

Interview with MAJ (b)(3), (b)(6) Red
2 July 2009

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) My name is (b)(3), (b)(6) and I'm a historian for the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Today I'm interviewing Major (b)(3), (b)(6) who was the executive officer (XO) for 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry (2-503) with the 173rd Airborne Brigade during their deployment to Afghanistan from 2007 through 2008. Today's date is 2 July 2009 and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, if you feel at any time we're entering classified territory, please couch your response in terms that avoid revealing any classified information. If classification requirements prevent you from responding, simply say you're not able to answer. Let's start with some background. Where did you get your commission? What experience do you have in the Army? Red

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I was the Task Force Rock XO. We had over 1,200 US soldiers part of the task force as well as an additional 2,500 Afghan National Security Forces which included the police, Afghan National Army as well as other Afghan enablers like the local police chiefs and government officials that were part of that. This was during Operation Enduring Freedom VIII. That was our designated rotation and it was a 15-month deployment. I was actually there in its entirety for 16 months since I went first and came back last. I was commissioned in 1994 from John Carroll University as an infantry officer. I've been in the Army for 15 years. I served as the 2-503 XO for 22 months, of which 16 of that was as the Task Force Rock XO. Prior to that, I was on the Southern European Task Force staff awaiting my time to go down to the Rock.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Have you done any other deployments aside this one to Afghanistan?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes. Prior to going to combined task force (CTF) I was at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC), and prior to that I was in the 101st as a captain where I had three commands. I commanded in the Rakkasans, the 3rd Brigade, in 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry. Headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) was my first command and I deployed that company to the very first Operation Enduring Freedom, probably before it was even named OEF. We deployed to Jacobabad, Pakistan after 9-11 to secure the air base. My unit deployed in November 2001 and I deployed in January 2002. I returned in May 2002 and took command of Charlie Company in the same battalion. I deployed that battalion for the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. I returned in June 2003 to take command of the division's air assault school. I deployed that school in September 2003 and we returned in December 2003 after completing four months of training and awarding the air assault badge to those students in the course who met the standards. I stayed on with the school but in May 2004 I was picked up to be the new commanding general's aide de camp. I did that for a year and then went to CGSC and all the other places where I ended up in Italy. Even prior to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, I was at Fort Drum, New York where I was a company XO and battalion logistics officer (S4). Prior to Fort Drum, I was in Korea as a very brand new second lieutenant. I was a platoon leader and XO in a mechanized unit for then Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) who was then my battalion commander when I was his XO in 2-503. I got to serve with him again. He's been a mentor and close personal friend since 1995. I'm currently at the 5th Ranger Training Battalion. I failed to mention that prior to going to Fort Campbell I was at the 4th Ranger Training Battalion down at Fort Benning, Georgia. I was in that unit for a year and then served on the brigade staff for a year prior to going to Fort Campbell. So it really goes Korea, Fort Drum, Fort Benning for the career course, and I stayed at Fort Benning for the Ranger Training Battalion (RTB). Then I went to Fort Campbell, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and Italy. Now I'm back at the RTB but I'm at the mountain phase in Dahlonega, Georgia at the 5th RTB. I served from January until June as the XO and now I'm the XO for the battalion. Diamond

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Who were you with at Fort Drum?

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Red (b)(3), (b)(6) 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry (2-87).

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) I was 2-87's fire support officer when you were in junior high. I was in 2-87 when it was a mech unit.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) The Catamounts.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Well, I was there before they were the Catamounts. I was there when they were the Kill Tank Battalion in Germany. That's quite a long time ago, I'm afraid. I started off as a fire support officer for Charlie Company, 2-87 and then I became the battalion fire support officer (FSO).

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I was in Bravo Company.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) I visited them in Afghanistan, which was kind of interesting. Anyway, it sounds like you've had a lot of deployment experience and you'd been to Afghanistan previously.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) That's right. I'd been to both countries.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) When did you get to the 2-503?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I arrived there in February 2007 while the unit was up in Grafenwhor going through a field training exercise (FTX) and some platoon live-fires. That's when I took over as Rock 5.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) You took over just about the time that you discovered the mission was changing from Iraq to Afghanistan.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) That's correct. As I recall, we got the official word on that in March when we were doing our mission rehearsal exercise (MRE). I took a period of leave in April and then I deployed with a five-man advanced echelon (ADVON) on 27 April. That's when I got on a bus to Aviano and flew out of Italy into Manas. We waited there for two days and then I arrived at Bagram on the 29th.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) It sounds like you didn't have much of a chance to really settle in before you had to get on the airplane.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) You're right. We used what was remaining of the FTX and it all started to come together in the MRE. The battalion was clearly ready and was head and shoulders, perhaps even light years, ahead of the other battalions in the brigade as far as being ready to deploy and execute our mission. We knew from the day we did our transfer of authority (TOA), and we TOAed early, on the recommendations of Colonel

Delta (b)(3), (b)(6) and it was approved at the four-star level. We TOAed almost a week early on 5 June 2007 because of the staff, the way we handled the unit and how we took over the battle space. We knew we'd be ready to get after it, and we were.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Was your battalion headquarters always at Blessing or were you at Asadabad (A-had) for a while?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) No. I spent my entire time at Camp Blessing. I ran the tactical operations center (TOC) and I considered that TOC mine. We were very proud of it. We eventually transitioned it to have all NCOs in there. We originally had a day battle captain, who was a captain, and the night battle captain was a sergeant first class. We eventually transitioned to having all NCOs including manning the fires desk with NCOs. The officers would come in as needed to help synchronize fires and whatever else was needed. I was always available on Camp Blessing. The operations officer (S3) was sometimes out of the wire with

