

~~SECRET/ACGU~~

(b)(3), (b)(6)

6 May 2008

Embassy Annex, International Zone, Baghdad

By (b)(3), (b)(6)

MNFI Historian

### **Abstract**

I am a USMA graduate and ORSA. To do COIN, OR has to develop new metrics and find new algorithms for the human terrain. Deploying in May 2007 was a disorienting experience. Under RDML Smith, we organized STRATCOM as it should be, and MG Bergner led all the O-6s in integrating effectively. General Petraeus is a great communicator and leader. We do extensive and careful media assessment and analysis. Polling data among the ISF and Iraqis is helping considerably. I can not just develop information; I have to tell my boss how to make productive use of that information. Helping GoI spokesmen develop their skills has been important. The pan-Arab media is developing. The March and April IDF showed me what stress people experience in war and under bombardment. 53:57.

### **Interview**

#### **Background**

(b)(6)

(U) ORSA has always focused on Resource Management. No one has ever applied it to Strategic Communications. This is a difficult environment. COIN demands measures of effectiveness.

(U) The problem really came up in the September 2007 testimony with the 18 benchmarks. Ambassador Bremer and General Petraeus made the point that we could achieve all 18 benchmarks and still not have security and stability. Or, we could have security and stability and still not have checked off the benchmarks. Even if we get the benchmarks, simple metrics doesn't cut it.

(U) We have made strides getting ORSAs into higher headquarters, and they clearly need us.

(U) At the Naval War College, the main point or concern was the national decision making level. In 2005, we saw a shift [from modern warfare?].

~~SECRET/ACGU~~

08:15. (U) As an Operations Research community, we are still struggling with this because when we look to the future, all of our efforts have been on the traditional tank-on-tank, mechanized division vs. mechanized division. So what I will find to be interesting over the next decade is how do we account for this non-traditional, counterinsurgency warfare. Our models and simulations are not attuned to capture the intricacies of these asymmetric conflicts. Throughout the Cold War, we focused on algorithms for things like line of sight and penetration of armor.

(U) Our numbers are not geared for the human terrain we face. The pitfall is that traditional operations research focuses on statistics, optimization, [stochastic?] modeling. Some of it gets into human factors like ergonomics, but it does not address the social, psychological and non-linear effects of operations. We have to get more into the soft sciences in order to better understand the human dimension. On a small level, we can examine effects on a couple of people or a squad, but how do you blow that up to deal with the magnified effects on large populations, a city or a country? If we conduct an action in an country that we are unfamiliar with, what factors will feed into understanding the effects of our operations. We have a long road ahead in constructing models and simulations.

(U) We do not seek predictive power, but we do seek to understand effects.

(U) As I finished the war college in 2007, I volunteered to do my part to relieve the stress on manpower from the deployments. I knew the guy out here, (b)(3), (b)(6) I volunteered for the position, as did a few others, but I was selected, I think partly because he knew me and trusted my qualifications and abilities. It was the right thing for me to do to volunteer.

11:40. (U) (b)(3), (b)(6)  
(b)(3), (b)(6)  
(b)(3), (b)(6) The ones that I really feel for are those who are getting back to back to back deployments. I don't know how those families do it. I know the Army is trying to help that.

(U) I arrived here on 8 May 07, I attended the last CONUS Replacement Center session they held at Ft. Bliss.

***What was it like getting here?***

12:45. (U) It was completely disorienting. I got on the plane and had a sleepless 24-hour flight over here. Arrived in Kuwait, got shuttled over, and then waited for a flight up here. I think most of the folks I've talks to, it was confusing and disorienting, and even though we've been here a couple of years, you can't imagine what its like until you've done it. It is hard to fathom. When I arrived in May, we had a lot of IEF activity for a couple of months, then it got very quiet right until this last Easter. Then, with striking into Basra and Sadr City, we got a lot of IDF. I was caught outside perhaps 1/2 a dozen times. I would say that the closest I was to an actual impact was 150 meters. The one that surprised me the most was in August '07, there was a huge explosion that I thought

~~SECRET/REL ACGU~~

~~SECRET/ACGU~~

must have been a rocket hitting the Embassy. It turned out it was a VBIED across the river. It shook this building as if it had hit this building, and it literally knocked people off their feet, so you can imagine how much of that explosive power was, and it was across the river, and quite memorable.

