

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Iraq Experience Project

COLONEL LLOYD SAMMONS

Interviewed by: Larry Plotkin
Initial interview date: October 1, 2004
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Lloyd Sammons was a Special Forces colonel who served as a military assistant (MA) to CPA. He was assigned to Scott Carpenter in the governance section. He served four months, beginning December 2003.

Sammons notes two major problems. First, political appointees and FSOs in governance had their fingers on the pulse of the political nuances back in the U.S., but were not sensitive to the population/culture with which they were working. To the degree that they were sensitive to Iraqi needs, they were too Baghdad-centric. The second problem Sammons notes were divides between civilian and military commanders that led to a lack of clear leadership.

Sammons' overall conclusion was that the U.S. is failing in Iraq because of our inability to understand the society and the motivation of Iraqi extremists. Sammons compares these extremists to Ho Chi Minh. "You couldn't buy Ho Chi Minh because you didn't have anything that he wanted except one thing, reunification of Vietnam under his rule. I said [they are] the same way. [The governance people] didn't get and neither does our president."

Sammons also offers his observations of democratic initiatives. He has a low opinion of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), which he regards as overly focused on political realities in Baghdad. In the provinces, he notes that tribal sheiks held a good deal of sway, a fact that would undermine traditional western concepts of "one man, one vote". Voting rights for women was another contentious issue with the sheiks.

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Q: Good morning. We need to start with basic biographical information: your name, area of specialty, age, education, and employer.

SAMMONS: Lloyd Foster Sammons. I'm 59. I am a reserve Special Forces officer. I'm just making that distinction, but as although a reserve officer, basically I've been on active duty since 9/11. I enlisted in the Army in 1969. I was a Special Forces medic and served in Panama, got out, went back to college, graduated University of Utah, ROTC. I went back in the service as an officer from 1976 through about 1980. Got out as a lieutenant, spent time in the 82nd Airborne, Special Forces and psychological operations units, again left active duty and went to law school at Antioch; graduated in '82, went back in the service for a fairly long tour. Took my bar, more than once. Passed.

Then I practiced law. In 1985, I was selected to go to the Marine Corps Command and Staff College and have stayed with Special Forces units from that time. I was in what they call troop program units, the weekend warrior-type units, from '80 to '85, and after '86, when I graduated from Command and Staff College. I then went into individual mobilization augmentee status which means I've been, since 1987, always with active duty units, never with a weekend warrior unit. I've always been on active duty.

Most of those active duty units have had something to do with Special Forces. I've been at Special Operations Command Central almost for the last 10 years. Since 1993, I've probably deployed 11 times – not all long deployments, some only one month. And I've been a non-asset assignment, though in Kosovo I was the area support group commander for all Kosovo and the southern Balkans for about a year. I received a Legion of Merit for that. I've have other awards throughout the years, but that's my highest award. I may be pending for a Bronze Star from Iraq. I spent only four months there, so I'm not expecting the Bronze Star, but it's possible for those who went.

I also went to the Army War College where I earned a master's degree, and of course, I said, a JD degree out of Antioch, and a BA out of Utah.

Q: Let me ask you, now, about your transition to Iraq. What was your assignment there? In terms of what you've mentioned so far, what training was most applicable there?

SAMMONS: Before I went to Iraq, while I was the area support group commander, I was looked at for a couple assignments. One was up at the War College, teaching. I took

that assignment, but in the interim, before I went to the assignment, I was contacted by the Special Operations Low-Intensity Conflict, Special Operations Counter-terrorism section. They had my resume, and they asked me if I would consider joining them. I said yes, but that I needed and I wanted a full time position, and they agreed. So, I started there in October 2002, almost literally two years ago today. I was basically in a policy division, as the Deputy Director of Strategic Initiatives within that section.

In November of last year (2003) – so had I been there about one year – I was approached by the director who said, "They're looking for military assistants to go over to Iraq, to be embedded within the Coalition Provisional Authority." I had already had some exposure to ORHA (Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance) – not as an action officer, but as an observer, attending meetings and listening to where they were going with ORHA.

I thought about it. I wanted to go to Afghanistan and was tentatively scheduled to go, but it wasn't certain. I said, look, I'll raise my hand and put my name in for Iraq. I was initially rejected. The military assistant at Secretary of Defense called me and said, "Thanks, but no thanks. You don't have military assistant experience." That was sort of where I left it. Military assistants, in the past, were super aides. Now, they generally serve as the executive officer of a general officer or the Secretary of Defense or the Deputy Secretary of Defense.

