29 Oct 09

Interview with CPT (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(1) 1.4a, c Oscar
1 December 2008

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) My name is (b)(3), (b)(6), I'm an historian for the Combat Studies Institute and today I'm interviewing Captain (b)(3), (b)(6), who was the former commander of Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, in connection to the actions in Wanat, Afghanistan, on 13 July 2008. If you can, could you give me some background on where you grew up and how you received your commission?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Sure. I actually grew up in a military family. My father was in the infantry for about 27 years, so I grew up as a military brat and I lived all over. I was born in Fayetteville but lived at various military posts. Then I got my commission from West Point in 2001. The first unit I went to after training at Fort Benning was 4th Infantry Division out of Fort Hood. I did some training there and obviously it was a mechanized unit and we deployed to Iraq in Operation Iraqi Freedom I. I was deployed there for about a year and then after that I went to a Marine Corps course, basically a Captain's Career Course for the Marine Corps. Then I went to Italy, was on staff as the assistant operations officer for about three months, and then I took command of Chosen Company after that.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Can you describe what Chosen Company looked like at that time?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) When I got to the unit, the battalion had just returned from Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom VI. I was on staff for three months and then I took command of Chosen Company. So they had been back from a deployment for about six months when I took command. We pretty much knew that we were going to be in another trainup for deployment. Originally it was for Iraq, so we had started to focus on training events as a battalion that involved the company. So the company, as far as what it looked like, was a mixture of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, from the previous two deployments, as well as a large turnover of new soldiers. There was kind of a core element of E6s and E5s who were combat vets and then there was a large portion, probably over 50 percent of the unit, who had not been in combat and were new soldiers. We did a pretty extensive trainup of three deployments for training to Germany of about three to four weeks at a time. We really focused on a lot of live-fires. We did extensive live-fires and just really wanted to focus on getting soldiers comfortable with having live rounds in their weapons, because that's what they were going to be doing in combat regardless of where we were going. So, we did a lot of live-fires, a lot of range training and then eventually about three months before we deployed, we did a lot of situational training at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Germany.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What date did your company arrive in Afghanistan?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) The day that we left Italy was 22 May 2007. I remember that because that was my first sergeant's birthday and I think it was probably like five days before we arrived into Bagram Airfield.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) You guys probably knew you were going to be doing a 15-month tour? Did you know that in advance?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes, that was definitely the expectation because that was right when the military moved to, "You're going to be doing 15-month deployments, so plan on that." We knew for the soldiers and their families that that was the best thing that they would have that expectation, because it's always better if you shorten somebody's tour and make sure they have the expectation of the longest time that they'll be there.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What did the TO&E of the company look like when you guys arrived over there? Were there any changes between 22 May 2007 and July 2008?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I would say the biggest thing when we arrived, I was going to have a full rifle company. But based on the battlespace I owned and what 1-32 Infantry had said, I was actually going to detach a platoon, which was my 3rd Platoon. We detached them to another company. They had a totally different area and they were basically under the command of a different commander. I had my two platoons that I was going to be concentrating on – the Camp Blessing area and the Waygal Valley. 1-32 Infantry had the same kind of setup and they had three different locations where they kept their platoons, so it was COP Ranch House in Aranus, Bella outpost and then another platoon at Camp Blessing that concentrated on that area around there.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What was the enemy situation like during this timeframe? What were some of the goals of your company and the battalion, for that matter, in this area?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) The enemy situation, based on 1-32's experience … they had actually occupied those bases, so four or five months before we got there, they had spent extensive time establishing bases and trying to get them built up in those areas. Their idea of counterinsurgency doctrine was the oil spot. They wanted to establish a base and then spread out their influence from there. So from Camp Blessing to Aranus, it was about 20 kilometers through mountainous terrain. It was basically only air accessible with very limited mobility for the unit that was up there because of the terrain. What they were trying to do was just couple themselves with the village of Aranus. When we came in there, our thought was that it doesn't need to be just us. It has to be the government of Afghanistan that needs to be involved with what we're doing and the Afghan Army needs to be involved with what we're doing. They're really what needs to be able to be competent to take over this mission, because it's their country. What we came in on was, which is what 1-32 needed to do, they were very much relied upon by the local people. But what we wanted was the local people to rely on their own government. We had a US military unit that was relied upon by the locals and a very inefficient and corrupt district government in that valley. That's what our first thought was and we were assessing that we really need to get the government to be reliable to the people. We really need to help that guy out. We immediately started looking at how we can reposition ourselves to do that once we got there. We really didn't want just to use combat power, have them up and in the area and influencing a part of the population but the population being totally reliant on US forces.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What were some of the major events that led up to July 2008, such as the Bella ambush and the Ranch House fight and any other important events that you recall?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) The Ranch House and Bella were relatively, I wouldn't say quiet, but the level of attack was much smaller. It just seemed that the enemy wasn't well-coordinated in the area, so I think when 1-32 occupied, they kind of flushed the enemy out. They had good relationships with the locals so they could maintain security in that area that way. Now the big event for the Ranch House, it was exactly 90 days after we had left country. That outpost had not been fired upon at all. There were some OPs that had some contact, but no US forces had had any contact for 90 days. So on 22 August, there was a large-scale coordinated attack with the intent to overrun that position. There is some terrorist footage from that attack out there. The enemy, we figured out in hindsight … we realized that they were a very planning enemy, very competent and led by trained terrorists. Basically the evidence from this video that we saw was that they had some sort of counterintelligence that actually knew and developed an entire sketch of the outpost to where they could make a planned attack and attack it very methodically with the intent to overrun. It was to the credit of 1st Platoon, Chosen Company, (b)(3), (b)(6), who was actually killed at a later date. They had spent every moment they could trying to improve their position. But because it was newly occupied, 1-32 had built it up the best they could but we knew there were a lot of improvements, so he did a lot of

Cypress

force protection, they did a lot of rehearsals upon attack, even though they were really seeing no kind of enemy activity. That attack was about a two-hour firefight where the enemy attacked at the most vulnerable position from a little bit higher ground coming down, because that post is on a spur or a ridgeline. They attacked from the east, almost southeast side, and swept around. They attacked the positions that were occupied by the Afghan National Army and Afghan security guards, and the Afghan security guards were local people who ~~we~~ had hired. I had a feeling that they definitely knew they were going to be attacked and they immediately left their positions, which left it vulnerable. I think that was part of the enemy's plan. So basically it was small contacts from all around the post and then they put a majority of their force through there and then started to try to sweep across. Then the stand there by the platoon, led by the platoon leader talking to myself on the radio, and then Staff Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day. Romeo

1-32 hired the Afghan Security Guards and it was handed over to US.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) This is the same Phillips, if I recall, who's also manning the mortars at Wanat?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Exactly. He's the same guy. His actions that day earned him the Distinguished Service Cross and one of his mortarmen, Specialist (b)(3), (b)(6) also received a Silver Star for that action. Basically they made a stand at the mortar pit, coordinated to help some of the injured who were there, and just their actions are what made the difference in the fight – between (b)(3), (b)(6) shooting the 60 millimeter mortar handheld about 80 to 100 meters in front of him upon the enemy, and then Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) trying to coordinate to get to the wounded and also fighting the enemy within hand grenade range and within 10 meters of his position. Romeo

