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A project of the Combat Studies Institute, the Operational Leadership Experiences interview collection archives firsthand, multi-service accounts from military personnel who planned, participated in and supported operations in the Global War on Terrorism.

Interview with MAJ Kevin Brown



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Abstract

An assistant operations officer with the 75th Field Artillery Brigade, Major Kevin Brown deployed to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM with his unit, which became the command and control element for the 75th Exploitation Task Force (XTF), charged with searching for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and conducting sensitive site exploitation (SSE) of all “abnormal” finds in country. These included mass graves, weapons caches and chemical plants. From March until late June 2003, “We were the bastard stepchildren,” as Brown described it, “for all things strange within Iraq.” Providing C2 for this diverse task force – comprised of over 20 agencies and employing everyone from civilian scientists to military intelligence types – was a considerable challenge, said Brown, one that his field artillery brigade was not exactly trained for. “We were comfortable shooting rockets, but dragging lab technicians and intel folks around the battlefield was kind of a unique prospect.” Nevertheless, his unit’s expertise in identifying and engaging targets proved most helpful indeed. In this interview, Brown discusses the disconnect between what SSE teams found versus what they (and the world) expected to find vis-à-vis WMD; his personal assessment of Saddam Hussein’s WMD program (or lack thereof); his experience “exercising leadership in an extremely painful environment”; and what he considers a significant XTF accomplishment: “We took this massive prioritized target list of data, the genesis of which was all forms of intel generated over the years, and we either validated or invalidated the information.” While not personally comfortable concluding that Saddam *did not* have a WMD program, Brown did say that the XTF disproved “the existence of an active assembly line of chemical rounds being rolled off the plant.”

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Interview with MAJ Kevin Brown

17 October 2005



JM: My name is John McCool [JM] and I'm with the Operational Leadership Experiences Project at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I'm interviewing Major Kevin Brown [KB] on his experiences during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM [OIF]. Today's date is 17 October 2005 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, I'd like to say that if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information or simply say you're not able to answer. Major Brown, could you please start off by telling me what unit you served with during your OIF deployment?

KB: Yes, the normal name is 75th FA [Field Artillery] Brigade. Once in theater, we changed it to the 75th Exploitation Task Force, i.e. XTF.

JM: What was the time period and position you held?

KB: Units started leaving Fort Sill the first week of February 2003 and I was on the last plane back, which would have been about the last week of June, so a total of about six months.

JM: For the record, could you tell me about the 75th XTF, its equipment, its size, its soldier/civilian makeup?

KB: The core of it was HHB, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, out of a normal FA brigade that would normally be associated with III Corps. There are 120 to 140 folks in general organically assigned. However, because of the unique mission that we were given, we essentially built a task force and we pulled certain ranks and equipment, soldiers from one of the battalions in the brigade.

JM: What were some of the capabilities of this?

KB: Mainly it was designed to be a C2, command and control element, as an overlay to a multi-agency, multi-national task force for sensitive site exploitation.

JM: What was the chain of command?

KB: The commander was the brigade commander, an O-6: Colonel, now Brigadier General, Richard McPhee. And the chain of command was essentially him and our direct headquarters was CFLCC [Combined Forces Land Component Command], Third Army.

JM: And did you have civilian components as well?

KB: Oh, yeah.

JM: What was the range of specialties with them?

KB: When I left, the task force was comprised of 20 to 22 different units, agencies and countries. So, FBI, DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] - let's see, what other civilians? We had Judith Miller as our embed.

JM: From the *New York Times*?

KB: Yep, the one and only, and what other civilians did we have? Periodically, we had one or two guys who would tag along that were fielding new equipment for us, who were civilian contractors. That was primarily within the confines of Kuwait. So, I think that's about it.

JM: Could you describe the circumstances surrounding your deployment, from back starting at Fort Sill?