Q: So they were looking for someone with military assistance experience?

SAMMONS: Yes, and I said fine. I didn't have that specific background. I'd been an aide one time, but an MA is different than an aide, though it's very similar in some ways. He said, "I'll keep you in mind," and we left it at that. Then, in November of last year, a list came out, and my name was on the list, but there were a lot of names on the list, about 40, and I think he said he needed 20 or so, so I figured, he's just throwing me a bone. He was a Special Forces officer, didn't know me on active duty, but I thought, "fine."

I went to the meeting of potential participants where he repeated that they were looking for people who were MAs. Again I thought that I wouldn't make this cut. Another list came out, and to my surprise, I was above the cut line. I remember saying maybe it's because I'm a lawyer. I'm not a JAG. I'm a Special Forces officer and will leave the military as a Special Forces officer, but I do have a JD degree.

People might argue about that because Antioch was a very liberal. That's why we all take the bar so many times. We are always arguing in the bar exam when we should just be answering the questions. Anyway, I kept finding my name above the cut line, ending up number four on the priority list. I was really surprised, but basically, because I was a lawyer, they wanted me for governance in the CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) which was fine by me. That was as close as I was going to get to where I really, truly wanted to be, in Afghanistan.

I went to Iraq. In addition to my Special Forces identity, I have a varied background. Because I'm a reservist, I have often had the ability to cherry-pick my assignments. Plus, I was a War College graduate. I think all, except maybe two, of us assigned to Iraq in this program were War College graduates, whatever service we were in. An MA assignment is typical for the full colonel just prior to the War College or just afterwards.

Q: What did you find while in Iraq?

I worked with mostly State Department people when I worked at governance. Scott Carpenter was the director. He was a former DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary). Dean Pittman was his deputy. He was an FSO-1 (Foreign Service Officer). Others were largely mid-level officers. I remember there was a big issue about people coming out of language school and going directly to Iraq without earlier field experience. Most of that was nixed by the State Department. They were not going to send first tours people right out of FSI (Foreign Service Institute). I was the only military guy there within the primary governance section. I was assigned to be Scott Carpenter's MA.

Q: Tell me more about the organization of the governance operation in Iraq. What were its goals, what did it accomplish while you were there, what was your own role in it, and how would you evaluate how things have been done?

SAMMONS: Well I'm not the most intelligent guy that's working on the planet. I will tell you, though, what I could see, and what I saw initially was moderately disturbing, but not outside the box.

Q: When did you arrive?

SAMMONS: My group of MAs arrived in Kuwait on the 7th of December, after a week of hell at Fort Bliss. It was an annoying week there, especially for prima donna O-6s -- standing in line, waiting to do this and that, and [it was] very poorly run. One of our main thoughts was that if they're managing things for O-6 officers so badly, what was happening to E-1 enlisted men. We could talk back because O-5 was the highest rank there. We could eat their lunch, and we knew it. But the poor E-1s were suffering, so we took up the gauntlet for them.

Anyway, we arrived in Iraq on about December 10, 2003. I believe we were met by Scott Norwood who had been the military assistant for the Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz's military assistant. Wolfowitz had sent Norwood to Iraq, and he stayed and became Bremer's MA. Steve Bucci, who was the Secretary of Defense's MA, ended up serving as MA for Ambassador Jones. Jones had come from Kuwait and was a Middle East hand, versus Bremer, who I later found out wasn't a Middle East hand. General Kellogg (retired) met us as well and gave us a bit of a brief.

Responsibilities were divided. I was under operations, and with one COO and one CPO, Kellogg. Jones ran the COO. Both reported to Bremer. Too many acronyms, but I soon knew what CPA meant -- Can't Produce Anything. That's what CPA ended up being.

Kellogg came in and he was a rah-rah guy. "I'm here to fix this stuff. I've been 82nd Airborne." I think he'd been corps commander to a guy who was a three-star. He ran things that were more concrete -- oil resources, things like that.

Governance was under Ambassador Jones, sort of. When I first got there, I reported to Scott Norwood who was going on leave, and this was a little disconcerting. Those working for the State Department, once in country for 45 days, were eligible for a quickie leave. Those around for 60 days got to take a longer leave. During the whole course of the time I was there, even as we were pushing to 30 June and the end of the CPA, everyone took their leave, always. I remember Dean Pittman saying, make sure you take your leave, and I thought, "Well, OK."

