

UNCLASSIFIED

Contemporary Operations Studies Team

A project of the Combat Studies Institute, the Contemporary Operations Studies Team (COST) archives firsthand accounts from US Army military personnel who planned, participated in and supported Operation Iraqi Freedom from May 2003 through the Iraqi national elections in January 2005.

Interview with LTC (P) L. Barrett Holmes



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Abstract

Lieutenant Colonel (P) L. Barrett Holmes served as the commander of the 20th Engineer Battalion in support of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division in Iraq from March 2004 until March 2005. Predeployment training consisted of preparation at the National Training Center (NTC) in preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom I, but they did not deploy as initially planned. For the next year, his command planned for the stability and support operation with a return to NTC when the training center was converting to stability and support operations style training. This was supplemented by additional training at Fort Hood including convoy live fire training. Training continued while deployed to Kuwait. Holmes' area of responsibility consisted of eastern Baghdad from the Tigris River to the east within the districts of Sadr City (Thawra) and 9 Nissan, an area that has an estimated five to eight million residents. His soldiers operated in a three forward operating base configuration: Camp Eagle to the north, Camp Cuervo to the south, and off to the west Iron Horse Base. The transition between 1st Armored Division and the 1st Cavalry Division was still being completed when the Sadr City uprising began. This resulted in the 1st BCT having seven soldiers killed in action. Holmes also discusses a temporary shortage in the bulk water that went into tanks for showers, major infrastructure reconstruction projects with the sewer system and electrical grid. He highlights Colonel Abrams' weekly civil-military operations meeting during which all task force executive officers briefed the civil affairs infrastructure activities being conducted: sewer, water, electrical and trash. He addressed the Labor Directory's efforts in Sadr City and the employment of Egyptians to do work that the Iraqis did not want to do. Finally, Holmes discusses the importance of force protection and treating Iraqis with dignity and respect. Soldiers demonstrated discipline and cultural awareness when interacting with the Iraqi nationals, he said. Holmes also discusses the post-deployment required training efforts that soldiers within the 1st Cavalry Division must complete for their next rotation.

Interview with LTC (P) L. Barrett Holmes

6 December 2005

DV: My name is Dennis Van Wey (DV) and I'm with the Contemporary Operations Studies Team at the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, currently researching for the follow-on book to *On Point*. I'm interviewing Lieutenant Colonel (P) L. Barrett Holmes (BH) on his experiences during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The time is approximately 1620 hours, today's date is 6 December 2005, and this is an unclassified interview. Before we begin, please understand that only unclassified information should be shared. If a question cannot be answered in an unclassified manner, then simply state that this is the situation and we will proceed to the next question to avoid revealing any classified information. Let me go ahead and give you a copy of the read-ahead questions that we talked about. I have more detailed questions that if we have time we will get more into. Please begin by telling a little bit about yourself, your education, your background and any information you might have that will add to the interview.

BH: I'm Lieutenant Colonel (P) Barrett Holmes. I was the commander of the 20th Engineer Battalion at Fort Hood, Texas, supporting 1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT) during OIF II. I have been on Active Duty 21 plus years. I have served in a variety of positions. I started out as a light fighter as a platoon leader and executive officer (XO). I served some time in the combat heavy in a construction unit. After company command and advanced civil schooling, I went to the University of Florida, got an advanced degree in civil engineering, and served at the Vicksburg District level there. Then I went to the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). From there I was 10th Engineer XO in the mechanized world. I went back to the combat heavy as XO, back to back. I served a joint tour over in England as the facilities and logistics manager, which got deployed to Bosnia, and did some pretty good construction work. From there, I went to Fort Hood. I spent 37 months as a battalion commander. Now, I'm the division engineer for the 1st Cavalry Division.

DV: You have lots of real-life engineer experience. Did you say what your undergraduate degree was?

BH: My undergraduate degree is in agriculture economics (AG ECON). I'm an AG ECON major, farm boy.

DV: Then you made the transition?

BH: Well, I was always a combat engineer. I got advanced civil schooling at the University of Florida with the Construction Management School of Engineering. With the Vicksburg District, I worked on the Red River realignment, levee upgrades and facility upgrades. That was three years with that district as my utilization tour. That was a good job.

DV: What was the military duty position and assigned military unit you held during your OIF deployment? From when to when where you deployed?

BH: The position was commander of the 20th Engineer Battalion. I was deployed from March 2004 until March 2005.

DV: How well prepared did you feel you were prior to your arrival in Iraq?

BH: I don't think we could have trained any better or had any more preparation. We were ready for the fight and what we were going into. With my battalion, as I mentioned earlier, I was 37 months in battalion command. That is a long time. Normally it is about 24 months. We initially trained up for the "heavy fight," if you will, the attack into Baghdad. That, based on the troops needed at the time, was no longer needed, so we kind of stood down from that one. So we trained up during our National Training Center (NTC) rotation for the heavy fight and then kind of took a step back. For the next year, we planned for the stability and support operation. We got to go back to the NTC, when the NTC was converting from the big force-on-force fight out there to stability and support operations. So we had a lot of civilians on the battlefield and those types of scenarios. Then we did a lot of training here at Fort Hood. We did convoy live fire for the first time ever here at Fort Hood. That was a big event. Once we got over to Kuwait, we had about two and a half weeks where we received equipment, we were able to get out in the Kuwaiti desert and re-qualify with our crew-served weapons, individual weapons, and do reflexive fire training, building entry and that type of stuff.

DV: So I presume then a lot of the expertise that came back from OIF I was utilized to prepare you for OIF II?

BH: Yes. We looked at a lot of after-action reports (AARs). As far as our soldiers in the formation, it was unique as a battalion commander, because with some of these soldiers I was able to train with them for the entire two years and then serve an entire year with them in combat. That was a definite plus. Everybody kind of knew what was expected. Everybody knew everybody's training level. For me personally, in my formation, when I would go out with my PSD, there were things we would do that were automatic and you didn't even have to speak about them.

DV: What was that acronym?

BH: A personal security detachment (PSD). That was my group of 12 with me anytime I moved for engineer reconnaissance or any kind of mission on the battlefield. We went around in either a three-M1114 set or if we were going to a place like Sadr City, based on the threat level, we would use four M1114s and 20 personnel.

DV: Those are the armored Humvees?

BH: Yes, the uparmored Humvees.

DV: Once you were in your area of operations (AO), it's my understanding that it was Baghdad itself, eastern Baghdad.

BH: It was eastern Baghdad. I supported the 1st BCT and 1st CAV and we had more or less from the Tigris River to the east. We had the districts of Sadr City or Thawra and 9 Nissan.

Those were our two primary districts there. Within those two districts, there is a huge population. Of the city of Baghdad, which is about five to five and a half million, the two districts we fought in had about three and a half million people. Sadr City alone, about six by seven kilometers, was anywhere from two to two and a half million people. So there is a very high density of folks there in Sadr City.

DV: What mission surprises did you experience when you first arrived in theater in your area of responsibility (AOR)? Did you have any surprises or was it pretty much as you planned?

BH: We pretty much fell in on what we thought we were going to do. The one thing I think took everybody by surprise was 4 April 2004 when we had the contact with the militia in Sadr City. That was a big fight. On 4 April, the 1st BCT had seven soldiers killed in action (KIA). At that point, we knew we were in a little bit different fight than we thought we were going to be in initially.

DV: This was like the immediate timeline when you were taking over.

BH: Right. As a matter of fact, we were doing our left seat, right seat ride. We were still technically under the command of the 1st Armored Division. The 1st Armored Division commander was still in charge of Task Force Baghdad. We had not totally passed the baton to the 1st CAV. During the transition was when we had the contact with the militia. From that point, at least initially, there were 60 days of continuous combat operations on a daily basis. We thought we were going into more of the atmosphere that 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) had, where they pretty much had free movement throughout their battlespace with no contention. They had no deaths or enemy contact in quite some time. I think 4 April 2004 changed a lot of minds and a lot of attitudes.

DV: What impact did that have on the transition from the unit that was leaving and your unit coming in?

BH: I think when it happened, as far as the timing, any time you are trying to transition out and when you are doing a relief in place, that is probably a time you do not want to get hit. But we did and we really didn't know any better. We started receiving all the intel reports and situational reports; we had lots of contact in our sector. If it has got to happen, having it happen hard up front, I think, put our soldiers in a really good mindset. There was no chance to get complacent. Once we were hit, we were in contact. Everybody definitely had their game face on from that point on. So I think if there has to be a benefit, having the heavy contact up front and then seeing it gradually taper off over time was a benefit to us.

DV: You heard about, and I'm sure you are totally familiar with, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the search for that. Was there any impact of that on your mission in any way?

BH: In our little piece in Sadr City and 9 Nissan, I am not aware of any WMD and that really didn't come into play for us.

DV: What were the major logistical challenges encountered in theater and how did you overcome them?