Diamond

Rock 6, Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) but that was my TOC and I was the one who went to bed every night with the Icom radio. The TOC would call me if they saw anything on the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) or if there was a requirement for clearance of fires. I would be the one notified and I would come in and do that. If Major (b)(3), (b)(6) was available, or if the colonel himself was on Blessing and available, he would do it. The actual lethal part, the combat operations, was my responsibility. I considered myself current operations and Major (b)(3), (b)(6) really focused on future ops and future plans. Major (b)(3), (b)(6) would come in and do the fight as needed, particularly if it was something more than a couple of pot shots or if it was a significant troops in contact (TIC) like Wanat was. I was also responsible for synchronizing the efforts of our base defense through the operations sergeant major as well as all of the infrastructure improvements we did to make quality of life better for us and our Afghan partners who lived on Blessing with us. I was responsible for all of the contracting that occurred. I had to ensure the contracts were correct and that the contracts that each of the companies had were executed, turned in and then I'd fight for funding approval through the brigade with the contracting approval authorities. The joint facilities utilization board (JFUB) would do monthly meetings to go over approval of funding for certain projects, be it a force protection wall or helicopter landing zone (HLZ) improvements or putting in a forward ammunition and refueling point (FARP) or putting in a dining facility (DFAC). I was able to get funding to put a DFAC on Blessing while I was there. I did erosion control, sanitary stuff and all of those municipal responsibilities we kind of take for granted in the cities we live in. There are certainly municipal requirements but we contracted for fuel and water through the Afghans we hired. Incidentally, regarding Wanat, we hired and contracted for heavy equipment since the Army's engineer heavy equipment wasn't available. Because there weren't any indications of an imminent attack at Wanat we were very comfortable with contracting local national heavy equipment to go up to that combat outpost and begin filling HESCOs, leveling the area and doing all of the things that the engineers said needed to be done as part of their site survey months earlier. They had surveyed and drew up plans for building that COP to make it sustainable so they could fight from it and live out of it which included the construction of hard huts and everything else. Since there was an initial occupation of that terrain, it was collocated next to the bazaar. That was the best piece of terrain we had where we could co-op with the local nationals and attempt to establish a presence in that part of the Waygul Valley. It was better to be there instead of so far north up in Bella where our logistical resupply was constantly strained. It was hard for us to resupply that area. For Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) it was a matter of force protection and extending his lines of communication (LOCs) in order to protect Blessing. There was no real population up there that we could really influence. We wanted to get off of Bella sooner but there just wasn't the command emphasis at the brigade level to do that. We knew we needed to get off of Bella prior to us handing over the battle space to Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) and the 1st Infantry Division (ID) when they arrived. That relief in place (RIP) became a forcing function for us to get the hell off of Bella so they wouldn't have to inherit the challenges that we had the entire deployment with resupplying that place or getting a generator up there if their generator broke down. If they came into a significant TIC of some sort, like what happened with the Aranus ambush on 9 November, our ability to mass combat power up there was so limited. All we could do was provide fires. We were aviation-centric. At least at Wanat we had a ground LOC, just like with all our other combat outposts. Aviation would still be a significant means of being able to resupply that COP quickly and efficiently. It made a lot of sense to move it to that area. (b)(3), (b)(6) had gone up into that valley numerous times to talk to the locals and the elders, the same elders who turned on us, to try and pave the way. We knew, and Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) knew, that there was just something different in the personalities of those local nationals in that valley. They were much more anti-coalition or -American than some of the other outposts we had. I think that was due to their isolation and the fact that they'd just rather do things the way they did them on their own. We knew that if they were given the choice they would rather facilitate Taliban operations rather than assisting us with our operations or those of the Afghan National Police up that way. We now know that the Afghan National Police (ANP) was completely in bed with the Taliban and the elders up there who influenced and coached them to do wrong prior to and up to the day of the attack. There was a lot of research and analysis that went into occupying the area and ensuring we had the right resources to be able to quickly establish that combat outpost as well as defend from it and build it up so we could operate from it in order to influence

