

Magenta

**Interview with CPT [redacted] (b)(3), (b)(6)
6 May 2009**

Garnet

Magenta

DC: My name is [redacted] (b)(3), (b)(6) (DC) with the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Today I'm interviewing Captain [redacted] (b)(3), (b)(6) (BP) who has been and who currently is the intelligence officer (S2) for 2nd Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry (2-503). We're going to be talking about their deployment to Afghanistan from 2007 to 2008, in particular about the Battle of Wanat. Today's date is 6 May 2009 and this is an unclassified interview. Let's start with some background. Where did you get your commission?

BP: I was commissioned through ROTC at Central Missouri State University in December 2001. I was assigned to active duty infantry. I did most of the basic infantry schools expected of an infantry officer. I went to 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry, which is a Stryker battalion in 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis. I did 12 months of rifle platoon leader time, 27 months of mortar platoon leader time, to include a deployment to Mosul as a mortar platoon leader for 12 months. I came back and went through the Military Intelligence Transition Course followed by the MI Captain's Career Course, Signals Course and G2X. I moved again to the 173rd and went to the brigade headquarters to work in the brigade S2 shop. I served as a brigade planner and then as the brigade collection manager. For the first six or seven months, I served as the brigade collection manager for Afghanistan and then in early February 2008 I transitioned down to the S2 for 2-503. I finished out the deployment to Afghanistan, redeployed last August and have stayed with 2-503.

[redacted] (b)(6): What's your degree in?

[redacted] (b)(6): Computer science and mathematics.

[redacted] (b)(6): So you can actually understand all the signals intelligence?

[redacted] (b)(6): That's my specialty.

[redacted] (b)(6): So you'd already been in Afghanistan and been working. How was your transition with the previous S2?

[redacted] (b)(6): It was fine. I'd been identified as his replacement for over a year so I'd come down for training even in the garrison environment. I made one trip a month to the battalion forward operating base (FOB) while I was at brigade and I was there for a lot of the major contingency operations (CONOPs) as well as random enemy-initiated events. I'd already had a good relationship with the battalion and the transition was pretty seamless.

[redacted] (b)(6): I assume you'd been working with them on a daily basis from Jalalabad to Camp Blessing?

[redacted] (b)(6): Yes.

[redacted] (b)(6): Who did you take over from?

Oxford

[redacted] (b)(6): [redacted] (b)(3), (b)(6). I think he's a major now.

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(b)(6): Today we're going to focus on CONOP Rock Move, the operation in Wanat and how you saw it from your perspective. Let me start with some background information. Did you work at all with the human terrain team (HTT) that arrived in Afghanistan in April?

BP: One of the reps came up to the FOB and gave us a brief introduction on what they can do. He laid it out there on the line and I think it was very realistic when he said he really wasn't going to be able to offer us anything. He was busy trying to play catch-up to our level but he would attempt to set the conditions for the unit replacing us and get them up to speed much quicker than we were able to get up to speed. Our working relationship was more along the lines of answering the questions they had rather than them providing any in-depth analysis that we didn't already have a handle on. That was just because we were coming towards the end of our 15-month deployment and they were just getting on the ground.

(b)(6) How effectively did the battalion use the tactical HUMINT teams (THTs)?

(b)(6) The THTs were actually extremely useful. We had a very unique opportunity for intelligence gathering in our battalion. We had multiple teams. I think at one point we had three direct support (DS) teams and a general support (GS) team that provided us support from different locations. Normally you just don't have that level of support. Of course the terrain is much more restrictive in that area so getting around was more difficult, but having that many collectors in the battlespace allowed us to get out there and flood the market with our requirements. I think it was pretty good for the battalion overall. The problem with HUMINT collection is that it's human collection and people have personality conflicts, so there was always one team or another with one collector or another that had little issues come up. Overall, the companies and the battalion as a whole did a really good job using the resources available.

(b)(6) Did you have a THT helping you with the preparation for Wanat?

(b)(3), (b)(6)

(b)(6) Yes. THT 06 based out of Camp Blessing had a team member up in Bella. That team member was actually there when they got pulled out of Bella and the day after the attack, we had another collector go up to Wanat with the reinforcement element. THT 06 was involved in that. There were also two GS teams. One was based in Jalalabad and one was based in Asadabad that did have limited source access to the Waygul Valley and when they were able to, they would give us information on anything around the Bella area as well as the other valley to the east, the Waterpor. That was significant because there's a very long-standing family connection between the people in the Waterpor and the people in the Waygul. They were also collecting in the Waterpor for us, which would tell us a lot about what was going on in the Waygul. Every once in a while we'd get a phone call from another organization that could tell us some stuff over the phone sometimes from their sources.

(b)(6) I understand that between those two valleys there are consistent family ties.

(b)(6) Yes, and they are long-standing. They all consider themselves Nuristani.

(b)(6) Did you have HUMINT sources you could work in the Waygul Valley and at Wanat?

(b)(6) We had limited access. Once you get a little north of Wanat, there's a certain area where there's a path that comes down from the east, from Muladish, and right around there there's a very rigid divide between people of the Muladesh area. Keyamameshataz (ph) area and the Nishagram area. It's a very firm divide. We had a recruiting source that worked for THT 06 who actually lived north of Wanat and had a certain amount of access to that area. Depending on what the current security situation was and when there had been attacks, we had to be careful tasking him to go places that would put him at too much risk. People knew he was a source. That wasn't a secret by any means. Because of who he was and who his family members were, he had something like a protective bubble around him. He was our best

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source and he provided us with about 75 percent of our information from that area that we could rely on. The rest of the information we got from every little kid you speak to, every elder you debrief or patrol leader you debrief, and then sorting through it all to find pieces of information that you could really act on.

(b)(6): I think the 10th Mountain Division had a program that said every soldier is a sensor. I assume you had something like that as well?

(b)(6): Yes. I thought that was an Army program.

(b)(6): Maybe it is. I know the 10th Mountain was big on it.