BH: I wouldn't call them major challenges, but we operated in a three forward operating base (FOB) configuration. I think we were the only BCT in 1st CAV to do that. We had Camp Eagle to our north. We had Camp Cuervo to the south. Off to the left we had Iron Horse Base. In that triangle there, there were probably eight to 10 kilometers separating the three. Our lines of communication (LOC), of course, were along Route Pluto and along Route Predator. We had to keep those LOCs open at all times.

DV: You said that was Eagle and Cuervo. What was the other one?

BH: It was Camp Eagle, Cuervo and Iron Horse Bases. These names have changed. They were different when we were there, we changed them, and they are different now. I don't know what they are called now. I think Patriot was Iron Horse Base. I'm not sure about Cuervo and Eagle.

DV: It was main supply route (MSR) Pluto and what was the other one?

BH: Pluto and Predator were the two MSRs that we had to definitely keep open on a daily basis. We had units assigned to them and their primary task was to just keep those open. Initially, there were a number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) along those routes and we put in measures to mitigate that. We cleaned up the trash, did more aggressive patrolling and got explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) out there to clear them. I don't think we ever had any supply shortages based on enemy contact along MSRs. We always kept those open and we always kept supplies flowing. The only logistical challenge we had at Iron Horse Base was during the really hot summer months. We actually had water pumped in from the outside and it was filtered through a reverse osmosis water purification unit (ROWPU).

DV: So you had a shortage of water there?

BH: Well, for a period of time, probably about two to three weeks during the summer months, there was no shortage, but what we had to do was get tanker trucks. So with a platoon's day worth of tanker trucks and a 3,000-gallon water blivet, we just filled in up at Cuervo and just kept doing those round turns.

DV: Okay, it was bottled water that wasn't there then is what it sounds like.

BH: No. We had plenty of bottled water. Bottled water was never an issue. It was the bulk water that went into tanks for showers mainly and that type of thing. That was the only real challenge we had. I'm sure there might have been some other specific repair parts (Class IX) type issues but I am not aware of them.

DV: What about any equipment or repair parts. Did you have any shortages or problems with that?

BH: Actually, during the rotation, our primary vehicle was the M113. Our operational ready (OR) rate was really good. It was in the 95 percent realm and we put a lot of miles on the M113. The other platform we put a lot of miles on was the M1114 and it was a tremendous vehicle. Mine personally, I know when I came north from Kuwait into Baghdad, I rode up in an M998 with just regular canvas doors that we hung some half-inch metal on. But once we got to Iron

Horse, about a week and a half later, we actually got a brand new M1114 that had something like 40 miles on the odometer. It still had the plastic on the seat. It was fantastic. By the time we left, that particular Humvee and my PSD had 80,000 miles. That was just mainly Baghdad. I made a couple trips back and forth to Kuwait when we were doing the transition, but a lot of miles.

DV: For transcriber's purposes, the M998s are the soft unarmored Humvees and the M1114s are the trucks?

BH: The M1114s are the uparmored Humvees.

DV: I thought you said 1113s also.

BH: We had M113s. The M113 is our armored platform for engineers. We put a tremendous amount of miles on those and the M1114s, and they were very reliable. We didn't have any problems with those at all. The armored glass on the M1114s is phenomenal. That does stop rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). It deflected RPGs. With 7.62 rounds, we even had one incident around Iron Horse Base where we had a sniper who was taking shots at our convoys. He used a round that had a titanium point that doesn't incinerate and doesn't mushroom on you. My interpreter was sitting in the back in his seat and the round actually came into that glass and it never penetrated. There was a little bump on the inside. Of course it shattered the window and we dug that titanium point round out of there. But it was a fairly close shot. We determined it to be from a second-story window or a building that was probably about a 50- to 75-yard shot. It absorbed that one round and we were always very impressed with that glass. It did a lot for us and it saved a lot of lives.

DV: That is pretty impressive that it stopped that round. What differences did you notice between Regular Army soldiers and officers or the Reserve units who were there supporting and assisting in their own capacity, whether it be as engineers or whatever capacity that they were in your AO?

BH: I didn't have a lot of contact with reservists on Active Duty, but the ones I did see impressed me as being squared away and in the fight. They had good situational awareness. I believe our Operation Iron Claw team was reservists. They were an engineer clearance team that operated throughout the battlespace. They had a tough job.

DV: What was their job?

BH: We called it Iron Claw. Iron Claw is the Buffalo. It is the route clearance vehicle which you have probably seen. It has large pneumatic tires, a V-shape hull, and it has a lot of arms that articulate out and they are able to remove debris and actually determine if you have an IED out there. It has a camera on it. It has some optics. Once it finds an IED, it has to back out of there and then we send EOD in and they destroy it.

DV: So they were doing the patrols on the MSR.

BH: Right. They had a specific clearance mission there. It was a limited asset. I think we only had one of those clearance teams in Task Force Baghdad. So on a rotation, maybe once every month or month and a half, based on the threat, they would come into our area on the routes that I described to you earlier, Pluto and Predator. Those were the main areas we would send them and target areas for them that could have possible IEDs.

DV: How did you utilize assigned special operations soldiers, civil affairs and psychological operations (PSYOP)?

BH: The PSYOP team was assigned to the BCT. We had a good relationship with the civil affairs team.

DV: Were those six-man teams, each of those?

BH: I don't know what their numbers were, but at the brigade level, and I think it was very effective for us, every Thursday we had what our brigade commander, Colonel Abrams, called a CMO meeting. It was a civil-military operations (CMO) meeting. He had all of his task force XOs come in and brief infrastructure: the civil affairs activities out there, sewer, water, electrical and trash. That was kind of our main focus in infrastructure. Every Thursday at 1000 hours; that was our target time. We didn't do that initially. But after about a month or a month and a half, we did that. We saw the great benefit we got from having task force XOs brief this as opposed to having your engineer or your civil affairs guy stand up there and talk it. But everybody in civil affairs, engineer, PSYOP, the fires guys who were working information operations (IO) and the brigade staff, they were all there, and of course everybody heard it.

DV: So that gave a big picture perspective for everyone?

BH: Exactly. It was usually an hour or an hour and a half max, but everybody got a lot of good information out of that. I had an engineer battalion that could support the sewer, water, electrical and trash, that portion of the infrastructure. The civil affairs folks mainly focused with the task force on things like food distribution. I know we had a big operation called Happyfeet, where we got shoes from the States and handed those out as part of the task force's goodwill in the area. We also had a large agricultural effort down in 1-82 Field Artillery's sector where they had a farmer's co-op. They bought seed and some equipment for them, did some work on their irrigation systems, and kind of helped stand up the agricultural aspects along the Diyala River. The CMO guys really helped tie that one together.

DV: So this is the southern part of the Diyala River?

BH: Boy, I wish I had a map. You have one? Wait a minute, this is even better. I just looked over here and saw my infrastructure book. I should have had this out sooner.

DV: Do you by chance have this on digits?

BH: I knew you would probably ask that. Somebody probably does somewhere. As a matter of fact, I took this book with me into the CMO briefing every week and any time I went to Amanat of Baghdad. That was like their city municipal sewer, water and electrical folks there. You can

see the table of contents. A picture is worth a thousand words, so we had some pictures up front. This is actually in Rust and this is my Humvee. It hadn't rained there in over six months. You can see his rain stuff here. That is not Gatorade. That is standard sewage in the streets. You had to make adjustments to the way you thought about things. That condition was about halfway up the Humvee, to the wheels. You would see that in numerous places. This was actually the sink hole in Sadr City. This was one of worst sewage breaks that we had in the city. Sadr City was six kilometers by seven kilometers. There was a lot of stuff wrong. Saddam Hussein had neglected the infrastructure for 30 to 35 years. These were predominately Shi'a. In Sadr City, what he had done is created this space there for them for unskilled labor. So the predominantly uneducated Shi'a moved up into Sadr City, and they were not some of Saddam Hussein's favorite people. They were kind of the have-nots and he had neglected them for many years. Even though this was a big mass of problems, and you would see conditions like this throughout, one of our key tasks was to go in and start somewhere. So we were going to start block by block, street by street, and if when we leave here only this block here has been improved, then so be it. We made a start and we got a foothold. So the sink hole was in Sadr City. It was one of the worst they had and we went out and contracted this on our own before some of the larger contractors moved in. It was one of the worst breaks. You can see this is dewatering. We worked with the Amanat of Baghdad to find out what their priorities were. We worked with the local officials.

DV: What is the Amanat?

BH: The Amanat is their equivalent of their city engineers. They have all the municipalities and they have the sewer, water, electrical and the trash. It is all managed out of that office.

DV: It looks like there are pumps there that pump the sewer.

BH: This one here, you can see the pump here. What this does, because this hole is dug down to about 25 to 30 feet, any time you go that deep, the water table is pretty close to the surface. So you actually have to dewater. The Iraqi engineers designed this and these are well points going down around the perimeter and this is pumping fresh water, if you will, out of the hole so they can work in the dry.

