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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 Mike Sullivan



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Abstract

A member of the 10-man advisor support team attached to the 6th Battalion, Iraqi Army, Major Mike Sullivan provided advisory and training assistance to two rifle companies and the headquarters company from April to August 2004. Standing up this battalion from scratch, Sullivan and his fellow team members took Iraqi officers trained in Jordan and merged them with NCOs trained by Vinnell Corporation, trained a battalion cadre team, and then ran their own basic and advanced individual training – culminating in this unit eventually conducting joint operations with the 1st Infantry Division. In this interview, Sullivan discusses the full range of his experiences and provides in depth analysis and constructive criticism of the job his team did, as well as the U.S. resources and support (or lack thereof) available to them. He also shares his insightful grasp of history with respect to training indigenous forces and talks about what lessons can, were and should be learned for future operations. Focusing on cultural relations and rapport-building, Sullivan admits his team initially tried “to impose an American military culture on an Arabic society,” which did not go over well. He relates how they adapted their approaches and training plans; endeavored to overcome “the ghost of the old Iraqi Army”; dealt with a myriad of sensitive ethnic and religious issues; and addressed his biggest concern: the Iraqis’ “lack of understanding of the logistics behind the missions.” Offering a wealth of advice for future officers who’ll be working with and training foreign armies, Sullivan says that, “We need to find the right kind of people who, like T.E. Lawrence, are not afraid to go out on their own and take some chances, to immerse themselves in the culture, and work with these people all the time.” Most of all, he adds, what’s needed is an “adventurous spirit.”

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Interview with MAJ Mike Sullivan

5 May 2006



JM: My name is John McCool (JM) and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major Mike Sullivan (MS) on his experiences during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Also present are Bob Ramsey (BR) and Pete Boissen (PB), also of the Combat Studies Institute, who will be asking questions as well. Today's date is 5 May 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. Could you please start off by giving us a brief sketch of your military career up to this point?

MS: I graduated from West Point in 1994 and was commissioned in the infantry. I went to the Infantry Basic Course and then to Fort Bragg where I served with the 3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR). I spent most of my time there in the anti-tank company and then moved to a rifle company. I went to the Armor Advanced Course and, while I was there, I saw the light and became an armor officer. After the Armor Advanced Course, I came here for the Combined Arms Service and Support School (CAS3) and then was fortunate enough to go to the M1 Tank Commanders Course at Gowen Field, Idaho, where I actually got to go inside a tank for the first time. From there I went to Germany where I worked in the Warrior Preparations Center in Kaiserslautern - which is the United States Army Europe (USAEUR) simulations center - for a year. Then I moved over to 1st Infantry Division (ID), 3rd Brigade, in Vilseck. I hooked up with 1-63 Armor and went immediately downrange to Kosovo for KFOR 1B and spent seven months in Kosovo. I returned back to Germany in June 2002 and took over Alpha 1-63, a tank company. I commanded that company for a year and then took over Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 1-63 for another year. We were lucky enough to win the Phillip A. Connelly Award for the best dining facility (DFAC) in the Army and somehow I got the Douglas A. MacArthur Leadership Award while I was there. I married my wife there - who's German - and had the option between National Training Center (NTC) and Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) in Hohenfels, Germany. Since I sunburn too easily I opted for CMTC and was an observer controller (OC) there for three years. I was an HHC OC with an infantry maneuver team and then a company team OC, and that's the one I deployed downrange to OIF with, from April to August 2004. Once I came back from OIF, I was the assistant operations OC.

JM: Did you volunteer for this advisor support team (AST) assignment?

MS: I did.

JM: Once you knew you were going to be part of this AST - for 6th Battalion, Iraqi Army - how did you prepare yourself and how did the Army prepare you?

MS: We found out on 13 January 2004 that our OC team – a 50-man team – was going to receive a 10-man tasking to go downrange to Iraq. Our boss was Lieutenant Colonel David Sage, our team OC, and he brought the team together and gave us a briefing. Once we heard about this tasking, my particular team – the Timberwolf 13 team, which was myself and six non-commissioned officers (NCOs) – we all huddled together and talked about whether we wanted to volunteer for this, because the colonel was looking for volunteers first. Five out of the six NCOs agreed that we would volunteer together and go downrange. From that point it was your typical Army stuff of, you know, you don't know; you may go, you may not go. In terms of preparation, the only things we did which were country-specific was a convoy life-fire, which was a USAEUR requirement that's actually run by our own OC team in Grafenwoehr. We did some individual teaching with our own 13 team and then we were really scrounging for information and equipment.

JM: How did you approach training indigenous Iraqi forces versus your work training U.S. forces at CMTC?

MS: That was our biggest problem. We had a hard time breaking from the idea that we're not going down there to conduct U.S. Army basic training. We had a couple NCOs that were drill sergeants so they had a particular idea in their mind of how they wanted to do it. I had a contact in Iraq, Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Devine from the Australian Army, who happened to be my Armor Advanced Course instructor. He was working for the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT) G3 at that time. We weren't getting any information from the officer channels so I kept going to him via email trying to get an idea of where we were going to be and what we were going to do. The information we got back was very limited, but the impression we had was that we'd get a battalion from scratch and would have to make it into an operational battalion. Trying to break the paradigm of a U.S. basic training regime – I think we went down there with that mentality. Our chain of command definitely thought that's what we were doing. For example, at Hohenfels, you don't have M4s and your normal complement of high-speed infantry weapons. We have an infantry battalion at Hohenfels – 1-4 Infantry was the opposing force and they had all the M4s, reflex sights – all the things we would have liked to have brought downrange with us. When we asked for this equipment from the operations group commander, we were told we didn't need it, that all we were going to go do is train basic trainees. So I think there was a misunderstanding, or it wasn't clear between what USAEUR was getting and what we were getting from downrange. Downrange was telling us that we were going to be going on operational patrols with these guys, so basically what you train is what you go out with. USAEUR and Seventh Army Training Command were telling us that all we were going to be doing is basic training, that we would never leave the post. They said we didn't need any fancy equipment and to take our nine millimeter pistols down there and we would be fine. We managed to coerce people to at least give us M16s so we would have some sort of longer range capability because we knew there would be convoys and we wouldn't be on a base camp the entire time.

JM: Was there a program of instruction (POI) that you had to devise or was there one available that you could consult?

MS: When we got downrange, we first spent two weeks in Taji and the intent was to give the ASTs an initial train up. It was very disappointing because we assumed we'd get language

training, country specific training. Well, we were lucky to get an hour of language training. The training kept getting pushed off and the ASTs at this time were still very new. There were only a few Iraqi battalions that they had stood up at this time, so what we got was very bare bones, maybe two hours total of Iraqi language training in this two-week period we were in Taji.

