INTERVIEW OF:

LT. GEN. RAYMOND ODIerno

COMMANDING GENERAL
MULTINATIONAL CORPS - IRAQ

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HEADQUARTERS MNC-I

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This interview was transcribed from tapes provided by the Center of Military History.)
PROCEEDINGS

INTERVIEWER: This is the Multinational Corps-Iraq Historian. Today is Sunday, the 24th of June, 2007, at approximately 2000, here interviewing Lt. Gen. Odierno, the Commanding General of Multinational Corps-Iraq.

Good evening, sir.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: how are you.

INTERVIEWER: Good, sir. Sir, I just wanted to ask the first question, which is: When you took command of Multinational Corps-Iraq on the (Inaudible) transfer authority on the 14th of December, looking back on that, what was your initial assessment of the situation?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first off, obviously, we've been working it for six, seven, eight months prior to that as we ramped up the war training, constant contact with the Corps as well as MNF-I. So we tried
to move forward with what they were doing as we trained up.

As we began to do the transition when I first got over here, at that time they had just published guidance about transitioning to Iraqi security forces, in that the goal of the Corps would be from December through 2007 the transition of all security to Iraqi security forces and the transfer to the provincial Iraqi control of all of the provinces.

So when we first came in, that was what we focused on. In fact, as we were getting ready to come in, we were told that we would probably go to 10 brigades, either right when we got here or right after we got here, and our force structure would be reduced. Much more of the security operation would be turned over to Iraqis.

Then when I got in here, maybe the day before I took over or the day after, General Keisley (Phonetic) came to me and
said I would like your opinion on what we can do in order to make a decisive improvement in security within Baghdad; think about that, and come back to me.

So that is when I really sat down and I did an assessment of what was going on, and I had a (Inaudible) group as well as my planners kind of -- I gave them some things I needed them to think through, and I kind of gave them my initial impressions, having walked around here.

A couple of things that we decided at that time: One was, very clearly, that the problem that we were facing was that you had the Iraqi citizen that was looking for a few things. They were looking for security, individual security, security for their family, basic services, employment, etcetera.

You had a brand new government of Iraq that was in place, had been in place for about eight or nine months. They were attempting to provide these, but they were so...
immature and, in fact, what I call -- I call it societal devastation, that the Iraqi society after the fall of Saddam Hussein and their ability to support the people was very bad.

So because of that, you have this large gap between what the Iraqi citizen wants and what the government of Iraq could provide. So what we had is with all these different groups trying to fill those gaps, you had Shia extremists, JAM, other elements. You had Al Qaeda.

You had Turkey. You had all these trying to influence these groups, trying to co-op these groups, in fact, in order to gain power within Iraq and gain control within Iraq.

So what I decided was, in order for us to be successful, I would have to narrow that gap between the citizen and the government, and there's three lines. We decided we had to do it through security,

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diplomatic and governmental issues, and economic issues.

In security, we made the decision that we think, in order to do that, we must protect the population; and in order to protect the population, there's several things that we would have to do.

First, we will have to really reverse our strategy, which was to come out of the cities into the large (Inaudible), turn it over to Iraqis, and we would be just transition teams with them.

So we kind of reversed that by saying we think we need to be out in the population. We need to help the Iraqis to secure their population, to protect it, and the only way to do that is to get out there in a larger force in order to do that, both Coalition and Iraqis working together.

(b6) Sir, let me interrupt you here for a minute. This is (b6) at the Center of Military History jumping in
That's a fundamental shift, though, from what 5th Corps and General Torelli (Phonetic) had been doing.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Right.

And it involved some risk, did it not?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It did. I think when we got here it was clear that things were not going the way everyone wanted them to go. Violence, murders were up. Sectarian violence was significant. So because of that, everybody realized that there had to be a change of some sort. We might have disagreed on the changes, but I think everybody had finally come to the conclusion there had to be a change.

That's when we started having this discussion. So, you know, some people thought like all we had to do was increase the number of jobs, and the sectarian violence would go away. So, you know, I
think -- So that was one option.

My thought was the first thing we had to do was protect the population, and the jobs would come, and that was a different way to look at it.

So we fundamentally changed from transitioning to Iraqi security. So what I wanted to do was fundamentally change from transitioning to Iraqi security forces as quickly as possible and go back to protecting the population.

INTERVIEWER: And how did General Casey (Phonetic) see that?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I think when we first started talking about it, I think he knew something had to be done in Baghdad specifically. So he understood that, in order to have a decisive change in Baghdad, that we would have to have a fundamental change in what we were doing, and I think he understood that. So we had many, many discussions about that.
He -- and so he -- We had several conversations, and then we go into, in early January/late December, okay, so if we do this, what additional forces will we need to do this; and we had a lot of interaction on that.

He thought we only needed a very small increase in order to effect a significant change in Baghdad, and I felt that we needed a bit bigger one, and we continued to discuss it. We had several iterations of that.