KB: We initially were going to be a counterfire headquarters for 4th Infantry Division. And because of logistical issues, they wanted to pare down their force package. So we stood down from that, if you will, in the November-December timeframe probably. Late, late December, around the first of the year, I was the brigade assistant S3 and I clearly worked for the S3. He called me or we met somewhere or something and he said, "Hey, you know, we're getting the WARNO, warning order, that we need to start looking at a sensitive site exportation task force." We both kind of laughed, because we had never heard of any such beast. At any rate, we did a few VTCs [Video Teleconference] the first week or two of January with Major General [James] Thurman, who at the time was the CFLCC C3, and some of his staff on what he wanted us to do. He gave us some loose guidance on how big we could build the task force. So once we got the commander's guidance, we began within a few short days after the first of the year to start building it. And so we built it internally; we had some folks from the Minnesota National Guard, I think. Some reservists who were out of somewhere on the East Coast, Maryland if I remember correctly, who were aviators, because they were going to be our air support for the movement of our teams. And we had some other folks, Navy folks, come in and had a few meetings to discuss what we were going to be doing, what their piece of it was, and all the logistics that go along with the deploying. We got that put together. A couple hundred folks, organically like I said, left Fort Sill in the first half of February. We went straight to Camp Udairi in Kuwait, about a dozen miles from Iraq, and built our combat force there, built everything up there. We started doing our rehearsals and whatnot. We spent that time up until the invasion just doing rehearsals, mission planning, reviewing all the intel that we had on the sites that we were supposed to go to, that we knew we wanted to go to. And then some our teams: we had five sensitive site teams and three or four of them were permanently attached to a maneuver unit. A couple of them went to one of the brigades in 3rd ID; one of them went to the Marines, I MEF [1st Marine Expeditionary Force]; kept another one back as a reserve. We had three mobile exploitation teams who were much more robust and would only go out when called upon. They're the ones that have a lot of the technical experts as far as weapons of mass destruction. So anyway, once the ground war started, we had a lot of sites or targets of opportunity that the SSTs would go and evaluate and then call us back and give us a rundown on the site, whether we need to send a MET [Mobile Exploitation Team] or not. Maybe about the second week of April, we moved from Udairi into Tallil Air Base down by An Nasiriyah. We stayed there for 25 or 30 days and maybe not even that long. Around about early May, we

went ahead and moved to Baghdad. I don't know the proper name of the palace complex. Right by Baghdad International Airport there were two large palace compounds: one in the north of the highway that went to the airport, one to the south. We were in the south. And then we continued to work there, up until about mid-June when we started doing the battle hand-off or relief in place with the Iraq Survey Group. So we closed back in on Fort Sill the end of June.

JM: Why was the 75th Field Artillery Brigade chosen to become the 75th XTF?

KB: I don't know. We had done a warfighter with the 4th ID. We were on the initial TPDF [Time-Phased Force Deployment], the deployment document, so we had already started a lot of preparations, as you would with any unit getting ready to pack your stuff and go. I honestly don't know why. I will say this: one of the reasons I understood was that what General [David] McKiernan wanted and maybe General [Tommy] Franks, I don't know who initially crafted this. I knew it was going on in Afghanistan prior to us, but I think that was one of the lessons learned from Afghanistan: there was not a single chokepoint for the all operations for sensitive site exploitation. From what I understand in Afghanistan, Special Forces were doing it, CIA was there, DIA, all these people were doing it, but there was no single chokepoint to account for who was looking at what sites, what they were finding – and again, you had some civilian agencies on the ground in a tactical environment. So I think the reasoning was they wanted to overlay a tactical headquarters, an artillery brigade headquarters. Our nature is to communicate up and down. Via computer networks and radio equipment, we could communicate with a lot of folks, up and down. That's what we were designed to do when we're shooting stuff.

JM: Did you feel like you were adequately prepared for or able to do this kind of mission. When you got the order, what were your initial thoughts?

KB: For lack of a better term, there was just fear of the unknown. I mean, we were all artillery guys: officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. So putting a captain in charge of a team to get on a CH-47 or some other aircraft or on a truck with 20 guys, half of them being civilians who have three Ph.D.s who have never been to a field environment potentially. In hindsight, a lot of them had prior service, but how to do that? We were comfortable shooting rockets, but dragging lab technicians and a lot of intel folks around the battlefield, that was kind of a unique prospect. It clearly could have been maybe more appropriate for a one-star general's staff; we just didn't have the depth as far as planning. I mean literally, it was me and about two of the other captains who would rotate through planning – meaning, for a couple months, I was the current ops officer, maintaining, "Hey, this is what we're doing today and tomorrow; here's where the teams are at; this is what's going on." A friend of mine, he was future ops; he was maybe one of the only future U.S. ops planners. We had two different British teams with us. One primarily worked in the staff to be a planner with us. He was a lieutenant colonel and had a captain with him. So bottom line, it was just the depth and planning that was kind of tough. And I think, superficial as it sounds, having a one-star brings obviously more clout to your organization. When your higher headquarters is an army – I mean, we were essentially a brigade talking to an army-level headquarters. I can't think of any other example where it happens routinely or has happened in recent time.

