

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

Major General Votel: Okay, (b)(1), 1.4a, (b)(2) CDR, welcome back. Good to see you. I appreciate you coming back here and chatting with us. First off, I just want to remind you - I'm obligated to remind you up front that all the cautions kind of put in place last week as part of this thing in terms of a sworn statement and truthfulness and all that kind of stuff all still apply here.

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: It's really kind of continuation of that discussion. Hey, (b)(1), 1.4a, (b)(2) CDR, what we're doing now in the investigation is just kind of by way of introduction is what we've been doing over the last couple days is really coming back and reinterviewing some folks and in some cases reaching out to some additional folds here to kind of fill in information gaps.

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: So this isn't a complete review of everything that we talked about on Saturday but is really designed to kind of now as we're kind of necking this now is kind of just really kind of answer some specific question areas. There's a couple that I'm interested in trying to talk through with you here today and just make sure that we've got everything we need here. And I'll kind of take this in segments like we did the last time. I want to talk a little bit about the orders and planning development process there, kind of things that happened before hand. I want to talk a little bit about how you kind of saw key things on the objective. I want to talk a little bit about the ISR plan. I want to talk about risk assessment and then a little (b)(1), 1.4a, (b)(2) CDR business there at the end. So with that kind of as a background here, we'll kind of do it the same way that we did here the other day and a little bit of a round robin here with the team.

Did you have an opportunity to meet UK SME?

WIT: We met last night.

Major General Votel: He had a little travel challenge there on Saturday so actually go in early, early Sunday morning. I think by then, we'd concluded your interview. Okay. Let's talk about kind of orders and kind of the planning development. I'm interested to kind of get your perspective here and fill in some details on how you kind of viewed the mission and what you kind of

viewed the key tasks that needed to be accomplished as part of this mission.

WIT: Well I'm overstating the obvious but our number one priority was to get Ms. Norgrove back and that was the whole - it had been a two week ongoing search for her. She had led us all over Konar, up through the valleys. So our primary, it was obviously to get her, bring back the safety of the force right off the top is always paramount. And some of the planning things that kind of - you have to dig away it. We always shoot for obviously, minimal collateral damage which we adhered to no problem I believe in this case other than Ms. Norgrove unfortunately and the main thing getting to and from. We do a lot of off sets so we knew we were going to sacrifice that given the nature of the terrain. And those are primary -

Major General Votel: What did you kind of see as the tactical key to success if you will? I mean, were you able to articulate that with your subordinate leaders or talk through that or --

WIT: We knew we were definitely sacrificing. We had originally gotten information and our best assessment was that she was in that valley in the 24 hours prior to the actual mission. It was little bit later in the planning cycle. We were still fully ready to go. We had been going through different scenarios and we'd look at it and we'd knew it really challenging g terrain and so we actually - we made a decision (S) (U) (1) (4) (b) (2) High out. We're like at's going to happen if we let this develop (U) (1) (4) (b) (2) High? Would it be better, worse, different, what's going to happen? I sort of felt it was going to be at a standstill. I was like, this - and I think I mentioned this before, it sort of started to add up to me that they ended up in this place because it was just really forbidden terrain and they really weren't that well connected and they weren't going to go link up with other groups and all that and they were getting some heat from various village elders and stuff. So it sort of added up to me that was sort of their last place they were going to. I wasn't overly concerned and I honestly at that point, we were not a 100 percent that she was there. So we weren't a 100 percent. It was really challenging to get to and we said -

Major General Votel: Not a 100 percent, how did you kind of assess that? Are you a 50/50, 60/40, 70/30?

WIT: The first day I would have said it was a flip of a coin and as I started looking at it more and thinking about it more, by the time we launched, I was just slightly over 50/50 whether she was going to be there. We had rolled 24 hours and we had looked for every avenue to do an offset too and it just wasn't feasible. The terrain was too high, the ACL's weren't going to support. Any place that we could INFIL was going to be so forbidding that just getting over that terrain even if it was possible, our hand was going to be tipped way out just because of the noise signature and how slow we would be moving. So we knew we were giving up definitely some of the advantages that we wanted, key, get in there if we can get in there undetected, obviously, that was out of the window. We knew we were going to be heard about six minutes out, best case, maybe even further. Basically at that point, we're kind of leaning -

Major General Votel: That was the helicopter pilot's assessment that -

WIT: Yeah. Ballpark, they guys gave out a ball park.

Major General Votel: About six minutes out?

WIT: Yes, sir. Once we kind of committed to that valley, just the noise signature was going to be a spike and it was pretty remote. I should say six minutes before we actually got to the target. It was going to take us a slow down hover to get guys off and move over to the target. So at that point, we kind of defaulted to the plan was not going to happen for us and then just more speed of movement to the target. We knew we were locked into going to the X and we assessed we had two spots we could get in and knowing we had to go to the X, we leaned towards going as close in as we could just to - it was already high risk doing the X but we did have zero illum; that was working in our favor and then the advantage of the rotor wash, open buildings. A Chinook hovering overhead is pretty significant so we actually used that to our tactical advantage.