(U) My predecessor was (b)(3), (b)(6) He had been at the TRADOC Analysis Center, and he's back there now working for LTG Caldwell.

***In my interview with RDML Smith, he said he saw things at MNFI's Strategic Communications in the Spring of 2007 that needed to change. How did you assess the situation and what needed to be done as you joined MNFI?***

15:35. (U) I think that sometimes personalities don't mesh well. I think many of the O-6s who were here at the time would concur that they did not all get along very well together. I know a lot of the O-6s that came in with me, we all sort of banded together and said, if there's one thing we're going to do, let's make sure that we are functional, we're not going to be dysfunctional, we're going to be functional and we're going to do. That was the first thing we did. I think the second thing that happened is that RDML Smith

A) made sure he put the right people in the right job. It is not offensive. I would not be the right guy in the PAO slot because I don't have the training and experience. He made sure he had the right mix of people with the right skill sets in the right position, and

B) re-organized so that the organization had checks and balances, that the skill sets were aligned properly, and that within a particular section, the right mix of people both grade, rank, and service, were there so they could better perform the mission, and that was a pretty radical re-organization, for the better at least from my perspective. . . .

17:30. (U) Also, MG Bergner brought all the O-6s together, we would meet, 2-3 times a week, so I would know who was running the political and economic sections, so we had the opportunity to bond very quickly. Also, with General Petraeus, I can not imagine any clearer guidance or insight into what he is thinking. He is very clear in his communications, what key talking points are, how we should address key questions when they come up. He would always stress things to be ready for for upcoming press conferences and stories to prepare for press releases. Furthermore, on a weekly basis, we would go brief him for 30 minutes on various topics. That would be MG Bergner, RDML Smith, RDML Driscoll, and myself, and the chiefs of staff, and I would brief on anything to do with polling information, focus groups, or any analysis and assessments of how stories and press conferences were being portrayed in the western and pan-Arab press.

***Do you think General Petraeus ever used the BUAs to work through elements of his testimony preparation?***

19:50. (U) We've talked about this, and I do think at times that some of his comments in BUAs were really about thinking through testimony talking points. So we got to hear first hand his thought processes, and as a result, nothing that he ever said in the testimony was every surprising, because it was always what he had been alluding to in the BUAs or in our Strategic Communications half hour sessions. It was always very rational and logical thinking. And I think his synchronization with the Ambassador was something

~~SECRET/ACGU~~

I've never seen. The way that the Embassy and the MNFI complemented one another in this was very impressive; Petraeus and Crocker always seemed to speak with a unified voice. I think that was the primary catalyst for Strategic Communication.

***One thing that was missing from the testimony that you see in other venues is his sense of humor.***

21:00. (U) That's true, and we've collected some remarks, but one thing to note, though he rarely does, he can and will light into anybody from a two-star general to a specialist who is reading the slides, but having made the effect, he will then immediately follow that up with some sort of humorous remark to lighten the tension in the air. You would always know when he was serious, there would be no doubt, but he would never, it seemed, hold it against a person. Some of our favorite lines were "You don't need a four-star action officer," "you don't need me to do the thinking for you," or I think the classic one was when he said "Don't go there girlfriend." I don't know who he said it to, but it was always a way to lighten up the mood. I always found him to be very gentlemanly and he always treated me surprisingly well even though I may have said a few gaffes here and there during a briefing. He was very respectful and I can see how he got where he is.

