

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

**INTERVIEW #23**

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**Executive Summary**

The interviewee was an USDA agricultural specialist, who had previously done a tour in Kunduz, Afghanistan, and served in the same PRT function at a base near Tikrit, Iraq. This latter tour was from December 2006 to March 2007. The informant for the most part praised the cooperation among the military, the USG civilians, and the embassy in Baghdad. That said, he noted that initially there was little cooperation between the 101st Airborne and the civilians, but that matters improved dramatically with its replacement by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. He ended up ranking the effectiveness of the PRT by giving an “A” to the Americans and a “D” to the Iraqis.

The informant was somewhat exhausted by the long daily briefings chaired by the State Department. He felt that there was “too much information.” In the course of the interview, he did acknowledge, however, that without these briefings, he would not have been able to answer the interview questions. He was proudest of his work with the University of Tikrit and the local agricultural officials to stimulate the development of an agricultural extension service. He also was pleased by his work in getting local officials despite central government hostility to an agricultural conference in Amman, Jordan. He thought the greatest accomplishment of the PRT itself was arranging to have Saddam Hussein’s body transferred back to Tikrit for burial following upon his execution. The speedy expediting of the request in the limited time available for a ritual burial helped to bolster the argument that the PRT could deliver. He also made a contribution to improving military-civilian relations at his base by suggesting that civilians receive arms training and Humvee driving instruction, including from the back seat. The new training program helped to gap the civilian-military divide and provided the civilians with some confidence that they could engage in self-defense, should the circumstances warrant.

The interviewee is not surprised that USG civilians are not eagerly stepping up to volunteer for Iraq. He noted the disparity between the long-term medical care offered to injured veterans of the Iraqi theater and the little that would be offered to civilians in the same circumstances. Had he been permanently disabled, the income loss for his family would not be adequately covered. Had he been killed in action, the \$ 250,000 insurance payment would have been insufficient for his surviving family members.

## Interview

*Q: Could you describe the location, history, physical structure, size and staffing of the PRT in which you served:*

A: I did two tours. I was in Afghanistan from August 2004 to January 2005 in Kunduz, which is the northeast part of Afghanistan. That was with the German Army. So during that PRT experience, we had a U.S. State Department official and myself. We were the only Americans on the base.

And then from December 2006 to March 2007, I was in Tikrit, Iraq. That was an American base. The New York State National Guard was the military unit there. The team leader was State Department, and there were two State Department folks, a political officer and an economic officer. They had a complement of a USAID officer, a Justice person and then some IRMO folks, an econ person and a governance person. So I believe it was a full complement.

*Q: And about how many people were there all together, during the period you were there?*

A: With the military or without?

*Q: Military and civilian, in your PRT, in Iraq?*

A: Fifty, I suppose.

*Q: Can you describe the role and mission of the PRTs in Iraq and be as specific as possible.*

A: Overall the provincial reconstruction team was working with the local Iraqi government to build their infrastructure and their governance. My role as the USDA agricultural advisor was to work with them in that realm. I worked within the economic section to add value while I was there.

*Q: And was there any specific mission to your PRT, say, different from the others, or did they all share common goals?*

A: They had a mission statement, and people knew what it was. As far as I know, all of the PRTs were getting the same story. It was a State Department person who was heading it, and she was very good at disseminating information. So all of them had the same mission, whatever environment you were in. At that time, we were in Saddam's hometown. We were there when they executed him. Based on where you were at the time dictated how much you could move around and interact with the locals.

*Q: Can you describe the PRT's relationship with the Provincial Affairs office or the National Coordinating Team, the U.S. embassy and the U.S. military commands?*

A: Well, the deputy team leader was military and actually, as a career U.S. government official with USDA, I was actually very impressed with how the State Department team leader and the military interacted. Then they were in constant contact with IRMO and they were always in constant contact with the embassy. So the coordination and communication amongst them was very good. We got transportation to fly back and forth to Baghdad and whatever they needed in terms of meetings and that sort of thing. I was very impressed with it.

*Q: Describe the chain of command, both civilian and military and the internal organization of the PRT.*

A: The team leader was State Department. The deputy team leader was a navy captain. We had lieutenant colonels who were heads of the economic team, the governance team, the infrastructure team, rule of law, that sort of thing. They had civilians under them.