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the population. We also wanted to put a paved road up to Wanat where we intended to stop it. Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) said that roads were the key and he was absolutely right. The roads along the Pesh River Valley really opened up a part of Kunar Province that had never seen the benefits of having a paved road, or even an improved gravel road. This improved road allowed commerce and transportation and access to a part of Afghanistan, Asadabad and Jalalabad that many of these extremely isolated villages had never seen before. The Pesh river road went from being a donkey trail several centuries ago to being improved by the Russians to us actually paving it. That was a huge infrastructure improvement that gave us freedom of movement but also benefited the local population tremendously as well. As we left, there were light posts going up and businesses going in and that was all due to the roads. We were trying to connect Waygul and give them a chance. We were trying to give them a chance to join the government and be a part of making things better for Afghans, not for Americans or my unit. We were trying to make things better for them and connecting them to other opportunities that these people at Bella, Wanat and Wanat really had no exposure to. ~~The decision for the attack was made by General Schloesser, the Combined Joint Task Force-101 (CJTF-101) commander, with recommendations from Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) and Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) to pull out of there once the attack occurred.~~ It can be debated as to whether or not the enemy was defeated that day. I'd say yes. Was the cost to us huge? Yes. Strategically, did the enemy probably win? Yes, because we pulled out of that area. Will we go back into that area? Yes. I think there are plans to do that. In the short term they may have gained what they needed, but in the long term, we'll eventually establish a foothold up there with more combat power. ~~We had no intelligence or human intelligence (HUMINT) or signal intelligence (SIGINT), and we were masters at it by this point in the deployment.~~ We were just three weeks before our TOA and we were masters at collecting that data, analyzing it and operationalizing it. We could use that data to conduct an operation, to thwart it, to provide aerial assets to observe it, or for our ability to be able to listen to it in order to monitor it so we could have some predictability as to enemy movements throughout the area. We had no indications that I can recollect that there would be a massive attack that morning of the scale and scope and planning that caused us to be kicked out of there. I think if we were going to stay there, we would have stayed there, but because of the risk to mission and force of the brand new unit coming in, ~~General Schloesser wasn't willing to put his name on it. There was no additional benefit to go up into Waygul at that period of time.~~ This was an initiative we did as a result of the TOA because we needed to get off Bella. Bella protected Blessing because the ~~flies, the Taliban and local fighters, tended to go to Bella and we were able to defend in depth 15 kilometers north of Blessing instead of seven kilometers north of Blessing, which is where Wanat was located.~~ We could still cover any TIC or ~~crime~~ through the 155 battery we had at Blessing and with the 120 mortar we ended up putting at Blessing. We could provide plenty of indirect fires to include any of the close air support (CAS) or Apache helicopter support that was needed to provide close combat attack (CCA) for any of our ~~soldiers~~ or TICs. We did that daily throughout the deployment. We tried to co-op with the locals. Many of the locals knew Waygul. The good people, those who are just good Afghans in general, would be in the valley areas, close to the roads and up in some of the villages. It was part of our command and control (C2) template that the Taliban would be farther up in the valley and up in the hills because it provided them isolation so they'd have better freedom of movement because we weren't up there. We just didn't have the combat power to be everywhere at any one time. Bella and Wanat became an economy of force for us. Did Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) over extend? At the time, no. That's where he needed to be because Blessing was still a fairly young combat outpost that was growing into a forward operating base (FOB). It was kind of a FOB minus. It didn't quite have the 500 people you needed in order to quantify it as a FOB. It was certainly more than just your rinky dink combat outpost. It was a battalion-sized C2 node and we could do everything that we needed to do from Blessing to support anyone in area of operations (AO) Rock at anytime. We were even able to support soldiers up in the Nuray area, which we had to do numerous times to help 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry (1-91) when they got into the thick of it.

Hawk

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Red

(b)(3), (b)(6)'s funny that you mentioned Ranch House. When we took over from Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) we were all like, "Holy Moly! What are we going to do with these two combat outposts?" When we took over they were still lightly defended. 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (1-32) did a superb job setting us up for success when it came time for TOA. They allowed us to TOA into combat outposts that we could defend from. But they were tired, just like we were tired when we left. Our fresh energy came in and we were doing immediate force protection at all of our locations, particularly at Ranch House and Bella. That meant tons and tons of supplies. I couldn't even tell you how much. You could probably ask Captain (b)(3), (b)(6). When you talk to him you're going to get the benefit of two perspectives. He was Chosen 5 when they actually pulled off. He was the company XO because Chosen was up that way. He was the company XO that would daily, or when needed, resupplied both Bella and Ranch House. He was also the XO who executed the retrograde, closure and eventual burning down of Ranch House not long after the Ranch House attack occurred. We had been itching to get off the Ranch House anyway but the only reason Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) went there was because the enemy was there. He said, "Okay. I'll just take this from you." And that's just what he did. When we TOAed in there that's where we TOAed in to. The ability of those guys to be able to defend the Ranch House was due to the efforts of Staff Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) at the time Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) and his NCOs and soldiers. They put in great old school defenses to be able to defend the Ranch House. Although the enemy ended up penetrating that perimeter it was never overrun. A lot of people say it was but it was not. Considerably more Taliban showed up than we actually had occupying the Ranch House. The Ranch House and Bella became the most dangerous, the hardest and most challenging logistical operation that we did. We didn't resupply them daily but whenever we had a Pesh resupply there would be legs that we would schedule in order to take sling loads up to Bella as well as the Ranch House. The HLZ was basically the school house where all of that stuff got dropped off at Ranch House. Those resupplies were done at tremendous risk to the soldiers on the ground as well as to the aviators. I give them all the credit. They must have had brass balls in order to fly up that very narrow valley and would routinely take pot shots and get rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) launched at them. That became a significant emotional issue for us. As those aerial threats occurred, we were forced to do more to attempt to throw the enemy off balance to maintain that air LOC since we had no ground LOC that we could use with humvees. You could take the little Toyota jingle trucks up there and we did. We actually had a water delivery contract where we contracted for the little Hilux to drive up there with water and other general supplies. If someone took those we really didn't care but it was actually a very good contract that provided us some flexibility. We maintained 30 day's supply of water and all of that stuff up there at those locations. We'd get a basic load plus of 120 ammunition and all the other Department of Defense Ammunition Codes (DODACs) of ammunition that the boys would shoot at any one time. We were always having to resupply ammo. We would pay very close attention to the weather and would have to synchronize if and when they were doing a patrol outside the wire. We had to make sure they had the illumination to support MEDEVAC and that the weather supported aerial assets to support them if they got into a TIC of some sort. Although fog had moved in earlier, when Ranch House occurred it had lifted and they were able to get those A10s in there that eventually did the gun runs that thwarted that attack. That was due to the efforts of Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) who was later killed two months later in the Aranus ambush. Aerial resupply up the Waygul Valley was the most dangerous logistical mission we did during 90 percent of our Pesh resupplies. There were some times when we could not execute legs or flights up there due to the prioritization that we had. If I knew they were good on ammo, hadn't had a TIC in three weeks, and they had plenty of water and chow, then I would focus on the Komegal Valley and push aviation assets into that valley. They were constantly consuming more ammunition, fuel and everything else than the other combat outposts combined. They were in multiple TICs daily and their ammunition consumption was outrageous but required. We had a very precarious ground LOC that my forward support element (FSE), commanded by Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) and First Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) handled. They did a phenomenal job with the COP resupplies they did by ground using five-ton jingle trucks and his up-armored humvee gun trucks to escort everything from mail to ammo. He carried it all on those four by four jingle trucks. In fact, one of his drivers lost his life due to an improvised explosive device (IED) going up that road. We had to maintain that ground LOC to keep (b)(3), (b)(6)