JM: Did you have any particular training? I would assume you went through NBC [Nuclear, Biological and Chemical] training, things like that?

KB: Not really, because our job was not to run all the high-tech gear these guys brought and we didn't deploy with boxes of Petri dishes to culture samples we found. We were simply the tactical interface, so when the 101st [Airborne Division] or 3rd ID or 1st Marine Division came across something, we were in their net. A lieutenant or captain that was running one of the teams and their S3 or whatever level said, "Hey, go figure that out." And then the 75th FA Brigade proper soldier, the officer would take his merry band of lab techs and intel folks and go do that. Those guys did some things, but other than equipment we already had on hand, normal chemical detection gear and chemical suits, we didn't really mess with it.

JM: Once you began work, did you face any particular problems with respect to communication or logistics or anything like that?

KB: One of the biggest things in the realm of logistics was moving. We were just a brigade headquarters, which in and of itself has very little lift assets, trucks. And then we compounded that by bringing all these other civilian agencies and other units on, planning staff on. It eventually grew to 600 to 700 people, but we probably had enough lift assets for 150. So we were extremely, extremely dependent on theater and corps-level movement. And we had these labs: one or two of them were the size of a 20-foot MILVAN. I think the Brits had some that were a bit longer. Very sensitive equipment. They were designed to be mobile, but you can't just throw it in the back of a truck like a rucksack. So that was a thorn in our side with moving. That's why we only moved two times, because it was just so complicated to move the labs and just the normal stuff you carry with you in the field.

JM: So you weren't going out to any of the actual structures that were being searched?

KB: I personally was not. The five SSTs, and I think we had four mobile METs: they would go. We built a couple of them to have their own trucks, so they could move on the ground at any time. A couple of the METs, the larger teams, one or two of them were built to move on the ground. The other two were built to move simply by air, hence we had sort of operational control of a platoon of CH-47s and Blackhawks.

JM: Did you feel constrained, or was your mission hampered in any way, by the actual conduct of military operations? Where there any challenges associated with operating within a wartime environment?

KB: A little bit. We were all in soft-skinned vehicles, Humvees and five-tons, or in the aircraft. And once they got there - and if they moved by air, when they hit the LZ and that aircraft left, they were dependent on whoever's area they stepped into for transportation, because they'd be there for several days, if not a week or more sometimes. So they were dependent on them for fuel, food and water and all the other stuff. In an event like that, when you're invading a country, the OPTEMPO [Operational Tempo] for I MEF and III Corps was pretty quick, meaning they would roll through an area, and once all the bad guys were gone, they'd keep moving north.

JM: They'd help secure sites, things like that?

KB: Some of them they did, but a lot of them they didn't, so you ran into the whole looting issue and contamination of sites and that became a problem. Not all the time, but there were a lot of sites we went to – one specific site – I mean to the point where the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] had come out and it was a former UNMOVIC [United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission] site. It was one of their sites and part of it had been compromised, again because the maneuver forces were not available to guard hangers. They had to continue to move north and defeat the enemy. It was tough always gearing a team so that you'd have an uncompromised site. And once you got there, having enough protection from the local populous to conduct your missions.

JM: Did you ever have any cases where you needed to be protected from the local populous? Were there any incidents of that sort?

KB: I went to one or two sites because I was tired of sitting in the TOC [Tactical Operations Center]. For the most part, the insurgency had not started to the tune of it's going today. There were looters and civilian people walking around. You never knew because, at the time, a lot of the units in the Iraqi Army that capitulated, they would simply take off their uniforms and have a T-shirt and blue jeans under it and be walking the streets. There was always the threat of you're not really sure if this guy's a barber downtown or if he's a gunner on a tank. So with that being said, one of my jobs was being part of the de-briefing team, and I would take all their products – pictures, their written summaries from the reports – and make a database. The intel folks did it, but they did it in much more detail. But one of the portions on there was just your general activities on the site: what else did you see; did you get any information from the local people; were they cooperative? And for the most part they were cooperative, meaning they would tell you, "Well, this is what we see going on here." So they were not very hostile. Again, this is early April, early May, when the euphoria of liberation from Saddam Hussein was still going on.

