

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**JOHN MCNALLY**  
Special Forces, U.S. Army, War on Terror  
2006

OH  
870

**OH**  
**870**

**McNally, John.,** (b.1974). Oral History Interview, 2006.

Approximate length: 2 hours 41 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

John McNally, a Necedah Wisconsin native, discusses his training and his service in the U.S. Army 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 23<sup>rd</sup> infantry as well as 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Special Forces Group during the War on Terror. McNally explains that he attended West Point and entered active duty in 1996. He outlines his basic training at Fort Benning [Georgia], and his advanced training at Airborne School, Ranger School, and a Bradley Leader Course. He describes being stationed at Fort Lewis [Washington] and serving as a platoon leader. McNally discusses the selection process at Fort Lewis and the training he received at Fort Bragg [North Carolina] to become a member of the Special Forces. He specifically recounts the toll it took on his body. He explains the role of the Special Forces and outlines 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Special Forces Group activity in Africa. McNally details his three deployments to Afghanistan during the War on Terror, including training the Afghan National Army during his first deployment in 2002. He mentions participating in further training with HALO team ODA 314 at Fort Yuma [Arizona]. McNally discusses his second and third deployments to Afghanistan; Jalalabad in 2003 and Kandahar/Dayshopan in 2004, and outlines his units' roles which included counterinsurgency, personal security, and building a base. Throughout, he comments on relations with the Afghans and life in Afghanistan. Lastly, McNally talks about why he chose to leave the Army.

**Biographical Sketch:**

John McNally (b.1974) attended West Point in 1992 and entered Active Duty service in 1996. He served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry out of Fort Lewis [Washington] before entering the Special Forces for the remainder of his career. He served with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Special Forces Group during three tours of duty in Afghanistan in 2002, 2003, and 2004.

Interviewed by John Weingandt, 2006.

Transcribed by the Audio Transcription Center, 2015.

Reviewed by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Abstract written by Claire Steffen, 2015.

## **Interview Transcript:**

[Tape 1]

Weingandt: This is John Weingandt. I'm interviewing John McNally. The date today is the twenty-fourth of March, Friday, about one in the afternoon, or something like that. John, we're going to talk about your experiences in the military obviously. Let's get the born when, where, and all that good stuff, out of the way.

McNally: Sure. Born May 16, 1974, in Friendship, Wisconsin, raised in Necedah, Wisconsin. I come from a family of seven children and my father is a public defender up there, and he is still currently the only lawyer in town. I fall right in the middle. I have a twin brother as well.

Weingandt: And you went to high school there?

McNally: I went to high school there and graduated in '92, from high school. My older brother went to West Point, starting in '86, and being in sixth or seventh grade, when I first went there to drop him off. I was an impressionable youth, and so seeing the guys walking in file on the parade ground kind of caught my attention, and kind of helped me decide to go there as well.

Weingandt: You are West Point?

McNally: Yes.

Weingandt: Okay, good. I didn't look for the ring.

McNally: No.

Weingandt: That was--I had it when I was on active duty, look for the pointers.

McNally: I don't wear it too often.

Weingandt: Okay. So you went right from high school to West Point?

McNally: Yes.

Weingandt: In what year again?

McNally: Ninety-two.

Weingandt: Ninety-two, '93, '94, '95, '96 you're out.

McNally: Ninety-six, yes.

Weingandt: And you're on active duty, and what happens to you now?

McNally: Immediately following graduation went down to Fort Benning, Columbus, Georgia.

Weingandt: Infantry.

McNally: Infantry, the infantry officer basic course, that's roughly four months long. Completing that, I went to Airborne School in January, 1997, and following Airborne School, started Ranger School, in January of '97.

Weingandt: That's impressive.

McNally: It's supposed to be a two-month school. I was fortunate to extend myself for an additional four months. So I was in Ranger School from the end of January until July eleventh.

Weingandt: And what were you doing all that time? They must have had you instructing now.

McNally: Right, well I recycled the couple of phases. It's divided into three phases; the Benning Phase, the Mountain Phase in Northern Georgia, and the Swamp Phase in Florida. The RIs, Ranger Instructors, they do a lot of evaluations, and some of its objective and a lot of its subjective, based upon whether you're an officer and they think that they would want you to lead men. And rightfully so, I was recycled, but that was good. I ended up losing--I lost about thirty pounds. So I went in weighing 160 pounds, came out 130 pounds.

Weingandt: Wow.

McNally: By the time you're finished, and you're usually carrying about eighty pounds on your back the whole time.

Weingandt: You're about what, five-ten or so?

McNally: Five-eleven.

Weingandt: That's pretty skinny.

McNally: You take a beating and your relationship with food is never the same.

Weingandt: I can remember my similar training, it's rough. I remember one thing as a cadet, at the University of Wisconsin, I was regimental commander. I

stood in the viewing grounds. I was viewing the troops that marched by. You know what? I got to active duty and I didn't have the training that the rest of the guys had, and I repeated, which is a good thing.

McNally: It is.

Weingandt: It was, it prepared me. So I know what you're saying.

McNally: Right. Initially, in Ranger School, you go in. You know, I was just trying to fake the funk, I guess you know? I really didn't take it to heart, the training that they were trying to give me, and they caught on that, which was good.

Weingandt: It probably didn't help that you're wearing that ring either.

McNally: Well, I take it off for that, but it doesn't matter, because they have your records and they know who the West Pointers are.

Weingandt: I'm curious, were they rougher on you guys from the point, do you think?

McNally: Yeah, they do tend to be. Depending on your experience level and what you'll be expected to do in the Army. You have some E4s who come through, and the instructors will kind of just walk them through it, they'll take them by the hand and ensure that they do pass, because not much will be expected right away from an E4, but from a lieutenant who's going to go lead infantry, they expect a lot more from you. So it's good and it's always changing. Ranger School, the dynamic shifting, you know there's always people coming in and out, but that's good.

Following Ranger School, went into the Bradley Leader Course, because my follow-on assignment was to the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry, at Fort Lewis, Washington, which is a mechanized brigade, mechanized battalion. I reported out there following all my training, in late '97, and assumed duties as an infantry platoon leader.

Weingandt: Is that typical?

McNally: Yeah. It's challenging, dealing with a lot of young guys, about thirty-two men underneath you. You have a platoon sergeant who is an E7, has been in the Army for at least ten to fifteen years.

Weingandt: And he's convinced he knows a whole lot more than you do.

McNally: Which is rightfully so, he normally does, but everyone has their lane, different styles of leadership. I did that duty for eighteen months and then I went to the Mortar Platoon for another eighteen months, which is in the

same battalion. And it's interesting, there was a different--the guys in the Mortar Platoon, they seemed to be a little smarter than the typical infantrymen. They'd have to do calculations for the mortars and they just have to be usually a little more--have more self-initiative.

Weingandt: Okay. That was another eighteen months at Fort Lewis?

McNally: That was another eighteen months, at Fort Lewis.

Weingandt: You must have been pretty familiar with Fort Lewis.

McNally: It's a good area.

Weingandt: It's a nice area.

McNally: It's beautiful. You have the mountains.

Weingandt: The climate is a little damp.

McNally: Right, a little cloudy, but the view of Mount Rainier is worth it, when you can see it.

Weingandt: When it's out, I guess they say, right?

McNally: Right. So following that, I decided to go into Special Forces, and they have a selection course which is brutal. We started out with 264 guys in my selection, and it's lasts three weeks long. The first two weeks are a lot of land navigation, going seventeen, twenty-four miles, just back-to-back, rain, night and day.

Weingandt: A full pack.

McNally: A full pack. They weigh your pack when you leave and when you come back. They'll set up little stop stations out there too, and if you're caught with less than the amount you're supposed to have, which is sixty-five pounds, not including the gallon or two of water that you're carrying to maintain hydration, they'll boot you out.

Weingandt: John, I don't mean to stop you, but at this point, you have your--you're a Ranger and a paratrooper.

McNally: Correct.

Weingandt: Okay. Okay, go ahead.

McNally: So 264 guys and we finished with 44.

Weingandt: Wow.

McNally: In one day alone, we had over a hundred people drop out. Following the two weeks of land navigation, you do one week of intensive, they call it team week, and it's just that you're paired up with twelve guys, and they want to see, (1) how physically tough you are, (2) how well you respond to pressure, because every morning they give you a situation, and they assign someone as a leader in this group of twelve, and you don't know these guys very well, and you have to assemble some type of concoction. They would give us four metal bars, which weigh about fifty pounds each, they'd give us some lashings, a pole slider and a duffel bag full of sand that weighs about 250 pounds, and say this is a down pilot. You have to carry him from here, and they give you a map, to here.

Weingandt: Got it.

McNally: In addition to that, you're carrying these ammo cans and these water cans. So, in addition to the sixty-five-pound pack now, we've got--you know, we're carrying about 400 pounds between four guys. You were trying to figure out a rotation schedule, because you can't carry it for too long on your back, and then you've got the guys whose grip will give out carrying the water cans.

Weingandt: Sure.

McNally: We went for ten miles that morning, in that configuration, and we just had seventeen inches of snow that we were trudging through as well.

Weingandt: Let me ask you something. At this point you're a second lieutenant.

McNally: I'm a first lieutenant.

Weingandt: First lieutenant now, okay that's right. You've had two back-to-back eighteen-month tours. What was the makeup of this, I'll call it a unit.

McNally: For this training?

Weingandt: For this training. I mean, were there other officers or is it mixed?

McNally: Yes, it was mixed. There were about four or five other first lieutenants on that team, and then the rest of them were specialists and sergeants, all wanting to go into the Special Forces.

Weingandt: Right. Was there rank there?

McNally: No, no, that's interesting. We strip all rank off the uniforms.

Weingandt: That's what I would have thought, yeah. They know who you are but still, you don't wave it and you don't bark orders.

McNally: Right, and that's interesting because some officers, even when they take the rank off, they're going to try to use that, and the guys aren't going to respond too well. You're tired, you're carrying 200 pounds, you can't be barking orders. You have to just pull your weight and heave-ho together. People that would try to bark orders, we would do evaluations at the end of every day called peer evaluations, and yeah, the officers that barked orders or tried to appeared at the bottom.

Weingandt: Didn't work.

McNally: And they would get booted out.

Weingandt: What was the highest rank in your group, first lieutenant?

McNally: The highest ranking was a captain.

Weingandt: That's interesting. So you really had a mission that--who took control of the group?

McNally: Whoever the instructors assigned for that.

Weingandt: Oh, okay, so they could--an E4 could be...

McNally: Right. And so now you've got an E4 who's in charge of a captain and once again, they do the subjective evaluation, how well. Even though you're not a captain, you've got your rank off, you're going to have to take orders from this E4, who doesn't have rank on but you know he's an E4.

Weingandt: You know it, yeah.

McNally: Because that prepares you for the situation in Special Forces. In Special Forces, you've got a team. One guy is a captain, a team leader, a warrant officer, and then an E8, who's the team sergeant, and then most everyone else on the team are E7s. Every single one of those guys have more experience in the Army than the captain.

Weingandt: I was going to say, yeah.

McNally: Particularly the team sergeant. When I got to my team, I had one guy on the team that had twenty years in the Army already, fifteen in Special Forces.

Weingandt: Wow!

McNally: So that prepares you for--you're not going to be necessarily the guy with the most experience and the guy that knows the right thing to do.

Weingandt: Right. Rank doesn't mean as much in Special Forces.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: I'm asking that.

McNally: Right, no it doesn't. It's, you need to get the mission done and the leader, the captain, has to acknowledge who is best suited on the team to do that.

Weingandt: Really?

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: That's interesting.

McNally: Which isn't necessarily always himself.

Weingandt: Yeah, okay. Okay, so you did that for how long?

McNally: Did that for three weeks, following that.

Weingandt: You're 130 pounds now.

McNally: Well, I dropped another thirty pounds for that course, so always just oscillation with Army training. Completing that, then you go into the qualification course, which is twelve to eighteen months of Special Forces training. Small unit tactics, patrolling out in the woods. Half of it is officer-specific, so they separate the officers and you go through detailed mission planning, and then they regroup you at the end with the different MOSs, which are with 18 Bravos, the weapons experts, 18 Charlies, the engineer experts, and they can build things, electrical, and they can destroy things, the C4, everything. 18 Deltas, who are the medics, and they receive a year of intensive medical training. Out of all the members on the 18 Delta is by far the best trained in his field, because first a year of intensive training, and they have doctors that come and they specialize in trauma. They train on caprines, goats, and they'll actually inflict wounds on goats, and they have to sustain this goat's life through IVs, and they

have to do surgery on this goat, in the middle of combat-realistic situations and environments.

Weingandt: Awesome.

McNally: It's incredible. My 18 Deltas had done amputations already. They worked in emergency rooms in hospitals.

Weingandt: In the field?

McNally: No, not in the field, in hospitals, or they go to Indian reservations.

Weingandt: Okay, well go on.

McNally: Eighteen Echos, are the communications experts, and they learn Morse code, long-wave, they learn short-wave, satellite communication.

Weingandt: I'm dumbfounded to hear that Morse code is still being used.

McNally: Yeah. It's the most secure means for long-range.

Weingandt: Really?

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: I learned something.

McNally: So we get back together at the end of that and go through what's called Robin Sage, which is the final culminating event for the qualification course. Its three weeks out into an imaginary land called Pineland, which is in the Uwharrie National Forest. A lot of the farmers out there have been contributing to this training since the 1960s, when Special Forces started up.

Weingandt: How do they contribute?

McNally: We use a lot of the farmers' lands to do aerial drops.

Weingandt: Oh, I see. They allow you to be there.

McNally: Right, right, and they actually provide--they do a little roles as well. They play the opposing forces. It's pretty neat. They have these little kids out there too, who are really into it, and second and third generation have been helping out.

Weingandt: That's awesome.

McNally: So following that, four months of French training, language training. Every Special Forces soldier has some type of language training, four to six months. I received French. A lot of guys get Arabic, now they're getting Pashto.

Weingandt: What's Pashto?

McNally: It's a regional dialect in the Afghan region, and Dari.

Weingandt: What do you do for instructors for something that specialized?

McNally: They hire, they contract.

Weingandt: There's not many people who can speak Afghanistan dialects.

McNally: Native speakers. No, no. I don't know where they found the people. Some of them, they've just picked off the street actually, some cab drivers that were here. Some of them are--they fled the Soviets in the late seventies, early eighties, come over here to the United States, become a U.S. citizen. So they have a security clearance and they can come and teach us.

Weingandt: So they're providing instructors obviously.

McNally: Yes.

Weingandt: What's going on here as far as failure rate? You guys have taken so many other courses to get that far in Special Forces, right?

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Your training is typical, is it not?

McNally: Yes, it is.

Weingandt: I can't imagine the dropout rate by this point. Is that high?

McNally: It is. I can't even speculate, because with selection of forty-four out of 264, and then through the training, I think our numbers dwindled another half.

Weingandt: Okay, so there's 264. That was the start of Special Forces training, is that correct?

McNally: That was right, the selection.

Weingandt: And forty-four made it.

McNally: Forty-four made it through the first phase.

Weingandt: So it is very high.

McNally: Yes.

Weingandt: With all the things you guys have gone through, all the training you've gone through, to get cut is almost unthinkable I would think.

McNally: Right. It's hard.

Weingandt: Yeah. And that's intentional, because the Army wouldn't do that if you know.

McNally: Well, there's pressure now that they're trying to boost the numbers, so they're...

Weingandt: Relax the whole thing.

McNally: Relax the standard so much, which is unfortunate, because you need that subjective evaluation from the guys that have been on the team, who go back out there as instructors, and they know who should be a team leader. There's a lot of pressure from the officer side, O6 and general level, that they don't want that type of evaluation going on any more, because we've got to meet the demand for Special Forces in the "war on terror" right now.

Weingandt: How do you feel about that?

McNally: Well, I don't think it's right, and all the guys I've talked to in the course, who are actually instructors, have seen this play through.