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(b)(3), (b)(6) and the COP resupplied. We routinely sent things by air as well. We built up the COP on an order by General Rodriguez who said to the CJTF engineer (CJ7), "I want hard huts built up there." And we got a lot of CJTF resources to help us do that. But that took a lot of aviation and movement by ground of all that wood and lumber. We had an engineer platoon that built ~~the things~~ so the boys could have something safer to live in for direct and indirect fires. Back to Wanat, we had the commitment of the engineers to build it but it was our responsibility to first occupy it and then establish the initial perimeter. That occurred by the time the attack occurred, but the defenses weren't where we wanted them to be because they attacked early in our establishment of that combat outpost. We didn't have everything the way we wanted it because they attacked as early as they did. Had they given us a few more weeks it would have been much harder for the enemy to do as they did. I think they knew that and I think they were quite smart to attack when they did. They attacked right at begin morning nautical twilight (BMNT) and I think you know the other story about how they turned on the irrigation ditch that was right in front of Observation Post (OP) Topside so we couldn't hear them moving in. They were very familiar with the area. They knew where the TOW truck was. They knew where the 120mm ~~was~~. I don't know if you know this but we fired that TOW in direct fire mode on any Taliban we saw in our sights that we considered a threat. The locals called that one weapon system the 'Finger of God.' We had confirmed kills with that weapon system. That was another reason why the enemy ~~looked~~ in on it. Our tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) were pretty mature by this point in our deployment so they knew that the TOW mounted on that truck was the weapon system that many of their men had been killed by. They needed to take that thing out. Just as they teach the Second lieutenants to go after the enemy's most casualty producing weapon, for us that was a significant weapon system that we could use at long range to disrupt or kill enemy in hardened areas, in bunkers or behind rocks. Because of the awesome capability of the improved target acquisition system (ITAS) it was tremendously lethal. I tried to requisition and get an early fielding of the bunker buster TOW but was unsuccessful. I was an advocate to try and get an anti-personnel TOW developed that would shoot flechettes or some other kind of flash because they were designed to kill tanks, not personnel. It would kill personnel but I wanted something that would be more lethal against a group if we might see them. We had some success, but not complete success, with that one weapon system. We did not occupy Wanat haphazardly, or just because we had a wild hair up our ass. We wanted to get off the Ranch House even before the attack out there. We had to information operation (IO) the hell out of ~~this stuff~~ because the enemy was seeing it as victories for them. And the population, they could say, "Oh, yeah, The Americans did leave." Through the radio we had at Blessing we had to IO the hell out of it to fight the information war to control the information and to attempt to control the perceptions of the population as to what was really going on. We sold it from the beginning that we wanted to get off the Ranch House because it wasn't doing anything for us. We wanted to get out of Bella because they weren't doing anything for us. There's just no free fried chicken. Quite frankly Afghanistan is a dependent society. Not only do they depend on each other from village to village but if you have something they want and I have something more that they want then they'll side with me in order to get the biggest bang for their buck. But because we aren't Afghan they would turn on both of us in a heartbeat if it came down to it. Getting off Bella and Ranch House were part of our long-range strategy during our time there. They extended our LOCs and it was a huge risk, not necessarily to the mission but more importantly to the boys up there. We were able to cover that risk and mitigate it. Other than when Aranus happened and Staff Sergeant Koehner was killed up there by the Afghan Security Guard (ASG), Bella remained pretty quiet. It was in other parts of AO Rock that we had to focus our efforts and our fires and everything else, particularly in the Kornegal. The range was always hot in the Kornegal. We could have put a red flag at the bottom of that road to that mountain because the range was always hot. In fact I wanted to do that as a joke.

Due to the TOW's lethality

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Garnet

(b)(3), (b)(6) understand the Kornegal was really your battalion priority of effort.

Red

(b)(3), (b)(6) Well, our main effort was really the Pesh River Road and where Able Company was located. That's where the population was and that's where we were having the greatest advances in partnering and

bringing government and visible signs of government action through our civil affairs projects and the construction of buildings such as schools. Commander (b)(3), (b)(6) as well as his replacement and what they did as part of the Asadabad provincial reconstruction team (PRT) and what they did with the roads became our whole main effort. What the PRT did, to include Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) was the main effort. The combat operations and the fighting were occurring on any one day in the Kornegal Valley. Whenever we'd go up to the Watapor Valley off the Pesh we'd get into a TIC. Whenever we'd go into the... south of Asadabad. The Pesh was our main effort but the Kornegal had issues as well. Whoever was in contact had priority of fires and the majority of the fires ended up going into the Kornegal Valley to support those guys who were getting shot at or mortared or whatever else they had going on. There were even discussions about why we were even there. People wanted to just close the road off and let the people who lived out there just die on the vinc, but they'd been there for so long that they won't die on the vinc. They'll just adapt and overcome. It was an attempt to bring government to an area that's never seen that. Haji Mujib (ph) and all of those criminals were up there.