DV: So these holes here with the wires around it?

BH: These are manholes. This is actually an offset manhole and this is actually the primary manhole that is tying into the Zeblin line. That was the large three-meter pipe that handled all of the sewage coming out of Sadr City. I will show you some other maps here. We did the same thing on the industrial line. You have a lot of equipment going here, but one of things we found is that you can employ a lot of local labor instead of doing it with large mechanized equipment. Initially, we hired about 500 people. We put picks and shovels in their hands and paid them a wage and let them be part of the prosperity.

DV: Was that \$5 a day?

BH: Our wage rate that we tried to equate to was about, I think, \$6.50 a day. That was a great wage for them and it actually paid more than the militia. Moqtada al-Sadr, at one point, was

paying militia. Of course some of these guys are militia fighters at night, so if we put a pick and shovel in their hands and get them tired during the day, they are much less likely to pick up that RPG or that AK47 at night.

DV: Did you have any problems recruiting people to do the manual labor saying that it was beneath them, for example?

BH: No. Now the one thing they did not like, and you had to be kind of selective, was going down and cleaning out the grates at some of the sewage lift stations. That was manual labor, and what we found out is that at some of the sewage lift stations, there were Egyptians who did that. Some Iraqis probably did not want to do that. But for this unskilled labor here, for the digging with a pick and shovel, we had no problems. I say we, but the Iraqis contractors had no problems hiring labor.

DV: When you say Egyptians, you mean they were Iraqi Egyptians?

BH: No. They were from Egypt. Several of the people we talked to were born in Egypt and they had moved to Iraq. But that was their job. They worked in sewage lift stations.

DV: They stayed in country?

BH: They did. This was one of the sewage lift stations that we renovated. This is Sewage Lift Station #2. This was the living quarters. There were 15 sewage lift stations in Sadr City. At each one of these lift stations, you had family who lived there, and they were not very good accommodations. I think I have taken out some of the before and after shots. This was a facility we constructed for them and it had a shower and running water.

DV: I remember reading about some of the conditions they were in before you built, obviously that one, a new living environment.

BH: I'm looking for some of my before and after shots. This is Sewage Lift Station #11. This thing had been broken forever. This was the big hole up there and this is the repair. That was a big deal up in Sadr City.

DV: So the gray sewage would just come right back into the city.

BH: When this pipe is broken, whenever they would turn on the pump station, it would just bubble up outside of the station. So we got that one repaired. This is some of the 11kV line. Again, we were employing a large number of local workers with picks and shovels instead of doing it by mechanized means. This is along Route Predator just north of Iron Horse Base. One 32kV cable going in is just a massive project. Once it is in and is underground, you don't see that. It is out of sight and out of mind, but this was going to take the place of the overhead.

DV: These are the underground electrical systems that keep the lift stations running?

BH: This actually powered the electrical grid throughout eastern Baghdad. This is the 132. These are all 132kV lines, three phases, so there are about nine lines of this under here. It is

actually going to be redundant of this 400kV line overhead. So if you had somebody take this one down, this one would still continue to go.

DV: Now which power station? Did these feed into the Ad Dawr area power station there?

BH: Right. I'll just kind of flip through the pictures real quick and I will show you some of that. This is actually up in a neighborhood that never had power. You can see it is fairly newly construction up there north of 9 Nissan. It never had overhead cable before so this is all brand new stuff coming in and going to their house. This is one of the electrical poles in Sadr City that we had constructed.

DV: It looks like downtown Sadr. This poster on the wall, what was this about?

BH: I don't know what that specific verbiage says right there, but this was right behind the Al-Mohsen Mosque in Sadr City. There were a lot of loyal Sadr supporters, but as far as infrastructure, we were in there helping them out and trying to benefit everybody in the city. So, we employ everybody and put them to work. This is a picture of all the brand new electrical poles that are going in.

DV: While you were doing the operations here, did you rely on the field manuals (FMs) like FM 3-0 and FM 3-07? Did you rely on any of the doctrine that was previously published or was there any formal path you followed, so to speak?

BH: Some of the stuff we learned in our training, we probably got that initially out of the manuals. But as far as working with the infrastructure and doing this level of management and the engineer reconnaissance, I think this is something we were kind of creating on our own. One of the things we did that helped us tremendously before we went to Iraq that was we kind of partnered with the city of Killeen, Texas, here. We had our engineer brigade, 1st CAV Engineer Brigade at the time, now we don't have an engineer brigade because we have transformed and gone away from that, but we had classes set up by the municipality here in Killeen and Copperas Cove, Texas. Even the city of Austin hosted the brigade and division commanders and the leadership, and just talked to them about what it takes to run a city. We had several sessions with our local folks here in Killeen. The power, water and sewer, we actually went there and did some reconnaissance. At least we had a general understanding of what we were going to be facing there.

DV: How was that initiated? Was that based on the previous rotation or was that just based upon what you perceived would be needed?

BH: We based it on what we perceived would be needed. The previous rotation in this sector, the 3rd ACR, I believe it was the 84th Engineer Company, had an engineer company supporting an ACR out here. Their main effort was to get in and secure the FOBs. They did a lot with survivability. But that one company commander and his staff, that is really all they were able to focus on. We knew coming in that the infrastructure effort was going to be part of our five lines of operations because I had a battalion staff who worked this. There were five lines of operations that General Peter Chiarelli stressed and we looked at the entire time we were there. One, the combat operations; we knew we were going to have to do that. Rebuilding security

forces was number two. Number three was rebuilding the infrastructure. Economic pluralism was number four, and then establishing a viable government was last. So at any one time, we worked the five lines of operations constantly, simultaneously, almost every day. Some days we had full-scale combat operations. Simultaneously, we were still going out and making an assessment of whether a pump station still worked and whether an electrical grid was still up and operational. We had kinetic operations where we had to knock down a wall. One particular operation, we went in to get some bad guys and we knew we were going to have to take out a wall. We did that but we already a contractor lined up to go in there and make the repair on the wall, repair the gates and repair the windows that were damaged. So within 48 hours of that operation, we already had people immediately going in and helping them out, helping them rebuild the infrastructure.

DV: How did that affect their perception, so to speak, of the coalition forces?

BH: Any time you go in there, of course they understand the bad guys and us taking the bad guys out. When we damage something or destroy it, I think you build a lot of goodwill between the people and the US coalition forces because they actually see that we are there trying to help them. We are not there to destroy things. We are there to build them up and help them with their infrastructure. We usually got a very good reception everywhere we went, especially when they realized we were there to make a difference and help them. That was very proactive. This is Mahala 745. It never had a sewage system before. We are putting in the curves and putting in the underground pipe. Al-Amin substation, state of the art and the biggest in the Middle East, was in our AO.

DV: What confusion was there between Sadr's militia? I came across an article that was explaining how people believed he was paying them to do work as opposed to coalition forces or the local government.

BH: I have a real good vignette that kind of explains that. Initially when we hit the ground, we had two big spikes in combat operations. The 4 April 2004 was one of the big spikes, with about 60 days of continuous combat operations. Then it started tapering off. The amounts of contact gradually almost went down to near zero, or very few incidents in the July timeframe. During that timeframe we were out making our assessments and talking with the locals, finding out just how to put the infrastructure piece into motion. We were really starting to gain some traction with some of these new projects, and then 1 August 2004 hit and there was another big spike. With the problems down in Najaf, our saying was, "So goes Najaf, so goes Sadr City," because you had so many Moqtada al-Sadr supporters in Sadr City. That was a base of support for him. When we had the big spike in fighting in August, we had a lot of major projects going on. We had water pipes going in, we had the electrical grid going in, we had the sewers being repaired, we were picking up trash all over the city, and we were employing close to 16,000 local Iraqi people out of Sadr City and 9 Nissan. So when the fighting started, it got untenable for the local Iraqi contractors to go into Sadr City, so they more or less stopped working. When they stopped working, they stopped paying. Moqtada al-Sadr tried to say, "Look what I'm doing for the people," and whatnot. Let me refresh my memory on what I had in the book here at the end. Health care facilities, fire stations, this is the main trunk line I was telling you about, the Zeblin line, and the Al-Amin.

DV: We are looking at different pages in his notebook and identifying different projects that were completed.

BH: Okay, this is actually one of our last projects, if I kept this thing updated. On 14 February 2005, this was our final set in Sadr City. This is our Sadr City sewer. What we have here is just a schematic of the city and we have the major projects based on phase. We have the industrial line. You saw a photo of that there. This is Route Silver here that is being completely redone and a sewage system being placed in underneath the road. All these little green dots are the point breaks that we have repaired or are going to repair in there. There are 33 breaks we had identified that were repaired in there.

DV: Were any of those recent or could you tell they had been there for many years?