JM: Who did you get this from?

MS: They were guys from CMATT. They were stationed there at Taji and were responsible for receiving the ASTs, conducting the train up and then sending us on. The other thing we did get to do while we were in Taji was a brief weapons familiarization where we got to get hands on with an AK-47, but that was it. No other weapon systems.

BR: Did they give you their POI or a better understanding of what your tasks would be?

MS: No, not at that time.

JM: Can you talk us through your specific responsibilities? Obviously you're not doing just basic training. What was the range of tasks, from individual soldier skills to squad and platoon maneuvers?

MS: When we moved from Taji to Kirkush – and this is where we conducted our training, at the Kirkush Military Training Base, also known as Camp Caldwell. When we got there, that's when we started getting the information. We originally thought when we got to Iraq that we would be training the 5th Battalion – all of our bags were marked 5th AST. Well, once we got there they said we were going to 6th Battalion. When we got to Kirkush, we started getting an understanding of the lay of the land and, at that time, there were civilian contractors conducting the NCO academy, so they were training all the NCOs. We found out later that all our officers were in Jordan receiving their officer training and at some point – and nobody could tell us when – we would get a cadre of NCOs from sergeant major all the way down to squad leaders, and a cadre of officers including a battalion commander all the way down to the platoon leaders. We would take these two groups, merge them together, and basically conduct a train-the-trainer. Your cadre would now be formed and we would conduct the training with them, the goal being for them to conduct their own basic training. So eventually they would receive about 700 soldiers and the officers and NCOs would run the basic training. When we got to Kirkush, it probably took about a week before we figured out what we were supposed to do. There was a lot of confusion as to which ASTs were staying, which were leaving, who was going to go back to Taji to do more training. What we started doing was going out and gathering information. I linked up with a British sergeant major that was running some of the NCO training. We had a few British and Australian NCOs who were teaching commonwealth drill and things like that. We got with him and I got his POI on what he trained the NCOs on. Based off this POI, we developed our own basic training POI which did everything from your basic marching formations, drill and ceremony, all the way to the end of basic training and individual movement techniques and rifle qualification. At that point, we knew there would be a week or two week break in the cycle and then we would move into what would be comparable to Advanced Individual Training (AIT). We would get more into the crew-served weapons, squad and platoon tactics, and convoy operations. We developed our POI probably within the first two weeks of being in Kirkush. We sent it to the CMATT headquarters there on

Kirkush, which in turn was sent back up to CMATT who then distributed it out to everybody. I know this happened because I made a folder in the POI with clips of funny videos and humorous commercials, and it apparently made it all the way up to General Paul Eaton. He wasn't exactly thrilled that his POI had these funny commercials in it and so word filtered back and people asked why I did it. I said that I did it because the POI was intended for use by my own guys, not CMATT, and I didn't know CMATT was going to use it. They took this POI we created for the first 45 to 50 days of basic training and, at least for the first couple months, were handing it out to other ASTs when they arrived in country.

BR: Besides basic and AIT, how did you come up with the training plan for collective tasks?

MS: That was the hard part because there was a lot of confusion as to when the battalion went operational, who they would be attached to, who would support them and what roles they would fill, so we had to form something based off what we trained U.S. troops in Hohenfels - the tasks we watched the guys preparing for OIF. Back in Hohenfels, we were the blind leading the blind. None of us had been to OIF, we were training units from the 1st ID to go to OIF, and none of them had been either. So other than a few senior officers and NCOs at Hohenfels who had done some right-seat rides and came back and told us what Iraq looked like, we had a picture in our heads of the tasks American units were getting trained on and that's what we figured we needed to train our Iraqis on as well.

BR: Was that a good assumption?

MS: I think it was. It gave us a planning range. We had the experience working with U.S. units and we had tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) - not so much doctrine at that time. Convoy security we had doctrine for, so we were able to base our training plan off what we knew American units had to learn because we knew Iraqi units would have to do the same missions.

BR: Table of organization and equipment (TOE) and table of distribution and allowances (TDA), in terms of force structure and equipment - when did you become aware of what that would be and how did that affect your training plan?

MS: That was an absolute nightmare. It took a while before we figured out what a battalion would look like. We were fortunate in that while we were at Taji we got to see 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Battalions and got to talk to their AST trainers. The 2nd Battalion team was a Marine team and the 3rd Battalion team was a reservist team. 2nd Battalion was the famous battalion who refused to get on the helicopters and go to Fallujah. We were there when that happened and we sat there scratching our heads thinking, "What did we get into?" We got an idea of the structure and, once we got to Kirkush, it kind of firmed up a little bit. We were going to have four rifle companies, an HHC and a transportation company. Advisor-wise, the biggest problem for us was how do we break down our advisors to train these people. We sat down one night in our barracks and devised our plan. We were going to have one NCO per company and each captain was basically going to be responsible for three companies. Because I had HHC experience as a commander and an OC, I had the HHC Company, the second company and the fourth company. The other captain, who was an air defense artillery (ADA) officer, had the transportation company and two rifle companies. It was more for oversight and training the

officers and things like that. There was other problem – and I’m working on a paper on this now. What we didn’t focus on was logistics. We all got parceled out a little bit. I was responsible for training the logistics officer (S4); the ADA officer was responsible for training the personnel officer (S1) and the operations officer (S3) and their respective staffs; and Major Pete Fedak took on the battalion commander. He was going to be the mentor for the battalion commander.

JM: Major Fedak was the head of your AST?