*Q: What was your title and role in the PRT?*

A: U.S. Department of Agriculture agricultural advisor. I was assigned to the economic branch.

*Q: You have partly described this already, but can you rate the effectiveness of the PRT leadership and management structure?*

A: Looking back, it is always easy to throw stones, but overall I was very impressed with the State Department and the military, in terms of being in a very volatile area. We were in Saddam's hometown during the time they killed him, so that was the time when the Sunnis were trying to leverage al Qaeda involvement. That was before the Sunnis turned against al Qaeda. So it was a very difficult situation. I thought the State Department and the military's working relationship was phenomenal in that environment.

*Q: And do you have any improvements that you would recommend, in terms of the internal organization or the chain of command?*

A: When I was in Afghanistan, I was with the Germans, and they had the military and the civilian heads equal as co-team leaders. And there was a lot of merit to that, I thought. To be honest with you, you could find dissent. We civilians were on a huge military base in a war zone. The military has all the resources, provides all the force, and then there is this Department of State figurehead as the team leader. So my specific recommendation would be to make them joint team leaders, as the Europeans do.

*Q: But how would you rate the effectiveness of the organization?*

A: In terms of working with the Iraqis, I was amazed at how much risk our folks put themselves. So in terms of the Americans who were there being transported and working with the Iraqis, I would give them an A.

Now the effectiveness of the overall mission: Iraq is only going to be as effective as the Iraqis allow, and while I was there, the Iraqis were quite resistant to change. The situation has changed now, with the Sunnis' improved relationship with Americans, but at that time it was pretty belligerent. You were dealing not only with a former Soviet-style leadership economy, but the people we were working with were Republican Guards. They were in Saddam's hometown; they were people who had derived all their power from the regime that we had replaced.

So the effectiveness of the Americans giving a hundred per cent to work with Iraqis was an A. The effectiveness of the Iraqis working with the Americans was a D.

*Q: Did you encounter agency stove piping at your PRT, or did you find there was coordination and integration of programs by agency representatives?*

A: To be honest with you, the State Department had their team: an economics person, and a political person, their team leader. They were their own team, and they were stove piping.

USAID is to be commended. I think the USAID role in Afghanistan is the model for Iraq. USAID in Afghanistan had the funds, and they were the development experts. They were doing a lot of good. Yet in Iraq they were very minor players. They were not even on the staffing charts. They were relegated to contractor status. They pushed paper and ran contracts. Those contracts would then be managed by Research Triangle International. So they were a manager of subcontractors, and personally I think that was a horrible waste of USAID's talent.

*Q: Can you describe the relationship and interaction of members of the PRT? You have already touched on this, but did you have regular meetings, did you coordinate?*

A: In terms of management style, our team leader had a joint military-civilian meeting every night, and actually that was too much, and the new team leader that came in changed that. I think it would have been more effective for the civilians to meet separately. We ended up having some separate meetings ourselves. At that time the management structure was military, and civilians had a big team meeting every night and went through everything. That was too much information. It would have been better to have, just like in a corporation, your civilian department heads working together and then interact with the military on a senior management level, as a briefing type thing, rather than have sergeants in this meeting. As it was, you would have a meeting of 20 or 25, just sitting there.

*Q: And often you just felt it was too down in the weeds for a lot of the people?*

A: Right. As an economic development person, I do not need to hear what State is doing in terms of all the political intricacies. You can hit the high points so we had an idea, but we did not need to hear everything, just as in any office situation. You tell your staff what they need to know so they can do their jobs plus having a basic understanding of the situation. But you do not tell them everything.

In all fairness, as I said, it is easy to throw stones. I give the State Department team leader credit. She was trying to make sure everybody had full information because we were in a volatile situation. So take that criticism with a grain of salt.

*Q: What was your PRT's relationship with the brigade combat team?*

A: To be honest I did almost all my work with the battalion civil affairs person to get out and about. I did not use the PRT very much. I did all my stuff with civil affairs on the battalion level, because they got out more.

I was too low on the totem pole. The PRT, with what resources they had, State got to do their mission, and then the second priority would be the RTI subcontractors.

So in order for me to get out and about, I championed my relationship with the battalion. That worked for me. I had that experience in Afghanistan, so I was pretty flexible, looking for opportunities. You just seized the moment and did what you had to do, instead of waiting for the system to take care of you.