(b)(6): The nice thing about doing that is anyone can come up and say, "This is what we saw." Normally that was fed back up through patrol reports. The patrol leader would consolidate all his information, send it back up and say, "This is what we saw." It doesn't have to be an THT or a company commander. It can come from anyone and it eventually gets to us. Or people also just walk into the S2 shop or catch us somewhere and say, "This is what I saw." It's a great way of passing information up. However, when you start adding distance in there or limited to no connectivity, it tends to complicate getting information from every single soldier, but the option is always there.

(b)(6): What did you see as the enemy situation as CONOP Rock Move was being implemented and what were the cultural and human conditions in the valley at that time?

(b)(6): The plan for shutting down Ranch House at Aranas and Combat Outpost (COP) Bella at Bella and moving those to Wanat had been in discussion since the summer of 2007. The problem was that the battalion could never get approval to do it. Those were mandated FOBs that had to be kept open. It wasn't until the late summer or early fall when they got approval to take down Ranch House. It was negotiated that we would leave and they would provide security for it, and then there was that massive attack that became known as the Ranch House attack. That left us just with Bella and it became our northernmost position. Attacks increased a little bit on Bella but nothing significant. The problem was where Bella was located. It was located in a valley and if you wanted to go north of that from the Muladesh / ~~Klaygal~~ (ph) ^{Cal-le-h g-1} area, you had to go up through Aranas, which involved a hike up a very tall mountain to the east, or you had to risk the traffic control point (TCP). Some people decided to risk the TCP and sometimes they were caught, sometimes they weren't. It was a real harassment location where we were really able to harass the Anti-Afghan Forces (AAF) because it really restricted their flow of movement to the northern part of the valley. Although we wouldn't use the Waygul Valley to do anything in Nuristan because of the way the terrain is since it keeps going up and up, the AAF did use those routes to go up into central Nuristan and sometimes into western Nuristan. As a result, that did limit their freedom of movement. As far as the people in the area were concerned, the mountains are extreme rugged terrain. We said the rest of Kunar had pretty extreme terrain and it really was. There are ridiculous mountains that don't support roads for some reason or another, but the area up here was even worse. I think the valley floor in portions of the Waygul is higher than mountains in other portions of Kunar. It's much higher terrain and the villages tend to be much more isolated, thus there are more tightly controlled groups. Everyone from Muladesh (ph) knows each other and everyone from Jamamesh (ph) knows each, and they generally have better control over their own individual areas. The downside of that is they don't see very much need for a consolidated government presence, so they're not as likely or willing to support a government of Afghanistan or coalition forces or really anyone else unless they see an incentive for it. That makes them susceptible to bullying because the AAF can go in there with a lot of people and some arms and make threats. We can't really do much about it because we can't access the area as quickly as they can and the AAF can get out of there before we can even affect it. This really gave the people in the northern Waygul area, who were already isolated and didn't see a need to support us or the government of Afghanistan, yet another reason

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why they didn't need to. There isn't a lot of industry up there so for those who are looking for an escape, a little bit of money goes a long way. If you wanted to do an attack on COP Bella and you did have your core group of hardcore fighters, and there really weren't all that many, you had to pay them. You could find multiple 'INTs of reporting that would corroborate that. "We wanted to do a big attack on this day but Hajji Bad Guy didn't show up with the money." Things are very financially driven up in this area. That took us off guard at first because initially we thought things were more religious based, but they weren't. The further we looked into the problem and the more we started sending out requirements against sources, people were surprised that we even asked that question. We were pretty off base when we thought it was all religious up there. We closed Ranch House and the elders signed agreements saying they were going to provide security for northern and southern Waygul as well as the rest of the Waygul Valley. We got all of their fingerprints on some documents and they agreed to provide security. This wasn't holding true at Bella. Just a few months prior, Sergeant First Class Kahler had been shot going up to Observation Post (OP) Speedbump. He was just going up to do a linkup and some of the Afghan Security Guards (ASG) shot him. That was what you could call a friendly fire incident since they were working for us. However, that was just one incident. They got rocketed all the time. When aircraft flew up there, they got shot at. It didn't matter if it was military or the Russian fresh fruit and vegetable aircraft that go through those areas. They constantly attacked Bella. It wasn't always effective but the threat was always there. The locals in the area provided almost no assistance and there was constant surveillance on the FOB that we could confirm through multiple 'INTs. It was definitely a high-threat area but there was little the coalition forces were able to do about it because of limited mobility and lack of assets to place against the problem. We didn't have the right amount of intelligence collection assets, rotary-wing assets or close air support (CAS). We just had a limited number of assets to put against that problem, but that was happening everywhere in theater. Everyone was starving for assets and to do stuff up in that area, you need more than most.

(b)(6): I understand that the Waygul Valley was the economy of force effort and your battalion was the economy of force effort within the brigade. In turn, your brigade was the economy of force in Afghanistan. So you were pretty far down the rungs in getting assets, I assume.

(b)(6): Yes. It was an economy of force of sorts in Waygul, but I don't want to discredit anything they did with what they had available. They did a lot of good stuff, but to do big CONOPs in there you really need a lot of assets compared to other locations, and they didn't always get it. I will give credit to brigade and division when there was a troops in contact (TIC) going on. They did their best to support with what they could, but without having stuff preplanned for support of long dismounted movements, it led to things like the 9 November ambush. It was an economy of force of sorts, but I know the guys over there did everything they could with the assets they had available.

(b)(6): When you pulled out of Bella, did you lose any intelligence assets or capabilities?