JM: Did you have any interactions with Iraqi scientists or people that were actually employees or former employees? Were they helping you at all?

KB: Yes. I don't remember their names, obviously, but yes they did. Being as unclassified as I can be, yes. If you went to pesticide factories, you wanted to see the guy who's mixing the pesticide and ask him, "Are you mixing pesticides?" So, yeah, for the most part they worked with us.

JM: Speaking maybe in general terms, how would you assess the quality of the intelligence that you saw?

KB: I saw two categories of intelligence. One was stuff we got prior to going there. The other would be the intel that was developed on the site or after analyzing what came from the site. And again, our guys focused more on the tactical interface so the folks that were with us, the other agencies and units, were more expert on the stuff. They had access to large databases of intel that had been gathered over probably 20-plus years to specific sites. In the bowels of their agency, they would analyze it and go, "Okay, this XTF, these are the sites, this is the priority that we want them to look at if possible – if the tactical situation allows it." I remember this guy who was actually my neighbor, he also deployed with us. He was from the team chief's unit

and he said, "I would look at a brief intel report and I was looking for a rocket fuel factory. But when I rolled up, there was a McDonald's there." Now, that's his jovial way of saying it, and he said it wasn't like that all the time, but there were instances where the intel was *that bad*. But then again, there were instances where it was amazing that it was so good. The lack of human intelligence to corroborate: is that truly a rocket fuel factory or the roof of a McDonald's? That clearly was not there in a lot of instances. Again, not always. Overall, the quality, I think it was good enough to answer questions or suspicions of specific sites we had. It was good enough, married to a short site survey, to determine if we needed to explore it further. You know what I'm saying? Meaning, do we need to get into the local population and really find out? You could take the intel that was already developed and what we saw once we got there and pretty quickly say, "Yeah, they just make rubber bands here. That's why they have tanks of this chemical out back."

JM: I guess while you guys were getting ready to deploy, this was Secretary of the State [Colin] Powell's big speech at the United Nations in February of '03. Were you referring to this or thinking, "Okay, this is what we're going to find; this is how we're going to deal with it"?

KB: Yeah, that was part of the deal when we had those other units. In January, it was pretty rapid from receipt of mission, from literally printing off the email that gave us our deployment order, to boots on the ground was, I think we said, 29 days. So to build this task force, we pulled military and civilian people from 12 different locations across the U.S. in 29 days and had people on the ground, and then others slowly trickled in once we got there. But we started doing rehearsals on what to do with stuff during January. We would talk with these people, "Okay, you're the expert; we understand that you're going to do this and get the samples and do this with them. What do you need from us?" So we could kind of get ourselves in the frame of mind of what to do. Once we got to Kuwait and Camp Udairi, we'd start practicing how we would take a facility if it were hostile, how to establish security - that kind of stuff. And we were starting to refine our reports from the teams back to my shop, the operations cell. I think we were pretty well prepared considering the timeframe we had. I didn't have any great fears that we would not be able to operate properly.

JM: What did you prepare for and expect to find versus what you actually found? What was the comparison?

KB: I would say, as a citizen, it was easy to watch the news and get all hyped up that you're going to roll in there and find 7,000 rounds of 122 millimeter cannon rounds, just stacked to the ceiling. To me, it was easy, and it still is easy for the American public to ask, "Why didn't we find bunkers and bunkers of green glowing gas and all that mess?" Again, I'm an artillery guy, but I'm a biologist from my undergrad. So I will tell you that it's unfortunate that most people don't understand the nature of chemical and biological weapons - that they're often made or prepared to be used in as little as 12 hours prior to use. There are a couple compounds that have a shelf life, we'll say six months, but biological rounds are just that: they're biology; they're cells; they're staff infections, mono, that you get in school. So I personally knew that we would not walk in and just find canisters of live agent, because biologically you just don't. Again, there are caveats: radiological weapons - those are different; those will have a longer shelf life. That's what people expected us to find; that was the, God forbid, the president's term, "the smoking gun." I knew, and most of the people on our task force were more educated than that, because

we'd been thinking about it and going through it and everything, so we knew we were not going to find the smoking gun – and my perception of the public's smoking gun definition was, again, 7,000 rounds stacked in a bunker somewhere.