State had priority, but in all honesty, it was theirs and the military's show, so you have to understand that.

I know when the PRT first got there it was with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. It was a less than productive relationship. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne did not embrace the PRT concept. Then the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne came in, and the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne embraced the PRT. This is just what I was hearing in the meetings and all that sort of thing. So they had a good relationship.

*Q: In terms of security, what was the level and nature of the threat?*

A: Every time we went out, the military gave a briefing. There were two dozen attacks that occurred.

*Q: So during your period there, you were under frequent attack?*

A: We got mortared, rocketed, sniped at, and one day we had a vehicle bombed. The vehicle I was in was chased.

*Q: Well, you obviously, then, had a close relationship with the U.S. military. And what did you find to be the military's specific role?*

A: It was force protection. Every section was led by a lieutenant colonel.

One note of interest, I would say, is now they are trying to match civilians with their military counterparts and are training together before they deploy. When I was there the unit was a National Guard unit. They were getting ready to go back to the U.S. in two months. They had had eight attacks on their convoys. They were quite conscious, as anyone would expect them to have been, that they had served their time and were a month or two months from going home. That is why I said for me it worked better to go with battalion civil affairs.

*Q: Did your PRT rely any on Iraqi security forces?*

A: No.

*Q: But personnel, despite this danger, were able to operate out in the field, is that correct?*

A: Yes. As I said, I got out one to two times a week with civil affairs. I was really amazed that the governance people working with the Iraqis, like the RTI contractors that would work in the provincial government to help build up their capacity and book keeping and such, I think they went out three times a week. I believe there was a PRT convoy to the provincial government every day, the different sections being represented going in there.

*Q: Can you describe the PRT's relationship, if any, with international and non-governmental organizations? Now you have mentioned RTI, but I want to save that for a separate question.*

A: If there was international participation, I did not see it. Now keep in mind, USDA was in a different position. We were an add-on. I saw only the State Department, USAID, and the military. Then there was a Justice guy there, and there was me. So we were not exactly in the mainstream.

In Afghanistan we worked extensively with NGOs. I do not know if they worked with any NGOs. I am not saying they did not, but from being on the outside and just at meetings and listening to stuff, I do not remember any participation.

*Q: You do not remember any mention of European Union?*

A: No

*Q: Or the European Commission as being active?*

A: No, I did not hear anything. There was an Australian force protection group. They were contractors.

*Q: Not Blackwater?*

A: Not Blackwater. There was a force protection group that was in the same building that did provide support for somebody, I can not remember who.

*Q: Who were your Iraqi counterparts?*

A: I worked with the university and spent my time in agriculture schools. I worked with battalion civil affairs to move me around and get introductions. I worked with government officials who were experts in agriculture, educators, the sheiks' council, and a farmers union. But USDA's main initiative over there was an Iraqi agriculture extension revitalization program.

In Afghanistan I got out every day, because I rode around with the Afghan National Army. The Germans would not provide force protection if you went outside of a certain area. I was able to have a lot of flexibility. Yet I could not really get out to see real people in Iraq in the fields and stuff like that. So I said, "Well, what am I going to do? What I am going to do is to prioritize this extension initiative," and I actually did well with that. I was able to get and deliver invitations. I also made the communication arrangements so that the university was able to participate in a conference in Amman, Jordan. Before the first session, right before I left, I finally made the final connections. So Iraqis actually attended.

So I can actually say I did something. I feel good about that. By my being able to get information from Washington, Texas A&M, the central government and from the region. I actually was able to move this initiative. I went to civil affairs to have them hand people information, invitations, paper work, so we could get them to attend.

*Q: Did you did have interaction with, tribal councils?*

A: Yes, we worked with the farmers' union and the sheiks' council to identify projects.

*Q: And how about the local business community and citizens groups?*

A: Not me.

*Q: Did your PRT have a public affairs officer and program?*

A: Yes, I think that was one of the State Department people.

*Q: And do you know who their audience was?*

A: To be honest with you, no. That was out of my lane.

*Q: And you were not sure whether the program was effective or not? You did not hear?*

A: I could not tell.

*Q: Counterinsurgency: the PRTs are intended to bolster moderates and to provide the economic component of the U.S. counterinsurgency effort. Were you aware of this effort and was it effective?*

A: With everybody we worked with, it was to win hearts and influence the moderates. When we started out, local attitudes were very antagonistic towards the PRT and over a period of time while I was there, the State Department team leader and the military did a phenomenal job getting these folks who at first hated us to work with us.

