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

INTERVIEW #25

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Initial Interview May 1, 2008

Executive Summary

The interviewee was the PRT team leader in Diyala province from February, 2007 until March, 2008. Diyala province is ethnically mixed, comprised of roughly 20% Shia, 40% Sunni, 9% Kurd, and the remainder other groups. Although intermarriage was frequent (e.g. the governor's paramount wife was a Shia, but his young wife was a Sunni) and coexistence among the groups had been traditional, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the sectarian divide was accentuated, along with the manifestation of a complex mosaic of conflicting loyalties and historical grievances.

The interviewee's principal mandate was to develop the capacity of the provincial government to function. However, with the constant combat and frequent ambushes he describes, lasting from February through the late fall of 2007, the PRT's ability to travel was severely limited. The interviewee describes how, initially, they had to pick up the provincial governor in his own village 20 miles away and bring him to the government center so he could sit in his office. After about three months, the PRT renovated and fortified his office so that he could remain there overnight three to four nights per week. That example led to the assistant governor, deputy governor and other directors resorting to the same governing technique.

The interviewee describes how Al-Qaeda was initially invited into the province to protect the Sunni inhabitants from the Shia militia operating at the behest of the Shia police chief. Toward the end of 2007, the local Sunnis decided they wanted to rid themselves of these outsiders, because they did not want Sharia law, and were not in favor of the strict customs these foreign fighters were imposing. This development provided an opening for reconciliation talks, which became an integral part of the PRT activities. The interviewee describes his objective in these talks as: "trying to get these guys not to kill each other." As progress was being made in the reconciliation talks, Al Qaeda responded with deadly suicide attacks, which, while not specifically targeting the PRT, were conducted in areas where PRT members could easily be among the casualties. The PRT leader recounts that he was himself an Al Qaeda target, with a $25,000 bounty on his head (if kidnapped; only $5000 if killed.)

Despite the incredible violence, the interviewee was able to point to a number of impressive successes on the economic development and reconstruction front during his tenure. The PRT re-energized the local chamber of commerce, reawakened the honey

growing association, rebuilt the date processing center, and reopened the Diyala Electrical Industry factory, which is the biggest employer in this largely agricultural province. The PRT also reopened the hospital in the provincial capital of Ba'Qubah and set up a number of clinics, reestablished a functioning criminal court, and set up a process to get the sheep dipped for the first time in four years. The PRT was in the process of reopening the Vocational-Technical Training Institute when the interviewee left. When asked about his PRT's public affairs program, he admitted that: "When you're moving back and forth between fire fights, it's very hard to get public diplomacy done." Nonetheless, in this area too, the PRT managed an impressive achievement, setting up the Diyala Media Center, which broadcasts not only in Diyala province, but also reaches an area south of Baghdad as well as into Iran with regular programming to highlight the accomplishments of the local government (e.g. the opening of a new water filtration plant, new school openings, public service announcements and the like).

The interviewee provides a detailed picture describing his own leadership style, the interdependent relationship of the members of his team, and how they functioned successfully as a unit, while operating under the general command of excellent and supportive brigade commanders. This interviewee believes that the PRT is the appropriate mechanism for these activities, noting that he had been told numerous times by the local Iraqi leaders that they did not want to talk to the military; rather, they wanted to talk to a civilian.

Interview

Q: Thank you for allowing me to come today to spend some time to talk about your experiences in Diyala province. When were you there?

A: I arrived in Diyala province in February of 2007. I was the team leader for the provincial reconstruction team in Diyala. I left on the 16th of March 2008 and so I had roughly 13 months on the ground as team leader, working with two different brigades.

Diyala is considered the bread basket of Iraq. It's approximately 50 miles northeast of Baghdad, the capital city of the province is Ba'Qubah; the eastern border is with Iran. To the north are provinces As Sulaymaniyah and Salah Ad Din, which are considered part of Kurdistan, to the west is Anbar province, to the south is Wasit and Baghdad. It's really a large province and mainly agricultural, with approximately one and a half million people. The capital city of Ba'Qubah had about 300,000 people. The other population centers were Al Muqdadiyah in the north at the other end of the river valley -- we called it the breadbasket. Baladrooz to the east, Al Khalis to the west and to the northeast along the Iranian border was Khanaqin and Mandili. So we had a large group of folks approximately, depending on the time of year, 48 to 52 people in the PRT and that included a civil affairs company assigned to us by the brigade combat team.

Our job was, as I call it, nation building 101. Trying to develop the capacity of the provincial government to function, provide basic services to its people and to re-establish a normal way of life for the folks in the province. In the beginning it was impossible.

There were battles, constant combat going on from February through, I would say, November of 2007, and then things slowed down a bit and picked up a little bit around the beginning of the year and things were sort of back to normal again when I left in March. But the combat operations limited our ability to get out of the forwarding operating base. We were stationed at forward operating base War Horse (FOB War Horse) which was approximately 8 miles from the provincial capital of Ba'Qubah. So we had to ride the road, as we say, everyday to get into Ba'Qubah.

Q: Your goal was to go in to meet with the officials of the government in Ba'Qubah?

A: Yes, those that we could find. In the beginning, we even had to pick up one high government official in his own village that was about 20 miles to the north and bring him to his office.

Q: How long did you have to do that?

A: About three months, and we finally decided we would keep him in Ba'Qubah. We renovated a part of his office to set up a bedroom and bathroom for him so that he could stay there for three to four days and nights per week. At the same time we sent a part of our governance team, about 8 people, down to an important government building. We fortified the building; we had a company of soldiers there to protect it. So we kept a team of about 8 people there 24 hours per day. The advantage was they were able then to meet with government officials at odd hours, particularly after business had closed. That trend led other government officials also renovating their offices and spending the night in the government center. So that helped quite a bit in terms of access, though the difficulty of getting back and forth was always there.

Q: The staff that you wanted to meet with, who renovated their offices and were living in their offices, was that primarily for their own benefit so they could carry on their business better or was it essentially very helpful so they could meet with you?

A: A little of both. But I think the main reason was, I think, they could continue with business and, I think, not having to go on the road at night was a major factor. We had a governor who was Shia. The province, however, is about 70% Sunni. The Sunnis, as you remember, boycotted the elections back in 2005. So the governor is a former mayor of Ba'Qubah and, who was from a fairly prominent Shia family in the community, was elected by the provincial council by sort of a coalition vote, so he won the governorship. The deputy governor is a Sunni who was appointed by the Sunni block after the elections were over, and then there are three assistant governors: one is a Sunni, one is a Shia and one is a Kurd. The chairman of the provincial council which is the elected body of the province is a Kurd. Even though the Kurds make up only a little less than ten percent of the entire population; he was elected by a coalition. So everything is done by sort of blocks and coalitions and is a very sensitive subject.

Q: Yes, the provincial council had a member, a Kurd, who was elected or selected by the coalition?