I understand differences between State and DOD (Department of Defense), and as a lawyer, I have practiced law in federal court, so I know differences in cultures and stuff like that. I had a guy named Tom Murphy who was a good friend a long time ago and worked in the State Department, so I used to see the differences in the cultural aspect of the military and State.

That didn't really affect me. I'm not rigid military. I don't think SS guys are rigid anyway. Also, I came up through the ranks, I'm very much attuned to that kind of stuff, and I don't believe everything I hear. I don't nod my head yes and go, "Yes, sir!" and all that stuff all the time. I think through stuff. People have sometimes said that despite myself I made O-6 because I am relatively independent. I tell the truth, I mean, as much as I know. I won't say I know all the truth, but whatever I know, I throw it out.

So, I met Scott on his way on leave. He handed me over to Dean Pittman, who, as his deputy, was basically trying to figure out what to do with me. I thought, "You don't know what to do with me?" I mean, I thought this was all greased. But during the course of the four months I was there as the military assistant to Scott, I had -- and I am stretching this -- maybe 15 minutes of face time with him...maybe. He was a busy dude, though. I can't say he wasn't busy, but what he didn't want, and I surmised pretty quickly, was someone regulating him, which sometimes MAs do. They set calendars, stuff like that.

The structure of the office had Dean as deputy to Scott. At the next level were the regional officers. I was sort of put in this regional pool. I didn't speak Arabic. Scott had three people working for him that he seemed to rely on the most. One was Roman Martinez. When I got there, Roman wasn't around; he came back sometime early in January. A second was Meg Sullivan, a bright woman, I thought. There was a third, but I can't recall his name. Those two were very much attached to Scott, and Scott was very much attached to Bremer.

Both seemed very bright people with good pedigrees. Roman Martinez used to say (he came out of Cuba) he was a Cuban guy, and I'm laughing because he said, "Oh, I'm just from the barrio." Well, if the barrio is 555 Park Avenue, which was his address, then so be it. I don't know New York City that well, but something tells me that 555 Park

Avenue ain't in any barrio. He went to Bentley -- which I guess is a pretty good school in New York City -- to Harvard and to Cambridge. He was maybe, 25, and had all the arrogance of his youth and thought he was the new Thomas Jefferson.

Meg was a little more settled. She was Georgetown and Oxford, and now teaches back at Georgetown where she was the professor of one of my Pentagon colleagues. Scott was a PhD, as well; I didn't know from where, and I understood that he had worked for Gingrich.

All of them, really definitely had their fingers on the pulse of the political nuances back in the U.S. I think they were all political appointees. Meg was sort of a contractor. She was an MCO, not an FSO. MCO meant something like Major Contracting Officer, a label for people brought in to fill positions requiring specific areas of expertise. They were largely governance people. Regarding governance -- those three people I've mentioned were all in Bremer's pocket. I mean, he was allowed to have them in his pocket. I didn't really care about that, but what I picked up was that they were a very close-hold, nothing sort of left that little circle.

Meanwhile, I watched and the situation disturbing. I didn't come to these conclusions overnight, I sat and waited. First of all, we were told we were in Iraq to help. Well, got it. I'm here to help, and I'll do pretty much anything that you legally ask me to do. However, I wasn't asked really to do anything. You could almost cut the feeling with a knife. I thought, because I was a reservist and a lawyer, that they would understand that I'm not, quote, unquote, a typical career kind of military guy who's worried about making a star. I didn't have any of that baggage. I felt I was sort of selected based on that, meaning I was someone they could work with. Almost immediately, I was really pretty much marginalized.

Outside of Baghdad, we had 18 regions. The regional officers were mostly career people. A guy named Michael Gfoeller was down in Hillah, one of the regions, the southern-central region, and he seemed to have more power than the others, or didn't give a shit. He'd definitely been around the Middle East for a long time, and he was cited in the newspapers a couple of times. He didn't seem to be intimidated by Scott.

My perception was, first of all, that the 18 provinces out there were compartmentalized so that none of them would really contact each other. We were supposed to come together for meetings about every two weeks, but it always got stretched to maybe the third week, and sometimes, because of Christmas, it didn't make it until January -- a lot of that crap.