***A friend of mine at home who is very anti-war has a kneejerk reaction to Petraeus, reviling him, it appears, first for being a general, second for leading operations in Iraq, third for apparently having staved off defeat and quick withdrawal, and as a result regards anything Petraeus says to include testimony before Congress as an out and out lie. How do you break through the walls people put up to stop communications?***

22:55. (U) Five years. It has been five years, number one. Then, when you look at the polls, you get very dichotomous perspectives from Vietnam, where back then it was don't like the war, don't like the soldiers. Here, it is don't like the war, but support the soldiers. It is very Catch 22. I think, from my perspective, the whole analysis of this is going to take at least a decade to play itself out, not the war, but the analysis of it, because it is mired in having been a long war already, the election is coming up, so I think the whole, what we should learn from this . . . we learned lessons on fighting in Vietnam, and in Desert Storm we learned how to treat the military, but in terms of the national government and how people regard the military, and how the military portrays itself, I'm sure many people . . . you've got many people assuming "of course he's going to defend the war," and then charges of the Pentagon having primed media analysts. There is always going to be skepticism. The effect will take years of study to comprehend.

(U) We are a learning organization. We have adapted to the situation.

(U) Analysis and Assessments has three Air Force Operational Researchers and a Ph.D. who is also a Rhodes Scholar. We have a Gallup contractor and a Lincoln contractor. Our major products include a single page of key messages.

(U) 26:00 We do a Communications Assessment Report where we look at the effects of stories on public perceptions. (Listen for more details)

~~SECRET/ACGU~~

(U) 27:30. We disseminated these products through many venues and they took on a life of their own.

(U) JFCOM came to see what we were doing as did DOD, and they are seeing it as the model. They had never seen this level of analysis done on Strategic Communications. RDML Smith may now go to Central Command or to DOD. He wants the same capability at Central Command as we have here. Petraeus is the best general officer I have ever worked for, and hopefully he will go to Central Command.

***In late March, the PM went to Basrah, and things looked very bad. What did you know about it?***

(U) 31:20. MNCI sent (b)(3), (b)(6) down to do PAO. He is the Deputy PAO to (b)(3), (b)(6) We would interface with him each week. We would provide him what the media was saying, pan-Arab and western. Things were bad and the media was portraying it that way. But I think one of the best talking points was, yes, it happened and there were all these bad things, the good thing is that their deployment and logistics were better than they would have been a year ago. There were hiccups in the initial operations. Thus, they required CF support, but that is why we were the over watch forces. I was surprised at a personal level because I anticipated a much longer fight and was surprised when JAM did fold. The situation turned when JAM found the ISF was willing to fight. We didn't know everything that happened.

(U) Iraqis are increasingly confident in the ISF. We do not publicize our polling. We are always concerned about our polling.

(U) The trends show increasing confidence, and there are still significant differences in Sunni/Shia confidence.

34:15. (~~S/REL ACGU~~) With MNSTCI, we are conducting a focus group with many of the senior leaders and soldiers of the ISF. We should have information within a couple of months to find out how prevalent sectarianism is in the ISF. Among Iraqis, we've found that they, over time, have gained greater confidence in the IP and the IA. The caveat is, we do not advertise our polling. We actually do not let our pollsters know they are working for us, because that would put them in danger. There is always concern about polling data and its accuracy, but what is important is not the number in and of themselves, but the trending data is very positive toward the ISF and the GoI. The word of caution is that there are still very significant differences between Sunni and Shia perceptions; the difference between them is 20% or greater. That is true of the Sunni and Shia perceptions of the GoI and the ISF.

(~~S/REL ACGU~~) In Sadr City, we're doing focused groups. We'll have the results within 40 days, and we'll have monthly polling from before and after the operation in Sadr City before too long. We do a detailed analysis for the GoI, but we show them the results. They know not to go public with it. In certain instances we might provide hard copies, but never identify it as MNFI material. We show results.