The same thing occurred at the university. The first time I went to the university I was greeted with absolute open hostility. But once you keep going back, you work with them and then you see, “here is this initiative, this program, and we will work together. My job is to help connect you with that, so you can get some benefits in terms of capacity building.” I thought it was very successful.

If there is one thing that was always swirling around, from a person who is not a Foreign Service officer, it was all the information gathering. When you talk about counterinsurgency, to me that is being right in the middle trying to have your sensors up, trying to figure out who are the good guys, who are the bad guys. That, to me, permeated everything that we did. When I was talking to the agricultural people, I knew the military and State had their sensors up, that they were trying to figure all this out. I do not know if that answers your question, but just as an outsider who is not a trained Foreign Service Officer, I was really aware that you were not just talking to Joe Blow, you were part of a whole bunch of scenarios. The information was taken back and dissected.

*Q: And this relates to this theme in a way, can you describe the PRT activities, as you saw them, related to promoting democracy and the ability of the provincial or sub-provincial governments to function effectively and provide public services?*

A: That is everything that we did. I was amazed. I had worked in projects in the former Soviet Union, so you work against this concept of a centralized government, what was once centralized. Now you are trying to make it more democratic, which was essentially to represent the people. I thought the PRT staff members went out and talked to the Iraqis, that was in the forefront, the whole concept of government by the people, for the people, representation, transparency, in a very difficult situation. I was really impressed with the PRT. I was really impressed with how people were working in a very difficult situation and throwing their lives on the line, working with people very resistant to change.

I saw the same thing in Russia and Moldova and Ukraine. They were used to operating with a centralized government, and now they were making a transition to a market economy, so you were going to have change. But not only that, we were in a Sunni area, right during the tensest point, when Saddam was executed. Not only were the



people resistant to change, God, they hated us. And yet every day convoys would go out and people would do their jobs. I was impressed. I was absolutely amazed.

*Q: Did you see any improvement in the province being able to provide public services?*

A: RTI bent over backwards to teach the local government people, in terms of accounting and all that sort of thing, book keeping, on what the right thing to do was. So training had been given. Daily support was given by Americans--the PRT people going in there to support projects. Now it was an issue of "will the Iraqis actually do it, help themselves?" So, did I see improvement? Yes, but it was very incremental.

*Q: And as long as you've mentioned RTI, Research Triangle International, did you find their program to be effective?*

A: Once again, yes, as a training component. The Iraqis knew what needed to be done. They got training from RTI. Now the question is, will they execute what they learned? I was very impressed with RTI.

*Q: Can you describe the PRT activities related to economic reconstruction and development?*

A: Well, it was run by the military. On the economic side, I did not think it was very effective. I am a program director for USDA. We have grants, loans, loan guarantees. That is what I do every day. In terms of actually working with an area for business start-ups and expansions and that sort of thing, I did not think it was very effective.

Having said that, once again, it is easy to throw stones. I know a major employer was an oil refinery. All we ever heard was how corrupt the management was. I know that the government section went with a civil affairs person one day and visited a flour mill that had shut down. They were in the process of identifying businesses that could provide services. Then the issue was that the Iraqis were overstaffed at the oil refinery by 500 people. The natural answer would be, well, assign thirty of them here to the flour mill. Let us build their capacity, get this flour mill going. The Iraqis would not do that. They wanted the Americans to hire thirty people.

So to answer your direct question, how effective did I think it was? I think it was at the initial stages. At least the PRT staff was going out and talking to opinion leaders and starting to identify businesses to work with, but it is the government that will have to effect a change to help those businesses.

*Q: Did the civil affairs soldiers participate in reconstruction projects?*

A: Well, from my standpoint, the battalion did so, yes. God, they were everywhere. We had an Army Corps of Engineers person on the PRT. He was very involved with the infrastructure.

Once again, I was very impressed. The military had a dual role. Here there was a captain in civil affairs who was supposed to fight bad guys; at the same time he was working with the good guys and who was who? I thought they did a phenomenal job.

*Q: Did you have any interaction with the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee, the PRDC?*

A: I was supposed to meet them, but it didn't happen. So I never did work with them. We were supposed to work with them. I might have attended one meeting, where I might have met their chairman.