The military commanders were also supposed to come in for these meetings. Every commander came in except one, and that was Petraeus. General Petraeus never showed up at the time I was there. He blew them off. I used to sit there thinking, "This is interesting, the 101st Airborne commander declines the invitation from Mr. Bremer. Interesting." There was always an excuse, but he never showed, and none of his people showed either. I mean, he just didn't show.

Swannack was there, as the 82nd Airborne commander. Dempsey was there as the 1st AD (Armored Division) commander. Odierno was there, as the 4th ID (Infantry Division) commander. Those I saw with some regularity at those meetings, every couple weeks. Petraeus, never.

Q: Did he never send anybody to represent him?

SAMMONS: Never.

There was another woman in the governance section named Candace Putnam, and Candace was interesting, and an Arabic speaker, but she left like – nobody stayed -- once her rotation was over. I'm going, "Well, wait a minute. You've got this big project coming the 30th of June, and here's an Arabic speaker working with the IGC (Iraqi Governing Council), and suddenly gone." We had a lot turnover and, it turned out, only one major focus – the transitional administrative law.

I recall writing to Meg one time. I said, "I know this is out of my lane and I understand you're all smart, but a lot of things that are happening here are Special Forces 101." What I meant by that, and what became rather frustrating for me, was you've got to know the people. But nobody was getting out. The IGC people never got out. They were Baghdad-centric like crazy. So, I like started to push. I mean, I got out.

Now, I didn't get out as much as I should have, and it took me a while to figure out where everybody in the office was coming from because there was hostility in the office. Some of it was probably generated by me. We had very little private office space. I had a special e-mail that kicked in from DOD news that issued bulletins: "Today, private so-and-so was killed in Anwar." I got all the casualty reports. I put up a sign that said "Why I am here?" in big, bold letters. That was my header, and every day I stuck up the names of people that weren't with us anymore. It was beginning to piss me off. It wasn't that I didn't expect people to die, I knew that. I felt that people in the office had a cavalier attitude toward these sacrifices, especially a lot of the young ones there. I just named a few, but there were more. There might have been 15 or more around doing other things like working with the IGC.

It was sort of like, we're back on campus. Meanwhile, I'm sitting there thinking, "I know we're in the Green Zone, and we're relatively safe." We get mortared every once in a while, but we're relatively safe. But, this is a combat zone. And these guys are going out for dinner outside the Green Zone. I mean, I'm sure they wouldn't do it today, but I remember writing to Pittman because people were just taking cars and going out.

I'm a full colonel and I'm sitting there – for me, maybe this is personal, maybe I have to get over it, but I was a 30-year-old lieutenant, and when I came back on active duty, my company commander was four years my junior, at minimum -- and he was one of the older captains. Well, I had signed on the dotted line. I had said, "This is what I'm going to do," and so my answer to him on a daily basis was "Yes, sir, I've got it." I was a late bloomer.

I understood I'd work for younger people. I expected that. Scott Carpenter was probably 20 years my junior. Now, I failed out of a couple of schools and I probably should be punished vigorously for that. I'm not an academically rigorous guy. I've got all of that. "But I'll be damned," I said to Steve Bucci, "I've got to draw the line at 30 years." If somebody's 30 years my junior, I'm just not going to take their shit.

Roman is the one I'm pointing at, really. He really was an elitist, right to his Miami roots. I know it sounds bad when I say it this way, but he had an arrogance that was borne directly out of his Batista background. I remember looking at him one day and thinking, "You know, I think I understand Castro a lot better now than I did a little while ago." But that was their attitude, an attitude of arrogance.

A time came when Bremer was asking for information from the field. Scott Carpenter had already gone, but I had an e-mail list I'd compiled of field contacts. Because the e-mail list, I started to be a conduit of information. I would gather information and I would shoot it out transparently to everybody within the organization. I mean, I wasn't trying to score any points. I didn't give a damn. I was just trying to say, "Look, we're losing. Do you notice what's happening out there?" Every time I would see people dying, it was getting to me. It was getting to me, and it still gets to me, as you can probably tell.

These things happen, but then to have to face the cavalier attitude of some of these guys who were acting as if they were doing great things when mostly they were just moving paper. I would walk into Steve Bucci's office wound to the ceiling because -- frankly -- I was getting to the point that as an old city kid from Philadelphia, I was about to tap somebody's lights out. I mean, I was getting really angry. I tried to be professional, but it's really tough to be professional as you're seeing people die. Yes, we're supposed to have a courtroom demeanor, but I'm watching people die in the street. You've got to be kidding. I mean, how can people act as if nothing's happening out there?