Major General Votel: We spend quite a bit of time talking about the infiltration and the exfiltration and I think we have a solid understanding of the risks accepted and the danger associated with that thing. Here's the question that I really would be interested in you answering and I'll try to be as clear as I can. Once you got on the ground, presuming successful

infiltration, everybody off the helicopters to the X, to their (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High locations, what did you see as the maneuver keys to success on the objective; move up and secure something, provide surveillance, can you talk about that and how those are articulated?

WIT: Once we're - I understand it's just once we're to the - that part was so dynamic and such a shorter part of the mission. I don't know the exact time -

Major General Votel: Fifty-nine seconds.

WIT: Pretty quick.

Major General Votel: Pretty quick.

WIT: Knowing we were going into a nonstandard - I wouldn't say nonstandard just a slightly different hostage rescue scenario. We had been through the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High with the two Navy personnel a couple months ago and it wasn't - we didn't have defined areas. It wasn't pure hostage rescue and so this was - it was obviously our number one goal was going to be a hostage rescue but since we weren't a 100 percent that Ms. Norgrove was there, we definitely have to factor in other things. So the guys, we talked about it ahead of time, and we have talked about in much detail over the last couple months because we did the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High tailoring somewhere being smart and doing what makes sense to the force, not overexposing the force to running into a chaotic situation when we're not even sure where she's at so. I would say the key once we were on the ground committed to the target was we still had to have speed of movement. It was definitely not a combat clearance, slow, methodical clearance but it was aggressive movement, tow areas that needed to be cleared and then those area that were to be cleared as quickly as possible while still maintaining what was smart to the force without over committing to something that was going to get someone in a bad situation.

Major General Votel: So it's all about balance?

WIT: It was definitely a fine line. I mean, once we knew - we knew once we had identified her location, then it was going to ramp up immediately to straight up get her but until we committed to that, it was just -

Major General Votel: How did you think you were going to locate her, I mean identify her specific location on the objective

once you're there. Is there anything else you're doing? I mean, I know you're trying to get the RECCE guys up in a position where they can be looking and obviously you've got tons of surveillance looking over it, is there --

WIT: To be honest with you, sir, they were all pretty small buildings. We knew they were going to be basically single room.

Major General Votel: So you're eliminating possibilities as you move basically?

WIT: Our best assessment which ultimately was not correct, we thought the 10 series building, ten or eleven, that was where the most foot traffic was in and out and the most activity and we're like that's probably where they're holding her. We didn't see a whole lot of foot traffic - she ended up being in 25 or 26, whichever she came out of. She ended up being down there which is the next tier down that hill side. We didn't see a ton of traffic in and out of there so it didn't add up, you know, we didn't see anybody bringing food down from 10 or 11 so our best assessment is she was there. As far as pin pointing her location, we knew they were going to be pretty tall on the roofs, the rooftops with the mud line is going to have about how many rooms are in this buildings. We kind of knew each one was going to be a pretty quick clearance so within getting one set of eyes into each one of those structures, we're going to have a good assessment if she was in there or not.

Major General Votel: Okay. That's a pretty -- you just highlighted something there pretty quickly just pretty important to that was trying to get some eyes into almost every general location on the objective quickly so that we could kind of eliminate or concentrate basically where we wanted to go. That was pretty useful. Did you have something else?

WIT: No, sir.

Major General Votel: Beyond a catastrophic loss of an infiltration aircraft which I think we would all agree is kind of the worst case contingency situation you might have to deal with if something shot out of the ground or a hard landing which in that type of terrain is almost the same thing. It's going to roll. It's going to be a big problem. Beyond that, what did you guys

kind of talk about as the potential contingencies that you needed to be prepared for on the objective?

WIT: The biggest ones for me were looking at even if it was not a major injury or wound was just the challenge of that terrain because things were going to compound pretty quickly given the terrain and the enemy's disposition. Just what would be maybe a routine gunshot wound to one of our assaulters in another target where we have a little bit a space and we can push out, we can own some terrain, we can set up an HLZ, that sort of thing; we were really committed to this target so that was sort of it for me. It was beyond the catastrophic of losing a bird was on target -

Major General Votel: Sustaining a casualty that you had to deal with was going to --

WIT: And just even a minor casualty is going to be a lot more serious in that situation. The same thing with Ms. Norgrove obviously, if she was wounded and we had to get her out of there extremely quickly, that was going to be a huge challenge because now we're bringing a bird in again for what was going to be a slow EXFIL, a litter EXFIL most likely which we ended up doing. That took about seven minutes I believe.

Major General Votel: Seven minutes to hoist her out eventually?

WIT: To get her out. I think that is about what it took, sir.

Major General Votel: And that's with the helicopter in a steady hover and then lower and raise -

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: Any other contingencies? I mean, that you were looking at either with respect to what the insurgents might be doing with Ms. Norgrove or anything else that kind of -

WIT: We had some indications that there was good chance they already planning to kill her. They were getting some pressure. I had honestly given, knowing that we were going to tip our hand coming in that close, I thought her chances were pretty slim, I think. They had already talked about executing her and I had a feeling there's a good chance if these guys are

serious once they hear us, they're going to realize they're done for and they're going to shoot her.