*Q: Rule of law, describe the work of the rule of law officer at your PRT.*

A: The two things that stand out for me, once again, as a pure civilian who was working in this environment: the RTI people working with governance and with the rule of law people. Those folks alternated going downtown every day. Monday, might be rule of law day; people would go down there and work on it. Tuesday was governance, *et cetera*. Those people put themselves at the local level at least on an every other day basis.

Now, rule of law, I think they got a new courthouse going. I know they were working with judges.

Earlier I said the team leader, her style of management was that everybody listened to everything and that got to be a bit much, but, yes, when you ask me these questions, the only way I gathered any of this information would be from listening. So it was not a criticism of management style, it was just that they were awfully long meetings. Does everybody need to hear everything? But that was the only way I am now able to answer any of these questions.

*Q: And you were aware of their working with Iraqi police, as well as the courts and prisons?*

A: I do not remember that. I do not remember them talking too much about that. But rule of law, the big things with us were the courthouses and judges. They had just had their first trials. That was the big thing. Before the Department of Justice guy left, they were actually going to have some more trials. The Iraqis, from what I gathered, were very proud of that, that they were able to execute on what the PRT had helped them with. I do not remember their working with the Iraqi police.

*Q: Were you aware of any programs in your PRT that related to training programs run by the Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq, the so-called MSTCI?*

A: No.

*Q: You were not aware of that? Okay.*

*Do you have any more specifics you would like to discuss or relate involving your role as agricultural advisor, your specific field?*

A: There was not a lot to accomplish. I was on recon. I was the first one to go over, to see what it was like. I got a phone call from the department, which said, "They are asking for volunteers. We do not know where you are going to go. We do not know what you are going to do. You are a big guy. You figure it out."

Specific to what did I accomplish, the main thing I accomplished was working with battalion civil affairs. The thing that civil affairs told me that I brought to them was, they had never worked with anybody in the agricultural sector. They had not worked with the university. They had not worked with the agricultural experts, and that fed into the farmers' union or association and that fed into the tribal sheiks.

Every quarter the PRT would sponsor a get together, a big meeting where they would bring the opinion leaders and the decision makers of the Iraqis into a meeting where they tried to build capacity and get them to work together. Because of the connections that I had made, they were able to add an agricultural component. So now you had the university, now you had the agriculture experts, now you had their extension service, the agriculture officials, tribal sheiks and farmers' union, working together. So from that standpoint, by me being on the PRT, I was able to connect a part of their society that the PRT had not made a connection with before.

The most tangible thing that I brought them was being able to get the university, because they were selected as one of six across Iraq, to work with the USDA-funded initiative, the IAER, the Iraqi Agricultural Extension Revitalization program. Because I was there I was able to break through the central government bias of not giving them information, and others not wanting to give them transportation. I was actually able to facilitate and deliver the necessary goods, so that these folks were able to attend an agricultural conference in Jordan. From what I understand, I just had a meeting two weeks ago in D.C., all six of those universities, two from the Kurds, two from the Sunnis and two from the Shi'a, are participating. So that makes me feel good.

*Q: I am just curious, from some of my other interviews, they have talked about working with beekeepers. Did you get involved with beekeeping?*

A: I look at it from the macro side. You can go help a beekeeper, you can go help bug killers and this type of thing. I was looking at systems development and to me, like in Afghanistan, USAID had money. Because the USAID person pulled out of the German area, because the Germans would not provide force protection, I just went out with the Afghans. I would go out with about thirty soldiers and my translator. I did 14 different USDA projects. I was kind of the USDA guy doing USAID stuff, you know, feeding back information.

So it is good to do projects. Everybody feels good to do projects. That is probably the biggest stress I see at the PRTs. You have a whole bunch of high performance people.

The situation is really limiting there. In order to have development, you have to have willingness to change from the locals, but you also have to have the environment to change and where we are at, there was tremendous resistance to change and acceptance of technology. Not only that, those that did work with us, some of them got killed.

So there was extreme frustration. So people wanted to do projects. I did a couple of projects. I helped the military do some greenhouses and cold storage.

To me, though, this is the first time where, because I do finance here, I made technical assistance over there a secondary concern. This was the first time, in Iraq, I was able to see the value of, gosh, it does make sense to build up an extension system. If you can help these folks, if you can help the opinion leaders who are educating the next generation to make the transition to a market economy, then they can help the next generation coming up.