I used to say things about Sistani. I used to say, "You know, Sistani is like Ho Chi Minh. I don't know why you guys don't understand it." I read a lot on foreign affairs. I haven't finished the book yet, but I read chapter 24 in Kissinger's book on diplomacy. I don't even particularly like Kissinger, but he's been around. He must know something. "I'll read his book," I thought, "because I'm going out there to work in governance." I didn't get through all of it, but I flipped to the part on Vietnam. You couldn't buy Ho Chi Minh because you didn't have anything that he wanted except one thing, reunification of Vietnam under his rule.

I said Sistani is the same way. What are you going to do? Build him a new road? He doesn't care about a new road. He cares about an Islamic republic, and that's one of the reasons I wrote to Meg. She seemed to be one who was at least receptive and respectful enough to hear you out, whether she blew you off later or not.

People can blow you off and sometimes that's OK. Between Scott and Roman in particular, though, all they really cared about was pleasing Bremer. I understand that.

That's part of the deal. But he had no push [with Sistani and others] and neither does our president. He didn't get ground truth. The meetings were Pollyannaish. There were some good Marine colonels there with me who were getting real tired of saying that "all's well" because a lot of their Marines were dying.

The other observation I can offer is that Bremer and Sanchez didn't connect. Now, I didn't see them together a lot, and I'm not making that claim, but basically, I heard a lot of stuff. When I attended Sanchez's morning meetings, it was clear to me that they didn't connect. Between Bremer and Sanchez, I felt there was more than just a division of their professional positions. They didn't communicate. In my estimation, there was a feeling in me, and it's only a feeling, that it was a class thing. Bremer came from a Brahmin background and Sanchez came from dirt, and somehow that translated into their relationship. I'm sure people would deny that, and I couldn't prove it.

I come from a mixed family. My father was American Indian. I watched him be discriminated against when I was seven years old, and I've never, ever forgotten it. You sit on a stool, somebody comes up, and you're sitting in the white section and that person says, "Who are you, and what are you doing?" They start questioning you. I have never forgotten that feeling. That's the feeling I had when I was sitting with those two. It's intuitive, and I may be dead wrong.

The other factor was the questions about who the hell was in charge? Was it the CPA or was it Sanchez? Let me tell you about a very specific incident when I was trying to stop the military from moving its troops out. They were working with the CPA in one of the provinces, and I was getting information from the province and thought the troops needed to stay there and not be moved out. I tried acting as the intermediary between the military and the CPA, which I thought was our job as MAs.

But CJTF-7 (Combined Joint Task Force 7) and CPA could have been on different planets, much less in different sections of the building. It drove you nuts. I was told directly that I could not write an execution order based on the information I was getting. I couldn't even write the draft so Bremer could sign it and say to Sanchez, "Look, I want you to keep these people in place." They may have thought they were on parallel tracks, but I think they were on divergent tracks.

I remember saying that I couldn't believe the political appointees. You know, I don't particularly even like Bush. I've known people like Bush in my life. I don't particularly like him, but I would never stab my commander in chief in the back like I've seen some of these people do, and they owe their damn political lives to him. I couldn't believe it, and it amazed me. I mean, I thought I'd seen a lot in the world, but I thought to myself one night, I'm a babe in the woods when it comes to this stuff. These people really maneuver well. I'll tell you, Scott was good. I could see that he will shine and so will Roman.

Q: You mentioned a woman, an Arabic speaker, who left at the end of her tour? You seem to suggest that people leaving at the end of their tours and not renewing their

obligations was normal in Baghdad. Did you feel that was because they themselves wanted out, or because the system wasn't providing them with encouragement to continue on that would have made it more possible for them to see projects through to something closer to conclusion?

SAMMONS: I thought there was no exception to Department of State policy on length of tours, even when it came to meeting the goal of 30 June. In other words, Candace was scheduled to go to Rome and be in the embassy there on such and such date. So, of course, the date was not slipped. The date was in granite.

Q: I've seen such dates change before when up against something that has more importance.