A: Well, this was the governing coalition, not the military. The election in 2005, like I said, was essentially boycotted by the Sunnis but the Kurds and Shia voted in large numbers. Therefore, their blocks got the governorship and the chairmanship of the provincial council. What happened is that in an open election process, everyone is elected a member of the provincial council, and then the provincial council appointed the governor. So the governor, being the former mayor of the city of Ba'Qubah, being a logical guy and living in the neighborhood and everything, they said "okay, you will be the governor, so we will have a coalition of guys, a Sunni, a Shia and a Kurd as your assistants and we will have a Kurd as chairman of the provincial council." So that way everyone had their finger in the pie, so to speak; everyone had some control.

Q: Were all of these officials locally based?

A: Yes.

Q: They came from the province, they were known to each other?

A: That's right.

Q: It sounded as if the province, before the war, had a certain measure of tolerance among them?

A: Exactly. It was like the breadbasket, they functioned beautifully together. What happened after the war started was that so many people were chased off their lands, they wound up in the cities and they didn't have anything to do, they didn't have any source of income. Most of these were young men of military age, some were former military guys, but they're very easily co-opted; they were brought into the militias, the Sunni and Shia militias. These guys were shooting at each other constantly.

And what happened after 2005 was the appointment of a Shia as the chief of police; he went to Baghdad around Sadr city and recruited we estimate around 6,000 to 8,000 men, all of whom were Shia, and he brought them to Diyala province and they became death squads; they raided Sunni villages from one end of the province to the other, arresting people without reason, killing people, absconding with property and making threats, that kind of thing.

So, the villages that were predominantly Sunni, particularly those to the north and to the west of Ba'Qubah, actually invited al-Qaida representatives in to protect them from the police, so you then had a force that came in from the outside. Al-Qaida came in, and they established themselves in a lot of the small villages along the Diyala River, which were predominantly Sunni. They started to institute Sharia law. Many of these guys were from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and other places and they changed the customs and way of life for many of these villagers.

Toward the end, as we moved into 2008, we saw that the concept of reconciliation that came out of Anbar found itself growing in Diyala mainly because the local Sunnis had gotten tired of the al-Qaida influence. They didn't want Sharia law; they didn't want the strict influence that these guys brought with them, they were outsiders, and so they started turning on them. After we started having reconciliation meetings in the fall of 2007 with the local sheikhs, a lot of them signed pledges in favor of the central government and decided that they wanted to chase the outsiders out. And so what we had towards the end of 2007 was a large number of these guys, in the thousands, coming over to the coalition forces and saying, "we're tired; we don't want to have al-Qaida in our midst anymore." They started turning these guys in. They are being paid now by the U.S. military; they have been able to keep their weapons. At least they're not shooting at us; they're shooting at the remnants of al-Qaida or anything like it. There have been some small disruptions between the Sunni groups and the Shia groups, but by and large they stay in their own neighborhood.

Q: This Shia police chief that you mentioned initially, what was his motivation to go and bring in a militia where there apparently hadn't been one?

A: Although I can't put words in his mouth without knowing him, I think his motive was to try to get back at the predominant Sunni group that had controlled his area for most of his life. This guy was a retired army general; he had been decorated by Saddam Hussein himself on more than one occasion. They brought him back from retirement and made him chief of police. So, the point here was he was answerable to the coalition in Baghdad, which is Shia dominated, so that is where his allegiance lies and so he took on this veneer of revenge. The Sunnis in the area had dominated life forever under Saddam Hussein; now this was an opportunity for these guys to get back at them.

Q: So, he was kind of an exception, because apparently he prospered under Saddam Hussein and was decorated and was, I don't know, was he well liked in the province?

A: He was feared, let's put it that way.

Q: Okay. Because the idea of bringing in death squads –

A: They didn't call them death squads, but they functioned as death squads. They went after the Ba'athites, any officials they could find from the old regime, the well-to-do Sunnis, the business owners, the educated people, the doctors, the lawyers, the judges, the college professors, all these people were rounded up and disposed of, by and large. So, those who weren't captured and killed fled into Jordan and Syria and places like that.

Q: Now, all this happened before you arrived?

A: Yes. He had been appointed in 2006 and he's still there. So he'd started his reign of terror, I think, towards the end of 2006, early 2007.

Q: Because the PRT was there before you arrived?

A: The PRT was started up in July 2006 under another team leader who left in I think November 2006 and IRMO appointed a colonel who was there until I got there.

Q: What I'm thinking is, that in preparation for your assignment, as you're getting your briefings, and you're learning about this situation, one question that might arise is "what is a civilian led organization going to be able to accomplish in this environment?" am I missing something here?

A: Well, I don't think so. My understanding before I got there, of course, was that we would work directly with the local government officials and help them bring some capacity back to function normally. And I think that starting with the contacts we had, it was on its way, but there were some complications. I think one of the things I had to do when I first got there was to establish a personal relationship with the brigade commander. I'd met my predecessor one time and that was here in Washington over the Christmas holiday. My predecessor had come back and at that time decided not to go back out again.

Q: After completing a year?

A: No, after a few months. Anyhow, my predecessor had a very unfavorable opinion of the activities of the brigade commander. When I got out there I discovered that it was a personality problem probably more than anything else. The brigade commander was in fact dedicated to trying to improve the situation. He wanted to have a big civilian presence there. He told me in no uncertain terms, "You know, I see you guys as my force multiplier; if you can get the Sheikhs and the local government leaders together, to get them going with providing food, water and security to their communities, then those are folks I don't have to shoot at." He and I got along great, I enjoyed him completely; the two old guys on the FOB, we sort of hit it off right away, a great working relationship.

So, when I got there I had to overcome the reluctance on the part of the military; one, to cooperate fully with us and two, to have us in on the planning. I would go out with the brigade commander to most of the meetings we had on the reconciliation process with the Sheikhs and so forth. He was instrumental in getting basic things for us. We didn't have office supplies, blankets, places to live, and so he extended himself, he went overboard, moved some of his soldiers to tents for example so we could have toilets. He saw it as a real advantage to having an active PRT on the base.

Q: And the "we" in your PRT I think you said earlier was about 48 to 52 people?

A: Right.

Q: And all of you were in this situation of not having housing and supplies?

A: Yes, it was pretty bad.

Q: Were some of them civil affairs officers, who were military?

A: They were military. They had their normal CHUs; containerized housing units. The civil affairs guys functioned as part of the brigade. So the guys were here and the women were there, and the men had their latrine and the women had their latrine and so forth. My predecessor had a CHU that had a bathroom in it way at the other end of the FOB. They put me in that one, so I had a bathroom, but no one else did.