Weingandt: Lowering the--

McNally: Where they lower the standard or they evaluate someone as, this guy needs to be kicked out. He doesn't need to be a team leader. And they've seen the same guy come back through the course again and again, because the chain of command says no, he's going to get another chance.

Weingandt: He will pass.

McNally: He will pass, which is wrong. You can't--

Weingandt: I don't know enough about it but I tend to agree with you. Is there something else that they could do to boost the number of people coming out?

McNally: No.

Weingandt: Either keep that standard or--

McNally: Right. It's up to the individual. Most of them just drop out. Some of them are subjectively evaluated as you need to go.

Weingandt: Some just say I can't take it.

McNally: Some just say we can't take it.

Weingandt: I'm curious what ratio.

McNally: I don't know.

Weingandt: Guess?

McNally: I'd say probably five-to-two ratio, I guess, of people that quit and those that are subjectively evaluated or evaluated, they don't need to.

Weingandt: Evaluated out.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: So for every five that quit on their own, two are evaluated out.

McNally: Right. As a guess.

Weingandt: That's not a boarded number down, but it's kind of interesting. You're in Special Forces training. Anything else on that?

McNally: No. After language training, you go through SERE School; Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape.

Weingandt: Oh, okay, yeah.

McNally: And that's another three-week course of survival training out in the woods, and once again, I lost thirty pounds.

Weingandt: Now, wait a minute, did you get any of that back?

McNally: I gain it back in-between the classes.

Weingandt: Okay, I mean by now you're getting down to--

McNally: No, no, no. You gain it back pretty rapidly after each of these classes.

Weingandt: How much strength--when you lose thirty pounds and you're--you went in weighing what, about 160 you said?

McNally: One sixty-five initially.

Weingandt: Okay, so you're going down to 130 pounds or so.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: How much strength did you lose? You're working so hard in survival school and all these good things. I would think your strength level would still remain quite high.

McNally: Surprisingly it does.

Weingandt: Yeah, well I'm not surprised.

McNally: Well I am in a way, because you're not eating the right food. Your body starts--you can smell it on your body. You start smelling ammonia, and that's your body breaking down its own muscle tissue.

Weingandt: So you are losing muscle.

McNally: You use up all your fat and you start smelling. If you haven't taken a shower for three weeks, you smell ammonia, you go--.

Weingandt: Among other things.

McNally: Among other things, you smell ammonia and you go, well my body is actually consuming its own muscle now to sustain itself.

Weingandt: That's got to be scary. Why is your diet down so? You're just out in the wilderness and you're eating grubs and stuff or what?

McNally: Yeah, yeah. And some of it is you're--they provide you with some meals, but it's not enough. If you're consuming 6,000 calories for physical exertion at a minimum, and they're only giving you 4,000 calories.

Weingandt: You were consuming 6,000 calories a day?

McNally: Sometimes.

Weingandt: Wow. Wow! Right now, you're probably at a level of what, 2,500, 3,000?

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: What's that do to your body?

McNally: It takes a toll.

Weingandt: You come back.

McNally: Right, you come back and you eat.

Weingandt: I'm very curious about your physiology. You get through one of these phases, one of these schools, we're now in Special Forces school. First thing you do when you get through is go out and have a steak dinner?

McNally: Two or three of them.

Weingandt: Two or three, all right.

McNally: If you go to a buffet and you can't push yourself away from the table. You literally eat--

Weingandt: But that's not good.

McNally: No. You literally eat until you're sick, at breakfast, and then you come back for lunch and it's as if you hadn't even eaten, and you eat until you're sick again, and you do it for dinner too.

Weingandt: How long doing that? I'm not going to comment whether it's good or bad, but doing that.

McNally: Oh, I know it's bad.

Weingandt: You're 130 pounds, coming out of Special Forces school. I called it school, training. How long does it take you to put your weight back on and get back to 160, 165?

McNally: A week.

Weingandt: A week? Do you know what that yo-yo is doing to your body? (laughs)

McNally: I know it's not good but mentally, you just--it's interesting.

Weingandt: You have to be at your toughest of your whole life about this point, are you not?

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: You think, I can lick anything, anybody, any situation. That's a great self-confidence builder.

McNally: I mean, you're eating a lot, but you're still going to the gym and you're running. A lot of it's fat, and a lot of it, it's unhealthy, and you know it is, but you can't--it's interesting, you can't push yourself away from the table until you are sick.

Weingandt: So at one point your body fat is zero, I mean you're consuming muscle so it's at zero. Normal guy your size, probably right now, you're running around 20 percent? Do you know?

McNally: Somewhere around there.

Weingandt: Yeah. That's an unbelievable yo-yo. How many times did you drop in weight and then come back up again? Was it only Special Forces?

McNally: Ranger training.

Weingandt: Ranger training you did it? How about paratrooper training?

McNally: No.

Weingandt: So, Ranger training and Special Forces are the two times you've done this.

McNally: Well, in Special Forces training it happened twice; once during the survival training and once during the qualification course, the Q-course.

Weingandt: You must be one mean guy about this time, huh?

McNally: Not too happy.

Weingandt: Okay. Why weren't you happy?

McNally: No, no, I'm just kidding.

Weingandt: But you were ready to lick the world, right?

McNally: Going to try.

Weingandt: Okay. Then what happens to you?

McNally: Following that?

Weingandt: You're still at Fort Lewis, right?

McNally: I'm at Fort Bragg now, going through all this training, yes.

Weingandt: Right. Okay, I missed a move.

McNally: Sorry, yes. After the selection course, I moved from Fort Lewis to Fort Bragg, to go through all this training.

Weingandt: Bragg is where, I forgot.

McNally: North Carolina.

Weingandt: North Carolina. On the Piedmont?

McNally: Yes, yes.

Weingandt: Hot.

McNally: Hot and flat, sandy.

Weingandt: Humid.

McNally: Very humid.

Weingandt: Not for a guy from the Upper Midwest. But you didn't really care at that point did you?

McNally: No. No, heck no.

Weingandt: All right, we're at Fort Bragg, now what?

McNally: So following that, I was assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group.

Weingandt: Try to look down here, John. I don't want the tape to run out.

McNally: Sure.

Weingandt: I've been listening. I have no concept of how long we've been talking here. Okay, go ahead.

McNally: I was assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group, which is at Fort Bragg, so I didn't move following all the training. In particular, 1st Battalion, 3rd

Special Forces Group. I didn't get a team initially, because there were team leaders on all the teams. I was assigned as a Company Executive Officer for a Special Forces Company.

Weingandt: You're a first lieutenant?

McNally: I'm a captain at that point.

Weingandt: Captain now.

McNally: I made captain somewhere in all that training.

Weingandt: No ceremony.

McNally: No ceremony, it doesn't matter.

Weingandt: You didn't have the bars out, right?

McNally: Didn't need them. And so in a Special Forces Company, you have the six Special Forces teams, and all of them have twelve guys assigned to them, and then you have a headquarters element within the company. In the battalion itself, there are two specialty teams. There's a scuba team and there's a HALO team, and all the other teams have other specialties. One of them is a ruck team; all they do is a lot of road marching, because their means of infiltration is going to be just marching.

Weingandt: Walk.

McNally: Yes. Some of them are mountain teams; they have all the mountain gear. They send their guys training all over the world. Some of them do contacts with local indigenous forces, to set up networks. So, I'm the executive officer for a company and there are six teams, and there's a major, who is the company commander.

Weingandt: I was going to say, the structure, how many troops are in a company?

McNally: Eighty-two.

Weingandt: So it's not that large.

McNally: No, it's not.

Weingandt: It seems a little top-heavy in brass are we?

McNally: You are, but that's because all those teams, they don't work--they can be in six different countries at the same time. When I was the executive officer, there was a team down in--there were three teams in Africa.

Weingandt: How big is a team again?

McNally: Twelve guys. Because of the expertise in a Special Forces detachment, they sent them, by themselves, all over the world. So it isn't strange to have a team, just twelve guys, by itself, in Sudan or South Africa. I'm relating it to Africa, because that was our area of operation for 3rd Special Forces Group.

Weingandt: What part of Africa?

McNally: Sub-Saharan, as well as the Saharan region.

Weingandt: So you were in what, Chad?

McNally: The teams were. Sierra Leone.

Weingandt: Not very nice.

McNally: No. Cote d'ivoire and Yemen.

Weingandt: Oh, wow.

McNally: Ethiopia, we send guys to.

Weingandt: These are pretty hot areas.

McNally: And this is, I get to the battalion following 9/11 and almost immediately after getting assigned to the company, we hear that we're going to be going to Afghanistan. The company ships to Afghanistan and I actually stayed back in the rear, as a company detachment. The major and all the teams go forward and I'm supposed to maintain accountability and ensure that supplies get over. That's what I did for the first four months of that deployment, and then I was shipped over to Afghanistan. Our mission for that first deployment was training up the Afghan National Army. So there was no army.

Weingandt: Give me a date.

McNally: April, 2002. There's no--

Weingandt: I'm trying to do my history and think what was going on in Afghanistan in April.

McNally: Two-thousand-two.

Weingandt: Two-thousand-two.

McNally: The Taliban were--

Weingandt: Still active?

McNally: Oh, yes, absolutely, but they officially had been kicked out of the government at that point.

Weingandt: Which they weren't very happy about.

McNally: No. They were training out of the old Kabul military training center, which is just a little west of the downtown Kabul region. But this training center had just fallen into utter disrepair. Part of it was because Americans, we dropped JDAMs on it when we were going through, because that's where the Taliban were holding up, and they had a bunch of tanks there, and so a lot of it was from us, but a lot of it was, it just--you know, they were cleaning out the fecal matter from these classrooms. Whatever, I guess. It's an interesting--the Afghans don't care where they crap, and so I mean there would just be fecal matter knee-deep in some of these classrooms, and they had to shovel all this stuff out.

Weingandt: Who's they?

McNally: Us, the battalion.

Weingandt: Us, yeah.

McNally: They did it all before I went over, but I was hearing about this from the company.

Weingandt: Then you show up and all the dirty stuff is done.

McNally: That's right.

Weingandt: I'll bet it's not all done though.

McNally: So they had to do the dirty work. They had to shovel all this stuff out and start up the training center.

Weingandt: After all that training, you end up shoveling shit. (laughs)

McNally: Right. So we started training the battalions, and it was very hard initially, because of that tribal rivalry between people. You didn't want to have one member of a tribe as--

[break in recording][00:31:28]

Weingandt: You trained these disharmonious people, is that his way of saying it?

McNally: It is. Things are fluctuating. It was interesting, because we were able to overcome some of their differences through just typical U.S. Army training. How do you overcome just the fractions, it's by making things so tough on them that they have to bond together.

Weingandt: That's right.

McNally: And so the NCOs, who are the best at doing that, would make them drop for pushups, have them low-crawling if they fell out of line.

Weingandt: Excuse me, John. How did they take that from an American? They obviously must have, but there's got to be some resistance.

McNally: From the officers?

Weingandt: Well, yeah, okay, sure.

McNally: From the Afghan officers there are, but surprisingly though--

Weingandt: You know, and E4 or E5 tells me to give him twenty.

McNally: No, but it's all E7s though on the Special Forces team.

Weingandt: Okay, that's right.

McNally: And they had already built up enough of a rapport with the soldiers, that they knew that we were trying to train them and do what was best for them. Just based off of that, these guys, one, they also see it as a challenge. You know, you've got these tough Americans, they're telling me to do something; I'm going to prove to them that I can do it, I'm going to do these pushups. That helps the process of getting these different tribal fractions to meld together. Another thing was describe to them the United States; how it's fifty different states and yet we all work together in one country. Surprisingly enough that helps with the officers, getting them to understand that you can work together because guess what, the United States has done it.

Weingandt: And we're trying to show you how.

McNally: And we're trying to show you how now.

Weingandt: And this will be a better country for it.

McNally: Right. For the most part the soldiers were-- they want what's good for their country.

Weingandt: Did they all share a hatred of the Taliban?

McNally: Well, some of them obviously, they're plants too.

Weingandt: Yeah, you must have some of that.

McNally: It wasn't uncommon for us to find out that some of them--

Weingandt: Some of them would be Taliban.

McNally: Yeah, and they were just trying to infiltrate. So we set up different little systems for trying to weed that out too, and testing them, knowing what their results should be.

Weingandt: I would think they would know, within their own group, this guy doesn't fit, he's a bad guy?

McNally: Well, if they're from different geographic regions, they might not know each other. Initially, it wasn't uncommon too, for having sometimes twenty, fifty guys, just pick up and leave one day and say we're not going to deal with this.

Weingandt: John, if I remember back to the book I read recently on Afghanistan, historically, the country warlords and fiefdoms, and to band together in a cohesive unit is just not something they do.

McNally: Initially they weren't.

Weingandt: You're selling them on a whole new system.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Wow. Before Americans came, there was no such cohesion, is that correct?

McNally: Correct.

Weingandt: They fought the Russians and obviously, made it so untenable that the Russians left or quit. So they had to have some harmony.

McNally: Well, they had harmony in the sense they had a common enemy, but they weren't fighting for a better Afghanistan as a whole.

Weingandt: And that's the difference.

McNally: And that's the difference. Now, we're trying to inculcate them with, hey you guys need to bond together because Afghanistan needs to be a better country.

Weingandt: I'm impressed, that's good to hear. I'm going to digress here just a little bit, but as long as we're talking about this. Has it succeeded or is it succeeding in your mind? I know it's a tough question. It's subjective.

McNally: To a certain extent. I guess the lower class, it's succeeding with them, because there are still the warlords over there, and they're looking at this time period right now with the Americans as just biding their time.

Weingandt: We'll leave at some point and they'll--

McNally: Right. And then they'll use whatever money they've been able to stockpile and arms that they have continued to stockpile in the mountains, in their caves, and once the Americans leave, they're going to try to assert themselves over again. And even within the government itself, we were having problems with different governors. I guess the equivalent of the defense secretary, we knew was a huge warlord, as well as Hamid Karzai, he's a warlord.

Weingandt: Karzai is?

McNally: Oh, yeah. He's little playing games as well.

Weingandt: Is Afghanistan made up of the equivalent of what we call states here, or are there just areas of control or influence by warlords? How is the country broken up, or is it?

McNally: It's broken up by provinces.

Weingandt: There are provinces.

McNally: Provinces, yes.

Weingandt: And there was a governor for each?

McNally: Yes, there's a governor for each.

Weingandt: Were you trying to establish a democracy of some sort?

McNally: Within each province?

Weingandt: Yeah.

McNally: No. Its still governors.

Weingandt: I would think that would be a hard sell.

McNally: It is. The governors like their autonomy and yeah, they like to have control over their little region.

Weingandt: You know, nobody's ever conquered Afghanistan.

McNally: The British.

Weingandt: A lot have tried, but we never really conquered it. I don't think I would call it that.

McNally: No.

Weingandt: The British tried it a number of times, the Russians did several times, three times I can think of, and wanted to make a colony out of it.

McNally: A lot of it is, it's similar to Italy, when they had the city states. They didn't have the infrastructure for the people to communicate on a regular basis, so they had the warring city states. It's similar to that in Afghanistan, in the sense that the geography helps to facilitate that, with the mountain range.

Weingandt: I would think so, yeah.

McNally: The Hindu Kush separates the north and the south, and then even with the geographic areas, you don't have a good road structure. To go a mile on what they call a road for us, it would take sometimes an hour, because of the potholes.

Weingandt: Even in a military vehicle?

McNally: Even in a military vehicle. We would be straddling...

Weingandt: Good God.

McNally: We would be straddling. One tire would be in an irrigation ditch, and the other tire would be up on a donkey trail, sometimes, and that's how we would travel into these areas.

Weingandt: But the maps show that as a road.

McNally: Yes. Oh, yeah.

Weingandt: I'm going to talk to that cartographer. Wow.

McNally: They have a lot of cartographers over there right now, trying to re-map the whole area, because the road system isn't properly portrayed on the maps. The best maps that we had were 1 to 100,000. That doesn't do you too good.