SAMMONS: Well, I saw a lot of people coming there, punching their tickets. I will admit that I was probably punching an emotional ticket. I had only been fired at once in my life. I had been in Special Forces for 30-plus years, but this was my first actual combat, though I'd been in hostile fire zones. I'd been in the Middle East with some frequency with SOCSAN; I've been in Qatar; I've been in Kuwait; I've been in Kenya; I've been in Egypt; I've been around. Albeit, I never had been in what the Army would call a combat patch zone. Because I was about to retire, I knew this was my last hurrah in that respect, and I thought I had something to give. I knew I wasn't going to be hauling a rucksack and charging the enemy. Those days should be over. I turned 59 when I was there. I understand that I'm not physically a kid; I'd hold people back. But I had a sense of urgency, a sense of mission.

The key goal was the transition from the CPA. When focus on that was pushed aside for like three days, oh my God, you would have thought that the whole world had caved in. I didn't think the transition law was worth the paper it's written on. When Bremer killed Sharia law with a stroke of his pen, I thought, "Who the hell does he think he is? I mean, really, what are you guys doing? What do you think the Iraqis are going to do?"

I went to a couple of meetings with Larry Diamond. He's written on Iraq recently and has been published in Foreign Affairs. He was from Stanford. He came in on his white horse. We went one time to Hillah where a couple things happened that make my point. We went with the local imam to one of the old mosques that I guess Saddam had built. It had been made it into a school. The place was absolutely packed. We'd given two days' notice of our visit, and the imam probably had 3,000 sheikhs there. I thought there are two messages here. One was, give me two days and I can gather 3,000. Now give me seven [days] and see what I can do. The other message I took from one sheikh who stood up and said, "What do we need democracy for? And what do we need 40 percent of the women to vote? They're just going to vote the way we tell them to do anyway."

I took another trip into the Sunni Triangle with a great guy, a great asset to us. He was a Brit named Giles Denham. He was in the senior advisor in charge of one of the ministries. He took me and his MA -- his MA and I were friends -- Ted Oberin, to a meeting with some of the local sheikhs. One of the sheikhs at the meeting asked, "What

is the percentage of women in the United States Congress?" Some of these people have been trained in the United States. They speak better English than we do. Denham said 30 percent, and I'm going, "No, no, no, it's not 30 percent." The guy was saying, "Well, you want us to have 40 percent..." We couldn't come up with a legitimate answer to his question.

The other thing I took away was from one of the meetings with an Iraqi provincial council. All the Iraqis on the council got a stipend. The head of the council asked Denham whether they could get stipends for the tribal council members as well. Well, we didn't have any tribal councils, but then the bell rang in my head. Well, yes, there is no tribal council that the United States or the coalition has put together, but clearly there are tribal councils out there, and here is the provincial council asking to be sure that the stipend can be given to the tribal council. To me, the logic was clear. The provincial council couldn't do anything without the tribal councils' approval. We're not changing a thing. All they're doing is appeasing us. They'll get some provincial council out there, and they just go back to the tribal council, because they don't dare to go against the tribal council, and they know better. It made perfect sense.

Later, we make a trip to Baquba, which is now going through some bad times with a lot of fighting and insurgencies up there. We were there during Asra, and there was a procession of Shiites, of course. I remember telling somebody, "You know, I have 45 rounds. I don't know how many you have," I said, "but if they make a left turn instead of a right turn, we're in trouble. We're in a lot of trouble." We would have stood our ground, but there were enough people out there that if they just kept on coming, they would have overrun us.

Q: What can you say about what we are doing in the north, with Kurdish population?

The Petraeus model, I'll call it. Giving money out as fast as possible and calming the masses up there in the north who were the easiest ones to deal with. We went to Mosul where I had to talk to a largely Army Reserve Civil Affairs Group from Philadelphia. I'm from there and I always identify myself with American Bandstand, and that's how I talk to people of a certain age. I was there. I knew Justine and she came out of my neighborhood and all that, if you watched the show as a kid. It breaks the ice. They were very worried, and they had a good reason to be worried. General Ham had replaced General Petraeus in charge of the Stryker force in the north. Ham was a nice guy, but he was no Petraeus. Petraeus walked around with two stars on his shoulders and two stars in his pocket. You could tell. You could feel it. I hear now they call him King David over there.

Petraeus was the model and his mode of operation was basically to spend his commander's emergency relief fund, spreading it across the board. Everybody got paid. Great. Now comes in Ham, who's a one-star with no stars in his pocket. I felt that Sanchez probably ate his lunch. Ham seemed to indicate that basically Sanchez came down on him, saying, in effect, "Yes, I had to take it from Petraeus, but I'm a three-star and I'm not taking it from you. You'll do my bidding and whatever I say." Ham was

going to do was do what he was told.