You had to share latrines with the soldiers. It was pretty rugged. I mean, mud in the winter time inches deep because of the machines, tanks and Bradleys and Humvees, and big trucks all times of the night. In summer time, it was hot and dusty, mosquitoes and little bugs and tarantulas and scorpions, those sorts of things. So it was very basic. During the time I was there, we had the corps of engineers build two buildings for us so we could house our folks at least, and office space with cubicles up, a wooden building, one of which was hit by a mortar just after we got it up. It was very basic and the brigade really went beyond the call of duty, I think.

Because the idea was to give the people of Diyala the idea that the government was functioning for them, and so we would literally have to take government officials in a helicopter and fly them to some village so that he could address the elders. After it got to the point that the insurgents had been chased out of the city of Ba'Qubah, then we could go by road, we could put him in a Humvee or an MRAP, and take them out there. But it was the kind of thing I think that helped the local communities understand that the local government was in charge, not me and not the colonel.

Q: Did you typically accompany these officials on their Humvee rides along with the brigade commander?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: And then after you get there, you'd be - ?

A: Standing somewhere with a bunch of soldiers around me. I learned there was a reward on my head. $5,000 if I was dead and $25,000 if I was captured. So, they were watching me rather closely.

The soldiers were very protective; there were some great kids, I mean, they were fantastic. We were ambushed a number of times. Not just in terms of going out with government officials but just going from the FOB to Ba'Qubah or from the FOB to Baladrooz . It was inevitable; you were going to get hit. Once you got into town, you had to buckle down because of the snipers.

Q: Now, in terms of enemies, you mentioned some of them earlier but there were groups that didn't like each other and were fighting among themselves. Still, I imagine that we and the PRT, the Americans, were not totally popular either, so who were the security threats that you had to protect yourselves against?

A: You know, it was very hard to tell. We couldn't tell who al-Qaida was and who was just a militia guy. You've got to remember that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was head of al-Qaida in Iraq lived in a village that was almost in sight of our FOB.

Q: Oh, he did?

A: Oh, yes, he was still in Hibhib back in June.

Q: I remember when he was killed, but I didn't remember where.

A: It was right there, right there among the Sunni. So, it was really hard to tell who was shooting at you or who had planted the IED, whether these were Sunni or Shia militia; it was very difficult, we were just an occupier.

Regardless of what the government and community leaders would say, there was very little control over these guys who were out running around the countryside. There were a number of local governmental guys, and sheikhs, who would not meet with us.

The other thing you've got to remember is that the province itself is very large, with 26 distinct tribal groups and over 100 sub-tribes, and each one of these tribes and sub-tribes had their own leaders and whether they were al-Qaida or not was hard to tell. And early on we couldn't tell at all. When we were able to finally get some reconciliation meetings going in the latter part of 2007, then we found out who these guys were, who they were loyal to and so things were at least a little bit straight in our minds once you could identify Baladrooz was under the control of this group and Muqdadiyah north was this group and Mugdadiyah south was this group and Al Khalis belonged to someone else and Khamisiyah to somebody else.

Q: All these things you were enumerating were little places?

A: They were little cities and towns within the province. So, it was very difficult to deal with. But, between Ba'Qubah, Al Khalis which was five miles to the west, Baladrooz which was about eight miles to the east, another town which was about 10 miles south towards Baghdad, within that area there, I believe the brigade tracked about 10 distinct military or militia groups. And it depended on how and what was going on, whether they were shooting at us or whether they were shooting at one of the other groups. So, it was a real mishmash.

In a province that had 40% Sunni, about 20% Shia, 8% or 9% Kurd, then a few other groups mixed in, it was really difficult to determine who was who. Over the years many of these groups had mixed. You would go into a village and you would have intermarriage between Shia and Sunni. The governor has his paramount wife who is a Shia, but his young wife is a Sunni. In his village are Sunnis and Shia. So, it was hard to tell who these guys were, who they're loyal to –

Q: Did that make the idea of reconciliation somewhat more plausible?

A: It did, yes. It was easier for us to do because they knew each other, because they were related to each other and because they weren't afraid to meet on neutral territory. And so, if we for example, had decided that at the crossroads where Route 2 crossed Route 1 to set up a meeting point, where we would have a tent, and we wanted all the sheikhs from the south to come and all the sheikhs from the north to come, and we would provide security, where at each table there would be water and sodas and juice and tea, and we want to talk, it could happen.

Q: That was how you spent a lot of your time; setting up these kinds of meetings?

A: Trying to get these guys not to kill each other. A guy would walk in and he'd see somebody that he hadn't seen in 20 years and he'd pull out a weapon and go after him. It wasn't easy in the beginning.

Q: I'm sure it wasn't easy at all and I'm trying to imagine your role there as a facilitator of this discussion; you would have had to say something to get them talking.

A: No, they did not need any prompting to get them talking, for the first couple of meetings they would simply scream at each other. And then finally the colonel would step in and he would say, "alright, that is enough, what do you have to say" – and a high government official would say a few words, and then "okay we'll meet again next week," because these guys are still mad. Then the next week maybe they wouldn't bring all their entourage, they would bring one or two guys, then you could get something done.

In the end we finally wound up with a signed agreement; they'd put their hand on the Koran and they'd swear they wouldn't fight any more. With that done, it was a bit easier for us to move about the province. And these guys didn't pull their militias back to their local communities. Now if you crossed paths or when the other guys crossed paths, you might have a fire fight, but at least it pulled us out of the middle. There were still rogue elements that would plant IEDs or take a shot at you if they could.

What we saw after that was the growth of suicide bombing. We had women, young men, do things that were just unimaginable. I mean, during Ramadan we had patrols that would go into the streets of Ba'Qubah giving toys and candy to the kids and we were watching from the top of a building and a woman ran out of an alleyway and exploded herself right there and killed five of our guys and eleven kids.

Q: Where did this woman come from?

A: We don't know. There were some al-Qaida operatives in the area. Just before I left a woman went into the bus station in Baladrooz and blew herself up, killed six people. Right next to the government the center where the legislature meets, the blue dome we used to call it.

Q: You called it what?

A: The blue dome. A domed building that was somewhat faded blue, but it was where the provincial council has its office and held meetings. Right next door to them, across the alleyway, is where the Iraqi police station and chief of the area had his offices. They would have police formations out there every morning, and then go off to their spots. A guy came down that street between the government center and the police station on a bicycle back in September, exploded himself and killed twenty-eight people.

At one of the first reconciliation dinners that we had a high government official and the brigade commander, my team, several members of the provincial council, had gathered at a mosque. My team luckily had not gotten there; a man came in and exploded himself, killed seven bodyguards, wounded the high government official, wounded our brigade commander and two of his staff and killed twenty-four other people. So, you know, this was even after the reconciliation talks were started.

Q: Even after the reconciliation?

A: It was the kind of thing you were never prepared for. It's hard to put it in words but you've got to look at it from the perspective that every time we made progress, we'd made a step or two forward, they were bound and determined to do something in retaliation, and they did. And they are doing it today; they are still doing it. I heard from my guys that they have had a number of these things. One, where a minibus exploded near where our people stay, killed thirty-five people. None of our guys, luckily, were out.

