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INTERVIEW

OF

LIEUTENANT GENERAL RAY ODIEINO

COMMANDING GENERAL

MULTI-NATIONAL CORPS - IRAQ

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BAGHDAD, IRAQ

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PROCEEDINGS

(b)(6) This is (b)(6) the

Writing Historian for III Corps from CMH. Today is 13
February 2008. I am at the Joint Visitors Bureau in
Camp Victory outside of Baghdad, Iraq, and I am about
to interview Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, the
Commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq.

Sir, it is at the end of the Corps' nearly
15 months deployment in Iraq, and I would like to ask
if you would reflect back for a minute and think what
were some of the pivotal decisions or key decisions
for you during the course of the 15 months.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, I think first
was, obviously, the decision as we came in initially
to really -- We had to do a complete review of our
operations plan when we came in. But the Corps was
scheduled to go through -- Really, it was about
transition. It was about continuing the transition to
the Iraqi Security Forces.

In fact, the plan had been published right
before we had gotten here by V Corps to continue to
transition -- expand transition teams and reduce our
combat capability.

So when I first got in here, though, we realized that what we were seeing was a significant rise in sectarian violence, significant rise of instability in Iraq. So we had to make the decision whether we would shift our (Inaudible).

So I had discussions with General Casey, and the guidance he gave me was try to make a decisive difference inside of Baghdad itself. We then started to -- We made a decision to change course and change how we were doing business. So that was the first fundamental decision that I had to make.

The second decision, I thought, turned out to be more decisive, though it is at a bit lower level, was then some of the things we decided to do such as pushing everybody out into Joint Security Stations, combat outposts, and we made that decision late December and began executing that in early January.

Then it was the surge, then deciding to request additional forces with significant discussions with General Casey. I think one of the decisive
decisions we made was to have decision points and a plan to bring five brigades forward, as well as the decision to add two Marine battalions in Anbar Province to exploit the success in Anbar.

(b)(6) Let me ask you about that decision. Was there an option or was an option discussed about bringing the five brigades in simultaneously?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Initially we wanted to

(b)(6) Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: So then what we did is we then based our decision points off of what the Army said they could provide to us, which was about one brigade per month for five months.

All right, sir.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: So what we did then is we actually pushed them a little bit faster than they initially had planned to, but we never -- We were never able to consider five brigades once we were told
that could not be done by the Army.

Right. Let me go back to your second decision on the JSSes and the COPs. I have an interview with the G3 of MND-Baghdad, who says that you and General Casey visited General Fil (Phonetic) and General Fil's office at Camp Liberty sometime -- He didn't pinpoint the exact date, but it was, he said, before Christmas.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Yes, it probably was.

And at that point General Fil apparently sketched out on a napkin or there was some kind of a napkin sketch of what you wanted in a Joint Security Station.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Well, I don't remember specifically, but yes. We went down and had a very -- a discussion about establishing Joint Security Stations in and around Baghdad, and then General Fil -- We had a long discussion. General Fil started writing some notes down and said this is what I think I want to do, and this is how I think we should do it. We all came to agreement that we will
start. I would trust his memory on that.

Right. He said he wasn't present, but --

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Yes, but I think that is probably right.

Okay. All right, sir. Then those are three decisions on --

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Yes. And then the next one was: I realized after we made the decision on the brigades, there were some enablers that I felt we absolutely had to have, the first being a fourth division headquarters.

I felt that the battle space that MND-Baghdad had was too complex and too large for them. What I wanted them to do was focus on Baghdad, the center of Baghdad city, not Baghdad Province. They also had Karbala and Najaf and several other places that came under their command.

I just thought the span of control was way too great for the amount of forces they had and what I really wanted them to focus on. So I realized I needed another division.
So I went back to the Army and said I need another division headquarters. I wanted it in March. They told me they couldn't get it here until April. So the 3d ID got here in April.

I think that was significant in the execution of the surge. It enabled Baghdad to focus really hard on the ten security districts inside of Baghdad, and it also gave me a headquarters that could focus on the southern belts that affected Baghdad, the Arab Jabour region, out in Yusufiyah, the Momahdiya (Phonetic) area.

So it was a very important decision in my mind. Then in addition to that, we asked for another combat aviation brigade. Now that came in with the 3d Infantry Division, and that then gave us the additional airframes to do air assault operations, attack helicopter operations, air-ground integration.

So I thought those enablers really made a significant difference. So I thought that was a key decision that we made early on.

The next one was I wanted -- I knew early on in March -- February/March that Baqubah and Diyala
Province was a problem. I had experience up there with the division commander.

As I went there and visited, I knew that al Qaeda had really taken over and had a very strong influence in this area.

And that is where you had commanded a Division Commander.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Yes. I owned that. So I could just tell that there was something not right there, and I had discussion with the local commanders, and they confirmed that they had seen the shift over the last six months. So, clearly, al Qaeda was moving from Anbar out to Diyala.