Lambda

Delta

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) When did you start to plan what became Contingency Operation (CONOP) Rock Move to pull out of Bella and set up the new COP at Wanat?

Garnet

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I don't remember specifically. (b)(3), (b)(6) Can you remind me when we officially pulled out of Bella? I know it was in the spring.

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

Oscar

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) You had Bella until 8 July. Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) was on the last helicopter flight out and he said that happened on 8 July.

Oscar

Oscar

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Okay. We had been moving the equipment and all of that off of Bella for weeks and we had been planning the move for months. We relied on the company to tell us how they wanted to do it and it was my job to resource the air using the Pesh resupply in order to do it. As I remember, the mission to finally pull those guys out, with (b)(3), (b)(6) being on the last flight, that that was a special CONOP we did in order to have enough aviation to pull all the ammunition. We had to leave all of that stuff there until the end so they could defend themselves. It would take a very deliberate CONOP to pull all of the ammunition, all of the secure post office protocol (SPOP) and all of the communications they had off of there. If we were there as late as 8 July, then we had been planning that move for months. (b)(3), (b)(6) had pressed to get off of Bella anyway and we used the TOA as a forcing function so we would not have to send 1-265 soldiers off of Bella to occupy that combat outpost. We knew we would not send any of Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) men up there. We had wanted to get off Bella so much earlier and to be honest with you we moved off of Bella because we wanted to. Not because anybody told us to. Nobody at brigade told us to move Bella. We moved it because it just didn't make sense and because there was indecision at the brigade level. Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) finally just decided to do it and we executed it.

Oscar

Citrus

Diamond (b)(3), (b)(6) finally just decided to do it and we executed it.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) How did you plan on getting all of the moving pieces and logistics support up to Wanat? You mentioned the construction company and the 62nd Engineer Battalion. Weren't they pretty new to Afghanistan?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes, but it wasn't like they had just showed up. They had been there for at least three months. I'd have to ask (b)(3), (b)(6) I haven't been able to contact him but he was my Task Force Rock engineer. It was through his efforts along with those of the 62nd Engineer company commander, his survey team and Task Force Rugged, the brigade element that actually owned those engineer assets that were sliced to the 173rd, that they were able to accomplish what needed to get done. That engineer company was the 173rd's engineer company. I could have used an entire engineer company in Task Force Rock and kept them busy everyday but the engineer assets were so limited that we had to make do with what we were provided. We weren't provided any heavy engineer assets. That was a deliberate decision. We would have much preferred to have had Army engineer equipment up there and made it just an Army operation rather

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due to all the
WANKING with*

than trying to partner with the locals. We could control our movement up there instead of having to deal with Mr. Nervous Nelly back hoe driver or excavator driver not wanting to go up into the valley because of the boogy man and all of the local lore that surrounded the Waygul Valley. That valley had also been the last place that Osama Bin Laden had been seen. The people up there had been facilitating bad ju-ju for probably centuries. Walt really did all of the calculus on this with the help of (b)(3), (b)(6) who was the Chosen 5 XO, and (b)(3), (b)(6) it was really a team effort. The engineers went up there and figured out the footprint based off of what Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) wanted and what he thought he could defend from. They took all that information to include the GPS grids and put it on Google Earth as well as their other survey software. From that they were able to determine how many tons of rock we needed to bring in for fill dirt since the area was kind of on a slope and we needed to grade it out so we could have good drainage for the COP. They figured out how many and what size HESCOs were needed. Once that stuff started to get delivered to Blessing, which was the hub for all of that, we stored it up and waited until it was time to go. When we got ready to leave all of that stuff was loaded on jingle trucks and Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) and his men escorted it up there. The engineers and everyone else that went up there began to establish that footprint. Were we able to fill the HESCOs as quickly as we wanted? No. Did we encounter problems with the locals who were driving the construction equipment? Yes. They weren't a construction company per se but more so contracts for that heavy equipment through a contractor who owned that heavy equipment. In fact, I think we even used equipment we had on Blessing because we had some issues with what that contractor was providing with that equipment.

Falcon
(b)(3), (b)(6)
Oscar

Papa
have
propaganda

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

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Had you worked with that contractor before?

Copper

Brown

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I would have to ask Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) or my contracting officer, Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) but I'd say yes. They'd done work for us before, and quite frankly, we would favor contracts for those who were dependable and to those who we'd worked with previously.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Where were they from?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I don't remember.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Were they from the Jalalabad or A-bad area?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Probably. Most of the money and the resources were from that area. There may have been some drivers from Nangalam that did the driving and who were actually the equipment operators. As part of our contracts, we were very disciplined about ensuring that a certain amount of the population in and around Nangalam and Chapa Dara and out that way were hired as laborers or whatever it was to make sure there was a better distribution of funds. Everyone would benefit, not just those in Jalalabad or Asadabad.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) I understand that up until the last kilometer or so on the road from Nangalam and Camp Blessing the road was really unimproved. Was part of your plan to finish that road to a better standard?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) It wasn't part of the plan to do that prior to occupying Wanat. It was more of a road than we had going to Bella and it was passable, and we were good with that. We knew that, in the long term, I-26 would end up doing road improvements as a result of the contracts that (b)(3), (b)(6) and the other PRT commander had put in place. There were plans to improve and pave that road headed up to Waygul. That was another reason why we wanted to put that combat outpost there. It would help secure that northern part of the road as we built the road up that way.