Weingandt: That's a real small scale.

McNally: That doesn't do any good.

Weingandt: No. Not if you're in a tactical basis.

McNally: Right, and you have a contour relief of thirty or forty meters, contour intervals. How do you pick out--it's impossible.

Weingandt: Well, if you've got a mountain, yeah.

McNally: Right, but you can have--

Weingandt: But hills and so, they don't even show.

McNally: Yeah. You could have huge hills and you get to the area and according to the map it looks good. We encountered that all the time too, we're like okay. You do a map recon of we're going to go in this area, and you'd get into it. It's just, you've got huge hills, you have these ravines that go down twenty or thirty feet.

Weingandt: John, who does the maps? Are they U.S. maps or Afghanistan or what?

McNally: We used a combination of some Soviet maps, that the Soviets had used, some U.S. maps as well, from I don't even know when it was updated. They were just terrible though. And that was part of our job too, every mission that we went out on, if a road, trail ended--

Weingandt: You've got some topographic engineers in Special Forces don't you?

McNally: No.

Weingandt: Oh, okay, but you have engineers.

McNally: We have engineers. That was part of my job, after every mission that we did, I had to send up a report, and part of that report was this trail ended here and we had to go around to this, and there's a trail here. That's how we were helping to update their maps.

Weingandt: What's the rest of the infrastructure like in Afghanistan? I'm talking about police, fire, things we take for granted. You're laughing, I can tell.

McNally: Well, interesting story. We started a fire at the Jalalabad Airport once, a grassfire, and there was a fire truck, the only fire truck in Jalalabad there, at the airfield, you know spray the water on this fire. We don't have any water. Okay, we'll go get some. Well, give us some money to go get some, because we're not paid. What's the sense of having this water truck here if you don't-- So we gave them money and they ran out of gas. So now, we had to send another vehicle. Half an hour later, we're fighting off this grassfire, but where's the water truck, where's the fire truck? They ran out of gas. They want more money. So we had to send back, get more money. Yeah, they always, they wanted more money. Gave them more money and finally, they came back with some water.

Weingandt: What's the fire done in the meantime?

McNally: Oh, in the meantime, it was cooking off all sorts of landmines that were in the ground.

Weingandt: Oh, that's all right.

McNally: Which is not too bad, but it doesn't do too much for your confidence, when you're out there trying to fight the blaze and you get a couple mines.

Weingandt: Who fought the blaze, you?

McNally: My team did and some members of the Afghan National Army that we were training with at the time. That's typical though. School structure, they were getting that back up.

Weingandt: How about hospitals?

McNally: Hospitals?

Weingandt: I think the Americans insisted on putting a pretty decent medical facility.

McNally: There's a good one in Kabul and Jalalabad. They actually had two universities as well, in the country; one was in Kabul and one in Jalalabad.

Weingandt: My next question.

McNally: In the outlying regions, it's very few and far between where you might see a medical clinic.

Weingandt: Schools?

McNally: Schools, yeah. They wanted and they needed school supplies as well, and so we would often bring just little pens and paper with us, and they were excited to see that, so that the school children could use them.

Weingandt: Climate-wise, John, my sense of Afghanistan, of course the mountains are much higher, but is the climate maybe like Utah? In this country, what can I relate to there?

McNally: I think Utah is a good, fair approximation, but without much of the vegetation. It had been--it's gone through a seven-year drought.

Weingandt: That's devastating.

McNally: Yeah. The only precipitation they would get is in the wintertime, with the snow, and so in the summertime nothing, and very dusty. Any day, you're always just covered, caked in dust.

Weingandt: What does that do to your equipment?

McNally: You're constantly cleaning it. The radios in particular, are always acting finicky. Anything electronic, it just really wears it down fast.

Weingandt: Ever get the feeling, what are bothering to be here for?

McNally: Sometimes.

Weingandt: I wouldn't blame you. Okay, what else have we got on this general area here?

McNally: The first deployment, because it was just after the Taliban were kicked out, it was similar to the wild west. You didn't know who was who. You had guys running all over the place, with guns. What's going on?

Weingandt: How do you know the Taliban from a friendly?

McNally: You don't know. It's almost impossible until he shoots at you.

Weingandt: That's a great way to find out.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: In Iraq it's the same problem.

McNally: Yeah. They're not wearing a uniform. So, other than local intelligence and locals telling you, well there's some bad guys here.

Weingandt: Yeah, but that's a good way to get rid of your brother in-law.

McNally: Sure, and that's--because of that, there's a mentality over there; they hold grudges for seventeen, twenty years. And so if you're not careful, they're just going to pit you against their neighbor, because they're having a problem with them. And sure, everyone can lead anyone to a cache over there, because everyone has AKs and mines stashed, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're the Taliban and they're going to use them against you. They have a stash because they know what the country has gone through in the last twenty years, which is nothing but warring. So it's more of a self-preservation to them.

Weingandt: More than twenty years. You're going back to what, the Russians?

McNally: The Russians. Don't include the British in the 1800s.

Weingandt: That's going way back.

McNally: The Mongols. Kublai Khan.

Weingandt: You've obviously done some good reading too. Go on, I'm sorry.

McNally: Initially too, the commanders were--the higher commanders, I'm talking colonels, were very risk-averse at the beginning there. They did not like--you're over there to do a job and the team is willing to accept that risk, but the commanders.

Weingandt: You're talking about their commanders.

McNally: No, my commander.

Weingandt: Oh, yours.

McNally: My commander. It differs based upon personalities, but my commander at the time, he didn't want anything going wrong on his watch, and so you can't accomplish your mission unless you're--

Weingandt: No risk.

McNally: Right. And so the guys were very frustrated at that point. My battalion commander was using more of--

Weingandt: He didn't want to write it up.

McNally: He just wanted to--he was using it as a political tool. He wanted to make 06. He didn't want to get anyone shot on his watch. But at the same time, you're not doing anyone a favor by playing those games.

Weingandt: Well, he's not accomplishing any missions obviously.

McNally: Right. So that was unfortunate.

Weingandt: Well, don't the higher-ups spot that?

McNally: I don't know.

Weingandt: You have no casualties, you know.

McNally: They should. They should.

Weingandt: You would hope so.

McNally: I don't know what type of smoke he was blowing.

Weingandt: You said what, 06.

McNally: Oh-five, my battalion commander.

Weingandt: And you are what at that time?

McNally: A captain.

Weingandt: You're a captain, which is what, 03?

McNally: It's 03, yeah.

Weingandt: That's a new designation. I go back to the Civil War, so you've got to help me out here.

McNally: Sorry.

Weingandt: Okay, go ahead.

McNally: Following that deployment, I was there for two months that first deployment, and I learned that I was going to be assigned to a team. I was going to the HALO Team, ODA 314. Halo is high altitude, low opening.

Weingandt: Meaning?

McNally: Meaning it's the military form of skydiving. They sent me back for HALO training, which is four weeks long, most of it at Fort Yuma, Arizona, and you're jumping out of C-130s at 14,000 feet generally. You pack your own chute.

Weingandt: How high are you?

McNally: Fourteen-thousand feet.

Weingandt: Wow!

McNally: We did one jump, 18,000 feet. You have oxygen at that point.

Weingandt: I was just going to say, you can't breathe.

McNally: No. The cutoff altitude is 14,000, before they require you to have oxygen.

Weingandt: I was always told twelve, but whatever.

McNally: Probably so.

Weingandt: Right. By that point in your life, hit the fourteen, what the heck.

McNally: So you go through three weeks of intensive jumping out there, day and night. It becomes a little bit trickier when you have ten guys jumping out at night.

Weingandt: At 14,000 feet.

McNally: At 14,000 feet. We opened the parachute at 4,000.

Weingandt: Clouds?

McNally: Generally, no. If there are clouds, you don't jump.

Weingandt: So a freefall.

McNally: You freefall until 4,000 feet, you pull the parachute at 4,000 feet.

Weingandt: You have to do it.

McNally: Yes, you have to do it, and you have a reserve if that doesn't work. And then from 3,500 feet is when your parachute is fully deployed, and from there you have 3,500 feet to orient yourself to the drop zone and make your way to it without running into anyone else.

Weingandt: How do you train for that drop zone? Do you have aerial photos?

McNally: They show us an aerial photo before you jump.

Weingandt: What's scale, I mean is it fairly good scale?

McNally: It's about a mile, a square mile, was the size of the drop zone.

Weingandt: So you can pick out trees.

McNally: Right. At Fort Yuma, it's a lot of desert out there.

Weingandt: Probably not a lot of trees.

McNally: At night, they light up the drop zone with lights.

Weingandt: Flares?

McNally: Not flares but just strobe lights.

Weingandt: Okay.

McNally: It's not a blind drop zone, which would be no lights, but it's still, it's--

Weingandt: You must have had training though, for blind drops don't you?

McNally: Yeah. And so following that training, I was assigned to ODA 314, as the captain, which starts the, I'm on the team now and I'm the leader.

Weingandt: Really?

McNally: Yeah. These guys, they had already done a tour in Afghanistan.

Weingandt: Oh, wow, they're pretty seasoned guys.

McNally: They were seasoned guys. They had done multiple trips to Africa, working there. One of the guys, my warrant officer, Eddie Hall, was just a great, great warrant officer, and he's the second in command and he helps the captain along, making sure that I don't screw up.

Weingandt: My memory is that warrant officers had a very special place.

McNally: Yeah. Especially if they're good ones, because they have so much--

Weingandt: I had one that kept being the warrant officer, then he was back to buck sergeant. Then they'd need him there. I'm sure you had some of those too. But they always had a special place.

McNally: And they have so much longevity too, on the team.

Weingandt: Yeah, that's my experience.

McNally: When I went into it, because of that leadership challenge, you've got seasoned, hardened guys. How do you establish yourself on that team? You can't go in there shouting orders. The way I approached it throughout my time on the team is, for one, you have to ensure you're in the best physical shape, because you have to be able to beat all of them in anything. Two, whatever training you do with them, you don't critique it. You have to get to their level of proficiency, so that they're comfortable with you and they're willing to rely on you to keep them safe and alive.

Weingandt: You said a very important word, comfortable.

McNally: You have to--

Weingandt: They have to yeah--you have to be comfortable with each other.

McNally: You have to be comfortable, because you're relying on each other. You've got twelve guys, you're going to be hundreds of miles away from nowhere, and if you get into a firefight, they have to know that this captain, who is the least experienced, has done all the necessary training with us and I feel comfortable with him. So, once you can do that, then you can--what I did, then you can kind of tweak things.

Weingandt: Sure.

McNally: Because now you have a certain level of proficiency that the guys are willing to acknowledge is there, and you have some credibility in their eyes.

Weingandt: I know it's a gradual process, but does it take a month or two?

McNally: Five, six months, before they're--

Weingandt: It adds to the word special. It's a very special situation, sure.

McNally: It is, and it's a lot of, you bit your tongue, I guess. As a captain sometimes you go okay. It's interesting, because the team sergeant runs the day-to-day operations of the team, and so he's the focal point for the NCOs. As a captain, I was in charge of the long-term training, and ensuring that what the team sergeant was putting out was right.

I'm going to get some water myself.

Weingandt: Sorry I haven't got anything more exciting than water in there.

McNally: No, that's fine.

Weingandt: All right. So you've got these twelve guys makes up a team, that's standard, right?

McNally: Yes. There's a redundancy. So each of the MOSs, there's two of, so that we can do split-team operations if need be. We have two medics.

Weingandt: So you'd have two teams of six if you had to.

McNally: Correct, right.

Weingandt: What have you got there? You've got a medic and what else? The MOSs.

McNally: All right. 18 Delta, two medics, 18 Echo, two comm. specialists, communications. Two 18 Charlies, the engineers. Two 18 Bravos, weapons, and then there's the 18 Fox, who is the intelligence sergeant, 18 Zulu, who's the team sergeant, and the warrant officer and myself. And so you can do split-team operations and maximize effectiveness, depending on the mission and the job, which we did when we were in Afghanistan.

Weingandt: You're back in Arizona doing this, right?

McNally: I'm finished with the Arizona training and I'm at Fort Bragg now.

Weingandt: Fort Bragg, back to Fort Bragg.

McNally: Back to Fort Bragg.

Weingandt: All right, now what? What are you going to do at Fort Bragg?

McNally: Train with my team. Since I'm new to the team, I have to maintain or establish--

Weingandt: They're training you.

McNally: Right, initially.

Weingandt: I'm sure they like to say that.

McNally: Oh yeah, they take every opportunity to rub it in.

Weingandt: I'm sure, yeah.

McNally: But it's good to maintain that.

Weingandt: We not only have a captain, he's a West Point captain, huh?

McNally: It took them a couple weeks to figure that out though.

Weingandt: The West Point connection.

McNally: Yeah. It's always good to keep a couple things hidden from the guys.

Weingandt: I totally agree, yeah.

McNally: It took them a couple weeks and then finally, I let the cat out of the bag, you know at the right time, whenever I thought it was necessary. They took it in stride, of course, I got a lot of good ribbing from it.

Weingandt: Well, I'm sure they found out they liked you and gee, if we'd known that from the start, they probably wouldn't have.

McNally: That's a possibility. So, we're gearing up for our next deployment, so the second deployment to Afghanistan.

Weingandt: So you're back to Bragg.

McNally: Back to Bragg. I was in Bragg from October, 2002, until March, 2003, when we began our second deployment to Afghanistan. This time, I was with the ODA, is what we would call it, ODA 314. Operational Detachment Alpha, is what ODA stands for.

Weingandt: Okay, and you're back to Afghanistan.

McNally: Back to Afghanistan.

Weingandt: But your group, most of not all, those guys have been to Afghanistan.

McNally: Correct.

Weingandt: It's their second time.

McNally: It's their second time there.

Weingandt: How did you feel when you found out you were going back to Afghanistan?

McNally: I felt excited. We knew it was coming, but to go back there with--

Weingandt: This is what you do.

McNally: Right, and this is what you train up to do. We're doing a counterinsurgency operation in Afghanistan, and that's one of our five main missions in Special Forces. And within that counterinsurgency, we're going to have the opportunity to do a lot more. And so we get back to Afghanistan and we take off, it's a sixteen-hour flight, so we would go nonstop; C-17, would do in-flight refueling. It's a long time to be on a plane.

Weingandt: Tell me what a 17 is again.

McNally: C-17 is the newest plane out.

Weingandt: That's a big plane, right?

McNally: It's big. It's not as big as the C-5.

Weingandt: C-5s are that big, yeah.

McNally: A C-5 Galaxy is huge.

Weingandt: You can play basketball on it.

McNally: Pretty much you could.

Weingandt: In fact, I interviewed somebody who did.

McNally: Oh really? They put tanks inside those things. It's incredible.

Weingandt: Sixteen hours in anything can't be very comfortable though.

McNally: No, and the seats on those things are just mesh, so as soon as you take off, you're sprawling out on the floor and you're taking Ambien so you can get some sleep, because you're crossing, I don't know how many time zones.

Weingandt: Oh, gosh.

McNally: You're eight and a half hours ahead when you hit Afghanistan. So it takes a good two or three days just to acclimatize and get used to the changes in the time.

Weingandt: If you took a globe, Afghanistan is almost straight through, isn't it?

McNally: It's pretty close. It's on the other side.

Weingandt: Yeah, it truly is. Okay, so you get over there and you're pretty much wiped the first few days.

McNally: Yes, and they take that into account, so you don't do anything, no teams.

Weingandt: By now, we're getting pretty good at that.

McNally: Right. So you just, you go to the gym and you start doing planning. Our assignment was to go to Jalalabad and operate a safe house there and conduct operations. Find the bad guys, capture them, kill them. Find enemy caches and get those out of their hands so they can't be used against us.

Weingandt: How do you know if its enemy caches, as opposed to somebody you might consider friendly.

McNally: Right. You do all sorts of trials. You try to trick them up too, to make sure that--

Weingandt: That's got to be tough.

