

~~SECRET//REL TO USA, GBR~~

Major General Votel: Before we get started, I just wanted to let you know we did have an opportunity to talk both to TM 1 and TM 5 today extensively. They both are doing pretty good here under the circumstances. I know you've been talking to US SOF SME about that and I think we're pretty well covered down on them here to make sure they've got everything they need as we work through this. I appreciate you're continued support.

WIT: Yes, sir. When I sent them up, I had an old friend of mine for about 15 years and I made sure that he was the one that'd be their point of contact, to keep an eye on them, and give me updates if anything changed a far as their disposition.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. TF CDR, just as we get started here. Again, we're recording this and I just want to remind you of the oath that I put you under here and that we talked about when we talked on Saturday evening here. Please just acknowledge did you understand all that as still in place here?

WIT: Yes, sir. I understand all of that.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. Hey, listen, what we've been doing here the last almost 48 hours now, of course, after we've been back and had a chance to go through all the testimony we collected this weekend and kind of continue to work through this, what we are doing is now trying to fill in all the information gaps and I recognize for you and others that we kind of keep pulling around and talking to. I know I've got your 1.4(a), (b)(2) High commander and 1.4(a), (b)(2) High chief back up here for a third discussion. What we're really trying to do here is make sure we've covered down on all the basics and have done a thorough review of everything so that when we do render our report, that it is as complete as we can possibly make it. So that's kind of what we're doing here right now. And especially like the talk with you this evening, really the area that we're generally talking about here is kind of the development of the plan and the dissemination of orders and kind of some of the commander related, commander at your level, commander at the 1.4(a), (b)(2) High level, kind of the leader, kind of dissemination and discussion of this mission with really the force and all the supporting assets so that's kind of the area

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in which we're going to kind of talk about this evening, okay?

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: Okay. Good. Thanks. We've had a chance back here - I'll go ahead and get started here. We've had a chance back here to kind of look at the CONOP that was put together by Team (a), (b)(2) High and pumped up here to Task Force (a), (b)(2) High for Objective 1.4 (a), (b)(2) High. The version we're looking at is the (a), (b)(2) High at least that's the date and time group on it here, Objective 1.4 (a), (b)(2) High CONOP. I don't know if you're able to have a copy of that or portions of it with you right now?

WIT: Yes, sir, I have a copy in front of me.

Major General Votel: Good great. Hey, listen I'm going to start off and then we're going to kind of round robin here because we're going to kind of try to cover several different areas. I am starting off and I'm looking at - the slides don't have numbers but I'm at the slide right behind Task Organization, I guess, kind of the - I don't know what you all refer to this slide as that's got a map on it, it's got the mission significance, it's got a lot of other details there. It's the one immediately after Task Organization; do you see that one?

WIT: Yes, sir. I'm reading it right now.

Major General Votel: Okay. Good. I'm wondering if you can just talk us through in general how the CONOP comes up through the (a), (b)(2) High you guys and then it gets transmitted to Task Force (a), (b)(2) High. The product we're looking at, is this the product that's looked at at both the (a), (b)(2) High level, the Task Force (a), (b)(2) High level, and Task Force (a), (b)(2) High or there different versions more detailed things lower level, I mean written things lower level and then it gets broader as it goes up? Can you talk a little bit about that?

WIT: Yes, sir. The detailed products like route studies, terrain studies, and kind of like white board talk are really the primary (a), (b)(2) High tactical products that they use to walk and talk through the mission. The (a), (b)(2) High headquarters and the (a), (b)(2) High staff develops this product at their level. They push it up through my

staff. We scrub it and do a QA check on it and this product that we're looking at now is the primary product that is both provided to (a), (b)(2) High for higher dissemination.