So what we did was I knew I had to go in there, but I couldn't quite do it yet, because my first priority was Baghdad, although I knew Diyala affected Baghdad.

So what we did is I had to wait for the surge forces to complete getting here in-country, and once we got to the fourth brigade, I then made the decision that the -- because we had reinforced Baghdad.
I was able to use my operational reserve, which was 3d Brigade, 2d Stryker, to conduct and reinforce and conduct a significant clearing operation inside of Baqubah. So one of the major decisions I had, was committing my operational reserve, which was working inside of Baghdad, to shift that to Diyala and Baqubah.

What I have seen on the records -- and, actually, you discussed this also in an earlier interview, but in March there was a commitment of one Stryker battalion.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: That's right.

And then in May the Brigade headquarters, I think.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: I think it was in June.

In June, June. Okay. And that was -- You consider that one of your key decisions, to reinforce MND-North, General Mixon?

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: And clear Baqubah --

Clear Baqubah.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: -- of al Qaeda.
That was really -- and that is what their mission was, and it was called Arrowhead Ripper, was the operation.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Which turned out to be a significant operation.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: That became the basis of Phantom Thunder, and that was the first subset where that was ours to conduct, to clear what I considered to be the safe havens and sanctuaries outside of Baghdad. So it was Baqubah, Arab Jaboob, 3d Infantry Division, Tarmia (Phonetic), Taji area by 42 Stryker and 11 Cavalry.

So that was a key operation that we began. Then the next one --

Sir, let me ask you: On Phantom Thunder I know that the way I've seen the operations -- in fact, you've characterized them as really small unit operations, and you constructed a Corps operation, Phantom Thunder, as kind of an umbrella for all the division operations, brigade operations. Is that right, sir?
LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Yes, but it was --
Yes, it is true, and the focus of this was eliminating
safe havens and sanctuaries that had once been
established.

In the Belt areas?

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: In the Belt areas.
That's right. And then, for example then, in Baghdad
they continued to go after the truck-car bomb
networks.

All right, sir.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: And then the
decision to bring -- And then the next decision was to
ask for the 13th MEU. Originally, it was scheduled --
They told me I could have it for 90 days, and I had to
decide when I wanted it.

So I made the decision to bring it in in
June, because then I would be maximizing -- The surge
of the five U.S. brigades was complete. Two Marine
battalions were here. Then by bringing in the MEU,
that means for the next 90 days I would be able to
surge -- I would be able to conduct operations with a
maximum amount of force as possible.
So the MEU became a major part of Phantom Thunder, as they also cleared the safe havens and sanctuaries in and around Lake Barhar (Phonetic) in the Ramadi-Fallujah-Haditha-Habbaniya area. So that was the other piece.

(b)(6) All right, sir.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: The next decision, which kind of happened simultaneous to this but in a different realm, was the reconciliation piece, the fact that we had watched what had happened in Anbar in the spring.

It had started earlier, but it really -- After we finished the clearance of Ramadi, it like fell off a cliff, the amount of reconciliation and how fast we moved toward peace with the sheikhs coming forward wanting to work with us.

We then started getting signs that other people wanted to do this. So we had to make a decision on how we would do this. So I made the decision to form a reconciliation cell.

I made the decision to reach out to the Concerned Local Citizens and to establish programs
where we would hire them as community watch types for local areas, and our comment was we would much rather have them -- Instead of pointing the weapons at us, we would rather point them at al Qaeda. What we started to see here was a mindset within the Iraqi people about rejecting al Qaeda, and  

We started seeing this is in the conversations and engagements we were doing.

So we really thought this was the time to work -- really go out and really start working hard on reconciliation. I think that was a major decision, the fact that we made the decision to do this.

So what I then had to do is establish right and left limits for the commanders and let them execute it at a local level, because in each case it would be done very differently, depending on the area it were done.

So that launched the reconciliation effort, which I think has contributed significantly as well to longer term stability and security.
growth of the Sons of Iraq or Concerned Local Citizens. It has really grown exponentially since June.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: It has. I mean, it is close to 80,000.

Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: And you know, it's interesting. Then I really went into a large engagement process with the government of Iraq on this for over a three-month period, three to four-month period, to really get them to understand this and worked with them.

I spent a lot of time working with them to understand the program. They set up their own reconciliation cell. We started working very hard with them, and we have slowly moved this forward. I think we are at a point now where it is starting to move forward at a quicker pace. We now have 10,000 that have been hired of these Sons of Iraq (Inaudible) into the Security Forces.

So I think it is really starting to move forward now. We still have some work -- more work to
do.

MR. EPLEY: Yes, sir. So would you say that, when you rendered that report to General Petraeus on your assessment to him before his September testimony, would you consider that critical?

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: It was. No, it was very critical. We spent a lot of time conducting our assessment. I had the division commanders provide me assessment, and I brought a group together and really took about 30 days to do an assessment.