Major General Votel: Okay. So you thought the level of danger was increasing in your assessment, the level of her personal danger was increasing as soon as you guys showed up in the area of operations?

WIT: I felt it was getting worse every day for her because they were getting continued pressure from village elders and things and they didn't want them around and then obviously us coming in was going to make her situation pretty challenging.

Major General Votel: Okay. Let me stop right there and Brigadier?

Brigadier Nitsch: (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High, good to see you again. I've just got three questions actually. The first one is just thinking more generically in your training, how often proportionally do you go to the X as opposed to INFIL from other locations?

WIT: I have a hard time putting an exact number of it, sir. (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High combat.

Brigadier Nitsch: Yeah. That's good enough. That's great. You described giving a very vivid indication of the balance between (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High and hostage rescue in terms of the operation, in fact, that you were doing a sort of a hybrid. It was a hostage rescue but actually there was a (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High or a combat clearance aspect to it. Was that balance ever discussed with the more junior operators; do you know?

WIT: Yes. We had gone through it actually in great detail when we did the - because it kind of the first time it came up when we did the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High couple months ago. So it had been hit on again, not as in great detail but we're like hey, guys this is the same stuff. Let's not forget. This is not pure hostage rescue, so it was readdressed. It was addressed heavily the initial time.

Major General Votel: If I could just for the record (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High refers to the operations conducted a months ago to recover two US Sailors who had gone missing here south of Kabul. And just for the record, was you (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High involved in those operations?

WIT: (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High. (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High I can't tell you the exact number off the top of my head.

Brigadier Nitsch: Just developing that a little bit more before my third question, do you believe that the operations that you did with (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High actually helped in your preparation and conditioning for the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High operation or you know just it was so far apart that there was no link between them?

WIT: No. I would say absolutely, sir. Even though we didn't have a great turnover or outcome from the original, the two US service members but the opportunity to go do that for us was a very good learning.

Brigadier Nitsch: So would it be reasonable for us to say that actually as well as all the training that you have done, the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High experience of a sort of hostage rescue type scenario in Afghanistan on this tour prior to the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High operation?

WIT: Absolutely, sir. I'm overstating that to say a pure full hostage rescue. We had what was very similar to what we were doing that night, we had done.

Brigadier Nitsch: So this form of operation you could say?

WIT: Yes, sir.

Brigadier Nitsch: And just the final question I've got for you (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High CDR, and it's something I've picked up on and it might be I've slightly misunderstand it and in which case, please correct me. You've described in your action on the objective, you've sort of given me the impression of wanting to check out the whole objective very quickly, almost checking all the rooms and all the locations, was that in your mind?

WIT: Yeah. That was our plan to kind of just come in - our primary was the 10 series, that was our primary pull and then 10 and then sweep down (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High and up taking a little bit longer than we had planned to come up but speed and movement was one of our goals.

Brigadier Nitsch: And the concept to just check everywhere as quickly as possible - your action on the objective was to - the priority was 11 and 12.

WIT: Yes, sir.

Brigadier Nitsch: But actually it was to get around all the rooms as quickly as conceivably possible.

WIT:: Well as mean as quickly as you could without, we can't drop a threat or anything so we had to ensure they're clear but yes, pretty quick movement with overly committed bum rushing into a room, it's going to get us in a bad situation but yeah, moving through pretty quickly, yes, sir.

Major General Votel: But the idea of eliminating possibilities, potentials where Ms. Norgrove is?

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: We got nothing in 21 through 23?

WIT: No one was taking time, a quick stick head in the room, nothing in here, no one was taking time to search and do SSE and flip over something that was obviously too small to have a - we weren't looking for pistols.

Brigadier Nitsch: Great. And underpinning that was your sense, your feeling, your assessment perhaps that actually it was unlikely that she would be moved during the assault?

WIT: I felt if there was - I did feel that going in there was a chance that once they heard us - and we didn't know the terrain as well as them by any stretch obviously. If there was a chance that they may have grabbed her and tried to get out of there, I kind of felt that that was pretty slim chance given the illum even though it was their back yard and they knew the terrain really well. They would have her. She wouldn't know the terrain. The word had been that she had been moved on a donkey because of an injury or she was probably milking it trying to slow things down which made a lot of sense. So I thought there was a possibility but I thought it was pretty slim that they were going to move her.

UK SME: Two if I may. Just starting with that theme that the Brigadier was asking you about, you had sort of considered in your mind the possibility of them moving Ms. Norgrove as soon as they heard you. Had you or did anyone else had the opportunity to discuss those sort of contingencies with the force? So had you gone through a period during your planning or your mission rehearsals where you had thought and

talked through the various contingencies as they related to Ms. Norgrove?

WIT: In this one, we didn't go into that in great detail and the driving factor behind that was it was the terrain because it was - if they actually left, then we knew they were gone. Getting anywhere else up in that terrain was near impossible. Like I said, we spent 24 hours trying to figure out a place to go. We knew we would track her. We knew we would try to get a "persons leaving the objective" team on her. We had an airborne IRF ready to go wherever we needed them to go but we hadn't gone through actual this is our spot, this is our spot, which in some other operations we were probably more likely to do. Hey, if they leave this big open area, if they leave, they're probably going this way, and we're going to plan on putting you out here and getting in front of them.