MS: He was. He was in charge of the AST. My NCO in charge (NCOIC) of our OC team was Sergeant First Class Richard Smith. He was the “delta” in OC terminology. He was going to be the senior NCO advisor for the battalion so we paired him up with the battalion sergeant major. Each NCO down at the company level worked primarily with the first sergeant, and then I bounced back and forth between the company commanders and the platoon leaders. Captain Chris Clay – who was the other captain there – did the same thing. You had this balancing act of needing to train the S4, who at that time was just an NCO. There was no logistical structure set up on the base camp and there was no brigade set up, so your battalion S4 really had nowhere to go other than they had established some sort of administrative support battalion run by the civilians. Bouncing back with him, getting with the companies, and then figuring out who was doing the more leadership-intensive training and trying to be there for that. So your NCOs were stretched kind of thin, but then the officers were stretched *really* thin. Before we even got down there, we talked about ideally what we would have liked to have had. Once we got there, my vision in 2004 would have been taking an entire OC team – 50 guys – and it’s broken down into three company teams. You have a scout team, mortar OCs, logistical OCs, medical OCs, and then you have your zero team, which basically looks at your battalion operations. Take an entire OC team and assign that to battalion or brigade so you have an administrative control. At the ideal level, we would have had experts in medical and logistics. Those were the two we were really lacking. We didn’t have any medics with us, so we had to train a medical platoon from scratch. Even though I was an HHC commander, I was nowhere near being a logistical expert, so working with the battalion S4 and getting his functions set up, it would have been great to have someone who was more familiar with logistics. Chris Clay, as an ADA officer, was in the same boat as me, so logistically we just didn’t have it. In terms of what we wanted to train – and this is all in retrospect – I think we should have focused on what I call the three Ls: the leaders, the logisticians and the life takers. In that order. The soldiers were the easiest to train because it was just basic combat skills. We were all familiar with it. I was surprised at the lack of weapons knowledge the Iraqis had, though. I expected them to be more familiar with the weapons. I had never fired an AK before I went to Iraq, yet I seemed to know more about that weapon than they did, yet they all had them. So that was sort of surprising. Fire discipline was another matter entirely. The logistician piece was going to be a big link in getting that established. For example, when we got there, there was a set of barracks that had been built or partially built by Saddam Hussein in the late ‘80s. Some Eastern European company had been contracted to build these barracks and they never were completed. When we got there, there were American contractors finishing up these barracks that would eventually become ours, and they were very nice. They were brand new, never lived in before. A lot of soldiers from 4th ID had slept in there because it was cooler in the summer. So they were cleaning them up and making individual rooms and bays, latrines in the rooms – it was like a palace. It was beautiful. We were told these were going to be our barracks and that we needed to set up a battalion area. Well, where were

we supposed to get beds, vehicles, office equipment, automation and things like that? Nobody knew, so they told us we had to convoy up to Balad Airbase, Logistics Support Area (LSA) Anaconda, and sign for everything. So we were literally taking our lives into our hands to get paper, pens, computer paper – stuff to teach the Iraqis that wasn't available there. We knew from the get go that we weren't going to be able to use PowerPoint slides because it had to be more hands on training, but to have some of those things would have been nice. To be able to put a picture up of how you're supposed to disassemble your AK or to give law of warfare classes where you could put some of this stuff up. We mooched a lot of this from the NCO academy that was there. Vinnell Corporation were the civilian contractors at the time, led by retired General Crocker. I developed some good relationships with the Vinnell guys and they sat down and told us what they were teaching. They also showed us the classes in Arabic, which was something we didn't have, so we were able to use that as well. That leads me to my next point: translators. We didn't have any when we got there.

JM: Were you relying on the students who spoke both Arabic and English?

MS: Well, this was before anybody got there so it was just us. We had some AST people at the higher level who told us to set up our equipment and our barracks and we kept asking them when we were going to get translators. We didn't get them until about three or four days prior to the officers and NCOs showing up. So in terms of preparing our classes – the ones we didn't get from Vinnell – we didn't have them in Arabic.

BR: And once you did get it, you didn't know what it was.

MS: That's exactly it. We were fortunate because some of the classes were dual classes in English and Arabic. They had the translator support to sit there and translate the classes they wanted translated. The other problem was, the way the battalion was structured it was supposed to mirror the religious breakdown in Iraq, and so you had about 20 percent Kurds in your battalion. Well, we didn't have anything in Kurdish and the translators we got initially didn't speak Kurdish either. When we finally started teaching, I would teach the class and let's say a Kurdish guy had a question. He would ask it in Kurdish and you would have to find an Iraqi soldier who understood both Kurdish and Arabic. He would get the Kurdish, then ask my translator in Arabic who would ask me in English. So if my answer was "a 7.62 millimeter round," by the time it got down to the Kurdish guy, it could have been 30 chickens – I don't know. You're really playing telephone, and it was really frustrating because we just had higher support expectations. At that time, though, there was a lot going on. In April 2004, Fallujah had just kicked off and the insurgency was very intense.

JM: What were your first impressions of the guys that actually showed up and how did you go about building and maintaining rapport?

MS: I may have had the hardest time with that personally. I went there thinking I understood the culture. I saw the PowerPoint slides, I had the classes in Germany, and I had my hour or two of language training in Taji. What I tried to do in Taji, and especially once we got the translators, was to get a basic working understanding of Arabic. Not conversational Arabic, but enough where I could say, "Hi, how are you?" "Thank you." "Please." "Sit down." "Be quiet." We had little language cheat cards that were laminated – they're called "quick point" and have

a whole bunch of pictures on them as well so you can point to something and somebody could say yes or no. I thought those were very beneficial. The problem we had was that we conducted our basic training a little bit too much like U.S. Army basic training. My initial thoughts as an officer, since I had never worked in a basic training battalion, I thought it was going to be like shock therapy. We were going to shock them out of their civilian life and into the Army life, and that turned out to be the completely wrong approach. One or two of my NCOs had the foresight to see that. After the first couple weeks, the way we were doing it was not working. I didn't understand it at the time but we were basically contradicting their culture. We were trying to impose an American military culture on an Arabic society and that did not go over well. I call this the "Chai Story." I'd never had chai before - the hot tea that the Arabs drink - and after the first week or two of basic training, we realized that chai was critical to mission success. If they didn't have their chai, things were out of whack. So the first time we were going out to the range - and it was going to be an all-day event out at the range, one of the first few field problems. The battalion executive officer (XO) asked how they were going to get their chai while they were out at the range. Well, I told him they wouldn't be getting it. We had box lunches for them and bottles of water, but we just can't bring hot tea out to the range. It was 110 degrees out. He basically said that if they didn't get chai, they wouldn't train. And me, being the stubborn Army guy, told them they were going to the range. They were going to the field, they had to suck it up, and I didn't care about their chai. They just insisted that they wouldn't go if they didn't get it and said they would quit. At this point, I was in a quandary because I was so frustrated thinking this would *never* happen in an American unit. You go to the field and you know you're going to be missing some basic comforts. These guys could not comprehend that. Long story short, we brought out the damn chai. We got a truck and a big metal container of scalding hot chai in the 110 degree desert sun. We had chai for lunch and everybody was happy. They went to training and they were more effective in training because they weren't worried about their chai. That literally was the decisive point for that training event - not shooting their weapons or understanding the marksmanship, but whether or not they were going to have chai for lunch.

BR: What was more critical to your ability to do the task: the technical skills or cultural/language skills you had to learn through the trial and error method?