Major General Votel: Okay. Good. Thanks. Do you recall for this specific CONOP here, Objective 1.4(a), (b)(2) High whether at your level, Task Forces level, if you guys added or subtracted anything in particular from it before it went up to (a), (b)(2) High

WIT: Sir, I personally don't recall adding or subtracting anything significant. I know that my fires guy almost always does a pretty good scrub on these and he's actually the one that prepares the - helps prepare the COFs and stuff, the COF products for dissemination to the ISR and fires platforms. But I do not recall any significant changes that we made to the existing product that we sent up to (a), (b)(2) High

Major General Votel: Okay. Good. Just in general, I recognize you guys generate a lot of CONOPS here. I know you've done a variety of them, at least at this point, the 101 days on the eight the 101 days that you've done. Is it normal that you, at least from your perspective that you add or subtract to it or pretty much what's coming up from the (a), (b)(2) High what goes forward to (a), (b)(2) High

1.4(a), (b)(2) High

WIT: No. I mean, we definitely do the QA scrub on it because we were given some direction that there were changes that needed to be made to (a), (b)(2) High is a master when it comes to combing through these things. I would say that typically there are not significant changes we make, mostly minor corrections, sir.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. I'm looking at the chart that I'd referred you to a little bit ago here and I'm looking at the mission statement here that's kind of across the top that basically says, "On order, Team (a), (b)(2) High conducts half or helicopter assault force assault on Objective 1.4(a), (b)(2) High." I assume that's the source?

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: And then at the grid there, not later than (a), (b)(2) High October in order to recover UK civ (b)(2) High. I

assume that's the PR event number that's been associated with Ms. Norgrove, right?

WIT: Yes, sir, it is.

Major General Votel: And then the block underneath that basically lays out significance. What's the purpose of that block of significance, or what is tried to be conveyed?

WIT: Sir, so I think what we're trying to do is we're just trying to say that the reason why we're going after this particular hand set is that it has been associated the PR event.

Major General Votel: Okay. How do you convey commander's intent with respect to this? As an Army guy, I have a certain expectation of what intent looks like, purpose, key tasks, end state trying to be achieved here, and I know it kind of highlights the significance of why we're going after this selector and obvious I think people understand that we've got a person we're trying to recover out there but how do you articulate those type of things for these CONOPS that are coming up?

WIT: I tell you, sir, how I communicate my commander's intent is with - in the case of (b)(2)High and the CCTEs is a phone call before the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High commanders go out on target. We talk through the target. We talk through

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

in this case for this particular op, I gave my one and only pre-mission speech to the actual 1.4(a), (b)(2)High and to the IRF force that was assembled. I'm not a big speech giver but I felt compelled in this case to go out and explain to them the significance of the target, explain to them the fact that this was the best intelligence we had in the entire time running up to these things. And then also explained to them that in my experience in these types of situations, you get to a certain point with the intelligence fidelity and after about a few weeks or so, it tends to not get better over time. And that was my method to communicating to them both the importance of this single mission and the reason why that was asking them to assume so much risk.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. Just briefly, can you describe the circumstances under which that talk or discussion took place?

WIT: Yes, sir. And I went out to the white board where they do their pre-helicopter load walk and talk through the objective. They have a white board there and what the troop does is they go through the mission, they go through the mission statement, the intelligence analyst gets up and gives them a rundown of the current intelligence on the target, gives them a current update from ISR on expected slants for the compound. Slant is a body count which attempts to categorize each person identified on target by males, females, and child. And then the chief and the team leaders talk through the tactical scheme of maneuver as they go through the target. Part of that is also a review of

1.4(a), (b)(2) High

would be in for response. After that wrapped up is when I gave them my commander's speech.

Major General Votel: I wonder if you might - I appreciate the lay down there and kind of understanding. I'm not sure I had that kind of understanding. I obviously presume something took place here but I didn't have it described to me like you have there, like you just did. TF CDR, I know you may or may have any notes or anything that you particularly talked. I know that kind of talk thing is a commander's style and varies by personalities and stuff like that. Do you recall kind of what your points of emphasis were when you talked about the mission that these guys were about to go on?