(COR)
(b)(3), (b)(6) Line

Lambda
COR

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Had you put route clearance package (RCP) between Blessing and Wanat?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes. The RCP was part of the movement up there. We employed that. We would never just blindly go up a road. The RCP was always employed with their Huskys and that was part of the occupation plan of Wanat. RCP was incorporated in every ground mission we did. In fact they were the most maneuvered element and platoon during our whole deployment, ~~was gone~~. They moved more throughout the battlespace than any other unit in the battalion.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) They tend to get around a lot. At this same time the RIP was in place and you were planning your redeployment to Italy. Did you feel that trying to do this operation was a little too much given all the other stuff you had going on or were guys able to handle things by that point?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) We were a very capable unit. I had complete faith and confidence that we could establish Wanat and hand over a good product very quickly to 1-26, just like 1-32 did for us. We knew we could give them something they could defend from and operate out of but they knew full-well that there would be a lot more work to do to get that thing up to better living standards like with the showers and other things we intended to put up there. Would it have been easier not to have tried to occupy and built that place while we were trying to RIP? Absolutely. At any time did we think it wasn't a good idea? No. We knew getting off Bella was the big gain for us as part of the RIP process. Going into Bella would have been equally difficult if not more hazardous for 1-26. We didn't have any indications that Wanat was going to be what Wanat turned out to be. I think if we had more intelligence or any indicators of anything to the scale and scope of what occurred on 13 July, we would have reconsidered going into that location. Or we would have planned for a more deliberate CONOP to clear the place out, much like we had done with Operation Rock Avalanche or another operation. Doing a CONOP into the Waygul Valley clearly would have been on 1-26's time for the scale and scope of it being a battalion mission going into that valley. We knew bad guys traversed through there but we didn't have the indicators that it was the size, scale or scope that was brought to bear that day.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Were you getting a good flow of information from Lieutenant Brostrom at Wanat as to how things were going and what was happening up there?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) primarily relied on Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I didn't personally talk to John at all as he put things together. John was a great lieutenant but I primarily dealt directly with Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) and First Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) I distinctly remember Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) telling Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) and I that we were not getting the HESCOs filled quickly enough, and we agreed with him. The reason for it was because the locals didn't want to get the damn heavy equipment up there. ~~They didn't want to drive the shit up there.~~ That was an extreme point of frustration. If we had had heavy engineer equipment up there that belonged to us, that wouldn't have been an issue. That was a risk that was built into the plan and one we were willing to accept because we had no other indicators that this was risk we did not want to assume. ~~That was a decision that Colonel~~ Diamond (b)(3), (b)(6) made. We were eventually able to get the heavy equipment up there in the next few days to start filling the HESCOs. Could the drivers and what was going on up there all been in cahoots with each other to kind of delay things? That's certainly a possibility but I don't think so. Those drivers could have come from Nangalam but more than likely they weren't. Would they have known about the Waygul Valley? For sure. Were they spooked? Yes. They got spooked and they disrupted our ability to get that heavy equipment up there so we could fill the HESCOs to have a better established perimeter. Even with OP Topside, where all our casualties occurred, we weren't going to get HESCOs and have that as really squared away position up there for weeks. A lot of that had to be done by hand. Their initial occupation of that was standard infantry defense – dig in, sand bags, sectors of fire, concertina wire, Claymores, final protective fire (FPF). That's how that thing had to be occupied.

Victor
Diamond

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) understand. Did you have any commander's emergency relief program (CERP) or the ability to hire any locals or anybody from Wanat?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes. As I recall we did hire locals. Once we brought up all that HESCO stuff, we had local national laborers to help with that.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) You said you were getting some reports of log problems at Wanat, specifically the ability to get the HESCOs filled. What specific reports were you getting and how were you able to respond to them?

Oscar
Red (b)(3), (b)(6) That came from the Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) and that was my point of frustration. My ability to do anything about it was very limited. All I could do was use my contracting officer to go back to the contractor and provide them with whatever else they wanted so their drivers could get the equipment up there. We basically had to continue to appease and say, "Hey. It will be okay. We need your equipment up there. You're contractors. You're being paid to do this." That was our approach. I didn't have any Army equipment to send up there. ~~I didn't have any soldiers who could drive that equipment. We were really painted into a corner but we did the best we could with what the brigade provided us.~~ heavy

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) All of us know you always want more engineers and you never have enough engineers.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Let me add this. Did I lose sleep over the fact that these HESCOs weren't getting filled any quicker? Was I uncomfortable with that? Yes. I was very uncomfortable because our guys were at further risk. Did we action it and address the issue? Yes. Immediately. Did it take time to resolve it? Yes. Did we start wringing our hands about it? No. We got after it. Our options were limited. I didn't have any Army equipment in my back pocket to use. I just didn't have that flexibility.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) I understand you didn't have the resources. Did you have any feeling that there would be problems getting the locals from Pesh and Jalalabad (J-bad) to get up to Wanat? Did you get any indication that that would be an issue with these guys?

Brown
Red (b)(3), (b)(6) No. Ask Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) that same question. He may have a different answer, but from my point of view and what I was told, no. I was told, "Hey, sir. We have this contractor. We're good to go. We're ready to execute." "Okay. Let's execute." I never went to Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) and said, "Sir. I'm concerned these drivers aren't going to drive up there because they have the heeby jeebies about going up the Waygul." I don't ever remember having that conversation with him. It was never part of our analysis. Did I talk to the colonel about the fact that the drivers weren't willing to drive up there? Yes and I said, "This is how we're fixing it." I do remember having that conversation. Diamond

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Right, after the problem had already been identified.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Right, after the commander had already identified it.

(b)(3), (b)(6) Had you been up to Wanat before?