MS: The second part: the trial and error method. The technical skills we were able to handle. We had basic weapons understanding and basic tactics - it was just a different type of weapons system. All the advisors had our own AKs, we had them up in our rooms, we taught ourselves and did a lot of self training. We would go out to the range ourselves and do familiarization fires. The weapons piece was a whole different issue in terms of getting the weapons and how we stored and issued them, but technically I don't think there was any issue. We were dealing with senior E7s for the most part and two captains and a major - so all of us had had some tactical experience. The technical skills, I didn't find that to be difficult.

BR: The other was a landmine?

MS: That was the hard part. I didn't understand that, I really didn't; and I think if I had had a better understanding of that before I went down there, I would have dealt with the Iraqis differently. I think I would have had a different attitude from the start and, actually, I developed a better understanding of their culture as a result of it. If I were going to go back tomorrow and

they told me I was going to be on a military training team (MTT), I would do it completely different.

BR: You'd be more effective?

MS: I would like to think I'd be more effective.

BR: You'd have a better chance of being more effective depending on the circumstances and who you were working with.

MS: Absolutely. The cultural piece was a big landmine and it was nice to get here to the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and see the big focus on culture. In Kosovo, the culture piece didn't seem to be as big an issue and I'm not exactly sure why. I don't know if it was because they were Eastern European and we were Western European. I don't remember it being that big a deal in the seven months I was in Kosovo, and I dealt with the Kosovars every day. But getting in with the Iraqis - for some reason, maybe it was such a difference in culture and probably because of my preconceived beliefs of what this culture was going to be. I think that added to the difficulty.

PB: Did your experience in Kosovo help you at all?

MS: I think it helped in the fact that I was not uncomfortable going into a foreign country and dealing with a foreign people. Kosovo lacked the 9-11 piece and the whole ground war piece, where I watched the ground war on television. I watched friends of mine or guys that had been in my company get killed, so I think that kind of made it a little bit more intense than in Kosovo, but my experience in Kosovo definitely helped.

JM: This is maybe a more military culture related question. I read an article you wrote for *Armor* magazine in June of last year. In that you said that, "Overcoming the ghost of the old Iraqi Army proved to be a leadership challenge." Could you expand on that a little bit?

MS: Absolutely. A lot of the officers had previous Iraqi Army experience and nothing I saw of the old Iraqi Army was a good thing. While we think we're there to better the welfare of the troops and train the troops, the Iraqi officers I dealt with felt that the troops were there to better their welfare. For example, when we finally got our mix of weapons and who was going to get what, we sat there - myself and my HHC NCOIC. We sat down when we got the battalion's mix of weapons and figured out what the breakdown of weapons was going to be per company. Based on our American experiences, our machine gunners who had the RPKs and the PKMs, they were going to get a pistol. So the first time this private or E4 walks out with a pistol on his hip, all the Iraqi officers flip out and want to know why they didn't get a pistol. We told them they were platoon leaders and they didn't need pistols. We were setting them up like an American unit and all the platoon leaders were in the tactical fight. The private has a pistol because all he has is a big machine gun and he cannot maneuver that big machine gun. They just kept insisting that they were officers and that officers carried pistols. That was hard to overcome, trying to get the Iraqi officers to understand that you put your troops' welfare first. For example, the simple thing of going into the mess hall and making sure all your soldiers eat first. You'll see that in any American unit and that was a concept they could not grasp. They felt

that since they were officers they should be taken care of first. Weapons training was another issue, and this goes back to my surprise at the lack of technical skills they had. I expected previous Iraqi Army soldiers to have a lot more weapons experience. We found out that they fired basically three or four rounds a year. That was mind numbing. Just in terms of the overall welfare, there wasn't any kind of abuse or anything like that; it was more of, "You're just a private. You're here to take care of me. This is the way it was in the old army. This is the way it's going to be." And we did hear that statement a few times from the Iraqi Army officers - "This is the way we used to do it." Well, we had to kind of remind them that it didn't work so well when they did it that way, but they didn't want to change and it kind of made me think. What if our American Army went through something like that? There would probably be a lot of us clinging to the old ideas, but at that point we couldn't. We had to tell them that it was their Army and we were going to try and help them make it as good as we can. Whether or not they took the lessons we were imparting to heart was up to them, but we tried to set the example for them. We didn't tell them they were wrong and that they were screwed up because that would totally isolate them, but we would say, "Hey, that's the way you used to do it; let's try and do it this way. Maybe this will work a little bit better for you." It was very hard to do, and I was very surprised at that.

BR: The way you described the situation with the pistols, I assume the platoon leaders did not get them, is that correct?

MS: Right.

BR: In retrospect, do you think it would have made things easier to give in on that to get leverage on other stuff?

MS: If we had had more weapons. We were limited in the weapons we had. We originally got Makarovs - those cheap Czech made pistols - and then we eventually got Walther P99s. At that point, everybody, including some of the advisors, wanted a pistol because they were very sexy. There were some things I was willing to give in on, like the chai thing, but the pistol thing to me didn't make sense *tactically*, and that's what I tried to emphasize to these officers. Yeah, it looks cool here, but I was trying to think outside of Kirkush Military Training Base when this PKM machine gunner now has to do something other than set up a support by fire mission. If his machine gun jams, the guy has nothing. A lot of them didn't get that and it was frustrating.

BR: What part of that was they didn't get what we were saying versus we didn't understand how best to get them where we wanted them to be?

MS: That's a good point. I think if we had had the resources to do that, we probably would have considered it. The whole pistol thing was a whole different issue. I had one of those low-hanging drop holsters and, in Kosovo and Germany, I had to have it. I would always rest my hand on it because it just happened to be right there where my hand was. The first couple times I did that in front of the soldiers, there was a panic and one of my interpreters told me I couldn't do that. I didn't even know what it was I was doing. He told me I was putting my hand on my pistol and I said I did that all the time. Apparently in the old army, if you did that somebody was going to get executed, so I kept my hand off my pistol after that. It was just one of those cultural things that I never would have thought about. If we had had the resources we would

have considered it, but I still believe today that we had to instill some sort of tactical basis for what we were doing. I learned as we kept going to give more and to bend more, but there were some tactical things that a lot of us, including the American NCOs, weren't willing to give in on because we thought tactically it would hurt them later on.

JM: You indicated that your goal was to mix the ethnic groups in order to mirror the breakdown of Iraqi society. Was this achieved and were there any problems that resulted?