(b)(6): Not collection per se because we did have one HUMINT collector there, but all he could really do was spot and assess. It wasn't safe to run sources out of Bella because it was constantly under surveillance and there wasn't a good way to see what was going in there. You could fake capture somebody at the TCP but that only worked a few times before everyone realized what we were doing. We didn't lose a lot as far as HUMINT collection was concerned. The main source that was providing information wasn't able to go that far north very often because of his own safety, so we actually brought him down to Blessing. We couldn't really run sources out of there either. The sources we did get out of there wouldn't last long, either because their family would be threatened or they would be killed, or they would just stop working for us. The signals intelligence (SIGINT) realm wasn't very successful in that area. Without going into too much of that because of classification issues, there were some benefits to collection because no matter where you put somebody ... if we put coalition forces 30 miles north of

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Wanat, we'd get collection from the area around wherever they plop on the ground. Just by having people there, there will always be something we can collect on it. However, we'll achieve that effect no matter where we go. So, we didn't lose anything spectacular intelligence-wise by pulling out of Bella.

(b)(6) Let's get back to the people in the valley living there. Was there any impact from the 4 July helicopter attack by those Apaches? Did you feel that altered perceptions in the valley at all?

BP: No. The amazing thing was the lack of outcry. Yes, some people were mad because some civilians were hurt. No one disputes the fact that there were some civilians there. What was amazing is that almost everyone that was hurt was brought back to Blessing. They conducted first aid on most of them and I think one or two of them were MEDEVAC'd through US means. They found vehicles for the rest through the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and drove them out to Asadabad. We tried to question everyone who was there and one of the common themes was that they were made to do it. They said, "They hopped in our vehicles. They shot at you guys and then they ran back in the vehicles." As the helicopters flew by, I think someone even shot at one of them. It became clear pretty quick that civilians were involved, but they were unwilling participants with the AAF that were conducting an attack. They were put in harm's way and almost used as shields.

(b)(6) Yes. They do that quite a bit.

(b)(6) Hearing that wasn't much of a surprise. I guess it's a good thing that there weren't that many people trying to attack us at that time, but it's unfortunate that civilians were involved. If you accidentally hit a dog that lives around a house, someone is going to come out and ask you for compensation for that dog, even if they didn't care for it. There was almost no outcry from this attack. The universal theme was, "They were shooting at you from our vehicles. It wasn't with our permission, so don't come arrest us. They didn't have our permission." People were almost more concerned with the fact that they knew they weren't willing participants rather than asking for compensation for what was done. That's not something you normally see if it's a blatant mistake done by our side. That was pretty much universal for almost all of Kunar. If we made a big mistake, like have a 120 round go short and it hits someone's house, you better believe that everyone who knows the person who owns that house will be at the base the next day asking for compensation. There was not a large outcry over that incident and that was one of the biggest indicators that the people we were debriefing at Blessing immediately after the incident were telling us what happened. Not everyone came to Blessing, though, because there were four 20- to 30-year-old males who were unaccounted for. When we were talking to everybody, they told us how many people were in the vehicles and there were four males aged 20 to 30 who we couldn't account for. No one would say who they were because they were all scared to talk about it. It wasn't like the valley turned against us after that. I think the majority of those people were from Nishagram.

(b)(6) Did you see a consistent pattern or composition of AAF forces in the valley? Were they moving in and out?

(b)(6) No. Because we didn't have a massive presence in the Waygul and neither did the ANSF, they didn't have a lot of fighters there constantly attacking it. During the winter period, Mullah Osman had pretty much gone into hibernation. When he came back and was ready to get stuff started, he went to his number two guy and said, "I need you to get this done and start doing these big attacks on Bella." After about two months, those attacks didn't happen so he appointed a new number two. That left him with two seconds in command and he was playing them against each other trying to get this attack on Bella to go off. When that happened, they were trying to pull in fighters from other valleys. You'd see reports of fighters being brought in from the Waterpor to assist an attack. Sometimes a small attack would happen and we'd disrupt it because we could identify an engagement prior to them engaging. Sometimes the attack wouldn't happen because they couldn't get funding in time. We'd see evidence of that through different

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'INTs. It was hilarious when you saw it because people just got frustrated and said, "I quit. I'm going home." Then we'd notice there'd be no attacks. There were also fighters being pulled up from other areas. The Korengal has a connection with the Waygul Valley starting back when the Korengalis were kicked out of Nuristan 90 years ago. Sometimes those fighters from the Korengal would go up there. You'd then notice a slight dip in attacks in the Korengal or no activity from certain groups in the Korengal. An attack or two would happen in the Waygul, sometimes different styles of attacks, and then they'd come back down. So, they do bring in fighters from other areas. It's not something that's out of the ordinary.

(b)(6) Were these more regionally-focused fighters rather than the transnational fighters like al-Qaeda or the Taliban?

(b)(6) Most of the people that would fight in this area were not what I'd call foreign fighters who came in from outside of Afghanistan to conduct an attack. I'm not saying it doesn't happen, because we know it does, but it wasn't a common thing in this area. They mainly pulled people in because of family connections. One thing that was very odd around the Bella attack that never actually materialized was that there was a lot of reporting, probably 30 days prior, of foreign fighters coming into Waterpor. Most of the fighters that came into Waterpor were reported to be at a base in the northeastern portion of the Waterpor Valley. There's a safe haven that almost nobody can go into. We went there one time and it was a horrific event. That's where they'd bring these foreigners to. Once we heard about this from five or six different sources, from three different HTTs, we really gave a lot of credibility to the fact that foreign fighters were coming in, but we didn't have any other evidence other than HUMINT reports of it happening. That made us susceptible to a disinformation campaign. We couldn't find bodies of fighters we'd killed that people could confirm were foreign and we didn't get any communications that we could definitely say were foreign in nature. It was important because at that staging ground in the Waterpor, we saw a brief movement of fighters down into the Shuryak to conduct attacks in the Korengal, and that was confirmed through HUMINT and SIGINT. The fighters were kicked out of the Shuryak because they were afraid we were going to blow up their houses. They weren't welcome in the southern Korengal because of tensions that were already there between different groups. One group felt they'd be used against them and the other felt they'd be used against them, so they basically kicked most of the foreigners out of there and they went back to the Waterpor. Most of this happened right before the attack on Bella. I wouldn't be surprised to find more evidence than we had that the foreign fighters had been brought in as an influx for the attack on Bella. That would imply logistical constraints, which they had a lot of, which prevented that attack on Bella from ever happening.