UK SME: So essentially you concluded that because of the terrain if they did move her, then they would probably - they would probably be impossible to follow up?

WIT: It would have been extremely challenging. We would have had probably, depending on how committed we were to the objective at that point, we may have had to pull back and say look, everybody just bugged out on this target. We think it's smarter just to let them think it's a flyby. Let them think they got spooked and we'll see where they go and see if we get anything tomorrow because they - if we hadn't tipped our hand, sir.

UK SME: Okay. And in the sort of minds of the assault force, in all your minds, how did you expect to find - in what state did you expect to find Ms. Norgrove? I'm just trying to get an idea of how your assaulters were visualizing the final moments of what we all hoped was going to be a successful operation? I probably haven't explained that very well but see if you can answer it and I'll ask it again if -

Major General Votel: Did you expect that she would be static, did you expect they'd be trying to move her around the objective, would she be bound or hid or -

WIT: Physically, we heard that she was moving slow so they'd been using donkeys to move her. She was out

and about doing stuff all the time around the country, the aid stuff. She was probably in somewhat decent shape so she was used to this country. We hadn't heard any specifics on her being really beat up or anything like that so physically we assessed she may have a twisted ankle or something like that. We didn't expect anything huge. They had talked about her being dressed in other men's clothing and that was neither here nor there. The guys are still going to identify what they needed to identify. As far as her actual disposition on the target, we had heard in intel that she was praying with them daily, she was talking to them. The one guard mentioned she spoke two languages so she knew she was interacting with them. And if she was prayer with them, we were pretty sure she wasn't bound up in a corner.

- UK SME: Okay. So you sort of expected or there was a reasonable expectation that she would be interacting with her captors, not bound up, not necessarily confined to one particular building?
- WIT: I kind of envisioned that she probably didn't have full freedom of movement just to run around the camp but they were also probably in a position up there, again, terrain, knowing you can try and run out of here but there's no way.
- UK SME: Do you think - you seemed to have thought this through in huge depth which is commendable. Do you think your thoughts and your assessments were fully understood across all the assaulters that night on the objective?
- UK SME: Okay. One other question which I'm sure you sort of knock this on the head very quickly. What consideration, if any, did you give to getting eyes on the target before the hostage rescue? I'm talking boots on the ground and -
- WIT: We did look at it, sir, it was just it was, again, the terrain.
- UK SME: Just impossible to get people up there?
- WIT: It was a very, very small group of guys could have gone 24 hours out and then just - moving and not getting your hand tipped is just chances of slim to none.
- UK SME: That's great.

Major General Votel: Thanks, UK SME (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High, that's really very helpful. One quick follow-up there, the roll of the immediate reaction force, what was their principle task?

WIT: They are on the hook for whatever contingency came up, sir.

Major General Votel: If you had a downed aircraft they did that?

WIT: That was really the biggest.

Major General Votel:

(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High

WIT: It would have probably been slim. It's not beyond the scope of possibilities but, again, the speed of movement it would have been a long time before that would have gotten into a place where we could have got those guys on the ground. Primarily in my head they were there to bolster us if we had a bad situation.

Major General Votel: Thanks. The next area I want to talk about here and this ought to go relatively quickly is the ISR plan and what I would like for you to kind of talk about is really two things: Who is controlling, who in the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High think I kind of know the answer here but who in the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High is controlling, when you are on the objective, is controlling and directing any of the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sensors and I'm not sure if we determined how many (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sensors we actually have, but, how many?

US SOF SME: (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sir.

Major General Votel: (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sensors and if you could talk to us about from your perspective where they were looking as you exited the aircraft and got on the ground.

WIT: I generally control the ISR, sir, and I do task ISR out on a regular basis depending on what we are doing and where we are at. I want to, generally I want to start, if we are doing some sort of an offset or anything. I usually come up. I'll talk to whoever is primary, if we have

(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High

(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High

just tell manned ISR when I get on the ground, hey, I just want to ask for an update. Just feed me what you are watching on TM 4a, (b)(2)High also. So, I generally do that. I also tell them who the key players are on the ground as soon as we start the evening if it is an offset. They will know that TM 4a, (b)(2)High primary (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High They will see a big patrol of us. We'll give a head count. There are 11, 4a, (b)(2)High on the ground, expect to see (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High. Anything route specific I relay that directly to TM 9. We are all

(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High

know they're cleared. Hey, can you push ahead, can you look at this. There is a building up there. They know that they can task during our patrol. We also keep a sensor, I generally like to keep one of

(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High

Once we commit to a target whether we have patrolled there or it was an X or a Y, depending on the number of the sensors, we had a lot of sensors that night obviously. We were just totally saturated and it really wasn't that much of a management issue. If we go in and we have, you know, if we go in and we have (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sensor I will generally, once we own the target I start using that sensor because I know the guys have got the X. I start using that sensor for

(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High

I'll, any additional sensors, when this guys report about a building that's 600 meters away they don't

care about that really. So, I'm sort of processing that information from those.