JM: Giant, 55-gallon barrels full of anthrax or something.

KB: Yeah, which is not the case. So the stuff that we found – without going into the details even to this day – I cannot make the statement that I know Saddam Hussein did not have a WMD program.

JM: You're *not* comfortable saying that.

KB: No. I'm also not comfortable with the definite "yes" that he did, because so many of these weapons are dual-natured. Dual-use is the word, I guess. Not to go into specifics, but I have a great deal of suspicion, even to this day, of why would you find a stack of three or four – or one, it doesn't matter – 12-foot long surface-to-surface missiles in a pesticide factory. That's as unclassified as I can be, but I don't get that. So what I expected to find was just that. Again, that doesn't prove that there was a program, but that requires a great deal more analysis and digging above my pay grade, at DIA, CIA level, other national mechanisms, they can figure that out. So that's what I expected to find and what I saw.

JM: Did you also do some intelligence gathering on crimes against humanity, war crimes, things like that?

KB: Yeah.

JM: Can you talk about that a little bit?

KB: I rationalize it back to the OPTEMPO, the maneuver forces. They were worried about getting the guy who was shooting back at them and accomplishing the mission of getting the regime to go away. So, that being said, as time progressed, when you started coming across these mass graves, or these unmarked graves, there's some reason they're unmarked, or there's some reason there are 350 bodies, still clothed, with women clutching children, buried four feet underground. So we started picking up some of these.

JM: So this *became* your mission?

KB: Yep.

JM: You weren't tasked with that from the beginning?

KB: Nope, not at all. We became the bastard stepchildren for all things strange within Iraq. Whether it was mass graves – and a lot of people think "mass grave" means 300,000 people, but a half-dozen people discovered here. We had a few folks that had dealt in that before.

JM: Forensic experts?

KB: Yeah, forensic folks; they didn't stay with us that much. When we found those, we would bring in a higher-level agency and let them take a look at it, but one team, that's what they did: dealing with unique discoveries of death.

JM: They would also develop intel? "Oh, you guys need to go look here."

KB: Most of it was just targets of opportunity, meaning the maneuver forces would find it, or somebody in the local populous would tell them about it and they would defer it to us. Then we would go and take a look at it. We would go take a look at it, get the initial take on whatever event occurred there, and it was usually taken out of our hands at that point to a more civilian-type agency that could deal with that kind of stuff.

JM: What kind of effect did that have on you and your soldiers, finding these mass graves and actively looking for them?

KB: It's just the normal, "I've never seen anything like that." It's unfathomable until you see it. I mean, in America, you just don't think of whacking 400 people and burying them in the ground. I didn't personally go to see them. I had the opportunity once but I was the one-deep plans guy at the time, so I just didn't have time to go.

JM: Was one of your missions to look for Lieutenant Commander Scott Speicher?

KB: It came up.

JM: Did you actually develop any intelligence or go searching or tracking down leads?

KB: It was one of our -

JM: For the record, he's the downed pilot from the first Gulf War, and there's suspicion he was taken prisoner and is still alive.

KB: We were given one or two deals where we had to go corroborate intel, and we went to those places and answered the questions from CFLCC and CENTCOM.

JM: During the period you were there, was there any insurgent activity or was it after you guys left that it really started up?

KB: It really started spiking when we left. Every night when laid down to go to sleep, people were shooting over the wall or random mortars here and there. If I remember correctly, it had to have been around the 20th of June when I left Baghdad. Because we were in the airport, literally 600 meters from airport, I watched airplanes come and go all day long. You'd see them take small arms fire, someone try to hit them. But not to the scale of today where you see two or three artillery shells stuffed in the trunk of a car. Now that being said, as time went along and it was clear there were still *Saddam Fedayeen* and other sympathizers out there, the commander, General McPhee, he started making the teams develop sounder convoy security. We developed gun Jeeps, as we called them, Humvees. We would give our men with sand bags or sheet steel

and mount guns like a .50 cal or something in the back. We did that as a general rule anyway, but we started really improving the protection of the occupants.