I initially was very concerned that I was not going to be able to give an accurate assessment, because the surge really didn't come to its full fruition until 15 June, and I was giving him an assessment at the end of August, basically.

Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: So I was worried it was only 45 days. But I started to feel -- What I started to see by the end of August is some trends beginning to show, and I wasn't convinced they were trends that would be absolutely deniable, but they were trends that we were starting to see.
We were starting to see a drop in violence. We were starting to see a drop in casualties. We were starting to see a drop in civilian casualties. We were starting to see more people coming across and wanting to work with us. We saw more people rejecting al Qaeda.

We saw our campaign against Shia extremists -- that's another decision I need to talk about, about Shia extremists -- was starting to really help.

So we started to see these signs. Although I was not yet convinced, it was enough that I thought I could -- I felt that we were making enough progress that could assist in his testimony, which really said we think we can get down to 15 brigades by the end of July of 2008, and that has helped. The trends have continued to show that.

So I thought that assessment we did was pretty good. What I learned from it, though, it is very hard to -- You know, six months, two years, is a long time in Iraq, and a lot of things can change. So you have to watch very carefully how you conduct those
assessments.

If I could go back to late December/early January, one of the other key decisions we made was that we were going to go very dynamically after the Sunni -- I mean after the Shia extremists inside of Sadr City, all around Baghdad.

We had to do hard work in working -- General Casey and myself did a lot of work in convincing Prime Minister Maliki to allow us to do this.

In the past, he had not allowed Pete Corelli (Phonetic) and V Corps to do that, and we showed him what was happening. We showed him the damage to Sadr City itself, the fact of what it was having on security, stability. He then allowed us through coordination with him to conduct a significant amount of operations.

So from January through April, I would say, we conducted four or five operations at night in Sadr City and eastern Baghdad, going after the leaders of these organizations. There was a combined special operations and conventional force operations that
allowed us to do this.

In my mind -- and we continued to do this.

Although we slowed down, we continued to do it throughout the summer all the way up until the end of August, and I think this played a huge role in the ceasefire by Sadr.

The operations that we conducted, I believe, really drove them to be significantly disorganized. They had a lost a lot of leaders. They had lost control of the forces. They were acting independently.

So I think all of those drove in part to Sadr ultimately asking for a ceasefire, culminating in when they were in Karbala and there were Shia and Shia fighting, which actually damaged some of the mosques there, because he had lost so much control, based on us taking out a lot of the leadership.

So I think that all played a role in it.

So I think that was a key decision as well.

(b)(6) All right. How about the fall -- let's say, after the assessment, General Petraeus comes back, and I know you are looking at ramping down
the number of brigades.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: The first thing that we did is we started -- What we still wanted to do is pursue al Qaeda.

Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: So through the fall our mission was to pursue al Qaeda. In addition, we started to really shift a bit from lethal to non-lethal operations. We still were doing targeted precision operations, but we were really starting to shift to providing basic security.

What we really started to realize is, now that we have started to provide security, our focus changed a bit to reconciliation, to providing services, to trying to provide jobs, and we really started to shift a focus toward there in the fall; because we thought, if we could get this, it would add even more security, because we were seeing security improve, but we realized in order for it to improve some more, we had to fix some of the other elements, again try to develop a reconciliation program for Sunni and Shia, try to again create
opportunities for jobs, give them basic services, which is what they were lacking, electricity, water, sewage, etcetera.

So we really started to work that, and all the time doing this clearly was working with the government of Iraq as well.

I am going to go back with one more decision.

That's all right.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: There's quite a few.

One of the other key decisions that was made by General Casey after the President's meeting with the Prime Minister in November was to stand up the Baghdad Operational Command, and we worked hard in December and January as well on how that would be formed, how it would be organized, what would be the relationships, and I think a key decision was establishing the Baghdad Operational Command.

It was -- In the beginning we weren't sure how well it would do. We worked very closely -- I established a cell to work with them. I assigned a two-start General, basically, to help train them, and
I spent a lot of time over there personally to stand up this organization.

One of the surprises has been how well they have done, how fast they have improved, and how well the Iraqi and U.S. forces have worked together under this arrangement. So I think that was one of the key decisions. Putting an Iraqi in charge of Baghdad security --

(b)(6) General Aboud.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: -- General Aboud -- was a key decision. That has helped significantly, in my mind.

(b)(6) And actually, I have already written a lot on that, and I see, when you -- You know, on 1 March it became basically an all Iraqi operation, still had the advisory team in there, but you worked hand in hand with General Aboud on that.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I saw -- Yesterday he showed me a piece of paper. We were in a meeting in January, and the Prime Minister was asking him when do you think Fardel Kanoun should start, and I wrote on a piece of paper 15 February, and I handed it to
him. And he showed me the paper yesterday. It started on the 14th. But he said, you told me -- I'll never forget this piece of paper; you told me the date that Fardel Kanoun would start; I keep this paper with me always. I thought that was kind of neat, actually.