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Did this attack change any attitudes or change what you guys thought might happen 90 days after you got on the ground?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Absolutely. We saw that the enemy was capable of conducting what we would consider the most dangerous course of action as you talk about intelligence. There are things that customarily happen and then it kind of builds up to a large event. What we eventually saw was a pattern of about 90 to 120 days of build up until a large-scale event happened. It was about 90 days after 1-32 left that we saw this large attack and then it was another couple months before the large-scale ambush happened in between Bella and Aranus.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) I've got those dates as 9 and 10 November 2007. Can you briefly explain what happened there?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Sure. From when we got ~~to~~ on the ground, what I said before in how we needed to couple with the government … we recognized, even before the Ranch House attack, that we needed to move the Ranch House. We had started to do things to try to move that to where it could become more relevant. I had a platoon that was split between two locations. I wanted to locate them all at Bella just because it was at the intersection of two valleys, so it was where a lot of people would pass through. If you're going north to south in the Waygal Valley on the road, then you had to pass through Bella. We thought that this was an area we could be in, there's a clinic in Bella, we could try to influence the population through the clinic and through meeting with local people this could be a good meeting place for everyone. Then we wouldn't have to try to support the Ranch House, which was a big strain on logistics because it was only accessible by air and the only thing that could land there was a UH-60 helicopter. You couldn't even get a Chinook to land there. We said we were going to move this place but we're still going to try to influence the area around us. We had moved the Ranch House and it wasn't there anymore, but we still wanted to influence the village of Aranus, which was right next to the Ranch House. (b)(3), (b)(6) the platoon leader for that platoon, 1st Platoon, Chosen Company, had a mission and a plan that he was going to move to Aranus, meet with the local elders, and then move back to Bella all in a day. He coordinated and said, "I want to make sure I get in there undetected so the enemy doesn't have time to try to make a plan, because the movement there is somewhat vulnerable from the road for an ambush." In the middle of the night, he Cypress

had moved the three hours it would take to get there and occupied an area in the village, then met with the elders that day and was going to move back later on. He had met with the elders in Aranus and then he had started to move back along a different route. He didn't want to return on the same route because he feared they would set up on him. He had a scout element, which was really like a squad-size element, that remained up on the high ground in overwatch of him the entire way. When he started to move back in the afternoon, he had a squad-plus size of US and a squad of Afghan National Army who were ambushed along a small trail along the way. That's when we lost five soldiers from his platoon and another US Marine, Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) (ph), who was in charge of all the ANA. Six were killed and multiple more were injured in that ambush.

Alabama

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Let's roll into July 2008 now. There was some talk of you guys reestablishing a new place at Wanat that had been talked about for some time and then finally they made the decision to do this. Can you talk me through that?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) We went with the same theme as when we first came to Afghanistan, that we wanted to co-locate with the government officials. The district governor and the district center were located in Wanat. A project started by 1-32 Infantry was to build a district center at that location for the district governor of the Waygal Valley. That was built by the time July came. Throughout the winter from when the Ranch House was broken down, I'd say December to the summer time, that was being built for them. We wanted to work out a plan, from seeing the success of different areas within 2-503's area of operations, that co-locating a US base with a district center would bring wide success because it just gave immediate legitimacy to the district governor because he could advocate with US forces for the people in his district. At Camp Blessing there was a district center and the district governor worked with myself and also had access to the battalion commander, worked with him every day. In the Watapor Valley where Able Company was, they had put a base that was co-located with the district center for that district and they had wide success there with security. So we knew that was the answer and was going to start to make a difference in the Waygal Valley. The district governor would have security by being close to the US forces. That was what we started to move towards. So very early on, even in the winter, we started talking to the local people about putting a base in Wanat and trying to work with them to find land that we could use to have a base that had all the force protection and quality of life things that we need to have something sustainable there.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) I guess the first members of Chosen Company arrived about four or five days before the attack?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes, it was about four days. They had arrived there on the early morning of the 8th.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) There was apparently supposed to be some contracted civilian construction equipment to help these guys out but they were delayed for some reason?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes. We had tried to coordinate the plans. It was really more complex than just occupying Wanat because we were trying to close down Bella outpost, which was becoming increasingly deteriorated as far as security went. We wanted to occupy Wanat at the same time and then also coordinate with local nationals to have equipment there to start building force protection. The Bella security situation was worsening and we had an OP there that was hit with a mortar round, giving me indications that they had that position dialed in and it was becoming increasingly dangerous for the soldiers there. We had a guy who got MEDEVAC'd there previously and I made the determination and asked the battalion commander to reinforce Bella while we broke it down, so we could have increased security there before we occupied Wanat. If we had just pulled Bella off before occupying Wanat, that would have allowed the enemy to focus more on Wanat entirely because Bella wouldn't have been there. So when they occupied Wanat on the 8th, that same night we had completely vacated from Bella outpost. It was kind of two moving parts at once. The importance of doing that was to keep the enemy spread out, and I had a feeling that the enemy

was trying to do a large-scale attack on Bella because they knew we were going to vacate it. They could do a large attack and then say they forced us out of Bella. That was basically an information operations part of the mission.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What kinds of orders did you give to the 2nd Platoon leader? What did you tell him the planning was going to be and how you were going to operate?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) We had both sat down before we went up there and talked about what we thought Wanat should look like, these are the phases we're going to have to go through to build it up. Obviously the most dangerous part of being initial occupiers is we're not going to have the force protection things we need, which is why we wanted the local national equipment there right away. We had coordinated with the local nationals on what day. It's just like any contractor, we had to say, "Be there on this day," thinking that's the day we were going to be there. Well, we got delayed because of assets provided and weather and other things that they said, "We can't do this on this day. We're going to have to wait until the 8th." That was also because of the conditions at Bella, due to a lot of aircraft being fired at. We even had a local contracted aircraft that got shot while it was on the landing zone at Bella and had to stay there for a couple of days. So, that situation was really the focus and all these things were going to support occupying Wanat. As Lieutenant Brostrom and I sat down, he talked about what he needed as far as force protection. We knew that the mortar system, the 120 millimeter mortar, was essential to have for that area. We also, from the attached Weapons Platoon, needed a vehicle with a TOW missile on it that was really going to make sure we had security there because we can affect immediately, through all the success of having that TOW missile in the Pesh Valley. We needed to expand that to the Waygal Valley, at least initially. That's what's going to keep the enemy away from us and allow us to build this place up.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Can you give me some detail on what 2nd Platoon looked like at this time? Also, what did you think about Lieutenant Brostrom? What kind of guy was he?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) 2nd Platoon, throughout the deployment, was like the jack-of-all-trades for the company but also for the battalion. They had spent a lot of time at Camp Blessing. They were a platoon that the battalion commander could utilize all over his battlespace and even outside of our battlespace. They were the platoon that went up with Chosen Company to do personnel recovery of Staff Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) They had experience in that and experience being a quick reaction force for the battalion. They had taken missions up to northern Nuristan with the company headquarters to do a government building of the Nuristan provincial government, so they had gone all the way up there. They had relieved Battle Company for some time for them to get R&R in the Korengal outpost. They were like the flexible unit for the company but also for the battalion. They were full of guys who had a wide array of experience. They were very competent NCOs supported by very motivated soldiers and led by Lieutenant Brostrom who had taken the platoon back in October. You could tell his character just accentuated through the whole entire platoon. He was a very laid-back guy from Hawaii. As a company commander, you always want to let guys lead within their own character and he was definitely a little more laid-back than I was as a platoon leader, but it was what suited him very well and it really helped out his platoon based on the situation they were in. With all the stresses in combat, he was the type of guy they were very comfortable with. They could always go to him with any issues they had. He was always laughing with them, joking with them and was really a leader. He was a leader people wanted to follow because they know he's competent, they feel confident with him and they feel comfortable with him. He wasn't the type of leader who's distant from his men. He was very close with them, almost at a level that I would say, if I was counseling him, it might be too comfortable, but I think for the situation it was mostly ideal and the type of leader he needed to be. The other thing about him was that he was very lead-by-example as a platoon leader. In firefights, it was this inherent desire he had to be with his guys and that was almost frustrating for me, too, because I always wanted to be talking to him, but he knew where he needed to be to influence his men in a positive way and in tough conditions.