BH: This entire system and this entire grid here had been extremely neglected. There was no money going into Sadr City at all. Again, these people are the have-nots. These are the people that Saddam Hussein did not care for at all. He did not show them any love.

DV: So when the fighting broke out, I understand that basically the projects stopped and then they were moved further south to a more secure area.

BH: Exactly. I don't know where you got that, but that was one of the vignettes that Colonel Abrams had talked about earlier and that is what I'm getting ready to share with you. What we have here is the grid of Sadr City. You can see the comprehensive plan we had throughout there to repair the sewer, water and the electrical grid. When the fighting started, I don't have the operational graphic, but General Chiarelli used this in his brief too. In Sadr City, what we found out when we got there was where the infrastructure was the worst, that is where the fighting was the toughest. That is where Sadr's message kind of rang true. All up here in the northeastern portion of Sadr City.

DV: What is the distance here approximately? The scale?

BH: I would say this is approximately six by seven kilometers. That is what Sadr City is. That is what that rectangle is. I don't have the scale there. But it is very compressed and pretty tight.

DV: This is a map of Baghdad city.

BH: You can see we mainly had Sadr City, Thawra, and 9 Nissan. That is the district here.

DV: That is over here in the Saddam City area?

BH: Right. Saddam City, you can see the grid system they actually built the city on. This is this photo if you orient it and turn it this way. That is the exact same map you are seeing. Here is what we referred to as Route Silver. This canal here is referred to as the abandoned canal or the police canal. To the south is the Army canal. That is the one down here to the south. This one is not named but according to the locals it is called the abandoned canal or police canal. It was an old flood control project to route water away from Baghdad, but you can see it was really never completed.

DV: This is a pretty good-sized area.

BH: Right. Again, if you look at the scale here, here is one kilometer. That is three kilometers roughly, so that is about six. So that is what we were calling six by seven kilometers. But you had two to two and a half million people in this one block. The whole population of Baghdad we think was probably somewhere around five and a half to six million. Then in these two districts here, we had over half the population of Baghdad and you had a real high concentration in here within Sadr City. What we found with the fighting in August, when it spiked, we were just starting to gain traction with the sewer, water and electrical projects here. So when the fighting did start, we had to tell some contractors, because this was the worst area, that is where we asked them to focus first, this northeastern portion of Sadr City. The sewage lift station repair I showed you photos of, that is Sewage Lift Station 1. Sewage Lift Station 2 we had done on our own at the request of the Amanat and local officials because they knew that one was the worst. So they had asked us to start here because this is where the conditions were the worst. So we were really starting to gain some traction. We were starting sewer and road work here. We had a contractor who had his job office set up right in this location here. At that point, when the fighting spiked, it was really just not safe for them in there. We were carrying out some pretty full-scale combat operations. From that point on, the August timeframe, it was almost 90 days of continuous combat, fighting every day in Sadr City. It started to taper off again in October 2004. So what we did, Colonel Abrams moved in two task forces here. And again, based on the mission at hand, we had different forces here, in the southern part of Sadr City, where we had the DAC.

DV: The DAC?

BH: The DAC is the district advisory council. That is like their center of city government.

DV: I think there is like, I don't remember the number, nine neighborhoods would represent one district. Is that right?

BH: Right. Well, Sadr City had records and tapes. That is their government building, the DAC. So that being the center of governance and where the government was set up, we always had at least probably a company team in here at all times securing this headquarters. So we started here in the south, definitely gained a foothold, and we kept pressure on Sadr City continuously from that point on. So for that August time period, we had at least two task forces down here in the southwest portion of Sadr City at all times, and we never left the city.

DV: So when you say pressure, you mean actively doing patrols?

BH: Exactly. We were physically present in this portion of Sadr City 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Whereas before, when we had done combat patrols, like for the April-May-June-July timeframe, combat patrols would come out of FOBs and go in here but not necessarily be continuous or around the clock. But from the August fight, from that point forward, we had continuous physical presence here in the south. So what we did with the construction effort, while Sadr was talking about, "Look what I've done for the people," when the fighting started, it all stopped. We shifted our concerted effort to take away from what was happening in the north; we shifted all of our construction effort to the south. This is where conditions were a little

bit better and people were a little more pro-US. We had foothold here. So we took all the construction effort here and shifted it down to the south. Then after about 30 days of that, we started hearing from the Amanat of Baghdad, we started hearing from the local advisory councils, and from the people, "Hey, when are you coming back and when are you going to start these projects again?" Well, here is the simple answer: "When you disarm and you disband the militia. Right now it is untenable up there and Sadr is not sponsoring these projects. It is the Iraqi government and the coalition forces."

DV: So the treaty came out?

BH: Right. That is when they started asking questions and they saw that entire effort shift from there to here. Then the light really came on and they figured out that there was something to it. In October, the Iraqi government sponsored a weapons turn-in or a buyback in the soccer stadium. It turned in a lot of weaponry.

DV: What kind of weapons?

BH: You name it. From hand grenades, anti-tank mines and AK47s, all the way up to some anti-aircraft guns.

DV: Was there a price tag attached to each one?

BH: This particular weapons buyback was sponsored by the Iraqi interim government. It did pay a price, but I do not know what it was for a particular weapons system. But that was set up in the soccer stadium, and at that point they kind of understood that. They saw the construction that was happening down here and they saw we were serious about it. So when the fighting stopped up here back probably in the later portion of October 2004, we opened the floodgates and said, "Okay, let's go north." Let's surge back into the north. People saw us come back in there. They saw the jobs come back. They saw the construction come back. They knew the Iraqi government and coalition forces were in control of that. The amount of enemy contact from the end of October until the time we departed there was almost zero. You could see the two big spikes, but once we started the construction effort back in there, it fell off to almost no contact at all.

DV: So what was the timeline from when you were doing the projects initially up north until fighting began and then you pulled back before they realized there was a relationship?

BH: It was about a 90-day period. When the fighting started in August, we were starting to do a comprehensive plan to do sewer, water and electrical all throughout Sadr City. We really had a good foothold. With the spike in fighting in August, it fell off and we shifted our effort south. Again, I have a personal journal that has this logged day by day. But really it took about 90 days for it to kick in. So once the construction started in Sadr City, there was no enemy contact almost whatsoever and it stayed that way until we left. I think it remains this way. Sadr City, after the big fight, after we got back in there with construction in November and December, was probably one of the safest places in Baghdad as opposed to what it had been those two times.

DV: So that was the metric you used. It was the level of fighting and that cause-effect relationship.

BH: Matter of fact, I have some good soft copy slides. Colonel Ken Cox, he was our engineer brigade commander and also the division engineer at the time, had that metric. Also General Chiarelli and Colonel Abrams used that same metric. The slides showed the level of anti-Iraqi forces (AIF) activity up in here. They showed where the water and sewer were in the worst conditions. So if you overlaid the AIF activity and the bad infrastructure, it would template right over this. That's why we started in here first to try to get some relief to the people. Of course they started fighting in August and we pulled out of there. We said, "Disarm and disband." They did that with the Iraqi weapons buyback program. We moved the contractors back in and from November until we were there at the end of the elections, it was one of the safest places in Baghdad and I think a really good model to use for the city. Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Gayton is one of my brother battalion commanders who fell in on this place right here. He is still doing construction out there and it is still a huge success story in Sadr City. So they are still moving forward and still making a lot of good progress.

DV: So the primary threat to coalition forces was the militia? What about other anti-coalition forces, for example Iraqi intelligence agencies, the Fedayeen or al-Qaeda links in the area?

BH: There could have been. There were some other elements operating in this area, but mainly it was the militia here. That was our main focus. During that fighting in August, they turned Sadr City into what we call an urban minefield with IEDs. Like along this route, we had been doing construction and paving for them.

DV: That was Predator?

BH: This actually here was Route Aeros. We were doing a lot of work for them there. This is what they turned the roads into. This was new pavement we had done, by the way. You see this is a detonation line here and this is an IED, where an IED was. There was an IED here and an IED here. These are all command detonation lines where they had dug up the pavement and linked them over here to a command detonation wire. This is very characteristic of what Route Aeros looked like during the fighting and what they had created.

DV: Just to look at them, it would appear they are just potholes with water in them.

BH: Right. But this is where they had planted IEDs. We had to go through with EOD and our combat engineers and verify once the militia said, "Okay, we have removed all our stuff." We went through the city and we proofed it and made sure they had actually done what they said and had removed them. In the October timeframe, they didn't get them all so we had to go through and just ensure that it was safe and all the IEDs had been removed and give that assurance to the contractors before they would go in there and work.

DV: Who did you say removed them?

BH: These were US EOD teams and my combat engineers. It was all in general support of 1st Brigade under my control there at Iron Horse Base.

DV: How did your command implement Baghdad Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) guidance prior to the end of CPA? I guess it was a three-month period or something like that. Or what policy coordination implementation efforts were made between your commanders, civil affairs personnel, and the ministries or the directories for your responsibilities? This may be a little higher than you.