MS: Yes, there were a lot of problems. It was dictated by CMATT that each battalion would have a certain type of structure. What I found, and some of my NCOs would agree with me, was that the better soldiers we had were the Kurds who had been trained by U.S. Special Forces (SF). These guys had a lot of experience fighting; they had the weapons experience; they knew how to take care of the weapons; and they had a little bit more discipline. Our battalion sergeant major - our first one - was a Kurd and I believe two of our company commanders were as well. We felt they had an edge on the Iraqis, just because they had more experience and more training. Somewhere between April and June of 2004 there was a statement issued by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) that said if you were supporting the Iraqi Army, you were against the Kurds; and at that time we lost our battalion sergeant major, two company commanders and a lot of NCOs - they just didn't come back. The leave thing was another issue I wasn't ready for. The way the pay was set up - you got your cash, you had a week off to bring it home to mama, pay your bills and then make your way back. The Kurds just didn't come back and, somehow, Sergeant First Class Smith, who was mentoring the sergeant major, got a hold of him on the phone and he said he couldn't come back. If he did, he would be ostracized from where he lived and he wasn't willing to do that. Well, okay. It did cause some problems and, as I mentioned earlier, the translation piece was tough, but down at the squad and platoon level it was hard to integrate the guys because of the language barrier. That said, I didn't see any overt discrimination because a guy was Kurdish or a guy was Sunni or Shi'a. Maybe I just wasn't attuned to it, but looking at it from the tactical level, we just didn't see guys being ostracized because he was Kurd or Shi'a or anything.

BR: Do you think our emphasis on having a certain percentage of each group made it a bigger issue with them than it would have been if we had just treated them all as Iraqis?

MS: I think we tried to treat them all as Iraqis but, like I said, the problem was the teaching part. You had to be able to do the Kurdish piece otherwise you left out 20 percent of your battalion. We tried to develop an Iraqi sense. We eventually developed a 6th Battalion patch and it was the biggest day of the year when everybody got their patch. You saw esprit de corps starting to build within the unit, and I always called it the "common suck" factor. You go through a certain sucky thing and you bond together, whether it's a field problem, a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation, or your lack of chai out at the range. You saw them build as a cohesive unit. I don't think we overemphasized the breakdown of religious and ethnic backgrounds. It was just a decision that was made at CMATT. We had to do a little bit of juggling, especially as guys quit, fell out of training or just didn't come back from leave, in order to maintain something of a balance, but we didn't spend a lot of extra time doing it. For the most part, it was probably a smart move on CMATT's part to try and mix things up, but it did pose some training issues.

JM: Can you give us a sense of the range of motivations, the reasons why people joined this unit? Was it just a job, something more?

MS: For the most part it was because of money. It's a fixed income. You knew when you would have guys quit or desert: it was right after payday. They were smart. Nobody quit the day before payday. You get the money and then they all want to quit. We had about 10 percent of the NCOs who got it and understood that they were there to make a better Iraq. They tended to be our better NCOs because they had this motivation that they wanted to learn and actually lead their guys. Those were the ones we pinned our hopes for the future on. If we had two NCOs and one of them was this motivated guy and another one wasn't doing so hot, the U.S. Army NCO in that company would tend to focus more on the motivated guy, because he was the future. You kind of got the impression from the other guy that he was just there for his paycheck and that's it. Despite the fact that CMATT doubled their pay while we were there, there were always complaints. The real heroes I think we had in the battalion were the interpreters. I had two interpreters in particular that I worked with all the time. One was from Baghdad. This guy would come out for three or four weeks at a time. Everybody in his family, except his wife, thought he was working on a construction job because he didn't want anybody to know he was working with the Americans. These interpreters were our lifeblood. When we finally got these guys, we developed real good relationships with them. All the advisors lived on this one floor of the barracks and all our interpreters lived on that same floor. We lived like kings. We all had our own rooms. All the interpreters had their own rooms, their own latrines. We took these guys to chow - they went everywhere with us. Out at the range, we'd let them shoot. They were our lifeblood and without them we couldn't have functioned. I wished we'd had more.

BR: How many did you have and were they your employees?

MS: They were contracted by an American civilian company.

BR: Could you hire and fire them?

MS: We could not. It had to go through the civilian contractor. Major Fedak could say that we didn't want a specific guy anymore, but he couldn't just tell him to leave. Most of the time we had anywhere from four to five interpreters for 10 Americans - so we had to pass the interpreters around. At our max we had seven, but that fell through to contracting losses and we ended up losing guys again. But we had the same three or four when I was there. So we basically said one guy per company; and if you needed one for HHC, you had to run over and borrow an interpreter, run him over to say something, and then send him back. It was a real juggling act with the interpreters.

JM: Did you ever have any problems with infiltration?

MS: Not that we saw. When the guys showed up, we did a shake out of their bags and there were some that brought weapons or drugs on post, but Kirkush was such an isolated base and it was nice because you were in the middle of nowhere. You could see for miles around the base camp. Up until about June we had retired Gurkhas guarding the base camp who were contracted by Vinnell. The Iraqis were scared to death of the Gurkhas. Within the base camp,

there was a small American compound that had our DFAC, barbershop, Internet – things like that – and there were Gurkha guards standing around it making sure no Iraqis would come in there. The Iraqis were scared to death of these guys and would not go near them. Once the contract ended with Vinnell and the Gurkhas left, it then became a joint American and Iraqi mission to guard the base. I think everybody at that time had even more concerns; but compared to Taji, which was right on the river and there was the city right outside, so it was very easy for insurgents to conduct indirect attacks on the base. At Kirkush, we had maybe two indirect attacks, whereas at Taji it was almost every day. In terms of training, it was a great environment because you didn't have to stop your training to go hide somewhere. We also had an American unit – the 30th Brigade – who eventually started giving us a lot of help in training our guys.

JM: What was the big fear of the Gurkhas?

MS: The stories behind the big knives. They're very intimidating looking. They were small statured with dark skin; and even though these were retired guys, they still had that discipline in them. You could see it and the Iraqis could recognize it immediately. When I first got to Iraq, the Gurkhas were all guarding the Green Zone. I didn't realize it until we got to the palace and there were all these Gurkhas around guarding the place. They were very effective in terms of intimidation.

JM: Eventually you were able to do some operations with these guys. Can you describe what the nature and scope of those were and how well they did?

MS: I had very limited experience because I eventually left country, so the few operational things we did with the Iraqis consisted of traffic control points (TCPs), for the most part right outside the base camp. Some of the issues were communications and equipment. Up until the time I left, we had no American Humvees; we had white Nissan pickup trucks. Those were the AST vehicles. The battalion was issued Indian or Pakistani trucks with not a shred of armor on them. The thickest things on them were the windshields. There was no way to mount any kind of crew-served weapons; they were just transports. That's all they were. So no radios built into these things and, as a matter of fact, the first couple trucks we got didn't even come with keys, so we had the ignition wires hanging out. To start the truck, we had to hotwire it. We used a little paper binder clip to clip the ignition wires together so if you were driving somewhere and the paperclip came off, your truck died. So that made for a very interesting time. It was touch-and-go there. The initial operational stuff – TCPs with an American platoon out there, getting the Iraqis to experience things outside of the base camp. Later on, they eventually deployed to Fallujah, but by that time I was already back in Germany.