(b)(6) I assume there's a fair amount of support of local fighters.

(b)(6) Yes, and everything is based on money. If you don't have the money, the attack isn't going to happen. You're not going to get fighters from Aranas, Taza (ph), Nishagram, or the upper and lower Waygul. You aren't going to get those guys unless you can pay them. The fighters from the Waterpor and the Korengal, you could probably pull in through connections with certain leaders and there probably is money involved there as well. You're definitely not getting fighters from the Waygul unless you have money to pay them, but there are people who will pay to conduct these attacks.

(b)(6) As you were planning CONOP Rock Move and setting up COP Kahler at Wanat, what was your intelligence estimate and what did you expect the anti-coalition militia (ACM) reaction to that to be? (b)(6); (b)(6)

(b)(6) We knew they were absolutely furious. We'd wanted to do that move since the summer of 2007, but I don't think they got permission to do serious discussion on it until about three months prior. Wanat is kind of like a crossroads. There's the high road coming up from the east, up to Klaygul (ph), which is also a little mountain highway straight over to Kravarsar (ph) and Waterpor. That joins with the Waygul Valley River Road, which goes up north to the west of the Waygul. Wanat is a great crossroads or resting

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stop location where you can meet and bring your stuff through. It's just a good central location. When they first heard we wanted to put stuff there, (b)(3), (b)(6) was absolutely furious. He started his intimidation of the elders and he started it strong. He started sending fighters there and moved some fighters into a small village just to the northeast of it where they set up shop. He did a lot of intimidation on the elders. They even started attacking us as we left Wanat. I know the tactical command post got hit two or three times in the two months prior to setting up Vehicle Patrol Base (VPB) (b)(3), (b)(6). That's something that had happened before but not to this intensity. We hadn't seen the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or anyone shooting RPGs from 30 meters away prior to that. We also had a massive spike in both SIGINT and HUMINT after they said we would be moving there.

(b)(6): That would suggest they were getting ready for you?

(b)(3), (b)(6)

(b)(6): Yes. They were anticipating it, but they didn't know when it was going to happen and we didn't tell them. We had a lot of problems with contracting and getting permission for land. The elders were getting severely intimidated. They'd say, "Have everyone who owns all of this land here for the next meeting," and only half of them would show up. They'd then say, "We're going to come back next week. Have all the people that own this land show up." The other half would show up. There was always a reason why they couldn't get the whole group together. In front of everyone, the best you could get from a leader was neutral. You couldn't get him to openly support it in front of lots of people because they have spies that are there watching all the time. If you talk to them individually or in small groups of two or three, they're all smiles. They'll give you hugs, kiss you on the cheek and tell you you're the greatest thing since sliced bread. At the same time, they'd warn us. They'd say, "We can't agree with you in public. We can't sign documents saying we're going to let you have all this land because it will come back on our families. The best thing for you to do is to take the land from us and reimburse us a year or two down the road. It's a good thing for you to come but we can't help you. We're concerned about our families." I think most of the elders and locals knew what we could bring and what benefits partnering with the government of Afghanistan would eventually bring to the valley, but they were too intimidated to openly support it because of what would happen, not only to them but to their families as well.

(b)(6): What did you know about (b)(3), (b)(6)?

(b)(6): We know a lot about him. On the secure internet protocol router (SIPR) side, if you get into Multimedia Message Manager (M3), do a search for him and you type in Waygul, you will find a lot of information classified Secret on this guy.

(b)(6): What I write is usually open source. I have access to it but I don't use it because we can't. Was he from Afghanistan originally?

(b)(6): Yes. I believe he's Nuristani. We actually had pictures of his house, where he slept and where the guard dogs were. He has a little shack outside of his house about 20 meters away for firewood. We actually tried to get another organization to do a kill-capture on him. We provided them with all the information and they said they were going to go for it, but then they said, "You know, we don't want to go up there." So, we have a lot of information on him. He's a vetted target.

(b)(6): Was he a member of Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) or have a relationship with them?

(b)(6): No. I would classify him as Taliban, but he's not a guy who's like a card-carrying member of any specific organization. There are a lot of guys in the Kunar area who you could say are more of one organization and less of another, but that only means that some of the people he cooperates with identify themselves as Taliban or as HIG. The thing with (b)(6) that he was really the guy in charge up

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there and he'd just do whatever he wanted. He knew he could, too. The only other person who had nearly as much influence as him is (b)(6) (ph). There are multiple (b)(6) (ph), but the one from western Nuristan, not the one from central Nuristan and the Waygul area, was much more important than (b)(6). For this area, though, (b)(6) was the guy in charge. But I won't say he subscribed to a certain belief and went just by that solely off the guidance of the leaders of that group. He didn't have to, either.

Blue (b)(6) Lieutenant (b)(6) was up there at Wanat as the senior officer for most of those first four days. Were you getting a flow of information from him?

Oscar (b)(6) We would get radio updates but not directly from him. We'd get them from Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) and he'd also come down and talk to us, because I don't think he went up there until the day before.

(b)(6) He went up the afternoon of 12 July.

(b)(6) I think on the night of 9 July and sometime on 10 July, he came in and we had some BS session about wargaming stuff. I talked to him about how I thought we'd get attacked if the same groups from Bella came down, which we had all indications that they would. He would tell us how they were doing in terms of force protection and what the elders were saying or not saying. The indications that he was relaying were that the intimidation had been cranked up to 11 and everyone was extremely scared. The people who had once smiled at him and said it was a good idea behind closed doors now wouldn't talk to him at all. Some people were saying, "You're going to get attacked. It's going to happen." But they wouldn't give any actionable information. In these areas, especially if you go somewhere and stay a night or two, to have someone come up and say, "You're going to be attacked," it's kind of like, "Thank you. I know that."

(b)(6) The sun came up this morning, too.

(b)(6) Right.

(b)(6) The 10th Mountain guys told me they got that every day. Someone was always coming up and saying they were going to be attacked, but never with any details.