BH: Yes. I think that one is probably a little bit out of my league. But as far as what we did, to link in with CPA, of course initially with all the water projects and the sewer projects, there was a tremendous amount of effort that was ongoing and we were trying to wrap our arms around that and coordinate with them. That was all done through the 1st CAV, Colonel Cox, at his level. Colonel Cox was the government support team (GST) commander, if you will. They handled all those meetings at the city of Baghdad level. Of course, just to get our arms around it, we made our own trips and own coordination to the Amanat of Baghdad, and specifically in Sadr City and 9 Nissan, found out the players there who we had to deal with. This is a who's who in the Ministry of Electricity. These are all the contacts that at any point we worked with. We tried to get their pictures and this helped with our transitions. These were all the city of Baghdad infrastructure contacts when it comes to the sewer network. These were the folks who we dealt with in Sadr City. This is the Baghdad Sewer Authority. Unfortunately I found out Mr. Al-Lawaybi was assassinated several months ago. He was the head of the Baghdad Sewer Authority. These were all folks we worked with. We just kept this diagram so that in transition we could do the battle handoff. Developing this product here took us about six months. It was really hard because going in we had none of this. We had nothing. So we really didn't know who these contacts were and we developed all this from scratch.

DV: So the unit you relieved didn't have any of this information?

BH: No, none of it. They had some names, but again, it was an engineer company. We had a battalion and I could devote much more effort to this and develop this product to hand it off.

DV: What detailed plan did the Army develop, that you are aware of, for the rebuilding of Iraq? Or was it just from your level? How did you decide what's going to be done and how it's going to be done?

BH: From the big CPA, big Army standpoint, there were some projects that were already ongoing in our AO when we came in.

DV: This is a diagram of the Iron Horse area of operations infrastructure.

BH: The largest sewage treatment plants for Baghdad just happened to be in our AO, Ar Rustamiyah North and Ar Rustamiyah South. So you had a large sewage treatment facility that had not been operated since the first Gulf War. Saddam Hussein had not put any money or any rebuilding effort at all into this infrastructure here. It took all the waste water and the sewage east of the Tigris River from Sadr City, 9 Nissan and the Muthanna area here, and all the sewage came here to be treated. But again, since before the first Gulf War, Saddam Hussein had not repaired that. What we were told by some of the local people was that the reason he did not repair any of the sewage lines was to punish the Shi'a downstream. All the raw sewage from three and a half or four million people was going straight into the river, untreated. You had the

facilities here, but they had been neglected, they were non-operational, and they had bypass lines around it and the bypasses were just this huge sewer pipe with raw sewage just going straight into the river. So Ar Rustamiyah North and South, they were being worked when we got there. This was a large CPA project. The one electrical facility that I showed you in Al-Amin, the electrical grid, again a large distribution center, that was ongoing there in our AO.

DV: Who was doing the quality checks on those? Was that Colonel Cox? Who was actually doing the project management for these master projects?

BH: For the large projects, at one point, this one I believe was KBR. Parsons had this one for the Al-Amin electrical facility. KBR was doing some of that. Down here I believe for the water and for Ar Rustamiyah, that was Parsons. They had their own contractual quality assurance and quality control (QAQC) folks. Then over time, the US Army Corps of Engineers had representatives at these sites doing the QAQC for the government. One of the things I thought was a very good deal in our AO, we saw early on that there was a lot of stuff happening out here and we needed help managing the construction projects. We asked for representatives from the International Zone, the Green Zone, to come out here and locate at Iron Horse Base so we would have a representative out there with us. So we asked for the equivalent of an engineer area office, if you will. They came out and they put Corps of Engineers representatives out there with us. You had a contracting officer representative. You had estimators. You had planners.

DV: Were these State Department people?

BH: No, US Army Corps of Engineers. These were Corps folks, civilians and volunteers who had come out to be part of the effort. So they were out there with us and we actually constructed a Corps office out there with the BCT and they were one of the first to be co-located with a maneuver unit forward.

DV: So they agreed basically to come to Iraq to do their mission. They were at the Green Zone and then they relocated to this area.

BH: Right. At one point, I think, when we left, we had 12 individuals working with the BCT there. They helped us do the multi-task order contract and they were able to help us contract jobs all the way up to \$250 million. For example, here in Ubaydi and Kamalaya, one of the big things of our effort was to try and get a sewer distribution network and a water distribution network for the people. That was based on the priorities from the Amanat. It was based on the priorities of the local people. But here in Ubaydi and Kamalaya, that helped. As a matter of fact, this photo was taken in Kamalaya. There were just bad conditions.

DV: That is where the water and the sewage were up to his tires.

BH: It was definitely a priority of the local people and a priority for the Amanat. So we designed, with the help of the US Army Corps of Engineers, and using the multi-task order contract, and we were able to bid from a list of five contractors. One of the five won the prime contract and they used all local Iraqi labor from these towns. That is where you get your big benefit. We used local labor to actually get out there and dig the ditches and employ these people. When you hire the people out of this town, they have a vested interest in making sure

this is going to keep going. They are getting paid. They are getting a wage. They are getting a tremendous benefit to their community. So we actually broke ground on this one.

DV: How were the labor directory and the social directory utilized for the identification of the skill sets and the laborers that were hired? They may have not been established.

BH: What we did, we went to local contractors who had been doing business in this area in the past. The Amanat of Baghdad made recommendations, for example, for the contractors we used on Sewage Lift Stations 1 and 2. And for the sink hole we initially did with our own contracting dollars, we went to the Amanat and said, "Can you give us a better list? Can you tell us who is competent enough to do this work?" They would give us lists, we would put it out to bid, and probably have about four to five contractors bidding on it.

DV: This is all local?

BH: All local from Sadr City. It was the same thing with Kamalaya and Ubaydi. The subcontractor of the larger prime out of the materiel task force contract, this contractor here actually lived out here in Muthanna. So he lived out here and he hired all the local laborers there in Kamalaya and Ubaydi and put them to work.

DV: How did you mitigate or control the corruption that was so prevalent over there, specifically with awarding contracts locally or anything along those lines?

BH: We took recommendations of contractors. There was total disclosure on our part. He had bid conferences at Iron Horse Base, where anyone who was competent enough could come in, look at the bid packages, and we would give them a briefing, if you will. We would go over the scope of work and make sure they understood it. So it was full disclosure. Anybody could come in and bid it with the help of the estimators and then look at the products they submitted to us. We reviewed their bid and as long as they were competent enough to carry out the work and had presented a good bid package, that's how we made our selection.

DV: Were there bids that were off the mark?

BH: Sure. In any construction you are going to have a wide range of bids, high and low. Of course, if somebody just bids it tremendously low you know that's probably not a good bid. You have your own estimators. That is where the US Army Corps of Engineers really helped us tremendously. They had a guy who was an estimator back here in the States and that's what he did. He came forward. He crunched numbers. He looked at the system to make sure we had a proper design. So when you do a bid, you have to make sure that it's within, I'm not sure of the percentage, say plus or minus five to 10 percent of the government estimate, otherwise you can not award it. It has got to come in within the government estimate's range. So if you have somebody who really low balls it, maybe this is somebody who just didn't understand the bid or he left a whole distribution line out or maybe he left the pump station out. If you think he's a competent contractor, you could go back to him and ask him if he really included all this or did he mean to include this. Of course you are going to have some folks who are high balling. They are really going to miss the mark.

DV: In terms of the fair market value, how did the estimator, the bidder person you are mentioning, the Corps of Engineer civilian, apparently, how did he come up with a fair market value?

BH: Over time, of course, you develop supporting documentation and data. Calling local vendors, for example, if you want a certain size pipe. We had been there long enough to know that you call up this individual here. We even had local Iraqis working for us who could talk on the telephone. The Iraqi who understood English working with our estimator was able to go out on the local economy and call and get comparative prices of what we thought this materiel was going to cost. We did that extensively for the water and sewer network here. We also had a very extensive electrical program going in to Sadr City, so we were able to call local vendors and just see what they thought.

DV: How did the translator shortage affect your mission?

BH: We were always blessed to have a good number of interpreters at Iron Horse Base. I'm not sure of the name of the company that provided the interpreters, it escapes me.

DV: Titan?

BH: It was probably a Titan contract. I believe it was. They provided interpreters. Knowing that the infrastructure was definitely a main effort and we had to have somebody who was competent enough to stay with you and technical enough to know a little bit about the terms. For example, like when I went out to the Amanat of Baghdad or out to the local advisory councils and DACs. So Titan actually employed one individual who was a civil engineer, Mohammed, and then I had Belind with me.

DV: Belind?

