but there's one house that has a satellite on it. That's probably the sheik's house. Makes

sense, but he knew right away. "How did you know this was the sheik's house?" "The satellite dish." Duh. But it's part of their culture so they understand that and he knows right away how to approach him in a way that's not intimidating and they speak the same language. Never could have gotten results - the American guys - to the level of the Iraqi guys.

JM: Traditionally, this training of indigenous forces has kind of been a Special Operations function or at least a specialty. Do you see conventional forces assuming part of this mission going forward and were you adequately resourced or equipped to do this?

JA: Resourced? No, absolutely not. The problem, I think, is that with the Special Forces doing it - you have foreign internal defense or unconventional warfare, depending on whether you're fighting with the insurgents or supporting the insurgents. But it's generally a small scale. We're advising this nation, working with their Special Forces, we're working with those guys in a fairly open way - or the unconventional warfare, where they're going in and working with the insurgents, mostly through bringing in arms and advice or bringing in a technical capability. If they want to do an operation, we control the air or the intelligence and those kinds of things. So totally different than what we were doing in Iraq. We were rebuilding an entire army from the bottom up. Way beyond Special Forces' purview. So, obviously, I don't think Special Forces could handle that because of the fact that they had other things going on and were not set up to build an entire army. But the challenge comes in that the focus for CMATT and MNSTC-I, rightly so, was getting infantry battalions trained and ready, because they're wanted to contribute to the fight, they're easy to resource, because it's not tanks, it's not artillery, it's relatively easy to train. The problem was that there was *no* logistical support through the advisors to the Iraqis, other than what was contracted. We lived on a FOB [Forward Operating Base]; we had contracted food support, contracted sewage and water, contracted laundry and bath. Beyond that, there was nothing. We had a CIF [Central Issue Facility] that, again, was run by contracted guys through KBR [Kellogg, Brown and Root] and then all of the soldiers' equipment, from boots and uniforms on up, was through contracts that were brought on commercial trucks into the FOB and then issued out to the soldiers. Didn't work. It didn't work at all, and you could probably, through other sources better than I, get to the root of that problem. But I do know there were issues with the first group. The guys who you're talking to now are blaming the guys that were before but, apparently, somewhere along the line there were thousands of contracts that were let all across Iraq that there was no accountability on. This led to something I alluded to earlier, namely that the commanders and generals would get briefings from their staff showing a status of green, green, green, green. That was based upon the fact that this was green because this contract such-and-such was let and the requirement was for these items to be delivered by date X. Well, date X has passed, so it's been delivered, right? Come to find out that it wasn't. And so we were entirely constrained by that. As we developed, I built my team internally and started looking towards conducting operations here shortly and what do we need. We finally got our two up-armored Humvees that we were authorized, one of which had Blue Force Tracker. Nobody in my team had ever used Blue Force Tracker before and we didn't have the SINCGARS [Single Channel Ground to Airborne Radio System] that you needed as well, nor did we have any method to get the secure fill or to program the Blue Force Tracker to give you your icon identification. We were somewhat fortunate because, on Kirkush, there was a National Guard or Reserve brigade that fell under the 1st Infantry Division. The 1st Infantry Division commander had given very strict guidance to his subordinate commanders that unless there was a TACON [Tactical Control] relationship