JM: Could you tell me about the handover to the Iraq Survey Group, how this was conducted? What kind of lessons learned did you impart to them?

KB: I wish it were just as simple as doing the handover to the ISG, because once we got to Baghdad, we actually took on another task force. They called it Task Force D & E, Disablement and Elimination. They dealt with nuclear stuff primarily, and they were headed by an O-6 who kind of did his own thing. They showed up late. They were from the USANCA, U.S. Army Nuclear and Chemical Agency. But they still reported to General McPhee, because again, the C3, General Thurman and General McKiernan, the CFLCC commander, they still wanted a finger to stick in the chest of somebody - one person to handle all these strange things in Iraq, or most of them. So we brought them on and did a handoff, because the teams, when we initially set out, they were more looking for chem and bio. We had some capability to detect some of the radiological weapons, but primarily, other than going, "Yeah, we're getting a reading here," we didn't have the assets to deal with it really. That's where these D&E guys came in. At that point, we started getting wind of this ISG being created.

JM: Is this the one headed by David Kay?

KB: Yes. Major General [Keith] Dayton - he was the director of ops for DIA at the time. He was kind of put in charge of it on the ground, David Kay being the civilian administrator or whatever you would call it. If I remember it correctly, they started down in Qatar. They had a base there, doing a lot of intel collecting from stuff that we had generated throughout the conflict. But once they crafted this idea, this ISG, is when they started actually putting boots on the ground. At that point, it was like, "Okay, why don't we just have them take over this whole deal and relieve the XTF of their obligations?" And to further complicate it, we had an MI [Military Intelligence] battalion from the Utah National Guard, I think, and we had a chemical brigade from I want to say Arkansas. They came in to do what we were doing. The ISG, yes, was in charge, but they were predominately all civilian folks. They didn't have the tactical communications and vehicles and all that mess to get around like we did. So this chemical brigade and my battalion, along with the MI battalion, which is predominately linguists, but they were tactical Army units. So they essentially subsumed the custodianship of getting these guys around the battlefield, while what we called the 40-pound brain guys would sit in these cells and just filter through all this intel we would bring back. The ISG would determine this target list, this priority, pull in the chemical brigade guys, however they constructed themselves, and used them kind of the same way they used us to get around the battlefield.

JM: Looking back, what would you consider your most significant accomplishments during the time of your deployment?

KB: I'm going to steal the thoughts of General McPhee, because he was really good at what he did: leading soldiers and keeping focused. I could tell when it came time for us to redeploy, a lot of people were, "Hey, let's go back home, I'm done with this, I'm tired of getting shot at and all that mess." But he could sense that we were like, "Doggone it, we didn't find the smoking gun for the president" and "We failed our mission." It wasn't on a gross scale, but he could hear

people talking about it. He pulled us together and he's like, "Hey, we didn't fail; we answered the question; we answered the mail: Go prove to me the existence of Saddam Hussein's WMD program." And as with any thesis in any college course, you either prove it or disprove it. And those are two reputable, viable answers. Well, the evidence at the time, upon my personal interpretations, disproved the existence of an active, ongoing WMD program for all intents and purposes, for the most part. So I will say, in the five or six months we were there, our major accomplishment or contribution was disproving the existence of an active assembly line of chemical rounds being rolled off the plant. Again, like I said in the beginning, that doesn't make me confident enough to say that one did not exist. But I've already talked about that. You asked why we were picked. I think because as artillerymen, especially in an FA brigade, one of our core competencies is targeting. And depending on what unit you're in, whether it's Air Force or Army or whatever, if you're an infantry squad leader, a target is some dude 300 meters across the road or a sniper in the window. To me, it's potentially 300 kilometers away and I'm just going to engage it with a tactical missile or something. But the point is that our nature is targeting. Whether you use radars to figure it out, use intel - whatever you use to identify, refine and assess the target and engage it. So I think that's one of the reasons we were picked, because of the targeting process that fire supporters, artillery guys do. Almost like the Air Force: that's what they do, they target stuff, and they figure out how to engage it and with what. I think one of the greater accomplishments was that we took this massive prioritized target list of data, the genesis of which was all forms of intel generated over the years, and we either validated or invalidated the information. That led to several things. The process of intel gathering at the national level, even to this day, everybody always says, we needed more HUMINT, we needed more HUMINT. I think we validated that, because then you wouldn't get off your Chinook and you're looking at your satellite photo, saying, "Where's this frickin' factory at? All I see is the darn cabbage field?" So, I think it validated some of the processes by which we gather and use intel and analyze it. And specifically in the database of suspect targets, we validated that.