Blue
Date (b)(6) Right. That was the problem. There wasn't any actionable information. I do believe that Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) was sending out patrols not just based on that information but also on his gut feeling on where he thought he might be attacked. I think (b)(3), (b)(6) may have told me that he would get a bad feeling about a certain area so he'd send out patrols to them. No one came up and said, "You're going to be attacked from the east by this person with this many people with RPGs." The only exception to that was the ^{recruited} recruiting source in that area. I think he made contact twice from the time we established that VPB to when it was actually attacked on the initial attack. Both times he said, "You're going to be attacked." The difference was that he was providing names and who was going to be with them, where they would be attacking from and what they would do. He couldn't say when it was going to happen, though. He'd always say, "I can't believe it hasn't happened yet. It's going to happen any time now." He'd say, "They're going to come from Kalankor (ph), they're going to come from Klaygat (ph)." But all that was doing was confirming what made sense. If you actually laid out the terrain on a map and looked at the elevation and where the enemy and population centers were, he was telling us what made sense, but there was nothing actionable. It wasn't from a lack of effort. I think if they were massing that many people, his freedom of movement was cut off significantly.

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Blue (b)(6) Apparently Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) interrupted a *shura* at the Afghan National Police (ANP) district headquarters on the night of 12 July.

(b)(6) Yes. The one that coalition forces weren't invited to?

(b)(6) Right. What did you hear about that?

(b)(6) That's about what I heard. I also heard that once he did get in there, nobody wanted to talk to him. They were extremely scared. I also heard that some of the people left town right after that *shura*. They weren't able to get us a list of who was at it or pictures of them, but that may have just been because of the lack of digital transmission capability.

(b)(6) They wouldn't have had any way to send that to you anyway.

(b)(6) No. At least not in time. I'm not saying he didn't have that stuff or didn't intend to send it because he very well could have. If so, we could have put it in front of the source and he could have said, "Yes, those are your intimidators." It was too little, too late.

Blue (b)(6) Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) and Captain Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) went to have supper with one of the local elders on 12 July and had a conversation. Did you get any information about that? They would have gotten back pretty late, but did you get a report on that meeting?

(b)(6) No.

(b)(6) I think they got back around 2300 at night. Were you getting any reports about whether the platoon was picking up any enemy movements or activity, people walking around the vicinity?

(b)(6) Yes. In the days prior to the attack, possible reconns had been reported on a near hourly basis. People were observing their positions but not identifying themselves as AAF. They didn't have weapons and weren't showing themselves as a threat. I think he said they detained one or two of them to do initial questioning and asked, "What are you doing? What do you know?" However, they let them go because they didn't have anything legitimate to keep them on for more than just a few minutes. They didn't initially identify anyone they considered a threat. Closer to the actual attack, they identified a five-man element to the west with their Improved Target Acquisition System (ITAS). I don't remember the exact details on that, but I think they were 1,000 feet higher in elevation and approximately a kilometer to their west. They were in a position that would give them excellent observation into the VPB. Those were the first people they identified, but I don't think they were initially able to engage them because they couldn't identify weapons; but right before the enemy initiated they had declared positive identification based off patterns of life and I think they had received something off the integrated communications (ICOM) scanner indicating they were about to be attacked. I don't think they were able to even get the first round off before the attack occurred.

(b)(6) No, they didn't The soldiers have told me that they actually had a missile loaded in the TOW launcher and the 120 laid on, but they were not able to execute the attack before they got hit.

(b)(6) Those are the only people I know they positively identified, but I know they saw others and watched them reconning them. They tried to make note of it but there's only so much we can do because of our restrictive rules of engagement.

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(b)(6) Did you get a feel for the composition of the force and its leadership that actually launched the attack?

(b)(6) Yes. The overall command and control was (b)(6). Commander (b)(6) (ph) was one of his real big guys for a long time. He's been basically his second in command. (b)(3), (b)(6) (ph) was in there but I think he actually died. I can give you a whole bunch of people if you're interested.

(b)(6): Okay. It's probably best if you just email that.

(b)(6) The CDs that just got mailed today have a lot of my emails on them that went back and forth about this. I know one of my emails has a very detailed list. There are about 10 commanders and a whole bunch of real buttheads from up in this area. These are the sub-commanders who coordinated with fighters from other areas. (b)(6) (ph) came down from Jamamesh (ph) and (b)(6) (ph) brought guys in from Aranas. Multiple people came in from Klaygar (ph) as well as people from the Korengal and Waterpor. For each one of these sub-commanders, they bring 10 to 15 guys with them and that quickly adds up to a lot of people.

(b)(6) So this force was certainly larger than company strength. Do you think it was about 200 or 300 guys?

(b)(6) I wouldn't say as high as 300, but 200 isn't an unrealistic estimate. From the initial information, we put it around 115. We found out later on through HUMINT that not everyone actually initiated. This battle happened in multiple phases and on the initial engagement, not all the different sub-commanders were in position and ready to attack. It's not unlike one of our movements at Ranger School where you think it takes a certain amount of time to move a bunch of tired, hungry individuals carrying weapons. Not everyone gets it right on their first try. Some of the sub-commanders weren't as experienced as others and some of them were late. When the initial engagement happened, I think they may have initiated with only about 100 to 125. Additional groups came in and you could see a resurgence as people were being brought in. A lot of them grabbed casualties and started evacuating them to the various field hospitals that were quickly overwhelmed because there were so many casualties, and there was an influx of ammunition. That occurred a couple hours after the initial engagement. People had gone from initiating with fire superiority but they were quickly overwhelmed by what was coming back out of the FOB. They were able to throw grenades but eventually turned to throwing rocks because they were running out of ammunition. As they pulled out, an additional wave of fighters and sub-commanders who weren't able to get into the initial push brought their ammunition with them. That resulted in a slight spike in firing again. By this time, our reinforcements had shown up and we had CAS and close combat attack (CCA) on station, which were both actually fairly responsive. Not as responsive as everyone wishes they always were, but they were actually fairly responsive considering the situation. With those additional assets, people that were showing up later in the fight, even if it was 30 minutes to three hours later, weren't as effective and they weren't able to make significant contributions, other than help to evacuate wounded and provide ammo to shoot while they did it.