that was in writing, established by MNC-I, the Multi-National Corps-Iraq, directing them by unit - by 6th Battalion, New Iraqi Army, 7th Battalion, New Iraqi Army or whatever - they weren't to provide us support whatsoever. Personally, I think that's illegal in U.S. Army doctrine, telling an American unit that they're not allowed to support another American unit, provide them any logistical support whatsoever, but that was a fact on the ground. This brigade told us pointblank, "We cannot provide you any support," which included teaching us how to use Blue Force Tracker, uploading secure fills so that we could communicate, providing us POL [Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants] for our Humvees - all that is stuff that should be provided to you by CMATT. Well, CMATT had no means to do those things for us. Luckily, there were some subordinate officers and NCOs within that brigade who took the initiative and said, "It's wrong to leave fellow American soldiers twisting in the wind, so we're going to help them out." And we got some stuff from them, what they could spare. But that was the biggest challenge overall. Culture, threat of insurgents - all of that paled in comparison to any sort of logistical support. It's my humble opinion and my theory that the CMATT mission should have been conducted by a U.S. Army infantry division with battalion teams assigned to brigades so that we would have had our own medical support personnel, our own communications support personnel, that not only would be supporting the advisor teams, but would have a logistical chain. We'd have units who could run logistics, not only for us, but if we said, "Hey, a shipment came in to Balad for the Iraqi battalion or the Iraqi brigade of 800 sets of body armor or AK-47s or whatever, we're going to do a LOGPAC [Logistics Package] to Balad to go pick up the stuff that belongs to this Iraqi battalion and bring it to FOB." It would be like that. It would happen in a day and it would be done. Instead, it was a huge ordeal and it would take weeks from hearing that something had come in to actually getting it to the FOB or the battalion that was supposed to be training with it - and then it may or may not ever arrive. It would have solved the problems of fills and all those kinds of things with Blue Force Trackers. Medical support. We didn't even have our own team medics. The only medical support that was on the FOB - if the FOB got hit, then it was a medical emergency and we could take our American advisors - it was the Iraqi-run little TMC [Troop Medical Clinic] that was there. And that was so under-equipped, and so under-staffed, that they would only take four soldiers per day on sick call. Well, imagine running a basic training and saying only four soldiers per battalion can go on sick call. It was ludicrous because there's more than that that go during American basic training. Coupled with that, I had issues like the fact we did our first three weeks of basic training without socks. No socks. So you have a culture where these guys have never, most of them, worn anything but sandals in their lives - and now they're wearing combat boots, brand new combat boots that have to be broken in. And we're doing PT [Physical Training], and since we don't have PT uniforms, like sneakers and socks for running, we're running PT in combat boots that are brand new and not broken in. After about three weeks, half of my soldiers either quit or were walking around in sandals conducting basic training, because their feet were bloody messes and the TMC would only see four of them a day. So you see the second- and third-order of effects of the broken logistical system, and if we would have had a logistical system inherent to CMATT, it could have solved a lot of these problems. "How do we get this? Okay, we found it, but how do we get it to Kirkush? And, oh by the way, 1st Infantry Division refuses to provide any support whatsoever." That was the biggest challenge overall, and I knew walking in here today that I wanted to make sure that was pointed out. It was a nightmare and I spent a lot of my time outside of training Iraqis constantly fighting those battles with our own personnel.

DW: Do you have any sense that this has changed since you've left?

JA: I have no idea. I think it has because of the fact that, at least while I was in Fallujah and from what I understand, when an Iraqi battalion or brigade deployed out of the basic training area, it was obviously partnered up with an American unit and then that unit was to provide them their logistical support. So when we were in Fallujah, our brigade was assigned to the 2nd MARDIV [Marine Division] and really linked with the 7th RCT [Regimental Combat Team], so I would go to them and say, "This is what I need." And I would coordinate with them, either MARDIV or the RCT, and tell them these are the things I needed. And I know the other brigade that was in Fallujah, the Iraqi brigade, was associated with Blackjack [2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division], and they were supposed to provide all of the logistical support. Because again, it's a TACON relationship to get your logistics from the unit you're supporting. Well, not under TACON but that - it got really fuzzy when you'd get some Americans that would be like, "This order says TACON and this is what TACON means." But we'd say, "Yeah, I understand that, but if you want them to exist, survive, support you, whatever, you're going to need to do, X, Y, and Z because they don't have that capability themselves. You've got to do it or else count them out as a fighting force, basically." So that always became somewhat of a challenge as well, but that was a workaround which, I assume, was done by somebody at the higher level who said, "Okay, well, it's a problem when they're in basic training, but once they get out into the field, they'll be partnered with an American unit and they can provide them with their logistical support." To certain degrees it worked, and to certain degrees it didn't, because now, some of the units felt a burden. "Now we've got these other guys that really aren't great fighters; we've got to do everything for them. They have no support themselves, and now our logistics that are already stretched are stretched even thinner." We kind of experienced that with the Marines out at Camp Fallujah, just asking for some of the simplest things like getting a generator, getting a generator fixed. That was a constant battle with the division staff. Every day I was in there as the brigade XO going, "You're a division; tell me why you can't get me a couple hundred generators or why you can't get someone out there to fix my 10K generator. I mean, please explain it to me, because I have a whole brigade that's here supporting you. It's one of your brigades that needs this asset." Because we were outside the FOB on our own little FOB adjacent to Camp Fallujah in a tent city. There was very little infrastructure and no power source directly to the main FOB, so we were operating off of generators. So I tried to explain that just as you can't function without electricity, neither can this brigade, so could you come and fix our generators. It was amazing to me that here I am involved in combat operations and this is what I'm fighting about - getting a generator fixed. But it would become a show-stopper - or shoes or socks for this Iraqi battalion. Literally, I got socks for my battalion when I sent an email to General [James] Schwitters saying basically, "If I don't have socks by Friday" - because Friday is their training holiday, their religious day - "then I recommend that this battalion stop basic training and not start basic training up again until we get socks." And we had socks by Friday. It showed that it could be done if the right people got involved.