So I did not stress working with individuals, because people always come up to you, to do something for sheep dips, which was the big thing that army vets wanted to do, because it makes them feel good, "we ran thirty sheep through a sheep dip."

*Q: It is concrete.*

A: Yes. Being the first USDA guy there and providing some ground truth, I was able to take this USDA extension development program, and it was like, "golly, I can actually do this." This was kind of fun.

*Q: Did your PRT have Iraqi cultural advisors? Can you describe their role?*

A: Every section, was it BBAs or something like that? Is that what you are talking about?

*Q: Right. Sure.*

A: I will be honest with you. The whole PRT experience, for a civilian, not only did you sense stress, but it was just like being at a good spook movie. Is everybody telling you the truth?

There was always the suspicion and second-guessing that I was getting from my peers at the PRT, "well, this translator might be telling you this, but you've got to be careful and weigh what his motivations are."

I did not like their role. They were very darned important people. The vetting process and that sort of thing, I think if I would say there was a weak link, I think the perception was that there was a weak link.

The more you talked to the BBAs, you knew that they had strong opinions.

In Afghanistan we had local area guys and here we had Canadian BBAs and that sort of thing. I never really felt comfortable. There was just a lot of drama and suspense surrounding those folks.

I showed up to the PRT. I did my work with the battalion. If I was totally dependent on the PRT, I would not have gotten much done, because if you were not State or military, you did not have the influence to marshal the resources that you needed to get work done. I am not bitching; I am just saying that is the reality.

*Q: What did you think the PRT achieved during the time you were there? Could you describe a list of projects completed, or other concrete accomplishments?*

A: The main thing I saw was, the week that they executed Saddam and that day surrounding what to do with his body, our PRT was flooded with local Sunnis working with our PRT team leader to arrange the helicopter to go down and get his body. When I arrived, Sunnis were openly against Americans. From just the time that I was there I was seeing that, "well, we may not like you but we understand your rules and we can work with you." But to me the biggest achievement was, what mattered most to them, was Saddam's body and who did they come to? They came to the PRT.

So everything else I could say would be minor compared to that. I do not know the team leader very well, but I was very proud. This, to me, was quite an achievement. Here was what mattered most to these folks and they came here, because if they had not worked with her, they would not have got the body in time and that sort of thing. But the team leader worked with the military and flew the choppers down there, picked up the body, got it back and got him buried within their ritual time period.

*Q: Did you see any other projects, though, completed?*

A: I think they did a courthouse. I remember driving by that building. For IRMO, that was their big funding. They had thirty or forty infrastructure projects. The Iraqis had to decide what projects to do and set up priorities and submit applications and that sort of thing. So they had, right as I left, the PRT IRMO representative submit all those applications for funding.

*Q: Did you feel that the PRT was accomplishing its mission in terms of improving governance, promoting economic development, utilizing American military and civilian resources effectively? All those, yes? And also with counterinsurgency, you felt there was an effective role for the PRT?*

A: My definition of counterinsurgency was to force Americans out to work with Iraqis, outside the PRT. That was just to me incredible, because they did put themselves at

great risk. While that military unit was assigned to the PRT, they had eight attacks on their convoys, PRT convoys.

*Q: As you look back on your total experience, was your training adequate to prepare you to serve in a PRT?*

A: Mine was, because I did it in Afghanistan. Otherwise, no.

When I went through, they sent me to a two-week course in D.C. I would rate that an F. I understand now that they send people to a four-week training with the military unit that is being deployed. I hear that is good.

When I got over there, I will say this, at least they listen to you. The military would tell me if you get shot or wounded you have got to take care of yourself because we have got to take care of ourselves first and then we will come back to you. I was never even issued dressings or bandages, the field dressings.

I made the comment once, “you always assume I am the one that is going to get hit. I am in the Humvee with you. I need to know how to fire your weapons. I need to know how to reload them. I need to know how to drive the Humvee. Because what if you get hit?”

Well they thought about that. They said, “you know what, that is a pretty good idea.” So the military every Saturday afternoon put training on for civilians. I said, “why does the military not reach out to the civilians, so we can use this as a team building exercise?” So the military, they taught us how to drive the Humvees from the back seat, they taught us how to fire the weapons and reload them and where stuff was. So I thought that was pretty good.