BH: That was his name. I had two interpreters who were fulltime dedicated just to my battalion and they worked out of my battalion headquarters. Any time we had meetings at municipal, local or city level, or when we went out to do our infrastructure recon, they would always go with me or my platoon leaders or company commanders. They worked mainly, strictly engineer with the infrastructure. So when it came time to present a concept to a local official, or you went to the Amanat of Baghdad, or you were briefing the mayor, they knew exactly what the concept was and they had the plan down.

DV: How did you vet the translators who worked for you or did you?

BH: We did. Titan was kind of responsible for doing the vetting. Once they came to us they were more or less approved. Now Belind and Mohammed, they lived on our FOB.

DV: So were they CAT I? The translators who came from the States basically already had a clearance?

BH: Yes. That's why they had to live with us. The other interpreters we used locally lived on the local economy and they came to work on a daily basis. They stayed out front. There was usually

a core group of five or six of them, so based on the mission they mainly focused at my platoon level. For example when EOD had a mission and we had to go in, they would grab whoever was up at the front and they would go out and do interpreting on the site for them.

DV: Were those men or women translators?

BH: We had one woman translator.

DV: Did they have any problems with intimidation or threats?

BH: Not to my knowledge. It was really the same core work forces who were there when we got there. There was some turnover, but the majority of them stayed. As a matter of fact, one was an electrical engineer. He was very capable and competent. He had been with 3rd ACR. He was very trusted. He was kind of the go-to guy who I would use. His name was Ali. I would go out to these specific meetings and he was a very good interpreter. The US Army Corps of Engineers actually hired him in a project office to help with the larger construction effort. I know when I left there he was doing a lot of work with the schools and hospitals throughout the AO. He's an Iraqi. He can go out there and make his own assessment. He can travel freely.

DV: How were the projects financed? Was it Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or US Agency for International Development (USAID)?

BH: He had all the above in our area. For the projects I mentioned earlier, CERP money went in here to help repair the sewage lift stations. Some of the larger projects were funded by the CPA. USAID funded some of the projects in our area. They specifically helped a tremendous amount with the trash effort in Sadr City because it was a different pot of money and they already had contracts established. They were actually part of helping relieve the sewage problems there because if you have all the trash on the city streets, it clogs the manholes, it clogs the pipes and it clogs the pumps. It is almost a cultural mindset. You have to clean up the trash in order to help the sewage pump station and keep your lines unclogged. So they had an effort going in here.

DV: It is also easier to see an IED.

BH: Yes, absolutely. We had big success along Route Pluto. That is one of the first things we did. We hired a local Iraqi contractor just to keep all the trash and crap off the sides of the road. Keep it well back off the shoulders. The brigade reconnaissance troop (BRT) had that battlespace and patrolled it daily.

DV: How was the money distributed for payments? Was it Titan who paid the translators?

BH: Titan paid the translators.

DV: How were the contractors paid?

BH: It depended on what level. Some of these jobs, like for the sewage lift stations and the sink hole, we would go down to the Green Zone and draw cash. We brought it back to Iron Horse Base and we had the controls there. We had a pay agent and we would actually pay the contractor cash. He would come in and get the cash payment here and then leave. Once we got some of the materiel task order contracts on line and got the Corps of Engineers in here, that funding was all handled in a more modern fashion. There were electronic fund transfers when you had larger contractors so you didn't have large amounts of money exchanging hands.

DV: That is potentially dangerous, I think, for theft.

BH: Right.

DV: What experiences with corruption did you witness or experience, whether it be Iraqi, coalition forces, contractors or whatever it was?

BH: We were very up front with everybody, and for whatever reason we never had any noticeable corruption taking place. We always had contractors who would tell us that maybe his competitor was trying to do this or he was trying to do something a little illegal. But the contractors we worked with were the core group that was passed on to us from 3rd ACR and were from recommendations we got from the Amanat of Baghdad.

DV: So the contractors that were used, they were the ones who already had a history of quality, so to speak?

BH: Right. And of course, the local officials would always recommend. Now here in Sadr City, in particular, when you worked with the local sheiks, there was always the tendency to want to hire this contractor, who was probably his brother-in-law or his brother or whatever. But the ones we used, we used them on smaller projects to make sure they could do it and kind of proofed them with the smaller projects. If they proved they could do the work, we were able to contract them on some of the larger projects. So we had very minimal corruption in our area.

DV: How did you deal with the de-Ba'athification efforts? How did that impact your area?

BH: At our level out here, like in Sadr City and 9 Nissan, I think in these local areas it was probably very minimal. The only time that may have come into play, and again I'm just speaking from what I think happened, at the Amanat of Baghdad, we had some key leader changeovers that were from part of the old guard. Matter of fact, Al-Lawaybi, he was one of the new guys on the block who came in, if you will.

DV: The one who was assassinated?

BH: Exactly.

DV: He was the sewage director.

BH: He was a new guy that moved in.

DV: He was the director of General Baghdad Sewer Authority. So he was the general director of the entire country.

BH: Right. But he came in probably during the July or August timeframe. It was about the time we had the spike in fighting, I believe, that is when he came in. Mr. Naffa, he was a great guy to work with. He was very helpful.

DV: Naffa Husafa? He was the director general for the country?

BH: Right. He was the minister of electricity for all of Baghdad. He did a lot of good work with us and helping us get the projects up and running in Sadr City. They had very competent engineers there, but what they lacked were the resources and dollars to do anything about it. So he was elated when we came to him saying, "How can we help you?" He was able to give us a lot of the projects. Like the electrical distribution network in Sadr City, all this was as a result of Mr. Naffa's engineers having the plan on the shelf and just having someone come and show interest and actually get this thing going.

DV: So he had a list of all these things that needed to be done but no way to do it?

BH: Right. No resources. Then we came in and started prioritizing along with the local officials and it really helped them out. Here are all the electrical projects we were doing in Sadr City. All this was a result of Mr. Naffa and his electrical engineers already having a design in place and we went through the contracting business. Now this section down here, it kind of goes back to the Moqtada al-Sadr thing. This is actually where we started the electrical distribution network. We started it in sector nine; that was the southwestern portion of the city. Eventually, we contracted and did one through nine, this chunk right here, as a result of the fighting in the north. So we committed down here and then they saw these projects coming on here. We had originally planned to put them up in the north along here because that is where the need was the greatest, but because of the August fighting we just said to heck with that and we will do it down here.

DV: So this is a mile or mile and a half here, in diameter, approximately, or two and a half clicks?

BH: Yes. That is probably about two clicks right there. All these projects came from Mr. Naffa and his recommendation of 11kV and 33kV. Dedicated lines into the sewage lift station was another thing we found with the load shedding.

DV: What is load shedding? Is that when they are at capacity?

BH: Based on the strain on the system or the demand, power will be off, for example, for four hours and then on two. So you are off four and on for two. Well, whenever these pumps were connected to the local grid, when they were off for four hours, guess what, they were not pumping sewage. What we did with Mr. Naffa's help, we got dedicated 11kV feeder lines that came in and gave them 24 hours a day, seven days a week power to these pump stations. That was part of solving the sewage problem in Sadr City, making sure these pumps had electricity 24 hours a day, seven days a week so they could continually pump.

DV: Those were the underground power lines?

BH: Yes. All this was buried. All 11kV and 33kV lines were buried.

DV: So those were all brand new?

BH: They were all brand new and we put them in.

DV: How was that funded, by CERP funds?

BH: This was CERP.

DV: You kind of touched on this already, but what actions did you and your soldiers consistently follow to overcome cultural barriers and build bridges of goodwill?

BH: One of the things, I think from our AAR comments, was that we could not get enough of cultural awareness training and sensitivity training. General Chiarelli has departed now, but one of the things he put in place was to have Iraqi contractors who are actually in our brigade combat teams now. Each one of them has three to five that are actually working with the BCT, helping them with language training and cultural awareness training. Myself and a couple of senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers attended a senior leader course in Jordan before we went over. That was a tremendous help.

DV: So the brigade has that now?

BH: They have it now. We knew it was going to be important, but I don't think we realized how important it was until we got over there. As far as AAR comments, having the language and cultural awareness training was huge.

DV: So that's something that's going on here in the States now?

BH: It is going on here now. When we prepared to deploy, we didn't have the Iraqis in our formations.

DV: How is that set up? I understand that is through Titan also. They had the contractors?

BH: Our general staff intelligence officer (G2) is responsible for that program. It could very well be a Titan program but we have Iraqis in our formations.

DV: But it is not just for the one brigade. It is for all of the brigades.

BH: Right. I don't want to misspeak, but I know we have got them in all of the maneuver brigades for sure. We are looking at trying to extend that contract on them until next fall before our deployment. Without the local interpreters, we would have definitely been in a hurt box. But with those Titan interpreters, for example Belind and Mohammed, they were invaluable because they were engineers and they understood it. They went with me on reconnaissance, and any time I had to pitch something to local officials, they would always interpret what I

would say, but there towards the end they knew it. They knew the plan, what was coming next, and it was just really a pleasure to work with them. The cultural awareness training is huge. Treating everybody with dignity and respect, Army values live in that, and we definitely saw that it paid big dividends for us there on the ground.