JM: One last question from me -

JA: I'm beginning to sound bitter, I know. I'm not bitter. It was a very rewarding experience. But that logistical piece was huge for the CMATT. And you even saw it on the news, prior to this time, when they're talking about the equipping part of the Iraqis. I remember General [Paul] Eaton was being interviewed before he even left and Petraeus came in to take over. I remember watching it on the news while I'm packing my rucksack to get ready to go and General Eaton is explaining about the equipping part of training the Iraqis. As a matter of fact,

General Petraeus was on C-SPAN just a couple weeks ago – I think it was broadcast about the same day he took command here [at Fort Leavenworth]. Basically he explained to reporters the same thing about how the equipping of the Iraqis was going. So you can see it's been a couple-year trend here, so I don't know if it's solved yet, but I know they're working hard on it.

JM: You spent a lot of your time coaching, advising and mentoring, not necessarily teaching –

JA: Right, not teaching.

JM: Is there anything that you *learned* from your experiences that you think has made you a better leader or contributed to your professional development in a positive way?

JA: To me, all of these things are educational. There's probably nothing that I can necessarily put a finger on and sit here and explain, but it just makes you a more rounded person, a better person. Beyond the actual combat, it was my own experience of combat, and those are things that I bring into class discussion when we talk about those experiences. That really amazed me when I actually got here. There are three guys in my staff group, out of 16, that have actually been in combat and can understand that, and I expect that number will continue to increase in the next couple years. But I was very shocked. I thought that if I hadn't been in combat by the time I came here that I'd be in the minority. Well, as it turned out, having had combat puts you in the minority right now. So that was good, because I think having seen the elephant to a certain degree, you see some of Army systems in action, how RSOI [Reception, Staging, Onward-movement and Integration] goes or doesn't go the way it should go, how those systems are employed in combat – all of those types of things. Working with the Iraqis. Like I said, I was in NATO and worked with a lot of former Soviet republics, too, and I think all of those – exposure to culture, exposure to how the different militaries operate, good, bad or ugly – just goes into the kit bag. Maybe they aren't necessarily things that, when I'm a battalion commander, I'll think about: "Well, how did the Iraqis do it? Well, I don't want to do it that way." I don't think that I'll think that, but that just becomes part of who I am so, yeah, it was a very rewarding experience. I had been stationed in Turkey and, before that, I had no appreciation of the Arab culture. There was nothing I thought appealed to me about the Arab culture. But having been stationed in Turkey and having spent some time in Iraq, I'm starting to understand a little bit more about what that's about. It's definitely opened my eyes to the point that I've embraced the Arab culture. There are things that I can take and things that I can leave, but the Arab culture definitely has a lot of things going for it and a lot of lessons that we can learn and apply to ourselves. So that is something I think I've learned that really helped expand my horizons and become less ethnocentric and more open to different cultures and different ideas. And again, having the firsthand knowledge of being there and working with Iraqis and understanding a little bit about what Iraqis are about. And also being able to either reinforce or dissuade stereotypes, because having seen other Arab cultures, I know they're not all the same. You can't just talk about "Arab culture." From our experience working with the Turks, they're nothing like the Iraqis within the construct of the Arab culture. They're very different. But not having experienced that firsthand, I wouldn't understand that. I would just think that Arabs are Arabs, and that's not true. So yeah, I have learned a lot about that, but not necessarily how to conduct military operations, rather a little bit more about the world in which we live in, so it was very rewarding for me. And I was glad doing that. I was glad that I was down in the weeds, living, eating and fighting with the Iraqi soldiers. That was the most rewarding

experience that I can possibly think of, being in Iraq. The only thing that might have been better was if I'd been a company commander commanding a rifle company, but at this phase, OIF II, I don't think I would have wanted to be on any staff. I don't think I would have wanted to have been in any regular TO&E [Table of Organization and Equipment] unit just doing day-to-day patrols, doing this mission and that mission or whatever. Even with all of the challenges with logistics and the problems with our system and the cultural problems within the Iraqis, I've never felt more alive than I did in my six months in Iraq, just because these were real problems that I could sink my teeth into. It wasn't perfect. I think most of the answers I've given you have been, "Well, we didn't necessarily do it right, or we didn't do it perfect." But darn sure we were trying. It was a great experience. I'd do it again.

DW: Really that's the perfect last question, but it does sort of go to what you're talking about from combat. What an advisor does training up a unit is far different from what an advisor does, at least ostensibly, in combat. So could you talk just a little about what your role was in those operations around Fallujah? Were you commanding the unit?

JA: No.

DW: Were you ever tempted to take command?