Brick

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What can you tell me about 2nd Platoon's platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) Yankee

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) He was actually a new platoon sergeant. One thing I forgot to cover was that 2nd Platoon was at Bella over the winter time and their platoon sergeant, Sergeant Kahler, was killed on 26 January. That was another thing that really contributed to a lot of this, because it gave us a lot of indication of how people we thought we could … not fully trust, ~~but more trust~~ … ~~could be (*inaudible*) local nationals and others~~. We had an incident where one of our Afghan security guards had shot and killed Sergeant Kahler. The investigation was inconclusive as far as if it was on purpose or an accident. But in my mind, this guy did this on purpose and he was never seen again. It was actually a group of people. That was something that was very hard for that platoon. Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) had come in to replace Sergeant Kahler after he died, from 1st Platoon. Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) had extensive experience. He was at the Ranch House as Weapons Squad leader for 1st Platoon. He was in that very large firefight and had done great things. He was also obviously at Wanat. He was very comfortable with Lieutenant Brostrom. They had a great time and a great relationship and the platoon definitely benefitted from that.

trust, we could

Yankee

Yankee

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) How did the embedded training team end up there? Did you guys have two or three Marines with these guys?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Everything we did was with the Afghan National Army and the embedded training team was a big part of that. They had recognized in their own planning … we said, "Whatever set of ANA you have at Bella, we need them to be at Wanat." Their leadership recognized that this was going to be a situation where we needed to put additional people there, so they actually put three Marines up there for the initial occupation, just to keep the ANA focused and keep them accomplishing their tasks while we occupied there. Usually they only have two, but for this event they put three up there, at least initially, and that was to help the ANA build their defense and to work with the locals. Those guys made a big difference in the initial occupation, because it's very difficult to work with the Afghan National Army. They're just not like US soldiers, so there are a lot of cultural aspects you have to take into account. They're very young and not all of them are educated. It's a very difficult leadership challenge for them and they did a good job with that.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Over the course of the days leading up to the day you arrived, which I believe was 12 July, I assume you were on the radio trying to coordinate stuff. What happened just a few days prior to you arriving at Wanat on the 12th?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) My original plan was to fly from Bella, because I was at Bella while they were breaking it down. So as they were breaking it down, I was there and I was going to fly with my RTO and my fire support officer, Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) straight to Wanat to do kind of the same thing. We had had some other things that went on. There was another 15-6 investigation that I needed to make some statements for based on some actions around Bella, and that needed to be accomplished within the next couple of days. I went back to Camp Blessing to do that and then on the next available resupply flight up to Wanat, I was going to jump on, which I did on the 12th. That's when I got there, around midday on the 12th.

Football

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) You arrived by chopper on the 12th. What happened from there?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I arrived with my RTO, Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) Seattle who was the guy I always kept with me. I didn't take my fire support officer because Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) was up there and he was the most competent FO we had in the company. I knew he could do everything he needed to do. I got up there, got on the ground, looked at what the platoon had done so far. I looked at the wire that they had put up and I went around to each position looking at them. I was really just saying hi to all the guys because I hadn't seen them in a while. I wanted them to know that this was a very difficult thing for them to do, being so close to redeployment.

Cyan

We knew it was the right thing to do as far as our mission went, but it was difficult for them to be out there. They were more vulnerable than they would be at Camp Blessing, within a couple weeks of redeploying. I knew I had to be there with them, so I just went around and said hi to them, looked at their positions and walked around with Lieutenant Brostrom, talked to Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) about the mortars and how much ammo they had and what they needed. Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) walked around as well and identified some things that we really needed immediately to help them out. I had come in on a resupply flight so I came in with fuel and water, which were some of the things that they needed. We needed to stock up on them since we were going to be there, especially the fuel to support the local national equipment as well as the engineering element that was there. So when I got there, they had built up the mortar pit, which was the priority since that was a large weapons system that was going to affect the enemy. Then I just went around to all the positions, I looked at the OP, I looked at their sectors of fire and then I went over with Lieutenant Brostrom his fire plans. He had briefed me that they had done rehearsals of what to do upon contact. They had done a lot of fire missions and had done observer training to refine their targets and to know what were the most vulnerable areas we could be attacked from.

Romeo

Yankee

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) They had done these fire missions with the 120 and the 60 millimeter they had there? Had he already done some coordination with the 155s down at Blessing?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) We had done both of those, so basically it was observer training missions to refine targets in vulnerable areas. Based on what we had seen in Bella, one of the enemy TTPs is rockets, so a lot of times it's essential to shoot the known or the likely areas where they shoot rockets from. That's going to prevent them from affecting your position, so we refined some targets with the mortar and also the 155s from Camp Blessing to make sure we had those areas targeted. If we did get attacked with rockets, we would be able to affect those areas.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) These engineers who were attached to you, where did they come from?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I can't remember the unit number, but they were basically a horizontal and vertical engineer detachment that was going to help us build up the area.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) They didn't really have any machinery or anything, just a truck and that was about it?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) They had a Bobcat, a small tractor to move dirt and help build force protection. The reason was because that was the only thing we could lift with an aircraft to put up there because it was so light. That was going to immediately help us dig holes for force protection and also fill HESCO barriers that would provide force protection. They had a good amount built up. They had the mortar pit entirely surrounded by HESCO barriers and they had at least two other positions that had HESCO barriers filled around them for force protection.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Somebody had told me too that on the morning of the attack, there was some water in the mortar pit and they were trying to alleviate that problem?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes, there was basically an area of the base that had some standing water from some irrigation, because it was farmland that we had occupied. It was farmland that wasn't utilized; it was just dirt fields and there was some standing water from some irrigation. They were trying to push the water and fill it in with dirt so we could put the mortar pit there. It was actually adjacent to the mortar pit, is where that area was.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) It's my understanding that when you arrived there, there was somebody who wanted to talk to you about the fact that you guys were going to get attacked. One of the translators from Wanat knew something?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) When I got there, there were a lot of locals who were just milling about adjacent to us, just seeing what was going on. There was a guy who spoke English who was talking to me. His father was an elder in the area who lived nearby and he was worried about his house getting hit with rockets and stuff like that. You have to kind of take reports from locals with a grain of salt. You have to fit a pattern in of what really is truthful, because on any given day in Afghanistan, a local will come up to you and tell you that you're going to get attacked. What we anticipated was that they were going to first attack us with rockets, because that was something they could do that didn't take a lot of personnel to do it. If we had a new area occupied, they could try to affect us and try to dial in those rockets like they had done at Bella. They had shot rockets at Bella over time and then eventually they could get them inside the wire pretty consistently. So we thought if they were going to do a large-scale attack, they're going to first refine all the assets they wanted to utilize to do that, and then after something like 90 days, then they're going to try to do a large-scale attack like they did at the Ranch House.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Where was your command post located?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Our CP was pretty central to where all the positions were. It was a Humvee with a .50 cal on top that was just adjacent to what the PL and the platoon sergeant had prepared. It was really a platoon CP and I was just a part of it. They had three holes dug for force protection for the PL, the platoon sergeant and the RTO. Then myself and my RTO just slept right next to the Humvee in some area they had underneath the camo net. That was just adjacent to a building that was half built up there.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) You and your RTO didn't have your own holes to get into?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) No, we didn't. But there were still HESCO barriers built up. It was basically the Humvee with HESCO barriers from the front of it to this building, they had three holes dug on the other side, and then it was kind of open on the back side. We still had force protection from the Humvee and the HESCOs, and then those other guys were in their positions.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) The platoon sergeant gets everybody ready for stand-to at 4:30? Talk me through the events as the sun is getting ready to come up.