Then we finally -- I knew from back channels with the Army that the absolute most that they would be able to provide is five brigades. So what we talked about was -- He mentioned basically about two brigades in Baghdad, what I felt is we should have decision points all the way, because we know all the brigades would not be able to get here at one time.

So what I said is we know when the
brigades can make it. About one a month is what we were told it would be. So let's just put up a bunch of decision points there and, as we move one forward, you move another one to Kuwait. As you move the second one forward, you move the next one to Kuwait, and then we could always make decision points where we need them or not.

The other fundamental difference we had is I wanted to add two battalions to MNF-West, because I wanted to exploit the success that was going on in the west.

When I got here, it was clear that there was a fundamental change occurring in MNF-West. It wasn't clear what it was going to be yet, but they were making some progress, and people were still very unsure when I got here. You know, some of the intel -- In fact, the MNF intel officer was still not sure that there's much of a change. The commander felt there was, and we had a lot of discussions. General Zummer (Phonetic) and I
had quite a few discussions about this.

So I wanted -- I felt if I was able to get them two additional battalions, they would be able to cover down on areas they have never been able to cover down before, which would allow them to -- in order to gain more traction in order to work with the tribes, and also to disallow Al Qaeda from continuing to move up and down the Euphrates River valley, and he agreed with that, and so we had several discussions.

So it took me about 30 days to convince General Casey of that, because he did not see the need for that. He said, well, it's going pretty good out there, you know. And so we finally came to an agreement on that.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, at what point, as things evolved on the decision points for General Petraeus, and he was identified to come in to take charge of Multinational Force-Iraq -- At what point, as you reflect
back -- That can be something of an awkward situation

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It was very awkward. The decision was made in late January, really middle of January, that General Petraeus would be nominated. January is when he went through the nomination process, and they did have two different views of what was going on and, obviously, I got kind of caught in the middle of all that. But I was true to both of them, and I was very honest with both, and I told them what I thought, and it worked out okay.

General Casey is a real professional soldier, and he -- you know, he worked very closely with me, and he didn't always agree with what I recommended, but he listened, and we came up at least with a plan which I thought gave us lots of leeway and options.

General Petraeus, when I first started talking to him, was very clear what
he wanted to do. He was in agreement, wanted
to move forward, wanted to get as many forces
in here as possible. So we had a couple of
conversations before he got over here.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel like
ultimately then you were able to answer both
General Casey's desires and move ahead with
General Petraeus wanted?

LT. GEN. ODIerno: Yes, sure.
Yeah, and I think the decision point piece
was what really allowed me to do that.

The other thing -- I would like to
backtrack a little bit. The other thing that
I realized in the beginning was I really felt
we were able to define the complexity of
what was going on, and the complexity was --
this is not COIN; it's even more complicated
than COIN, counterinsurgency operations,
because of several things.

One, first you have the number one
issue was sectarian, which is really not
counterinsurgency. Sectarian violence is
outside of counterinsurgency. It's not an insurgency against the government; it is, in fact, you know, two different sects fighting against each other. So that was one piece.

Then you had -- You had the Sunni insurgency. you had Al Qaeda. You had Al Qaeda in Iraq. You had the Sunni on Shia violence, which was the sectarian violence, and then you had Shia on Shia violence, which was power brokering, maneuvering for position, maneuvering for position of power throughout the country.

So we defined those, and then you have the normal other things. You had corruption. You had just pure criminality. So those operated across the entire spectrum.

But what I told everybody was, it was different depending on where you were at in the country. So we couldn't look at it in one specific way.

So what we did is -- You know, so if you are in an Anbar, your threat is Al...
Qaeda, your threat is Al Qaeda. If you are in Baghdad, it depends on what part of Baghdad you are. Certain parts of Baghdad, you have Al Qaeda, and you have the Sunni insurgency. In other parts, you have Sunni on Shia violence. You have the Sunni insurgency. In another part you have Shia extremism.

So what we've tried to talk to is that you have to deal with each one of these problems in a different way. So you had to understand that. Depending on where your brigade or battalion was, you had to deal with the problem a bit differently, and we were directing that, and that was part of the recognition of this is even more complicated than COIN, and then we talked about the different ways that we were going to move forward to try to accomplish this.

Now I don't want to -- We still very much thought it was important, important to define what the political goals were, and

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General Casey, I felt, did a very good job of defining for Prime Minister Maliki what he had to do, and where they had had problems in the past.

First, you had to attack all --
You had to -- Attack is the wrong term. You had to defeat all elements that (Inaudible) on Iraq, just not Sunni elements. You know, in the previous time they had only gone after Sunnis when they had done the operations. They really had not agreed to go after any of the Shia.

He got Prime Minister Maliki to understand this problem, and allowed us -- In December we started going after in a very large way Shia extremist targets; and when he made a speech -- I think it was on the 6th of January -- Prime Minister Maliki said we had to go out to all enemies of the government of Iraq, no matter what sect. That was huge.

He also talked them through the importance of his Army and his police and
using them to not having everybody giving them orders but forming a chain of command, having somebody in charge, having them held responsible, and then came the formation of the Baghdad Operational Command.