Q: None of your guys, meaning the PRT?

A: None of the PRT or the coalition forces that are on the ground. That's al-Qaida's answer to the progress we're making. But you know, my first time into Ba'Qubah it was like Dresden out there during World War II; there wasn't a soul on the street except for military and police. But when I left there in March, we had traffic jams; schools were open, kids were going to school, the shops were open, there was food in the market, everything was going on, commerce full-fledged. So I think we brought a modicum of security there; we certainly brought some stability. We had these militias in the city of Ba'Qubah, but by and large they stayed in their own local areas, and didn't bother anybody. The coalition forces could pretty much patrol outside the area without getting shot at. The courts could function, the banks had money.

Q: Those are good signs of economic activity. And often the PRT has some practical goals in the area as well, the projects that you were trying to reconstruct or implement.

A: Ours were pretty much related to what the economy of the area was: agriculture. We had some very basic problems; one, water is always a problem in the farming community. Canals hadn't been cleaned out in years and so even though the river runs through the middle of the province and joins the Tigris just north of Baghdad, there were so many blockages and run-offs by tribes up north who were trying to prevent the guys in the

south from growing crops. So you had a drought almost in the south around Baladrooz and places like that. And so we had to reopen the irrigation canal leading from the Diyala River; we worked to establish an agricultural union. We reenergized the chamber of commerce; that was up and running when I left. We reawakened the honey growing association; they now have a functioning market. We rebuilt and renovated the date processing center. We reopened the Diyala Electrical Industry operation, which is the biggest employer in the province; they potentially can employ about 3,000 people.

Q: The electrical industry?

A: Diyala Electrical Industry is what we call it. They made things like batteries, coaxial cable, generators, transformers, these kinds of things.

Q: It wasn't generating electricity?

A: No, no. Producing electrical items.

But they needed water and electricity to carry out their production. We had a construction company of local people that had dredging equipment and so we contracted with them to dredge the canals. We were trying to reopen the water purification plant, which had been partially destroyed. We reopened Ba'Qubah Hospital and set up a number of clinics there. We are now in the process of reopening the Vo-Technical Training Institute in the city and we are hoping to bring a lot of the young guys from the Sons of Iraq, or CLCs as we called them, into vocational training and giving them some practical training in some things like mechanics.

Q: The Sons of Iraq, CLC?

A: The Concerned Local Citizens is what we started out calling them. And they called themselves the Sons of Iraq, self-protectors and so forth. So, we're hoping to get the young guys into the vo-tech training. There are three centers in Ba'Qubah and there's another one in Muqdidia. They have the capacity to have maybe 2,500 students, in plumbing, carpentry, electricity, auto mechanics, generator repair, and those kinds of things. That was just starting out as I left.

The one thing we had not been able to do was to provide the security in the countryside that would give folks the feeling that it was easy to go back to their land. The other thing we discovered is that as the Shia police and so forth moved through the province, they were allowing displaced people to move into abandoned properties. And since there was little or no land registration or property registration it was just a customary thing. Depending upon which part of the province you're in, either Shia or Sunni have been displaced. In the towns in the east that were predominantly Shia, they are taking over for Sunnis that have been chased out. In the towns in the west the Sunnis are taking over where the local Shias have been chased out. So, it is one of those things that is going to be a problem for a long time. The central government in Baghdad has agreed to provide a fund in which they will pay people for the lost property. Rather than going through the

process of trying to determine who the actual owner is, they were going to pay 100,000 dinar per family to allow them to resettle somewhere; that had just gotten started as I left. It was a good idea.

Q: That was Iraqi money?

A: That was Iraqi money.

The key, I think, for us in Diyala province is that the commanding general of multi-national forces north, who is a fantastic guy, just understood the process. The first thing he said to me when we met him back in October was: "I want you to provide 10,000 jobs down here. I'm not going to spend any more American money down here." You know, the Iraqis are sitting on literally billions of dollars and they hadn't spent a cent, and so the general believed that we needed to urge the Iraqis to spend their own money.

Q: Yes, I've heard that before.

A: Yes. Towards the end he kept on saying, "listen I'm not going to approve any more projects in the northern part of this country until I see the Iraqis spending their money on those projects." And that worked like magic, because we were able to set up a provincial affairs committee within the provincial government that oversaw the granting of contracts for reconstruction. We were able to get the central government to allocate the monies for those contracts and it's up and running. We have two members of our PRT who are monitoring the process with the provincial government.

Q: Is that the same as the provincial reconstruction development committee?

A: They've renamed it; it's the same thing.

Q: They would set the priorities on what projects are needed?

A: Exactly.

Q: The money would be flowing from the central government?

A: Right. That was another issue we had. In the early part of the year as the battle raged in Diyala, the Central Bank stopped sending money; they refused on the grounds that it was unsafe to have their people bringing money up. And so, during Operation Arrowhead Ripper, we literally sent brigade vehicles down to the Central Bank and demanded money.

Q: Arrowhead Ripper?

A: Yes, that was the military operation.

Q: So you sent your vehicles to pick up the money?

A: Right from the Central Bank. They didn't like it at all, but the colonel and lieutenant colonel were there and said: "we want the money." So we finally got a portion of it and put it in a locked trailer that I had both keys to and 50 billion dinar sat there in the back of a government building. And when the bankers needed money they would come over with their dollies and they would get an allotment that they would sign for and we'd lock it back up again. That went on for about four months until we finally convinced them that they needed to start shipping the money up. They would cut us short every month and every month we would scream and holler. So finally, I said: "no, you guys are going to start bringing the money up." The first time it was robbed, they ripped us off.

Q: Who stole it?

A: The Iraqis.

Q: En route?

A: The Iraqi army stole it, yes.

Q: The Iraqi army just stopped your truck there?

A: No, the guys who would drive it were Iraqi army guys; they just drove off. That happened once and I said: "okay, I know who you guys are and that's not going to happen again." I warned them, the colonel warned them, said "okay, you guys do it again and we're going to arrest you." They got there. And now they are back in the routine of every two weeks bringing an allotment of money up to Diyala from Baghdad so that public servants can get paid, so that there is cash in circulation and it is working fine. But we had to force them to do that. The same thing with the public distribution system with the food stuffs. There were complaints when I first got there that there was not enough food in the province; people were almost starving. We had to send coalition trucks down to the warehouse in Baghdad and say: "hey guys, give us the food for Diyala." They were reluctant, but then again who would argue with an armed, mad colonel? So they gave us the food, and we put it in the warehouse; and now the process is working quite well.

The staff of the public distribution system had never met. We brought them all together in a meeting at the base, introduced them, and told them what each function was. Everybody described what they were going to do and how the function was working; the whole thing is working great. So you know, it takes a push.