Well, the result of that was that the commander's emergency relief funds got reduced, and the Iraqis were furious because Ham couldn't fund a lot of the projects that had been promised by Petraeus. Do you think that maybe the Civil Affairs people are going to have a hard time working and living in that situation? We're talking mainly about reservists who, for the most part, were not equipped to handle a lot of violence. A lot of them are very smart. You have PhDs and you have people with real world experience who know how to do things and are no idiots. I don't know how they managed in the long term, but I can't imagine that they've had an easy time of it.

That was the Petraeus model that everybody was touting back here, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld and others. Of course, they reward him with his third star. He was the first two-star in Iraq who got his third star, and, of course, they sent him back to fix everything. Well, the jury's definitely out on that one, but we'll see.

Q: You have referred to contacts you had, experiences you had, with the Iraqis. How much time were you able to spend with Iraqis and where did they stand in the process?

SAMMONS: I didn't spend a lot of time with them. I was sick the first couple of weeks I was there. I got the crud, and we all lived in a big bedroom.

Let me say something about our housing. There were some trailers, but the people in them had this little trick with keys. When they left, they gave their trailer-mate their keys and didn't sign out anywhere. They just left with the understanding that, if they came they'd take their keys back and be roommates again. If they didn't come back, the trailer-mate had the place to himself.

Q: Not nice.

SAMMONS: That was going on rampantly in the whole area. Everybody was doing it, but as people poured in, you had 400 people living in the great bedroom of one of the palace bedrooms. We lived there about a couple weeks before trailers came open for us. I turned my key in; I did what I was supposed to do. I understand people want to live a little better than everybody else, but they even screwed their own people. I remember when a guy named Ephraim Cohen came in. I was still living in a big, shared bedroom, having been told that we're not going to get out for like six weeks, maybe eight weeks. Not a peep was made. No one said, "I've got an extra bed in mind, come on over."

I'm a big boy and I recognize things aren't perfect in this world, but to me it was sad. I left with great sadness. Frankly, I left early. Nobody threw me out, but I knew that I was probably reaching an untenable level of anger and sadness. I would rant and rave right outside of Ambassador Jones' office while visiting his MA. Jones had to hear me. When Bremer would walk in every once in a while (he had to pass my desk on the way to the john) I'd just look at him like he was a piece of shit, and that's how I felt about him.

I'm sorry; I may be wrong. I mean, I don't know every inside deal and everything, but I'm not an idiot. You can sort of smell when you're losing. You can sort of figure it out. It was Pollyanna all day long. I mean, they were living in la-la land acting like they were doing great things, but I couldn't see it. I'd have been glad to see it. Show me the beef.

So, when I had the opportunity to leave, I took it. Because I was a reservist, I had accumulated excess leave over a 30-year period. What they do with the reservists on active duty is back up all of their leave days. At the end of your tour, you take it, because the Army doesn't want to pay you for it. If you get a six-month tour, it's not really six months. It's six months minus the 15 days of earned leave, minus the time you're in processing for the tour. It's never a true 180-day tour.

I looked at my orders and said, "Guess what, the Army declined extend my time in service to this coming January, 2005. Fine. I decline to sit around here with people that I really don't have any respect for. I'm just not going to stay, unless you've got something else for me to do somewhere else -- I would be glad to go to Afghanistan -- I'm out."

Q: Why did you have the prejudice to go to Afghanistan? Why there, rather than Iraq?

SAMMONS: Osama bin Laden. I don't think I'm a natural born killer. I was a Special Forces medic, so even though I'm a Special Forces guy, I came from the medic background, and I care about people. Still, I could put a nine millimeter in his mouth and say, "You've done a great job, and you're a piece of shit and you die." I mean, I think I could do that. I don't know, I'd probably throw up afterward. I don't know what I would do, but I would pull the trigger. I felt that from day one, really. Get him. Get the man who's responsible for this stuff. Do bad things to him.

Also, politically, I just don't buy the line in Iraq. Weapons of mass destruction. I'm sorry, it didn't fly. But I was there, and I did what I was told, obeyed orders. And I left.

Q: The next question is about lessons learned, but I think I've heard something about that already.