Yes, sir. And I know that you were at a three-day surge. I think it was called Black Anvil -- a three-day surge of operations, actually throughout Iraq, but focused in conjunction with Fardel Kanoun.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Right. To get it kicked off. So I think that was a key decision as well.

Of course, then the decision process -- The other big decision was how -- in the fall, was how we were going to -- the ramping off of brigades. Actually, I started to think about that, obviously, in August when I gave my recommendation to General Petraeus.

We thought about it a lot in August. We validated it September-October-November, and we ramped off the first brigade in December, and we are getting
ready to ramp off the second one here in about a month.

So it was that process and deciding how we were going to do that. Although we were ramping --
The decision was made, yes, these are the five brigades we are going to ramp, but they are not necessarily going to be brigades that get pulled out and leave a specific area.

We will send a brigade home, but we will fill those spaces in some spaces with other units, and we will think the lines slowly, and that was one of the key decisions we made as we ramped these brigades.

That was made in the fall as well.

Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I think those are probably --

Okay, sir. On Phantom Phoenix, I want to bring it forward a little bit. That just kicked off about a month ago in early January, and I know you have already given a press conference in January on that. I have your comments on that, but I wonder now, after a month or so of
operations, what would be your assessment of that?

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Well, I am very
encouraged. The bottom line is this was again --
There's two things I wanted to -- the reason I wanted
to do Phantom Phoenix in January.

First off, we had off-ramped a brigade,
and I wanted to make sure everybody understood that.
Yes, we had off-ramped a brigade, but we still had a
significant amount of capacity to conduct operations.

Secondly, it was about the continued
pursuit of al Qaeda. It was clear they had moved.
They had moved up to the Diyala River Valley. They
had moved north in my mind, to Baji, north up to
Mosul, and there were still some remnants in the
south, and this was really to continue to put pressure
on them and never allow them to establish a
significant safe haven or sanctuary.

Now they had tried to reestablish
themselves up in Nineveh Province in Mosul. They are
a little bit dug in there, but we continue to
eliminate these areas.

So the focus of this operation was to
eliminate any areas that they think they might be able
to establish themselves and make it extremely
difficult to establish those support zones in order to
support operations anywhere in Iraq but, most
importantly, they will always try to get back into
Baghdad, and so to push that as far away from Baghdad
as possible.

So that was really the thought process
behind Phantom Phoenix. So far, I am very pleased.
We have done a very good job in Diyala River Valley.
We've still got some work to do there.

In the south, in Arab Jabour, in my mind
we are almost finished there. I think in another 30
days, two weeks or so, I believe it will be finished.
It will be almost defeated down there.

\[(b)(6)\] Clear.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: I think that the
that the work is in Mosul, but I am confident with
where we're headed. I think that's going to take
another 60 days or so up in Mosul, and it is not --
You know, people tried to characterize that as a
battle. It is not a battle. It is about protecting
the population, controlling east and west Mosul with
U.S.-Iraqi Security Forces, and then begin the
rebuilding process there.

What makes Mosul a little bit more
difficult is there are political issues because of the
Kurd-Sunni issues up in Mosul and the fact that it is
a Sunni dominated province in terms of population, but
all the leaders of the Provincial Council and
government are Kurds.

So we have worked closely with the Kurds.
We established the Nineveh Operational Command, which
was another big decision we made, to do during this
time. The selection of the commander was very
thoughtful.

General Petraeus and I were personally
involved in this. I had to do a lot of engagement up
with the Kurds. For the Sunni Arab in charge of the
Nineveh Operation Command, we took somebody we trusted
who had operated in Baghdad, commanded the 9th
Division.

So I think that is going well so far.
We'll see how that plays out. But again, it's kind of
taking the template of Baghdad, but it is a bit different, because the problems are a bit different. But we think at least the majority of the solutions are the same, protecting the population, establishing combat outposts, JSSes inside of Mosul.

(b)(6) Do you think there is sufficient combat power, both Iraqi and U.S., out there in Mosul?

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: I do. You know, we are still just getting started up there. We added -- I made the decision to add an Infantry battalion up there. So we've moved an infantry battalion up there.

I think the two battalions with the 2nd Iraqi Army Division and the Police are enough. We will be prepared to reinforce it more, if we need to do that, but I believe we got to -- With the capability of the 3d ACR up there now, I think there's a little bit more capability.

I think it is enough. I think that will be one of the decisions that General Austin (Phonetic) has to make here in about 30 days after (Inaudible).

(b)(6) All right, sir. I'd like to
move on. That's a very good review of all your key
decisions, but I would like to move on for a minute.

I haven't asked this question before. On
your relationship with Multinational Force and the
Commander, General Petraeus -- You had talked a lot
earlier in interviews about General Casey, but I
wondered if you would reflect a minute.

What does General Petraeus bring to the
battle?