What happened was, when we came in, we swept out the entire Ba'ath party; these were the bureaucrats, these were the guys who knew how to run government.

It was so unsafe in Ba'Qubah that we had to somehow or another get them out of the province, so we had training up in the North and in Baghdad for a while. Those guys came back and they trained others.

Q: So the training was not all that long?

A: It wasn't, it wasn't.

Q: How long?

A: I would say two weeks at most.

Q: Two weeks and that would equip them to do these functions?

A: Among our PRT members for example, the guy who was in charge of the infrastructure team, every day would go down to that office and sit there with the guys who had been trained and they'd say: "you do this, you do that, here's a computer, here's how you turn it on." We'd donate a computer; we got computers from central government for the public distribution system. Most of the guys who left took their computers with them. Some dropped them off at the central office at Baghdad and they kept them there. We were down there and said, "Wait a minute; why are all these computers sitting here when we need them in Ba'Qubah?" So we brought them all back, and trained the new guys on how to use them. This was particularly good in the project area because they could then determine who bid, how much and so forth. They have a pretty good operation going on now in terms of monitoring projects, making sure the bids are handled properly, getting out with our aid to the site to see that the project was on-going and that somebody wasn't just pocketing the money, and that happened quite a bit.

Q: Now these functionaries you drafted for the jobs, or were in the jobs, were they college educated?

A: Some of them were. There is a large group of well educated, well trained people in Diyala. Diyala has a university in addition to the vocational training center; granted it was concentrating more on the agricultural stuff but there are lawyers, engineers, accountants, and managers. All those folks are right there. We just had to provide the security so that they would be willing to come out of their homes and come to work every day. And so that's where you had to work with the local militia to make sure that these guys were not going to be stopped going home at night; explaining that "this guy was working for the government."

Q: By "working with the local militia" what does that mean?

A: Well, the local militias would stop anybody coming across their territory, exact payment; take money, your watch, whatever they felt like doing, particularly if this was someone they didn't know. So, you had to work with them to make them understand, mainly through the sheikhs, that you no longer set up road blocks; you can see people coming and see them going, but you can't stop cars any more.

Q: They would accept that?

A: Yes.

Q: It sounds like this was their source of income.

A: They were also getting 300 bucks a month from the U.S. Army, so that was enough to buy chai and cigarettes and a new t-shirt and things like that.

Q: Did they have other jobs?

A: No, no most of them did not. Some went back to school once the university and the vo-tech center opened. Very few went back to the land, because at that stage at least there was still al-Qaeda elements running around up in the valley and it was not secure. For those who stayed on the land, I think things had gotten better because they at least were able to harvest their crops; their good date crop, good orange crop, good pomegranates and basic vegetables and so forth. The black market functioned very well and that's what had been holding the province together. So even though the municipal trucks to pick up the trash did not have gasoline, you could go along the road between Al Khalis and Ba'Qubah and see a kid with five gallon gerry cans or a plastic bottle full of gasoline, and you'd say "Okay, alright. Somewhere along the line between the refinery and the stores in Ba'Qubah this stuff was getting siphoned off," so that was one of our big problems that we were trying to overcome.

Q: Well, was it actually a PRT issue?

A: No, it was basically going back to the government and saying: "What are you guys doing about this?" And it was very sensitive because everybody was getting a rake-off. If you divert a truck from the refinery, you know, "Oh we had a flat tire." "Okay yeah, but it showed up here empty. It left the refinery with X number of gallons." So, that's an ongoing problem. Corruption is a major hassle out there in every aspect of everything. We even heard stories that high government officials were on the take. You know everyone is on the take; that's how they live; that's how they exist. So, the mere fact that a couple trucks of gas were diverted and the contracts were not being carried out, you sort of have to go along with it for the time being until you get enough security in the area where people will come forward and make accusations; but that's going to be a long time coming.

Q: I believe it. Security has emerged as the principal concern for you there. I am curious to ask a little more about the inner-workings of your PRT. You described your relationship with the brigade commander. You were the team leader so you were in charge of all these folks, such as the civil affairs team. What kind of guidance did you give them? Was there any difficulty in you being perceived as the leader, given that they were not State Department employees?

A: I don't think so, I got along quite well. Maybe it was my personality, I'm not sure. I think almost to a person they came to me and said: "You know, you've changed things,

the dynamics are not the same any more." I could go to the colonel and get things done. I could go to the battalion commander and get things done. I could have my people attached to a battalion movement if they were going into an area and I needed to have someone go and look at the electric plant. I could call a battalion commander and say: "I need to send two of my engineers with you tomorrow, is that possible? Yeah, no problem; I need to send my MPs to the jail, is that possible? Okay." That was the relationship I had with both brigade commanders and the battalion commanders; we coordinated things. The civil affairs guys saw me as their leader; they understood the military hierarchy; they had a company commander, they had a first sergeant, you know everybody had their military rank, but they looked to me as the leader, which is quite comfortable. One of the things I had to do in terms of mending fences was to make sure that the non-green-suiters, our civilian guys, participated in everything that happened with the brigade. If there were memorial services, I insisted our guys go; it was a required formation. Hero flights, I don't care if it was midnight, you were there.

Q: Hero flights?

A: That was when the bodies were taken out. In the nine months with our first brigade, we lost 146 guys. The three months with our second brigade we lost 37 or 38. So my hope was that you had to get this concept of one team and there was no way to do that except to go there to treat those young guys as equals. And I told them in the orientation that I gave each one of my new guys who came in, "You might be a GS-15," I said, "but when you get into that Humvee that sergeant is in charge; you do what he tells you what to do." And believe me, we were hit enough so that by the time they were on the ground a couple of months they understood very well what I was trying to tell them. We were ambushed so often that you wanted to get up and do something; that was not normal; it was not what they told us to do.

We'd have a brief every morning before we left. Every morning we came out in front of the office building and I would brief what the mission was and then the company commander, normally a first lieutenant or the first sergeant for the movement team would say, "Here is where we are; here are what actions have taken place in this area we are going to over the past 24 hours. If we are hit, this is what we do." We would say a prayer and we would mount up. And we got hit. I mean, we got hit numerous times. So, had the PRT folks not been aware that we had to function as a unit, I am sure we would have lost a lot of folks. I'm not sure what kind of training they had back here to prepare,

But those guys were dedicated to keeping us safe. They literally put their life on the line. So it wasn't to me a joke; you function as a part of a team, I don't care if that kid's 18 years old, he's in charge; when you get outside of this wire, you do what he tells you, and that includes me. I rode with the first sergeant all the time and we'd move about and we got separated a number of times, we'd take incoming fire and he'd always holler: "Get out of the vehicle; get under the vehicle, run with me." He saved my life; I'm here. It's hard to explain to people, you know, it's hard to tell people that.