WIT: Yes, sir. I started out, I said I know we did a very difficult mission two nights ago. And then I moved on to both the importance of the mission of the standpoint of going and getting an allied civilian who was being held captive. I went on to talk about the relative quality of the intelligence with respect to anything else we had up to this point. I characterized it as pretty good. What I told the guys was in my personal opinion, I thought there was

a 50 percent chance that she would be on target. I went on to tell them that that is the reason why I was asking them to assume such a great amount of risk. I sensed there was a lot of anxiety in the force because of the helicopter insertion points, very exposed, very exposed to the single RPG shots. So I was trying to put them at ease. I was trying to give them some confidence because I knew they were going into a very difficult target and I knew the most difficult part of it was going to be the insertion. Once they got on the ground, I felt relatively confident that they had the edge for superiority at that point.

Major General Votel: Good. Thanks. Let me -

WIT: Sir, if I could one additional -

Major General Votel: Absolutely, TF CDR.

WIT: Yes, sir. And as this thing develops into the night and we talked about - I was talking a lot with Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) about the location. There was an additional site of interest about a kilometer away to the west that was a site of interest. We didn't know whether it was a point to which the guys - the kidnapers would go to broadcast because it was high ground but we talked about what we would do if we cleared the target and she was not there. In our discussions, we decided that it was best to prepare the force to do an extended search out from the target and to be prepared to remain over the day. So that was also part of my commander's comments to them before they loaded the helicopters was number one, once the target was secure, we would have to be prepared to expand the search zone and we'd also have to be prepared to remain over a day.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks very much for that. TF CDR, the next area I want to kind of talk about a little bit here is you kind of brought up the risk aspect and can you kind of relay what the discussions were that were ongoing between you and the (a), (b)(2) leadership, maybe the (a), (b)(2) here and others regarding the level of risk, the risk to the force, the risk to the mission that was associated with this particular objective.

WIT:

You know, sir, my gauge for risk is typically the chief and the senior enlisted who have - both have the most experience operating in these types of environments. So I rely on them to characterize that risk for me so that I can weigh that against the relative importance of the target and any other factors that I deem relevant when we're making the decision to go or not to go. I have waded off on similar targets to this because the target itself was not worth it. This insertion on this kind of terrain under these conditions is not something I would replicate to capture kill anybody except the highest of HVTs. So in my discussions with those guys, we definitely talked about this target itself being very high risk, much higher risk than we were prepared to assume under most other conditions during this deployment. But as the day developed, even the night prior when we had not as quite as good intelligence but we had pretty good idea that we were going to go on this target one way or the other. I think the leadership knew full well my intentions of pressing ahead with this mission.

Major General Votel:

Okay. So to kind of summarize part of what you said there is that acknowledging that there's obviously high risk here with this particular operation, that the potential, in your mind, the potential payoff of recovering Ms. Norgrove or since you've kind of estimated 50 percent gaining more information that may lead to a recovery was worth the risk that was being accepted by you and the force.

WIT:

Yes, sir. And I would add to that even if we didn't find her, the thing that made it different than the typical just strike to develop intelligence is that we were relatively confident that if we got on this target and captured the guy, he could lead us to her. It wasn't just additional intelligence. We felt quite sure that any leads that we got off of this target were going to lead us directly to her.

Major General Votel:

Okay. Thank you. One of the things that you identified with respect to the risk is the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High phase and I know that we talked quite a bit about this with you the other evening and, of course, we've talked with others as well. I understand there was significant study of the terrain to look for

infiltration locations either HLZs or 1.4(a), (b)(2)High locations, et cetera, et cetera. Beyond the risk associated with the infiltration, did you identify any other risks, any other factors that posed significant risk to the force during the conduct of this operation?