JM: So while you were there, they didn't go out and do cordon and searches and things like that?

MS: Not when I was there. We trained on it but I was not there when they conducted those types of operations.

BR: Was the tasking you went on for a fixed period of time?

MS: It was originally a six-month tasking and it got extended an additional two months. So we were there for eight months. I left right at the end of the six months with one other member of the team. Another AST that was with us was training the 5th Battalion and they cut back their numbers as well. There seemed to be this general belief everywhere, except with the ASTs, that they could get away with fewer advisors. If I had had my way, we would have brought 10 more advisors down. You just didn't have the eyes and the supervision you needed. You had one NCO trying to train an entire company. That was tough and those guys were working their tails off, but you just couldn't be everywhere.

BR: Did you see yourself as the advisor team to individuals and company commanders versus building the entire battalion?

MS: I think it was a combination of both. In my roles, I was the advisor for three companies, but then I spent the majority of my time working with the company commanders and the platoon leaders. There were also times I would speak to the entire company, trying to give them some motivation, advice, ideas or feedback on how the training went. We would conduct physical training (PT) with our companies every morning. We'd go out there about 0530 to do our PT with these guys. There was one NCO with the company doing PT with them every day. You wanted to make your presence known and they had to see you out there; they had to see you running the stuff. They had to see you at the training, but the goal was to have the Iraqis run the training. We conducted train-the-trainers with the NCOs and the officers and then we sat back and let them run the training. It required a lot of hands on from the Americans to fix the training, especially the planning of the training. Getting the logistics lined up for a range was a difficulty. I don't think they understood the logistics. They just thought when they were going out to the range, the bullets would just be there, the water would be there, and the medics would be there - well, they won't be there unless we plan for it. Throughout my time there that was always a weakness, I thought.

BR: Was the weakness in planning or in the lack of a system that was clearly understood of how you get that stuff?

MS: Both. There wasn't a system developed yet; and maybe because of the way the old Iraqi Army trained, there was this lack of common sense.

BR: From our perspective?

MS: Correct. We had a very hard time - starting with the first operational patrol they went on - with weapons discipline. Where they pointed their weapons, how to manipulate the safety. The first TCP that was done, a guy fired off a round and just missed his toe. You're expecting enemy contact, you hear a rifle go off and it's one of your own soldiers. This was a consistent theme out at the range.

JM: And it's obviously a lot easier to go to "rock and roll" with an AK than it is with an M16.

MS: Right. We tried to work the safety manipulation with them at every training event we had, but for some reason these guys just didn't get it. Reflexive fire was an interesting training aspect. The way we trained reflexive fire, we go from safe to semi and - as you indicated - on

an M16 that's just one click. On the AK - when you go from safe up, it's now automatic. So trying to get a guy to do reflexive fire drills, he now has to manipulate that safety; and some of those safeties were hard to move all the way up to the semi position. Then after he fires his rounds, all the way back down to safe. There was almost an apathetic sense of laziness where it just seemed like they didn't want to move it those two clicks because it was too hard, so they would decide just to leave it where it was on full automatic. There were a lot of accidental and negligent discharges that we saw, no matter what we tried to do to reinforce the safety aspect of this with these guys. Like I said, I don't know if it was because of the old Iraqi Army, but it was difficult. We also would have weapons pieces come up missing - bolts out of the AK-47s would disappear - basically to restock their own supplies back home. So you'd have your weapons turn in, and the arms room was basically an empty room with a bunch of empty beds. We'd just stack the weapons up and paint numbers on the bottoms of all the weapons. We eventually came up with weapons cards and with a system from scratch on how to issue this stuff out. Conducting the inventory was about a three-day process, and it was something I don't think the Iraqi Army had done in the past with any of their equipment. What we started finding is that even though we'd inventory the rifles and actually have it, the next time a guy took it out the bolt was missing. I guess that was an Iraqi training method as well: they used to take the bolts out of their weapons. When they were done training, the officers would collect the bolts so their soldiers wouldn't shoot them - meaning the officers. Some of the soldiers were just so used to taking them out at the end of training, taking the bolts out and putting them in their pockets. That was another thing we'd never heard of or anticipated, which proved to be a big training difficulty when half your platoon was missing the bolts to their weapons and you don't find it out until you get to the range. What we had to start doing back in the arms room was making sure all the weapons had all their pieces, so that increased the turnaround time in the arms room.

JM: We got a briefing recently from some guys in 1-64 Armor and they said that, from their experiences in eastern Baghdad, the Iraqis could definitely handle the full range of security functions based upon their great performances during big events like the national elections or when they got juiced up for some big cordon and search operation. The problem, they said, was that the Iraqis were terribly reluctant, unwilling, even lazy, when it came to mundane, everyday tasks like manning checkpoints, walking the beat. Is that what your experience was and, also, what hope do you have that someday they'll be able to take over all these tasks?

MS: I would agree with that statement. I think they could conduct the bigger ticket operations if they had the logistical support. That's my big concern with what I saw with the Iraqis: their lack of understanding of the logistics behind the missions. I think they could conduct short term operations; and towards the end of our training, you could see the progression in their understanding of tactical maneuvers, how to do a cordon and search, how to plan convoy movement and things like that. But logistically, and then the mundane tasks of doing preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) on their weapons, making sure all their equipment is there - we had a hard time getting that down to the soldier and NCO level. Trying to teach a sergeant that they had to check their soldiers to make sure they had water - which they never drank anyway - that they had bolts in their weapons, that they had the right amount of equipment - those were difficult tasks and continued to be all the way through my time there.

JM: What did you attribute that to?

MS: I had a limited experience working with other Arabic officers at the Advanced Course; and when you would have to go out and conduct a PMCS on your tank, the feedback we got was that somebody else does this for us. I'm not sure if it was a function of the old Iraqi Army and this attitude that the soldiers were there to better the officers' welfare. That may be part of it. There just wasn't the internal belief that they had to check their soldiers to make sure they were doing the right thing. It was this attitude that the soldiers have to make sure that *I'm* taken care of.

BR: That's partially institutional, but the institution exists in the larger culture. We talk about the American way of war and our capabilities, limitations, strengths and weaknesses – they probably have the same sort of thing. It gets back to that understanding of them as soldiers and them as Iraqis.