Then he laid out some other things that he thought the Prime Minister had to do (Inaudible) which is reconciliation, hydrocarbon laws, provincial election laws; and we worked very hard to work that piece of it.

So, obviously, he had a military piece, but he had a very important political piece, and then the economic piece was our ability to -- He got the Iraqis to -- and General Petraeus finished this off, was getting the money they had promised out to Anbar Province, out to Klofur (Phonetic), and that was huge in reaching out to the Sunnis.

They worked them in order to finally have a budget that was given to each one of the provinces this year for the first
time, and so they can then do some
reconstruction on their own. So all those
things were the first steps that I felt were
very important and a part of this plan in
order to help the Iraqis move forward.

Then you had the (Inaudible) line
which is to continue to increase in
developing and equipping the Iraqi security
forces. So all of those were a part of this.

The one thing that we understood
coming in was the importance of force
protection while you are trying to defeat the
IED network, because we knew that was the
number one threat to our soldiers.

So we did a lot of training on
that, and the Divisions that came over, we
did a lot of work on trying to coordinate as
much as we can to defeat this threat. Up
until this point we have not been successful.

I mean, I think we are finding and clearing
more of them than they had ever had before.
We have really been able to take down some of
the cell structure, but the one thing that I realized when I got here is IEDs were so proliferated, it was very difficult to get inside the entire network, and that's what we are trying to work through now.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, let me ask you a question on the surge.

The United States went to Kuwait in 1991 with 303,000 U.S. troops plus 200,000 Coalition troops. General Shinsecki estimated that there would be several hundred thousand troops needed to occupy Iraq. Even by the standards of the new COIN manual, we should have about several hundred thousand counterinsurgents.

What makes you think as Commander of MNC-I that a surge of some 30,000 up to about 152,000 or 4,000 U.S. troops will make the Iraqi population more secure today in 2007 than a year ago or two years ago?

LT. GEN. ODIerno: Well, now the difference -- The difference, though, I'm
sure, in 2003 and -04, is you do have an Iraqi security force structure in place. You know, I mean, you do have right now 10 divisions of the Iraqi army. You do have nine brigades of the National Police. You do have Iraqi police that have been trained.

So all of that counts, and should be counting in those numbers now. So I mean, that's what's changed, and their ability continues to get better. It's not anywhere near where it needs to be, but it's much better than it was a year ago. It will be much better next year.

So I think that is part of the capital that makes me think that we will be able to do this. That is also the weakness of the plan.

I mean, the weakness of the plan is none of really knows. I don't know how well the Iraqi security forces will step up. They have done okay in this operation so far. They haven't done great. They have
done okay. Now they are fighting
-- You know, two years ago they were running
when they got into a fight. Today they are
staying and fighting, and they are taking
casualties. They have a replacement program
where they replace them, but they still have
weaknesses in their capabilities.

They still have -- They are
lacking a lot of leadership. They are short
leaders, and it tends to be mid-grade leaders
in that they don't have -- they are still
developing, the lieutenant colonel/colonel
level. So I mean, that is one of the
question marks.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, a question
about your operating style with your staff.
It's been interesting to me to meet most of
your key staff, to interview a number of
them, and a certain word has come up a number
of times, which is leadership, as a
description of the way that you like to work
as a commander, which if I understood them
properly, is more of a small decision making process, depending on the subject, bringing in those key players, but working through to a final conclusion as opposed to perhaps a broader, "everybody is included" presentation.

Is that --

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first, when I got here, we started doing things in very large groups where you have 100 people in the room, and I was very uncomfortable with that.

One of the things, when I develop plans and decisions, I want to be interactive with my people. When there's 100 people, you can't be interactive. You can't be honest. You know, it might not be -- you're not quite sure who is there in the room, who is not in the room, and it's not your close staff that you work with.

So what I decided to do is go into a bit of a smaller group and work more
interactive so I get more feedback, more information, and then allow them to go out and work with the rest of the staff. I've been very pleased with the maximum insight. It has actually enabled us to make decisions much faster and cut through a lot of red tape, in my mind, a lot of bureaucracy.

I'm not a fan of -- Maybe it's more I'm impatient. I'm not a fan. We used to have boards and meetings and, you know, we have a board for this, a board for that. In my mind, this is about results. This is about producing information that helps and products that help our subordinate commands.

This is not about process, and I felt like we got so involved in process, we forgot about the output.

So I was very focused on trying to get output as fast as I could and as quality output as I could. So that's a comment on why I went there. It's not that I -- I don't like soothing people. I like -- One of
the things I like to do is get opinions and understand what those are. But it was too early. I just did not feel comfortable.

INTERVIEWER: Am I right in understanding then that you chose that path because of what you had observed here or is that also a style you tried at other times?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, yes. I mean, I think this is the first time. Even when I was a Division commander, I never had groups the size that was showing up for these meetings that I had here. Yes. Then they would be on VGC and everybody else in the world, and I just felt very uncomfortable about some of the people who would be involved in our decision making process.