But, you know, it's the kind of thing you had to learn. So, I insisted that these guys be a part of that team and I think that not only did the civil affairs guys appreciate that, but the brigade appreciated that. They gave us all awards when we left; they hugged me and said: "You know, I don't know what I'm going to do without you." We stay in contact by email. It's pretty bad. And, you know, if these guys are not ready for it they're going to get hurt.

Q: What prepared you to do this? What kind of training did you have and what kind of experience did you have?

A: I'd done ROTC many, many moons ago. But, in terms of looking at my role out there, I saw myself as the manager. "I'll set the guidelines for you guys and I'm going to get out of the way so that you guys do what you are supposed to do," and they appreciated that. I didn't micromanage; I didn't look over anybody's shoulder. I would ask them at the end of the day to send me a message, write something up for me and give it to me in hand or send me an email as to what they accomplished that day and then at the end of the week we did our reports to Baghdad.

It isn't until a few months in that you start seeing these things, you get calls from the Ambassador, you get calls from the OPA director and IRMO director saying: "Wow, what are you guys doing up there? Whoa, this is great stuff." But you don't realize it because it's like you have tunnel vision. You see a problem, for example: "I know that there are dead bodies stacked up in the morgue in Al Khalis and that they don't have any electricity, or the canal in Balad Ruz is having problems and they'd come into Ba'Qubah screaming at the governor because he can't do anything." You ask yourself, "What do I do, what's my next move here?"

You're sitting up talking to yourself at three or four o'clock in the morning because you can't sleep because of rounds coming in and going out, drones taking off, helicopters coming in with bodies, that kind of thing. Three hours of sleep a night is good.

Q: Then you get an idea of what you're going to do about this problem. I'm thinking you were probably a senior manager before this assignment.

A: Yes, I'd been consul general and deputy chief of mission. And I've worked with the political-military guys at the embassy; you know, we did a lot of cooperative stuff, particularly in Africa and Latin America. So, I knew basically where we had to go. The one redeeming thing is that I could always get up and walk over to where the brigade commander was. I knew he was awake and we'd talk about what we had to do; he slept less than I did.

Q: You slept for two and three hours a night for all those nights?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you didn't drop dead?

A: After I got back here, yes. I'm up to about five or six a night now.

Q: How many did you sleep before you went to Iraq?

A: Probably about seven or eight hours. You get to about 6:30 or 7:00 o'clock and you know you've got to get back to the office because Washington opens up, Baghdad is still awake, and you've got things to do. You get out of there about 10:00 at night with a flashlight to walk back. Luckily, I had access to a vehicle sometimes so I could drive back to my CHU. But by midnight the shooting starts. Normally, if there's a battle in the area, fire support is coming from the base; if not, then someone is shooting at us; we've got mortars coming in, so you can't sleep, I mean, there's no way to do it. So you are there until maybe 6, get up, go take a shower, go get something to eat and go back to the job.

Q: I would think your brain would not be functioning very clearly though?

A: You'd be surprised, it functioned very clearly. Oh yes. You know that if you've got to get up into that Humvee and go downtown, and you know you've got to pass the battle space, you had better be ready.

Q: You're going to be alert?

A: It's easier for the young kids, I'll tell you that. Those kids, and I think that is one thing we've got to highlight in all of our reports, need help. I don't care if they are 18 or 19 and they don't come back with physical scars, every one of them who's been in battle has some little scars, every last one of them. If we can't do anything else, give these guys the help that they need. I've seen kids out there, you know, kids that are just on the edge.

We had one kid, he'd been a supply clerk and he'd been asking to go outside the wire, he was all ready to go. He was a gunner so we put him in the turret of one of the Humvees and sure enough we got into a fire fight; nobody was killed. We got him downtown, got the entire convoy in the destination and I asked where he was. He was sitting on the backdoor of the Humvee; he was sitting there and shaking. I said: "What's wrong man?" He looked up; we had these plexiglass three-ways around the gunner, then we had a camel tarp over. Well, one shot had hit the frame an inch from his head. It shook him up enough so he couldn't even light up a cigarette; I said: "Okay, that's it buddy, you are going to stay on the FOB, and I'm never going to let you off."

You never think about that kind of thing, this guy is a trained soldier but a random shot in a fire fight as we were passing through could have killed him. The one thing that bothered me more than anything else was having to write a letter to some family back here in the States saying: "I'm very sorry."

Q: Now that was a job you had to do as well?

A: As a part of our team, as a civil affairs guy, I would do that. We had members of our movement team killed; seven guys were killed in Al Sadr. But it's not the kind of thing you like to do. We had one guy that had a stroke, he was an older civil affairs guy; another guy developed colon cancer. It's not a pleasant existence out there, it's tough. But it comes with the territory; you sort of have to do it.

Q: Well, I don't think there are too many people that I know in the State Department who would readily volunteer for quite so much.

A: Things have slowed down a bit. When things developed up in Diyala I think it was a surprise to everybody. Nobody had predicted that the surge would cause this kind of thing.

Q: Oh, the surge would cause it?

A: The surge I think pushed it. There had been a number of instances when al-Qaida was coming up from Anbar, but what happened when they started fighting in Baghdad was they pushed these guys out and it's a four lane superhighway, from Baghdad to Ba'Qubah and so 35 kilometers away you have another city that is predominantly Sunni. As things started getting bad in Baghdad, they got worse in Ba'Qubah and then the fighting stopped in Baghdad and everybody started concentrating on what was going on in Ba'Qubah and the little communities to the north and we were right in the middle.

We were 8 miles from Ba'Qubah, 5 miles from Ah Khalis. We were dead center and we got nailed. So, no one really predicted that. I mean, additionally you had the development of the small Shia and Sunni militias, and that didn't ebb at all until the reconciliation started and you had the Sunnis saying: "Okay we're going to get rid of al-Qaida; we're going to stop shooting at you guys." So that kept it fairly quiet. About a week before I left, we had some rockets come in, but that was the last that I understand that the province had been hit.

Q: Are you optimistic about the reconciliation prospects for success, upon which seems to hang so much?

A: I'm cautious. Yes, you've got to look back at it and I say, "Here's the fight that started in 692 CE and it's still going on." The only thing that kept them from fighting for the last 30 years was Saddam Hussein. And so if you don't have that kind of hammer hanging over your head, I'm not sure if it's going to work. You've got the same actors there and you've got some pretty bad guys.

So what you are going to have are factions. If they can separate the factions and allow greater Kurdistan to take its fees and give the Sunnis something and give the Shias something, that might be a way to quell the violence, yes. But if they try to force a democratic representative form of government, at least in the northern part of the country, you are going to have civil war forever; it's going to happen. In the south, you might be able to do it because it is predominantly Shia, so south of Baghdad, except for that little

area that touches on Anbar, you might be able to do it. In the north, I think you are going to have a problem. You have a big Kurd interest there. They are well developed. In Khanaqin and places like that, it's like a different world. I flew in there in March 2007 and I was like: "what is this, the fields were green, cows were grazing, and it's like: 'wow'."