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Well, first -- It's
because some of decisions made (Inaudible) General
Petraeus got here. But General Petraeus clearly is a
believer in the counterinsurgency operations. He
understands it, a great supporter of getting the
assets necessary for the Corps to conduct their
missions.

He fully supported -- He was involved in
supporting getting a Division Headquarters, Aviation
Brigade. That happened once he got here. He was
involved in getting the MEU so we could complete -- So
complete supporter.

You know, he really helped -- He helped
significantly in making sure he reinforced about getting soldiers out with the population. So he really provided really great reinforcement to that. But he also brought energy to the MFI staff, in my opinion.

He brought the strategic energy, which made them really start looking at really several different areas: You know, providing the resources to the Corps, how are you going to focus on the oil infrastructure, the electrical infrastructure, reconciliation, supporting us in reconciliation, supporting us in any way he could with developing our ability to do population control measures, which in some cases had significant political implications initially for safe markets and safe -- You know, he really worked that extremely hard with the Iraqi government, backed us totally on everything we wanted to do, encouraged us, in fact.

So the role he played there was significant. So total collaboration. When he first came in here, I laid out for him the plan that we had developed for the surge, and he approved it. He
didn't make any changes. He approved it and backed us totally. I think did a good job of supporting us when we did that.

Obviously, you know -- And so what he did is he really caused the MNFI staff, in my opinion, to really focus on counterinsurgency and what their role is in counterinsurgency, from changing how business was done in Task Force 14a with the detainees to changing how we dealt with other -- trying to get better services, better economic development and supporting our operations with population control measures. He really pushed all of those extremely hard.

So it's basically his overall strategic leadership, which was significant in all of those. Then I would just finish by saying culminating, in my mind, at least in the first part of 2007 with his testimony, which in my mind is one of the most courageous things I've seen a General Officer do. He went in, told the truth, stuck to his guns under heavy criticism, heavy pressure, and handled himself brilliantly, delivered the message, the one that was
the true message, and I think that was very significant.

I think that is how I would describe him.

Okay, good. Very good.

I am going to ask a couple of significant -- or specific, more specific questions. Looking at your Operations Order 07-01, you say in the mission statement that you want to establish -- improve stability, and I think everybody agrees that is fairly well accomplished, but you wanted to create also irreversible momentum by December of '07.

I wondered if you would address or assess the Corps' progress on creating the irreversible momentum.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Yes. First of all, I made two mistakes when I did that. First, I did that in the beginning, because that is when the Corps was leaving initially. You know, that's when we thought about when we were leaving... in Dec/07. I realized, after being here a few months, that that was wrong, that what I really needed to do is project six months after the Corps leaves, because
I needed to have an op order where it would already continue to flow through where 18th Airborne Corps was.

So what I meant by irreversible momentum is something that could not be changed, something that even though you would have -- an event would happen, it would not change the course of where we were headed.

In other words, you could have a major event. Some event happened. It would not change the course, because we had so much momentum moving forward, it would not change the course.

I think you had to do that by providing security and stability. You had to do that by improving services. You had to do that by improving Iraqi Security Forces and local governments. Those were the key things I thought we had to gain irreversible momentum on.

So what I would say is I later updated that to the summer of 2008.

Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: And I did that for
a very specific reason, first because we weren't going
to get there by December, but more importantly, I
wanted to drive it six months out for the 18th
Airborne Corps.

Now what I think we have achieved is we
have changed the security and stability, which has
given people hope. It's not yet irreversible. We
have started with reconciliation.

This reconciliation process is moving us
closer, but it's not completed yet. We have to --
They passed a calibrating justice law, but the
implementation of that law will be the key in order to
get irreversible momentum. So I think that's a big
more.

Job creation is the other one. Basic
services are improving slowly, but now it's about
jobs, long term jobs, jobs that are honorable jobs,
not just make work jobs. So that is the next key
piece, and then provincial elections.

You don't have to have the elections, but
at least you need a date in place, a date where people
understand that they are going to happen.
So I think those things will create irreversible momentum. So I think it will happen sometime in 2008. I'm not sure when that will be.

The last thing I would say -- So I mentioned creating security and stability and start reconciliation.

The other thing that happened, again that gave us momentum, is the rejection of al Qaeda by the populace. We did not have that when we got here, but by the summer, maybe late summer, almost thoroughly throughout Iraq they have rejected al Qaeda, and we have also started to see now a beginning of a rejection of militias and Shia extremists as well.

So I think those are the key things that are really starting to drive us toward that, but still a little bit more work to do.

Yes, sir. Sir, there have been some commentary in the States on what 2007 has meant, and you may be aware of them. Essentially, what they are -- you know, some of the commentary is trying to frame already the history of 2007.

One of the themes that seems to come up is
that, hey, you know, the turnaround in Iraq is basically because the Sunnis have stopped turning their guns at us, and we are paying them so they won’t turn their guns on us, and that’s the key to the turnaround.