McNally: It is. We get into Jalalabad, and we were taking over for another team that was already there, so they had established a good intelligence network already. We met with the elders. This area that we're operating in is, you know, we're the only American team there and this is our area of operations. It's the size of two or three counties in Wisconsin, and we're the main U.S. advisors to the governor. Governor Mohammed was the governor of the province of Nangarhar, which is where Jalalabad is.

Weingandt: That's kind of a hotbed. I don't know if it is now, but wasn't that kind of...?

McNally: It is now, it's heating up again, because it's right on the border with Pakistan. And so if it isn't the Taliban, it's the Pakistanis, who are doing cross-border raids, you know they won't acknowledge. It's interesting, the map situation there, there's a constant warring going on just between

Afghanistan and Pakistan, because the maps that Pakistan goes off of shows the border five miles past where everyone else acknowledges the border. And so they'll do operations and they'll hit Afghan checkpoints saying no, look at this map. Well, look how old your map is. Look at our map, this is the right one, you're invading Afghanistan.

Weingandt: You're out of here.

McNally: I found the Pakistanis to be very arrogant and hard to deal with. I did not like dealing with them whatsoever. The Afghans were much more down to earth people, I think.

Weingandt: All separate languages?

McNally: Between?

Weingandt: Afghanistan and Pakistan?

McNally: Sometimes.

Weingandt: Or is it tribal?

McNally: It's tribal, again. If it's right on the border, if the people grew up on the same geographic area, they spoke the same language, or at least they could understand, because some of the dialects were so similar that it didn't matter.

Weingandt: There's part of Milwaukee I have trouble, so I know what you mean. But yeah, they cross. Interesting. Go on, John. I'm not trying to lead you anyplace here, just kind of letting you go.

McNally: So we're in Jalalabad and working in that AOR, what we call the area of operations.

Weingandt: AOR is area of operation, okay.

McNally: Our job was to find people, and at the same time, we're trying to build cohesion as well, trying to get people to work together. We would conduct what we'd call elder meetings, and we'd have the elders. We'd give them a couple day heads up, but the problem with that is, once they know there's an elder meeting, they know that the Americans are coming, sometimes, and you don't want anyone to know that you're coming because then they'll just mine the road. It's kind of tricky. You'd have to tell them, you're going to have one; it's going to be here. We try to get them to come to us but sometimes it would take a day or two, because they're riding on ox sometimes.

Weingandt: Roads aren't any better than you described earlier.

McNally: No, no, they're terrible, it was actually painful. You go a couple miles in a couple of hours and you're making good progress.

Weingandt: I'm just about at the end of this tape here, John. I'll get one ready here. Go ahead. I'm not ignoring you. I just want to get this ready.

McNally: So the tribal meetings, and at the same time, working with the intelligence network. The warrant office, Eddie Hall, and my intelligence sergeant, who was Frank Spence, they did a really good job. It's a lot of sitting down, eating a lot of chai tea and talking to these people for hours sometimes. Within those hours, you might not get any good information the first meeting or the second meeting, but you're establishing, (1) that rapport, (2) you're trying to get some information that you can double-check through another trusted source.

Weingandt: Corroborate.

McNally: Corroborate.

Weingandt: So, somebody is not just trying to get rid of his brother in-law.

McNally: Right. And so we never acted on anything right away, unless it was from a trusted source. If it was someone coming in and going, I know where the Taliban are and I can take you to them, and they have [inaudible; overlapping] and everything.

Weingandt: Oh, yeah, right.

McNally: Here we go, okay, that's nice. Why don't you draw a little sketch, and stuff like that. No, you need to take care of it now.

Weingandt: Come with me now.

McNally: Yeah. And they want you to.

Weingandt: In fact, go up in front.

McNally: Right, exactly. No, thank you, we're not doing that.

Weingandt: Not a good deal, okay. I'm going to cut this one off.

[end of audio file]

[Tape 2]

McNally: This is after the initial bombing of Tora Bora, but we had been getting intelligence reports that they were using some of the caves again, as staging points, and cacheting [sic] weapons and ammunition there. And so it's only, as the crow flies, maybe thirty or forty kilometers, so twenty miles. It takes you eight hours to get there though, because of the road network.

Weingandt: You shouldn't even call it road.

McNally: No, it isn't, legitimately it isn't. It's a trail at best.

Weingandt: Trails, okay. What are you driving? Humvees?

McNally: No. At this point we are driving a Toyota Tacomas. They're European, they run off of diesel. My Bravos went down to a local welder and we welded together, stands for the machineguns, to be put in the bed of the truck, and we jerry-rigged it ourselves, so we had the satellite antenna on top. You just carry, in the bed of the truck--

Weingandt: Any armor?

McNally: No, no armor. The only armor we have is the vest that you wear, and you carry--and we typically carry, we try to carry three days' worth of water, food and ammunition. We just loaded so much weight into these things it was unbelievable. It was funny, because we had maybe 2,000 miles on these things and yet, they looked like they had a hundred or a hundred-fifty thousand miles on them.

Weingandt: It's got to be rough on them.

McNally: Just dented and the shocks were just shot.

Weingandt: Nonexistent after a while, yeah.

McNally: But going down to the Tora Bora region, we ran across an old garden that was made by a king, an Afghan king, in what our interpreter told us was the 16 or 1700s, and it was fed by a natural spring up on a hill, that they had a water reservoir, and it fed by gravity, down into this fountain. It's interesting, you're driving in the desert and all of a sudden you come to this area and you're looking down in the valley and it's green, there's this green spot with beautiful date, palm trees.

Weingandt: An oasis.

McNally: An oasis.

Weingandt: How large? Roughly.

McNally: Roughly two miles square.

Weingandt: Wow, that's huge.

McNally: It was pretty big. Actually, that was nice, it was a nice break. We stopped and had lunch there, and there were some local Afghan kids playing in the fountain. But to see, in the middle of a desert, this oasis, with a fountain coming up that's been there for over a hundred years, was just incredible. This is en-route to Tora Bora. You were trying to rely on these maps. The roads weren't there and there were a couple points, as a team leader I'm going well, we need to go down this way, this is where the map tells me. You know, you get to a certain point and there's no more road. That happens a couple times and the guys start getting a little mad at you going, "What the hell are we doing here?" We keep on turning around. At this point, I'm still a new team leader. I've been on the team for maybe five months. This is my first combat deployment with them and they're not too happy if you turn around a couple times. You try to go hey guys; you try to navigate off of these maps.

But eventually, we got into the Tora Bora region and we found a couple caves that they were stashing mortars and RPG rounds. We found fresh Italian, 20mm shells for the DShKs. We had an EOD team, Explosive Ordinance Team, with us, and we put a hundred pounds of C4 on these things. There's an 18 Charlie engineer who could have done this, and with the C4, you put a timing fuse. We told the explosive ordinance guys, we're like, we want a 10-minute time fuse, because we had some Afghan soldiers with us who were pulling security all around, up on the high ground, and we wanted time to pull them down and away, because this was going to be a big explosion, cumulative of about 2,000 pounds, with all the rounds that we were going to send off. And so we tell them, we want a 10-minute time fuse on this. Well, five minutes goes by and we're walking away now and about to get in our trucks to go back up and away, out of harm's way. Five minute and thirty seconds, you know four minutes and thirty seconds before it's supposed to, this mountainside just erupts, shooting rocks and debris all over the place.

Weingandt: And the rounds are going off too.

McNally: And some rounds are going off too. There are two Afghans who were pulling guard not more than thirty feet, up on this hillside, away from this

huge explosion, and you've got rocks and debris raining down on us, and everyone's diving underneath the trucks for cover. Everyone is cursing the explosive ordinance guys; "You're never doing that for us again!"

Weingandt: You know how to do this?

McNally: You're never doing that for us again!

Weingandt: What's your MOS?

McNally: Yeah. But luckily, it didn't break any windshields. It dented up the trucks pretty bad but no one was injured.

Weingandt: You're lucky.

McNally: The only guy that was injured was an Afghan soldier, who dove into the ground and got a little raspberry or a strawberry mark from some rocks skidding him on the stomach. The rest of his guys were kind of heckling him about it, because he came crying to the medic going, "I'm hurt," and the medic looks at it.

Weingandt: Yeah, right, can I go home now?

McNally: My medic looked at it and he laughed at it, and the rest of the Afghan soldiers were starting to laugh and point at him.

Weingandt: Good.

McNally: So that was good, ended up destroying that staging point, I guess, for the cachets.

Weingandt: Any Taliban around?

McNally: No, not at that point. It's hard to go anywhere in that country without them knowing you're coming. They have a good--

Weingandt: You're wearing a uniform.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Standing next to one of them.

McNally: And even if they don't realize it, you might not be able to identify them. Sometimes they're still afraid. They're going to leave the area because some locals are going to tell us if there are Taliban in the area, where you know, we'd have to double-check it.

Weingandt: Sure.

McNally: But you're driving the trucks, they know you're coming, you're sending up a dust cloud. Even at night, they have communication relays with flashlights. They'll have guys sitting up on the mountainsides and they'll just flash each other, to let them know when we're coming up and down these valleys. Even on foot, how do you get anywhere on foot without being detected? There are shepherds everywhere, people herding goats. It's almost impossible.

Weingandt: I realize you've got all sorts of travel influence and war alerts and so on, but in general, how are the Taliban regarded by the Afghans? Are they the bad guys or are they tolerated? Who's the good guys, who's the bad guys?

McNally: Generally, the Taliban are considered the bad guys. Some of the young interpreters working with us were put into jail because they didn't have the prescribed length of beard.

Weingandt: Right, because of their interpretation of the Muslim--

McNally: Right. And because of that, they didn't care too much for the Taliban, and how much they infringed on their freedom. They enjoyed it a lot more with the Americans there and the government we were helping to establish. They could shave. They didn't have to have a length of beard that you can take a hold of with your hand.

Weingandt: How about the women?

McNally: In the outlying regions, all of them were still covering up and you barely saw a woman. They keep them within the compound. The only time they come out is at night. It's strange. You don't see half of the population because the women are all locked up. In Kabul, that's the capital, there are a lot more women going around without the burkas on, and schools, women's schools and girl's schools being established.

Weingandt: In your estimation, John, is the--I know that's certainly the goal, but the governing structure we're trying to establish there, do you sense the Taliban are just marking time until we leave? I know you said some of the warlords are, but I'm talking now about the Taliban.

McNally: Yes. Yes, and the Taliban are too. The Taliban know. They have a shadow government set up. It's that well-structured. The frustrating thing is, the Special Forces have been fighting there since late 2001, and we've been--you know, you report to hire saying there's a shadow government already

established. It's a full-blown insurgency. They've got underground operatives, they have runners, they have people--from the opium, they're getting the money to train, to recruit new people.

Weingandt: Buy weapons.

McNally: Buy weapons. You report to your higher and it took them a while. I think just recently, the Department of Defense started acknowledging that yeah, there's an insurgency going on, because they wanted to go straight from, we got the Taliban out of the country to, we are rebuilding the country now. Well, you know, in military doctrine, there are a couple of phases in-between there, that once you get the Taliban out, they have an insurgency going on, you can't start rebuilding the country until you're not being shot at. If you're still being shot at, then there's still an insurgency going on. We were sending up intelligence reports, the guys on my team, in Jalalabad. One of the things we did really well was this intelligence report was being relied upon by guys way up, three-star and department and State, for what we were reporting in our area of operations. What we were reporting is--I'm trying to think of the-- Anyway, the shadow government, they have regional commanders established for the southern, the eastern region of Afghanistan, and so there's a whole hierarchy. This isn't piecemeal. There's an intelligence behind this and they're planning it. A lot of it is from the Pakistan side.

Weingandt: That was my next question, who is the prime supporter of the Taliban, outside support?

McNally: Outside support-- officially?

Weingandt: In your experience.

McNally: In my experience? The Pakistanis want them to win, because it creates instability in Afghanistan.

Weingandt: They don't want it to be stable.

McNally: They don't want Afghanistan to be stable.

Weingandt: That's not hard.

McNally: No it isn't, because of the hostility. But at the same time, we were getting reports that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was a warring faction, he's the one who sent 10,000 rockets onto Kabul. He was warring against the Taliban at one point, and that's the main reason why Kabul is destroyed, wasn't because of the Americans; it was because of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Also, there was a communist influence as well, you know, the

communists were coming, Russian oil delegations were coming into country, ninety or a hundred guys and their advisors.

Weingandt: I shouldn't think they would be very well received. The Russians don't have a very good reputation.

McNally: Not with the Afghans but with the Taliban.

Weingandt: Okay, you're answering that question, okay, I understand.

McNally: Right. So they were getting support from the Soviets as far as advising them.

Weingandt: So it was coming in here, it's coming here?

McNally: Yeah. Influence is coming from all over the place, trying just to maintain that instability. They want the Taliban to win and then who knows from there.

Weingandt: Yeah, but they can't win as long as the government is stable.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: I'm going to stop this for just a minute.

[break in audio][00:12:48]

Weingandt: Once again we're rolling.

McNally: A lot of discretion is given to the team, to develop this large area, and how one sees fit.

Weingandt: Well it sounds like you break through a lot of the chain of command too. There's two or three-star generals are receiving this information, and at State as well as Defense.

McNally: Right, which is an interesting aspect. At the same time, in addition, we're given--the U.S. isn't the best at following its own doctrine at times, and so you're technically given this area and yet, they would place arbitrary restrictions on us sometimes.

Weingandt: They being?

McNally: Our own chain of command. Such as if you went outside of a ten kilometer radius, six miles from Jalalabad, we had to submit an operation order and have it approved up through the group commander, an O6.

[inaudible] Joint Special Operations Taskforce. Technically, our entire AOR is ours. The only thing that an op order gives us is they know roughly the route that we're going, so that what they say, so that they can have medical standby, and so they have an idea where we're at if we get hit. That's irrelevant because when we get hit, you have to send up your location anyways, and they're not going to send you a medevac unless they have your current location. They don't even look at your operations order.

Weingandt: I could see what you're saying, sure. They don't track you.

McNally: They don't track you. It was needless bureaucracy. Sometimes, you then have to submit, what takes 24, 48 hours to get these things approved, and if we get intelligence reports from someone that we trusted and that we wanted to go after, and it was outside this ten kilometer radius. And yet, you have to be very responsive to some of these intel tips. One of them was from one of our trusted sources, they had a tip that there was going to be a Taliban recruiter who was going to be like twelve kilometers, so two kilometers outside the radius. Right, so okay now that means I have to send out this op order, and in this operations order, you have to give some information. Well, this Taliban recruiter who is coming that night, it happened to be a Pakistani general.

Weingandt: Boy, you'd like to have him.

McNally: Yeah. And we'd already been sending up intelligence reports and they had received intel that this guy was working for the other side and that he was working with the Pakistani ISI, their intelligence community. He was knee-deep in the opium trade over there. So now I'm sending up--one, I don't want them to know that we're going after this. This is going to be a high value target. You've got a Pakistani general who's recruiting for the Taliban and any time that higher hears that you're going to go after an HVT, well you have other so-called Delta Force or the SEALs over there, and their main priority is to go after high value targets. So there's a--

Weingandt: So they want it.

McNally: So they want it and they want it not only because that's their job, but they want it to justify their existence in country.

Weingandt: I can understand that.

McNally: And because they have priority resources, oftentimes if an SF team who's on the ground, who knows the lay of the land, who knows the intelligence reports, if we were to report something like that, they would snatch it from us and say you're not--

Weingandt: Even though they don't know the terrain.

McNally: They don't know the terrain and they can't respond within the twelve hours that we need to go get this guy.

Weingandt: You've got a timeframe here.

McNally: Right. They would confine us to that safe house. You guys can't go anywhere outside the two kilometer radius now. Then they would send these guys in and everyone knows who they are.

Weingandt: Late.

McNally: What's that?

Weingandt: Late.

McNally: Late. They would come a day later and they would be in the area for four days, asking us all types of information, and then they would go out for a couple of days, going after Osama bin Laden or an HVT. Osama, we got a lot of intelligence reports that Osama was in our area.