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) The Ranch House attack happened at first light and we knew that was the most vulnerable time if we were going to get hit. So everybody was up and we were at 100 percent security. Guys were in their trucks behind the guns. We'd actually repositioned the TOW truck to try to start doing some scanning and we were also going to do some fire missions that morning just to disrupt any kind of enemy observation. The platoon sergeant was going around and he was checking to make sure guys were up and had all their gear on. Then the TOW gunner and the TOW truck was starting to report that they saw people moving way up on the mountain, about two kilometers away way up on this hillside. Some locals had said that everyone up there was bad, which is what they commonly say but it might not be necessarily true, because there are shepherds and other things up there, too.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Were they seeing this off to the east?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) No, it was actually off to the west. So if you look at your map, some of those areas where there are a lot of cliffs, it was way up there. The Bobcat was actually working that morning, too, and he had built a position where the TOW truck could drive up a little bit of a slope so he could angle the TOW sight to see up at a high angle to the west. They were actually observing people moving back and forth. They didn't have weapons or anything like that, but usually somebody that early in the morning looking down at us, it was suspicious. I told the TOW gunner, "Continue to observe and see what they're doing. See how many people you can pick out and then we can determine positive identification based on their activity." Then

he started to see more than just a couple of people. He said it was five people. That's an indicator of something suspicious because guys up there, if they're in a group of more than two people, then they're probably not shepherds. Five shepherds aren't going to be together. Based on the terrorist videos that we've seen and things like that, a group of five to 10 guys up in the mountains is commonly enemy personnel.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) You're going back and forth with him over the radio. He's not yelling this to you, is he?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I had actually walked over to the TOW truck, so it was about 10 meters away from the CP. I was standing there with Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) talking to Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) who was the head of that section. Once we had seen them, we determined PID. I said, "Okay, let's do it coordinated. We can coordinate a mortar fire mission with shooting the TOW at the same time." So I told Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) to tell Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) to go ahead and direct lay the mortar up on that area, and then as soon as we shoot the mortar we can shoot the TOW and get maximum effects on those personnel based on that. Then as soon as we did that, I was basically coordinating, Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) was prepping a round to shoot it and that's when everything kicked off.

Yankee Yankee Romeo Ixiar Romeo

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What did that look like? What happened then?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I was just outside of the CP and the first thing that happened was RPGs from two positions, as I remember, and they were targeting the TOW truck definitely. They had two RPGs. One landed just underneath the front of the truck, from the west, and it was at a range of maybe 50 meters. Just outside of that side of the wire was a little bit of dead space that went down to a creek. The enemy had gotten back there and they were occupied inside local national housing. They had shot and they were trying to target that TOW truck. The first one went just underneath the truck and I could tell they were trying to move the truck to where they could affect it. Then the mortar pit was also attacked with machine gun fire. I couldn't really tell from where, though, because I was running around for cover.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Where were you able to find cover, back behind one of the other trucks?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes. I was standing just on the west side of the CP, so I had just run around into the CP and got on the radio. I was in a position where I was talking on the radio and I was looking out the windshield of the Humvee at the TOW truck and the mortar pit. The mortar pit was under machine gun fire and I saw the TOW truck take multiple RPGs through the engine block, so at least two went into the engine block and the front of the Humvee and lit on fire. That's when Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) made the call for those guys to get out of the truck. They knew it was just going to burn.

Ixiam

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) And it had 20 or so TOW missiles on the back of it or something?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) TOW missiles are large and they couldn't carry that many. I think it had about six in the back of the truck, plus one that was loaded. They got the TOW to shoot off, but because of the RPG fire I don't think the TOW gunner was able to hold that initial shot, from what I recall.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) So one of the TOW missiles did go firing off to the west somewhere, but nobody knew where it went?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I can't remember if he actually shot it or not, but I know he was prepped and in position to shoot to do that. The largest part of the attack had started from the west side and the mortar pit was the focus. Those guys were still trying to shoot rounds, but they were also in a very close fight with the enemy. Recalling from Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) report, there were enemy in the trees who they were shooting and throwing hand grenades at from within 10 meters.

Pepper

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Then were you starting to get reports at this time from OP Topside?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I know based on the reports, the OP was saying they had not gotten any contact initially; it was all from the west. It was very loud and I was trying to report to the battalion over FM about the large scale of this attack. That's what's going to start the time clock of pushing assets towards us, which I knew we were immediately going to need.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) You knew immediately that this wasn't just a typical attack?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Right, based on the positions it was coming from and the volume of fire that initially came, we knew this was different. If it was further away, the fire would have been a lot more inaccurate so it wouldn't have been as immediate a problem. But I do remember reporting, "This is a Ranch House-style attack and they're in close range with the intent to overrun" or at least get maximum effects from that." It was also a large amount of people. It wasn't two-, three- or five-man teams from 600 meters. Initially I could easily say it was 40 to 50 guys based on the volume of fire and then the length of the firefight that lasted. Somebody had to carry all that ammunition. We knew, based on that, it's an increased amount of people. I did report that immediately so I knew the battalion would get rolling and get the maximum amount of assets to us.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Do you recall who you got on the radio at the battalion CP?

Oscar CMM: Yes, it was the RTO, Rock 33 initially, but soon after that it was Rock 6 because either he was already awake or they had gotten him. Within five minutes I was talking to him.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What was the battalion commander's initial response?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) He was giving us what we needed to try to prevent that. I had already started trying to work some targets, or at least get some immediate suppression artillery targets done. We just needed to shoot the mortar just to get a reaction, so Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) had started to move to do that. At some point, I yelled over to him just to shoot the mortar because he was already laid on that initial target that we wanted to shoot. I said, "Just shoot that and that should get some kind of effect." It may affect some kind of enemy command and control that's up on that hilltop. So he went to do that and then immediately fire picked up on his position at the mortar pit.

Romeo

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) He was able to get off about four rounds with that?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes. I think that's what he got off and then that was it. He also had multiple guys injured. Specialist Abad and Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) were injured at his position. So as soon as he did that, he got RPG fire, which was a big problem because of all the mortar rounds that were there, and there was also machine gun fire onto the mortar pit from an angle where they could actually get it over the HESCO barriers. That was kind of a problem with shooting the mortar. That's when he started to evacuate his casualties from there about 15 or 20 meters back to where the CP was, because that was a better covered position.

Pepper

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) So they're going to be running from there to your position. Which direction were they going?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) They were running east from their position to my position across what was going to be the outpost. So he moved across, they moved in there and the TOW truck was essentially 10 to 15 meters south of the CP, and those guys, since their truck was on fire, had also broken contact back to the CP. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing because it sort of became a CCP for us and it gave ~~me~~ my guys who were

extra to help out with command and control. I didn't have my fire support officer, so I needed a guy who could do that. I was trying to operate with my RTO and the platoon leader's RTO together in that CP.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What kinds of radios were you using? How many did you have?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I know there were at least two radios inside the Humvee that were just ASIP FM radios. We could get FM communications back to Camp Blessing, which was a good thing because that's something we couldn't get when we were at Bella. We only had TACSAT capability. So we had two FM radios, one talking to the platoon and one talking to the battalion. Then we also had a TACSAT radio that was secondary communications for us.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Okay, please continue.