WIT:

1.4(a), (b)(2)High. The slant count that was on target was well within our ability to mitigate through our tactics and procedures. We felt relatively confident with the ileum, with our proficiency working night vision and lasers that the threat from the target itself was not all that great. We were relatively confident we would be okay there. Of some concern was the fact that two nights prior when we did the other operation, there was a lot of movement that seemed to emanate not exactly from the target we were hitting but from other compounds further off the target site. And we were taking fire from several different cardinal directions on that objective. The fact that this target was in a kind of a bowl surrounded by high ground, we were worried about eventually people making it to the high ground and having that advantage over our force. The mitigation for that were the fires and ISR that we had on station. All in all, I would characterize the risk to the insertion as much higher than other risk we encountered during the planning of the mission, sir.

Major General Votel:

Okay. Thanks. Hey, TF CDR, now given the nature of this operation, again, staying on topic of risk here. How do you assess the risk to the force of transitioning from 1.4(a), (b)(2)High operation or as you guys characterize it in some cases as this combat clearance to a hostage rescue situation? How risky is that? How much risk is associated with kind of a flow that moves from one to the other based on your experience and then kind of how you assessed it with respect to this operation?

WIT:

Sir, the risk to the mission in the case of transitioning is not that great. There are subtle differences as far as movement techniques, entry techniques. 1.4(a), (b)(2)High

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

way to move fast through this kind of terrain as you can see on the video tape as those guys are crawling around. They're negotiating pretty big rocks and crevices. Speaking to the mission itself, 1.4(a), (b)(2)High (b)(2)High operation is not all that different from a

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

Major General Votel:

Okay. I just want to take you back to one thing we kind of talked about here. I think we talked about it in your first interview here and maybe this is the area I'm really kind of getting at, I know that the Task Force Commander puts his primary focus on bringing everybody back. So as we go into - I apologize for referring to this but the routine or the more normal (b)(2)High operations that kind of characterize most of - all but in this case maybe one of the operations you did during this deployment where we do proceed, we may be proceeding a bit more cautiously because of his guidance to preserve the force, bring everybody back out of there. But in this situation, did we provide any guidance that say, hey, listen, this is a hostage rescue. We may be willing - we are willing to accept a bit higher risk to the force by limiting the use of certain munitions, maybe grenades or whatever, going into this so that we can accomplish the objective which is recovery of Ms. Norgrove. Can you talk a little bit about that?

WIT:

Yes, sir. For us, it's almost standard that you would not employ inside of a normal rescue situation. And the ones we practice at home are 1.4(a), (b)(2)High

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

I was asking the force to remain over a day possible and expand the search through a very rural rugged area. So we did not specifically talk about not bringing certain types of munitions or ruling out the

use of anything, what I would characterize as kind of hostage rescue SOP would have you not employ those kinds of munitions as you're doing the primary clearance on the objective.

Major General Votel:

Okay. Thank you. Let me ask one more question and then I'll go to the Brigadier here, given what you just said there, do you have the means, does the

1.4(a), (b)(2)High have the means out at 1.4(a), (b)(2)High or Logar that if they have to - I recognize when they got a mission like this, 1.4(a), (b)(2)High

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

1.4(a), (b)(2)High Do you know if the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High was able to - again, I recognize I've been to 1.4(a), (b)(2)High a number of times. Is there any way to replicate that or do you have any thoughts or recommendations on what we might try to do to address that?

WIT:

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

Major General Votel:

Right. Does the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High your view have sufficient technical means so they can fully study the terrain and understand the significance of that terrace in front of buildings 21, 22, and 23? Do you feel confident that they have everything they need to really understand the terrain in which they're stepping into to operate in because they're coming in from a flat air field in central (b)(2)High?

WIT:

Sir, I think they made a very good effort to go over and above. They sent one of (b)(2)High in an ISR platform the morning before the assault and he took some very detailed photographs, still photographs of the objective area. And I think that more than any of the terrain analysis and any of the ISR tapes that we were watching in the run up to this gave those guys a very good appreciation of how the target was laid out and some of the terrain challenges that would be presented to them.

Major General Votel: Thanks, TF CDR. Brigadier?