Major General Votel: That's great. I think you answered my question here. Can I just ask you to switch and talk about what the coverage on the objective looked like in terms of, what's your expectations, what your direction was to them to be looking at as your warm hands came off the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High here?

WIT: We had told them coming in, (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High coordinated with, I can't remember, but they had their HLZ designated and as soon as they were committed and they had it I had them shift a sensor over to the primary target so that it shifted over to the 10 series so as the guys hit the ground in semi-brown out conditions they could ID it and move to it. So, I did that and (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High staying primary on us and we had so many other sensors that I just relayed to (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High get everybody in a defensive posture as soon as we commit to the target. So, really I just had everybody, we kind of had the target, we had (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High we had the gunship, so we had a lot of eyes right there on us which was great.

Major General Votel: So, when you say, "defensive posture" that means to the ISR assets to keep your eye on us and watch for threats to the force at this point?

WIT: Yes, sir. Well, defense I knew I had my primary eyes on so we (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sensors directly on us. I was talking to (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High and then to go defense is to start scanning the area around us, anybody else encroaching, I was very concerned about that. We had this huge ridge, well we had it on every side but the one to the east was the most dominate that we were totally underneath so just to start scanning the hillside. Any movement up there I want to know immediately. Things unfolded really quickly. My main concern was, now we are on the target. Now if someone's on the other side of this ridge and they've got an RPG that was what was going through my head so I wanted to own that valley the best we could because I had to bring those Chinooks back in.

Major General Votel: At what point does the posture change from defensive, as you kind of describe it there, to something else? In terms of what their, okay, we've got it. We are established on the ground and I do recognize that the force is in contact within seconds.

WIT: Sure.

Major General Votel: So, is there a point at which the focus changes a little bit maybe even after the mad minute there or?

WIT: On this evening, not really. I mean the main things that are going to unfold are if we have personnel leaving the target so that becomes a separate scenario, you are going to dedicate an eye to following that. If someone is coming from the target towards us, that's a different situation and, but on this, we kind of, a couple of minutes of, you know, a little bit of chaos on the target. We had some engagements, handled that. Then kind of pushed everybody, hey maintain eyes on us, go to a defensive posture. Watch this valley for us and give us any updates. But since nothing unfolded there was really no additional, if I had ten PAX departing the building to the south that would become the event there for me.

Major General Votel: Okay. Then my last question here before I pass it up. Is there any specific direction given to any of the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sensors, any of the (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High sensors to - regarding Ms. Norgrove? Are you - do they have any specific indicators that they are looking for?

WIT: No, sir, we didn't task them out. We really wouldn't have had anything to pass them.

Major General Votel: Okay.

Brigadier Nitsch: Just one question. So, did you give any different direction to the sensors, you know, any more than you would have done - then would have been done for a (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High, for a (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High operation?

WIT: No, sir, nothing significantly different, no.

Brigadier Nitsch: That's great. Thank you.

Major General Votel: UK SME?

UK SME: Nothing.

Major General Votel: Good. I want to move to, and I appreciate the clear concise of your answers here this morning. You are allowing us to move along rapidly and cover a lot of areas here. I want to talk about risk assessment and you mentioned earlier (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High, that by the time you were INFILLing into the objective, you are a little better than 50/50 here in terms of the chance

of getting here. Talk to us a little bit about the discussion about the payoff of recovering her versus the risk that's being accepted here and how that discussion went beforehand.

WIT:

Well, we knew, sir, going in, this, you know, hostage rescue is a high risk operation. We knew that this was ~~(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High~~ ~~(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High~~. This is what we were doing. We had the lead on it. Everyone understands going in that it's a greater level of risk immediately and you do everything you can to stack the deck in your favor. That was one of the reasons ~~(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High~~ the first evening when we thought she was up in that valley. It was just like, again, we were about 50/50 was she there or not and it was a really high risk. We were like, okay, this amount of risk for a 50/50 chance doesn't quite add up. So, as we let it develop a little bit more, you know, we got a little bit more confident that she was probably there and we started looking at the X, we are going to get closer, the bird wash is going to help us out so we did what we could. As far as the risk level, we knew going in it was very high risk. I gave us about a 20% chance of having a bird shot down that night and I expressed all this to my commander and just to let him know. You know, 'this is where we are at. This is my assessment of what we have going in. I think it is a little better than 50/50 that she's there. I think if she is there I give her 15% chance of survival. I think there is a really strong chance that they will execute her and I think we have about a 20% chance of something catastrophic happening going into this valley.' I brought that to my chain of command, like, is this the amount of risk we are willing to buy for this operation? The resounding answer to that is, "yes, we are going to commit to this." So, we drove on with it at that point.

Major General Votel:

Okay. Thanks. That's really, really good. So, I want to review those two percentages that you told me there. By your assessment, by a 20% chance, 1 in 5 chance that one of the aircraft would be engaged or something catastrophic would happen with one of those?

WIT:

Yes, that's kind of what I had.

Major General Votel:

I know, everybody has to make their subjective, but based on your experience, based on this situation that was kind of your assessment?

WIT: That's what I felt.

Major General Votel: Now, you mentioned something about 15% with Ms. Norgrove. Are you saying a 15% chance that given that you are on the objective and they're reaction that your actually going to be able to recover her alive?