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Some of the things that happened in between that time, there was a thing going on with the mortars, a thing going on with Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) with the TOW truck, and then the platoon began to execute their reinforcement plan, kind of an internal QRF that the platoon leader had planned out that if a position gets hit, this is how we're going to reinforce them. That's something they had rehearsed and planned out beforehand. Lieutenant Brostrom immediately recognized, after the initial hit from the west side, that the OP was the next vulnerable spot, and they were under an increased amount of fire as well. He was in the CP and saw what was going on around us. He said to me, "We need to get up there." I said, "Okay, go ahead." I didn't give him specifically how many guys to take or anything like that. That was part of his plan already and he began to execute that. That's when he went to a position that was due north, part of the TCP of what was going to be the gate to the outpost. He went due north, which was only about five meters away, to get Specialist Hovater from his position to go reinforce the OP.

Ixiar

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) So I take it that he's running through fire to get up there to the TCP?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes, absolutely.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) You guys are still continuing to be under RPG and small arms fire at this point?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) The RPGs were kind of intermittent. They definitely targeted those towards specific things. But the small arms fire was continuous, and we could hear snaps and cracks of rounds going by over the CP. Then a couple of times they'd hit the vehicle, so there was definitely a lot going on. In addition to that, that position had three guys who were injured as well. I don't know if that had happened before or after Lieutenant Brostrom left with Specialist Hovater, most likely it was after. But yes, it was continuous fire that was moving at all angles through the outpost.

He, LT Brostrom

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) So [you] ran straight north from the CP to the TCP to pick up the sergeant, and then what happens?

[LT Brostrom]

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Then he moved from there across the road and then in between a couple of buildings to get up to where the OP was.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) At that point he's moving off to a north, northeasterly direction?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Right. He's taking the quickest route possible to the OP, which was the first building that was adjacent to the road. It was a long rectangular building that runs north to south that was a bazaar. He ran to the north of that and then immediately to the east to get to the OP.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) I take it nobody really knows what happened after he got to the OP. I guess some people heard shouting and some shooting or something. Do you have any details on that?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) We thought there was a possibility that he got hit on his way up there. But then talking to Sergeant Cyan (b)(3), (b)(6) and in some of the reports, he actually did a face-to-face conversation with Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and Cyan Cyan Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) heard him talking with Specialist Rainey back and forth about where the enemy was. So there was a time, and I don't know how long that was, anywhere from a couple of minutes to maybe five or six minutes, where he was coordinating with the guys who were up there, shooting his weapon and trying to find out where the enemy was and shoot them.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Was he able to get off any more radio communications to you or anybody else once he left your position?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I don't remember if there were any radio communications with him. I remember mostly talking to Cyan Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) at the OP, because he was the one who was continually talking with the CP. He was talking to me and he was also talking to Specialist (b)(3), (b)(6) x-ray who was the platoon leader's RTO.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) So what was Sergeant Cyan (b)(3), (b)(6) telling you at this point?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) It depended on different times, because I had already begun coordinating for artillery fire and was beginning to plan out where I wanted aircraft to drop bombs around our area just to give us some breathing room so we could continue to fight. It was a situation, obviously, where we were going to shoot final protective fire, danger close-type rounds. But I didn't want to be careless with anything like that, because there's a fine line between where you're shooting danger close and where you're just not going to do any good because you're hurting your own guys. You have to make sure it's pretty accurate.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Had you already coordinated some final protective fires with the 155s back at Blessing?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Right, we had, and that's something that even if you're in a situation where the enemy is close, if you're still fighting that's probably not something you want to do because of the high chance of hurting Cyan your own people. I still had communications with Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and he was fighting. Let's put a round that is still danger close but it's more safe, more like a 200 meter away type thing. Then if that's good, he can walk it in to where he's comfortable. I had already coordinated for rounds to land off to the east and northeast of their position based on what I heard and based on what I knew of the terrain of where they were getting hit from.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Did they get those rounds off pretty quickly?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes, I felt the rounds. I haven't looked at the actual time on the 15-6, but I felt like those rounds were pretty quick. They obviously knew that we were in trouble and artillery was always pretty reliable in terms of the amount of time it took them to get rounds out. I just wanted to make sure they were having some sort of effect on the enemy on the east and north sides. I would say it was probably within eight minutes of the initial call that the rounds actually hit.

Cayan

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) So you're trying to call for fire, you've got (b)(3), (b)(6) who needs help with his group at the OP, and I take it you've got air coming in. How are you handling all that all at once?

Diamond

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) When Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6) got on the radio with me, he said, "The call sign is Bone, the B-1 Bomber," so I knew the capabilities of that are that they can drop multiple bombs at the same time. I had come up with a list of what I wanted him to shoot, which was about six targets. Two were on the west side, where the initial volume of fire was heavy from but it had kind of died down. I had two on that side and then all the others were on the east and north of the OP, basically in the low ground because I knew that's where the enemy had come up from if they were close to them. Then also if they were going to leave or break contact, they would have to go through that low ground. It was frustrating because the fire

had died down from the west side from when the initial call for those bombs went in. So they said, "Okay, we can get two targets on the west first," and that wasn't necessarily where the need was at that time, although that was where the need was when I called it in. So they did those two first and then they followed on with the others. The amount of information that the bomber can process is about two at a time. That's going to get it out faster. If you do six at a time, then it's just going to be a longer span of time. They can drop all six at once but it's going to take longer to process them all.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) How were you guys coordinating with them? Were you using a map to give them an eight-digit grid coordinate?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I was using the map and was giving them the best I could for an eight-digit grid. Then the battalion TOC would obviously refine that within maybe 10 or 20 meters just to make sure it was safe and clear. It was obviously danger close, probably within 100 meters of where we were, but making sure because of the terrain and stuff that it was safe.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What was the effect of those first couple of bombs coming out of the B-1? Was there a tremendous explosion?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I thought it was going to be a lot worse than it was because it was within about 100 meters. But because they dropped them in the low ground, it kind of muted a lot of the explosion. I yelled out over the radio, "Bombs are coming in." I told guys, "Brace yourself for the impact because these are going to be danger close." Guys were making sure they had their mouths open so there wasn't any over pressure from the explosion and things like that. We were all bracing behind the Humvee and we made sure that the other guys, who were inside their Humvees, were at their positions or at least behind cover in case some shrapnel flew over. But when it actually hit, it didn't seem to be as large as I thought it was for some reason, even though it was that close.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) At this point, the guys inside vehicle patrol base are continuing to fight back with the .50s and you've got some guys who are still mounted on some of the trucks with their crew-served weapons?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Right. The TCP positions that were on either side of the road, the one that was to the southernmost position on the road was Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and his squad. They were in some pretty heavy contact as well from the east. The enemy had occupied some of the houses off to the east. They were actually shooting from there and it was a lot of machine gun fire. Some of that fire also affected Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) the other squad leader's position, that was just behind the platoon CP. They had three guys who were injured in that position. At some point in between there, I think it was after the initial bomb drop, I had a list of targets that battalion was working. I knew they were coming in. At this point, I was trying to get a feel for how many guys were still capable of fighting. What condition are they in? That's when I ran just five or 10 meters to the north position, to Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) position, and that's also where the engineers were located. I wanted to see those guys. I knew I had two casualties in my position. I went up there and they had three casualties at their position. That was the medic (b)(3), (b)(6) Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and then one of the engineers had some shrapnel (b)(3), (b)(6) was hit in the arm and Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) was hit in the hand. So they were manageable. They weren't in a condition that was very dire, whereas back at the CP both (b)(3), (b)(6) and Specialist Abad were shot in the leg. It's hard to tell when someone gets shot in the leg, but that's where that big artery is so that was a little more immediate. Then the OP, I knew they were in a big fight, but I didn't really have an idea of how many casualties they had because it was so intense at that point. From there, I ran back to the CP and I reported how many casualties I knew I had, knowing that the battalion would then get a MEDEVAC at least pushed forward. Although we were still under fire, at least they could push them forward so when it was clear, we could get them in as quickly as possible.