DV: How did you track that from your level to the private's level to ensure that was all the way through?

BH: That was the commanding general's command philosophy and that was my command philosophy. We talked about it every time we got in front of a formation. Anything you do as a soldier, for example, if you got out there and you were not disciplined with your fire and you killed innocent civilians or innocent kids, that's going to come back on you. They may not target you directly, but that will probably cause the life of a US soldier. We were very disciplined with our fires. Colonel Abrams could probably speak to this better, but we did not have indiscriminate firing. Any time we targeted bad guys, we were very disciplined with our fires. Very little fratricide, if any, happened in our AO because of that. I think that paid big dividends with the people. They knew we weren't just out there tearing up everything and being ill disciplined.

DV: How often did you interact with Iraqi nationals?

BH: Multiple times a day.

DV: Did you interact any with the national government or provincial government, or just the city government and the local citizens? It sounds like most of them were uneducated, considering what you have been talking about, with that area being poor and basically have-nots.

BH: But the engineers were educated and they were very competent. All these designs and everything, we got them from them. It was their stuff and they were just waiting for the resources. I had a lot of interaction at the just the local citizen level. Out on the street saying, "Hey, how is it going? Have you heard about this?" Going to the DACs, presenting this plan, and saying, "You have asked us to help and this is what we are doing for the people." These diagrams were up in the Sadr DAC and the 9 Nissan DAC so that when the people came in they could see them. They were in Arabic, by the way. That is another big thing we found. Initially, we were doing stuff in English. Well, the majority of the Iraqi people don't speak English. So we used our interpreters and translated all of this to Arabic. For 9 Nissan sewer, we had the task, the purpose, the dollar amount and a little description about what it was, what we were doing and where it was happening. So the people could hear their local officials talk about it, actually see it on a map and then see it happening out there on the ground. That contributed a lot to credibility.

DV: Did PSYOP help any? Were they utilized to help communicate that either via speakers, television or radio?

BH: We had our tactical PSYOP teams, especially in the effort in Sadr City. We used those teams to broadcast and talk about these projects, talk about what was happening down in the

south, and why we pulled our effort up in the north because of the fighting and because of the militia. If you disarm and disband, you will see prosperity come back and you will see construction come back. We did use the loudspeaker teams to get that word out.

DV: How well did you understand Iraqi's civil administration, emergency services and their public support systems as they existed prior to OIF, before and now?

BH: Not very well at all before. Like this diagram that I showed you, about how they worked and how they set up and who's who, it took us about five to six months to develop this, to really know who the players were. That took a tremendous amount of effort. Once we understood it, of course, we had been there a year. Any time you do something for a year, it becomes a lot easier to you and more naturally. But we were able to take this effort here and pass it off to 2nd Brigade, 3rd ID, Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Gayton and his folks, and I think that helped them a lot.

DV: You have talked about the district councils. Aside from that, what civil administration efforts were made to reestablish the labor and social affairs directories? Actually that would probably be a level higher, but from the local level, sometimes there were satellite offices that were set up.

BH: Right. Matter of fact, when you mentioned the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, that was an organization that actually Prime Minister Allawi, because Sadr City was so important, had assigned a cabinet level minister to just oversee the construction in Sadr City. The Madame Minister, Minister Layla Abd al-Latif, I believe it was, but she was the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. We would go usually monthly and have meetings with her at her offices there.

DV: She was focused specifically on Sadr City?

BH: Right. Matter of fact, here is the last one we presented, 7 February 2005. This is the Sadr City working group that she was in charge of. We talked about the funding status, where it was coming from, the media campaign and a project update. This is the project update we actually gave to the Madame Minister. We showed some of the before and after shots. Here is the sewage lift station and that was their quarters.

DV: We are looking at pictures of a sewage lift station before they were habilitated and then after.

BH: They were just a little shack with whatever they could find. Of course, this is during construction, and this is what they had afterward. You can see the tremendous progress we made just in the lift stations. That went over big in Sadr City because each one of them was in real bad shape. This is actually Route Aeros I was telling you about before with a lot of trash and IEDs and they are actually putting asphalt paving on there with curving. That is the water and that is the power projects.

DV: I think you touched on this a little bit. What efforts were made to win the hearts and minds of Iraqi citizens and reduce the insurgency? From what you have said, it doesn't sound like the insurgency, the bulk of it, was beyond the militia. Did you have any other issues or

problems from the insurgency? I guess I combined a couple of things. Basically, what did you do to minimize that and win their hearts and minds? It sounds like you hired them. What other additional things did you do?

BH: Number one is, and I will always go back to this one, just treating the local people with dignity and respect. We are in their country. We are here as their guests, if you will, to help make this a better place for them. A lot of the Iraqi people, I had a lot of contact with locals and they are really no different from you and me. They want to have a job. They want to be able to provide for their family. Through this construction effort, we were able to realize that and actually go to them, ask them what their priorities or needs are, and then turn that into action. I think that established a lot of credibility. They said, "Okay. You are actually here and you are doing something and that is good." Using the local labor and going out there and showing a genuine interest in the people and actually starting to do some of these projects helped win the hearts and minds. We talked a lot about sewer, water and electrical, but there were also hospitals and health care clinics. This was all happening simultaneously with \$148 million worth of effort into Sadr City alone.

DV: These were all projects you were involved with?

BH: Education projects were \$15.1 million just to renovate the schools.

DV: There were 28 schools or 48?

BH: Right. These are combined effects. We had 28 that we were just working with the BCT alone. We were going in and doing wall painting and making things from an aesthetic standpoint look a little bit better. The Ministry of Education was renovating 48 schools on its own. You can see them based on the color code what they were doing there. Then having brand new schools built. We had a total of 18 of those being constructed in our AO. That was throughout. I mentioned the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. From the MLSA standpoint, she was looking at establishing a job training center for women and men.

DV: I believe they included computer training also.

BH: Right. She was also looking at establish an orphanage and a senior citizens center there. I'm not sure about the factory she was talking about. There were also sports fields. This was all proposed by the ministry. They came forward with that proposal for \$6 million. But there was a lot of effort going in there to help.

DV: But that is just in the Sadr area.

BH: That was specific to Sadr City, but we had the same type of efforts going into 9 Nissan.

DV: Actually, that was also being paralleled in other parts of the country. So that's good that it's consistent. That is interesting. What do you know now about cultural awareness that you wish you knew then? Along that same vein, what culture related areas would you recommend that soldiers receive for additional training? It sounds like you are already tracking that.

BH: That was one of our biggest AAR comments. You just need more language training. One of the big things that meant a lot to the Iraqi people, it was a simple phrase, but it was just an American taking the time to try to learn the Iraqi language. As we were there over time, a traditional greeting would be, "Asalaam Aleikom" Peace be with you. Then, "wa-Aleikom Asalaam" And also with you. Sometimes you would be walking a patrol down the road, you would be dismounted, you would see people, and I tried to interact a lot with the people, so just when you said that phrase, you could almost see relief or just them kind of opening up to want to talk to you. Then you could of course bring the interpreter up and ask them, "How is it going and how's business? Have you heard about any of these projects that are going to be happening in the local area? Jobs are going to be coming here soon." Just that simple phrase and being able to say hello greetings and thank you and good bye, the local Iraqis appreciated that.

DV: Sounds like you tried to be approachable but at the time to re-communicate and ease any concerns people had.

BH: If you had to do something at platoon and company level, I would say more of the language training and have them learn phrases up front so when you hit the ground, you actually have a little bit better understanding of the language. Over time, these young soldiers are amazing. Like up in the guard towers, of course, they would occasionally talk with the locals and some of them got to be very proficient and very good just picking up the Iraqi language. The local kids were the same way. It was amazing the amount of English they learned, and they would learn it from US soldiers. So just making the effort to communicate with them and a few of the ice breaker phrases go a long way.

DV: Were there a lot of sheiks or tribal influences in the area you were in?

BH: Yes. Part of that is learning the network and who the powerbroker sheiks are. Who are the ones who have the most religious and family influence.

DV: So you had the major sheiks then and I guess the minor tribe sheiks? How did you balance the, and maybe this is a little bit higher up, tribal councils and the district councils? Or were they combined?

BH: As I understand it, the sheiks and the tribal leaders and the district councils, they are two kinds of different organizations, if you will. Now you could have a sheik who would be a member of one of the district councils, but usually the two were kind of separate. Our battalion commanders, Gary Volesky and Tim Meredith, they had Sadr City and 9 Nissan. They were actually the landowners of those two and I was in general support of them. They had the most contact with the sheiks at that level. They had more of that sheik contact. Now I would attend their meetings, like when they would have a meeting to explain anything infrastructure related. I would usually go with Gary or Tim, as the general support engineer in their AO, and I would kind of help explain that or if they had any questions or kind of backstop them.