(b)(6) Did you get a feel for what the ACM objectives were and how they actually conducted the attack?

(b)(6) The goal was to drive coalition forces out of Wanat. That was the desired endstate. They wanted to get rid of coalition forces at all costs. I think there were several HUMINT reports where they actually say those words. "Throw everything you have at Wanat. Get rid of this place." It was going to be a significant hindrance to their freedom of movement in the Waygul Valley. As far as the tactical play, we do have information from HUMINT reporting and some from SIGINT placing certain commanders in certain areas with their fighters. We know they used the low ground with the water coming in from the east as

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well as the river running north-south to conceal their movement, both visual and for sound as they walked over the shale and rocks in the area. We do know they had OPs up on the west. Not just the one that was spotted but we found another one through other intelligence that was way high up the mountain. The mountain forms a natural bowl and they came to the lip of it so they could drop back behind it. There was also another command and control position up on a mountain top between Kamkalay (*ph*) and Muladesh (*ph*). We identified that with SIGINT and I think we struck it with the Predator about eight or nine hours into the fight and got casualties as a result. As a matter of fact, an important leader was killed there but I can't remember who it was. Through the use of the different 'INTs we had available, we were able to detect different command and control locations and map out where some of the sub-commanders took their guys through. We had a forward arming and refueling point (FARP) right there on Blessing and the Apaches were going through. I don't remember how many times they went black on ammo but they were shooting pretty much everything they had. When they came back to the FARP, we'd either meet them at the helicopter landing zone, I think I met them there twice, or the pilots would come up. That happened two or three times. We did debriefs between their runs back up into the valley. I had a big blow-up map and they'd point to it and say, "I blew up this house, this house and this house. We left this one alone. The ground forces were blowing up this house." They were telling us where all these fighting positions were while the fighting was still going on. We pretty quickly got a good guesstimate on the enemy strength, current positions, and more importantly the routes they were going to have to use to get to their aid stations and areas of support. We targeted those for the next 12 to 18 hours.

(b)(6) How many ACM KIAs did you guys recover?

(b)(6) I don't remember. I tend to not play in the dead body realm too much past trying to identify them. I can't remember. For cultural reasons, we tended not to handle their KIAs. I think there was some limit to handling them, but for the most part I think the commando battalion or the Afghan National Army (ANA) platoon that was with them did most of the handling of the dead bodies. I bet the guys that were there could talk to that much better than I could.

(b)(6) I was just wondering if you were able to do any identification of nationality or anything like that.

(b)(6) I had a law enforcement professional (LEP) over there named (b)(6). He actually just left Afghanistan two or three weeks ago. He was there at the same time and he was in charge of trying to identify the KIAs, which I don't think we were able to do anyway. Our Paladin rep, (b)(6) tried to help us with that also. Just as important, we tried to identify the people who used the weapons we'd recovered. We recovered a lot of weapons and he was a cop before he came to support us. I think he fingerprinted every single piece of equipment, over 300 pieces, in an attempt to put them into the biometrics program. We left less than a month afterwards, and by that time there hadn't been any feedback on that yet.

(b)(6) Did you have any feel of them trying to do any type of information operations (IO) objectives, such as capturing an American or capturing equipment?

(b)(6) Yes. I think that's what they were trying to do at OP Topside. I think they thought it was going to be an easy snatch-and-grab but it obviously wasn't. The guys up there had to reinforce it a lot and they took a lot of casualties as well. They weren't able to actually penetrate the wire and get anyone from that objective. I do think they wanted to, but I don't think that was the overall goal. The goal wasn't to snatch-and-grab and get out of there. The goal was to drive coalition forces out of there. I think on a sub-command level, they had to at least be looking at that prize.

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(b)(6): Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets were mostly withdrawn from you on the 12th because of other things going on in Afghanistan. How did you react to that? Do you feel that had any influence on the engagement?

~~_____~~
(b)(6): That was ridiculous. I think as early as 10 July, they identified that we weren't going to have any Predator coverage starting on 12 July. The problem was that it was days into the whole move. As the second-to-last helicopter lifted off in Bella, you could watch the locals flood in to see if there was anything scavenge-able. The fact that that helicopter wasn't shot down almost destroyed any chances we had of getting any real support for the rest of the operation. Nothing shiny happened. Everyone thought things were going exactly as we planned and that we had it all under control. People started losing interest. The one big downside of briefing six-, seven- and eight-day operations, which we did based off the moon cycle and getting assets, is that everyone in front of the deputy commanding general for operations (DCGO) says, "That's right, sir. We're going to support. We're going to give them these assets. This is how we can help. This is what we're doing to support the warfighter." The second something shiny comes along in another location, though, they totally shift focus and forget about all the promises that were made and all the plans that we had gone into with them. "You said you were going to give us support here. You raised your hand and said, 'This is what we can provide.' We made plans with that information." The fact that they were pulling assets ... as early as 10 July they were forecasting not having anything for us in terms of full motion video (FMV). I think they still provided three or four hours of SIGINT coverage but in this area that's not sufficient. Another limitation we had was that since the mountains are so ridiculously high, the brigade-level FMV assets couldn't go there.

(b)(6): Right. I understand the Shadow couldn't even fly into the Waygul Valley.

(b)(6): You could get a good picture four kilometers south of the valley, or you could get the aircraft four kilometers south of the valley. You could technically see the village, but that's like trying to identify a certain tree when you're looking at a whole mountain. When you're that far away and because of the limitations you have flying at max altitude, you don't get a good picture you can use, so the Shadow wasn't an option. It didn't help. This was a major point of contention. I already sent you most of my emails regarding this stuff so you can pull them up. This was a point of contention between me and Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) even got unprofessional with him the day before the attack happened because we were losing so many assets and had so little support. He was doing the best he could and in turn was doing the same thing to division. He was demanding the support we weren't getting, but we weren't the priority anymore because it wasn't flashy.