Scorpio

Pices

Pisces

Iowa

Memphis

Iowa

Pepper

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) So you didn't have to do anything with calling for MEDEVACs. The battalion took care of that for you?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Right, I just basically reported what I had for casualties, because a lot of the MEDEVAC information they already knew. They knew my location, they knew the LZ and they knew the LZ was hot at this time. So all I gave them was numbers of casualties and a quick assessment of what I thought they were. I knew that two guys were urgent surgical and others were probably just urgent. But they knew they were going to have to have more than one MEDEVAC already with five. It was almost [redacted] a mass casualty situation at that point.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Everybody I talk to thinks the MEDEVAC guys just did bang-up job.

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) This was the only MEDEVAC the battalion has done where the MEDEVAC was integrated into the firefight. I don't know if the MEDEVAC actually took rounds, but there were definitely parts of the perimeter that were under fire while they landed on the ground, so those pilots, I hope one day to meet them. They definitely assumed a risk to themselves. They obviously weighed the risk, but they definitely assumed some risk in order to save those guys' lives. We had seen that before, not with enemy fire but with the 9 November ambush – the ability of a pilot to take some risk.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What happened up to this point, up until the time the first MEDEVAC arrives?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I'm kind of backtracking a little bit. It's hard to distinguish which event is before the other; it's just little snapshots of what happened. The mortars were treating casualties inside the CP, treating their own guys. The 60 millimeter mortar was in a different position, out in the open, and we were trying to get control of that so we could utilize it. We thought the mortar pit was pinned down and the mortars were unable, because of the injuries … they didn't have a full crew either. So we concentrated on working the 60s that were still under fire. Sergeant Phillips was trying to get control of that. To their own credit, I never made any orders other than to Lieutenant Brostrom to reinforce the OP. I was trying to coordinate the external assets to try to give us some breathing room. Then the squad leaders were executing the platoon leader's plan of reinforcement. So somewhere in there Sergeant Garcia, along with Specialist Larkspur (b)(3), (b)(6) had moved across from their position, which was actually the northwest-most position, to move across there and get to the OP. They had gone down and they had somehow linked up with Sergeant Scorpio (b)(3), (b)(6) and Specialist Philly (b)(3), (b)(6) to move up there. They had moved to their position across the road and then they were going to move the 50-plus meters from there to the OP, which was basically on the east side of all the buildings. At some point, they had gone and done that and reinforced their position. There was a lot of time that those guys, obviously on the OP, were fighting based on what Specialist Plum (b)(3), (b)(6) said Plum (b)(3), (b)(6) and Plum (b)(3), (b)(6) up on the top with a 240, and then also Specialist Fig (b)(3), (b)(6) Sergeant Tango (b)(3), (b)(6) and those guys were already injured. Plum (b)(3), (b)(6) I think, said he was out of ammo. They knew they had to do something, so those guys were starting to move back towards Sergeant Scorpio (b)(3), (b)(6) position, and at the same time Sergeant Scorpio (b)(3), (b)(6) Sergeant Garcia and those guys were moving up to replace them. I think some of the guys moved them back while other guys were moving up to the position. As they were moving up to the position, they occupied some of the other positions and, at some point, some of the lower position guys … that's when the large amount of people were killed. Hovater and Brostrom were both killed. Rainey and Phillips at some point fighting down there were killed. Specialist Zwilling down there was killed and then Ayers was killed up top, in the top portion of the OP. Then Specialist Bogar as well somewhere down in there was killed. What we think is that the enemy had gotten around into the buildings and in very close range. They were holding their sectors of fire, but then also noticing that they were taking fire from off to almost their left rear side from some of the buildings. I'm not sure how exactly that action took place, but somewhere there was a catastrophic hit. What some of the guys think happened is that there might have been guys down near the bottom who got injured or killed and some of the guys had moved to help them. Then they took another large volume of fire from that side to where a

lot of them were killed. Many of them were killed in all the same area. Meanwhile Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) who was hit in the initial barrage of RPG fire with shrapnel, couldn't walk because of the trauma that was to his legs, so he's on the radio, also with a 240, down inside the position and he's shooting over the sandbags at the same time he's talking to me trying to coordinate for more fires.

Cyan

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) What were you telling (b)(3), (b)(6) Cayan? Do you recall any of that conversation?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I don't recall a lot of the specifics of our conversation, but I do remember hearing him report things and me using that information to help coordinate for fires. Besides the bombs that were dropped, there was that an Apache section that came in that we were using to shoot up some of the buildings and shoot some of the area in front of the OP that he was also a part of. I've talked to him but he doesn't remember coordinating a lot of this, but he was giving me information that I was utilizing. To his credit and for the award he was put in for, he was the one guy who was actually holding that whole thing together. The ability of him to continue fighting for over an hour considering the extent of his injuries was something you wouldn't expect a guy to be able to do under those circumstances. There was a point where his radio transmissions were starting to sound very weak to me and I thought that was because he had lost a lot of blood and was getting worse. I knew guys had reinforced him up there and I was trying to balance the decision of whether to get the MEDEVAC in here while we were still actually in contact. Obviously you want to get a guy out, but if you have an aircraft that gets shot down, then you're in a worse situation than before. So that was something we were balancing out. I knew we were in a better situation because we had the Apaches there and we had the MEDEVAC waiting on the LZ at Camp Blessing. I knew I had to start coordinating for that, but I was really trying to get them breathing room for the MEDEVAC, and then also have enough people available to move the casualties that we did have. It was really an unclear picture because even at that point, I was getting reports of casualties but they kept changing. The only way I'm going to know truly how many there are is by going to look at them. I had the Apaches doing gun runs in between the OP and the positions around the base, then also doing to the east of the OP, doing 30 millimeter gun runs in front of their positions. Once we had them identify where the OP was, I said, "50 meters to the east, that's where the gun runs need to be continually." So they just kept coming in like that. Then based on some of the reports I got from up there and on the radio transmissions I was starting to get from Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) it was, "They're in the buildings." So I had them start doing gun runs on the buildings that were just to the north, but also in between the OP and the base.