~~SECRET/ACGU~~

***What do you have to do to make your boss's job easier?***

(U) 38:50. This is something I learned here. I can not just provide information. I need to tell him the significance of the information and what productive use he can make of it. I need to tell him what action is necessary to capitalize on the information. What is the recommendation? So, situational awareness is important, but the most important thing that MG Bergner has conveyed to me is what is the so-what, what am I going to do with it that is going to achieve the result that I want to achieve that is going to make everybody's life easier?

(U) 39:50. For example, we weren't certain how the Iraqis perceived Iraqi government spokespersons, so we did a focus group that found that Iraqis did not trust the GoI communicators because of the legacy of Iraqi government spokesmen. On the other hand, Iraqis trusted coalition spokesmen for information, but resented them as occupiers. In fact, the original spokesperson for Fardh al Qanoon used to come out and say things that were just blatantly false. This went back to the old Soviet-style way of doing communications. It went back to Baghdad Bob. So there was skepticism there. The solution was for coalition and Iraqi spokesmen to do joint press conferences and we did them on Sundays and Wednesdays. This enhanced the Iraqi spokespersons' trustworthiness and it enhanced our legitimacy as being something more than occupiers. The GoI communicators got credibility from doing this. After a while, the Iraqis were ready to see their spokesmen standing up on their own again.

(U) 42:30. There was something we did not do well. Al Baghdadiya puts out an anti-coalition paper. Many of the papers put out a story, and we look at it, and know its not right, but we never did anything about it. They would put out wrong, libelous stuff. We used to see it and just let it go. We realized, from RDML Smith, that we needed to start tracking it and contact the paper, telling them it was wrong, and providing accurate information and showing them what they were doing. Initially they ignored us, but since we've continually harped on it, they're now less likely to print trash and they're more likely to print a rebuttal, or even acknowledge that they got something wrong. Also, we find that these erroneous stories go away faster, not hanging around for days, but disappearing sooner. The whole pan-Arab press has gotten better, and you can see that in the press conferences. When I got here and first went to a press conference, you could count on one hand the number of pan-Arab/Iraqi journalists that were there, and you could count on one hand the number of questions they would ask. Now when you go to a press conference, there's few if any empty seats, there's plenty of pan-Arab and Iraqi press, and they're more than willing to ask questions, and not just easy questions, but they're willing to call a spade a spade, and it makes the GoI spokespersons nervous, but they're having to address these issues.

(U) 46:45. When we deal with stories, General Petraeus' concern is always that it always needs to be balanced, in the proper context, and with proper characterization. So when we say bad news happened, happens, or will happen, the media can and should report it, but they should not choose propagandistic and false buzz words--illegal occupation, overly aggressive coalition, purposely massacred civilians. There is nothing wrong with the facts, and that is where we have tried to work with the media with getting the facts

~~SECRET/REL ACGU~~

~~SECRET/ACGU~~

out there. Pan-Arab conspiracy mongering is a serious problem, but if you're not careful, you'll wind up chasing your tail trying to keep up with it.

*We then had a discussion of the direction of the surge, limited US military resources, Afghanistan, Iran, and what comes next.*

(U) 51:50. Those are a lot of interesting points that can and should be discussed at the war colleges, but it is really going to depend on the change in the administration that we will see in January. That is where this debate will really take off.

(U) My lasting impressions of this are: First, that people matter, that this is a team effort. I have never before seen how fast a team could form and how well we worked together and cared for one another. It could never be replicated in peacetime. Second, at West Point, my philosophy professor was LTG Dubik. He taught ethics and the military profession. He talked about how people react to stresses. And I will always remember Easter Week when we were just getting shelled, from IDF, just a lot and very accurate, and walking around here and seeing people's expressions, and there were decreasing volumes of email, and you could see the stare in people's eyes as they tried to deal with it all. There was more stress than I have ever seen, and I think I could then, after all these years and decades of reading, I thought then, "I got it," I could then understand what it was that people experience. Nowhere near what young soldiers deal with in having to break down those doors, but I could really see the impact and effect of this IDF, and I could see how it made people just so wary.

~~SECRET/REL ACGU~~