(b)(6): Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) told me that, "The battalion S2 got pretty hot."

(b)(6): That's an understatement. *(Laughter)* I think there were six people in the office and about once a minute one person was getting up and walking out because they didn't want to be witnessing the conversation.

(b)(6): So as of 12 July, when the attack force was moving into their assault positions, you had no effective ISR, correct?

(b)(6): With the exception of the ground-based ITAS. We had no support from brigade-, division- or theater-level assets at the time. They were actually moving into position when the attack happened.

(b)(6): Were the assets at the COP direct line of sight assets?

(b)(6): Yes.

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(b)(6): I understand that you had the little organic Raven system but it had limited capabilities.

(b)(6): Yes. It had very limited capabilities, but it's actually more of a liability in an area like this. The way the valleys are naturally formed can lead to certain gusts of wind coming through there that are much faster than what the Raven can handle, which can make them crash. When that happened, you had to send a patrol out to go get it. If you don't get it, it's an IO win for the enemy because they captured US military equipment. Although you could use them in certain areas and get a good picture, in others like the Waterpor, Waygul, Korengal or Shuryak that had those deep, deep valleys, it wasn't useful.

(b)(6): I was told by the operators at Fort Drum that updrafts and crosswinds were causing a lot of problems. You get all sorts of those winds in the valley.

BP: Right, and they'll hit you fast. Fast enough to make your heart skip a beat if you're flying in a Blackhawk. Imagine what it does to a Raven.

(b)(6): You couldn't have brought one up to Wanat and gotten anything useful out of it?

(b)(6): No. They wouldn't have used it. Chosen Company knew their surroundings. They wouldn't have even pulled it out of the box.

(b)(6): Was there any chance that it would function better at night when the winds were calmer?

(b)(6): Not really. You have to remember that there are really steep mountains on both sides, so the area where you can operate that thing in is very limited. The other thing about the mountains in that area is that I'm pretty sure they have a high iron content. That really messes up the signals. Ground-based SIGINT has an extremely tough time in the Waygul Valley and I think they had problems obtaining link with the Raven they had at Bella before. They were getting so much interference from the sides of the mountains that stuff like that wasn't feasible.

(b)(6): Is there anything else you'd like me to know about the engagement at Wanat?

(b)(6): I guess everyone has talked about the actions of the soldiers there. No one can argue that what they did was unbelievable. The biggest thing I can talk about that no one else can is that this was a known enemy. We knew they were going to attack. We'd received a lot of reports saying they were going to attack. The guys on the ground knew they were going to get hit, too, at least eventually. Knowing all that, the fact that all that support was pulled away was absolutely unbelievable. I'm not trying to point fingers at any one person, but I wish it could be ingrained in people when they show up at an echelon where they are assets providers, that when they make commitments ... I understand that things come up and we need to change, but the second- and third-order effects of those changes need to be seriously evaluated. Sometimes the battalion commander needs to have more ability to weigh into those decisions and not just leave it in the hands of the staffers at brigade and division level. Us finding out that we just lost assets two hours after it happened, that decision was made, we should have been given a chance to weigh in on that stuff. I firmly believe this situation could have been prevented. We had enough information and given the resources, we could have disrupted this attack. We'd done similar things in Bella. We detected infil for what was supposed to be a major attack on more than one occasion and disrupted it. We could have done it here at Wanat, too, but we didn't get the assets to do it.

Diamond (b)(6) Did Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) get involved in trying to get the assets restored?

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(b)(6): Yes, he did, but it was reactive. He didn't get that courtesy call from the DCGO and I didn't get the courtesy call from the division G2, Bayonet 2, saying, "We're about to pull these assets for these reasons. Do you want to weigh in?" Everything I got and everything Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) got at the brigade level was all reactive. It was all, "We've already made these decisions and you're going to have to deal with it." Brigade had a pretty good picture of what was in our area. Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) was all over that and he could talk about this area intelligently, I'm sure, but I know division couldn't. We'd seen products division had made before and we had areas across our battlespace where they would brief the commanding general (CG) and say, "There have been no enemy attacks in the last 90 days in this area." I'm talking on the border, seven or eight TICs including small arms fire engagements. Almost constantly the division intelligence picture of what was going on in the area was wrong. I can almost guarantee that the CG or the DCGO were making decisions on placing assets in certain places based off bad information. If I'd had the chance to say to General Milley, "This is what the enemy situation is," and right after I said that, Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) could say, "Sir, these are the impacts to my operations. This is how I'll have to change things for the ground tactical plan." If we could have done that, I do not think anyone would have made the decision to pull assets from us, but we were never given the chance.

Foxtrot

Foxtrot

Diamond

(b)(6): That's good information. In fact, in early June I'm scheduled to talk to the division G2. I will try to elaborate on what you just said.

Alpha

(b)(3), (b)(6)
(b)(6) Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6)

(b)(6) Yes. I've already talked to the division operations officer (G3) and didn't get much, quite frankly. Did you expect a full-scale attack or did you think they'd do intelligence gathering and harassment fire initially?

Oscar

(b)(6): That was something Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) and I disagreed about. He expected harassment fire and I thought they'd do a large-scale attack. That was based off the leadership involved. (b)(3), (b)(6) kind of gets mad at little attacks. He liked stuff like the Ranch House. He'd already looked at replacing (b)(3), (b)(6) (ph) from Jamamesh (ph) with Commander (b)(3), (b)(6) (ph) because (b)(3), (b)(6) (ph) had been unable to successfully pull off a large attack on Bella. That's what he wanted. He wanted a large-scale attack and that's what I thought he was going to bring down to Wanat. I obviously had no clue that they'd be as successful as they were and cause as much damage to us as they did. I didn't think that was possible, so in that aspect I probably underestimated them. I didn't think there would be harassment attacks, and a large part of that was because of the location the VPB went into. Doing harassment attacks right next to a lot of people's houses over a long term would significantly degrade the AAF's ability to work with the locals or even intimidate them. Eventually they would just get fed up, and that had been happening in other areas of the Korengal, which used to be completely AAF dominated. If they could come in and do a spectacular attack, something everyone takes note of and they could stand up, shake their fists afterwards and say, "We were successful." Of course they can mold their definition of success, but for them to stand up and say, "We were successful," and for the locals to believe them, that's what they needed in that area in order for them to achieve victory and get us driven out of there. They had to do a big attack. I don't think we completely agreed on that one, but neither one of us had definitive information to say one way or another. Both courses of action were definitely plausible and both courses of action had a million variances of how it could have actually happened.