WIT: That's about what I felt.

Major General Votel: So, just slightly better than a 1 and 10 chance that presuming the force can get on there. Gets on the objective. Given what you know about, (b)(1), 1.4a, (b)(2) through everything else and what these guys have said about it, by the time you got to her she would be alive?

WIT: That's kind of where I placed it, sir. I knew the guys that talked about possibly executing her and they had been on the run for 2 weeks. They know that we have hit other objectives. They know that other, you know, we have had engagements and killed other guys in these valleys so they know that the force coming after them is not to be messed with.

Major General Votel: And that discussion there is one that you had with TF (b)(1), 1.4a, (b)(2) CDJR?

WIT: Not in the detail we just discussed it, sir. I just said, hey, we are committed to X, is this the amount of risk we are willing to take.

Major General Votel: Last question before I open it up here. Would you describe the discussion between you and (b)(1), 1.4a, (b)(2) CDJR as debate or disagreement?

WIT: No, not at all. It was neither. We have a ----

Major General Votel: A professional/personal discussion between you two?

WIT: We have a great working relationship. I couldn't have asked for a better commander to bring that information to.

Major General Votel: No unnecessary undiscussed pressure to get this thing under way and get in the air?

WIT: No, I just honestly wanted to voice, I just want to make sure this is the amount of risk that we want to buy tonight. And he was like, 'yes, this is what we are going to drive on with.'

Major General Votel: Excellent. Brigadier?

Brigadier Nitsch: Just one question again (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)CDR, were you happy with the amount, were you personally happy with the amount of risk you were buying?

WIT: Uhm, it was a lot of risk. I would have liked to have a little bit more clarity that she was there to accept that amount of risk. But at the end of the day it's our job and it's what we do. So, it's really not my - I don't feel that it is my spot to make that call.

Brigadier Nitsch: No, I fully accept that. I think that it is absolutely admirable you do what you are told. We all end up doing what we are told. But your personal assessment was that actually given the risk that you were sensing feeling and have assessed that actually the operation shouldn't have been launched?

WIT: No, I don't think that it shouldn't have been launched, sir. I think it was a lot of risk and that's our job and we go do it and I think that at every - at the team leader level they are going to look at a certain thing and certain risk to their guys and as it goes up and up and up, and I just, you know, when I got the word this is what we are saying we are going to drive on with. We understand the risk. We understand it's an X in the Konar and a (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High and we've got it and you are going to this level. To me that sends a message that the overall, much beyond my pay grade on the political level is saying that this is even losing a Chinook with some guys in it is worth the risk to send the message that you don't ever do this to our people.

Brigadier Nitsch: Okay, thank you.

Major General Votel: UK SME?

UK SME: Yes, thank you, General (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)CDR, just one, this 15% figure, was that based on your assessment that her captures would kill Ms. Norgrove rather than she might be hit in the cross-fire or whatever?

WIT: That was absolutely 100% on them killing her, sir, yes.

UK SME: So, you gave her such a low chance of surviving on your assessment that it was highly likely, in fact probable that her captures would shoot her or kill her by another means the moment they heard the assault force arriving?

WIT: Yes, sir, I thought there was a really strong chance of that. I thought they may, as far out as we were going to be heard, they would have some time to ponder and think about it and once they realized that last 2 minutes that we were absolutely coming to their village.

UK SME: And what facts led you to that assessment?

WIT: Again, we had just been - like I said these guys had been on the run for 2 weeks. We had already hit other targets in the area. They knew that we had engagements and we had killed other guys in the valley who had engaged us so they knew we were not to be reckoned with, we were a force to be reckoned with. The village elders had given them pressure. They had already mentioned executing her and, again, these guys in my assessment were not high enough that they were connected with the key Taliban guys so they were a smaller group. I think all of that pressure on top of them was what kind of led me to believe these guys kind of want out of this thing.

Major General Votel: So, high confidence by you and the intel of reporting that you had seen before. I mean you believed the pressure the insurgents were feeling and the discussions and everything else and that the threats to killing her were very, very real?

WIT: I thought it was very plausible, sir, and also with what happened, again, a couple of months ago, they finally, the second Navy one was killed. They realized that this is just too much heat on us. We are getting hit by every direction and they ended up executing him just to get out of it.

Brigadier Nitsch: Okay. So, I know this is sort of an art rather than a science and these numbers are just based on your judgment, so, your assessment was there was an 85% chance that her captures would kill her on realization that there was a rescue attempt being launched?

WIT: That was just my gut assessment, sir.

Brigadier Nitsch: It was your gut assessment?

WIT: Yes, sir.

Brigadier Nitsch: And, appreciate that this is not necessarily your balance of risk decision to make, so I'm not - this

is not implied criticism at all, but you said earlier on that you as the team commander and your J2 had made an assessment as to what her - what the probability was of her being moved or just being killed anyway. So, can you just try to describe for me the balance of those two probabilities? So, on the one hand there is an 85% chance that she is going to be killed the moment her captives hear you come in. What sort of percentage chance did you believe she had of being killed if there was no rescue operation launched at all?