So I felt that it just was not a good situation. So -- And I have to interact. I like to interact. Now I've still got plenty of people coming in. It's not like it's two people, three people. It's significantly reduced from what it was.
INTERVIEWER: One more dynamic question about the way you like to work. Can you speak a little bit about -- and of course, especially in this coalition environment, you have an array of deputy Commanding Generals, your Chief of Staff. Can you speak a little bit about your decision process in deciding how to use them and how you like to work with them?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first it was -- It was somewhat in place, but I'm actually more fortunate, because before us there was a British Deputy. There was an Italian who was Coalition, and there was a Fifth Corps DCG and then their Commander and the chief.

I have a Canadian DCG that is part of III Corps. It's an agreement III Corps have with the Canadian Army for years and years and years. So I brought him over, and he was able to fill that Coalition position, which to my mind gives me a great advantage.
I'm comfortable with him. I've worked with him for a long time. So it's made it very good, but anyhow -- and that's my second British DCG.

When we were training up, we decided -- I went through all of this. I had one of the former British DCGs came to our training program. We worked through, and so we were very -- back then defined what each one of the DCGs would do.

The DCG-US was responsible for the separate brigades. I have a piece of paper I need to give you. If you want it, I can give it to you, defining the lines of what I gave them. But fundamentally, the DCG-US is responsible for the separates and is responsible for logistical support of Multinational Corps. There's other things he does, too, but those are two major things.

The DCG-UK is responsible -- He's my operations and intel. but what he really does is he is my interface with our Iraqi
counterparts, which is to sift through the Iraqi ground forces command and the Baghdad operational command. Now it is not (Inaudible). He does it on a daily basis.

My DCG-Canadian does Coalition operations, Coalition forces, but he also does my infrastructure. So he is responsible for being my representative and working the oil infrastructure, the electrical infrastructure, etcetera.

Then the Chief of Staff does the normal Chief of Staff functions, you know, coordinating operation of the staff, as well as coordinating our products with MNF-I, and we have very clearly defined all that and gave that to them. We did it during the exercises. They understood what they had to do coming in, and I have been very, very pleased.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, we talked -- You had mentioned the rather dramatic change where you decided not to commute to the fight
but go in and stay in the JSSs and the COPs, the Joint Security Stations and the Combat Outposts.

You started that, I believe, in February.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It was before that. It was in January, January/February.

INTERVIEWER: January and February? And you -- I believe, in February you renamed Together Forward. You renamed it FARDEL (Phonetic) Command.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, the Iraqis named it.

INTERVIEWER: The Iraqis did. Can you talk a little bit about -- behind how that name came about?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first off, the one part I did leave out is there was a meeting that happened between Prime Minister Maliki and President Bush in December in Jordan, and they came to an agreement on security and what the way
forward would be. I don't know the exact of it. It was just before I came over here, but that's when they decided they would do a joint plan in Baghdad, basically.

They agreed, you know, the Iraqis would be in the lead; we would be in support of them. So that also gets to the reason why -- I skipped that earlier -- why General Casey asked me to put together something precise. It was all part of this -- all this that was going on at one time. Trying to think what FARDEL stands for. I forget. I've said FARDEL so many times, I forget what the translation is.

INTERVIEWER: Enforcing the law?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Yes, enforcing the law. So what we -- We started talking about it. We started to talk about names with the Iraqis. First, the Iraqis came up, presented us their plan, and they divided it into 10 security districts. They did all of that.
INTERVIEWER: This is in February?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: This is in December/January, end of December, beginning of January. They defined all the security districts. They defined -- They talked to us about standing up the Baghdad Operations Command, all of that.

Then we would have meetings three times a week with the Iraqi leadership, with their security leadership, MOI, MOB, my national security advisor, the OCINC, and then also the Prime Minister would be there once or twice a week where we discussed what the plan would be and how we would move forward, or we would describe what we felt was appropriate. General Casey led that. I was there in support, and that's where we talked about controlling the population, all those things.

What Prime Minister Maliki said in a couple of his speeches was we are going to enforce the law within Baghdad and around...
Iraq. So that's where we tried to come up with Enforce the Law, but it didn't translate properly in English. English to Iraqi doesn't translate right. So the closest thing in Iraqi is FARDEL (Inaudible). So we decided not to have an American name to it, and we would use their name since it was an Iraqi led operation.

So FARDEL (Inaudible) is Enforce the Law. It doesn't quite translate like that. It translates a little bit different from that. That's why we -- So we decided to go with that joint name.

INTERVIEWER: I saw, you know, documents that MNC-I, your documents, that refer to it about mid-February, which would put it right around the time after General Casey left and General Petraeus came in. So I wondered if --

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: No, I think General Casey was --

INTERVIEWER: -- General Casey was

INTERVIEWER: Sir, I wanted to ask about -- and you spoke about the fact that each region has a different kind of fight on its hands, and I wanted to ask a little bit about the MNC Southeast region, which is predominantly Shia.