It’s a question of emphasis. I mean, everybody seems to throw in, well, the surge -- the additional troops helped, but the real key was the turnaround and the Iraqi population, particularly the Sunnis.

What would you say to that?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: First of all, I saw it in Anbar first. They would not start working with Coalition forces. They felt that they were going to have security and stability against al Qaeda. What they saw with the surge and our progress we made is that we were serious about what we were doing. We were establishing security and stability, which caused them then to say, okay, I feel more comfortable with rejecting al Qaeda, and there will not be harsh ramifications for doing that.

So this is not a chicken and egg -- It is
very clear. Once you provide population security, they will reject al Qaeda or any other extremist organization who is using intimidation as the tool to control that population.

So there is no doubt in my mind that that made a difference.

(b)(6) Yes, sir.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Now let me get to another point. It really bothers me about this buying of -- This is not about buying anything. This is about people who have made a decision that they don't want to fight al Qaeda.

How did al Qaeda get them to help them in the beginning? Because they needed to support their families. They would do anything to support their families. They got to feed them. They got to have a place to stay.

So I can't just say, you know, we want you to defeat al Qaeda but, oh, by the way, you got to do it for free. I mean they got to survive somehow. so you got to give them some kind of money to do this.

Now I told all my commanders when we
started this process: The worst case scenario is that, since the requirement to get any salary at all, you have to be fingerprinted, you have to get a retinal scan, you have to give us your name, you have to give us all your IDs -- So the worst case -- These people are already fighting us. So the worst case is they fight us again, but we have all their data. We know exactly who they are -- exactly who they are.

So even in worst case, we are better off than we were when we started this program. Now I don't think we are going to be worst case. I think what's going to happen is you are going to find about 75-80 percent of these people are genuine, maybe even higher or very genuine, in what they wanted to do.

They want to be recognized by the government of Iraq. They are tired of fighting. They want to be part of the solution. They see this as a way to gain legitimacy.

There might be 10-15 percent that don't, and we will deal with them. But I feel very confident with that statement. We have seen nothing at all that would tell me anything different.
I know. When an event happens, there is already people trying to interpret the history of it.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, and it's because Sadr declared a ceasefire. Well, listen. They don't just do this stuff. There's reasons why, and the reasons are they had no choice, frankly, and it had to do with some of our operations.

You know, let's go back to December and January before the surge started. They weren't -- We could have bought them off then. Why didn't we do it then? Why didn't Sadr have a ceasefire in January of '07? Why did it happen in August, really September 1.

Why did al Qaeda start being rejected once Ramadi fell, once Baqubah fell, once Arab Jabour fell, once we provided better security in Baghdad? It's kind of funny. That's when it started happening.

I think the most telling thing is the numbers of CLC has increased over the summer months and into the fall, and that came after essentially the surge operations began to take effect.

Sir, I wondered if you could take a few
minutes and describe how you exercise command over
Multinational Corps. If you could, sort of a
philosophy of the command.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: First, I knew coming
in -- a very diverse organization, very complex, very
different problems in different areas. So the most
important thing for me was my Commander's intent, and
making sure that commanders, three levels down --
although I started at two levels, three levels down
understood my intent and what I wanted them to do.

So it was about, first, communicating that
intent and giving them enough latitude within that
intent to execute what they needed to, to be
successful in their area, where one brigade's area is
much different than another brigade's area, one
battalion's area is much different than another
battalion's area, and giving the latitude to do that.

So I think that's the most important
thing, is I got to provide them the latitude, right
and left limits, to conduct their operations and still
guiding them on what we wanted to do.

For example, I want you to protect the
population. Here are your right and left limits on what you can do in population control measures. Here's your right and left limits on what you can do on reconciliation.

Then, obviously -- Then it comes down to resourcing and how I allocate combat power, how I allocate ISR, how I allocate all intelligence systems, how I allocate money, cert money. All of that stuff is then how you do that.

The second piece is then it's about getting out into the battlefield. Five or six times a week, I did battlefield circulation in the afternoon, four or five hours every day.

In order to understand what is going on, I've got to talk to commanders. This is about talking to other commanders, division commanders, brigade commanders, battalion commanders, understanding what they are seeing, understanding what their issues are. It enables me to see the battlefield. It's still about being able to see the battlefield.

So that's why we -- That is how I was able to make key decisions. That's how I was able to
understand what the effects of my decisions were over the past year -- you know, a decentralized approach to operations, but providing an intent and guidance that enabled them to conduct those decentralized operations.

(b)(6) All right, sir. Sir, you mentioned you traveled a great deal in the last 15 months. I wondered if you -- and you said you were out five to six days a week. Have you managed to visit just about every U.S. battalion out there?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I have visited every U.S. battalion, and I have visited every -- almost every Coalition battalion as well.

(b)(6) And that gives you the view. So when you come back to your staff and your staff makes an assessment, then you can judge that on what you have seen on the ground. Is that correct?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: The advantage I have is the staff gets reports.