(b)(6): Did you have any input into the decision to withdraw from Wanat?

(b)(6) Yes. I was asked what my assessment was of it. I thought we should have stayed. A large reason for that was the IO piece, because that was going to come out of it for them. We did spin it and said, "The elders said they're going to secure it. There was an agreement on it." My personal opinion was that

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despite the sacrifice, I thought we should have stayed in some form. That didn't mean it had to be US soldiers. It could have meant ANSF. But I thought we needed to keep some sort of presence there. Every source that had information, had access to Wanat, was extremely happy that we had gone there. They could not quit saying enough good things about what we were going to do being at Wanat and the level of disruption we were already achieving. From an intelligence-gathering point of view and from us disrupting AAF movement, which normally generates more intelligence, I wanted to stay. I relayed my opinion on it and I think it was taken into consideration, but eventually the decision was made that the people in the valley really didn't want anything to do with ANSF or coalition forces. We'd had major attacks at each base we've had up there and they continued lying to us, so they wanted to pull out.

(b)(6): What command level was that decision made at?

(b)(6) The command level to pull out of the other ones was brigade commander. I knew we couldn't pull out of Bella until we were given permission to. I can't definitively say who had to say yes or no, but I'm 95 percent sure that it was Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) position to have us pull out of there. I'm not totally sure if he was the one who said yes or no, though. Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) may have had some level of say in it as well. I just don't know. Most of that discussion was probably between the commanders or between the field grades and the commanders.

Diamond

Delta

(b)(6) I've gotten the idea that the decision was all commander-to-commander with little staff involvement.

BP: I was asked my opinion. It wasn't like the intelligence portion was completely blown off. I did have a chance to weigh in.

(b)(6): How did the loss of Wanat affect your operations in the valley?

(b)(6) I think Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) went back up in the valley and reengaged the locals. There were some complications. We did place under confinement (PUC) the district governor. I'm sure that was going to cause some problems long term. He was just a dirtbag. The ANP had shown themselves to be completely useless, so there were definitely some concerns with that and we actually kept their weapons. I knew there was going to be some blowback from it, but I can't speak intelligently on what happened long term with our operations in the valley because we did leave about three weeks after the assault.

Oscar

(b)(6): When are you coming back home?

(b)(6) I'm actually waiting on orders now. I may be heading to the DC area sometime in the next couple weeks or I may stay in this job until about halfway through the next deployment and then move back to the DC area a year from now. I don't know yet.

(b)(6) Do you know who you'll be working with in DC? Can you even say?

(b)(6) I probably shouldn't talk about it.

(b)(6) I understand. If you ever get out this way, please let me know. I owe you a beer and a cigar.

(b)(6) I wouldn't mind coming by to see some of the work you guys have done.

(b)(6) Our Staff Ride team has done very detailed modeling of the location. In fact, I'm trying to get Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) who was one of the guys from 2nd Platoon who was out there, released from Fort Riley to do a detailed review of what we've done. It's so detailed that we actually have individual rocks

Maple

and trees placed. I'm up to about 250 pages now and I'm still talking to people and getting information, trying to unravel it all. As a historian, I'm used to writing about (b)(6) from 200 years ago. If I say something bad about Jeffrey Amherst, maybe I'll see his ghost in few years. This time I'm dealing with people who are still in command and still out there and you don't want to hurt people's careers or sensibilities. It's a very complex thing. I have a pretty good comprehension of the engagement from our standpoint, but the real story is how this platoon got put in this position and what was going on with the counterinsurgency in the Waygul Valley.

(b)(3), (b)(6)

(b)(6) Another person you may want to contact who could tell you more about the people in the Waygul is Staff Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6). He was the HTT 06 team leader but not during the engagement. I was successfully able to fire the guy who was the team leader during the engagement about two weeks later. Not because of his performance during the engagement but because he couldn't do his job correctly. Staff Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) did collect on this valley for a long time and he could give you more information about Doodah (ph), whose real name I don't even know, who was the team leader before him. They were responsible for HUMINT collection in the valley. He's still in but I don't remember which battalion he's with.

Pulma

Pulma

Hawk

(b)(6) Okay. I'll try to get in touch with him. I also just talked to Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) who was the battalion commander beforehand.

(b)(6) I'd love to see whatever you end up putting together, if that's possible.

(b)(6) Certainly. I'll keep in touch with you. I'll review the data you sent me and get back to you with any questions for clarification purposes. This interview will be transcribed and I'll send it to you for your review and approval before we actually start using it here. This interview will be used here for my project and then at some point it will be provided to the Center of Military History that has a data-gathering effort for all the Global War on Terrorism.

(b)(6) One thing we just did was to take all the people from the S2 shop and went off and played intel by ourselves for a week, training on our systems. We used the Battle of Wanat and compared it against the old British book, *The Defence of Duffer's Drift*. We used that as a tool to show and teach intel folks how to make potential recommendations to commanders.

(b)(6) I'd certainly like to see that. Did you have any written results of that?

BP: No. It was all discussion. We reviewed the British book and then we reviewed much of the same stuff we talked about here for the Battle of Wanat, then using the benefit of hindsight and what we actually know happened, how we'd make recommendations. It was a good critical thinking exercise on looking at real-world scenarios and how to do things better in the future.

DC: Fantastic.

BP: I have to get going now.

DC: Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by (b)(6)