It seems as if -- and, obviously, there are political forces at play for the UK that's down there as well, but they have been very quick to move ahead with the moving to provisional Iraqi control, and I kind of wanted to get your impression of what's the right balance between when we hand over that provisional Iraqi control, because obviously, there are two ways we can go, that we say here you go, you got it, or there's metrics in place.

LT. GEN. ODIerno: Well, and the southeast region is kind of difficult. First of all, they were supposed to do it in April, and I've kept pushing it back, and I'll talk
a little bit about that. Now it is scheduled in August, if it goes well.

The problem with Basra is, first, it's Shia on Shia violence. It's JAM, Fatar (Phonetic), Fidela (Phonetic) party trying to all gain control of Basra, which probably is the second largest city in Iraq, clearly, I would argue, a very important city economically because of the Port of Um Qasr and everything has to do with the export of oil and everything else. So it is an extremely important part.

When I got here, what we found was -- is there was some infighting ongoing down in Basra. You had a security structure. The 10th Iraqi Army was not quite stood up yet, and it was not doing very much. The police chief was controlled by Jaish al-Mahdi. You had -- They had stood up an emergency security council which was -- Three individuals in it were enforcement put in by Jaish al-Mahdi.
So the problem was that it was a security structure that could not work in Basra. So what's happening down in Basra is Jaish al-Mahdi continues to attack the Coalition base down there, with indirect fire mostly, and it is more just because they want to. They want the Coalition to go. They want to gain control of the political structure within Basra.

What we are trying to do -- So a couple of things about it. First, the 10th Iraqi Army has got new leadership. It has improved 100 percent. It is a fairly good outfit that has conducted operations with the Coalition partners and really been pretty good.

We have just now replaced the Provincial Director of Police. They are now going to stand up with Basra Operational Command. They are going to link all of the command instruments together. They have eliminated that executive steering committee.
for security. So they have started to do all the things. That's all happened within the last couple of weeks. So we will have to wait and see exactly how that works out.

The problem is Basra is Shia on Shia, and I think it can be solved fairly easily, and I think it is more -- Iraqis could probably solve it better than we can, especially since it is Shia on Shia.

So I think if we turned it over, I think you will see it to be okay, but we've got to make sure that the security structure that is set up is appropriate. That's what I am more concerned about, is the structure itself.

So I think -- and the British, of course -- and the fundamental when I came in -- I mean, the bottom line is the British have changed their strategy. Their strategy within the Middle East is a focus on Afghanistan and not Iraq. So they are trying to transition as many forces as they can to
Afghanistan. Their army is not big enough to do both Afghanistan and Iraq at the size we need to. So they need to reduce their force in Iraq so they can send more forces to Afghanistan. That is part of this equation.

So they have decided to reduce their forces, and one of the things I have talked about with them is -- I think they were supposed to go to 4,000. We talked them only going to 5500, because we felt they were not ready to go all the way down to 4,000 because of the security structure that was in place and the violence that was going on.

So we were able to get them to change that, but they are still working to go down to 4,000. I think as soon as they go to essentially Iraqi control, they will be down to 4,000.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, why does it seem like to an observer like myself that you are putting more emphasis now in June of '07 on reconciliation as opposed to, say, back in
March or February?

You mentioned reconciliation in your documents back then, but now it seems to be at the forefront and, in fact, your 07/01 mentions it as a key task -- second key task.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, again it's about me doing an evaluation when I got over here, and it is about -- it's several things. First, we'll change this.

We have these groups reaching out to us on several different levels. So they kept asking us, and we kept meeting with them. I would meet with them. General Lamb, the DCG, was really in charge of this piece before General Petraeus was working this.

So what we found is we kept getting these groups that wanted to come and say we want to fight Al Qaeda; we want to work with the Coalition. And of course, it took us a couple of months to sort through it to decide whether we thought it was real or not.
Then we kept watching what was happening in Anbar, and that continued to move forward very quickly. The tribes, one by one -- I think there is like 18 tribes. We started out with four or five who worked with us, then 10, then 12, then 14, then 15. I think there is now only two that aren't still.

So we watched how that went and how they continued to improve security, how it was working was possible, and that, in fact, these groups that were either passive and just allowed things to happen and didn't help or were actually part of these groups were now working with us and really making a difference in the security.

So we started discussing, General Petraeus, myself and General Lamb, about, you know, why can't this work other places. So although -- and we saw reconciliation, we still see reconciliation as a government of Iraq task, but we decided that we thought it
could work here.

The second thing that happened is we had a battalion commander down in Abu Ghraib, Commander of 25 Cavalry, who on his own in March or so got contacted by Ansar al-Sunna and some other groups down there who said we will provide you information about Al Qaeda, and they gave him some information. We executed it, and it was very, very accurate good information. We were able to take down several key targets of Al Qaeda, was, and we took a couple down ourselves.

He continued to work with them, and they said, all we want is -- you know, we have young men who want to join the Iraqi security force who have not been able to join the Iraqi security forces. So he started holding meetings with them.

Well, he got to a point where he just couldn't do it anymore. It was really too big of an issue for him. So, you know, I
went down there, started to take that on, and we continue to work that. We now have 1500 that want to join, and we think we've got -- 1900. We think we got agreement with the government of Iraq to do that.