Garnet No, but
Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I felt like I'd been there because I'd seen so much satellite imagery of it and I had helped plan and provide guidance to the task force engineer and helping Charlie Company with getting the ball rolling. Did I physically set foot on it? No. The only field grade other than Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) was Major (b)(3), (b)(6) and that was after the attack. Diamond Gray

Gray
Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Right. I've talked to Major (b)(3), (b)(6) about moving up there after the event. I got some good info from him.

(crosstalk)

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I need to get you hooked up with Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) Falcon

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) d really like to talk to him.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) The challenge is that he hasn't been up on the net in recent months. I don't know what his problem is.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Is he with the 62nd Engineer Battalion?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) No. He was the Task Force Rock RCP platoon leader when we first took over and TOAed from Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) He did that for about half of the deployment and then he became part of the special troops battalion (STB). When the STB commander eventually transitioned, my brand new second lieutenant engineer, Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) who was really my winterization guy and who helped me with infrastructure stuff. He had nothing to do with planning Wanat but Will did. Eventually the STB commander moved Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) from Task Force Rock XO and made him a platoon leader and he gave me back (b)(3), (b)(6) Falcon to be my Task Force Rock engineer. (b)(3), (b)(6) focus then became planning the engineer effort for Wanat. That's when we got the 62nd on board. They brought all of that engineer equipment up there to do surveys. We got Task Force Rugged on board along with (b)(3), (b)(6) who was the brigade engineer. I was friends with the Task Force Rugged XO. He and I were CGSC grads. We were in the same small group. He was the battalion XO. He was a great help with a lot of the analysis. I was in with those engineers and we were putting together a good, executable plan. I didn't want to hear their whining and bitching and I didn't want them to continue to massage the plan. I needed something the guys could occupy, that was safe and that we could get the right amount of equipment to while keeping the costs within tolerance. I think we were spending \$850,000 on this, bad boy. It was a significant amount of money and it included all the contracts, all of the HESCOs, the rock, everything. This combat outpost was not a fly-by-night operation. It was very deliberately planned for building it up into a first-class facility. I had the funding and everything else lined up for it but the enemy got a vote.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) The 62nd Engineer Battalion provided me with those plans.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Did you see how detailed they were? That was pretty darned detailed. That was the first combat outpost that we really established from nothing. Well, that's not necessarily true. Able Company established Honaker-Marigold down in the Peck Valley. They established that from nothing so that's not necessarily true. But we didn't go into the engineer survey stuff down there. It was a good area. It had good drainage and there was plenty of room. Because of the location of Wanat, the terrain, the roads and being right next to the bazaar, it was more challenging. That little parcel of land we were going to use also had 13 land owners. That was another reason Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) went up there. He talked to the elders and said, "Where are these 13 land owners?" Their reply was, "We haven't seen them for years." We were ready to pay those guys and lease the land. Blessing had 56 different land owners that we paid to use the area. It basically transitioned to the government paying them but they were unable to pay them so they came back to us.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) understand that's why the combat readiness support teams (CRSTs) had been implemented at division. There had been problems paying the land owners.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) The CRST team came out too. We did execute everything from A to Z to establish this COP. It was a very thorough operation that involved all elements of combat power from CRST, the PRT, the whole road piece and the civil affairs team who went up to Wanat to talk to those folks. It was really a battalion effort to get those guys on board. We brought CRST out to Blessing, not only to address Wanat but to also address our issues with Blessing and some of the other locations as well. It took considerable effort to accomplish that. I had to call and flog the brigade engineer just bitching about CRST issues. Finally the colonel made it an issue with Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) as well as General McConville and General Votef and all the other general officers that routinely came out to visit us. We would air that dirty laundry to them to

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

Delta

Challenge to

Falcon
Falcon

Diamond

Rock 6

help break the log jam. I'd call my friends that were up in the joint operations center (JOC) up at CJTF-101 and ask, "Where are we with this? What are we doing? Are you tracking this? Are you tracking that someone just took my Predator?" Or we'd try to get extensions on CAS or whatever it was. I would sometimes circumvent the system and utilize the friends I had up there to make ~~shit happen, bypass brigade, and to help brigade resource me.~~ *it*

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) That reminds me of something. You guys had most of your intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets withdrawn on 12 July. Were you aware of that or able to influence that at all?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) I don't remember. I'm embarrassed that I don't. It was a battalion-level CONOP. It wasn't a brigade-level CONOP. So, unless brigade, or even CJTF-101 had resourced us to have ISR the whole time to put this COP in... Again, we did not have the commitment of that 24/7. I do remember that. It wasn't like we were doing this in the Kornegal Valley. We had no indications that an attack like what happened on 13 July would ever materialize. My gut instinct is that if they pulled our ISR, I can guarantee I probably fought for more but there must have been other priorities for CJTF-101 and they had to reallocate those assets elsewhere. ~~I know there were issues with the Shadow operations during our RIP.~~

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) You couldn't fly the Shadow up into the Waygul Valley anyway.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) That's right. We couldn't fly it up there anyway so we had to depend on the Predator alone. Quite frankly I'm not surprised we lost the Predator since it was in such demand anyway.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) I actually sat down with the CJTF-101 intelligence (G2) staff about a number of systems they had and why they made that decision on that date. (*crossstalk*) I just wanted to see if you had any perspective on that from your viewpoint in the TOC.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Whenever we lost ISR it always became a significant emotional event, particularly when it was tied to the movement of troops or to support a CONOP. We always requested ISR, and for the most part we got good support on that. We'd beg, borrow and steal. We'd go bug the operators over there and ask them for their stuff and we'd work drug deals to do what we could to maintain ISR wherever we could put it. I wonder if we'd actually had ISR up there that night if we would have seen these ~~fuckers~~ *THE AAF* moving into position. We probably would have and we probably would have had more early warning.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Ben Fry is adamant that they would have picked that up.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Sure. They had numerous fighters and they always moved in ranger file.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Shepherds don't move like that.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Right. It's a pattern of life and for us it's clearly a military formation. The local farmers don't move like that. We knew what bad guys looked like on a Predator screen. We knew when they were up to no good and we never hesitated to address that with the company commander in charge of the battle space and to seek to bring fires on that as long as they were observed. *@ there was imminent threat of PFD.*