Brigadier Nitsch: TF CDR, good evening. Good to speak to you again. TF CDR, I've just got a couple of questions, the first one is does the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High derive its own mission or does the mission flow down the chain of command to get to them?

WIT: Sir, we give them a verbal warning order in order to start planning against a specific target. In this case, we planned to get to this target the night prior. The timeline was such that we were restricted from any insertion ops except for the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High insertion because of when the sun was going to rise in relation to when we correlated the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High and all the data to this particular target. As the day developed the next day, I told the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High continue to develop this target and to also look for insertion points further out that would give them the opportunity to possibly land the helicopters out of audible range and then foot patrol to the target to preserve surprise.

Brigadier Nitsch: The mission statement, do you give them a mission statement? Does it come from the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High or does the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High commander devise his own?

WIT: 1.4(a), (b)(2)High The 1.4(a), (b)(2)High commander will write the mission statement and then we'll scrub it if it needs to be changed as it goes up the chain of command, sir.

Brigadier Nitsch: That's great. Thanks. TF CDR, in terms of the mission statement here, is this a sort of, is this what you would also expect to see for a capture kill type of mission? Or is this significantly different from that which perhaps the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High commanders might normally produce?

WIT: No, sir, it's similar. The difference would be an

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

Brigadier Nitsch: TF CDR, that's great. Thank you. Could I just move on a fraction of time now and I think we've had a very clear discussion of risk and I apologize if I'm a bit out of context but do you discuss with the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High commander the detail of the action on the target? So what his actual scheme of maneuver is going to be in order to deliver your intent?

WIT: Sir, our tacticians [redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High. We certainly listen to them as they develop the scheme of maneuver on target. My [redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High commander when it

[redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High

Brigadier Nitsch: Thanks, TF CDR, that's really clear. But prior to deployment, so prior to the departure of the force, would there be a discussion at some stage perhaps between the ops room staff and maybe the team chief or whatever that would look at options and contingencies and work on it together? The reason I'm asking that is really two fold, one to find out whether there is that discussion that goes on; and secondly, whether the ops room and the ops room staff have a clear vision of what the scheme of maneuver is on the objective?

WIT: Sir, when you say "the ops room staff," are you talking about the [redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High ops room staff or are you talking about my staff in my JOC?

Brigadier Nitsch: I think in the JOC, TF CDR.

WIT: Sir, [redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High and I both sat through the [redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High brief prior to them loading the helos. Both of us had a good idea, had a good sense of what the scheme of maneuver on target was going to be and both of us were in the JOC throughout the entire plan, sir.

Brigadier Nitsch: Okay.

WIT: As far as my staff, my staff inside my JOC knowing the scheme of maneuver, they knew from the CONOP where the [redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High was going to insert, the two [redacted] 1.4(a), (b)(2)High 1.4(a), (b)(2)High points. They knew that they were going to clear the objective but my staff does not sit in on the actual tactical plan to know where the individual schemes are moving, what exactly the teams are doing by man.

Brigadier Nitsch: That's great, TF CDR. And just one final question, I assume that you were completely satisfied that the

1.4(a), (b)(2)High has sort of snapped up the hostage rescue focus of this mission when you listen to what they were talking about on the objective and the options that they might develop and how the situation might open up.

WIT: Yes, sir. I mean, they have been planning this operation the entire night prior to and the next morning when they got up, they turned to and this was their sole focus. I did not spend most of my time down with them as they were planning. I did check in on them periodically, and I was satisfied with both the level of effort they were putting towards it and I was also satisfied with the span of options and contingencies that they were looking at.

Brigadier Nitsch: Roger, TF CDR. And just the very last question, the contingency that Ms. Norgrove might have been mobile on the objective, was that something you think they may have had to think about?

WIT: Sir, I don't specifically recall them and I can't say that I ever heard anybody discussing a contingency where she would be mobile.

Brigadier Nitsch: Hey, TF CDR, that's been really helpful. Good to speak to you again; thank you.