Weingandt: Well, I would think so, sure. You're up here.

McNally: Right. And so sometimes we would be four hours behind and we'd send up an intelligence report saying we're going after Osama.

Weingandt: Oh no, that's ours.

McNally: And then they would say no, you're confined to your safe house.

Weingandt: The SEALs go get him.

McNally: The SEALs go get him, or Delta go get him.

Weingandt: And he's gone.

McNally: And he's gone. He only stays in the area for four hours at a time and that's it. That happened with this Pakistani general. I sent up the operations order.

Weingandt: Oh, so you didn't get to do it?

McNally: No, we didn't get to do this because I sent up the operations order, kind of side-skirting the issue of who this was. I didn't want to say who it was. I just said we're going after this guy.

Weingandt: You would have had SEALs all over.

McNally: Right. It just sounded to them, they smelled it out that this was going to be a direct action, we're taking this guy down. So they came back with we want more information.

Weingandt: And you said oh, nuts, the jig is up.

McNally: Yeah. I told the warrant, I was like what should I do?

Weingandt: He said, you shouldn't have done that, captain.

McNally: He goes well, just send them all the information. Yeah basically, you shouldn't even have told them, we should have just gone and get him. But then you're in a bind there if something goes wrong, you get your hand slapped.

Weingandt: You're the one that gets slapped.

McNally: Right. Damned if you do, damned if you don't, but the funny thing is you're trying to do the right thing. You're trying to prosecute this war.

Weingandt: Strategically, you're doing the right thing, yeah.

McNally: Right. But because of paperwork and bureaucracy, that's what happened. I sent out this operations--

Weingandt: I'll give you, the SEALs have got better training probably right?

McNally: No, no they don't.

Weingandt: They don't have any better training than you guys.

McNally: No.

Weingandt: Well then why the hell not send you guys in?

McNally: They should, but it's in-fighting right now, between the different services over there and who's going to get the big guys. Well, if we're spending all this money and we have all these resources given to the SEALs, then they should be the ones to catch him. Well, maybe, if they're in the right

position, but what's the objective here, to get the bad guys or to confirm why they're here? It was very frustrating for the teams.

Weingandt: I hear what you're saying. It's got to be very frustrating. You have the resources, you've got the ability, you know where and when.

McNally: You spend months developing intelligence.

Weingandt: Its two kilometers too far.

McNally: Right, and they would hamstring you. This happened a couple times to my team, and I heard it happening to other teams as well, the same thing happening, that as soon as you send up any good intelligence and you're going to act on it, you know. According to our own doctrine, we should have been able to go. It doesn't matter.

Weingandt: It certainly belies all your training.

McNally: Right. That was very frustrating, that aspect.

Weingandt: I'm sure you're saying why bother training me to do this stuff if you're not going to let me do it.

McNally: Right. Another thing they started directing were border meetings with the Pakistanis, because we wanted to show good face, I guess, with the Pakistanis. So they would tell us, we need to go down there and meet with them. Well, the problem with that is that you send up your report, your operations order of when and how you're going to get there, with the route, to the American side, when there's a Pakistan liaison officer up at the three-star level, in Afghanistan. That Pakistani liaison officer sends it to his side in Pakistan and the guys on the ground know that the ISI are in deep with the Taliban.

Weingandt: I was just going to say, the bad guys are somewhere picking up on it.

McNally: Yeah, and so there's so much of a sieve for intelligence here that now, you know pretty much for certain, that the bad guys have your route, they know when you're coming, and you're just setting yourself up for failure, for an IED or an ambush, and yet it's our guys, our own side that's dictating.

Weingandt: You're given them too much information.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: That's got to be very frustrating, John.

McNally: Some guys that happened to. They had IEDs, they found them in the road, along the route that they were going to go to this border meeting. Well, you know what did you expect?

Weingandt: You might as well put it in the paper.

McNally: That happened sometimes. We would go into--

Weingandt: No.

McNally: No, well, we would go into a valley and the local people would know of a big operation that was going to happen thirty days from when we got there, before we would know. We would go into this valley and start talking to the locals and the locals are going, "when is the big operation coming, when are the airborne coming?" We hadn't heard anything about it. They aren't coming. Oh yeah, we heard. I would send up a report that night saying hey, what's going on in this area? Well, there's something going to go on in thirty days. Well, the gig is up because everyone in the valley knows.

Weingandt: Everybody in the valley, good guy and bad guy.

McNally: Right, and two days before this is going to happen, all the bad guys are going to get out of town.

Weingandt: Why, sure. And they know they don't have to go any sooner either.

McNally: No, because they know. Where are they getting that intelligence? You have all these liaison officers at the highest level.

Weingandt: When you say three-star in Afghanistan?

McNally: Yes.

Weingandt: So the Pakistanis are our friends, yeah but.

McNally: Yeah, but they're helping to facilitate the flow of drugs.

Weingandt: I was going to say, the opium, it's got to be, running the...

McNally: Particularly the ISI. In Nangarhar, our intelligence was indicating that President Musharraf of Pakistan was just five levels removed from the distribution in Nangarhar Province. It's hard to confirm that but everything was indicating that the ISI is deep in that and Pakistan is, because that's a huge source of income. It goes to Pakistan. Because of

religious problems, they store the pure opium in Pakistan, but they won't process it in Pakistan, so they bring it back over the mountains and they have these huge processing plants in the mountains, high up in the mountains, in the snow regions, and they process it on the Afghan side, because it's not against the religion or the tribes' religions, or the Pakistanis. Then they bring it back into Pakistan processed, and then it's shipped through--

Weingandt: Why take it to Pakistan in the first place, if they have to bring it back for processing.

McNally: The buyers. I think the buyers and the shippers; they don't want to maintain it in Afghanistan. It's a strange--a lot of it has to do with the religion and whether or not the tribes are willing to accept the risk of storing it, but not processing it. But some people are willing to process it but not store it. It was very strange. And then once it goes back into--

Weingandt: Of course they don't pay anybody anything over there, so to do that is probably fairly cheap.

McNally: Yeah. They buy it from the farmers super cheap and then it gets siphoned through Pakistan, the Russian mafia, and it's distributed all through Europe and back into the United States as well. But the Russian mafia has a big hand in the drug trade over there, and then the Russian mafia pays off Pakistan, ISI, for facilitating all this. They get big cuts.

Weingandt: I got you kind off on the opium bid here, but it's very interesting.

McNally: It is. So that was frustrating, the border meetings, you know why? We're being dictated to give the enemy our own position, so that they can ambush us.

Weingandt: Yeah. Why bother?

McNally: Right. It didn't make sense. Everyone was sending up complaints, going this is stupid, we're setting ourselves up for failure.

Weingandt: What other strategic level was the reason or purpose of you guys having these border meetings with the Pakistanis?

McNally: To facilitate the good faith with Pakistan, that's all. A lot of operations that were supposedly done in conjunction with Pakistan was just for show.

Weingandt: Is that going on still, to your knowledge?

McNally: Yeah, that's still going on.

Weingandt: That's a good way to get people killed. Yeah, okay.

McNally: Yeah. Everyone was frustrated with that.

Weingandt: That's got to be terribly frustrating. Okay, John, go on.

McNally: We're in Jalalabad and another interesting aspect is, as a Special Forces team, we would get a \$60,000 operation fund to work with. Two guys on the team were responsible for maintaining accountability of it, and every month we'd have to fly them back on a re-supply flight to Kabul, because they have to clear their operations fund, show receipts of what they've spent, what they haven't spent, and get reissued \$60,000. That's how we get by, because we purchase everything off of the market in Jalalabad.

Weingandt: I was going to say, a lot of it's used just to--

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Get the fire truck to come over here or whatever.

McNally: Right, right, and trying to grease the gears as well, trying to get intelligence.

Weingandt: Sixty-thousand dollars, when you're fighting the opium trade, can't be a lot of money.

McNally: It goes a long way though.

Weingandt: It does, okay.

McNally: It does, because twenty-five cents over there, that's considered a lot. So it goes a long way. The people are happy to get a couple bucks. Unfortunately, we're going to be in Afghanistan for seven months and the battalion still has the same commander from the previous deployment, the one who is concerned about his political career. And so he's happy--you know, instead of being a commander and a leader, he wants to appease the teams. So he pulls us out of Jalalabad after two months. There's no continuity there. We're establishing good intelligence, the best in the country as far as what we were being told, and he brings in another team. An unfortunate aspect of the Afghan society, or I think the Muslim or Arab society in general is they don't like black guys.

Weingandt: Oh, really?

McNally: No, they've been considered second class citizens, slaves, over there. Special Forces, we have black guys on the team. Mine didn't, but the team that was going to replace us had three.

Weingandt: Okay, you're telling me something I didn't know. Nothing I've read about Afghanistan mentioned that.

McNally: They won't talk to them. They don't like them. They treat them as second class citizens.

Weingandt: Well, we've got to know that.

McNally: Well, we do. The commander knows that and we complained to the commander, saying you can't--if you're going to replace us.

Weingandt: Put in a team that's not a red flag.

McNally: Put in a team, right. Because of the circumstances, you have to play their game here. We don't want to lose all the intelligence and the sources, if you're going to replace us.

Weingandt: That's got to be the most important thing, rather than showing racial equality or whatever he's doing.

McNally: Right, right, which is what he was doing. There are other missions that they can do.

Weingandt: It's unfortunate but it's a fact of life.

McNally: It was.

Weingandt: You want to be successful on your mission and after all, that's the whole thing.

McNally: Absolutely, and you approach that with the commander, saying you can't do this, you know, you have to have situational awareness. We won't tolerate this back in the United States, but gosh darn, we've got a mission to do. You're shooting us in the foot here. Nonetheless, against our objections, they pulled us out after two months and they sent in this other team.

Weingandt: Must have been a disaster.

McNally: They sat around.

Weingandt: Things shut down or what happens?

McNally: They sat around. I talked to some of the guys on the team and almost zero intelligence was coming to them, rapport broke down, and they just, they were ineffective in that area.

Weingandt: I'm curious how long before he pulled them out.

McNally: They were there for three months.

Weingandt: Longer than you.

McNally: Yeah. That's one of the leadership aspects that just didn't make sense, as far as the American side.

Weingandt: I can't imagine what he's trying to accomplish.

McNally: He was just trying to appease everyone, instead of being a battalion commander.

Weingandt: He shot the morale in the foot. I don't call that appeasement do you?

McNally: Well, it's appeasement if the other team wants to get into the so-called action. So they brought us back into Bagram at that point, and we were going to be personal security detail for the VIPs that came into town.

Weingandt: Oh that's got to be fun.

McNally: Oh yeah guys, the guys love that.

Weingandt: What? How do you get trained for that? I don't remember anything back in the States or anywhere else.

McNally: You quickly figure out some tactics and procedures, but we had some retired admirals come by. They want to go out into the local bazaar, so my guys would have to go out, in full flak-vest, pulling security for a guy that wants to go buy some scarves or something.

Weingandt: For his wife or something.

McNally: For his wife. Senators or whoever comes by, and you act as their personal security detail.

Weingandt: We send Special Forces out to do that? What kind of MOS do you have for that?

McNally: Still the 18 MOS. We can do it all, trust me. So, unfortunately, we did that for three weeks, and that was a trying time in the Bagram area. You know, there are 20,000, roughly, troops in Afghanistan, and of those 20,000 maybe 400 are out in the bush.

Weingandt: Four hundred?

McNally: Four hundred, and all of them Special Forces. There are some infantry out there but once again with the infantry; they only use them as reinforcement after Special Forces gets into contact. At least that's the way it was when I was there.

Weingandt: And less than your first hour or so of training, no infantrymen can do what you could do. Just can't.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Where are you again, now?

McNally: Where?

Weingandt: Where.

McNally: At this point, I am in Bagram.

Weingandt: I don't know where that is.

McNally: That is due north of Kabul.

[break in recording][00:31:26]

Weingandt: With John McNally, and it's now Friday, the thirty-first of March, and we'll pick up where we were at, John. You about changed commanding officers at this time?

McNally: Yes. Nice segue. We're in the middle of our second deployment and the morale isn't too high because the first commander was looking more for political gain and wanting to advance his career. So, midway through our second deployment the battalion commander changed out and the subsequent commander, his name I will mention, because he was so good, is Colonel Slemp [sp?] from Tennessee. All the guys immediately noticed that he was a commander that wanted to get the mission done. He wasn't afraid to call up officers that were one or two grades above his head and tell them how it was, if the guys, the team members, were in trouble.

Weingandt: There's a firefight.

McNally: A firefight, they needed medevac. He had no qualms, and in fact he told the staff, he worked staff to death. I became the S1 later, but he would tell his staff he goes, "This is what I'm here for. If you need to wake me up at two o'clock in the morning, to go wake up an 06 and 07, then that's what I'm here for." So just that assurance from your battalion commander, that that's his job. If nothing else, he's not there just to sleep, it's to actually run that interference and to wake up these 06 and 07s and get them off their butt.

Weingandt: I bet they loved it. They preferred the predecessor.

McNally: Some of them actually hated--they hated our battalion, because the battalion commander was like that.

Weingandt: Tough.

McNally: But the guys immediately noticed a change, that he got on the radio, the satellite communications, when he took over and he said something to the effect, this is Colonel Slem, I'm the new battalion commander and continue your mission. Everyone noticed immediately that he was more aggressive; he wanted the guys to be more aggressive. He wasn't conducting investigations after every firefight like had been done. He would congratulate the guys instead of, you're under investigation. It's good job, carry on and press the fight, and his motto was pressure, pursue and punish. And the guys, I mean that's, that's what--

Weingandt: He obviously lived what he said.

McNally: Yeah, and that's what the guys want to hear. The Special Forces team, it's like dogs on leashes and you don't want to restrain them because their job at war is to pursue the mission. And so everyone enjoyed Colonel Slem when he came in.

Weingandt: Well, and you had his support too, that was great.

McNally: And everyone enjoyed it. So that happened halfway through our second deployment. Unfortunately, my team is still doing the personal security detail at that point. But we did it for about four weeks and then, in typical Army fashion, we were told to go down into the Gardez area and be prepared for a five-day mission, which eventually converted into a four or five-week mission.

Weingandt: Wow.

McNally: Which, you know, we were prepared for five days and all of a sudden we're down there for--

Weingandt: Where is Gardez?

McNally: Gardez is due south of, what is that Kabul and Bagram?

Weingandt: Looks like more up here. Kabul, about here.

McNally: That's Kabul. It's due south of Kabul, approximately seventy miles.

Weingandt: Okay, still out in this--

McNally: Yeah, yeah. It's in a valley, the Zurmat Valley.

Weingandt: Okay, well go ahead, I'm sorry.

McNally: Part of our job down there was to work with Navy SEALs, SEAL Team 6, their dev group, who were doing more of the direct action stuff. My personal opinion, the SEALs are over there just because everyone wants to get their fingers in the pie.

Weingandt: There's no water around, what are the SEALs doing there?

McNally: No. Well, you know they have--they're excellent in the water, that's their job, but on the ground, away from water, their small unit tactics and their TTPs are somewhat wanting. But because they have better priority and a higher up on the pecking order--

Weingandt: You mentioned that last week, yeah, the SEALs typically got the-- something out fifteen meters, or kilometers rather, whatever.

McNally: While we were restrained. So we were working with them initially and unfortunately, you can't go through the same routine. I discussed this with their commander, because we were helping to secure compounds, while they were going in, and since they have a lot of the resources, they were able to get a lot of the radio direction finding, and figure out where the bad guys were. So we would help them, help secure the compounds and catch the bad guys, or what they thought were bad guys. But the problem was, they set up a routine, that they would go out right around dusk, in trucks, and everyone knew who they were, and then they would come back into the compound around one or two o'clock in the morning. You do that a couple times, using the same routes, which they did, the bad guys pick up on that pretty fast.

Weingandt: They pick up on that.