So that was the other thing that happened. So we had Anbar. We had groups contacting us. We actually had this group in Abu Ghraib who -- Abu Ghraib is one of the most violent places we have. It is now not violent at all due to its Coalition forces. They helped us to gain some very good information to target Al Qaeda. So that was kind of a proof to us that they were willing to work with us.

INTERVIEWER: These are mostly Sunni?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: These are mostly Sunnis.

So that started us saying we ought to take a look at this.

Then we started -- With all the
attention in the Arab press that was given to the Anbar salvation group, it was amazing. Other Iraqis of all -- from Diyala, from Ninevah, Saladin (Phonetic) now said we want to be part of that, too; we want to do the same thing. And again, they continue to contact us.

So because of that, we knew that -- we felt this was something we needed to exploit and needed to take advantage of. And we decided that in March and April we would just continue to mature it, and now we have made it part of our permanent organization, and now have a reconciliation cell that's full time that is working this.

So I think that is probably what caused the changes, a variety of different things. It is something we always wanted to do, but it is something that really presented an opportunity. So it's a matter of taking the opportunity or not taking the opportunity. We decided to take the
INTERVIEWER: I am going to change the tape.

It seems one of the issues there in the work with the government of Iraq is can you speak a little bit to the process of convincing or whatever -- if there was a convincing process, because of the sectarian issues, because of the Shia elements in the government, that he is primarily the source of this anti-al Qaeda movement in particular (Several words inaudible) how is that balancing the structure?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It's hard. Well, let me throw some of it back and kind of talk about the government of Iraq anyhow.

First, they are making some progress, but it's slow. They are struggling to move forward as a government, but they are making -- The meetings they have today are so much more sophisticated than meetings we had in the summer. So I've seen a huge increase,
at least in their ability to organize
themselves and go through decision making
processes, which is good.

What we still don't have is we
still have is distrust even between the
Coalition and the Iraqis. You have a
distrust between different groups within the
Iraqis, and that holds them back from making
real progress, in my mind.

The distrust is created over years
of educational biases, cultural differences,
you know, a whole bunch of things,
misunderstandings. So it is one of the
difficult things you have to work through
every single day.

What I was concerned with when we
started this plan was none of us wanted
General Aboud to be the Commander of the
Baghdad operation. We felt he was sectarian.
We thought he did not want to work with the
Coalition. We thought that it was the worst
of our -- worst case scenario. But since we
have been working with him on a daily basis. We put a Colonel with him, whose sole job is to work -- He's with him 24 hours a day just about, Middle Eastern (Inaudible) who came out from I Corps staff.

We sent officers over there. We sent lots of time with them, and the relationship has actually been tremendous. He is a good commander. He is not sectarian. He is trying to do the right thing. He is under a lot of political pressure from a lot of different groups. He handles that about as well as you could expect. He is very, very dedicated to the Prime Minister, which is good, and he should be. So, you know, he does answer to the Prime Minister first, but really been a pleasant surprise.

Then we went through a lot to stand up their staff. I mean, we spent a lot of time and effort. We brought people over from Leavenworth to help them train. We
helped train, had a lot of my staff over there. Their staff is much smaller.

So we've really built these relationships that I think are pretty good.

INTERVIEWER: And that was the BOK staff?

LT. GEN. ODIerno: That was the BOK, yes.

Now let me -- The question you asked me, really, was the sectarian, sectarian in the government? Is that --

INTERVIEWER: Relative to taking advantage of this opportunity for reconciliation originating out of the --

LT. GEN. ODIerno: It is very difficult for them. You know, this is a government who is still struggling to maintain itself. It is feeling like it is under pressure from a lot of different areas. It is under pressure from the United States. It is under pressure from the whole Shia bloc. It is under pressure from the Sunni
bloc, and they still have this deep seated anxiety reference Baathists, probably rightfully so, considering what they have been through over the last several decades.

So they see them as Baathists and people who want to potentially overthrow the government. So we have to work very carefully with them and help them to understand that, in fact, that is not the case. In fact, this is better for you, if they drop their arms and come on your side and help fight Al Qaeda. But in the back of their mind, I believe they would expect a potential coup where the military could turn on their (Inaudible) having too many Sunnis in the military.

So we've got to constantly talk with them about this, and it causes issues, and it makes them very uncomfortable. Anbar was okay, because Anbar is way out there. We are not worried about Anbar. That's way out there in the desert, you know, in the west
and along the Euphrates. Abu Ghraib got their attention, because Abu Ghraib is a lot closer to Baghdad. So working with Abu Ghraib makes them very, very nervous, and the closer you get to Baghdad it makes them very, very nervous.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, I know you like to get around to the units on the ground, talk to our soldiers. I would like to get some sense of how you as the Commanding General of this Corps feel or react when you see reports of soldiers that are killed by IEDs, and what do you tell the soldiers like that unit in 573 that was described in the Coalition Chronicle?