Major General Votel: Thank you, Brigadier. And I'm going to go to UK SME here. I think you guys met out there so UK SME, over to you please.

UK SME: TF CDR, hi again. Just two questions, first of all, you said that this scenarios that the guys were faced with on 1.4(a), (b)(2)High was unlike anything that they'd faced in training and I can certainly see that from the point of view of the terrain and I can see that from the point of view of the 1.4(a), (b)(2)High Were there any other ways in which 1.4(a), (b)(2)High was completely different from anything that you've trained for?

WIT: No, sir. I don't want to - when I said it was different than anything we trained for, I was trying to be very specific and I know for a fact that just prior to this deployment we did not train for a hostage rescue (b)(2)High (b)(2)High the mountain. We trained on hostage rescue. We did

do some mountain training, but we did not marry those up.

UK SME:

Okay. And as a matter of interest just on this theme, in your training there's obviously a limit to the numbers of different physical environments, different types of terrain that you can exercise. But how many different scenarios as they pertain to the hostage and what the hostage is doing do you train for?

WIT:

Okay. Sir, prior to our deployment, we did a two-



UK SME:

Okay. So I think we've sort of nailed this one nail. What was unique about ~~1.4(a), (b)(2)High~~ was a mobile hostage outside of a stronghold and was still moving towards rather than away from the assault force; is that correct?

WIT:

Yes, sir, that's how I would characterize it.

UK SME:

Okay. And my other question, TF CDR - thanks very much for that; it's really useful. My other question is just picking up on something you said which was that at their base or at their heart of (b)(2)High missions and hostage rescue are basically the same or very similar. I can't remember the exact phrase. It doesn't really matter. And I agree in terms of task organization and assets stacked up overhead and the targeting process that you go through. They are very similar but I think there are some differences and I'd just be interested in your view of what those differences are in terms of the tactical design for the operation that you're going to plan to rescue a hostage and maybe some of the TTPs that are employed by the force.

WIT:

Yes, sir. So speaking to your first point on the tactical design, again, I'll emphasize that point

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

1.4(a), (b)(2)High So when it speaks to where you're willing to insert in order to get to the target objective in a certain amount of time, that speaks to that portion of it. When it comes to the

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

UK SME:

TF CDR, thank you for that and I agree with you absolutely. I think you described that perfectly. The assumption of greater personal risk to the force in order to close with the hostage and rescue him or her as quickly as possible. So my supplementary is do you think that what you just articulated to me was

clearly articulated to the forces on the ground that night either by your or the ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ commander or the ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ chief or someone else that I haven't mentioned?

WIT: Yes, sir. I do believe it was communicated. I heard the guys talking about hostage rescue and I heard them talking about employing what ~~my (a), (b)(2) High~~ would call the hybrid TTP. Again, since this terrain does not lend itself to the sort of SWAT clearance you tend to typically see on a linear target, we knew that some of our movement over the terrain was going to have to be a little more deliberate, so some of the techniques that we used in combat clearance were to be integrated. The main point of emphasis for the hostage rescue was the speed in which we were trying to clear that target with, sir.

UK SME: And along with speed, that's really clear and useful, TF CDR, thank you. But along with speed, and just to try to nail this one out of site, was there discussion about the assumption of greater personal risk for the Soldiers?

WIT: I don't think we ever discussed it in those terms, sir. I just think we discussed as characterized by the difference in training philosophy when we talked about the differences in movement and the differences in mind set on pressing the site at different points in the clearance.

UK SME: TF CDR, thank you very much. It's really clear and helpful. Thank you.

Major General Votel: Thanks, UK SME. Hey TF CDR, let me just stay on that last line of questioning and discussion here with respect to the discussion that takes place. Are you referring to a discussion that takes place in the context of a broader, perhaps ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ talk kind of stuff or is there a critical discourse between you and TCDR about ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ - including ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ and ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ there about the risk that is being accepted here?