McNally: So, unfortunately, as a result, they had a couple of their guys ambushed, and one guy was killed. What this leads into is the medevac, they called for a medevac, or we called for a medevac through the regular Army channels, and the helicopter for that was one mountain range over, about twenty or thirty miles. But the problem was, they don't spin up when they hear somebody in contact. They wait until someone verifies and calls them, instead of being a little more proactive.

Weingandt: Yeah.

McNally: They were telling us it would take about an hour or more for them to get a medevac in. So the SEALs, through their resources, and the CIA that were over there, called up a medevac from three times a distance away who, when they had heard about the firefight, had already started spinning up. And so they were on the ground, had picked up the guys that were injured, and they were gone, from three times the distance, before the guys that we called had come over and touched down. When they touched down, our side, the regular Army medevac, they were mad at us saying, you know, "you called us". Well, you know, you see the dilemma. You try to work through your own channels and unfortunately, a lot of people sit back and they aren't proactive.

Weingandt: I can understand why you guys would react to a single source of information and rush out, you want a verification. But why would a medevac need a verification, if I'm hearing this right?

McNally: They want a verification of the place that they're going to be picked up.

Weingandt: By who?

McNally: By Americans.

Weingandt: You can't verify your own situation, so if you're all alone out there and you call in?

McNally: No, no, well we can, but--I forget that they want to verify through--they have to hear it from us and then it also gets verified at the battalion level, they verify it with the battalion as well. There's so many weird things about it.

Weingandt: It doesn't make sense to me.

McNally: No, it doesn't.

Weingandt: I can understand why you don't want to walk in, a trap. But why would they need a verification?

McNally: I don't know. It's unfortunate. It's one of those things that just, it takes up time. It's not needed and as a result you have some Americans--

Weingandt: Suspected casualties. They wanted the helicopter there right now.

McNally: Right, absolutely. And we've had guys that were on the ground, waiting to get medevac'd for an hour or two and the 18 Deltas are sustaining them, keeping them alive, and then they die en route to the hospital. But subsequent to that, we worked with the SEALs for a little while and they--

Weingandt: They seemed to work up a little higher echelon.

McNally: They do.

Weingandt: They don't have the necessity of verification to get a medevac.

McNally: No, they--

Weingandt: That's a question.

McNally: No, no, they didn't have to. They were able to get air assets a lot faster and speedier than anyone else.

Weingandt: You kind of want those guys around, everything else being equal. They can cut through things.

McNally: If for no other reason than to use their resources, yeah, yeah, which you know, we kind of finagled on the side. Another good aspect of that mission was after we finished working with the SEALs, in the Zurmat Valley, my team started working, just trying to piece together, who are the guys that ambushed them. We had a radio direction finding team with us, SOT-As. And so we started--it takes patience. Guys on the team, they don't necessarily always like to be patient. They want to go in and they want action all the time, so part of my job was to say hey, we need to develop this a little bit. So, that's what we started doing with the SOT-As. Because they were expecting Americans to come in on vehicles, because that's all they had seen, we started--I told the guys we needed to do something different. And so we came in this area that had been getting a lot of radio activity. We came in, over a period of two weeks, we're getting a lot of hits, I guess, of radios, and so we came in with a translator from the east side and we settled in right before dark, and so everyone could see, hey this is where we're at. We could have more attached to our vehicles, or so they thought. I sent four of my guys, we did split team, on

foot, at night. There was no moon and they went in four miles, amongst the compounds, to the area that we thought that these guys were talking, and they were up on the radio net that night.

It turns out, the way he was talking, this guy was the main ringleader for this whole valley, and they were directing the teams, the ambushes against people. The unfortunate thing with that night was, you know you can't get a pinpoint location on a radio if you only have one interceptor.

Weingandt: Right.

McNally: We weren't able to get the overhead airplane that night, and normally they can give you a ten-digit grid, which is within one meter.

Weingandt: So they work from a plane as well as on the ground.

McNally: Yeah. So if we can have a plane and us on the ground, or we can have two guys on the ground.

Weingandt: That's going to bring it in.

McNally: We can bring it in. But for that night the resources weren't there. We only had ourselves on the ground.

Weingandt: You've got one dimension.

McNally: We just had one dimension and we knew he was right along the path that would intersect with his compound. So we couldn't give the guys on the ground, hey we need to go nab this guy. We knew, the way he was talking, that he was out in the field. He had a big dog. The guys on the ground who were out there said that they saw a guy in the field on the ground.

Weingandt: The bad guy.

McNally: The bad guy, yeah, and they didn't know we were there. So I said guys, it's not worth compromising the fact that we know that they're in the area right now, if we're not a hundred percent sure that we're going to get--

Weingandt: You're going to inflate the casualties, yeah.

McNally: Right. So I pulled them off that night and they came back right before dawn, and we said we'll tack it later. So, we went back to the compound we were staying at in Gardez, and we refitted. Two days later, we came back, but only from--we have now positioned ourselves north of the same compound, about three to four miles.

Weingandt: This guy hasn't moved.

McNally: Well, we don't think he's moved. He moves around, but from the pattern that he was establishing himself, there were certain days that we were 75 percent sure that he was going to be at this compound area.

Weingandt: Wow.

McNally: Other days were bad, so Wednesdays and Fridays, he always seemed to come up in this area.

Weingandt: I'm going to stop you for just a minute here, John. How do you handle the language? Did you have people in your unit?

McNally: We had a translator.

Weingandt: You had a translator.

McNally: An interpreter with us, yes.

Weingandt: Was he Afghani?

McNally: Yes, he's Afghani, but he's American. Also, the SOT-A teams, which are really good, they get more language training than we do because they're sitting there listening on a radio. So some of these guys had what the Army evaluates the languages as a 1-1 or 2-2 or a 3-3. Three-three is proficient, you're a native speaker, 2-2 you're very proficient. Some of these guys were 3-3 in Arabic and Pashto.

Weingandt: Pashto is the?

McNally: The local dialect.

Weingandt: I'm sorry, I interrupted you. I'm wondering, how do you know it's a bad guy?

McNally: No, for this one--well, from the way they're talking. They're talking about bringing in rockets.

Weingandt: That means that you know the language, that's why I'm asking.

McNally: Right. And then for this case though, we had a U.S. citizen who was Afghan, who fled Afghanistan in the early eighties or seventies.

Weingandt: You think they'd be very valuable.

McNally: These guys are because you know; it's hard to pick up on different voices if you're not familiar with it. He would be able to pick up on the different voices. We didn't know their names, so we would assign numbers to them; 51 or 13. I think this guy was number 51, and he seemed to be the director of the area. And so we came in two or three days later, from the north now, doing the same thing. You know, we're going to let them see us come in at dusk.

Weingandt: What direction were you in before?

McNally: We came at them from the east before.

Weingandt: Okay. Now you're coming from the north.

McNally: Now we're coming from the north.

Weingandt: Now you're in effect, doing your own--

McNally: Right, for that. We still need that immediate rate of direction for that night.

Weingandt: But you're pretty--

McNally: But we know.

Weingandt: Pretty good, yeah.

McNally: And we set ourselves off three or four miles again that night. So dusk comes, there's almost zero moon illumination, which is good, you know the guys can't see us and we've got night vision goggles. And so I sent the guys in again, the same four guys, they had been on the terrain before, they knew it. They knew what they were looking for and I sent them in at night from three, it was about three or four miles away. The plan was, that night we did have the airplane overhead, so combine that with our capability.

Weingandt: Now you can get a good triangulation.

McNally: We can get a triangulation when the guy came up. The guy did come up again that night. They usually operated in a window, between 9:00 p.m. and midnight or 9:00 p.m. to one o'clock in the morning. They wouldn't operate any other time other than that.

Weingandt: Is that because they felt safer?

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Okay, go ahead.

McNally: As luck would have it, or not, that night my new battalion commander had gotten intelligence of a lot of activity going on fifteen miles south of us, but he ordered all his teams to flood the area. So now we have a bunch of Americans coming down these three main roads and who should come up but our guy in his compound is ordering ambushes against our guys.

Weingandt: He knows they're coming?

McNally: He knows they're coming because he's got eyes out there, he can see their headlights, and so now he's ordering ambushes against them. We're three miles away picking this up.

Weingandt: You're kind of in the middle aren't you?

McNally: We're right in the middle and my battalion commander is trying to tell me, you need to move south fifteen miles and join the teams. I told him no, you know, we're picking this up, they're staging ambushes against the guys that are coming down right now. And once you realize that the information I was getting he goes, "Okay, you guys stay in place and you continue to work that." All right, thank you very much. But he was coming up really strong and we knew he was in that area, and what was pretty neat was they didn't know that I had four guys on the ground, on foot, right outside their compound.

Weingandt: The bad guys.

McNally: No, I had four friendlies.

Weingandt: No, no, you had four guys in place but the bad guys didn't know it.

McNally: Right, the bad guys didn't know, the Taliban. They were clueless because they thought we were in these vehicles three or four miles north of them.

Weingandt: And that's the only Americans in the area.

McNally: Right. So, I made the decision that as the window was closing, that we would drive up and take the compound. This compound ended up being a little bit bigger than what I would have liked. There were mud walls, three and four-feet thick, just they're huge. And inside these compounds you would have seven to ten families, all in these mud huts, and everything is connected. The doors are maybe four or five feet high and they're super skinny. They're very convoluted once you get into them, it's a maze.

Weingandt: I imagine they're not new, they've just been added onto over the years.

McNally: Right, yeah. So we drove down in the vehicles now, I've got half a team. We're driving the vehicles and I positioned the vehicles on the north side of this compound, and the four guys that I had on the ground, they moved around to the south, to seal it off from the south. As we were coming up from the north, they're outside the door of the compound and three guys try to sneak out the back, and so my guys nabbed them right away. We know one guy got away that we should have gotten, but he snuck in, because he knew all sorts of little back alleys and stuff, and he snuck through a couple of guys on my south.

We ended up having just--all we could do was just secure the compound at that point, because it was a lot larger than what we had wanted, and I had to call for backups, for reinforcement. So another team joined me, as well as a company of Afghan National Army soldiers. So once I got them, about two or three o'clock in the morning, we started securing the compound. We separated the men and the women. The women, we never touched, and you just kind of section them off from the guys, because it's the guys we're after, and we don't want to violate any of their religious norms or customs. And then come daylight, after we did the initial search, we find a guy hiding underneath a woodpile. We did a more detailed search of the compound and we found two large Soviet spy binoculars that were up in towers. We found a bunch of armor-piercing AK-47 rounds, grenades. We found a long-range radio that they had. It was like basically a walkie-talkie, but they're very good at rigging everything to work a lot better than what we would.

Weingandt: This is Soviet issue?

McNally: It was old Soviet.

Weingandt: Radio?

McNally: Old Soviet, yeah. And so basically what we think we captured was the command and control node for the guys that were hitting the Americans in this valley. The funny thing, without a shot fired.

Weingandt: I was going to ask. Was it quiet?

McNally: Yeah. That was a long night and that was intense, but it was pretty good, that we were able to pull it off.

Weingandt: John, what's happening with the--last Friday, you mentioned the fact that if you got out more than ten kilometers, it had to be covered by--or okay'd higher up.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Of course the leaks up there pretty much prohibited the element of surprise, or any success. Now, has that changed with this new general?

McNally: No, but the way we found--

Weingandt: You mentioned he's operating out twenty miles here and fifteen there.

McNally: We found a way around it.

Weingandt: I sensed that.

McNally: And the way around it was to umbrella an operation. You defined it as; we're going to be doing an operation in this large area, for this long period of time. And so once you've got this large area and time umbrella'd, in this operations order and they approve that, you could just do--

Weingandt: You could do your tactical things within that.

McNally: Right. You could send, over the radio, a quick fragmentary order and just say hey, we're going to this location and we're going to do this. And so now you don't have any of the intelligence going up and we can do it on the fly.

Weingandt: Excellent.

McNally: That was really good.

Weingandt: Now, you're still in Gardez, right?

McNally: Still in Gardez.

Weingandt: Now, if we're really smart, we'll have you write this thing up and you can edit the thing. Just a suggestion. I'm serious. But go ahead.

McNally: So that's--we were down in the Gardez, Zurmat area, for approximately five weeks. After that, alluding to that one operation that I talked about, where everyone in the valley knew there was going to be a big operation, a big push, we were involved in that thirty days after we found out from the locals.

Weingandt: I thought that was going to be a three or four-day?

McNally: It was a three-day.

Weingandt: This whole operation has gotten bigger, right?

McNally: Yeah, my original time down there, the team was. They were not too happy about that but oh well, what are you going to do? But the funny thing with that is we positioned ourselves on one of the mountainsides, to try to catch any people that were fleeing, when the big push came in, but with everyone knowing that it was coming, it was kind of a ridiculous situation. But while we were up there, just calling this ridiculous, we had a nice spotting scope, and so we would set ourselves off about one to two miles from some of these villages.

Weingandt: And by a spotting scope you mean one that works at night?

McNally: No, this was just a daytime spotting scope.

Weingandt: Okay. I'm going to interrupt just for a question here.

McNally: Sure.

Weingandt: How much of your operations go on at night? It sounds like these guys like to operate after dark.

McNally: Right. A lot of it did.

Weingandt: The Taliban. Of course that means you're on call twenty-four hours a day when you're in a situation like this.

McNally: Right. Typically, the daytime was downtime, to refit, to clean the weapons and the vehicles, top off the water, get some sleep.

Weingandt: I'm sorry I interrupted, but it just struck me as--

McNally: No, no, no. A lot of what we were doing was at night and yeah, just long nights out on hilltops or mountainsides, and trying to piece together a good picture.

Weingandt: With this scope you say you have.

McNally: This was just a daytime, and we have nighttime ones too, but at this point we were just using the day one. But just happenstance, we were on the mountainside, looking into a village, and one of the indicators that somebody is a bad guy is if they had Iridium phone. It's a satellite Iridium phone, which costs on the average, about \$2,000. Plus, you have to pay, I don't know how many--you know, it's like \$100 a month charge, just to maintain the service.

Weingandt: What kind of phone is this?

McNally: It's a satellite phone.

Weingandt: How big?

McNally: It's the equivalent of the original mobile phones. It's a large...

Weingandt: Size of an old walkie-talkie.

McNally: Old walkie-talkie, yeah.

Weingandt: Okay, but you can see somebody is carrying one of those things and that's a bad guy. Is that what you were trying to say?

McNally: It's pretty much assumed that he's a bad guy, just because of the amount of money that it takes to maintain this, to maintain the service and to get it.

Weingandt: Lots of poppies.

McNally: Right. That was at least an indicator that he could be a bad guy.

Weingandt: A person of interest.

McNally: Yeah, right, a person... So we would, just happenstance, we were up on the mountainside, this is the third day, I think we were doing this and kind of getting tired of it, but my warrant officer spotted a guy with an Iridium phone down in this village, about a mile and a half away. He goes, well that's interesting, what's he doing with a satellite phone out in the middle of nowhere. So, I sent two of the vehicles down there while we maintained eyes on this guy, to make sure he didn't move, until we could kind of direct our guys in. They ended up picking him up and he's trying to be very coy, oh you guys can have the phone.

Weingandt: Oh, yeah, \$2,000, just here?

McNally: Yeah, here you go, I don't need it. But my guys were like no, we need to take you in for a little more questioning. We gave some of the numbers to our intelligence section and they were numbers, incoming calls that he had received from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, all over the place in the Middle East, and it wasn't a day later that the CIA flew in and picked this guy up because of his connections.

Weingandt: Well, yeah, strategic and tactful.

McNally: Yeah. He wouldn't do us any good, but hopefully some of the information that he had did someone some good. So I think this is late July, early August now.

Weingandt: Hot?

McNally: Very hot, hot and dusty. But our rotation is coming to a close, which is good, so we start packing up. The funny thing is that you have to go through a customs inspection while in Afghanistan, before you leave, which means dumping all the stuff out of our Connexes, our big metal buildings, into the dust, so that they can go through it.

Weingandt: Who's they, Afghanis?