MS: Before I went – and I've read it now – I wish I'd read some of T.E. Lawrence's stuff. I've read other books on the Arab mind to try and get an understanding of how an Arab mind thinks, but I got more out of T.E. Lawrence's work than I did out of any of the other textbook-like books that say, "Here's an Arab, here's how he thinks, here's his history." It was the way Lawrence was able to understand their culture. That's how I'd like to be if I had to do it again. Maybe not get dressed up in the full man-dress, which I did on occasion. I got the man-dress from one of my interpreters and had the soldiers show me how to put the wrap on. I'd do that every now and then to break some of the tensions and try and blend in a little bit with them. But the understanding he had of the culture and the way he was able to have the culture work for his benefit. He knew the cultural strengths and weaknesses and was able to use both towards his benefit to achieve his goals. That's something I think we need to be better at.

BR: You're talking about *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, correct?

MS: Yes, but I liked Thomas Lowell's book, *With Lawrence in Arabia*, as well, because it was watching Lawrence. It wasn't Lawrence talking about Lawrence; it was somebody else saying, "Here's what I saw Lawrence do." I liked both of them.

PB: That was very first-person, too. He was there and he wrote about a specific thing.

BR: He was also a publicist for Lawrence. Have you read any recent biographies?

MS: I have not. Not on Lawrence.

BR: Have you read the *27 Articles*?

MS: I'm about halfway through.

BR: What do you think of those?

MS: I think we need to get that out to more people.

BR: My thoughts about that are that there are a lot of great quotes and you see the positive quote side of it, but you don't see the rest of the sentence or two after that, which gives you a little more balance.

MS: Right, the link. I'm not sure how they train the MTT teams now. From what I've heard, there's a lot more emphasis now on how these teams get there and there's a support structure set up. I was there when General David Petraeus took over and we saw changes. Equipment started to get to us, there seemed to be a more solidifying effect on who your chain of command was, and Iraqi brigades started to be established as well.

BR: On both the advisor and Iraqi side?

MS: Right. We saw progress on both. It's my understanding now that they have a lot more of this in place and it's not 10 OCs yanked from Germany sent down really quickly. We found out on the 10th of January and were in country by the 15th of March. In between that time, we still did another rotation at Hohenfels training guys for KFOR - so we weren't doing a lot of training for Iraq at that time other than a few trips to the range. There really wasn't a train up for us and, from what I've seen and heard, that's a lot different now.

BR: Initially the thought was that anybody could go down and do this. Just take a bunch of guys and send them over. It's just basic training but they speak a different language. Establish rapport -

MS: Right. You don't need any weapons - just bring your pistols because you won't be going anywhere. And then meanwhile, just to get pens and pencils was a three-hour convoy. Guys would come under fire so they could get computer supplies, paper and things like that. It was a surreal experience.

BR: How do you get to be a guy like Lawrence? He's not a soldier, and when he says to speak and understand them, he's not talking about their language but about their dialect - which is very important. He's also not trying to turn them into the British Army; rather he's trying to take their strengths and weaknesses and use them to get them to where we want them to go, or where we think they want to go. Compared to our institutional approach -

MS: I think institutionally - and we talk about this a lot in my classes. We're talking about this joint interagency management approach where we need to set free the bonds and the gates that an American officer has to hit. Let a guy go out and be with the State Department for two or three years and then let him come back. I think we need to develop advisors in the same way. We need to find the right kind of people who, like Lawrence, are not afraid to go out on their own and take some chances. To immerse themselves in the culture, understand the culture, and work with these people all the time, maybe for a couple years, and then pull them back into the regular Army again - or let them track like that. I don't think a foreign area officer (FAO) is the guy you're looking for to do this kind of stuff. I think it's someone who has that adventurous spirit, who's willing to go out. And the American military also has the expectation that we're not creating another American military in Iraq, that these guys are going to do things different, that they do have different cultural strengths and weaknesses. We expect them to accomplish specific tasks and they need to be competent enough so we can eventually leave the country;

but the way they do it may be different than the way we do it and we need to understand that. As long as we're not violating human rights and international laws and we're showing them the right way, but their way may be different. Like I said, I was very naïve when I got there and, in retrospect, if I could go back and do it differently, I would have read a couple of T.E. Lawrence's books before I went. I would have had a much more open attitude and would have already had it in my mind that we weren't conducting a U.S. basic training session with these guys. The last thing I would have tried to do was to *really* get into the cultural aspect. I think I focused more on trying to learn the language than I did trying to understand the culture; and that for me made things a lot more difficult and made accomplishing our mission a lot more difficult.

BR: Towards the end of Vietnam, they came up with a military advisory officer program. It wasn't FAO; it was sort of a lesser form – but it was to get guys to go and be advisors. They had special training, gates and selection, etc., and it only lasted two or three years. I think initially they anticipated they would have 6,000 slots but they only ended up with 300 or so takers – and that was when we were phasing out of Vietnam. We were still doing the business, but it wasn't perceived as the core things that real soldiers do.

MS: Right, and also they're worried about how it will affect their promotions. Am I going to get a battalion command, am I going to become a battalion S3? It's all those things we're dealing with today. I think it's a good idea to have almost like a standing advisor headquarters or advisor teams where you learn all about how to be an advisor, and the only piece missing is, "Where are we going and what culture do we need to now understand?" You'd have a four- or six-week train up period where you get to learn that culture before you ever set foot in that country – or at least before you ever see that first soldier you're going to advise. This is what SF is great at; and unfortunately, when you're dealing with a country like Iraq, there just aren't enough SF guys to do it, so the Army *has* to rely on a former infantryman who's now a tanker, an ADA officer and six NCOs to come down and train an Iraqi battalion. That's just the nature of the times. When I was there, I did run into one of my former soldiers who was with an SF team and I was able to get some tips from them while I was there. He was pointing me back towards those things I said I wish I'd done in terms of how you deal with the guys. One thing he also said was that tactically you couldn't give anything up. You want to keep those tactical skills and I thought that was good advice. It was at that point where I had an enlightenment and it steered me back on track culturally about where I need to be with these guys. Never having done this job before and only having dealt with American infantry and armor units, it was a hard shift for me.

BR: So you're saying we need some sort of structure or doctrine – someone who's putting together ideas of what we should do if we have to advisory stuff bigger than SF. Rather than nobody being responsible for it and we just make it up again every time we go.

MS: Right, and I think that's what we're doing. I created a POI just out of luck because I met the right Vinnell guy who had the PowerPoint slides and I had a thumb drive. Well, there's your POI.

BR: But there wasn't a standard POI.