What do you tell the soldiers of the units that survive?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I mean, first off, I do like to get around, and I go out probably four or five times a week for an afternoon, and I do that for a reason.

I do that to -- I do that so I can
touch, small, sense, feel, understand what is going on, so when I make decisions, I really have a good understanding.

In fact, I've found myself having a much better situational knowledge when I come back, so I can deal with a lot of the issues we deal with, because I am out there, and I can talk from a position of knowing. So it's very good.

Well, first off, it is very difficult -- It's not difficult; it's appropriate that I'm out there with those soldiers after they have lost -- I go out there to talk to the leaders, because this is -- When you lose a bunch of soldiers, it's about leadership, and it's about the junior leaders understanding that they are the ones who have to deal with this, and they are the ones that have to keep that unit moving forward.

When I went out to see (Inaudible), it was extremely easy, because...
the company commander and the First Sergeant were just incredible young leaders who had put this company back together, and I got there two days after it happened, and they were already moving forward, still mourning the loss of their good friends, but they have a motivator. They had them thinking through what their next step was, what they had to do, what their next mission was, that they had a mission to accomplish.

So what I was there to tell them is, first, that, you know, we still do have a mission to accomplish, and you have to take — — You still have to take care of yourselves. You have to work with each other to make sure that you are able to protect yourselves and continue to do the things you are asked, and you should do this in memory of those guys who were there with you and wanted to be there with you, because they were volunteers, and they would want you to be successful in what you are trying to do now.
You know, with them I sat down. I talked to about three or four sergeants and staff sergeants. It was about five of them. We just talked about 30 minutes. You know, what they talked about was just the fact that what was important to them was to move forward and how they had to move forward, a very, very good session.

I just wanted to let them know that, although I'm the Corps Commander, it means a lot to me, their sacrifices. And that is one of the things I also try to do when I'm with the soldiers, you know, that I do appreciate the sacrifice they are making, especially with the strategy of the JSSes (Phonetic) and the COPs.

I go to every JSS and COP, and I go out there for a reason. I go there, first, to show we are integrated with the Iraqis but, secondly, to let them know how important it is, what they are doing and why we are doing this strategy.
One of the things I've been a little disappointed with in some units is their communication on why we are doing it, why we are out there, and what are we trying to accomplish.

So I go out there and try to explain it to them. I hope they tie in a couple of commanders, and in 90 percent of them they have, but there's a few that have not, and so the soldiers are kind of wondering why we are doing this, you know, what's the difference, why (Inaudible) inside walking through that. I give them a chance to talk to me about it. So I think that's pretty important.

I also get a good sense of the relationship between our troops and the Iraqi -- troops from Iraqi, and that's pretty helpful, too.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, as you look back during the preparation phase, knowing that -- having been here before and knowing
you were going to take the Corps over here, is there any particular theorist or study of previous warfare that you found to be most --

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, not really. But what I did do is I read as many counter-insurgency manuals, books, but none of them really -- But all they do is inform.

What I thought -- Of course, I stayed in touch with this, and I followed it; and I got promoted and became the Assistant to the Chairman, and part of my job there was Iraq portfolio, and I was an advisor to the Secretary of State. So, you know, I was involved with Iraq and Afghanistan with her.

So I was involved with the (Inaudible) at the political level with what was going on. I tried to stay connected with what was going on, but you never can stay connected tactically when you are at that level. But what I really wanted to do was continue to watch and understand what exactly is happening. What has -- because it changed

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significantly from when I left and came back.

When I left -- and I left in March of '04 -- you know, I could walk -- You know, I walked down every street in Samarra. I walked down the street in Kirkuk. I walked down every street in Tikrit. I walked down every street in Baqubah.

I mean, the last 60 days I was in command, I didn't have any deaths. There was a different Iraq when I came back. It was a very different Iraq, for a lot of different reasons, sectarian violence that had occurred. Insurgency, in my mind, had increased in its capability.

So I had to understand what that meant. One of the things changed, we now had a government -- Iraqis had their own government in place. They now had to shift the amount of security forces. They didn't have it all in one (Inaudible) the first time. They were just starting.

So there had been some really
significant changes. So I had to make sure I understood what all those changes were, understood the fact that we are in a counter-insurgency fight and how do I apply all of those things? How do I apply counter-insurgency doctrine? How do I apply it in the environment that we are operating in, which I described earlier as a bit more complex than counter-insurgency.

So I really tried to think through that, and there were no answers. One thing I came to is there are no answers to this. But the answers are that you have to decentralize to (Inaudible). It's a battalion and brigade commander's fight.

What I have to do is build a sense of our resources and of our strategy, operational concepts and guidance, and then (Inaudible) and then discuss it, and that's what I try to do.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, Multinational Division North has on at least two occasions
that I could recall requested and received reinforcements, requested reinforcements from General Mixon. And I noticed in your latest operations order, you have created an operational reserve of a battalion, and I wondered how difficult it is in this COIN environment to keep a reserve, and do we have enough troops to keep a reserve in?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, committee members are (Inaudible).