WIT:

Well, it is one of those things, if you never go you are never going to know. So, I mean, they have been sitting on her a while. I think if everything stopped and all US Forces stopped working the whole area her chances of survival may have increased because the pressure would have decreased. They were kind of remote. They would have realized it was fine. These guys, you know, maybe, but that wasn't really going to happen. I mean, we were committed to that entire operation. We had boots on the ground throughout the entire area. The entire battle space owner committed to it. So, whether we went or not, I don't think, we were just one small group (b) (1), (4a), (b) (2), (c). I don't know if I'm answering your question or not.

Brigadier Nitsch:

I'm sorry to go on. No, no, I think you are actually. So, let me sort of try to paraphrase your answer. You believed that her chances of survival might increase if the pressure on her captives was reduced but you no longer develop the intelligence, develop the target, you know, you went to normal capturing insurgency activity?

WIT:

Well, I think it was such a big operation. I say, yes, if everything was called off, I think it may have increased her chances of survival. Our piece was a - even though we were the finish piece, we were relatively small piece in this big thing that was going on.

Brigadier Nitsch:

And finally, because I do think the figure, the 15% is quite important. Is that a figure that you just came up with now or is that a figure that you were thinking at the time? And if so, to the best of your recollection, did you mention that figure, IE: just about a 1 in 10 chance of survival. Did you mention that up the chain of command up to (b) (1), (4a), (b) (2), (c)?

WIT: I did have that number in my head that whole day and evening. No, I didn't vocalize that exact number to my chain of command. I said - as I mentioned before, this is the amount of risk we are accepting, and I think whatever, if (b)(7)(F), (b)(1.4a), (b)(2)(C) wanted to put 25% chance or 15% they were just arbitrary numbers.

Brigadier Nitsch: But was there a conversation with you and (b)(7)(F), (b)(1.4a), (b)(2)(C) to the specific risk attached to Ms. Norgrove's likely survival? So forget about the helicopter being shot down. Forget about whether or not she was there. Can you recall a discussion between you and (b)(7)(F), (b)(1.4a), (b)(2)(C) about her chances of survival if she was on target?

WIT: We had discussed it. I don't recall going into the exact detail, like, you know, this could happen, this could happen. We kind of all knew that this was going to be very challenging. There is a good chance that they can execute her and we went through all that stuff, but I don't recall the conversation with (b)(7)(F), (b)(1.4a), (b)(2)(C) that we went into the specific detail of that but we had hit on the topic.

Lieutenant Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6): What did you think that the risk was before you had determined that you needed to go to the X?

WIT: I'm not sure what you mean? You mean when we are looking at off sets or?

Lieutenant Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6): Yes.

WIT: Okay. If the offset was possible, which it ended up we went to the X. We wanted to do an offset, if an offset had been possible I think it would have greatly, I shouldn't say greatly, it definitely would have increased her chances, in my mind because if we had had a viable offset, which is straight up hypothetical, we know with the terrain is absolutely not one available. But if it was viable it would have increased. Pretty likely we would have been able to contain the target without them, if they had somebody awake, so I think we would have surrounded the target pretty quickly.

Major General Votel: Okay. Let's move on to the last area here and what I want to do, this will be relatively brief here. I want to zoom ahead to Sunday, I guess late in the day, afternoon Zulu around 1800 or whatever it is when the smoking gun tape shows up, the high resolution thing that you guys first get the

opportunity - the first time you see it is out at
(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High right?

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: Okay. What takes place in terms of the discussion, I got it, I think the TFSE brings it out, gets the
(b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High chief and the team leader and they show it and kind of the quintessential question is asked is, 'did we throw the grenade?' then of course then we know how it comes out. What happens in the wake of all that?

WIT: So, (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High TFSE came back and got with TFSE who got with (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High chief, we were just all to and from chow. He grabbed him first, pulled him in and then he went and grabbed TM 1 first and then came back and watched it again and then I believe I was coming back. I ended up bumping into (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High coming back from the chow hall, so I probably got the word from him about a half an hour after they had done that, plus or minus, and (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High chief and I immediately got together and we said, we've got to get the guys together and we need to talk. We brought the whole crew in and I let ----

Major General Votel: The 'whole crew' meaning the whole (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High

WIT: The whole (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High everybody who was on the objective. I let (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)High chief introduce it and he explained it.

Major General Votel: And this is (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)Highly discussion, TFSE is not there?

WIT: It was (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)Highly, sir, it was (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)Highly level and it was us plus the enablers so we had the PJs there and actually I'm not 100% sure of that, it may have just been the TF.

Major General Votel: (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)Highly the initial proctoring?

WIT: (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(2)Highly said, "hey, listen, we have had some bad news. An additional ISR tape was brought with a different clarity and showed a different angle and it's pretty clear that someone threw a grenade on the objective."

Major General Votel: Did we call out the person, I think it's fairly obvious who actually does it?

WIT: Actually, yes, it was pretty clear who does it on the tape. (b)(1), (b)(4), (b)(2) Chief, did not initially give a name. He started talking through it explaining what happened and then immediately he got from the crowd the guys were obviously furious and they wanted to know a name immediately so he, actually I think, I believe that (b)(3), (b)(6) actually just said it was me. Guys were professional, guys were furious. We had a borderline lynch mob at that point. I mean nobody did anything at that point but the guys were heated. A little bit of shouting match. He got chewed out by a couple of the guys right off the bat.