*Q: And that was at your suggestion?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Great.*

A: Because I said, “I’m your first true volunteer. I have a full-time U.S. career job, three kids, and I am married. I am just like your brother or sister. You are going to get a different whole wave of people coming in here. You are going to get true volunteers who want to do well. You have got to make them feel part of the team.”

I will be honest with you, some of the military just wanted to get the hell out of there. They were ready to go. And that was kind of unnerving. I had a couple of them come up to me and say, “Look, if you think we are driving you out to a farm, you are full of shit. We are not going to get wasted because you want to go see a bunch of damned farmers.”

That was when I said, “You have got a good point.” I immediately went with the battalion. I am not criticizing them. They had been hit eight times. But they were quite stand-offish on the civilian side.

Once we had these joint trainings at the PRT, you are firing machine guns and you know how to reload them and you are driving a Humvee. The mere fact we would be driving a Humvee from the back seat means that they would have been killed. I saw more improvement going through that exercise than anything.

So, was my training adequate? If you take away my Afghanistan experience, no, heck, no.

*Q: Did the USDA provide you with any programmatic training?*

A: No.

*Q: What modifications would you recommend, then, in the training programs?*

A: What people really need to know is, I could see one week where they talk about the culture and that sort of thing, what you are going into. Just about everybody that was in my D.C. training class, they are going to sit their time out in the Green Zone. They never would leave the Green Zone.

So for the PRTs, they need to understand State, what State does. They need to understand what AID and the subcontractors do. And they the need to understand the military and they need to understand how to use the tools of the military, from the standpoint of “here’s your M-16, here is how you reload it, here is how you drive a Humvee,” that sort of thing.

That two-week training in D.C., the weapons we fired, we never saw any of those weapons, the medical training. Once again, I am not throwing stones, it is easy to criticize, right and I do not want to criticize but you asked me, “What would I do to improve training?” I would have a couple of days on culture and stuff but what a civilian really needs, a civilian volunteer, really needs to know is: all right, here is the State Department, how do you interact with these folks? What is State’s mission and how can you add value? Here is the military: how do you interact with these people and how do you add value? Then here is how you use the tools for when you actually get into a war zone.

*Q: So, my final question to you is what lessons did you draw from your experience?*

A: It was fabulous personal and career development, but if I had been injured, it would not have been worth any of it. Because I did not get hurt, I look back and say, “I really learned a lot.” Having said that, had I been injured--we had an agricultural advisor killed in Afghanistan--if you get injured, you are on your own. I think they are trying to change that, but medical care and all that sort of thing, you are caught in this limbo,

because the military would say, “you are not military.” Just like that DOD civilian who got injured--Walter Reed would not even accept him. Boy, that has got to get changed. That has just got to get changed.

I am going to be honest with you, now I realize a lot of the people that do international development are kind of nomads; they go from job to job and travel all over the world and that is good. You keep reading in the papers, “why are the U.S. government agencies not stepping up?” Well, if you get blown up and can not even get medical care, you got to be crazy. A lot of civilians, I will not say most, a lot higher than the standard population, are divorced or get divorced through this process. So there has got to be a better support mechanism.

A soldier gets into it, now the National Guard, their bitch is none of them planned on doing two or three tours. But, at the same time, they signed up for it. It was good for their career. State Department, it was part of its career. The people that I know in State that went through Afghanistan and Iraq got to pick their next posting. You know what I got out of it? Nothing. When you are talking about getting people from USDA and other agencies to volunteer for these things, there is a total gap there, in terms of support and coverage.

So am I glad I did it, yep. Would I do it again? No. As I said, I did Afghanistan and Iraq, but it would tear my marriage apart, because if I get injured, the only one that pays the sacrifice is my family, because the life insurance does not cover you. Now you can take the \$250,000 foreign service policy; that does not cover much, when you look at my income and that sort of thing, what we are losing, namely medical coverage.

And this PRT thing, I really believe in the PRT structure, in terms of whether it is Sudan or whatever. Why should the UN give food to the bad guys and they keep it? If you are really going to effect change under the military, you got to get it to the right people and you got to change the government. When you are dealing with force, it takes force. So I am all for PRTs.

But if they truly want to get other civilian government professional involved, they got to do a lot better.

*Q: Well, on that note, then, we will conclude this interview. Thank you very much.*