WIT: I mean, sir, that discussion took place as we were building up to whether to decide to go on this target or not and then I think once the assumption was made we were going, that risk was accepted. And, again, as the guys did the walk through and the talk through on the white board before they loaded the helos,

that's when the points were made that they were going to press this clearance and the objective was to get to the hostage quickly.

Major General Votel: Okay. Did you and Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) have any kind of discussion of the risk that being accepted here?

WIT: Sir, the conversations I had with Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) mainly circulated around the risk to the helos and the risk to the insertion. I do not believe we discussed much increased risk to the force on the objective itself.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. Hey, I want to delve back into one area and I don't recall if it was the Brigadier or UK SME that brought this up, I want to talk about contingences. Obviously, having been around here a while and watching operations in Afghanistan, as you kind of look at worse case contingencies here, I think we would all have general agreement here that the worst case contingency or situation we might find ourselves with, which I think you guys clearly recognize, would be the shoot down of a helicopter during infiltration probably followed by the shoot down as the force is remounting and getting ready to EXFIL. I wonder if there is any other discussions about other contingencies for this particular mission and then - let me just let you absorb that and comment there.

WIT: Well, sir, the contingencies we talked through at the walk through prior to loading the helos centered around, you know, what do we do if we can't get into that (b)(4)(a), (b)(2) High site, moving to additional sites. If one of the helos had, indeed gone down, then at that point it would have been a deliberate call from the JOC if and when and where we would insert the QRF and then the CSAR package to start to deal with that problem. We would have to make an assessment whether or not we could at that point press ahead with the primary objective which was recovering Ms. Norgrove or whether we were combat ineffective. We felt by splitting the two helicopters it gave us a chance that even if one of them had gone down the other group would have gone in since they were in a different cardinal direction and quite a bit separated by distance so we would have at least a chance at one of those getting cleaned. Being able

to concentrate on committing the QRF at CSAR to deal with the problem and have that one chalk load and team deal with the primary clearance.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks, TF CDR, that's useful. I'm just going to press a little bit more here and I want you to just kind of think critically here. I guess my question is, is how realistic is the expectation that if a helicopter goes down, one of those two helicopters go down that you are going to continue to press with the mission in this case? The significance of the mission, I just want to make sure in your heart of hearts here, and again, I know a lot of this is revisionist thinking here and I have the ability of being in a warm, well lit, dry location to ask this question, but do you think the importance of this recovery would have overcome one of the helicopters going down, that it is so important that we would have continued to press?

WIT:

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

recovery. So, I think that, that is not a yes or no question. I believe there are degrees of that contingency that would lead us to believe or lead us to the decision point where we would have to say, 'could we press at this point or is the new main effort a catastrophic helo crash with multiple or a mass casualty?'

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. Let me see if US SOF SME has any questions. US SOF SME?

US SOF SME: I have none, sir.

Major General Votel: (b)(3), (b)(6)

Lieutenant Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6): No, sir.

Major General Votel: And Brigadier has one here.

Brigadier Nitsch: Sorry, TF CDR, just to come back on one more question on risk analysis, did your risk analysis consider the risk to Ms. Norgrove at any stage?

WIT:

Absolutely, sir. When we were weighing the decision on whether to try and do an offset insertion and foot patrol in which had we found an HLZ that we were confident that we could have landed without alerting anybody close by and then foot patrolled in undetected that was our primary preferred course of action for several reasons. Number 1, risk to the helicopters definitely way lower. Number 2, the risk to the mission being able to get as close to the enemy as close as possible without alerting him; so the risk of the mission in that instance is much lower. We could have gone soft, done soft entries, used hand signals, not use any verbal signals or just communicated over the radios and cleared the buildings with not trying to alert the enemy. The assessment was that painting the worst case scenario for both insertions, the ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ insertion close by that gave us the best success of getting to her quickly because it was a short time frame. The concern with any of the areas that we found that we could insert out further was that, number 1, there was a significant number of villages that we would have had to patrol through. The early warning that worked there was relatively significant. Even with the jamming what we have seen up in the Konar is the insurgents abilities to communicate with gun fire and it goes just like a communication system up these valleys. So, if you are coming in, people will start shooting up in the air and it alerts all the locals to coalition force presence. So, in our estimation that we looked at those offset insertion points, the risk of the enemy on target where we assessed Ms. Norgrove could possibly be held, the risk was they were alerted upwards of anywhere from a half an hour to several hours ahead of us arriving on target. Our estimation that could have been catastrophic as well, sir.