Major General Votel: Meaning TM 5?

WIT: TM 5 got it, yeah. They calmed down a little bit and I talked to the guys briefly and said, you know, it was almost pointless at that point but I said, "don't forget what you did." That was about it.

Major General Votel: Okay. Really not a question but just to comment here and I think I can sense particularly with the, again, I'm not a TF operator but I'm obviously very familiar with your organization and other organizations like that so I can understand the profound disappointed that goes along with, you know, not only the fact that the mission doesn't get accomplished then something like this comes out later on and of course it reflects poorly on the organization because we didn't know what had somebody help to discover for us and things like that and so it's got to be frustrating. I would just, I would kind of remind you as perhaps a lesson learned to take out of this is - the chain of command here is that while your obligation is obviously to try to accomplish the mission, discover the truth, it's also to ensure that people that may have been at fault due to poor tactical decisions or even in the cases of deliberate misconduct or violations of law, still deserve the right of a fair and square look here. That becomes the responsibility of the chain of command to ensure that that's done.

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: So, the concern I would just express to you here is that at that point, and again I can only imagine how emotionally gut wrenching that is for the organization to find out at that point that responsibility that I just talked about becomes more

important than ever so that we don't unfairly paint people. That we do allow a process to take place whether initiated by you or others to make sure that we get the facts straight (b)(1), (b)(2) ~~FOUO~~, I think that's a personal lesson for you that I would just encourage you to kind of think about and make sure we take out of this experience. I think it is very important that when bad situations occur how we deal with that and how we ensure people are dealt with whether they are guilty, suspected of guilt, have made horrible mistakes and mistakes that bring discredit upon our organization we still have a responsibility to make sure that we do right by everybody.

WIT: Yes, sir.

Major General Votel: It's kind of a whole, that is a pillar of just kind of our American approach to things and I'm sure others as well.

WIT: Absolutely.

Major General Votel: Okay. Any other questions?

US SOF SME: Yes, sir, I have two. Going back and talking about the risk of Ms. Norgrove being killed on the objective, were there any other operations playing in your mind or things that you have seen where a hostage had been shot upon the execution of the assault or upon the sound of the INFIL? Were there things out there that you can think of that were helping shape that perspective of, you know, we think she is just going to get killed flat out aside from that intel and we read the intel, I know that in the intel there were definitely some things in there that were concerning?

WIT: No, I didn't have a specific case of an execution based on noise or anything off the bat. I know that the other TF had a successful, I think it was about 2 years ago and they got in there quietly but not a specific one.

US SOF SME: When we talked with TM 2, there was some concern in him about the risk due to the hostage. Articulated differently, was there a consensus among (b)(1), (b)(2) ~~FOUO~~ were there conversations between you (b)(1), (b)(2) ~~FOUO~~ and TM 2 where they kind of felt like this as well or did you get a sense of their perspective on this?

WIT: Yes, sir. I mean, I didn't have a specific conversation with TM 2. No, I didn't have a specific conversation with him. Just like I was saying earlier, I understand that everybody sees risk at their own level and I'm sure TM 2's scope on it is, hey, this woman is in a terrible situation, she's probably dead anyway, we are going to go risk ourselves for what? You know, got it. You know, as you work your way up to ultimately where it resided at the major political decision level was, no, this is the message we are going to send. But yeah, the guys there was always going to be I get concerned about the guys when they stop bitching.

US SOF SME: ~~(b)(1), (4a), (b)(2), (4b)~~ His perspective was? Did you have a sense of his perspective on this?

WIT: Yeah, you know, he and I talked more. We both kind of knew the risks going in. He was continuing voicing his concerns with me. I was like, got them, bringing them up. You bring them to me and I'll bring it ~~(b)(1), (4a), (b)(2), (4b)~~

Major General Votel: Anything else that you think might be useful to us?

WIT: I don't think I have anything else for you here.

Major General Votel: Let me thank you very much. This has really been a very good discussion and you really, I believe, have helped fill in a lot of areas here and helped move this forward on this. I greatly appreciate you coming back down here. I apologize for dragging you all the way down here to the land of the big PX here. We appreciate it and the reason, I had a number of areas I wanted to discuss with you here as you kind of found out so I thought it would be better if we did it face-to-face here and so I felt reassured here as we have gone through that I've got a good handle on all the aspects of that. I especially appreciate your discussion of the risk here and your view of it there. That is very useful I think as we kind of continue to deliberate that. So, let me pass my thanks to you. I hope the wind dies down here and are you flying fixed or rotary wing?

WIT: I'll jump on the next fixed.

Major General Votel: Then you might be okay. Again, I appreciate you coming. I'll remind you the same cautions that we gave at the last couple of times we talked here about not discussing this outside of any other form other

than with the Chaplain or a lawyer unless I give you approval.

WIT: Absolutely.

Major General Votel: Okay. Thank ~~(b)(1), (b)(7)(C), (b)(7)(D)~~ you.

[The witness departed the room.]