INTERVIEWER: Right.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: But first, we worked through that together. I mean, that came across in the press much differently than what really happened, frankly.

(Inaudible) was an economy of force mission in Mosul, Kirkut, Tikrit, all the way down, and even in Baqubah when I got here. Again, as I told you, I was a division commander in Baqubah, and when I went down there in January, I walked up -- one of the first trips I went on was Baqubah, and the
hairs stood up on the back of my neck when I went through Baqubah, and I knew that fundamentally there was something extremely wrong in Baqubah when I got in there.

I knew that we didn't own that town. We couldn't secure it, that something had changed. So we started -- So it got my attention very early on, and right back then I went to (Inaudible) and said I know you've been in economy of force, but let's have a discussion. I at sometime -- I'm going to tell you, we are going to have to go into Baqubah and clear it and control it again, and we have to figure out how to do this.

So I kind of set him off, and he started working it. So when the surge started, I kept asking him, look, I want to see your plans on how we are going to secure Baqubah and how we can do the northern (Inaudible), and when he came back, he said this is what it will take for me to do this.

So, you know, it wasn't like he --
We had been talking about this for a long time and, actually, I knew it all along from the first time I went down there, that we were going to have to do something.

So bottom line is here's the other thing that I would say that has to do with number of forces. When I first started looking at Baghdad and securing Baghdad, the Iraqis just kept saying to me it's not Baghdad itself, it's the outskirts of Baghdad that creates violence in Baghdad.

It's always been that way, and it is that way today. So I mean, I kept listening to that. You know, we were worried about securing the population of Baghdad. So I was kind of headed in that direction.

Then in late December, 11 Cav up in Taji (Phonetic) uncovered al Qaeda's plan for Baghdad. We did a raid. We uncovered -- had all their plans, and their plan was -- I had a chart somewhere. They had a plan that talked about controlling the belts, you will
control Baghdad, and their plan was first to control the belts and then control Baghdad.

I asked my planners to go back. What did Saddam Hussein do when he was here? Well, what did he do? He had all of the Republic Guard divisions in the Baghdad belts, surrounding Baghdad, to control those belts.

So I looked at that. I looked at al Qaeda's plan. I listened to what the Iraqis said to me, and I said, one of the things we are going to have to do is we have to be after those belts. That's where the accelerants are. That's where the truck bombs and car bombs are, and so we are going to have to get in there, and we are going to have to -- As part of securing Baghdad, you are going to have to secure that or you are going to continue to have large, violent events.

So as we then looked at the surge strategy, there was not only reinforcing
Baghdad. It was reinforcing the belts themselves, which contributed directly to the violence in Baghdad.

So that's when I came to the decision I had to do this work in the belts as well as do work in Baghdad.

The hardest thing about this has been I've had to break up brigade combat teams, and that's been hard for me. I would rather have kept them together, but since I couldn't change how we were on the ground already, it would have taken too long, and I would have had too much -- What you want is just keep the familiarity on the ground and the people that were there.

So what I did was -- You know, we ended up out of -- and (Inaudible) battalions as combat battalions. So out of the 20 battalions that came in, 13 went into Baghdad -- 12 went into Baghdad; eight went outside of Baghdad, but I have actually two brigades outside of Baghdad and three inside. But the
brigades outside of Baghdad aren't full brigades. They don't have all the battalions. We put more of the battalions inside.

So I never realized I would be managing battalions and, in some cases, as a corps commander I managed divisions and brigades. But I'm managing battalions, and I never really thought I would do that.

That gets back to the decentralizing nature of this fight. So you know, it's one of the things I have learned since I've been here, actually.

Here is a copy of -- That map on the left there is the map. This is the map that we found. "Battle of the Baghdad Belt" was the title of it.

INTERVIEWER: That was in January, sir?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: December.

INTERVIEWER: December. Very interesting.
LT. GEN. ODIERNO: And then this is how Saddam Hussein brought this, and that's our assessment there.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, we are at the end of our time with you. I appreciate your taking the time to spend with us today.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: We will probably do this again, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, sir. We need to do it, sir, probably in another month or two, probably should do it every month or two with you, if you can make the time. I know you've got lots, of course, to do, and historians aren't near the top of your list.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: I probably should give you some documents, too.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, sir.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Some of my documents that I have developed. You know, the initiative you stuff to do, which is really the fundamental thing that shaped my -- I think we have copies out there -- my

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initiative that I worked with every night for
about a month and came up with a plan. That
was for 1.4a. That's probably background for
1.4a, but that's what also shaped my thoughts
for what we are doing now.

INTERVIEWER: Can I get with [b](6)
on this?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Yes, I think --
- They are out there, I think [b](6) and those
folks out there. I think it's important for
you to see that.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, I am going to
be coming back. The way the Corps did it
with the Center of Military History is that I
would be here with you six months and then
come back with you a month at Fort Hood to
wrap up, because I know you are going to do
an AAR there.

So I will be coming back from time
to time.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Okay. Sure.

And you will be --
LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Yes, sir.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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