JM: About how many targets were on this list?

KB: A thousand.

JM: That the XTF got. How many targets did you actually explore?

KB: There were several hundred that were in the database. A lot of them did not have enough intel really, for whatever reason, because they just didn't care. It didn't generate enough suspicion that they developed the target more than that. That's why they prioritized it, but we ended going to several hundred ourselves. It was a lot of work. The first target was the day after we invaded, 20 March, 21 March. Up until we left, the last target we hit was probably 10 June, so less than three months. We probably did on average three a day, if you actually added them all up. It was a lot.

JM: Are there any personal lessons that you learned from your experiences that you feel have made you a better leader or contributed to your professional development?

KB: One of the biggest things - and we laugh about it now; I laugh about it sometimes. It was tough for General McPhee because it was a top-heavy organization that we built. It was easy for

him in a leadership role with the 200 folks we took with us, because they knew him. We're all from the same brigade; he was the only O-6 there. We keep it simple in the military: this rank means he outranks you. It's pretty simple. But when you started having all these other agencies and other services show up, not so much the other countries – the other countries got it, because they were predominately military. But there was a great deal of competing interests from the other agencies and other units. There just were. They had different pots of money. They had the reachback, meaning if they hit a site and they needed to corroborate some information on it, they could call back to the bowels of the DIA, some guy sitting in the basement. The way I saw it, that reachback also went back to a secondary chain of command. It's funny now, it's easy for us to laugh about it now, but the term "primacy" came up more times than not. And I can remember the boss, other than me and maybe one other guy, made everybody get out of the TOC and brought all these heads in from these other agencies and units and just pointedly reminded them who's in charge. Because that was the whole idea, of having one guy to stick a finger in his chest and say, "You're in charge." When you have a two-star and a three-star at the army level, they don't want to hear, "Well, sir, um, I can't answer that right now; we're not really playing nice together down here." So he would, on occasion, have to remind everybody who's in charge and how it's going to be done. In hindsight, it's almost entertaining to see four or five O-6s – we always called it penis-measuring contest. It's easy to just put an O-6 in charge, but I personally think it would've been hard to find somebody personality-wise to do what he did. He would hear people out, let them say their peace about their agenda, and then he would politely say, "Okay, again though, I got it." So leadership-wise, dealing with other agencies, other units, keeping people focused – that's what I took away from it. He could have just caved and "let the inmates run the prison." But he didn't, and I'm sure he made more enemies than friends, but he didn't really care. It ultimately got the job done and brought everybody home safely. That's one of the biggest things I took away was just exercising leadership in an extremely painful environment.

JM: Were there any other issues that you'd like to bring up – any points you wanted to make?

KB: It's a shame that there's not a standing organization that can do this. There might be somewhere, echelons above Kevin Brown, and I would be surprised if there's not, because –

JM: If there isn't, create one of those in the future.

KB: We had guys that had done some time in Afghanistan, who had done similar stuff there. They're the subject matter experts in biological warfare, but they're not subject matter experts in being in a theater of combat and getting around and not getting whacked. So they took that lesson learned from Afghanistan and brought it to Iraq, to OIF. And I would hope that, as thin as we're stretched as it is – now the public wants us to fight the avian bird flu and hurricanes and all this stuff – but I don't think this is ever going away and I think there's some good lessons learned here. I hope that whether it's in the Reserve Component or Active Duty, whether it's the Air Force, the Army or Marines or whoever, that you could almost have a skeleton staff that does this, that interfaces daily with these other agencies. So when it comes time, I can call "Bob" over at the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and I can call "Tim" over at USANCA, and that relationship is already there. There needs to be a clear understanding that when you get on a plane and leave the States, this is the guy in charge and here's the pot of money that goes with it, that kind of stuff. Again, we got by. You fight as you are, not as you

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want to be. So that'd be the one thing I wish they would take away, and it needs to be a general officer staff, no less. Because in the planning, we just didn't have the depth.

JM: Okay, good deal. That concludes the interview then. Thanks very much for your time.



END OF INTERVIEW

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