SAMMONS: I think the main lesson learned is about unity of command. Where I come from, I didn't care who was in charge. I didn't care if Sanchez was in charge; I didn't care if Bremer was in charge. If Bremer was supposed to be in charge, then have him tell Sanchez what to do every once in a while, and let us do it. Whether it's a good plan, bad plan, I can walk away and say I don't agree with it, but someone needs to be in charge. The maneuvering and undercutting and not standing up to the plate and being quote, unquote "men and strong women" I saw in Iraq hurt us. It hurts us deeply, hurts us today. I think, in the end, it may defeat us and I'm sick about it.

I sometimes wonder about Colin Powell. I don't know what's going through his head at night. I wonder what he got himself into. Sometimes, I think about that. I've known people that have known him personally and believe he's a good guy, a great guy. But, every day, every day, coming in to the office and seeing what's happening. Dean Pittman

had worked for Armitage, and I thought that would mean something. But nothing.

Everyone just sort of passes off responsibility, as if, if they touch it and grab hold of it, they'll be lepers. I had never in my life experienced that, and I was stunned because I thought I'd experienced a lot, but I hadn't experienced that. I hadn't experienced the maneuvering. It felt to me like a lot of people were coming out to Baghdad, punching their tickets, and leaving nothing behind.

The people, though, that I do want to praise are those men and women in the provinces who worked their asses off most of the time. They are really on the ground. They are the point of the spear. I tried to get out to see them as much as possible, but often I couldn't get out. There was always a security thing in place. Frankly, to me, after a while it began to feel like cowardice.

The IGC wouldn't see the people in the provinces. When I was in Baquba, they told me they'd had two visits from IGC members up here. A third, by one of the ministers, was supposed to happen, but he cancelled. One spent 15 minutes before he said he had to get back to Baghdad. The other spent 45 minutes, and he took off. Give me a break. How can you have a legitimate government based on that kind of crap? The people just are going to reject it. I'm no rocket scientist, but I got the picture.

My takeaway, though, is that we had 20 really exceptional colonels as MAs in Iraq -- bright guys, a lot of academy guys, a lot of people who have been around, people who have commanded. I have commanded at an O-6 level. Either these guys have commanded at O-6 level or an O-5 level and have done well, and have a sincere desire to do a good job. Clearly, some of them got to do more than I did. I will tell you that they were exceptional officers, and they cared deeply. We were all frustrated.

Even Steve Bucci, even though he and I had it out a few times because I was politically incorrect, and I wanted to shoot people and he didn't want me to do that because it would look bad on my record. He is a good man, and very political. He has a PhD and was an embassy defense attaché, so he had a little more finesse than I, as did some of the others. We all had our bells and whistles. I mean, we weren't fools, even if we weren't Cambridge and weren't Oxford.

Q: Were you replaced in your position as MA?

SAMMONS: No, I was told I was not replaced. I wrote a very caustic e-mail to Ambassador Jones which got intercepted by Steve Bucci. I said this guy doesn't need a military assistant. He's basically an action officer. He goes out, whenever Bremer goes and jumps when he's told to. Fine, be an action officer, but you're no director. He goes off on leave as much as possible himself. Hell, he came home, and I was worried that I would actually see him.

Just to set the record straight, when I left, I didn't tell anybody. I was there one day, one day I wasn't, and that was it. I cleaned out my desk drawer. I didn't say a thing to Dean

Pittman, I didn't say a thing to Scott, because frankly, I felt that if I started to talk, I'd get so emotional I'd hit either one of them. I was that angry.

So I left. I didn't say anything to anyone. I did contact the OMS – management person that does the office management. I wrote to her later and I said I was sorry I left the way I did, but I just couldn't take it. Maybe I was going nuts. She wrote back, "No, you were just trying to be mature." The rest, they did act like kids. They acted like children. I thought, all these people with all these degrees, all this experience, and they act like little kids. Maybe I act like a little kid, too. I'll be honest. Maybe I was upset because I wasn't getting more responsibility – I was being compartmentalized. I mean, I could feel it.

Q: Obviously, you didn't get to do what you thought you were sent out there to do.

SAMMONS: No, it was a waste of time, and when I got back here and started working at the Pentagon again, I was basically told that it had been a waste of time, and that I shouldn't have bothered to go because I was working there with idiots. Of course, that was a cultural thing, too.

Q: What did you do when you came back?

SAMMONS: I took my leave, but what I didn't realize is that I had two sets of orders. One set overlapped the other, and the second ended just yesterday, my last day on duty.