

(b)(3), (b)(6) my adds in blue below...mostly for context. Good luck and safe travels (b)(6), (b)(3)

On 27 Oct 09, MG Swan, Investigating Officer, conducted an interview with COL (b)(3), (b)(6) , Commander, 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division (TF Mountain Warrior), as part of (b)(3), (b)(6) gation re: COP Keating. CO (b)(3), (b)(6) provided the following information:

- Mission prep begins months prior to deployment, and unit does relief in place into existing infrastructure and force posture; the BCT studied the “problem” they would face in their AO and traveled to Ft. Bragg in FEB 09 to discuss how they saw their future battlespace. They briefed realignment and closure of the COPs in Eastern Nuristan as part of this brief.
- Led PDSS in Dec 08 with battalion commanders and key staff; training focus on COIN; traveled to COP Keating during PDSS and attended memorial service for previous unit company commander killed there by IED. Was told that the unit at Keating had very little contact with the locals (“1 or 2 meetings with an elder who visited the FOB in the past two months”)
- Hard to get into Keating which does not make this base a good “counter-terrorist platform” to launch further in northern Afghanistan.
- Prior to deployment briefed wanted to pull out of Keating and other small COPs since he believed he lacked assets to conduct COIN in this area – also believed that the opportunity cost was too high since population is very sparse in this remote terrain/valley while several hundred thousand people go without CF support further to the south; consulted civilian Afghan experts and learned Nuristan province isolationist; plan well received at division when briefed at Ft Bragg; spent next months planning how to close these COPs and realign forces.
- Explained to leaders at Carson that the BDE was planning to realign and close outlying COPs; told commanders at the final rehearsal/backbrief at Ft. Carson to plan as if would be at their locations the whole deployment because we didn’t know when exactly the closures would happen; not able to answer why we have forces in certain locations such as Keating, i.e., no apparent strategic value and the Kamdesh COPs provided very little tactical value. Until this area is connected by roads/infrastructure, we cannot connect the Afghan Govt to these people without a political/tribal solution...that isn’t viable with a CF COP in the middle of their valley.
- Briefed realignment plan right after TOA with plan to be out before elections in Aug 09; close up north and realign south; briefed COMISAF and Cdr, CJTF-82 early July at FOB Bostick on closing plan; LT (b)(3), (b)(6) briefed, but did not get a commitment to realign from COMISAF (he had only been in country for about two weeks). One significant issue/concern was the negative IO potential in closing – the other was buy-in from the Afghan Govt; timeline for closing not approved
- Barge-Matal operation intervened; the BCT and CJTF did not want to go there, but spent two months with forces in Barge-Matal; 1-32 Inf went north to Barge-Matal. This operation drew most of the BCTs (and a lot of CJTFs) assets to support; briefed was a local problem and a problem that required Afghan political leaders to get involved (something that was not happening other than to demand CF go to BeM), but political concerns drove US forces presence; once committed to B-M, lacked resources to close COPs
- B-M operation lasted till approx mid-Sep; significant opportunity cost to rest of brigade, esp in Kunar Province and along Rte California; most ISR during period dedicated to B-M
- DUSTWUN in theater became JTF priority and take theater assets – I believe that BeM was the second priority, but would have to refer back to the slides that outlined CJTF priorities at that time to make sure.
- “Mountain Descent” planning: repackaging of the original plan aligned with the best illum cycles for rotary wing support given terrain/threat.