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) I understand you didn't have a lot of success with the Raven system.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) ~~Raven system~~ *power fan*. They just don't have enough ~~ass to them~~ *power fan* to work in that kind of terrain. The terrain dictated everything we did there - where we went, where we flew, where we walked, everything. When you operate in terrain like that there are only so many places you can go. With those little Ravens, you'd lose the signal so quickly and I'd always say, "Just start the financial liability investigation of property loss (FLIPL) right now if you're going to launch that thing." Nine times out of 10 that airframe would

never be recovered and quite frankly it became too much of a pain in the ass. We did have some success with them in the Watapor Valley with Able Company. (b)(3), (b)(6) used that thing and actually got some good video off of it and we were pretty impressed by what we saw. (b)(3), (b)(6) tried it in the Kornegal and crashed the thing. They happened to find it one day on a random patrol three months later. Typically when the Ravens crashed in the Watapor the locals would find them and bring them back to us. We'd give them a little reward.

Salt

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) understand that was almost a cottage industry out there.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) We didn't fly them that much. Able Company flew them the most but they had the widest part of the valley to fly them in. We wore the hell out of our Shadow and it was a great capability we could use. The terrain limited our ability to go any further north with the signal strength that's required to be maintained with that aircraft in order to control it.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) watched 3rd Brigade of the 10th ID fly a Raven into a pine grove at Fort Polk, Louisiana and it never came out. I understand they're pretty fragile systems.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes they are. It's basically a model airplane.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) need to get going. I need to give up the room I'm using but I'd very much like to talk to Captain

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

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) He's on board. You'll have no issues with that.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Fantastic. Is he at grad school right now?

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) He's on leave right now but he just finished up his degree completion. He'll be starting the maneuver captain's career course at the beginning of August.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Okay. He's an infantry officer.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes. He was my best staff officer and that's why he was the S4. I asked Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) for very few things but I did say, "Sir, (b)(3), (b)(6) is going to be my S4." He said, "Okay." He became a very dear friend of mine as well. He's older and he's prior enlisted so he's got a great maturity about him and a lot of engery. He'll be a great source of intel. I'll do what I can to get up with (b)(3), (b)(6) as well. I think that would really help to complete the picture of the engineer effort and the level of planning that went into the operation.

Brown

Saint

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) I did not have his name so I'm very glad you gave it to me. I actually had tried to get a hold of Captain Tompkins but he probably didn't get it.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) He probably got an email from you but I told him to just call you and he said he did.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) We've talked to about 110 people about all of this. Everybody from full-bird colonels at CJTF-101 to Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) and I'm trying to manage and coordinate all of these interviews.

Delta

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) if you've talked to that many people, your report will be nothing less than an extremely comprehensive, all-inclusive historical document about that day, the events before and after.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) We'll see. The problem is not everybody will agree with my analysis and assessments. As a historian, it's tough because if I say something bad about (b)(6) or (b)(6) he's

probably not going to get very pissed off at me. I'm used to working with people in 18th and 19th centuries, not guys I see on the street everyday.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) No one will be able to dispute the facts you've gathered. Was everything done right? No. Was most everything done right? In my opinion, yes. Did the enemy get a vote? Yes. Did he cast his vote? Yes. Was he successful? Yes. That's the reality of it. Was the cost to us great? Yes. Did we feel sorry for ourselves for ourselves afterwards? We felt saddened but we weren't defeated and we didn't feel that way. We can't bring back the men but I think those that were there that day and fought have been duly recognized with Silver and Bronze Stars for all of their valor. These men have moved on and are continuing to get after it.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) It was a pretty impressive bunch of soldiers. One of the things I like to bring out is that the insurgent force that executed the attack, either the anti-coalition militia (ACM) or anti-Afghan force (AAF), ~~was not a bunch of hayseeds. They were a very professional, skilled, talented enemy.~~ *was* *re-calculating*

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) These guys were more than just your average fighters. They probably came from all over and up the Watapor. Those guys were always very disciplined fighters. They came up from Nuristan and down the valleys. This was something they didn't just throw together. They put some effort into this, just like they did with the Ranch House. You've probably seen the Ranch House video where they planned and did all of that stuff.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) They were very impressive. The enemy is not dumb. Just because they're Afghan doesn't mean they're dumb. Did we underestimate their ability to mass on COP Wanat? Yeah, probably. That's where you're going to get into debates. Did we have any indications that they were going to mass, or even had the ability to mass men like that in short order? No, we didn't think they had that capability.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) We're going to let you go for now. (crosstalk) Thank you very much for your time.

Red (b)(3), (b)(6) Okay. I appreciate your time. I'm so glad I called you yesterday. It will be really good to have what I did and what the men did documented.

Garnet (b)(3), (b)(6) Everybody's input is absolutely critical and it helps me tell a more accurate story. It's a very challenging and comprehensive story we're trying to tell here. I recognize you guys are still on active duty. I know it's a pretty hectic and important time in your lives. Trying to get a hold of everybody as they've scattered to the four winds is kind of challenging.

(crosstalk)

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed By (b)(6)