Scorpio

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) You're talking directly to the pilots at this time?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Yes, I was talking to the pilots a few times and then also Specialist (b)(3), (b)(6) x-ray was talking to them to try to get them to where they needed to be. I would give them full situational awareness so they knew it was coming from the commander and then just telling (b)(3), (b)(6) x-ray what to tell them based on how they were doing. I could tell they were being very careful because when they would come in … usually an Apache can do a gun run from pretty far away, but they were basically shooting their weapons at point blank range, because they're coming in so low, right over top. We had guys who were within 10 meters of those rounds hitting, but it's what needed to happen to try to alleviate the contact.

x-ray

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) At this point has somebody launched the quick reaction platoon, which I believe is 1st Platoon?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I think almost immediately, based on what I said, the battalion commander had gotten those guys ready to go. That was even our big consideration for moving to Wanat, that if this type of attack happened at Bella, the only way to reinforce was through air, and it would've probably been three hours before that could have happened. Whereas because Wanat was ground accessible, those guys were in there within an hour and 15 minutes from when the contact started, which was key. This was also the first time the battalion had experienced a QRF actually coming in and being engaged by the enemy. Usually the fight is

over at that point, but because this was a four-hour firefight that was something that continued based on their reinforcement. I think that's something the enemy didn't expect was going to happen, which really, really benefitted us.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Were you in radio contact with the quick reaction force as they were making their way up there?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Because we were still trying to coordinate some of the assets, I didn't talk to them directly, but I could hear them talking to the battalion on the radio as they were moving up, so I was tracking them. Let me backtrack a little bit. Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and Sergeant Garcia with (b)(3), (b)(6) had gotten up there and were treating Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) which was something that needed to happen. I think if that hadn't happened, then Sergeant Pitts probably would've bled out. But because of those guys and their valor at getting up there even as they were getting engaged … at one point only Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) for a period of time … they quickly reinforced and held onto the OP with the enemy that was just around the other side. What I was saying before about when I thought Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) was weak from losing blood, it was actually because he could hear the enemy, and at that point he was by himself and he remembers it being quiet. He could hear the enemy talking to each other, just on the other side of the (redacted). So he was talking quietly because he could hear them really close. That gave me an indication of how close I needed to bring those gun runs and what we needed to coordinate to get up there. Then soon after (b)(3), (b)(6) and those guys got up there, a lot of the guys who were in the CP, I started directing them that they needed to go up there as well. Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) had gotten with Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and they had gotten with some of the ETTs and some of the guys from the TOW truck, as well as some of the other guys, and had all gone up there. They basically reinforced that. They went up there and maybe five minutes after that, I ran up there because I still was not getting a clear report of what the casualties were. I was thinking I'm going to need a large MEDEVAC to evac all these guys.

Larkspur

Scorpio

Cayan

Cyan

Cyan

Scorpio

Cherry

Pisces

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Up to this point, no MEDEVACs had shown up yet, right?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) I had run up there because I was trying to make a determination of where the priority for the MEDEVAC needed to be. Did it need to be the OP or did it need to be the five guys who I had? So I went up to the OP and went to see where Lieutenant Brostrom went. When I got up there, I saw Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) who said, "Don't come from that side because that's where they're at." He had been getting shot from those buildings. But either the gun runs or some of their fire had kind of pushed that back. I got up there and Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) my RTO, Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) they're all kind of coordinating the security up there. I noticed that I'm on top of at least seven guys who were dead. I was starting to check pulses, thinking that these guys were injured, but looking at some of them with the extreme trauma to their faces, they were definitely dead. I took Bogar's pulse, which wasn't there, and I tried to start moving him. Then I was like, "Wait a second, there are guys who are still injured up here." Sergeant Samaroo had his leg bandaged and he was still moving around trying to coordinate security with the other guys who were up there. That's when they started to move Sergeant Garcia, who had extreme trauma to him. He had taken a direct hit from a large amount of shrapnel to his midsection and he was getting moved. He was still alive and then shortly after that he died of his wounds up on the OP. They also had Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) up there who they were trying to move to the other side, to the south of the OP, so they could position these guys for MEDEVAC. At that point I said, "I know I've got seven killed and I think at least four guys injured." It was (b)(3), (b)(6) (b)(3), (b)(6) (b)(3), (b)(6) and I think (b)(3), (b)(6) was still up there, so I knew that probably the safest thing right now … because I didn't know if the MEDEVAC could land up there. I said, "The safest thing right now is to get (b)(3), (b)(6) out," because he was the most critical guy in my mind. From what I knew, he had been injured the longest. I said, "Okay, bring the MEDEVAC in," because there was a lull in fire at that point. I had the Apaches and I had aircraft working targets. I said bring the MEDEVACs in, we could bring them in to the actual combat outpost and we can get (b)(3), (b)(6) out of there. Just before that, Specialist Abad, despite getting a lot of treatment, had passed away. I don't know if it was his breathing that went or he lost a lot of blood, but he was no longer there, and Specialist Scantlin

Scorpio

Cherry

Pisces

Seattle

Cyan

Scorpio

Plum

Pisces

Pepper

Pepper

was the guy because the medic was injured. He was highly trained on a lot of medical. He had somewhat of a Special Forces background and had done a lot of medical courses, so he had become the medic and treated a dozen people. I knew I could get (b)(3), (b)(6) out, so they had landed initially. There were two MEDEVACs available so the first one came and got (b)(3), (b)(6) and the three other guys who were injured – Walker, Hewitt and the engineer had all gotten on that flight and gotten out. The next MEDEVAC came in and I thought we were going to have to move everybody from up top down to where the MEDEVAC was. But actually the MEDEVAC on its own landed up on the terraces, which was pretty risky in and of itself and, based on looking at the ground, it was amazing that they could actually do that. But it really did save a lot of time because they didn't have to move the casualties a long distance. They only had to move them about 10 or 15 meters into the bird, so that really helped out. First it was (b)(3), (b)(6) and those guys got out, and then after that it was (b)(3), (b)(6) Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and (b)(3), (b)(6) There were some other guys who were injured. I know (b)(3), (b)(6) was another guy who probably went out on that first flight, but Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) who was injured pretty badly, was still fighting somewhere. He had come from the OP but moved down, and then eventually later on I found him at the CP, but that was much later.

Pepper
Pepper
Pepper
Scorpio
Cayan
Philly
Fig
Tango

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) At this time, has the quick reaction force showed up yet?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) The quick reaction force, ~~I believe~~, showed up after the first MEDEVAC. ~~It was after the first two MEDEVACs, but I really can't recall. I'm trying to remember now~~.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) At this point, is the enemy fire slackening at all or are they still keeping the pressure on? What's happening with the enemy activity?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) At this point, it had slackened. There were almost two parts of the firefight. It was the first hour and a half and then there was some continuation after that. We had pushed them back with a lot of fire from the Apaches and we had dropped several bombs on the north side. We were just trying to consolidate a little bit, get the positions built back up and get more guys into position to defend areas. The QRF had showed up ~~and I think it was right at the same time. I really can't remember. I want to say it has being~~ before the MEDEVAC went from the top OP, but it was near the same time because there was a lot of flying around. So when they showed up, First Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and I talked face to face and I told him, "The only casualties are up on the OP. The stuff down here, we got pretty good control of." So First Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and ~~Sergeant~~ (b)(3), (b)(6) 1st Platoon's platoon sergeant, went up to the OP to help with the casualties. I talked with Lieutenant Thurman, the 1st Platoon leader, who did a quick assessment with me and I ~~suggested that he~~ push north and try to just expand our perimeter to the north. On the direct south side, we knew we hadn't taken any fire. So we knew that that side was pretty secure. He had taken his trucks, pulled out and he started to push north through the bazaar. As he was pushing through the bazaar, he started to take additional fire from the buildings in the bazaar. The enemy was planning to attack again from that side, and as he pushed through he started taking fire and immediately fired back on the enemy within close range. Basically the enemy was trying to move into the bazaar. It was almost like if they were trying to flank around the OP, we almost did a counter-flank as 1st Platoon pushed through with their vehicles. They pushed through all the way through the bazaar and basically got around the enemy, pushed down into some low ground and got some Mk-19 fire, AT4s, and started to coordinate with the Apaches to get more fire on the enemy. That basically had enclosed the enemy between reinforcing the OP on the east and then pushing north with some vehicles to put a couple of fighting positions to start shooting Mk-19s.