- Number of attacks in 3-61 AO up during summer months; later local fighters “overtake” B-M (we used the term “transfer of authority” – because FMV showed no apparent fighting)
Heard repetitive reports of large masses of enemy forces throughout our AO; what materializes is much less; significant SIGINT/HUMINT gets briefed to commander
- MG Swan said the unit didn’t Wargame against the MD ECOA (Question whether 400 man assault force is really most dangerous ECOA). There had been dozens of reports of large scale attacks throughout the entire AO – many of them were focused in the PECH (Lethal AO). Attacks that had reported as very large scale attacks often happened when they were reported to happen but at a much smaller scale. There were several other COPs in our AO where I believed the threat of a significant enemy attack was greater.
- Just prior to 3 Oct heard reports of Peace Agreement (Taliban-HIG truce) being “signed” in BeM; I was at Blessing briefing LTG Rod the closure plan for BeM and the ANA chief of staff said he did not know why US in Kamdesh – he said the BeM was political, but we should not leave Korengal
- As cdr, could have asked for more ISR based on intel reports, but how often can one fall on sword? If pass up every risk will not do anything. This discussion surrounded priorities. CDRs at every level have to make them.
- Challenge in whether to spend assets on force protection (and resupply) or try to win fight; only doing force protection at Keating so plan to leave COP
- Briefed closure plan; assumed enemy knew imminent closure as date was briefed up the chain (both CF and GIRoA), and expected dissemination of info in Afghan channels since ANA was leaving when we were
- Threat indicators up to 3 Oct not out of norm for enemy – nothing that I saw raised my concern beyond what we consistently had discussed as the threat.
- Target packages to bomb enemy command and control were denied; hesitancy to bomb structures – Afghan officials consistently asked to bomb (b)(2)High , but GIRoA officials (primarily the GOV) would not sign up or take re of CIVCAS.
- Impact of plan to close COP Keating and others, but stressed to commanders always to improve foxhole
- Think there was Class IV to Keating; reiterated to commanders to improve positions; not sense that troops were guided by intent to close; continued to ring in heavy up the chain of command that need to close COP Keating, and Lowell and Fritsche; have 39 COPs/FOBs/Ops in AO; everything on Keating is visible due to the terrain where the COP is located.
- Challenge of hindsight on situation; something different every day in area
- Lessons learned perspective – no air-centric positions in bad-guy territory; not respond where no strategic gain
- If do everything for every risk, then not do anything unless all is perfect; must assume some risk
- Cannot explain value in COP Keating; US not going to make progress there with just a CF COP. No link to GIRoA is not a sustainable solution...opportunity cost of having bases in Nuristan and very limited CF presence in other areas is high.
- ISR process similar throughout operations; need CONOP for ISR; limited assets; but needed ISR to develop CONOP
- If rely on aviation QRF then should be important objective
- B-M significant factor in delaying closure as drain on resources
- Subordinate commanders pass risk can’t handle up the chain; not want to sit back; priorities were Yukon recovery, B-M, (third item); address constantly that must address priorities; subordinate commanders must know what point to push actions up chain, and enjoyed open comms with commanders

- No issue over whether MEDEVAC go in to Keating on 3 Oct; issues other times, but understood heavy fire that night prohibited infil; not recall being adamant or action having to go to div cdr on 3 Oct
- Responsiveness of CAS issue; get on-station but key is when drop bomb; Tactical Directive affects decision-making, but that is as intended – CIVCAS does hurt our efforts here and the intent is limit CIVCAS; ground commander who has PID should buy bomb and they need to be the ones that interpret the TAC. Directive implementation, not the AF pilots.
- Combat stress support to unit is important and the unit has included this on their USR so that a combat stress team is out at Bostick full time given it is still a remote FOB; need more; tell this story
- Approx 1200 new soldiers in brigade within 6 months before deploy and train hard to get them ready; deployed with 300 fewer soldiers than predecessor; Our shortages are well known. I framed the discussion wrt R&R leave...10% on leave when at 90% strength has a bigger impact on a unit that is spread out at many small COPs...if allow soldiers go on EML, then put other soldiers who remain at greater risk
- 3-61 deployed close to 100%, but smaller unit; highest % of fill, but not in absolute numbers [note: rfi to LT (b)(3), (b)(6) confirms 96.7% fill at deployment was higher than infantry battalions, but that equated to X, 68 Soldiers fewer than unit being replaced; absorbed shortfall by reduced manning at FOB Bostick, and our log nodes at JAF, and BAF; went 1 for 1 at COPs and OPs]
- Only 6 soldiers at guard positions is not really stand-to; did not discuss with COP commander pulling in perimeter; expect other measures of force protection on COP