McNally: No, the Air Force. The Air Force would inspect our stuff with customs, but the funny thing is, we'd come back to the United States and we'd have to have customs officials look at it again. That did nothing but raise our ire about the Air Force and how ridiculous they were.  
The only thing I'll say about homecoming from Afghanistan is it's very surreal, to go from an environment where you're concerned with nothing but your survival, and there aren't many vehicles around, and you're just out there trying to get bad guys, and the food and the water is being provided to you. And then you come back to the United States and you have cars everywhere, you can go anywhere you want, without being afraid of being ambushed or blown up, and now you've got to worry about these little petty things, I guess.

Weingandt: Like whether to cross the street at the light?

McNally: Right or, you know, paying cable bills, just things like that.

Weingandt: Does it seem like our values are misplaced here? Specifically?

McNally: Yes, yeah. It just seems very busy, I guess, over here, unnecessarily so. People worry about trivial things when, in Afghanistan, people are just concerned about kids are picking up pine straw so the mother can make bread for their family. They just try to meet the basic necessities over there, you know food and shelter and clothing, and that's about it, and surviving.

Weingandt: John, the Russians left when, 1980-something, or did it get into the nineties?

McNally: Late eighties, early nineties, I believe.

Weingandt: I get the impression they just pretty much dropped things and got out.

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: Radios, weaponry. There's got to be a mixture of weapons over there; some we provided?

McNally: Yeah, well that's--

Weingandt: To fight the Russians.

McNally: Sure. We offer rewards for different weapons. The reward to give back a stinger was, I think \$1 million or \$100,000. We never found any stingers but we got some stinger batteries. The thing with a stinger is the battery and the stinger are matched up by serial number, so you have to have the battery to go with the stinger to make it work.

Weingandt: You can't have any battery?

McNally: No. You have to have the battery that's coded to that stinger.

Weingandt: Is that a smart move?

McNally: No it is, I mean it's a smart move, because not any old battery will make this thing work. You have to have all the right pieces.

Weingandt: Means don't lose the battery.

McNally: Right. But we were able to pick up three batteries, stinger batteries.

Weingandt: So that pretty much put those stingers out of operation.

McNally: Right. Another thing we were able to pick up a lot of were HN-5s, which is a Chinese cave-buster, I guess. It's similar to a rocket, but the idea is you fire it into a cave or into a building, and the explosion sucks all the oxygen out of the--it's a thermal type weapon and it sucks all the oxygen and the air out of the environment. So it either implodes someone's lungs, or you make them suffer, they can't breathe, that they pass out, more often than not. But we were picking up, surprisingly a lot of those while we were over there.

Special Forces are good, because once we get back, the recovery, you know, we get forty-five days. Depending on the battalion commander, the new one, he would give us four-day weekends all the time, because that's family time. It's crucial for these guys who have been away from their family for seven months, to spend as much time with them as necessary. My new battalion commander understood that. You can't have an effective soldier--

Weingandt: Wait a minute, you're in Afghanistan, you're having family time?

McNally: No, no, no, we're back.

Weingandt: Oh you're back here, okay.

McNally: Yeah, this is, we've returned from Afghanistan.

Weingandt: All right, you're back here amongst inconsequential things.

McNally: Right. But even while we were over there, though, Special Forces is very good about sending guys home for the birth of their children, to keep them home for two to three weeks.

Weingandt: Really?

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: That's excellent.

McNally: Yeah. Without even hesitation. Every time I've heard, it's always the same. Your wife's having a baby; you're going home for three weeks, so that you can be there for it. It's a special time and your wife needs you there to help take care of things. So, they're very accommodating and always have been, in taking care.

Weingandt: Boy, do they.

McNally: Not everyone is like that but I know Special Forces is.

Weingandt: Is this your second tour over there?

McNally: This is the second tour over there.

Weingandt: Okay, so now you're back.

McNally: Now I'm back and we have forty-five days recovery, a lot of four-day weekends for the married people to have good family time and the single people just to relax I guess, which is what I did. So this is, I think November, 2003. Not soon after, we learned that we were going to do another deployment, to begin in April of 2004. So there isn't too much training time in-between there with the recovery, but we are able to get in a lot of range time, which is what Special Forces spends--if we don't spend it--

Weingandt: What's range time?

McNally: Firing ranges, shooting pistols and rifles. We go to this one training site and we would shoot over 2,000 rounds in a day, which is, that's nonstop.

[end of audio file]

[Tape 3]

McNally: The third deployment to Afghanistan began April, 2004. Now, this was the first deployment--our battalion shifted as far as regionally. We were now positioned out of Kandahar, for this deployment.

Weingandt: That's down here somewhere?

McNally: Yeah, southwest of the Bagram and Kabul area. Kandahar is traditionally the stronghold for the Taliban, because that's the last place we pushed them out of in 2001, 2002, and that's the first place that they had a stronghold.

Weingandt: Kandahar is a city.

McNally: Kandahar is a city, yes.

Weingandt: Kandahar. How big, rough?

McNally: Area-wise, it's larger than Madison, I think.

Weingandt: So that means a lot more density.

McNally: A lot more. And it has an airport out there, which is where the American primary base is located.

Weingandt: Military?

McNally: Military base. But it's a lot of mud huts and they're spread over a large area. No high-rises, just mud huts for miles and miles.

Weingandt: That distinctive third world smell.

McNally: Oh, always, the open gutters and the sewer and stuff like that. It's a good time.

Weingandt: You have to give us credit for some of these things.

McNally: No, well that's the funny thing. Our translator, our interpreter would talk to the locals and say you know, why do you hate the Americans. They go well, they're not clean. And he would describe these things. The Muslims, they try to pride themselves on cleanliness, of their hands and their feet, and yet he goes, he would describe to them, indoor plumbing and all these ideas of how the Americans keep themselves so clean. He'd say this is what we need to do in order to--he goes, there are a lot of good things that we should take away from what the western world has, because it would make us better. But it was interesting that he would have these little dialogues and I would ask him later, "What were you talking to him about?" And he would describe these things to me, these little conversations.

Weingandt: Is disease rampant over there? The sanitary conditions there?

McNally: Yeah, oh yeah. Almost everyone is malnourished. They're not strong. They don't have any endurance either. They're very fast, they're very agile on their feet, especially in the mountains, but if they try to go for too long a period of time. The Americans, we just have a little more endurance I guess, because of our nutrition.

Weingandt: Fitness clubs.

McNally: And fitness as well, right.

Weingandt: You're a runner, right?

McNally: I am. I do triathlons.

Weingandt: Okay. I was going to say, did you do anything over there?

McNally: As far as running?

Weingandt: Yeah.

McNally: No.

Weingandt: It's a totally different environment, it doesn't deter you does it?

McNally: That's the hard thing you can't--how do you and where do you run. I would actually run in Gardez and even on this third deployment, you find out which roads you know are clear and don't have mines, and I'll go running with my 9mm in my hand, with another guy from the team, but we would always stay within eyesight of our compound.

Weingandt: You didn't happen to get a picture of that did you? Anybody get a picture of you doing that?

McNally: No, I don't think so.

Weingandt: That would have been priceless.

McNally: They should have.

Weingandt: You don't have to go back.

McNally: Send it to *Runners World* and say, dedicated runners.

Weingandt: This is how we do it over in Afghanistan.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: But you kind of leave those things behind don't you?

McNally: Yeah, you do. However the circumstances, the necessity dictates at the time, to stay in shape, because--

Weingandt: That's what kind of alerted me to it. Obviously, you would outrun and outperform an Afghani.

McNally: Right. As long as I'm not wearing a forty-pound armored vest on.

Weingandt: Is that how much they weighed?

McNally: I think they weighed about that much.

Weingandt: Wow!

McNally: Yeah, thirty, forty pounds.

Weingandt: Well, go ahead, the third deployment.

McNally: So the third deployment, my team, we learned that we're going to be at a different mission now. We're going to start up a base camp up in the Dayshopan area, because they want an American presence and to extend our operational capability in that area, and Dayshopan was--

Weingandt: Where is that from Kandahar?

McNally: It is northeast of Kandahar, approximately a hundred miles. It's about a good, it a full day ride.

Weingandt: So you're up in this area somewhere?

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: A lot of roads down there. Its a little flatter isn't it?

McNally: There are some contractors that work on--they were working on the main road, Highway 1, between Kandahar and Bagram, which now it's a good road, but sixty miles outside of Kandahar, we would have to take a left, going into the dirt trail again. It was funny, the first sixty miles to Qalat, was the name of town, took us an hour, hour and a half, because we could cruise on this hardball road. And then the last thirty miles took us about four to five hours.

Weingandt: Oh my God.

McNally: It's just, it's hard, it's treacherous, and we had to cross a river to get to our base camp, and there's no bridge. I don't know how the guys did it in the spring now, but I know with the spring runoff, they have to use a ferry crossing to get to this base camp now.

Weingandt: But you're there in spring, April.

McNally: I've been there in spring, but the waters at this point have already pretty much gone away, surprisingly. They didn't have too much of a snowfall in 2000, in that winter, to melt, from the mountains. But there's nothing there on the ground, so we have to--

Weingandt: How deep is the river?

McNally: When we cross it? It's maybe two to three feet deep. It's not bad at that point.

Weingandt: It's doable.

McNally: It's doable, no problems, and that's what we ended up bathing in too. There's nothing on the ground for this new base camp, so we have to build it from scratch, but before we start building, we want to learn the area. This has traditionally been a hot area, but no Americans have been up into a series of valleys that are north and west of Dayshopan, for over a month. I had some United Arab Emirate commandos with me, who I'll talk about later.

Weingandt: Yeah, I'm going to want to know about them.

McNally: We headed up into this area that we had heard intelligence about; that there were some bad guys, some Taliban, and possibly some training camps as well. So we get into this area, it's about a five-hour drive, and there's one point that every team that has gone through this one particular area, it's nothing but switchbacks, up a very restricted and confined mountain valley.

Weingandt: You don't have a problem with heights?

McNally: No, I don't have a problem with heights, but every team that's gone up here has been ambushed the whole time that we've been there. But for some reason, we weren't ambushed, but once we got situated into this open area, this other valley, the radio intercepts started coming in. They found out that we got in. For some reason the Taliban network had gone down. They didn't have guys positioned up on the mountaintops.

Weingandt: To your good fortune.

McNally: Yeah it was; otherwise, who knows. We started getting a lot of intercepts, saying they were getting the guys together; they're going to hit us with 400 men that night.

Weingandt: How many of you guys, one team?

McNally: We've got one team and some Afghans, so we've got about forty to fifty guys.

Weingandt: Twelve of your guys.

McNally: Twelve of my guys, right, but we're pretty confident.

Weingandt: Cocky is a better word, I think.

McNally: Well we have, you know, at that point I figure I have--I have two weapons guys. We have two .50 caliber machineguns, I don't know how many thousands of rounds of that. We have a MK-19, which is a grenade launcher. So we just have a lot of--plus we have aircraft availability.

Weingandt: And you know what to do with it.

McNally: And we know what to do with it, and I positioned ourselves so that we were in a good position.

Weingandt: After all, you've been trained for this.

McNally: Right. And they're very, we found they're very unorganized. When they would conduct their ambushes, they could do a lot more damage on Americans, but they don't open with their most casualty-producing weapon, which is, that's typical ambush TTP, tactical procedure, and so they would open up with an AK-47 or something, or an RPG. You don't open up an ambush with your least inflicting weapon.

Weingandt: Sure, yeah.

McNally: But they haven't caught onto that yet, so.

Weingandt: That's the first guy who fires.

McNally: First guys that fires, right. So that's fortunate for Americans while we're over there.

Weingandt: Don't tell.

McNally: Yeah. We haven't. We try to tell them, they're doing a good job.

Weingandt: Yeah, right, we're really scared.

McNally: Good job, Taliban. But we had the United Arab Emirates guys with us too, and I told them, like hey we're getting a lot of hits from this area. I wasn't too trusting of these guys because at night they would smoke up, whatever they were smoking, I don't know, from these large pipes.

Weingandt: It smelled sweet huh?

McNally: It smelled pretty sweet. So I sectioned us off and I said you guys work this area and we're going to work our area on the side of the ride in this mountain range, and they said fine. They purchased a goat from a local farmer that night, and they had this big roast, and we're sitting there going okay, what's going on here?

Weingandt: That sounds like spring break.

McNally: Yeah, for them, I think it was. They were out there just partying and having a good time. They weren't concerned about hunting the Taliban. It was kind of frightening.

Weingandt: Good targets.

McNally: Good targets, but they were Muslim, so I don't know.

Weingandt: You sense their heart is not really in it?

McNally: No, absolutely not, but they're getting credit because they're involved in the War on Terror, so they've checked that block as a nation. But for some reason that night--

Weingandt: You don't sound impressed.

McNally: No, I wasn't, especially after you hear what they did. This valley, you could only come in and go out--you could go in and out two ways, one of two ways, and since no Americans have been in the area, it's pretty important not to disturb or alert people on either route as much as possible. For some reason that night, intelligence said we needed to go back to the base camp area, which is ridiculous. I was extremely angry at my battalion commander and my battalion S3, because they were talking about the base camp being hit. Well, at that point there was no base camp, and the Afghans we left behind, they were worried about them being hit and not having anyone to protect them. Well, they've been in this country a lot longer than we have and my battalion S3 said, "What happens if they get hit? What's your contingency plan?" I go well, they're probably going to run off in the mountains, which I would expect them to do. And how are you going to collect them back up? Well, when we show back up again they'll come out, if they are going to be here with 400 people. The Taliban, at this point, they don't attack with 400 people. Maybe fifty people they can get together at a time. So that's why we weren't even expecting the 400 that we were intercepting to attack us.

Weingandt: A lot of talk.

McNally: A lot of talk. They try to pump each other up too, with all this radio talk, and try to encourage each other.

Weingandt: Do they sense you're listening?

McNally: I don't know if they knew we were listening at that point, because we didn't have the typical equipment at that point, so the tell-tale signs.

Weingandt: Okay, so it was self-contained bravado probably.

McNally: Right, right, that's what we think. So at that point, I'm very angry at the battalion because they tell us to go back. But we have to go through this other route. We've already burned the route that we came in. We don't want to take that again, they've probably mined it behind us. Well, early the next morning, something must have tipped off the United Arab Emirate guys, because early the next morning these guys, they take off without telling anyone what's going on. And I told them which areas, and

for how long to work. They take off, they're out of radio communication, I don't know where the heck they are.

Weingandt: They're probably not going to respond even if they hear you.

McNally: No, probably not. We end up getting on the route later that day.

Weingandt: This is the old route?

McNally: No, no, this is the new route that we want to take out of this valley.

Weingandt: Okay, all right, not mined hopefully.

McNally: Not mined, hopefully, but we learned that these Arab Emirate guys have taken this road six, seven hours before us.

Weingandt: Oh, great.

McNally: So now they know that we're coming, that the road has been used, and that's what we end up hearing this entire time, is that they've got surprises in the road for us, they've planted mines, they're going to hit us. I mean, everyone--I relayed back to the guys, because I have the interpreter with me, and he's telling me these things and he's scared to death, and we're just getting the most glaring looks from people, and people kind of smirk in a way that you think they know something that we don't.

Weingandt: You're talking about the locals?

McNally: The local people. They were not too friendly. I'm just thinking well bring it on, and I'm saying a couple prayers at the same time too, to St. Michael and my guardian angel and everyone else.

Weingandt: Is anybody up there? I need a little help here.

McNally: Yeah, just you know, help me protect my team and get us safe to the base.

Weingandt: You're getting into a sticky wicket here.

McNally: Right. They had all the advance warning with the Arab Emirate guys coming through. Our just was just, you know, we couldn't stay in that place and try to develop it. We had to just move through, against my better judgment, with the battalion commander and everyone saying we needed to go back down. But nothing happens, surprisingly. We're able to get through a couple of hostile towns and valleys. There was something different about these radio communications, in conjunction with the Arab Emirate guys, that it seemed more plausible that we were going to get hit,

that they did have mines or something in the road. And it's not uncommon for them to have mines in the road and not connect it properly. Just, some of their how-to isn't as good, and so they forget a lot of the necessary steps to detonate these howitzer rounds or mortar rounds that are in the road. There very well could have been something in the road, but I don't know, but nothing went off.