JA: [*Laughter*] I was tempted to take command *daily*, and even back in basic training there were a couple times where my brigade advisor, my brigade team chief, would be hammering us about something that was screwed up in the battalions and I'd look him back in the face and say, "Do you want me to be the battalion commander, sir? I'll be the battalion commander. But I'm not the battalion commander so you can't hold me responsible for what this battalion does. I'm an advisor." But every day I wanted to take command. I would have loved to have been an American major in command of an Iraqi battalion. I would have absolutely loved that. That would have been incredible, because you talk about a piece of raw clay that you can form - and the one obstacle, the battalion commander, could have been removed and replaced by me, and with my four-man staff I could have run that battalion. It wouldn't have been to the best American standards, obviously, because I wouldn't have had American soldiers. But, God, I wanted to take command of that battalion. I told my battalion commander every day - because when I lost the battalion commander I had no one interim - "I'll take command. Let me take command of this battalion and I will." But obviously for strategic-level reasons, that couldn't be done, but man, did I want to take command of that battalion. Every day. "Man, I can do this better."

DW: Did you advise in combat, though?

JA: In combat it was drilled down a lot more. At this point, I was not in the battalion team; I went over to be in a brigade team. The brigade, its battalions were sliced out to various respective brigades. The brigade staff had no real purpose, because they didn't have any real means of getting, analyzing intelligence and transmitting it to the battalions. They didn't have any logistics, so really they didn't do much. All the battalions were farmed out to the American brigades, so they didn't have much of a role. So I would battlefield circulate within the brigade to the various battalions and sit down with the American advisor teams and asking, "What can I do for you? What do you need?" I tried to be that problem solver for my American advisor

support teams at the battalion level and then do some limited operations with them as kind of the brigade LNO [liaison officer] rep down there. So when those kinds of battalion operations, company operations, were going on, I had no direct role. I was just another observer. But I saw that the advisor teams assisted with the planning, the military decision-making process, that the battalion went through on the planning and kind of got into the weeds with that. They would serve as a liaison to the American unit they were supporting, although eventually that changed as the American brigades they were supporting would slice an LNO team down to the battalion, so you almost got two teams there. You had the advisor support team that was to advise the Iraqis and then you had an LNO team that was wearing the 1st Cav patch or the 1st ID patch or whatever: they would also be there but as nothing more than a liaison between the two headquarters. You normally think that the Iraqis would provide the liaison up to the brigade. So anyway, the advisors, at that point, were advising on the mission planning, advising on the actual conduct of the operation. "When you get to the ground, everybody dismount the vehicles." Almost like an OC, kind of like, "Hey, company commander, don't you think you should probably put some security out over that way?" I talked to the battalion advisors and, having been one of them and now being at the brigade level when we were involved in combat, you try to be like a JRTC OC on steroids. You weren't just doing the hide the weenie, "Hey, don't you think you should probably do this?" kind of get the ball rolling. It almost got to the point where you would direct them to do such and such. "Hey, you need to stop; you need to do X or Y. You need to do Z because this is what's going to happen." And the 3rd Brigade was pretty proficient by the time I had joined them. They'd been fully operational capable for awhile. They'd been involved in other combat operations in Samarra or whatever, so they'd worked out a lot of the bugs and were rolling pretty well by the time that I joined them. The advisor support teams were like observer controllers, an outside looking in, but embedded and feeling part of the unit. There became a loyalty there. It's a very hard relationship to try to describe, but one where you try to be objective and not emotionally attached to the unit, but again part of the unit, so you build that rapport. And you did that by living with them and eating their food and all those kinds of things. You didn't sit there and when the Iraqis were eating their rice and their chicken stew, sit there and eat an MRE [Meals Ready to Eat]. There were times for MREs but mostly when the soldiers went through a chow hall, you went through the chow hall with them. And that's how you build a lot of that rapport and respect. But you did not take command of a battle unless absolutely necessary - you know, if people we going to get killed, you were going to get overrun. And I never saw that happen where we got into a situation where it was so desperate that the American needed to take command and say, "Get out of the way and follow me." It did happen from time to time, where you can be in a small little engagement, a couple firefights and guys were out in the open and the American - just because of our instinct - the NCO or even the officer - would say, "Follow me!" just to get the guys behind cover because they might freeze, but then that stopped. Immediately it was like, who's in charge? And that's where you get into that sparking initiative thing. "I've got five guys here. You're an NCO. Come on, take charge." But again, a lot of that came down to the personality of the advisor. You're in combat and the rules sometimes get thrown out the window, but I didn't see that happen all that often. That was a very, very rare situation. Generally speaking, their chain of command handled the problem, handled the situation, and the Americans tried not to put the units - whatever echelon it was, a platoon or a company or a battalion - into a situation where it got that desperate. Not to say that it didn't, I just never saw it. There's always the temptation, I think.

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JM: Do you have anything more, Don? Okay, this will conclude the interview then. Thanks very much for your time, Major Allen.

JA: Okay. Thank you.



END OF INTERVIEW

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