Q: Good for tourism.

A: Yes. Cars were on the road, gas stations were open, and I'm saying: "Oh, it's a half hour flight from there to Ba'Qubah and boy, you're in the soup when you get down there." It's a whole different world.

Q: You mentioned RTI at one moment and I think you had some dealings with them; how effective were they?

A: It depended. In the beginning when things were really tight and the shooting was bad, they had no role to play so I had to ask the RTI guys to leave. They clashed with our USAID person; they were planners and I needed people with practical experience. So it wasn't until things calmed down and we were able to get back with the local government that I invited them back to do some training and I think they are coming in small bits, two weeks here two weeks there, that sort of thing.

You know, the problem was as I say the kinetic operations. During the war, they served no purpose because they just sort of sat there and used up resources. They're good trainers, very strong people, but they've learned their craft in places like Africa and Latin America, and they are not the kind of guys you want to bring into a war.

Q: Maybe they weren't hoping to go into war either. These are third country nationals, not necessarily Americans?

A: Yes, yes right. They were good guys initially, but a little unrealistic in their expectations and when things got hot, they were ineffective. They left and then came back in early 2008 and I think they are doing a good job now.

Q: Did you have an agricultural attaché on your team?

A: We had a USDA rep, representatives from the Department of Justice (DOJ), USAID, State Department, and 31-61 contractors. Some of these guys are fantastic. The DOJ guys were unbelievable.

Q: What were they able to do?

A: The rule of law guys first of all reestablished the functioning criminal court; they literally took the judges in hand and took them and got a review of all the cases of the persons who had been in jail. We went to visit the prison and people were literally chained to the wall in the corridors.

Q: These were common criminals?

A: No, theses were guys that the police had picked up from the villages, never been charged, and with no file on them. These were 15 and 16 year old kids they suspected of being insurgents. You had that kind of thing going on. So the rule of law guys were really good. We also had one judge advocate general, a lieutenant colonel who was an outstanding guy. So they worked hand-in-hand; they now have the courts opened and functioning. Our USDA guys have done things like working to get the sheep dipped for example; that was a major event, and getting aerial spraying for the dubas bug that killed the dates and oranges. They were really fantastic.

Q: How were the sheep dipped before?

A: They weren't. For the last four years they had been slaughtered at a very light weight because once the ticks and other pests got into them they were basically useless; they would die. So, we got a grant from the military to order fifty tanks that were built locally; one of the foundries did it. We got chemicals needed from the Department of Agriculture, got them set up, got the agricultural solar labs set up so the farmers could form a group and drive their entire herd into this one area, and then they'd dip them and they could go back. We were able to get honey processing machines from India. Through the use of our Quick Reaction Funds we bought ten of them that were stationed throughout the province; honey is a major commodity in Diyala for the beekeepers.

Q: And was that brand new, that is processing honey in that way?

A: They had to send the raw product out. We rebuilt the date processing company; the building itself had been the product of Saddam Hussein's son Qusay, who had guarded the entire market on dates. He would take them and then sell them to Jordan and Syria for a profit. The poor guys had to accept whatever Qusay gave them.

We were able to rebuild the factory so now there's a date processing factory there. All this was done by USDA guys. We had a team, a little old guy that was a master sergeant from some place in Tennessee: he was fantastic. We also had a retired brigadier general, an agricultural specialist down at Fort Polk; he came in as a contractor, fantastic guy. These are the kind of guys who knew what they were doing, who knew what they wanted to do and I just had to point them and get out of the way. They really worked well. Another civil affairs guy, who was a master sergeant major and college administrator from the state of Michigan, was made an honorary sheikh when he left because he was able to get so many schools open. He worked with the Ministry of Education, got the exams collected, and got them down to Baghdad to be graded so that the kids could graduate.

Lttle things like that went a long way. I worked with local officials to have a date fair. They wanted to do it outside in the open, but we had it inside in a huge room, and all

these old date farmers brought their products in. We secured it; we had our Company down there.

Q: And auctioned off the dates?

A: Yes, it was great. We had a date princess and all the little girls, it was fantastic, it made the news.

Q: Who were the buyers for the dates?

A: These were outside guys; these were guys from Jordan, Syria and so forth.

Q: They were able to come even though things were pretty hard?

A: Yes. So, some of those things I am very optimistic about. Bottom line is security. If we can provide the security so that folks can start to live their lives normally again, I think we are going to be in good shape out there.

Q: Do you think the PRT is the right mechanism for these activities?

A: It's the only mechanism. I've been told numerous times by government officials and community leaders, "We don't want to see the green-suiters, the other guys, we want to talk to you; how come you didn't come to that meeting?" Because I missed a meeting and my deputy, who was a lieutenant colonel in the Army, would conduct it, I would get it the next day, you know, "Where were you? I said: "Colonel so and so was there," and they said, "No, no I want to talk to you."

So I think more civilians in there, getting more folks on the ground, getting more specialists in there and less green-suiters is the key. Because if there's a guy sitting there and he has a gun lying on the ground and if he says: "I want you to do this, that and the other," the official is looking at his gun. If I'm there I say: "I want you to do this, that, and the other," he's looking at me in my face; he's laughing at me because he's always teasing me about my gray beard, but he'll say: "Yes, I think we can work that out."

And so that was the thing that got me over with the governor, with high government officials and community leaders; they all knew me so when I would come in I would see my guys sitting there after they secured the place. "Wait; don't come in; just make sure the place is secure." Then the local leaders would all hug me and give me a kiss on the cheeks and that kind of thing. But they wanted to see me.

Q: Well, they obviously liked you and respected you. I am trying to think what they thought you were, obviously a well qualified individual, but kind of a one of a kind, so –

A: They saw me representing. I asked one official once: he said: "You work for the embassy, for the United States Government."

Q: That's right, but they don't all love the United States Government.

A: No, but the United States Government can give them things. The United States Government can provide things that they need. You know the military does things one way and the civilians do things another way and I think they are very comfortable with the civilian way. A good 90% of this is establishing a personal relationship with them, so it takes time. The first time I met with one local official we sat on the floor in his office because there were too many shots being fired through the window. You're not flinching and he's not flinching, and you're asking yourself what you should do.

Q: I'm sure it might rattle your concentration.

A: It does; it keeps you from sleeping for a couple of days, but you do it. That builds a certain amount of respect, that you went to his office in the middle of a fire fight and you sat down and you talked to him man to man. Taking a high government official home to his village, being introduced to his brother who is an important sheikh for the entire province and being invited into their brother's home, you know those are the kind of things people looked at.

Q: Yes, you obviously were an important person there, heavily respected.