Brigadier Nitsch:

That's great. Thanks, TF CDR. I think you very clearly there described the risks on INFIL, did you - are you aware whether that perhaps the ~~1.4(a), (b)(2) High~~ there was discussion that the risk to her was on the objective given that it was a quite dispersed location. You were totally certain of her location.

WIT:

Yes, sir, and the mitigation at that point was the scheme and maneuver that they came up with to attempt

to address as many buildings as they could simultaneously but with the caveat with keeping a critical mass of force in each element that was clearing so they were still able to fight as a team.

Brigadier Nitsch: Okay. Thanks, TF CDR.

Major General Votel: Anybody, anything else.

[Negative response.]

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. Hey, TF CDR, just one final question here for you from me and again, as you can tell we are dwelling in on the risk aspect here because that is kind of an information gap that we wanted to fill in here so we appreciate you helping us work through this. You mentioned in response to one of Colonel UK SME's questions here the RUT package, the Realistic, Urban, Terrain exercise and I know, my previous experience of looking at those that what is included into the packet there is kind of a risk assessment or a risk matrix that looks at, where we actually articulate, we write it down kind of what the risks are to the force and the measures we take to mitigate that. I recognize the extreme OPTEMPO that you have and again I remind myself that I'm sitting in a plywood room here in Bagram safe from most dangers that you all, you and your force accept every night. Do you guys ever look at - do you ever use that potential technique of just kind of orderly going through an operation and looking to identify all the risks and look at the mitigation factors that might be in place and in constructed in, I guess a little more formalized manner, particularly for the operations you do out here?

WIT: Sir, that is not a part of our process right now.

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

In retrospect, I am not sure that I would have had the time to devote to developing a product that this in this particular instance only because there were significant pulls on our time as far as communications with higher headquarters. Diving into the intelligence itself and really staring at this target.

1.4(a), (b)(2)High  
1.4(a), (b)(2)High

1.4(a), (b)(2)High

Major General Votel: Thank you, TF CDR. I appreciate those comments. Seeing no additional questions here. TF CDR, is there anything else that you can think of that we might be interested in here that might fill in any gaps or any information that you think we might benefit from?

WIT: Sir, unless you guys have any other questions for me, I am not aware of anything that I think I can provide at this time.

Major General Votel: All right. Fair enough. Appreciate that. TF CDR, first of all let me thank you here once again for this excellent discussion here. This is very helpful to us as we kind of look through this and we are, of course, trying to be as diligent and thorough as we can so I recognize we are doing some surgery here to make sure we understand all the aspects of it. I think that's what General Mattis expects us to do. I appreciate your assistance as we work through that. If anything comes into your mind here in the wake of this discussion that you think might be worth wild, please let me know and we'll reconvene.

I would just remind you kind of the cautions that I gave you at the end of the interview on Saturday night here. Please don't share this with anybody else other than those individuals I indicated at the last time; a Chaplain or a lawyer if you have one there. You don't have a need to particularly have one at this point but all those things that I mentioned pertain. I really appreciate the additional time this evening, TF CDR, and thanks very much.

WIT: Yes, sir. I understand all the instructions.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thanks. Hey, I think we are going to talk to ~~1.4(a), (b)(2)High~~ after this. If you could just ask him to call about 2215 that would be great.

WIT: Yes, sir, will do.

Major General Votel: Thanks, TF CDR.

[The telephonic testimony was ended.]