(b)(6) Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: And our reporting -- I was very pleased with our reporting system, but it's
not the same as when I get to talk to a battalion 
commander and he can tell me exactly what happened. 
It just doesn't get captured in that report -- or a 
brigade commander, division commander, who can tell me 
really what happened.

Sometimes it's night and day from what the 
report -- The context, the details make a difference, 
the details of who they really fought, the details of 
why they think something happened. You can't capture 
that in reports, necessarily. So that's what makes it 
so important.

(b)(6) Yes, sir. I want to talk a 
little bit about the staff and your view of this Corps 
staff. I know you have had a great deal of experience 
in command, commanding a division. So you have seen 
a lot of staffs, and I'd like you -- and I know every 
commander thinks his staff is good, but evaluate this 
Corps staff.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: Yes. I said it the 
other day. I really believe that this is the best 
staff I've ever had, and I've been a Corps chief as 
well. So I've been a Corps Chief of Staff as well.
Let me describe why it is. First of all, the experience level at every level was significant. All of them had deployable experience over here in key positions. All of them understood Iraq. All of them had a wealth of experience in their area of expertise.

You know, Mike Murray who had been a brigade commander, was actually Acting Corps Chief of Staff for a while; Jerry Tait, second deployment as the Corps G2, C-2, tremendous experience.

My Corps Chief, Joe Anderson, had been here as brigade commander, was a division chief of staff, but now the Corps Chief; Mark McDonald, who had been deployed here as the DivArty Commander doing Effects; Jim Simmons who had been over here before with the Corps.

So all these leaders have had really good experience, which really enabled them to really understand, and very quickly. But the biggest thing about this staff was two things.

One, they were team players. There was never egos. They were in it for the team. They were in it for the Corps. Then the second piece of that is
the guidance I gave early on, is we are here to
support divisions and brigades, and that your focus
must be on the divisions and the brigades, and they
never forgot that.

Obviously, not everything went perfectly
and, obviously, there was probably some issues. But
for the most part, they have focused on providing what
was necessary for brigades and divisions, proven by
how they planned the surge and executed the surge
flawlessly, bringing in five brigades, two Marine
battalions and a MEU without a hiccough -- places to
stay, FOBs, our ability to quickly move out and have
COPs and JSSes, almost 200 of them. We have 200 of
those around the country, and they have to get
resources to build those, and the work they did with
that.

The sharing of intelligence, the
allocation of ISR, the allocations of intelligence
assets, the ability to quickly change battle space,
allocate battle space between divisions -- all of
those, in my mind, was done easily from my viewpoint
because of the cooperation and relationships that were
built between the divisions and the Corps, all the Embassies and the Corps, and it had to do with their experience. So that's --

Yes, sir. On a more specific part of your staff, the COIC or the Counter-IED Cell that you had, could you comment a little bit on?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Yes, I would. Then there is another one I want to comment on, too.

First off, one of the things I wanted to do was I really -- Coming in, I felt that -- As I was training to come here, I felt that the IED process was the most important thing we were involved in, because the IED, whether it's a car bomb, truck bomb, roadside bomb, S-vest, is the weapon of choice for our enemy. If you defeat that, you will get to the enemy. You will get to the leadership. So I wanted to make sure we put emphasis on it. So I wanted to bring somebody in who I felt was a combat thinker who understood combat operations, who could run the cell.

So had been a brigade commander for me in 4th Infantry. I thought he was the perfect...
fit. What he was able to do -- He understood this. So not only was he able to, in my mind, understand how to go after a network, but he was able -- and then it related into three operations, because it painted a picture of what al Qaeda was doing, what the Shia extremists were doing, because again the IEDs were -- that's how they -- That was their weapon of choice.

So developing that capability was significant for me in gaining another understanding of the fight. So in my mind, it was critical for us in understanding the fight, and it was critical to our success we've had in reducing a significant amount of IEDs.

Early on, the divisions, even in our train-up with the divisions, they knew this was a focus, and they jumped on board, and brigades jumped on board. So it really became a synergy, in my mind, of really gong after the networks involved. So I thought that was very important part.

(b)(6) Yes, sir. And I wondered, since I know that the COIC was a creation of 3d Corps and yourself, is the (Inaudible) on board? Are they
going to keep it? I know a lot of money has been
invested.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Unclear on whether
they are or not. You know, they have said they think
they are, but --

The other one -- There is one other piece,
one other special staff section I do want to talk
about, is the Information Operations.

I believe one of the keys to our success
is how we have progressed over the last 15 months in
information operations, our ability to use satellite,
TV, radio, op eds, to drive our messages, to influence
specific areas, influence the rejection of al Qaeda,
rejection of Shia extremists, rejection of militias,
talking about unity, talking about building up the
Iraqi security force and getting confidence in that,
and our ability to run that process.