MS: Right, there wasn't one. This was a civilian company that created their own POI, which all of a sudden became everybody's POI. Capturing this stuff – which is what you guys are doing – is great, and for any advisor that's going downrange somewhere, being able to tap into this stuff is huge. I think having some sort of established doctrine or checklist, TTPs or sample POIs – and nobody will follow it verbatim, but it will give a basis and a guidance of where to start. You'll be able to see what's important – your leaders, your logisticians, your life takers, the culture – getting an idea of that and what you need to focus on to train guys to certain capabilities, and then to emphasize that this is not a U.S. basic training.

BR: That's interesting because they're putting together a POI out of Fort Riley.

MS: I think that's a great idea that they are finally assigning one command structure to do that. I wish they had taken all of Hohenfels and said, "Hohenfels, you are now in charge of training up this Iraqi brigade. Each one of your OC teams is going to get an Iraqi battalion." This way, you have an established command structure at the advisor level and you have all the necessary expertise. I still think they're sending 10-man MTT teams and I don't think that cuts it for a battalion-sized element.

BR: What size team do you need to raise a battalion and what size do you need to continue to sustain it? In El Salvador, they figured out that they needed about 55 advisors to go in and train up a battalion, but you didn't need that many when you were just sustaining.

MS: I agree. Believe it or not, the size of an OC team is 55 guys. For standing up a battalion from scratch like we did, I would have loved to have had my medical OCs with me: senior E7s who are experts in medical stuff and training and they know American doctrine. And then the more NCOs you have there, the more common sense you have as well.

BR: But also, that may lead to a more American focus and they might not be able to absorb it all culturally, institutionally or equipment wise.

MS: With the medics, I had to go to the 30th Brigade – a North Carolina National Guard brigade – and hook up with their docs and medics and ask for help. I needed people to be able to train my medics so they could save somebody's life. So instead of having the organic resources with a habitual working relationship, I had to go over to a brigade that's conducting active combat operations and ask them when they have a day off if they would send a couple of their medics over to train my Iraqis. I agree with you in that the stand up of a battalion is a much bigger requirement, especially when you don't have any systems in place. Once you have an operational battalion with systems in place, I still would say that you would need at least two advisors per company. When you go out on a patrol with these guys, you'd like to be with another American.

BR: Historically, if you look at what happened in Korea, you had regimental advisors – and you might have one officer per battalion towards the end and that was it. In Vietnam, there was a five-person battalion team that was almost always under strength and there were basically two officers, two NCOs and a medic. Optimally that may be right, but historically it's always that less is better.

MS: Right, and I understand that.

BR: You're trying to get them to do their stuff – that's the argument you use – but that may not be the real reason; it may be because other things are just more important.

MS: Sure, you just don't have the resources. I'm glad they're doing that at Fort Riley and I'm glad they're centralizing control – and here's the other thing. Kirkush had the 5th, 6th and 7th Battalions. 5th Battalion was being trained by the Marines, 6th Battalion was by us and 7th Battalion was by another OC team from Hohenfels. All three of us did things completely different. The 5th Battalion marched like Marines, called cadence like Marines, did their room clearing and military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) like Marines. Our battalion did it like the Timberwolf OC team and the other battalion did it like the Grizzly OC team. There was no standardization within what eventually became this brigade. Another difficulty we had was the level of training guys were getting coming out of the NCO academy. We had Navy guys training room clearing. Not to belittle the Navy guys, but a guy who's on a ship may not have a good understanding of basic MOUT training. So we'd get these NCOs with this MOUT training capability and we'd have to kind of retrain them. I think that's changed now that they have set up some POIs, but it was just funny to see because you could tell who trained each battalion just by watching them.

BR: Because there was no common approach or doctrine, it's all ad hoc.

MS: It completely was.

BR: It was as if we'd never done it before, even though we have. The thought was that anybody could do it.

MS: Exactly. It's basic training; just get down there and do it.

JM: You did a lot of coach, teach, mentor, but is there anything you learned, that you took from your experiences that may have made you a better soldier, a better officer, or contributed to your professional development in a positive way?

MS: Definitely. Trying to delve more into the culture. Every culture – not just Arabic – because we're not just going to be in Iraq. Trying to get a basic understanding of world cultures. I'm taking national strategy courses now to try and get a better understanding of how we as a nation – at a national government level – come up with these decisions. The other thing I walked away with was patience. I'm by nature not a patient person and that attitude – as great as it is in our Army – does not always work with other countries, soldiers and cultures. My one big regret is that wish I had known about the cultural aspect and the patience aspect prior to ever setting foot in Iraq. I walked away with a lot of great lessons from all this and, fortunately, they're things I have not lost and have been able to reinforce here at CGSC. It's nice to have the time to do the readings, to take the time to talk to other people and instructors, and find out some of these other theories on how things are done. If I had to do it again, I know I'd do it completely different. I think I'd go with a better understanding of the culture and a lot more patience to deal with these guys.

BR: Would you say the American approach seldom works or is more often counterproductive?

MS: It was more often counterproductive *in that culture*. In Kosovo, however, it worked well. When you were trying to stand up the police forces or dealing with some of the local governments – they kind of understood it.

BR: But the cultures were more similar to ours than this.

MS: Absolutely. There was a lack of understanding on my part of what the culture was and what the strengths and weaknesses were.

BR: When you talk about understanding cultures – knowing yourself – how about understanding what *our* culture is. Is that part of your reflection as well?

MS: Absolutely. There are only a few things I remember that I learned as a plebe at West Point and one of them was some of the leadership tenets – know yourself and seek self improvement. When I left Iraq, that was burning in my mind. We've done a lot of this in class, which has been a great reflection for me sitting there and looking at what our values are. I volunteered to do the "Know your World" brief for all our foreign guys – and I'm married to a German. So it was interesting building a brief on what a typical American is like to present to foreign officers and then talking to my wife, getting her feedback, and then realizing we don't even know who *we* are. As I was building that brief, I kept thinking back to my time in Iraq and how I didn't have a clear understanding of how we as Americans saw ourselves, how we operated, and what we considered normal. I think I understand it now and I've seen it here more at CGSC than anywhere else. I've had the time to reflect on it as well.

BR: There's a neat little book called *Backfire* by Loren Baritz that might be useful too.

MS: Thanks. You know, it was a good experience. I left there with some regrets. I don't think I did the best job I could have done, but I don't blame the Army because at that time there was a lot of turmoil and I can't sit there and say the Army didn't train me for this. I went there with the wrong attitude and I thought I understood Iraq and the history because I had seen the PowerPoint slides, but I really didn't. It really required a lot more research and in-depth immersion with these guys, talking to them, listening to them and getting a better understanding of how they function.

JM: Thanks for your time, Major Sullivan. It's greatly appreciated.

MS: You're very welcome.



END OF INTERVIEW

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