A: And that meant a lot. We, for example, couldn't find one particular official with an expertise in economics. We knew who he was, and I'd seen him off in a distance, but it wasn't until I was invited into the home of the important sheikh and we sat and he had a cigarette and I had a glass of tea, that he called him. And this was after months. He said: "I want to introduce you to someone." I said: "Yes, please do." "This is one of our local economics experts." And so that meant a lot because then he was there, he was the guy we'd been looking for, he was the key to opening the businesses, he was the key to getting the deliveries to the farmers' market, he was the key to almost everything. You know it took maybe three months before the important Sheikh would introduce me to the economics expert.

Q: Yes, you have to build that relationship, and it does take time. It's amazing what you were able to achieve, nonetheless, in a short time.

A: Yes. Well it was a fantastic experience. I'm not sure whether I want to do it again. But, I think we're on the right track; you're trying to fill a gap, trying to fill a vacuum, and if you can get away from the violence and the sectarian divide and just deal with these folks one-on-one as people, it works. You can't really condemn people from what you hear. There were eight attempts on the governor's life in two years. This guy has escaped assassination eight times, and there's a reason for that. He is very wealthy and he alienated a lot of people, but he is the only guy with any government experience. And so if al-Qaida can get rid of him, they will sow discontent and disorder. They would put in the deputy governor who is a Sunni, and then they will have their run of the province.

So that's why they're trying to get him. I made it a point to make sure I touched base with the key guys, and every time I saw them I would go in, shake their hands and drink a cup of tea with them, just to let them know I was there and that I wanted to talk with them. And when I asked them something, such as: "Can you get these guys from al-Qaida to stop shooting at us?" they'd say: "We will do our best."

Q: For a certain limited amount of time?

A: Yes, exactly. So when things happened and that was the only way to do it, then it was an unbelievable experience. We lost a lot of good guys out there.

Q: That's what I gather.

A: Yes, pretty rough for about the first nine, ten months. But I think things are going in the right direction. We just have to stay the course and not expect to make momentous changes overnight; it's not going to happen out there. I always said: "Baby steps, make baby steps."

Q: Sure, that's what development work requires so why would this be any different?

A: Yes, exactly. The guys who are volunteering are dedicated, nobody is out there to feather their own nest, you can make a little extra bucks but, those who come out there, if they stay, are serious about what they're doing and in 28 years with the State Department, I haven't worked with a better bunch of guys. Mortars go off at night and yet at 7:00 o'clock in the morning there they are with their helmets on, their vests on, their briefcases, boots, ear plugs and they're ready to go. It's an amazing thing to see these guys sometimes.

Q: Yes, I know you would have to be dedicated and hopefully there's time you can reflect on yourself before you get out of there to realize if you're not suited for it.

A: Yes, nobody looks down their nose. We've had guys come and stay a day and say "Whoa man, not here."

Q: Assigned to your PRT and they got there and said, "No, I don't think so"?

A: Yes. This was back in June and July when things were really smoking up there. We had a guy who was an RTI guy; he got off the helicopter and was standing in about an inch of mud with mosquitoes and stuff flying around. He stayed for the day and that was it.

Q: That was it. One final question, because I didn't yet ask about public affairs. Did you have an effective public affairs program?

A: Yes, it was limited. We had to assign other responsibilities.

Q: You were doing a lot of other things.

A: We were doing a lot of things, but the problem is when you are moving back and forth between fire fights, it's very hard to get public diplomacy done. We had a good exchange program; we had four people go last year on a local government authorities program, for example. We had the largest audience of any TV or radio set-up in the country of Iraq. We have the Diyala Media Center which our foreign service officers have done an outstanding job helping to get up and running. The brigade paid for it initially. Then, we were able to get the provincial government to allocate some money for it. It's a 1,300 foot tall tower that can range in listening area from south of Baghdad all the way into Iran; it is a huge thing and it's in Diyala province. And they are able to broadcast simultaneously.

They have a Diyala Media Center set up so government officials can make tapes to be broadcast; they have satellite capability. So one officer is sort of following along with that. They bring directors from Baghdad up to do interviews frequently as well as addresses. However, working with the local press -- there is a newspaper that one government official is trying to get up and running, but that was one of the things that I refused to put U.S. government money into, so I'm not sure what the status is right now. He's asked for a bunch of money and I said, "Are you kidding me" and luckily the brigade commander said, "Under no circumstances are we going to do this."

Q*: And that's because we don't think there would be enough leadership or it wouldn't be good quality?*

A: It wouldn't be good quality and it would be very sectarian.

Q: Does the media center emphasize broadcast media, radio and TV?

A: Radio and TV, yes. And they're functioning. They have a contract with the company out of Baghdad that has its headquarters in Cairo. They can broadcast things like soccer matches, sitcoms, whatever, so you know they're pretty good; they're on sixteen hours a day, they do the Koran in the morning and then the Koran in the afternoon and Koran at closing, but it's functional. TV is one of those things that also bleeds over into things like education and we have an education officer. So when there's a function like, for example, the opening of a new water filtration plant, they are there to cover that; when there's a new school opening or a ribbon cutting, they are there to cover that and they show it on the news in the evening. When announcements need to be made about where to get your children vaccinated and those kinds of things, it covers that. So it's been a hard job because you know this tower is located just south of Ba'Qubah.

Q: Sounds like an attractive target too.

A: Yes. They wear the Company out to protect it.

Q: A commercial company?

A: No, soldiers. It's sort of a Jaish al Mahdi, which is a Shia militia, area and I think that is one of the reasons it hasn't been blown up; if it were Sunni I'm sure they would have blown it up.

Q: I do want to thank you for this conversation. We've covered a tremendous amount of ground, you've shared a lot of your experiences, and it's been extraordinary. I'd like to thank you, not only for your help with this project, but for all you've been doing in the field.

A: Thank you.

Q: It takes a special person to manage to get this accomplished.

A: Well, you sort of have to force yourself; you know it's not what you're trained to do. And the little bit of training we have prior to going out really isn't sufficient, but you really don't know until you get on the ground what you are going to need. So, I'd like to see maybe the Department develop a more stringent training regimen for folks getting ready to go out there.

Q: That might take longer than a couple of weeks.

A: Probably yes. We had a month or something like that to do the entire process. But people need to be a little more aware of circumstances and I think for a while things are going to get a little better but it is questionable what kind of impact overall we're going to have in a country like that where there is so much history and so much hatred and so much violence. Are we going to make a difference?

Q: That's the big question.

A: Yes. We hope so. We've lost a lot of people out there and too many to just let this thing go now.

Q: It sounds like on balance you would rate your PRT experience as worthwhile, and worth the time that you spent there.

A: Yes, certainly worthwhile, certainly worthwhile and as I said before, we made some baby steps but I'm not sure we are going to be satisfied with baby steps.

Q: And at what price?

A: At what price, yes. The bottom line, as I think General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker said, the Iraqis are going to have to make up their minds; they are going to have to stand up and do it. Until they reach that point, we are just going to have to tread water and we'll see what happens. It's their country.