I think we have taken it to a new level,
in my opinion, that we have not done before, and I'm
very pleased. Obviously, there's always ways you can
improve, but much of the work that we did there, I
think, is ground breaking, and I think we need to
continue to review this.

I am still not happy with how we organize this within the Army to attack this problem, but I like what we have done here. I think we have done some very dramatic things.

A manifestation of that is the number of brigade, division and staff interviews. Is that correct? I mean, I don't have much to compare it with, but I do know that a great many of them always are talking to the press, and both Arabic, Iraqi and U.S. I mean, I see 15 people talking.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, there's two different things. I mean, that's -- IO is really a separate -- it's not separate, but it is a bit different. So that is -- You have your IO, which is done completely separately, that is injected into the Iraqi press.

Then the other piece was the public affairs piece, which was really talking about what we were doing and getting our message out. So they are complementary but separate.
western press, the Arab press picks up on it also.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: They do. They do.

So there is some spillover.

LT. GENERAL ODIerno: There is, but we have -- and by the way, General Petraeus helped with that as well significantly, that outreach piece and his emphasis on that and pushing that.

So I would just say that that was a major, major piece that we did. You know, I think I did 12 Pentagon press conferences or something like that in 15 months, quite more than they had seen before, and I changed how I did it.

I really gave them operational updates and then took questions. They used to do them for 30 minutes. I did mine for an hour. I was trying to tell them what we were doing, why we were doing it. But then we had battalion and brigade trainers out all the time.

Again, I tried to give them broad -- I didn't want to be -- I didn't really publish talking points. I don't like that. I want them, especially in this environment, I want them to talk about their
area, because I don't know their area. So I don't want to limit them. I just want them to be free to be able to talk about what they are doing.

The only restriction I put on them was stay in your lane. You shouldn't be talking about somebody else's area or some of the things above your level; just stay in your lane, and they followed that, for the most part.

Sir, you've commanded a division over here in Iraq in combat, and the Corps. I wondered if you can comment on the American soldiers over here, and Marines, on the quality.

Have you seen increased or decreased the training, the motivation of our soldiers, the junior leadership. I mean, there's been a lot of talk on the strain the war has put on our soldiers and our Army, but have you seen that manifest self in any Degradation in quality?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: First of all, the sophistication, adaptability of our leaders is probably the best it has ever been at the captain level, at the staff sergeant/sergeant first class
level, at the major, lieutenant colonel level.

It's just really amazing, and it has to do with multiple deployments, multiple experiences in combat, multiple experiences operating under stress. But what has impressed me the most is in between deployments how they have learned, how they continue to learn.

I tell everybody that I have seen -- I was trying to count -- I think it's 39 maneuverable brigade commanders, nine aviation brigade commanders, 11 sustainment brigade commanders, and there's others I'm forgetting. I have not seen a bad one yet.

They are all here on multiple tours again. They understand what they have to do. They are adaptable. They are adjusting. Yes, some do better than others, but for the most part, they are really understanding what we are trying to do here. That has made it a joy to be over here.

Down to our individual soldiers, you know, I read all the time, people are worried about high school diplomas and quality. I got to tell you that it is not manifesting itself here in Iraq.
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These young men -- First of all, every day how articulate they are, how understanding they are of what is going on, how aware they are of what is going on. Their ability to shift quickly from one of the most -- a lethal environment to a non-lethal environment is very difficult to do, but they are able to do that, and that goes for Marine Corps. This is in the Marine Corps as well.

So I feel very good about the future of our Army. I do worry about the strain on the Army. It doesn't have to do with soldiers' capacity or ability. It has to do with families, and can we keep families in the Army? Are they willing to continue to put up with the sacrifices? I think that's the key, and that's what we have to be concerned about.

Yes, sir. Sir, it's been about an hour. I've got lots more questions, but I wanted to kind of wrap it up here. I know you are busy, but if you have any other thoughts that you would to provide on this last interview.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I think the last thing I would say is: One of the things that I see
every day from our soldiers is they feel good about what they are doing right now.

These soldiers that came here on these 15 -- The other decision was to extend from 12 to 15 months. That was a very significant decision.

Right.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: It was one we had to do to maintain the capacity of the forces on the ground, a very difficult decision, understanding the strain. But the units that stayed 15 months, what those soldiers got to see -- They realized how difficult it was when they got here, but they saw significant improvement when they left, and they really saw that this place can move forward, and I think they feel much better about where we're at.

They do know there is more work, and they do know there's some frustrating things about it. You know, we don't think the government of Iraq is moving as fast as it could be, but they are moving. It's just going to take time.

The second thing is that the heroism of our soldiers is incredible every day, and the
sacrifices that they make.

I want to make sure -- and I think everybody over here wants to make sure -- those who have been seriously injured, those that have been killed -- they will not have given in vain, and that this thing will culminate in such a way that it has made a difference to the Iraqis. It has made a difference to our security. I think that is very important to all of us that we do that.

Thank you, sir.

This concludes the interview. Thank you, General Odierno.