Victor
Victor
Sergeant First Class
Raven

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Can you talk me through the closing events of the fight and anything else we may have missed?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) and those guys had some extensive contact. The firefight probably continued another 45 minutes. Between Lieutenant (b)(3), (b)(6) positions with the trucks and he was running around out back there as well, coordinating fires from the truck. He was marking targets for the Apaches with

Quebec
Quebec

Mk-19s to try to get those guys directed on, and this is actually to the buildings north, across the low ground from the OP. The OP, as well, began to take additional fire from RPGs and took additional guys who got injured. Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) got injured, Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) one of the mortars who reinforced got injured, Specialist (b)(3), (b)(6) one of the guys from the TOW truck that had blown up. He had come to the CP and then reinforced the OP, so you can just see how guys were moving across the battlefield. He got injured from an RPG blast. This is after the QRF and First Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) were up there. The platoon sergeant is up there shooting a 240, the first sergeant is handing him the ammo and coordinating security up there with Sergeant Phillips and all those guys who are up there taking additional fire. So that's the second half of the firefight. Now, the third QRF is still on its way from Able Company with Captain (b)(3), (b)(6) coming up to reinforce again. So they're on their way, halfway between Camp Blessing and Wanat. Then we're still dropping additional bombs and we're starting to get more assets to shoot a lot of the enemy that's beginning to break contact away from Wanat. Basically they had a close-in fight and then they just continued to fight as they went further and further away to the north. Then we just continued to kill them as they moved away. More assets got pushed and more enemy got killed and affected. We had additional MEDEVACs come in. I think there were a total of six or seven MEDEVAC flights that came in. Additional flights came in and they brought in additional medics because our medic got injured. He went up to the OP to help treat casualties and then he was involved in that second half of the firefight where he got injured and then MEDEVAC'd. So it was this continuous thing of people coming in and then people getting injured, then getting evacuated. Nobody from 1st Platoon got injured to where they needed to be MEDEVAC'd. Another thing to highlight was just another part of 1st Platoon. Sergeant Silvernale was one of the squad leaders who actually went through and cleared through a lot of the buildings in the bazaar just to make sure the enemy wasn't in there. He was part of marking the position on top of the bazaar to make sure the Apache knew where they were so they could easily coordinate to affect the enemy to the north. That was all done by 1st Platoon, while I was continuing to use artillery and the aircraft dropping bombs. We would do gun runs or drop bombs. If we were dropping bombs from the aircraft, I needed to move the Apaches south. So I would move the Apaches south, drop some bombs, that would kind of lull the fire, then I'd bring the Apaches in to start to patrol the ridgelines to see if they could see any enemy as we brought the MEDEVAC in behind them. So basically the bombs and then the Apaches would be the security for the MEDEVACs coming in, in all the different ways they came in. Then eventually we got to bring them in additionally to take out all the killed guys. First Sergeant Beeson was up on the OP coordinating to get those guys out.

Yankee | Khaki | Victor | Blackhawk | Ivory | Raven

(b)(3), (b)(6) If you were going to stand up in front of a group of fellow officers and say, "Let me tell you about this fight," what do you think prevented you folks from being overrun? What do you believe?

Date

(b)(3), (b)(6) We were at the tail end of a deployment and Chosen Company was very close-knit. All the platoons had worked together in multiple firefights. E5s had routinely controlled aircraft and done a lot of coordination. Specialists were well more mature than their years because of what they had experienced. Guys were so close-knit and so combat experienced, just the mere character of them, it was second nature for them to take the actions they took. No one was waiting for orders. An E5 wasn't waiting to be told what to do. A squad leader wasn't waiting to be told what to do. He was just doing it of his own initiative, which is key when seconds become minutes. You can lose a guy because you're not getting a step up on the enemy. Guys were fighting for each other and fighting for their lives without hesitation. If there was hesitation, then there would've been failure. That goes from the lowest private through the platoon, through the company, through the battalion TOC who were also doing a lot of things that they had become very seasoned at, because they had coordinated a lot of firefights. There were things at all levels that had just prevented that from happening, just continually knowing to reinforce, running into the teeth of a fight and not hesitating. The QRF from Blessing not hesitating to move up there saved minutes, which saved the element that was up there. We were pretty strung out and if the enemy had had enough combat power to launch another large attack without the QRF being there, it might've been something that was overwhelming to us, even though we had all the will in the world to fight.

Oscar

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Those guys in the QRF, they were trying to drive up there as fast as they could and they were probably concerned about IEDs and getting ambushed themselves?

Oscar (b)(3), (b)(6) Absolutely. That was actually a big consideration, especially for the additional QRFs. I think they shot a lot of Mk-19s on the way up to try and clear out the IED areas. It was basically a quick route clearance as they got up there. So they weren't being flippant about it; they were definitely just trying to get there as fast as they could. Being able to be in a unit that is seasoned at that and able to quickly coordinate things like that, the responsiveness of the MEDEVACs and the willingness of pilots – both the Apache pilots and the MEDEVAC pilots to take some risk for themselves for guys on the ground, that makes all the difference in the world and gives confidence to the guys on the ground. You see Apaches there and that boosts your confidence and allows you to concentrate on more things. Just being able to have all that come together is really key. As far as advice to other commanders, I guess I want to say that no one ever says in their mind that they're going to assume away some kind of risk. That was never my thought. We saw from the Ranch House what the enemy was capable of and we took measures to accomplish our mission of establishing that place, but we also took measures to prevent that from happening. But even if you have the perfect plan and you take all measures to prevent that from happening, it doesn't mean it's not going to be hard when it does happen, and it doesn't mean you're always going to have a leg up on the enemy if it does happen. If the enemy comes at you with over 100 people and you've only got 40 people, there's going to be some hard things that are going to happen for you to accomplish your mission. You can't keep those things from happening all the time, based on the way that a firefight goes. There are so many things you wouldn't think in training would be a possibility but that happen all the time in a firefight, as far as losing weapons systems or having something not be able to fire because of all the dirt and dust, or how bad something could've gone if I was two feet over this way as opposed to here. You just do the best you can and in no way, at any time, can you second-guess what you did. In hindsight you can say, "Oh, if I did this, that would've saved this person or would've accomplished this." But there's no way you would've known that, especially for your soldiers to have to deal with something like this after the fact. You're the expert on the ground if you're the commander, the platoon leader or whatever. You know you did the best you could for what the situation was and you cannot second-guess what you did. As bad as that situation was and I wish it had not happened, there's no way I'll ever say that a decision I made that day wasn't what I should've done. There's no way you could've known that, and that goes for all the soldiers who were there as well. There are guys who've said, "I should've gone up to that OP," but you don't know that, because if you would've done that, you would've given up this position and what would have happened to the position you were in? If I talk to a family member who lost a loved one that day, that guy was doing all he could for his country, for his fellow man, for his mission, and no one will ever take that away from him by second-guessing what happened. It's a shame if anybody ever does that, because it's just something that I know in my mind that no one will ever be able to take away from me.

Date (b)(3), (b)(6) Well, sir, I greatly appreciate you taking the time out to do this interview with me.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by (b)(6)