DV: You said Gary Volesky?

BH: Lieutenant Colonel (P) Gary Volesky was the commander of 2-5 CAV and Lieutenant Colonel Tim Meredith was the commander of 1-12 CAV. Tim had 9 Nissan and Gary had Sadr City. Gary is at the Air War College now and Tim is up here at III Corps.

DV: What coordinated information operations strategy was actively followed to leverage civil affairs, PSYOP, human intelligence (HUMINT) teams, public affairs and basic cultural preparation to win the hearts and mind of the Iraqi people?

BH: I mentioned my Thursday meetings. From an IO standpoint and bringing all those organizations together, Colonel Abrams did that very effectively. That was kind of our Thursday synch meeting to make sure everybody was on the same sheet of music.

DV: You mentioned civil affairs and PSYOP, but I don't remember you saying anything about the HUMINT teams or the public affairs. How did those fit into it?

BH: The HUMINT teams were out there doing their local collection and there was a good deal of interaction between our local population, if you will, and our HUMINT teams. I was in charge of the force protection of Iron Horse Base, so any time we would have somebody come to the front gate with a tip, we always picked up the phone and called the G2 and we had the HUMINT guys who would come and do their question and answer. If things went further, they would further pursue them. That was more in the G2 realm. Public affairs was the telling the good news story. Any time we had this type of stuff, we had a command post of the future (CPOF) network. So every day, the brigade commanders gave a briefing to General Chiarelli and one of the things he was always after was the photos. For example, when we started taking photos of new electrical work happening in Sadr City, we would put that on CPOF with a little bit of verbiage, where the brigade commander would talk about it and shoot that off. Whenever you would have those large groups like the photo that showed 400 dudes out there with picks and shovels, General Chiarelli and everybody loved that because you were employing a lot of locals and getting them involved. They were getting paid a wage and they were doing something good for their country. So we used the CPOF extensively, with photos like this, sending it forward, and also news articles.

DV: You have heard about the recent media comments about paying the newspapers to publish Army news and the Iraqi people. What do you think of that?

BH: I didn't have any personal knowledge of that in our AO. We were able to use our own media and our own public affairs officer (PAO) to get the good news out. We did work with the University of Baghdad. They had their own public affairs section. Matter of fact, the University of Baghdad, some of their professors, we worked with them, and we worked with electrical engineers and civil engineers to develop these projects and get them out there on the street. The University of Baghdad had its own PAO mechanism, if you will. So when we started doing work, they got out there and did their own surveys, published articles and put stuff in the local Iraqi paper.

DV: Was it the university paper?

BH: They worked for the University of Baghdad and they published in local papers. They had their own fair and balanced way of reporting, I guess. They were in on the ground level of helping design these projects and then get them out there and get them on the streets. So they had their own public affairs that actually worked along with everybody to try to get the good news out.

DV: I think we are about completed here. During your time in theater, what issues arose from change of commands or troop rotations? Yours obviously wasn't real smooth.

BH: Right. We were in contact during our transition. But we did change command at company level and we did a couple of those. Out of four companies, I changed out two of my company commanders just on a regular rotational basis. Based on the enemy situation, we didn't cut any corners when it came to accountability of property. It was 100 percent accountability of property, where inventories are done, just like back here in the States. We did a formal change of command with the pass of the guidon.

DV: How did the chain of command support the soldiers' needs? Initially, some units didn't have the uparmored vehicles. Some units maybe didn't have the basic supplies that one would think they would have, be it armored plates or whatever it was.

BH: We never went without anything. We had what we needed in theater to accomplish our mission. Initially, I said something about the M998s and the uparmored Humvees. We didn't get those until we got into Baghdad, but I think everybody identified that need and they started coming to us. We got our full complement of M1114s and really we had everything we needed to accomplish the mission. Initially, to mitigate that going north, the vehicles that were coming south that had steel plates, before we had the uparmored vehicles, anything we could do to help up-armor our own vehicles, we did it. We hung armor of the doors and put plates in the floor and did what we could to help up-armor those vehicles before we got the M1114s. Once we got that, we really had everything we needed.

DV: This is the last question. What from your experience are the most important lessons learned? What would you like to share with the greater Army in that respect?

BH: I think the biggest strength we have in our Army is our young soldiers. It was incredible the amount of discipline and resolve and professionalism they displayed over there. That was one of our key tasks. Tough disciplined soldiers and always looking like you were ready for a fight. When you go out of the FOB, you have all battle rattle on and it includes your outer tactical vest (OTV), with your collar, with your throat protector, with your groin protector, with your gloves on, with your eye protection on, with your Kevlar, and you have your weapon in hand and ready. If you looked like you are ready to do to combat, usually people would not mess with you. But if you showed ill discipline, or you showed that you were not quite as disciplined and you were kind of slacking off, the bad guys see that, and that is the kind of formation they are going to target.

DV: From a lesson learned perspective, I guess it is still the old adage of the best defense is a good offense.

BH: We were always going out looking strong. You had all of your stuff on. We did encounter situations where you had to use that combat force. Having your soldiers trained and disciplined to know that in a pre-combat inspection (PCI) you are going to check that. We did it every time without question. You are going to check all of that uniform and make sure down to the combat ear plugs that everybody has got them in. I always told my battle buddy, you check me before we roll out, and occasionally I would forget mine. He would say, "Okay, sir. Do you have your combat ear plugs?" And I would say, "You're right. I have to put them in." Just having that discipline to go through the PCIs and check it time in and time out. The other thing was combat lifesavers. If you can get everybody in your formation 100 percent qualified as combat lifesaver, do it. I think we only had one soldier die of wounds but he was catastrophic. He had lost his right arm and he was losing his legs.

DV: It was an IED, I presume?

BH: Right. That was the only soldier we had die of wounds. Just the soldier urgency down there at the troop level and being able to evacuate them to the next level care and then even on up to the combat support hospital (CSH) was phenomenal. Having that basic understanding of first aid was huge.

DV: So that's from a force protection perspective. What about from a reconstruction perspective lesson learned?

BH: From a reconstruction perspective, I think having the US Army Corps of Engineers in place and having them positioned forward with the BCTs is huge. Having a GS-14, who is a licensed professional engineer, who comes with a team of estimators, project managers and contracting officer representatives that can actually pull all the larger construction together, I think that's the way we need to go. Especially now with the engineer battalions being transformed. Now in the 1st CAV, you don't have an engineer battalion headquarters. You have Echo Company, that is a 76-soldier company, down in a task force and they have Bradleys. They are focused on where the rubber meets the road engineering. So now with the engineer battalion being removed, you need someone at the brigade level with the Corps of Engineers and those contracting officer representatives to be able to hit the ground and immediately start doing stuff. That is what took us a while. Once we hit the ground, we had to find out who the players were, we had to learn the contracting mechanisms, and then we could actually start making things happen for the people. I think the Iraqis understand immediate gratification. They understand that we did the chicken drops and the beef drops and the humanitarian drops. That was something they could take home. We even had Operation Billy Goat. We gave them billy goats. A billy goat to them, you get milk and you get meat from it. Some of the Shi'a there were just elated to get that kind of immediate gratification. But these longer term projects, these big infrastructure things, the people of Sadr City could probably care less if they got the sewage treatment plant in Ar Rustamiyah North and South complete and it was treating sewage before going into the river. They just wanted it out of their street. It is a synchronized, simultaneous effort. You have the large big stuff that has got to happen like the \$52 million Al-Amin electrical distribution project and the \$130 million Ar Rustamiyah North and South projects. At the same time, you have to invest the four and five million dollars or the \$21 million for Kamalaya to get a distribution water and sewer network so it's out the street for these people. That's where the Corps really helped us out. They were able to use that contracting and estimating expertise to

help us move forward. But if a BCT had that capability going in, I think it is a big leg up. Now we are even starting to train at NTC the US Army Corp of Engineer representatives. Civilians are going out there and they are part of our rotations now. That's huge. From an infrastructure perspective, that is the one thing the Army could have done and it looks like we are doing it to really make a difference.

DV: I was very surprised when you mentioned that because a lot of people don't want to leave the Green Zone.

BH: Those civilians, God bless them. They are volunteers just like we are and they are risking their lives. Ken Larson was our project lead out there in Iron Horse Base. They have the shorter rotations. I think 60 days was probably the minimum or 90 days. Ken was probably there for around four months. They could extend, and I knew some civilians who had extended there and they were there for a whole year.

DV: The CPA's rotation is typically about 90 days.

BH: So the continuity of that. That's kind of a tough thing to handle with the rotations, but at least they are there and are making a contribution.

DV: That is interesting. I wasn't aware that engineers were doing that. That concludes our meeting. I'm sorry we went over. Lieutenant Colonel Holmes, thank you very much for your time and your willingness to support the Army's mission in chronicling its current history of OIF.



END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Kim Sanborn