Weingandt: What happened to the United Emirate guys?

McNally: Oh, they're gone, they take off. They aren't even at the base camp when we arrive late that night.

Weingandt: So they've gone elsewhere.

McNally: They've totally gotten out of the area. They speak the language and they've been talking to the locals, so they wanted to get out of that area as fast as they wanted to. So something tells me--and when we had stopped that one night, and we were getting all these radio intercepts, we were picking up Chech'nyan voices and Russian voices. So they had a training area somewhere in that valley, in that region. Later on, the Marines did a big sweep through this same valley and they ended up doing a lot of good, because it ended up being a hornets nest basically, a large Taliban stronghold in that region.

Weingandt: I know the Russians are involved, as far as the poppy trade.

McNally: They also send, officially or unofficially, Russians and Chech'nyans have sniper trainers that they're sending down there, to train up the Afghan Taliban.

Weingandt: What if they're on our side?

McNally: I don't know if these are just freelancers or mercenaries. I don't know what the deal is. I don't know, but the Chech'nyans and the Russians, they're coming down there and they're doing demolition training with the guys. They're training their snipers and they're also getting--the Chech'nyans in particular are getting also, some experience. It's kind of testing ground for them to engage.

Weingandt: They don't like each other.

McNally: But they found a common enemy I guess, in the Americans over there.

Weingandt: Does this possibly--let's talk about last Friday. You explained to me, the hierarchy of the drug trade; the Pakistanis, and of course the Russian

mafia, et cetera. Is that some sort of a connection, the fact that the Russians and Chechens are in there?

McNally: It could be, I don't know.

Weingandt: I find that disturbing.

McNally: I do too, I mean I could...

Weingandt: Very disturbing to you, they're teaching these guys how to make life miserable for you.

McNally: And they're saying that they're not involved and they're saying they're our friends, and yet they're involved in training and conducting operations against Americans. There is a little bit of what seems to be--

Weingandt: It was a big shock to me, to hear what you had to say about the Pakistanis, that officially they're our buddies, friends, et cetera, but don't monkey with their drug trade.

McNally: Right. The drug trade is off bounds, but that controls the purse strings for the Taliban. If you can cut off that, then you cut off all their funding over there.

Weingandt: That's not going to happen.

McNally: Not any time soon. It's unfortunate.

Weingandt: Well, I've got you way off the path here.

McNally: After that, we start constructing this base camp in the middle of nowhere, and to do that, we had to contract some local Afghan construction workers. The funny thing is that the route between us and Qalat, which is the nearest road along Highway 1, was usually mined. There were three attempts on my team, going back and forth on this road, to get supplies. None of them succeeded. They hit a couple of civilian vehicles that were near our vehicles, they hit some infantry guys that were coming up to talk to us, but we were never--

Weingandt: Never hit the mines?

McNally: What's that?

Weingandt: These people coming up?

McNally: Yeah, they hit the mines. They were radio controlled, so the guys would be, the Taliban would be off on a mountain.

Weingandt: Oh, I see, and they trigger it.

McNally: They trigger it from the mountainside, then they can run away, or they detonate it through wires. So that made things a little difficult, building this base camp. Eventually, the local workers didn't want to travel up and down this road. We'd have people come in with fuel for us or--

Weingandt: If you're building this base camp, excuse me. If you're building this base camp, what's it going to look like? Is it mostly tents or improved buildings of some sort or what? I can't imagine, so.

McNally: Initially, no. Initially, you're just working on the walls for protection. They had these things called Hesco barriers, and it's a collapsible square basically, and its wire and this fabric meshed. And so you fill these things with sand, and the ones that we had were seven feet by seven feet by seven feet. It's going to stop most blasts and bullets. So we constructed to where we mapped out this base camp. It was going to be 250 meters on each side, which is a large base camp.

Weingandt: That's huge.

McNally: Yeah, it's huge. But we had to get all these supplies in there, all these Hescos. We had to get a bulldozer to fill them. The one thing Afghanistan has is a lot of dirt and rock, so there's no problem finding something to fill these Hesco barriers in with. So, just a matter of finding equipment.

Weingandt: But you've got to bring in the Hescos. They're collapsed of course, but you've got to bring all that stuff in.

McNally: Right. We had to bring all that stuff in. We had Chinooks carrying in sling-loads of this stuff. We had local jingle trucks that were just-- sometimes we had twenty jingle trucks, which were basically like five-ton trucks I guess.

Weingandt: Wow.

McNally: Just loading.

Weingandt: Is this your project?

McNally: This was our project, unfortunately. No Special Forces Team likes to build a base camp, because it ties you down in that one area.

Weingandt: Where's the Corps of Engineers?

McNally: Well, we had three or four engineers with us that were assisting us and overseeing the project.

Weingandt: I don't think of Special Forces as being engineers.

McNally: Well, I have two engineers on the team, right?

Weingandt: Yeah, but I think more in the area of demolition.

McNally: They can build and they can destroy, both. So they have a good understanding.

Weingandt: So they were essential, I'm sure.

McNally: Yeah, absolutely.

Weingandt: You're building a very substantial thing here. That's going to tie you down for how long?

McNally: That tied us down the whole time we were there. For this deployment, we were there for three months, and no one likes to do it. It would be just the logistics end, the supervision of the locals and the paying of them. Part of the plan is you build this and you want to get local help, and you want to give them some money, so that they can provide for their families, and get them away from enticement from the Taliban. But no one would trust us in this valley.

Weingandt: They don't trust you.

McNally: They don't trust me or they don't trust the team, and there was pressure from Taliban in this valley. They would pressure the local elders.

Weingandt: And you certainly didn't trust them.

McNally: No, no, because we heard some--we're trying to develop intelligence in this area too. Sometimes we would have guys that would come and talk to us at night, once the sun had gone down, and give us intelligence, but how do you know to trust them? It's a building process. You're trying to build intelligence in that area, you're trying to develop rapport with the locals and let them know that you're trying to help. We had school supplies that we would give out.

Weingandt: Next question, how about medical?

McNally: Medical, we would go to different neighboring towns with the medics and administer to them. But because of--they don't have too much respect for women over there, and so every time we came into a valley or one of these towns, to conduct something medical, all the boys would be lined up, because the boys are more--the medic, he'd been there so many times, the medics would go no, I'm not treating any of the boys, put the girls in line first. So all these girls that would be hiding behind the mothers, we'd wave them up, and the elders would be going... Eventually, we would help all the girls and we'd treat all the girls first, and give them school supplies, which was pretty neat. I mean, it kind of was a bit duplicitous, I mean we were trying to undermine the whole--their value system over there. But at the same time, we tried to teach them that all life is important, not just the guys, and so we would treat the girls first and the medics would look at them first and make sure everything was going all right or whatever.

Weingandt: Interesting.

McNally: I don't know what they would do. Give them school supplies and just give them stuff, and then they would go running away, smiling, to their mothers, and then we would see the boys.

Weingandt: So you'd see the boys but girls first.

McNally: Absolutely, yeah.

Weingandt: How did the elders react to all that? There must be a little resentment.

McNally: Yeah, some of them did resent it.

Weingandt: I mean, you're going cross culture here.

McNally: Right, but I think some of them, I think appreciated it as well.

Weingandt: Good.

McNally: From what I gleaned, talking with our interpreter, he would talk to some of the elders off on the side and he would appreciate us coming in and doing that, and taking care of all their children, not just the boys. Unfortunately, more than once, we had, while we were building up the base camp, we would have a parent bring in--the father, bring in a child, two or three years old, who had overdosed on opium, because sometimes they would just keep the raw materials in their house or their hut, and you've got this catatonic child, two or three years old, who has overdosed on drugs, and my medic would give them a shot of--I'm not even sure

what the heck it was. Something to jumpstart the heart and get everything flushed out of the system.

Weingandt: Wow.

McNally: But that would help build rapport with the locals, when they knew that they could take their children to us. That's part of the ongoing process. Every day, we'd put it out to the locals that hey, we're--there's a sick call hours for locals, if you want to come. People would come in. One guy had something wrong with his teeth, and my medic had to pull out a couple of his teeth.

Weingandt: I'm sure dentistry unknown.

McNally: No, it's not. This river, which is about a half-mile away, there's a little pool, so that's where we bathed. As a team, we would go down there and post security out and we'd go bathe. We'd wash our clothes in the same river, and not more than a hundred meters up the river you'd see the cows and everything else, the goats.

Weingandt: Upriver.

McNally: Upriver. It's impossible to--but it was--

Weingandt: You get hardened. You know, you've been in Afghanistan three times, right?

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Do you get hardened to some of the diseases that might knock you down when you first got there the first time?

McNally: I think so. My medic commented on everyone, when you go over there, I caught it on my second deployment. I ate something or I was exposed to something where you're just physically down and out for three days; everything is coming out.

Weingandt: That's a way of saying it, yeah I know what you mean.

McNally: And you can't hold anything down. You're sick and you're lying in bed. But once you go through that process, for some reason your body becomes immune to it, and so the guys that have been over there, even on the third trip, we would laugh at the new guys that hadn't been over there before, because they would eventually come down with it, and they would just be laid up, sorrier than...

Weingandt: Now, if you once get it, do you get it again, or are you susceptible? You kind of develop an immunity don't you? You've got cows defecating a mile up the river here.

McNally: Right. I mean, I don't know, but I think you become immune to it, because it didn't affect any of the guys that had been over there before, but I had two guys on the team that hadn't been over there before and they came down with it. So I go well, I don't know. There's nothing scientific about that.

Weingandt: Yeah, no, I just, you talk about the guy who came back from Africa one time with tapeworms. They have no idea what to do about that here. Where were you? Okay. What did you eat? Yeah, yeah.

McNally: And then malaria, we're taking Doxycycline, or on that trip we took Doxycycline, instead of--what's the other pill for malaria?

Weingandt: I don't know.

McNally: I don't know either.

Weingandt: I've taken it. I don't know what it is. It comes out of a bottle.

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: So you're bathing a mile downstream from the cows, and where was your drinking water coming from, the same river?

McNally: No, no, no. They were good about supplying bottled water, so we had bottled water to drink from.

Weingandt: Really?

McNally: Yeah.

Weingandt: Fly it in?

McNally: Yeah, they would fly it. There's huge storage sheds over there full of just bottled water, and we would--that's all we would drink, which is good.

Weingandt: That's essential I think, yeah, for us.

McNally: If we had to, we have water filters.

Weingandt: You could purify your own water.

McNally: Right, and iodine tablets, we could but if we don't have to, we don't, we don't go through it. So we spent three months working on this base camp, I guess, and then when it was all said and done, we had these large Hesco barrier walls set up, and then inside we just built lumber shacks, I guess. Within this compound, we put another little compound for Americans, because there's lessons learned from Vietnam; you don't know who you can trust. So even within this compound, we would have the Afghans in one section, but we had another little tiny compound inside of that for us, for the Americans, so that we could have our own security.

Weingandt: And you secured that.

McNally: Right, and we secure that ourselves, so that in lessons learned from Vietnam, if you have a traitor in your midst, you don't want them to have unfettered access to you and to our operations room, that we had all the maps and how we were game-planning our operations. So we had to build that, but once it was finished, it was quite a sight to see.

Weingandt: Were you able to finish it?

McNally: We were able to finish what we wanted on our tour, with the walls up and the towers for security.

Weingandt: Did they ever try to, the Afghans try to, or the Taliban, try to hit the base camp?

McNally: Not on that one, no, no.

Weingandt: I would have thought it to be a big target.

McNally: Oh, yeah, we were. I think they were starting to funnel in some rockets and get those positions. Well, yeah, we had a couple rockets fired at us, but they were so far off base. We were just, we were working at that point, to find out who's bringing these rockets in, and we were just starting to develop those leads when we were ordered to return back to the United States. We were able to pass that intelligence on to the team that followed on, that took our place, which funny enough, the team leader of the team that took over for us was a classmate of mine at West Point, so we knew each other right away. Some of the guys on his team knew guys on my team, so you established a good rapport and are able to handoff information a lot easier, if you know people like that.

Weingandt: Right.

McNally: But actually, I think that about concludes it. Unfortunately, we just worked a lot of, on the logistics, of establishing this base camp and getting an intelligence network set up.

Weingandt: I'm going to ask you the tough question then, John. How come you're no longer in the service? Or you don't want to get into that?

McNally: No, no, no, I am fine. After working with the Special Forces Team as a captain, you're with the guys, you experience so much together. I would have been a major by now. I didn't want to; I guess sit behind a desk and do administrative duties.

Weingandt: Even though you're Special Forces?

McNally: Even though I'm Special Forces. I was at a point in my career; I would become progressively further away from the guys, the guys on the teams.

Weingandt: I sense you didn't insist on being saluted.

McNally: No, I didn't, not with the guys on my team.

Weingandt: I mean when you're with your team.

McNally: Right, no.

Weingandt: I'm being facetious really, but I sense that you've got a different level of working with people, a different perspective, let's put it that way.

McNally: Sure.

[break in recording][00:31:29]

McNally: The guys would call me captain, because as close as you are to them, you have to maintain a certain amount of space, because when it comes down to it, I'm still the captain, and I would have to order them to do things that they might not want to do.

Weingandt: That's right.

McNally: They were comfortable with that and I was comfortable with them never calling me John, but always calling me captain or sir. They knew my first name though, everyone.

Weingandt: Well, of course.

McNally: But we were very friendly though, and they knew, and I think they appreciated the fact that I always tried to maintain that certain amount of space from them. I just learned recently, that my two--I mean, I don't want to--my two replacements, two subsequent ones, have both been fired. The team just doesn't like them. They try to get too close or too friendly with them. I would never--I would go out--

Weingandt: Your replacements tried to get too friendly with the rest of the team?

McNally: Yeah, my captain, the captains that replaced me. You know, you can't buddy-buddy up to them. They appreciate you if you work hard with them and you train hard with them, and if they realize that you have nothing but the best intentions for them and you want the team to do well.

Weingandt: I know exactly what you're saying. But you weren't above getting dirty fingernails on the way.

McNally: No. What do you mean by that?

Weingandt: I mean, you weren't afraid of getting dirty.

McNally: Oh, no, no, yeah, right. We were working on this base camp, I mean you're shoveling, you're hauling things together.

Weingandt: Yeah. You'd pick up a shovel.

McNally: Yeah, absolutely, you burn--our shitters over there, or latrines, were just fifty-five gallon drums that we had cut in half, with some C4.

Weingandt: Why not?

McNally: One of the duties was burning this stuff, and so if it was my turn to do it, guess what, the captain was out there raking the stuff and burning.

Weingandt: I would say you made a good choice.

McNally: It's funny with that though. There was a certain amount of space you still maintained though, for professionalism, I guess. It's a fine line, it's weird.

Weingandt: The enlisted guys wanted you to do that too.

McNally: Yeah, I think so.

Weingandt: Well, look at your replacements.

McNally: They appreciated it, I think.

Weingandt: I mean they want you to be capable of issuing an order, we don't vote on orders.

McNally: Right.

Weingandt: Democracy ends right there. I think you've described it very well.

McNally: I got out because I didn't want to end up sitting behind desks. I guess the fun had ended I guess, at that point.

Weingandt: Well, certainly, and I'm sure as years go on, it's still going to be very much of a focusing part of your life.

McNally: Absolutely, absolutely.

Weingandt: You're never going to forget things that happened.

McNally: No. I'm never going to forget the guys that were on the team with me. I call them up every once in a while and talk to them still.

Weingandt: Good.

McNally: We stay in touch because, just a great bunch of guys. I wouldn't want to replace it for anything in the world.

Weingandt: Well, there you go. Good note to end up on, John. Anything else you'd like to add for the record here?

McNally: No, I just appreciate the opportunity.

Weingandt: Well, it's good to have you. One of the best interviews I've had.

McNally: [inaudible]

[end of interview]